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Introduction

How many people in British Columbia are homeless? How many homeless people live in your community? How many of BC’s homeless have come here from other provinces?

These are among the important questions that homeless count results can help to answer. Counting Homelessness – Guidelines for a Standardized Method for BC Communities provides a standardized, core method of conducting snapshot homeless counts that all communities in BC can use. Count results will provide homeless advocates, service providers, citizens and government with information needed to effectively address the problem of homelessness.

The Guidelines have been developed for the Housing Policy Branch. Information was gathered from an extensive review of the current research on homeless counts, and from consultation with service providers, town planners, policy analysts and researchers from the non-profit, government and private sectors in BC. The Guidelines have been developed for use in communities large or small throughout the province.

This document provides the rationale for a standardized method, and details the benefits and limitations of homeless counts. It presents a framework for defining homelessness and provides “how-to” information for communities that are interested in conducting a homeless count.

Why do we need a standardized method?

Several communities in the province have conducted counts of their homeless populations (see Appendix 1). The Housing Policy Branch has received requests from other communities for informational assistance in planning a count.

In the absence of a standardized method of counting, results of counts cannot be combined and are difficult to compare. Homeless counts results can be applied more effectively when a standardized method of counting is used.

Communities within British Columbia vary in size, geographic location, resources and experiences of homelessness. These differences present challenges to developing a standardized method that is useful and practical for all communities who want to carry out homeless counts.

Nevertheless, it is possible to conduct homeless counts so that results can be combined or compared over time and across communities. The Guidelines are designed around a standardized core count, to which communities can add components that will meet their unique information needs beyond the core count. This approach is flexible enough to adapt to different communities, yet standardized enough to allow comparison of results.
**Benefits of a homeless count**

BC communities that have done homeless counts report many benefits. Chief among these is the awareness that is raised about homelessness in a community. A count provides an occasion to focus the attention of a community on the pathways into and out of homelessness and the plight of homeless people. It also mobilizes community members to work towards solutions.\(^4\)

Information provided by homeless counts allows communities to track trends in the relative size of their homeless population over time. Homeless count results can support funding applications for initiatives to address homelessness, and inform program and service planning. Conducting a count allows additional information about homelessness to be collected with very little added effort. For example, some communities have surveyed health needs, housing barriers or housing history to gain a better understanding of the issues involved in homelessness.

If homeless counts are done the same way each time, communities will gather valid and reliable data that can be combined or compared between communities. This will produce useful information for service providers and governments for planning and funding suitable programs to address homelessness.

**General limitations of a homeless count**

It is important for communities to be aware of the limitations of homeless counts. Understanding these limitations enables communities to interpret count results accurately and to apply the information appropriately in decision-making.

It is virtually impossible to get an exact count of the homeless population. Regardless of the method used, a homeless count will produce an inaccurate number. Accuracy can be improved by combining different strategies, but more resources are needed to do so.

A homeless count effort is limited by the resources available to do it and how accessible homeless individuals are to be counted. Invisibility is a survival mechanism for some homeless people. Others don’t happen to be at a location where they can be counted on the particular day of a count. Participation is voluntary; some homeless people do not wish to participate in a count and decline being included. Remote areas are typically not included in homeless counts because they are too time-intensive for the small proportion of individuals likely to be located. Homeless people who sleep on private property will not be included in a count unless they are counted at another location in the daytime. This includes individuals who are temporarily staying with family or friends because they have no housing of their own (commonly referred to as “couch surfing”).

Sometimes homeless people are dispersed from their usual locations immediately prior to a count date. This can affect the accuracy of a count. The weather can also influence the results of a homeless count. How experienced a community is with conducting

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counts can also affect the results. For example, the results of a second homeless count will normally be higher than the first count because of experience accrued from the first count.

How is homelessness defined?

A consistent definition of homelessness does not exist in BC. For example, the 2005 Greater Vancouver homeless count defined a person as homeless if s/he had no place of her/his own to stay for more than 30 days and did not pay rent. The 2004 count conducted in Kelowna defined homeless people as those without a permanent residence to which they could return when they chose. The Upper Fraser Valley count in 2005 defined homeless people as those who did not have a permanent shelter to call home. The various terms “absolute”, “relative”, “visible”, or “hidden” homelessness are also used to describe homelessness in BC.

A definition of homelessness is important because it determines where and how homelessness will be counted, and who will and will not be included in a homeless count.\(^5\) It is impossible to obtain estimates of the homeless population without a clear definition of whom to count as homeless.

The lack of a consistently applied definition of homelessness makes it difficult to draw comparisons between count results. At the same time, communities that have undertaken homeless counts may be reluctant to adopt new terms and definitions. The Guidelines provide a standardized definition of homelessness so that count results will be reliable and valid. It also offers the opportunity for communities to retain the local use of their existing definitions of homelessness.

A classification framework for a standardized count method for BC is shown in Table 1. The four operational categories of homelessness that are included in the standardized core count method are provided in the left column. These categories incorporate types of homelessness that have been counted in BC. The living situations in BC that correspond to the operational categories are outlined in the centre column. A generic definition is provided for each category. The right column identifies the count method to be used for each category.

The classification framework for homelessness does not attempt to harmonize different definitions of homelessness used in BC. Instead, its purpose is to provide a common, generic language for the different definitions that are currently in use, and a means to compare existing data on homelessness. The Guideline uses numbers rather than names to identify categories of homelessness. Communities and agencies can use this classification to identify which categories are represented by their data on homelessness and to communicate these in a meaningful way to a province-wide audience.

\(^5\) Cordray, D, 1992; Peressini, T, 1996
### Table 1: Definition framework for a standardized homelessness count for BC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operational Category</th>
<th>Living Situation</th>
<th>Generic Definition</th>
<th>Count Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 People sleeping rough</td>
<td>1.1 Public space or external space or structure not designed for habitation</td>
<td>People who live in public or outdoor spaces without legal claim and without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters; or in structures not designed for habitation</td>
<td>Public places (known locations) count Service locations count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 People in emergency overnight accommodation</td>
<td>2.1 Overnight shelter</td>
<td>People with no usual place of residence who spend the night in an overnight shelter or low barrier shelter that does not allow participation in a daily routine, and required to live in public space during daytime hours</td>
<td>Shelter count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 People in accommodation for the homeless</td>
<td>3.1 24-hour shelter</td>
<td>People with no usual place of residence who have 24-hour shelter and are not required to live daily in public space. Period of stay is intended to be short term (less than 30 days). Includes people who are homeless due to fire, flood, landslide, etc.</td>
<td>Shelter count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 People in women’s shelters</td>
<td>4.1 Women’s transition house; safe home</td>
<td>Women and children accommodated due to experience of domestic violence and where the period of stay is intended to be short term (less than 30 days)</td>
<td>Shelter count</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### The standardized core count – an overview

British Columbia’s communities vary in their geographic location, size, resources and experiences of homelessness. These differences must be considered when developing a standardized method that will be useful and practical for all communities who want to carry out homeless counts.

