

2015 PORTLAND/ MULTNOMAH COUNTY HOMELESS STREET COUNT VOLUNTEER INSTRUCTIONS

STREET COUNT OVERVIEW

The Street Count captures a snapshot of the individuals and families experiencing homelessness in Portland/ Multnomah County who are sleeping outside, on the street, in a vehicle, or other place not intended for human habitation. This information is collected in partnership with more than 150 organizations that participate in the count in one or both of the following ways:

- **Service-based surveys:** Service organizations will fill out a Street Count survey form for anyone coming to their programs for services who is unsheltered on the night of January 28.
- **Outreach:** Organizations that conduct outreach to people sleeping outside will fill out a survey form for anyone they encounter who is unsheltered on the night of January 28.

The Street Count survey can be conducted anytime between January 28 and February 3, as long as the only people who are surveyed are those who were unsheltered on the night of January 28.

As a volunteer, you have been assigned to help an organization administer the Street Count survey with people who visit their program for services.

ARRIVING AT YOUR VOLUNTEER SHIFT

Arrive on time for your shift, and bring your packet and survey forms with you. The shifts are timed to coincide with program schedules and it is essential that you are punctual and able to stay for the entire shift. When you arrive, ask for the contact person listed on the assignment sheet. Explain that you are there to help conduct the Homeless Street Count. Ask how they would like you to conduct the survey at their site, including where you should stand, who you should talk to, and how you should approach people. Wear your Street Count Volunteer badge.

In most cases only a portion of the people you will encounter at your site will qualify for the Street Count survey. Ask the agency for their suggestions for how to approach people to find out if they are unsheltered. They will know best how to do this in a way that is respectful and non-threatening, given the specific nature of the location and the clientele.

WHO TO SURVEY

Only fill out a survey form for people who are unsheltered on Wednesday night, January 28th 2015 and who have not already taken the Street Count survey.

Definition of “unsheltered”

Unsheltered means sleeping in a place not intended for human habitation. It does not include sleeping in shelter, transitional housing, an institution, or doubled up/ couch surfing.

“Unsheltered” includes streets, doorways, sidewalks, vehicles, parks, woods, open space, bridges, overpasses, railroads, abandoned buildings, boats not equipped for residential use, all-night commercial establishments, building roofs or stairwells. People who are camping or are staying on other people’s property in garages, sheds, tents,

on porches, or in backyards are considered unsheltered if they are sleeping somewhere without heat or running water and do not have access to these facilities.

“Unsheltered” does NOT include people who are doubled up or couch surfing; staying in an emergency shelter or transitional housing; or staying overnight in a jail, hospital or other institution.¹

APPROACHING RESPONDENTS

- **Start a conversation:** Begin a conversation with potential respondents by saying something like, “I am surveying people about their housing situation. Can I ask you a few questions?”
- **Find out if they qualify:** Ask something like, “Would you be willing to tell me about your housing situation on Wednesday night the 28th?” If they were unsheltered on that night, ask if they have already taken the Street Count survey. If they haven’t, then continue with the survey.
- **Get verbal consent:** It is important to get verbal consent before starting the survey. Briefly explain that you would like to conduct a short survey and then say, “Are you willing to participate?”
- **Confidentiality:** You can assure survey respondents that the information we collect is confidential. The identifying information will not be linked to the data, but will merely be used to eliminate duplicate surveys. Data will only be reported in aggregated summaries.
- **What if someone refuses?** Participation in the survey is optional. If someone refuses, you can encourage them, but don’t be pushy. Explain that we are trying to make sure everyone gets counted because this information will help us to get the resources and services necessary to meet the needs of people living on the streets. Respond to any questions or concerns they may have, but emphasize that their participation is optional.
- **Tally sheet:** If you encounter someone who is unsheltered but who refuses to participate, make a note on the tally sheet. The information on the tally sheet will help us to better understand the extent to which the official count number may be an undercount. If you can verify that the person was unsheltered on 1/28, you should also fill out Side B of the Street Count form.

FILLING OUT THE SURVEY FORM

- **The form should be filled out by staff or volunteers:** Only people who have reviewed these training materials should complete the survey form. You can assist respondents in filling out their own forms, but they should not fill out the forms without support from staff or volunteers.
- **Leave questions blank if necessary:** Make every effort to fill out the entire survey form. However, if a respondent refuses or is unable to answer a specific question, don’t insist, just continue with the rest of the survey. (Note that forms without initials, age, and gender cannot be included in the official Street Count data.)
- **Side A or Side B?** The goal is to fill out side A, but you should only use side A if you are able to get answers to the questions in the grey box at the top of the page (initials, age, gender). If you can’t, use side B. Fill out either side A or B of each form, never both.

