

A Resource for Engaging Survivors of Gender-Based Violence

This document answers questions on how Victim Service Providers (VSPs) and Continuums of Care (CoCs) can effectively work together to accurately, safely, and confidentially, identify survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) while implementing Point-in-Time (PIT) counts. Additional guidance on how VSPs and CoCs can effectively partner for the PIT count can be found on the [HUD Exchange](#).

About the Point-in-Time (PIT) Count

The PIT count is an annual, census-like count of all persons experiencing homelessness within a geographic area. The goal of HUD's PIT count is to gather a "point-in-time" snapshot of a community's current state of homelessness, including details about various homeless populations (e.g., survivors of gender-based violence, unaccompanied youth, chronically homeless persons, etc.). There are two parts to the PIT count: 1) a sheltered count (persons residing in an emergency shelter or transitional housing) and 2) an unsheltered count (persons residing outside or in a place not meant for human habitation). The PIT count is conducted on a single night during the last week in January. Communities are required by HUD to collect this data every other year, but many communities coordinate a PIT count every year to better capture trends and respond accordingly to people experiencing.

It is the responsibility of the local CoC to conduct the PIT count; however, CoCs partner with VSPs and are encouraged to partner with survivors, to complete the count. PIT count data collected during the count is used to measure homelessness on both a local and national level, is published by HUD on the HUD Exchange, and is ultimately reported to Congress. The snapshot created by the PIT count helps the CoC, federal partners, and the local communities understand the nature and extent of homelessness.

How is the PIT count data collected and where does it go?

CoCs can collect PIT count data using a variety of methodologies to capture the most comprehensive scope of homelessness on one night in the community. For the sheltered count, CoCs can utilize their Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) to pull information for individuals and families residing in homeless programs that participate in HMIS. For the unsheltered count, CoCs often use paper surveys or questionnaires to gather data from individuals and households living on the streets or in a place not meant for human habitation. Even if a homeless service provider employs HMIS, they can still provide PIT count information through a paper survey. HUD has provided a set of [model PIT surveys](#), based on local best practices and input from leading survey and homelessness methodology experts.

VSPs participating in the PIT count are able to submit aggregate data (deidentified) to the CoC in two different ways. Similar to a CoC's HMIS, a VSP's comparable database can be used to pull deidentified, program participant information for the PIT count. VSPs may also report the information to the CoC without utilizing a comparable database report. **Victim service providers are only required to provide aggregate information** on the number of persons enrolled in their program. CoCs and VSPs are encouraged to collaborate with survivors in determining the best method for reporting that ensures the safety, confidentiality, and privacy of survivors. It is essential to prioritize survivor autonomy in the reporting process by ensuring that survivors clearly understand their right to answer only the questions they feel comfortable with and to decline to respond to any questions if they choose.

For the unsheltered count, communities can choose between paper or digital surveys to gather PIT count data. Both methods should be selected with survivor safety and confidentiality in mind. No one method of data collection is preferred or recommended over another; however, HUD strongly encourages the CoC and VSPs to collaborate with survivors of gender-based violence to determine the most appropriate method for collecting data from survivors during the unsheltered count.

If CoCs and VSPs decide together to use paper surveys to collect information during the unsheltered count, precautions should be taken to ensure the safety and confidentiality of survivors. PIT count surveys do not require collection of personally identifying information such as name, social security number, date of birth, etc. However, many CoCs collect the initials of those who are surveyed during the PIT count as a method for de-duplicating surveys. If using an electronic survey, incorporate a two-step verification to further ensure online security and maintain confidentiality of survivors. CoCs and VSPs should work closely to determine the most appropriate and safe methodologies for collecting and protecting survivor’s information.

Are VSPs and CoCs required to work together for the PIT count?