The Guidelines provide a standardized core count, to which components can be added that meet particular information needs of communities. This offers a method of counting that will provide reliable and valid results, and flexibility to accommodate the needs of different communities.

It is beyond the scope of a core count method to include living situations that represent risk of homelessness. In many cases, information is already collected on people in these living situations by the associated service providers or funding agencies. For example, corrections, health and youth care facilities have the information to produce numbers of clients whose discharge from their system is pending. At this point in time, however, the systems are not yet in place for that information to be shared in a standardized way across government agencies.

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6 Adapted from European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless. (2008). European typology on homelessness and housing exclusion.
The core count method consists of:

- a night-time shelter count, followed by
- a daytime count at service locations and public or “known” places.

A panel of Canadian and U.S. experts noted that a service-based count including a shelter count is the most cost-effective method of counting homelessness. Most counts conducted in BC have included these components. The core count is conducted within a 24-hour period to reduce the risk of duplicate counting.

The core count focuses on the following four categories of homelessness as presented in Table 1:

1. People sleeping rough
2. People in emergency overnight shelter accommodation
3. People in 24-hour accommodation for the homeless where the period of stay is intended to be less than 30 days
4. People in women’s shelters where the period of stay is intended to be less than 30 days

The core count is conducted using a standardized survey form, developed from questionnaires tested in homeless counts in BC and from Statistics Canada’s General Social Survey. Basic, anonymous demographic data is collected from homeless people who agree to be interviewed by volunteer enumerators or, in the case of some shelter facilities, the staff. The core survey results will provide useful information for identifying trends over time in the size and nature of the homeless population in a community. Core count results will also provide information that is useful for developing, monitoring and evaluating programs or policies.

In addition to the core survey questions, an optional series of standardized demographic questions are provided as examples of “add-on” information that some communities may wish to collect. The daytime components of the count will inevitably include some people living in situations not included in the core count. For example, some people who are staying temporarily with friends (“couch surfing”) may be counted at service locations and public places. When the count results are compiled, data on individuals not included in the core count can be tallied and reported separately from the core count results. Some communities may be interested in collecting and analyzing this type of optional add-on information.

**Who to count**

The core count includes people whose living situations are identified in Table 1. The descriptions are provided below.

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1. **People sleeping rough**

People sleeping rough are those who live in public or outdoor spaces without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters and without any legal claim to the space in which they live. Examples are people who dwell in parks, streets, alleys, stairways, doorways, or under bridges or overpasses. This category also includes individuals who live in structures not designed for habitation such as containers, vehicles, parkades, garages, malls, transit shelters, transportation depots, warehouses or storage sheds.

2. **People in emergency overnight shelter accommodation**

The second category includes people who have no usual place of residence and spend the night in an emergency overnight shelter. An overnight shelter is defined as one that provides emergency, night-time only shelter and whose clients are forced to live in public space during daytime hours. This category includes cold/wet weather beds. This type of living situation does not allow individuals to participate in a daily routine. People who sleep in emergency overnight shelters carry their belongings with them throughout the day because they have no secure place to leave them.

3. **People in 24-hour accommodation for the homeless where the period of stay is intended to be less than 30 days**

The third category pertains to people with no usual place of residence who have 24-hour accommodation in a shelter. In communities where a designated shelter facility does not exist, alternate temporary and emergency accommodation is typically provided in a motel. The period of stay is intended to be less than 30 days. This category includes people who are homeless due to a physical crisis such as a fire, flood, or landslide.

4. **People in women’s shelters where the period of stay is intended to be less than 30 days**

People in women’s shelters are defined as women and children who are accommodated in a women’s transition house or safe home due to an experience of domestic violence. The period of stay in this category is intended to be less than 30 days.

Figure 1, below, illustrates the night-time and next day core count categories of homelessness.
Where to count

Shelter count
An efficient way to count a portion of the homeless population is to conduct a night-time count at emergency and short-term shelter facilities. The objective of a shelter count is to obtain the number of people on a particular night who are in:

- Emergency overnight shelter accommodation for people with no usual place of residence; or
- 24-hour shelter accommodation (or alternate temporary accommodation when a shelter facility is not available), for people with no usual place of residence and where the period of stay is intended to be less than 30 days; or
- Women’s transition house or safe home for people accommodated due to the experience of domestic violence and where the period of stay is intended to be less than 30 days.
In smaller communities without a designated shelter, the shelter count will likely come from numbers provided by the agency that arranges for alternate temporary and emergency accommodation (i.e. motel room). In some communities, this is provided directly by a provincial government office; in other communities it is administered by a non-profit agency.

The validity of the shelter count depends on the number of shelter facilities that provide their results for the count night. The number of people who sought shelter accommodation and were turned away on count night will provide an estimate of the demand for shelter accommodation. This provides information in addition to the numbers of people who actually had a shelter bed on count night. The number of people turned away is relatively easy to collect at the time of a count and can be useful information for shelter providers and funders.

In communities with designated shelter facilities

A useful first step is to assemble a current list of all the shelter facilities, including facilities that operate cold/wet weather spaces and women’s transition houses or safe homes in the community. The manager or administrator for each shelter facility should be contacted well in advance of the count night to introduce the count and determine willingness to participate. S/he needs to know the date of the count, an overview of what their participation will involve, and how their participation will benefit the count and the facility. A sample introductory letter is included as Appendix 2.

When the shelter manager provides agreement in principle to participate, a meeting can be scheduled so that information about the shelter count can be delivered personally to the shelter manager and reviewed, with an opportunity for questions to be answered. Depending on the size of the community, a series of private meetings with each shelter manager or a group meeting of shelter managers may achieve this. Preliminary information needed from the shelter facility for planning purposes includes the bed capacity, hours of operation and the shelter staff members who will be responsible for the enumeration forms on the count night.

Experience has shown that some shelters may require assistance on count night to collect the count information, while other shelters can do this without assistance. It is important that the process of collecting and returning shelter information is as easy and convenient as possible for shelter staff. This will encourage a high participation rate among shelters, and ultimately more complete results from the homeless count.