¹ We understand that by only surveying people who meet the definition of “unsheltered” we are leaving out people who experience other important forms of housing instability. This issue will be addressed in the Street Count report, but for the survey itself we are required to adhere to the strict definition of “unsheltered” that is provided by the federal government.

- **One form per person:** Use one form per person. If an individual is part of a household (a couple or a family with children), attach all the forms for the household together and/or write in a household ID in the box at the bottom of each form. (See p.7 for more on household IDs.)
- **Asking the questions:** Approach the questions in whatever way you think will make the respondent most comfortable and will give you the most accurate answers. If a particular question makes a respondent uncomfortable or brings up issues s/he is unwilling to discuss, move on to the next question and leave that one blank.
- **Reading the answers:** You do not need to read all of the answer choices for the multiple choice questions out loud. For most questions, you can simply ask the question, get a response, and then see which answer choice most closely corresponds to the response. Or you can let the respondent skim the answer choices as you ask each question.
- **Language translation:** If needed, you can access immediate interpretation services via a telephone hotline service available for free to Street Count participants. Call 855-899-9696, provide the access code 844295, and tell them the interpretation is for the Portland Housing Bureau. The easiest way to use this service is by putting the interpreter on speaker phone.
- **One Night Shelter Count:** The Street Count form should only be used for people who are unsheltered. A separate survey called the One Night Shelter Count will be conducted on January 28 to gather information about people who are in shelter or transitional housing. The information for the One Night Shelter Count is gathered by the programs that provide those services.

INSTRUCTIONS AND DEFINITIONS FOR QUESTIONS ON SIDE A

Top box: Don't start the survey without first asking the two questions in this box:

- **“Did you or will you sleep outside on Wednesday night 1/28?”** If the answer is no, stop the survey. (If the answer is obvious – i.e. if you are interviewing someone while they are sleeping outside on 1/28, you do not need to ask this question.)
- **“Have you already taken the Street Count survey this week?”** If the answer is yes, stop the survey.

Shaded box: The questions in this box are required because they are used to eliminate duplicate surveys. If the respondent refuses to answer them, we cannot use their responses in the official count, so there is no point in continuing to fill out Side A of the survey. Instead, just fill out Side B.

- **1st letter first name, 1st 3 letters last name:** You can assure respondents that their initials will only be used to eliminate duplication across surveys, not in connection with their responses. Write clearly please.
- **Age:** List the respondent's current age, not the date of birth. Write clearly please.
- **Gender:** Select one of the five boxes.

If selecting transgender, specify whether the individual is transgender male to female or female to male (this is required by the federal government).

The option “Z” is available for respondents who do not identify with any gender (not for respondents who opt not to disclose a gender – in that situation you should leave the gender question blank).

Question 1: Where did you/ will you sleep Wednesday night, January 28?

- If the response to this question is any place that does not fit in the definition of “unsheltered” on page 1, then you should stop the survey and discard it.
- Select “Park” for downtown or neighborhood parks. Select “Woods/ open space” for parks like Forest Park and Washington Park as well as for other kinds of woods and open space.

Question 2: What part of town did you/ will you sleep in on 1/28?

- The enclosed map shows the boundaries for each of the answer choices. One way to ask this question is to ask respondents to identify the location on the map.
- If respondents don’t have precise location information, ask for their best estimate.
- If the respondent moves frequently, make sure you are getting the location of where they slept on the night of Wednesday, January 28.

Question 3: Who slept/ will sleep outside with you on 1/28?

- Make sure to check all that apply.
- If the respondent says “my family”, clarify whether it is a street family or biological family, and check the appropriate box.

Question 4: Do you have custody of children who did not sleep outside with you?

- If the respondent answers yes, you should not fill out a form for those children.

Question 5: Have you experienced continuous homelessness for a year or more?

- This question focuses on the respondent’s current episode of homelessness.
- Another way of asking this is “has it been a year or more since you were in a living situation that did not involve sleeping outside or in an emergency shelter?”

Definition of “homeless”
For questions 5-7, the definition of “homeless” includes sleeping in an emergency shelter and/or in an unsheltered situation. It does not include living in transitional housing or doubled up/ couch surfing.

Question 6: How long has your current episode of homelessness lasted?

