

Why an Accurate Point-in-Time (PIT) Count Matters for Our Continuum of Care (CoC)

The Point-in-Time (PIT) count is the *only* nationwide, HUD-mandated census of people experiencing homelessness on a single night each year. HUD requires CoCs that receive homelessness funding to conduct an annual sheltered count and at least a biennial unsheltered count, in accordance with HUD standards and minimum data quality requirements.

When we undercount, we don't just miss people; we risk losing resource allocation and making decisions based on inaccurate data.

1. PIT Data Directly Affects HUD CoC Program Funding

- CoCs must submit PIT and Housing Inventory Count (HIC) data through HUD's Homelessness Data Exchange (HDX 2.0) as part of the annual CoC Program Competition.
- HUD's CoC Performance Profiles combine PIT numbers, HIC data, System Performance Measures (SPMs), and CoC Program funding information (as well as ESG and YHDP funding) to assess each CoC's scale of need and performance over time.
- PIT results are used in the consolidated CoC application to demonstrate need; guidance from states and HUD-aligned organizations explicitly notes that PIT counts "demonstrate real needs to funding entities like HUD" and inform how much CoC funding a community receives.

Implication of an undercount: If our PIT count is low, our community appears to have a smaller homelessness problem, which can weaken our CoC application narrative, depress funding justification, and reduce competitiveness in NOFO scoring that leans heavily on data and system performance.

2. PIT and ESG: Emergency Solutions Grants & Crisis Resources

- ESG is a HUD formula grant program that funds shelter, street outreach, prevention, and rapid re-housing. Allocations are based on factors like population, geography, and poverty, and recipients *must* coordinate with their CoC in planning and subgranting ESG funds.

Implication of an undercount: If unsheltered and sheltered homelessness appear artificially low, our community can fall behind in competitive or needs-based ESG and ESG-like allocations during emergencies or special funding rounds, and local planners may under-invest ESG dollars in the highest-need areas.

3. PIT Data in CDBG / CSBG / HOME / HOPWA & the Consolidated Plan

What's often called the "Community Development Block Grant" (CDBG) or "Community Solutions Block Grant" (CSBG) is part of HUD's Consolidated Plan framework, along with HOME, Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG), the Housing Trust Fund (HTF), and Housing Opportunities for Persons With AIDS (HOPWA).

- Consolidated Plan regulations require jurisdictions to use PIT count data in the homeless needs assessment; specifically, to describe the *nature and extent of sheltered and unsheltered homelessness* in the jurisdiction.
- Those needs assessments and priorities drive how CDBG, CSBG, HOME, ESG, HTF, and HOPWA resources are targeted over a 3–5 year period.

Implication of an undercount: If PIT data understates homelessness, the Consolidated Plan will understate need, which can lead to fewer CDBG/CSBG/HOME/ESG resources being directed to homeless housing, outreach, and supportive services; this can weaken justification for new projects in low-income or high-need areas.

4. State & Other Funding Tied to PIT

Many state and local funding formulas now explicitly rely on PIT counts:

- California's Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention (HHAP) Round 6 allocations, for example, are *directly based* on each jurisdiction's 2024 PIT count.
- State and local policymakers, auditors, and media use PIT data to compare jurisdictions and shape state funding, oversight, and policy direction.
- National analyses note that HUD's PIT results are widely used to assess progress on homelessness and to allocate federal funds beyond the core CoC program.

Implication of an undercount: Our CoC can lose ground in state homelessness programs, state housing trust fund investments, behavioral health/homelessness initiatives, and philanthropic opportunities that rely on PIT as a proxy for need.

5. PIT as a Planning & Performance Tool

Experts emphasize that PIT is more than a compliance exercise:

- National Alliance to End Homelessness and HUD materials describe PIT as critical for planning services, measuring progress, and identifying strengths and gaps in the homeless response system.



Rural Nevada

CONTINUUM OF CARE

- PIT data, paired with HMIS, feeds into the CoC System Performance Measures that are now scored components of the CoC NOFO (e.g., returns to homelessness, length of time homeless, first-time homelessness).

Implication of an undercount: Our dashboard shows “improved” outcomes simply because people weren’t counted, not because they were housed, which can mask rising issues, geographic hot spots, or subpopulations (youth, families, survivors of violence, veterans) who are being left behind.

6. Best Practices to Ensure a Thorough, High-Quality PIT Count

HUD’s PIT Count Methodology Guide and training materials lay out minimum standards and best practices for accurate counts, including 14 core standards around planning, data collection, and data quality.

Key practices include:

- **Strong planning & mapping:** Use recent outreach data, lived-experience input, and law enforcement/outreach maps to identify known encampments, rural locations, and hidden sleeping areas.
- **Robust volunteer training:** Provide standardized scripts, definitions, and survey tools so that all teams apply HUD’s homelessness definitions consistently.
- **Use of people with lived experience:** Engage peers and outreach workers who know encampments and are trusted by unsheltered neighbors.
- **Careful methodology (census vs. sample):** Choose methods that align with HUD’s standards and local geography, and avoid shortcuts that systematically miss people (e.g., “drive-by” counts without engagement).
- **Data quality checks & de-duplication:** Review surveys promptly, correct obvious errors, and cross-check for duplicates to improve accuracy before submission to HUD.

Bottom Line

The PIT count is a federal requirement, but it also serves as the backbone of how our community:

- Demonstrates need to HUD and other funders (CoC, ESG, CDBG/HOME/HTF/HOPWA, state funds).
- Competes successfully in CoC and other funding competitions.

- Plans services and housing that match the *real* scale and characteristics of homelessness.

A thorough, accurate PIT count protects our community from being under-resourced and ensures that every person experiencing homelessness is visible in the data, and therefore more likely to be visible in our funding, planning, and solutions.