A reminder phone call or email message the day before the count will confirm that the shelter staff is prepared for the count. This also provides an opportunity to confirm arrangements to collect completed enumeration forms from the shelter after the count.

The core information to be collected from shelter facilities and their clients is shown on the sample shelter enumeration form in Appendix 3. A similar template for a women’s transition house enumeration form is provided in Appendix 4.
In communities without shelter facilities
Smaller communities that do not have designated shelter facilities usually have other accommodation for people needing emergency short-term shelter. Accommodation may take the form of safe homes for women and children fleeing abuse, or furnished rooms provided through public funds for adults or families. Contact the agencies that administer these services in your community to make arrangements to obtain shelter count information for the count night.

Optional component for nighttime count
Some smaller communities have successfully acquired numbers of homeless people who are in the local hospital or holding cell during the night of the count. It is more difficult for larger communities with many hospitals and corrections facilities to obtain this data. In the absence of the means to share information with health authorities and corrections facilities, this component is optional and can be counted and reported locally as feasible.

Service locations count
Not all homeless people in a community are able to sleep in a shelter bed; therefore, a shelter count alone will not provide a valid estimate of the number of homeless people in a community.

Some homeless people go to community services and agencies to obtain relief from the outdoors or to receive assistance. A count conducted at these locations will include homeless people who were not counted in shelters the previous night.

Communities in BC vary in size and resources. This affects where in each community people who are homeless go to seek assistance to survive. Typical examples are food banks, meal programs, drop-in centres and laundromats. Each community can identify the specific agencies and service locations to include in a homeless count.

Prior to count day, it is useful to compose a list of agencies that provide services for homeless individuals. Each agency should be contacted well in advance of the count day to introduce the count and determine their willingness to participate. A sample introductory letter is included as Appendix 2. The specific programs or services the agency offers, the schedule for these and typical peak operating hours are important details to have for planning purposes.

When an agency agrees to participate, a meeting can be arranged to personally deliver and review information about the count and provide an opportunity to answer questions. It is advisable to note the layout of the service location so that the count activity is planned to create minimal disruption to the normal operation of the service on count day.

It is useful for service providers to post the upcoming count date at their location. This allows homeless clients to be aware of the upcoming count. Outreach workers can also spread the count date by word-of-mouth among the homeless people they meet.
Experience suggests that some homeless people express disappointment if they aren’t counted. At the same time, some advocates report that homeless people don’t want to be counted. Both purposes can be served if the count date is posted at service locations.

On count day, each client at the service location is approached by a volunteer enumerator and invited to participate in the survey. It is helpful if enumerators wear a distinctive identification tag so that interviewees will associate the survey activity with the homeless count. Those clients who agree to participate are asked the first four questions on the daytime questionnaire (see Appendix 5). The purpose of these questions is to screen people who are not homeless, who were counted the night before in a shelter facility or who were already counted at a previous location. This screening avoids double counting and provides an opportunity to gather basic, anonymous demographic information from participants. Answers to the core questions on the enumeration form provide useful information for service and program planning, funding and outcome evaluation.

At locations where clients line up for service (e.g. meal programs), it is good to be on-site early so that clients can be interviewed as they arrive and line up. This increases the likelihood that everyone in the line will be interviewed before the line begins to move. It is important to note when individuals join their friends in the front of the line-up so they aren’t missed in the count. It is also useful to notice the rate at which the line-up is forming in order to keep pace.

Every line-up is unique; therefore experience is the best teacher. The line-up at a site that serves hundreds of meals will likely start to move before it has been completely surveyed. In that case, one enumerator can go to the end of the line and work forwards while the other continues to work back through the line-up. When the enumerators meet, they can move to where the line ended and work back through the remainder of the line that formed in the meantime. At the point when clients reappear in the line for second helpings, the enumerators will know they have surveyed the original line-up and can step back, watch for new clients to join the line-up and interview those individuals as they arrive.

It is good practice to offer a small gratuity item to people who are approached to participate in the survey. The anticipated size of the population to be surveyed, the budget for the count and the ability to acquire corporate donations will influence the choice of item. Examples of small, easy-to-carry items offered include a chocolate, a bottle of water, juice, or packet of personal hygiene items. Outreach workers and service providers can suggest suitable options for the homeless people in their community.

An approach that several communities have tried successfully is to provide a meal on count day in a public or service location that is well-known and trusted by the homeless community. A location that offers a covered outdoor area as well as an indoor area will be attractive for people who avoid going indoors. A secure “cart check” area to leave
belongings will offer participants an opportunity to circulate easily through a meal service area and be counted. Service providers can also use this event to profile available resources for the homeless population.

**Public places (known locations) count**

The purpose of a public places count is to count homeless people who were not in a shelter the night before and who do not access services on the day of the count.

Not all homeless people in a community attend service agencies on the particular day of a homeless count. It is therefore important to include other places where homeless people are known to spend some of the day, rather than to systematically walk all the streets to count people who are homeless (known as a street count). The “known locations” approach is more efficient and feasible than a street count.⁸

Larger communities can conduct walk-abouts in advance of a count date to identify and confirm outdoor and public places where homeless people are located. This preparation serves several purposes. If as many homeless people as possible are located during daylight hours on count day, then it makes efficient use of the time spent counting.

Outreach workers, service providers, police, business associations and community organizations are valuable sources for identification of outdoor and public locations where homeless individuals may be found. In addition, the use of outreach workers to enumerate the most marginalized homeless people can accomplish valuable information-gathering with minimal disruption to this particular group.

It is useful to assemble a confidential list of known locations along with additional descriptors as necessary prior to count day. This enables the count to proceed efficiently on count day. Preparing a map of each counting area or route will help to ensure that enumerators do not overlap their count areas and will avoid the risk of double counting. The counting route may be covered on foot, by bicycle or by vehicle, depending on the size and density of the area.

Current practice suggests that interviewees are more comfortable when approached by a pair of enumerators comprised of a woman and a man. Each person at the known location is approached by a pair of volunteer enumerators and invited to participate in the survey. It is helpful if enumerators wear a distinctive identification tag so that

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Interviewees will associate the survey activity with the homeless count. Those individuals who agree to participate are asked the first four questions on the top of the daytime questionnaire (see Appendix 5). The purpose of these questions is to screen people who are not homeless, who were counted the night before in a shelter facility or who were already counted at a previous location. This avoids double counting and provides an opportunity to gather basic, anonymous demographic information from participants. Answers to the core questions on the enumeration form provide useful information for service and program planning, funding and outcome evaluation.

