

PRODUCING AN ACCURATE COUNT

IMPORTANT!!

These methods will increase the accuracy of the statewide homeless count and prevent duplicate counting.

1. Train everyone involved in the survey process!

Having agency staff/volunteers participate in the survey process educates them about the value of “surveying” as opposed to “counting.” It trains them to interview survey respondents, collect accurate and consistent data, and avoid duplication by ensuring that every homeless individual or, in the case of family groups and couples, only one adult family member complete a survey!!

Training should include, *but is not limited to*, staff and volunteers at:

- homeless shelters
- in rural regions
- transitional housing
- domestic violence shelters
- congregate meal sites and food banks
- pre-arranged homeless gathering
- encampments
- law enforcement offices
- faith-based groups

2. Increase Accuracy

- Interview homeless persons rather than having them complete surveys on their own.

Why?

There are many advantages to conducting interviews instead of having respondents self-administer surveys.

- Interviews are better than self-administered surveys for dealing with complicated issues and for asking complex or confusing questions. The respondent’s interaction with the interviewer permits clarification of questions when respondents do not understand them, and helps produce a more accurate response.
- Respondents may have difficulty reading or understanding a written survey.
- Interviewers often can establish rapport with the person being interviewed. This may increase the number of completed surveys. The higher the response, the smaller the chance of an undercount of homeless persons, and the greater the chance that the data are representative of all homeless persons.
- We know there will be some people at food banks, soup kitchens, etc., who are not homeless. Without a survey, we cannot distinguish between people who meet the definition of homelessness and those who do not. Surveying increases the accuracy of the homeless count, and it increases the credibility of the count with critical audiences.

The **only** exceptions where we can accept a count instead of a survey are special circumstances for “unsheltered” persons:

- If due to concerns about safety or remoteness of location, a sheriff or other knowledgeable person gives an estimate of the total number of unsheltered adults and children in a specific location
 - If due to concerns about safety, a sheriff or volunteer counts the total number of unsheltered adults and children in a specific location, but is not comfortable conducting interviews or distributing surveys.
- Prevent overcount. Interview every homeless individual or, in the case of family groups and couples, ONE adult family member in each family group.
 - **Prevent undercount.** THE HOMELESS COUNT WILL BE BASED ON RETURNED SURVEYS!
 - Conduct the survey on one day rather than over the period of a week.

Why?

This will increase participation of rural communities, increase the quality of the survey data, and reduce the likelihood of counting homeless persons more than once. The only exceptions are agencies/programs that do not provide services on the selected day. These agencies/programs would collect data on the first day they are open after the designated count day.

3. Follow procedures to avoid duplication!!

- Record the following respondent information on surveys:
 - first and middle initials
 - first three letters of last name
 - the month in which respondent was born.
- Train staff/volunteers when they collect completed surveys to inquire if the respondent or other family member previously completed a survey like this at another agency or gathering yesterday or today.