While PIT count data collection on survivors of gender-based violence is optional, HUD strongly encourages CoCs to work closely with VSP partners and survivors of GBV to determine the best way to collect data safely and confidentially on survivors within their communities. Survivors of GBV face complex barriers to both shelter and housing. Collecting data about the experiences of survivors in the PIT count allows CoCs and communities to better address the needs of survivors and to leverage additional resources to meet these unique needs. Including survivors in the count can enable communities to demonstrate the need for housing for survivors and their families, identify gaps in supports and services, enhance outreach and engagement strategies and support securing additional resources specific to households impacted by GBV.

What questions related to gender-based violence should be asked on the PIT count survey to ensure survivor privacy and safety?

Beginning in 2018, HUD changed the language pertaining to GBV used in the PIT count survey. The new language corresponds with HUD’s [category four](#) definition of homelessness, which includes any individual or family who: (i) is fleeing, or is attempting to flee, domestic violence; (ii) has no other residence; and (iii) lacks the resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing. According to HUD’s [Coordinated Entry and Victim Service Providers FAQ](#) document, “fleeing or attempting to flee” includes: domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or other dangerous life-threatening conditions (including human trafficking).

The question on the model PIT count survey for both the unsheltered and sheltered count has the same language, so that communities, HUD, and other partners can determine how many persons are leaving or attempting to leave their residence due to gender-based violence. The question on both surveys asks, ***“Are you experiencing homelessness because you are currently fleeing domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking?”***

While this change in guidance allows HUD to more accurately capture whether a survivor’s primary cause of current homelessness is due to fleeing, or attempting to flee, gender-based violence, many CoCs and communities have opted to include additional questions in their PIT count survey to capture data on homeless individuals who have ever experienced GBV. For example, many communities have elected to ask questions that collect information on a survivor’s experience with GBV across their lifespan. An example of such a question is, ***“Have you ever been physically, emotionally, or sexually abused by a relative or another person you have stayed with, such as a spouse, partner, brother, sister, or parent?”***

For example, one CoC expanded their GBV-related data collection by asking the above question in a slightly different way to allow survivors to specify the type(s) of abuse they have experienced if they so choose. The CoC asks, ***“Have you experienced any of the following forms of violence or abuse?”*** and allow respondents to select all that apply:

- Neglect by parent, guardian, or other relative
- Physical abuse by parent, guardian, or other relative
- Sexual abuse by parent, guardian, or other relative
- Physical abuse by intimate partner or spouse
- Sexual abuse by intimate partner or spouse
- Dating violence
- Stalking
- None of the above
- Declined
- Don’t know

How can communities ensure the safety and confidentiality of individuals who are identified during the PIT count as currently experiencing gender-based violence?

HUD strongly encourages communities to work with their local VSPs to determine the best way to collect data safely and confidentially on survivors of gender-based violence. Many communities have achieved this by meaningfully engaging VSPs in their PIT count planning process and having VSPs help to develop trauma-informed approaches and training materials for PIT count survey administration. Some examples of meaningful engagement of VSPs include: inviting VSP representatives and survivors of GBV to participate on a PIT count steering committee, having VSPs and survivors review and suggest appropriate language used for PIT count survey questions, and inviting victim service providers to help lead PIT count training sessions for volunteers administering the PIT count survey. Additionally, CoCs could recruit VSP advocates, survivors and VSP staff members to help administer the PIT count survey for the sheltered and unsheltered counts.

For example, in some communities, PIT count volunteers provide resource booklets, which include how to access GBV resources, to all individuals completing the PIT count survey. By doing this, these communities accomplish two goals: 1) providing information on community resources to all PIT count participants, and 2) discretely and safely providing potential survivors with specific sources on how to access GBV services. Similarly, CoCs can provide individuals who indicate feeling unsafe with quick and immediate access to a confidential victim services crisis hotline with the assistance of their PIT count surveyors. In deciding whether or not immediate referrals or resources can be provided in a safe manner or deciding a method by which that referral or resource can be provided, CoCs should rely on the expertise of their community's VSPs and survivors.