Experience shows that some people are more comfortable answering the survey questions if the enumerator stands beside them so they can view the survey form as the enumerator notes their answers. Also, it is good practice to offer a small gratuity item to people who are approached to participate in the survey. The anticipated size of the population to be surveyed, the budget for the count and the ability to acquire corporate donations influences the choice of item. It is also important to achieve a balance between encouraging participation and discouraging repeated participation. Examples of gratuity items are: a snack, bottled water, juice, or a packet of personal hygiene items. Outreach workers and service providers can suggest suitable options for the homeless people in their community.

As a count day progresses, enumerators should find that more and more people have already been counted. This indicates that coverage of the count has been effective.

Figure 2 illustrates the night-time and next day core count location.
When to count

The objective of a homeless count is to achieve a reasonably accurate estimate of the size of a population that is impossible to count completely. The optimum time to do a homeless count, therefore, is when the best chance exists to locate homeless people at the count sites.

In an ideal research situation, all communities would count on the same date; however, that option is not practical. Each community has an existing calendar of activities into which a homeless count would have to be scheduled. Significant variation in climates exists between some regions of the province that also precludes a province-wide count date.

Late fall, winter or early spring are the best times of the year to do a core homeless count in BC. Cold/wet weather shelter spaces are in operation, and shelter facilities commonly operate at maximum capacity during the poor weather months. The numbers
of homeless people included in the shelter portion of a count are maximized in the cold weather months.

It is also more likely during cooler weather that homeless people who sleep rough will need to visit service locations to seek some temporary relief. The validity of the count results increases when these individuals are more accessible to enumerators.

Homeless people are more likely to need services approaching the issue date of income assistance cheques. A corresponding count date increases the likelihood that homeless people will be included in a service-based count. A mid-week day during the third week of the month falls prior to the issue of income assistance cheques in BC. When possible, a count date that is also coordinated with a day that food banks are open offers an additional service site where homeless people can be enumerated.

One of the benefits of homeless counts is the ability to identify trends over time. The pattern of current practice indicates that a homeless count conducted every two years provides a stream of information that enables trends to be identified and monitored. The capacity of communities to undertake a biannual homeless count may vary, however.

Communities that plan their first count can choose a date with future counts in mind. Communities that have already done a homeless count can make a strategic decision to continue with a similar date or to begin a new series of counts at a different time of the year. For example, after 25 years of conducting their annual homeless count in the third week of October, Seattle changed their count date to the third week of January starting in 2006.⁹

**Planning a homeless count**

Careful planning and preparation is vital to the success of a homeless count. It is a large project for a community to execute because it involves the coordination and cooperation of many different parties.

This section presents information from the research literature and community experience in BC about timeframes for planning a count, resource requirements, recruitment and training of volunteer enumerators, and the importance of community support. A checklist of the major tasks involved in planning and conducting a homeless count is included as Appendix 6.

**Timeframe**

The size of the community, its available resources and its previous experience with homeless counts will determine the timeframe required to plan a count. Experience indicates that it can take up to a year to secure a funding source for a homeless count. For a large urban area, the "Request for Proposal" stage to a "count date" may be as

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⁹ Seattle-King County Coalition on Homelessness, One Night Count Committee, & King County Housing and Community Development, Homeless Housing Programs. (2006). *The 2006 annual one night count: People who are homeless in King County, Washington.*
long as eight months, with five months to organize the count. By contrast, a smaller town organized a count in approximately three months once a funding source was secured.

**Resource requirements**

**Volunteers**

Homeless counts are volunteer-labour intensive. The 2005 homeless count in the Greater Vancouver area covered twenty-one municipalities and used 300 volunteers. The 2005 homeless count in Greater Victoria covered three municipalities and was conducted by over 150 volunteers. The 2008 Metro Vancouver Homelessness Count used 670 volunteers in teams of two doing a 3-hour shift per team.

According to the research literature and current practice in BC, it is ideal if volunteers work in teams of at least two with a male and female on each team. It is preferable if one person per team has some experience with homeless individuals. This provides a measure of personal comfort and safety. The core count method is designed to minimize risks to personal security of volunteers and homeless people.

Volunteers are the backbone of homeless counts; therefore it is important for volunteers to have the tools and skills to be successful in their role. Important characteristics or skills for volunteer enumerators include:

- good people skills,
- an interest in social issues,
- respectful demeanour,
- ability to read non-verbal cues,
- familiarity with the geographic layout of the area,
- a sense of humour,
- good physical health and stamina.

Some sources of potential volunteers include:

- health professionals,
- faith-based community members,
- librarians,
- students of social justice or social service programs,
- members of local mental health associations, service clubs,
- real estate professionals, or
- service providers who are available for an enumeration shift on count day.

The suitability of potential volunteers can be confirmed with the use of a screening process. The provision of standardized training for volunteers helps to ensure that volunteers will be effective and that the count is conducted in a standardized, safe and effective way. This adds to the reliability of count results.
Training may include an overview of the principles of research such as the importance of a uniform count method and the ethical treatment of people and their personal information. Volunteers can learn, practice and troubleshoot interview skills through role plays. Orientation to the enumeration form will help volunteers to clearly understand the survey questions and responses.

The survey tool is intended to be anonymous; however, an interviewee’s anonymity may be at risk if an enumerator knows or recognizes the person being interviewed. For this reason, an oath of confidentiality should be part of the volunteer training to insure anonymity of results after the count. This is particularly important in smaller communities where the identity of individuals surveyed may be known by the enumerator.

**Potential sources of financial and in-kind assistance**

Financial assistance for previous homeless counts in BC came in the form of grants from the federal government, health regions and non-profit organizations. Federal government funding sources included Service Canada, Human Resources and Social Development, the National Homelessness Initiative, and Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative. It is important that a count committee establish with funding partners which party will own the raw data and the extent to which access to the raw data will be provided to other parties after the count.

Sponsorships from local businesses are potential sources of goods and services (e.g. printing) required for a count. Post-secondary institutions may have partnership arrangements (subject to ethics guidelines) whereby support could be provided for tasks such as compiling results, data analysis and report writing.

All sectors operate with limited resources. As with any undertaking, a homeless count needs to use available resources carefully in order to successfully execute the project. A key is to appropriately match the resources available to the tasks needed.

**Importance of community support**

In addition to the support of volunteer enumerators, cooperation and collaboration among agencies that serve disadvantaged people in the community is vital to the success of a homeless count. Without community support, a homeless count will not succeed.

