



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

2026 POINT-IN-TIME VOLUNTEER GUIDE

Please Note:

This Volunteer Guide equips volunteers with the necessary strategies for conducting a Point-in-Time (PIT) Count survey in a respectful manner. It is important to note that this guide is not a substitute for training but serves as an additional resource to help volunteers prepare for the PIT Count. This guide only includes information pertaining to ethical research and consent.

To gain a more comprehensive understanding, volunteers are required to attend training on the night of the PIT, where they will receive additional information about safety, survey procedures, attire, and general logistics.



The Role of a Volunteer

You have a significant, challenging, and demanding role as a volunteer. PIT Count surveys must be delivered accurately and respectfully in a limited timeframe. Nonetheless, it is important that survey participants feel comfortable, safe, and respected. As you prepare for the count, consider which qualities and skills you will need to be successful.

Qualities of an Effective Volunteer	
QUALITIES	APPLYING THE QUALITIES
OBJECTIVITY	Approach survey participants without bias. Avoid inserting your own personal views or expectations into the survey process. Remain friendly, but neutral.
PATIENCE	Do your best to remain calm and understanding during the survey. Ask a team member or your PIT Leader for assistance if needed.
COMMUNICATION	Ask questions clearly and accurately. Listen thoughtfully to the participants' responses and consider how their answer fits best into the response options on the survey.
CONFIDENTIALITY	Respect the privacy of survey participants. Do not share any personal information you hear - however mundane – with your friends, family, or colleagues. If you hear something that concerns you, speak to your PIT Leader or the PIT Count Coordinator.
COMPASSION	Recognize that homelessness is, for many, a difficult and trying situation. Be compassionate but avoid temptations to become overly personal with survey participants.
DETAIL-ORIENTATED	Pay close attention to the survey instructions. Capture the experiences of the survey participants while following the questions as written.
ADHERENCE	Pay attention to the directions and effectively carry out the assigned responsibilities per the PIT team leader's guidance. Following instructions is crucial for maintaining a cohesive and organized workflow within the team, ensuring that each member contributes to PIT count's overall success.

Sample Volunteer Script:

Hello, my name is _____, and I am helping Montgomery County, MD. conduct a short survey of our community. We want to learn more about people experiencing homelessness, what kinds of problems they face, and what services they may need.

Your participation is strictly voluntary, and all your responses are confidential. Your privacy will be protected and respected. If questions make you uncomfortable, you do not have to answer them. Your answers will not affect the services you receive. Would you be willing to take a few minutes to answer some questions?

Steps to administer unsheltered survey:

There are five steps to completing a PIT count survey. As an unsheltered volunteer, you should:

1. Identify yourself, engage potential participants, and explain the purpose of the count.
2. Deliver the script and consent process. Obtain verbal consent to proceed.
3. Ask the screening questions. Determine if the individual is eligible.
4. If eligible, administer the survey questions. If ineligible, thank them for their time and move on.
5. Thank the respondent for their participation. Provide the participant with giveaway items.

Survey Process Details

The Script:

We have provided you with a short and informative script. The script serves to introduce you, your role as a volunteer, and the purpose of the PIT Count. It would help if you practiced saying the script in a way that is comfortable for you. You will need to say it multiple times throughout your shift.

Obtaining Consent:

You must ask the people you approach if they are willing to participate in the survey. If they say no, do not push them further. Thank them for their time, and make sure to count them using the "Observation" survey.

Also, know that an individual can refuse to participate in the survey at any time. If you have already answered questions for the individual, respect their decision and thank them for their time; switch to answer and complete an "Observation" survey.

Screening Questions:

The screening questions determine who is eligible to participate in the survey. While many people have a range of challenges related to housing, the PIT Count is only designed to capture those who are **literally** homeless.

If you can't easily determine if an individual is experiencing homelessness, ask the individual, **"Where are you sleeping tonight?"** Literally homeless locations: sleeping on streets, sidewalks, cars, campsites, abandoned buildings, under bridges, etc. Only complete the survey with those that are eligible to participate.

Confidentiality and Privacy:

Reassure survey participants that the information they share is held in strict confidence. Clarify that all survey responses will be combined, and no information about a single person will be released.

Respect and Courtesy:

While the interview generally only lasts approximately 5-10 minutes, there is still an opportunity to develop feelings of trust.

You can do this by:

- Avoiding judgment
- Showing participants that you are interested in what they have to say. Maintain eye contact, have open body language, and listen to their answers.
- Using familiar, everyday language that will be easily understood. Ask survey questions as written, but feel free to provide clarification if the participants have questions.

Asking Sensitive or Seemingly Obvious Questions:

There are a few questions that could be deemed to be very sensitive or prominent, for example, questions about gender and ethnicity. **While you are conducting the survey, do not assume any characteristics about a person, including ethnicity, gender, age, or any other qualities.**

If you are uncomfortable asking certain questions, you may want to start the survey with something like:

"I need to ask every person the same set of questions using the same language. As a result, I will be asking you a number of questions that you may think are obvious. We ask these questions to gather important information. I don't want to make any assumptions."

Be aware of your surroundings:

You and your team need to remain conscious of your surroundings. Observe the body language of those nearby closely. If you feel uncomfortable or nervous or perceive any threats on the street, promptly inform your PIT Leader and remove yourself from the situation.

Ending the Interview:

Finally, when the interview is complete, be sure to thank the person and emphasize the value of the information they provided. Do not suggest that the PIT Count will result in more housing or services. If participants have questions, answer them to the best of your ability. If necessary, contact your PIT lead for more information.

Before you leave:

- Look over the survey to ensure you have recorded all responses.
- Offer participants giveaway items and resource information.

Understand your Emotions After your Shift:

You may hear some upsetting stories. Be easy on yourself – you are not the cause of this person's distress. If you feel upset, scared, or troubled during your shift, notify your PIT Leader or a team member. Do not hesitate to withdraw yourself from any situations that make you uncomfortable.

After your shift, we encourage you to share your concerns or feelings with your PIT Leader or Montgomery County Continuum of Care staff member– the well-being of our volunteers is a priority.

Thank you for all your hard work. If you have any questions, please reach out to us at HHSPIT@montgomerycountymd.gov