- We want to know the length of the respondent’s current episode of homelessness. This question is redundant with the previous question, but we are required to ask the question in these two different ways. If the answer to question 5 provided you with the information you need to answer question 6, there is no need to ask question 6 out loud.
- Another way of asking this is “how long has it been since you were in a living situation that did not involve sleeping on the streets or in a shelter?”
- If the answer is less than one month, write “<1” in the “months” line on the form.

Episode of homelessness
An “episode” of homelessness is a separate, distinct, and sustained stay on the streets and/or in a homeless emergency shelter. If a person is living on the streets, and then spends a few weeks on a friend’s couch, returns to the streets, then spends time in jail, and then returns to the streets, that would be three episodes of homelessness.

Question 7: In the past 3 years, have you experienced homelessness 4 or more times?

- We are interested in the number of separate episodes of homelessness (on the streets or in an emergency shelter) over the past 3 years.

- Another way of asking this is “over the past 3 years, how many different times have you been on the streets or in a shelter?”

Question 8: What is your race/ ethnicity

- Select all that apply by checking the relevant boxes.
- Encourage respondents who select “Hispanic/ Latino” to check one or more additional race categories, if applicable. The federal government requires this.
- The lines next to each race marked “additional detail” are optional. You can use the lines to better reflect how respondents define their race/ ethnicity. For example, if a respondent checks off “Asian”, they can use this section to indicate their country of origin.
- If the respondent does not provide an answer to question 8, leave it blank. Do not try to guess the respondent’s race or ethnicity based on your visual observations.

Question 9: Are you a U.S. Military Veteran?

- A veteran is defined as any adult over 18 years of age who has served in the U.S. Armed Services (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, or Coast Guard) or Activated National Guard/ Reserve.
- If the answer is “yes”, don’t forget to ask the sub-question “Did you serve after 2001?”

Question 10: Are you: Employed? Attending School?

- Check yes if the respondent is currently employed. Employment can be permanent, temporary, full-time, part-time, or seasonal.
- Check yes if the respondent is attending any form of school on a regular basis. (It is particularly important to collect this information for children under the age of 18.)

Question 11: How long have you been in Portland/ Multnomah County?

- If the respondent does not have a precise answer, it is okay to provide an estimate.
- If you are using the Gresham/ East County version of the form, this question will read, “How long have you been in Gresham/ East County?” It also asks you to circle whether the respondent is in Gresham or in East County (outside of Gresham).

Question 12: Were you homeless when you came to Portland/ Multnomah County?

- If you are using the Gresham/ East County version of the form, this question will read, “Were you homeless when you came to Gresham/ East County?”
- For this question, “homeless” includes staying in emergency shelter or in an unsheltered situation. It does not include living in transitional housing or doubled up/ couch surfing.
- If the respondent answers yes, don’t forget to ask the sub-questions, “What brought you here” and “Where did you move from?” For “What brought you here”, check all the answers that apply. For “Where did you move from”, check the location where they were living immediately before moving to Portland/ Multnomah County (or, if you’re using the East County form, to Gresham/ East County).

Question 13: In the past year, has someone abused or threatened you or your dependent in a way that made you afraid to remain where you are staying?

- Domestic violence is defined here as a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate

partner. Domestic violence can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person.

- This is an issue that can be difficult to talk about. Use active, empathetic listening to create a safe space for the respondent to talk about this issue if s/he wants to. Listen closely without judgment, be patient and respectful, ask open ended questions, and provide occasional response/affirmation. If the respondent is not comfortable answering the question, mark “declined” and move on.
- If the respondent needs support related to domestic violence issues, let them know about the Portland Women’s Crisis Line (503-235-5333).

Question 14: Are you experiencing any of the conditions listed below?

- This question can be uncomfortable to ask, especially in situations where others can overhear the interview. You may want to begin this question with something like, “This question gets personal, and if you don’t want to answer it, that’s okay”.
- Ideally, we would like to gather information on the respondent’s specific conditions, but if that’s not possible, please try to at least get a “yes” or “no” answer about whether the respondent is experiencing any of the conditions listed. If the respondent is not comfortable answering the question, mark “declined” and move on.
- Possible strategies for approaching the question, depending on the situation and what seems most comfortable:
 - Ask “Do you have any conditions that affect your ability to work or live independently?” If they say “yes”, say “could you tell me about it?” Then use their descriptions to check off the correct boxes.
 - In a situation where there’s no privacy, show the form to the respondent and give him/her the option of pointing to the answer choices.
- **“Mental illness”** is a mental health problem that is expected to be of long-continued and indefinite duration and substantially impedes a person’s ability to live independently. It can include serious depression, serious anxiety, hallucinations, violent behavior or thoughts of suicide.
- **“Drug abuse problem”** is a problem with drug use that is expected to be of long-continued and indefinite duration and substantially impedes a person’s ability to live independently.
- **“Alcohol abuse problem”** is a problem with alcohol use that is expected to be of long-continued and indefinite duration and substantially impedes a person’s ability to live independently.
- **“Physical disability”** and **“mobility impairment”** are physical impairments which are expected to be of long-continued and indefinite duration, substantially impede a person’s ability to live independently, and are of such a nature that such ability could be improved by more suitable housing conditions.
- **“Chronic health condition”** is a diagnosed condition that is more than three months in duration and is either not curable or has residual effects that limit daily living and require adaptation in function or special assistance. Examples of chronic health conditions include, but are not limited to, heart disease, severe asthma, diabetes, arthritis-related conditions, cancer, chronic bronchitis, liver conditions, stroke, or emphysema.