There are several barriers to garnering support for a homeless count. Some community stakeholders may not acknowledge that homelessness exists. A few service providers may fear that count results will be used to reduce their funding and current service levels. There may be concern among some homeless advocates that homeless individuals will be subjected to disrespectful treatment by enumerators or exploitation by the media during the count. Fear may arise that hidden locations of homeless people will be discovered and disclosed, resulting in those individuals being dispersed or harassed.
At the same time, there are benefits to be achieved for all stakeholders in a homeless count. These include:

- raising community awareness about homelessness,
- dispelling fear and myths about people who are homeless,
- mobilizing community members to work towards solutions to homelessness, and
- gathering standardized data to strengthen proposals to funders for initiatives to address homelessness.

It is important to communicate the benefits of a homeless count in order to build support among community members. Fears about counting homeless people may be allayed when a commitment to the standards of ethical research (no harm, preservation of dignity, anonymity, and confidentiality) is communicated. A Fact Sheet regarding the count can be developed and distributed to gain community support. A sample is included as Appendix 7.

Community stakeholders need appropriate opportunities to inform the plans for a count. This does not imply that all stakeholders must participate on a planning committee, but that the planning process includes their expert input. A flexible approach to planning that facilitates the inclusion of key informants and maintains a manageable and efficient core group of planners is an effective approach.

The information needs of a range of stakeholders can be met by a homeless count. The core method outlined in these Guidelines provides a basic mechanism that can be enhanced by individual communities to meet their unique homelessness information needs.

The right to privacy of homeless individuals must be respected while the count is being conducted. It is important to gain the cooperation of the media in this regard during the count. This will also help the count to proceed efficiently and without interruption. Experience shows that an agreement with the media to provide a press release when the count is finished can meet the needs of the media and protect the privacy of individuals during the count. A sample media release template for early results is included as Appendix 8.

**Compiling count results**

After the count, enumeration forms from all shelters and from volunteer enumerators are collected so the results can be analyzed and reported. Accurate data compilation is essential to a count effort. Analyzing and reporting data in a consistent manner is vital if count results are to be compared across communities. A general overview is provided, followed by sub-sections that outline in more detail the data reports to be generated from a core count.

The core count questions are tallied by category of homelessness. These tallies form a bank of core data from which reports can be generated and compared between and within communities. When the core tallies are completed, individual communities have
flexibility to form and name sub-categories or combined categories of homelessness as they wish, and to produce additional results as needed to serve their unique, local purposes.

The following sub-sections outline the data reports to be generated from a core count. Examples of add-on reports are provided in the last sub-section. In each case, the count data should be tallied by category of homelessness (as laid out in Table 1) and by gender. The following reports will generate a range of useful and standardized sets of homeless data that can be analyzed and applied to a variety of purposes.

**Core count information to collect and report**

The enumeration forms from the nighttime count of shelters and the next day count at public places and service locations will provide the information required to produce the core count reports. The ease of conducting interviews was given priority in designing the enumeration forms. Consequently, some additional steps are required to prepare the data for compilation and analysis. These are noted in italics under the applicable data items below.

Count results should be reported as number of respondents by category of homelessness:

- Category 1 - People sleeping rough
- Category 2 - People in emergency overnight accommodation
- Category 3 - People in 24-hour shelter accommodation
- Category 4 - People in women’s transition houses and safe homes

Unanswered questions should be reported as “not answered”.

*For each category:*

Results should be compiled as laid out below. A report produced in this way will also provide a total count of all the categories combined.

1. Total number of homeless people
   1.1 Total number of males
   1.2 Number of males in each age category - Subtract year of survey from year of birth as recorded on the enumeration form to get respondent’s age (e.g. 2008-1980 = 28 years):
      - < 19
      - 19-29
      - 30-39
      - 40-49
      - 50-59
1.3 Total number of females

1.4 Number of females in each age category - Subtract year of survey from year of birth as recorded on the enumeration form to get respondent’s age (e.g. 2008-1980 = 28 years):
   < 19
   19-29
   30-39
   40-49
   50-59
   60-69
   70 +

1.5 Total number of dependent, accompanying children (under 19)

2. Length of time homeless – reported by gender
   Recorded response to be converted into the appropriate time category for reporting:
   Less than 1 week
   1 week to less than 1 month
   1 month to less than 6 months
   6 months to less than 1 year
   1 year or more
   Not answered

3. Length of time in community – reported by gender
   Recorded response to be converted into the appropriate time category for reporting:
   Less than 1 week
   1 week to less than 1 month
   1 month to less than 6 months
   6 months to less than 1 year
   1 year or more
   Not answered

4. Community of last residence – reported by gender
If a different community than where the count took place is identified as the community of last residence, reference its location on the regional map of BC below. If it is within the same region, report as “Different community, within region”. If it is not, report as “out of region and in BC” or “out of BC” or “out of Canada” as appropriate.

- Same as the current community
- Different community, within region (see regional map below)
- Out of region and in BC
- Out of BC
- Out of Canada
- Not answered

Regions as delineated by the Ministries of Health, and Employment and Income Assistance to locate community of last residence

5. Health conditions – reported by gender
   - Medical
   - Addiction
   - Mental illness
   - Physical disability
   - Not answered

6. Addiction and mental illness – reported by gender
Examples of add-on information that is commonly collected and reported

In order to build a bank of add-on data in a standardized format, add-on information may be compiled and reported as follows, by category of homelessness.

7. Reasons for homelessness – reported by gender
   - Can’t find a place
   - Can’t afford available housing
   - Evicted
   - Moving/stranded
   - Abuse
   - Addiction
   - Relationship breakdown
   - Family conflict
   - From corrections / treatment facility
   - Don’t qualify (no ID/references)
   - By choice
   - Other
   - Not answered

8. Reasons for not staying in a shelter facility – reported by gender
   - Turned away – shelter full
   - Turned away – ineligible for facility
   - Couldn’t get to one/none in area
   - Don’t know about them
   - Able to stay at someone’s place
   - Don’t like shelter
   - Other
   - Not answered

9. Living with: – reported by gender
   - Partner/spouse
   - Children
   - Friend(s)
   - Pet
   - Not answered

10. Ethnicity – reported by gender
    Report as Aboriginal if only Aboriginal is checked. If Aboriginal is checked plus Métis or First Nations, report only as Métis or First Nations.
    - Aboriginal - unspecified
    - First Nations
    - Métis
    - Asian
    - Black
    - Caucasian
    - Filipino
11. First Nations Band name – if provided