To further support safety and confidentiality for survivors who choose to disclose their experience with violence during the PIT count, some CoCs have altered the way by which they administer the PIT count survey. For questions related to sensitive topics such as drug use, gender-based violence, disability status, and other sensitive topics, survey respondents are asked to use a response card to indicate their answers. For example, the surveyor would ask "are you currently fleeing violence or abuse," and then present the person being surveyed a card with the options "yes (1), no (2), decline (3), don't know (4)." The person answering the survey is only asked to answer using the assigned number value next to their response. This method provides additional precautions and protections for survivors who wish to disclose without the worry of an individual or persons hearing their verbal response.

In addition to using the response card method, CoCs can also train individuals administering the PIT count survey to make sure the person being interviewed is safe from immediate threats of violence prior to asking questions related to experience with violence. If the individual administering the survey feels the situation is not safe, they are instructed to indicate the safety concern on the paper survey and proceed to the next set of questions.

What are some examples of what NOT to do with GBV survivors during the PIT count?

- Communities **should not** administer the PIT count survey in a group setting, as this could compromise the safety and confidentiality of survivors. Ideally, communities should administer the survey in a private location, outside of ear-shot of others, and not in the presence of a partner or spouse. This will help to provide sufficient and appropriate space for a survivor to disclose their experience if they so choose.
- CoCs and community volunteers administering the PIT count survey **should not** ask questions in such a way that might re-traumatize a person being interviewed. Communities can avoid this by taking a trauma-informed approach in the design and language used in the PIT count survey. In addition, GBV service providers or other trauma-informed care professionals should be involved in PIT count volunteer training to help surveyors understand how to approach potential survivors and administer the survey in a non-threatening, non-judgmental way.
- Community volunteers or CoC staff administering the PIT count survey **should not** express disbelief in the responses provided by survivors during the count.
- Those administering the PIT count survey **should not** make individuals feel pressured to answer any questions they are not comfortable answering. Instead, they should make survivors, and other respondents feel respected and safe to respond to questions however they choose.

What are some examples of BEST PRACTICES for engaging GBV survivors in the PIT count?

- CoCs should meaningfully engage and involve victim service providers and survivors from the beginning stages of the PIT count planning process. Many communities across the nation have found success in developing a PIT count planning committee as a way to involve all allied partners, and specifically VSPs in the PIT count.
- Victim service providers should develop and lead the training of persons administering the PIT count survey for the sheltered and unsheltered counts. Community members who volunteer to help with the PIT count may have limited experience working with survivors. In such circumstances, volunteers should be provided with training on how to appropriately interact with survivors in a compassionate and respectful and trauma informed manner. Permitting staff availability and capacity, it is ideal to have staff members or advocates from VSP organizations involved in the administering of the PIT count survey for both the sheltered and unsheltered counts.
- Victim service providers and CoCs should work closely together to ensure that the data collected during the PIT count is kept secure and confidential. CoCs and VSPs should work together to determine if and how resources or referrals should be made for survivors who indicate feeling unsafe at the time of the sheltered and unsheltered counts. Special considerations and strategies need to be implemented to ensure a survivor's safety.

Additional Resources

- [Notice CPD-18-08: 2019 HIC and PIT Data Collection for CoC and ESG Program](#)
- [Engaging with Domestic Violence Survivors: What CoCs Need to Know](#)
- [Partnering with CoCs on the PIT Count: What Domestic Violence Providers Need to Know](#)
- [Point-in-Time Survey Tools](#)
- [Safe Housing Partnerships](#)

Gender-Based Violence and Housing Technical Assistance Consortium

The Consortium, launched in 2015, provides training, technical assistance, and resource development at the critical intersection of homelessness and domestic violence and sexual assault. Funded by a partnership between the U.S. Department of Justice, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Consortium supports a TA Team of four national organizations: CSH, Cloudburst, the National Alliance for Safe Housing, the National Network to End Domestic Violence, and the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence. The Consortium works collaboratively to improve policies and practices that strengthen efforts to build safe and supportive housing options for domestic and sexual violence survivors.



To find this FAQ and other related resources, visit SafeHousingPartnerships.org, an online resource for domestic and sexual violence advocates as well as homeless and housing partners.

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