- **“Developmental disability”** is a severe, chronic disability that is attributed to a mental and/ or physical impairment that occurs before 22 years of age and limits the capacity for independent living and economic self-sufficiency.
- **“Traumatic brain injury”** is an injury to the brain from a bump, blow, or wound to the head leading to permanent or temporary impairment of cognitive, physical, and psychosocial functions, with an associated diminished or altered state of consciousness.
- **“Post-traumatic stress”** is a condition that can occur in people who have seen or experienced life-threatening events such as natural disasters, serious accidents, war, or personal violence. Symptoms may include flashbacks, nightmares, severe anxiety, depression, and feelings of detachment.
- **“HIV/AIDS”** refers to a diagnosis with AIDS or a positive test for HIV.

Household ID:

- If an individual is part of a household (a couple or a family with children), please attach all the forms for that household together and/or write the household ID in the box at the bottom of each form.
- The household ID is the first letter of the first name and first three letters of the last name for the head of the household. If there is no head of household, just choose one household member and use their name for the household ID. Each member of the household should have the exact same household ID. For example, if you have a family with two children and a mother whose name is Jane Smith, the household ID would be J-SMI. You would fill out the bottom of Jane’s form as follows: Household ID J-SMI, Form 1 of 3. The two children’s forms would have the same ID, and one would be “Form 2 of 3”, the other would be “Form 3 of 3”.

Person completing form: Please write your name. If we have questions about anything you write on the form, this will enable us to contact you for clarification.

Organization or site: Please list the name of the site where the form was completed or, if the form was completed via outreach, list the sponsoring organization for the outreach effort.

INSTRUCTIONS AND DEFINITIONS FOR QUESTIONS ON SIDE B

Only use Side B if you are unable to complete Side A. Do not fill out both sides.

- **Questions 1, 2, and 3:** Please fill out these questions completely. This will enable us to contact you with any questions. The date and time will also allow us to reduce duplication among forms.
- **Questions 4 and 5:** Please fill out these questions completely. For question 5, refer to the enclosed map for boundary information.
- **Question 6:**
 - If the response to this question is any place that does not fit in the definition of “unsheltered” then you should stop filling out the form and discard it.
 - Select “Park” for downtown or neighborhood parks. Select “Woods/ open space” for parks like Forest Park and Washington Park as well as for other kinds of woods and open space.
- **Questions 7 and 8:** Provide an accurate estimate, based on your observations. If you cannot provide an accurate estimate, check “unable to determine”.

HOW TO RETURN YOUR SURVEY FORMS

Please return all forms no later than February 7, 2015. Use one of the following methods:

- **Mail:** Put the forms in the enclosed business reply envelope and drop them in a mailbox. You do not need to attach any postage.
- **Drop off:** Put the forms in the enclosed business reply envelope and drop them off at the Portland Housing Bureau, 421 SW 6th Ave., Suite 500.
- **E-mail or fax:** If you have a small number of forms, you can scan them and e-mail them to Carrie.Young@portlandoregon.gov or fax them to attn: Carrie Young at 503-823-2387.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Preserving the confidentiality of the information collected via the Street Count, as well as the privacy of Street Count respondents, is essential. Any volunteers or staff who will be conducting the Street Count survey must agree to maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of respondents. This means that information gathered in the course of conducting the survey should not be shared in any context outside of the survey itself. The survey form must be returned to the Portland Housing Bureau in the enclosed return envelope and the information collected on the form cannot be reproduced or used for any purpose other than the Street Count.

NEED MORE INFORMATION?

Contact Street Count coordinator Kris Smock at kris@kristinasmockconsulting.com, 503-235-2492 (office), or 503-789-1969 (cell) with any questions.