12. Main source of income – reported by gender
   Report the underlined response for this data field.
   - Welfare / Income Assistance
   - Disability benefit
   - Employment Insurance
   - Pension
   - Panhandling
   - Recycling (binning, bottle collecting)
   - Employment - occasional or casual
   - Employment – full time
   - Other
   - No income
   - Not answered

13. Other sources of income – reported by gender
   Report checked responses for this data field
   - Welfare / Income Assistance
   - Disability benefit
   - Employment Insurance
   - Pension
   - Panhandling
   - Recycling (binning, bottle collecting)
   - Employment - occasional or casual
   - Employment – full time
   - Other
   - No income
   - Not answered

14. For shelter clients: Place to live upon discharge – reported by gender
   - Yes
   - No
   - Not answered

15. Number of people who declined to participate
   Total number of Daytime Core Count questionnaires with “No answer” selected for questions 1 or 2, or “No” selected for question 2.
Reporting count results

It is essential that results of homeless counts are interpreted and reported correctly. This requires that the results be clearly understood. This section provides information on the interpretation and limitations of results from homeless counts that are conducted according to the Guidelines.

The core method described in these Guidelines produces information that represents the number of people who:

1. were counted; and
2. at the time of the count, were
   - sleeping rough, i.e. in public or outdoor spaces and without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters; or living in structures not designed for habitation and without legal claim; or
   - sleeping in an emergency overnight shelter and required to live their daytime hours in public space; or
   - staying temporarily in 24-hour shelter accommodation; or
   - staying temporarily in a women’s transition house or safe home

Some people whose living situations fit the categories of homelessness included in the core count may not have been counted. This can occur if a qualifying shelter does not participate or only submits partial results for the count night. It can also occur if people sleeping rough don’t pass through a service location or public location on the particular day of the count. In addition, some homeless people may decline to participate. The number of homeless people is also subject to fluctuation because of the cyclical nature of homelessness. These are some of the reasons why it is impossible to accurately determine how many people are homeless.

The Guidelines provide a way to draw a reliable and valid estimate of the magnitude of homelessness through a uniform count method applied to a clearly defined core group. The count method produces a low estimate, or an estimate of the minimum number of people who, at the time of the count, slept rough or spent the night in a shelter.

It is important that limitations of the count results be stated in the report of the count. For example, the questionnaire collects self-reported data from respondents. This should be identified in the report as a potential limit on the reliability of the demographic information collected. Factors that contribute to the undercount should be stated as limitations. These include any circumstances that might have impacted the results of the count, such as weather conditions, numbers of volunteers available to conduct the count, bed capacities of any shelters that did not participate in the count, or if known locations were found abandoned on count day.

Another limitation is that only four categories of homelessness are counted in the core method. Living situations that represent risk of homelessness require different methods of data collection, some of which remain to be developed and others that are already in use. For example, data on inadequately housed people is collected by Statistics
Canada in their Survey of Household Spending. The Census collects the numbers of individuals staying temporarily in households as of Census Day that may provide a reasonable estimate of “couch surfing”.

Results of a second homeless count are generally much higher than the first count conducted by a community. Some of the increase can be attributed to experience with counting. This should be included as an interpretation in the second count report. Experience suggests that the learning curve for counting flattens after the second count. Results from third and subsequent counts more accurately reflect the trend in the magnitude of homelessness.

**Summary**

The core count method described in these Guidelines was developed so that communities throughout BC can count their homeless populations in a standardized way, using standardized definitions or classifications of homelessness. The core information needs of service providers, funders and policy analysts are incorporated in this method. The common elements of homeless counts that already take place in BC, and good current practice as reported in research on homeless counts are reflected in the core count method.

The core method will generate a valid estimate of the *minimum* number of people who, at the time of the count, slept rough or spent the night in a homeless shelter. It will also provide a basic demographic profile of the homeless people who were counted.

This approach to counting homelessness provides a means of gathering information that is useful for service and program planning and outcome evaluation. It will enable trends in homelessness to be tracked and compared between and within BC communities over time.
Selected Sources Consulted


## Appendix 1

### Some BC communities that have conducted homeless counts

The following is a list of some communities in BC whose homeless count reports were obtained and reviewed in the preparation of these Guidelines.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capital Regional District</td>
<td>February 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Victoria and area)</td>
<td>January 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Vancouver</td>
<td>March 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>January 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamloops</td>
<td>November 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelowna</td>
<td>November 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>April 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nanaimo</td>
<td>September 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>July 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>November 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>April 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunshine Coast</td>
<td>January-May 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Fraser Valley</td>
<td>August 2005</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2

Sample introductory letters

For shelter facilities

(date)

To Whom It May Concern:

RE: Homeless Count, (date)

Your agency has been identified as one that provides shelter services to the homeless population in (name of community). The (name of planning group) is coordinating a homeless count, the results of which can be used by service providers, advocates, citizens and governments to address the problem of homelessness. Count results will provide an estimate of the size of the homeless population and a current profile of homelessness in (name of community). The results will be publicly reported.

The objective is to count homeless individuals using a survey. The anonymized demographic information will be used to develop a profile of homelessness as of the date of the count. Knowing the estimated size and demographic profile of the homeless population will help to identify trends in homelessness over time.

We request your agency’s participation that will involve administering the survey to all clients who stay in your facility on the night of (date of nighttime count). Volunteer enumerators may be available to assist if needed. The completed survey forms will be picked up from your facility at a pre-arranged time.

We really need your help to make this count as complete as possible. Your facility has an important part in contributing results for the homeless count.

I will be in contact with you in the next several weeks to arrange a meeting to discuss the upcoming count and to answer any questions or concerns you may have.

Sincerely,

(contact person’s name)

(Agency affiliation)

(phone #)

(email address)

10Adapted from Homeless Count 2003: New Haven Final Report, September 2003
For service locations

(date)

To Whom It May Concern:

RE: Homeless Count, (date)

Your agency has been identified as one that provides services to the homeless population in (name of community). The (name of planning group) is coordinating a homeless count, the results of which can be used by service providers, advocates, citizens and governments to address the problem of homelessness. Count results will provide an estimate of the size of the homeless population and a current profile of homelessness in (name of community). The results will be publicly reported.

The objective is to count homeless individuals using a survey. The anonymized demographic information will be used to develop a profile of homelessness as of the date of the count. Knowing the estimated size and demographic profile of the homeless population will help to identify trends in homelessness over time.

We request your agency’s participation that will involve volunteer enumerators attending your location to administer the survey to clients who visit your agency on (date of count). We would like to meet with you to confirm your participation, hours of operation, services provided and recommended peak times to optimize a count effort at your location. A poster is enclosed for you to post to encourage clients who are homeless to be counted on count day.

We really need your help to make this count as complete as possible. Your agency has an important part in contributing results for the homeless count.

I will be in contact with you in the next several weeks to arrange a meeting to discuss the upcoming count and to answer any questions or concerns you may have.

Sincerely,

(contact person’s name)
(Agency affiliation)
(phone #)
(email address)
Appendix 3

Shelter Enumeration Form

(name and date of count)
Shelter Enumeration
Front page template

Name of shelter: _______________________________________________________

Town / community: _____________________________________________________

Capacity and type of beds:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th># Men</th>
<th># Women</th>
<th># Dependent, accompanying children (under 19)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cold/wet weather</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emergency/overnight</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24-hour</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of clients on (date)    # Men ______ # Women ______

               # Children ______

Turn-aways – number of people unable to be served on (date) because:

    the facility was full       _________ or
    the person was ineligible for this facility __________

Total # of turned-away     Men _____ Women _____ Children_____

Please note any unusual circumstances that may have affected the count tonight

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Anonymous demographic information is being collected as part of the nighttime and
daytime components of the homeless count. Please complete a client enumeration form
for each person staying in your facility. A separate form for each child accompanied by
an adult does not need to be completed; children’s ages can be entered on the adult form.

At the end of the night, put all of the forms into the enumeration envelope, seal the envelope and call the pick-up number on the front of the envelope.

If you have any questions or need assistance, please call (contact person and number).
(Name of) Shelter Enumeration Form – one form per client to be completed

Gender: □ Male
□ Female
□ Unknown

Client’s year of birth: ____________________

Is this shelter client: □ Alone
□ With dependent children (under 19); how many ________

How long has client been without a place of her/his own?
_____ days
_____ weeks
_____ months
_____ years

How long has client lived in this city/town/local community?
_____ days
_____ weeks
_____ months
_____ years

In what city/town/community did client last have her/his own place to live?
_______________________________________________

Does client have any of the following health conditions? Check all that apply.
□ Medical condition
□ Addiction
□ Mental illness
□ Physical disability

Add-on / optional information

What are the main reasons client is without own place to live? Check all that apply.
□ Can’t find a place
□ Can’t afford available places
□ Evicted
□ Moving or stranded
□ Abuse
□ Addiction
□ Relationship breakdown
□ Family conflict
□ From corrections / treatment facility
□ Don’t qualify (no ID/references)
□ By choice
□ Other ___________________________________________________

Is this shelter client:
□ Alone
□ With a partner/spouse
□ With children: ages________________________________________
□ With friend(s)
□ With pet (specify) ________________________________
□ Other __________________________________________

To which ethnic or cultural group does client belong?
□ Aboriginal:
  □ First Nations _____________________________
  □ Métis
□ Asian (i.e. Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Cambodian)
□ Black
□ Caucasian
□ Filipino
□ South Asian (i.e. East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan)
□ Other
What are client’s sources of income? Check all that apply; underline the main source

☐ Welfare / Income Assistance
☐ Disability benefit
☐ Employment Insurance
☐ Pension
☐ Panhandling
☐ Recycling (binning, bottle collecting)
☐ Employment: Occasional / part-time ☐ Full-time ☐
☐ Other ________________________________
☐ No income

Does client have a place to live when they leave this facility? Yes ☐ No ☐
Appendix 4

Transition House Enumeration Form

(Name and date of count)
Transition House / Safe House Enumeration
Front page template

Name of facility: ______________________________________________________

Town / community: ____________________________________________________

Total capacity and type of beds:  # Women _______  # Children _______

Number staying on (night of count):  # Women _______  # Children _______

Turnaways – number of people unable to be served on (date) because:

the facility was full _________ or

the person was ineligible for this facility ____________

# adults turned away: _________  # children turned away: _________

Please note any unusual circumstances that may have affected the count tonight

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

Anonymous demographic information is being collected as part of the nighttime and daytime components of the homeless count. Please complete a client enumeration form for each person staying in your facility. A separate form for each child accompanied by an adult does not need to be completed; children’s ages can be entered on the adult form.

At the end of the night, put all of the forms into the enumeration envelope, seal the envelope and call the pick-up number on the front of the envelope.
If you have any questions or need assistance, please call (contact person and number).
(Name of) Women’s Transition House Enumeration Form – one form per client to be completed

Client’s year of birth: ________________________

Is this shelter client:  □ Alone
□ With dependent children (under 19); how many ______

How long has client been without a place of her own?
   _____ days
   _____ weeks
   _____ months
   _____ years

How long has client lived in this city/town/local community?
   _____ days
   _____ weeks
   _____ months
   _____ year

In what city/town/community did client last have her own place to live?
_______________________________________________

Does client have any of the following health conditions? Check all that apply.
   □ Medical condition
   □ Addiction
   □ Mental illness
   □ Physical disability

Add-on / optional information

□ Aboriginal:
   □ First Nations _________________________________
   □ Métis

□ Asian (i.e. Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Cambodian)
□ Black
□ Caucasian
☐ Filipino
☐ South Asian (i.e. East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan)
☐ Other

What are client’s sources of income? Check all that apply; underline the main source
☐ Welfare / Income Assistance
☐ Disability benefit
☐ Employment Insurance
☐ Pension
☐ Panhandling
☐ Recycling (binning, bottle collecting)
☐ Employment: Occasional / part-time ☐ Full-time ☐
☐ Other _____________________________________________
☐ No income

Does client have a place to live when they leave this facility? Yes ☐ No ☐
Appendix 5

Public Places / Service Locations Enumeration Form

(name and date of count)
Daytime Core Count Questions
(for Public Places and Service Locations)

Name or description of location: _________________________________________

Nearest street / intersection: ____________________________________________

City / Town / Community: ______________________________________________

Time: _________________________

Screening questions
1. Have you already spoken to someone wearing a tag like this today?
   □ Yes (Thank person; end of screening)
   □ No (Proceed to Introduction)
   □ No answer (Thank person; end of screening. Collected for partial estimate of under-count)

Introduction: The (name of count) is surveying all youth and adults in (name of community) who are homeless. The purpose is to get a current estimate of the size and nature of homelessness in (name of community). The survey is anonymous and the answers will be useful for homeless advocates, service providers and governments to address the problem of homelessness.

2. It will take about 5 minutes and you are free to skip over any questions you don’t want to answer. May I ask you some questions?
   □ Yes (Thank person; go to next question)
   □ No (No problem; end of screening)
   □ No answer (Thank person; end of screening. Collected for partial estimate of under-count)
3. Do you have a place you pay rent for?
   □ Yes (Ask next question for clarification to screen out people who aren’t in categories being counted)
   □ No (Next question)

4. Where did you stay last night? (Checks for false positives to previous question)
   □ Own apartment / house / room (Thank person; screened out of questionnaire)
   □ Shelter (Thank person; screened out of questionnaire)
   □ Women’s transition house or safe home (Thank person; screened out of questionnaire)
   □ Outside, parkade, public building, abandoned building, container, transit shelter, vehicle (go to next question) (Coded as Category 1)
   □ Other ________________________________ (go to next question; category will be confirmed by data analyst based on description provided by enumerator)

   (end of screening questions)

5. Observed (don’t ask) gender: □ Male
   □ Female
   □ Unknown

6. What year were you born: ________________

7. How many children (under 19 years old) live with you? □ None
   # __________

8. How long have you been without a place of your own?
   _____ days
   _____ weeks
   _____ months
   _____ years

9. How long have you lived in this city/town/local community?
   _____ days
   _____ weeks
   _____ months
   _____ years
10. In what city/town/community did you last have your own place to live?  
_______________________________________________

11. Do you have any of the following health conditions? Check all that apply.
   □ Medical condition
   □ Addiction
   □ Mental illness
   □ Physical disability

Thank you for participating!

Add-on / optional questions:

12. What are the main reasons you are without your own place to live? (Check all that apply)
   □ Can’t find a place
   □ Can’t afford available places
   □ Evicted
   □ Moving or stranded
   □ Abuse
   □ Addiction
   □ Relationship breakdown
   □ Family conflict
   □ From corrections or treatment facility
   □ No ID/references
   □ By choice
   □ Other ______________________________________________
13. Can you tell me why you didn’t stay in a shelter last night?

☐ Turned away – shelter full
☐ Turned away – ineligible for facility
☐ Couldn’t get to one / none in the area
☐ Don’t know about them
☐ Able to stay at someone’s place
☐ Don’t like shelter
☐ Other

14. I’d like to ask who lives with you - are you:

☐ Alone
☐ With a partner/spouse
☐ With children: ages_______________________________ (cross references question above)
☐ With friend(s)
☐ With pet (specify) ________________________________
☐ Other __________________________________________

15. To which ethnic or cultural group do you belong? (If Aboriginal, can also select sub-category and fill in Band name if provided by participant)

☐ Aboriginal:
  ☐ First Nations _________________________________
  ☐ Métis

☐ Asian (i.e. Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Cambodian)
☐ Black
☐ Caucasian
☐ Filipino
☐ South Asian (i.e. East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan)
☐ Other
16. What are your sources of income? (Underline main source; check all others that apply)

☐ Welfare / Income Assistance
☐ Disability benefit
☐ Employment Insurance
☐ Pension
☐ Panhandling
☐ Recycling (binning, bottle collecting)
☐ Employment: Occasional / Part-time ☐ Full-time ☐
☐ Other ________________________________
☐ No income

Thank you!
Appendix 6

Checklist of planning tasks

The following checklist is offered as a general guide for the major tasks or work units to be accomplished for a homeless count.

Prior to Count Day
- Secure funding source(s) for the count
- Seek donations from the community for goods and services required
- Gather lists of count sites: shelter facilities, service locations
- Engage in consultation or walk-abouts to develop a confidential list of public places (known locations)
- Contact shelter and other homelessness service providers to determine their participation in the count
- Develop logistical plans for daytime portion of counts: route maps, schedules, physical layout of service locations
- Add additional questions to enumeration forms if required
- Recruit, screen, select volunteers
- Prepare and distribute information/instruction packages, enumeration forms, large and distinctive identification tags for enumerators
- Train volunteers
- Contact shelters and service providers to remind them of the count and confirm they are prepared

On Count Day
- Provide support and information as needed throughout count day
- Collect enumeration forms at the end of each counting shift

After Count Day
- Ensure that shelter forms are collected from participating shelters
- Compile early basic results (i.e. total number counted)
- Release early results to media
- Thank you / debriefing / evaluation event for volunteers and planning group
- Compile core count results
- Compile add-on components of count results
- Write report
- Release report
Appendix 7

Sample Fact Sheet for Communities ¹¹

Homeless Count (Year) Fact Sheet

(Name of homeless count) is a comprehensive community-wide homeless count sponsored by the (name of planning group) that will include youth, single adults and families in (name of community). We are recruiting volunteers to help conduct these surveys in a variety of settings, including meal locations, drop-in centres, food banks and with agency service providers on (date).

This project includes a nighttime shelter count followed by a count at service locations and public places during the daytime on (date). The information obtained from this count is important to identify trends in need for housing and services for people who are homeless in (name of community). This information is useful to service providers, advocates, citizens and governments to address the problem of homelessness.

All service provider organizations in the area that work with this population will be contacted over the next several weeks by representatives of the (name of planning group) to inform program staff of our intentions, and review the plan of activities for the count. Programs are also invited to have staff volunteer in conducting surveys.

(A description of the count planning group can be included to provide an overview of its membership and objectives.)

¹¹ Adapted from Homeless Count 2003: New Haven Final Report, September 2003
Appendix 8

Sample News Release Template – Early results

On (date of count), the (city/town/community) of (name) conducted a count of homelessness. The purpose of the count is to identify profiles and trends of homelessness so our community can understand and more effectively deal with the problem. The results of our homeless count can be used by service providers and governments to plan and fund suitable programs to address homelessness.

During the daytime (yesterday??) (insert number) homeless people were counted who are living rough, and spent the night outdoors, (list several general sample places without specific identifiers, i.e. under bridges, in transit shelters).

Overnight on (date of nighttime count), (insert number of categories 2, 3 & 4) people who were homeless were staying in shelters. Of these, (insert number from category 2) people were in emergency overnight shelters or cold/wet weather beds, and are forced to spend time daily in public spaces.

The total number of homeless people counted was (insert number). This only represents those individuals who were counted, and reflects the minimum number of people in (name of community) who either live rough or sleep in shelter facilities.

Detailed analysis of the results will be available in a full report to be released (estimated date). It will provide insights into the profile of homelessness as it currently exists in (name of community). It will answer important questions such as, are these people coming from other areas or were they living locally before becoming homeless? What is the average age of a homeless person in our community? Are they able-bodied and choosing a homeless lifestyle or do they face barriers to becoming re-housed?