

City of Pasadena

2026 Homeless Count

Volunteer Handbook

Count Headquarters

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Pasadena Partnership



CITY OF

PASADENA

Logistics and Guidelines

We thank you for your willingness to participate in the 2026 City of Pasadena Homeless Count. Your efforts are essential to providing the City and social service agencies with essential data to inform strategic planning efforts to improve programs and services for people experiencing homelessness.

Why do we conduct a count of people experiencing homelessness?

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires all jurisdictions that receive funding for homeless services from the federal government to conduct a Point-in-Time (PIT) Count of people experiencing homelessness, both unsheltered and sheltered, during the last 10 days of January.

When will the Count take place?

The Count will take place on the night of Wednesday, January 21 (8:00-10:00 p.m.) and the morning of Thursday, January 22 (6:00-8:00 a.m.), 2026. Certain shifts will take place during the day on January 22 to count individuals at predetermined sites and libraries.

Who will be counted?

The Count includes individuals, families and youth who, on the day of the Point-in-Time Count, fall within the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) definition of homeless, which is as follows:

“An individual or family is considered homeless only when he/she lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and resides in public or private places not meant for human habitation such as a car, park, vacant lot, sidewalk, abandoned building, etc.”

Where will the Count take place?

The Count will take place throughout the entire City of Pasadena. Volunteer counters will be assigned to one of 28 pre-established zones, libraries, and service provider sites across the City to actively count people who are experiencing homelessness using the 2026 City of Pasadena Homeless Count survey instrument. We ask that teams pay close attention to:

- Shopping centers
- Churches
- Major streets and alleys
- Overhangs/ Sheltered areas
- Open parking lots

Do not attempt to count any people in the following areas:

- Freeway embankments
- Parks
- Vacant/abandoned buildings
- Covered parking lots

General Guidelines

1. Volunteers will be put into teams of five to seven, and should split into sub-teams of two or three while counting to be able to cover the full zone and reduce intimidation.
2. Counters will go out from 8:00–10:00 p.m. on January 21 and again from 6:00–8:00 a.m. on January 22.
3. All teams will have a designated team leader for their zone. Team members are expected to share their contact information with their team leader.
4. Count team leads will check in at the start of each shift and check out at the end of each shift using the survey app.
5. Teams will interview people they encounter and will enter information via a web-based survey on a smartphone or tablet. Teams should ensure that phones and/or tablets are fully charged and connected to the internet to cover each 2-hour period.
6. Cold weather kits will be distributed to team leads on the evening and morning of the Count for volunteers to hand out to people they encounter.
7. Each team is responsible for covering their assigned zone or designated area only. Do not go or count outside of your zone boundaries. When a zone is next to other zones, only cover the inner side of the street in the zone boundary. (See map)

How to Approach an Individual

When encountering an individual, please follow the guidance below:

1. Be polite and ask if they are experiencing or know someone who is experiencing homelessness;
2. Inform individuals that we are conducting a survey to count the number of people who are experiencing homelessness in Pasadena;
3. His/her/their participation is completely voluntary and confidential;
4. His/her/their participation will help secure funding and resources to address the needs of people experiencing homelessness in Pasadena;
5. You are not asking for their full name, social security number, or any personal information that can be linked to the participant.

What do I do if I encounter people who don't want to participate?

Do not insist that people provide you with the requested information if they decline to participate. Please be respectful of everyone's decision. If you are confident that they are experiencing homelessness, fill out the observation only section of the survey and use your best judgment to record the person's gender, ethnicity, race, and age. It is not required for someone to participate in the survey to receive a cold weather kit. You can ask if they would be interested in receiving one anyway even if they decline to take the survey.

Survey Basics

Overview

Mobile Format

The mobile format will help streamline and standardize the process for volunteers. Certain questions will only be offered based on the responses people provide.

Accessing the Mobile Survey

There are two options for accessing the mobile survey. You will receive an email prior to the event with the link to the live survey. It will also be posted on our website at <https://pasadenapartnership.org/volunteer-homeless-count/>. Please bookmark our website to ensure quick access and do not share these links with anyone other than your team members. If you would like additional practice using the survey prior to the Count, [please use this link](#).

Introduction

The survey starts with a quick introduction:

“Hello, we are conducting a survey on homelessness in our community to help us plan for homeless services and housing programs. The survey is voluntary and confidential. Can I have a few minutes of your time? ”

We recommend that you familiarize yourself with this introduction and when you encounter someone, do your best to paraphrase it in your own words. Just be sure to ask the last question, “Are you or do you know anyone who is experiencing homelessness?” If the person declines to participate but you believe they are homeless, proceed to conduct an “observation only” survey by selecting “No/prefer not to say/dropped out” and you will be taken to the “observation only” questions. After you complete these the survey will end.

Survey Basics

How to read questions

With the exception of the disability question, read each question aloud and let the respondent answer in their own words, then select the most appropriate response. Do not ask leading questions that will prompt someone to answer a certain way.

Answer all questions

All questions must have a response. If questions are missed, the survey will not be accepted when you try to submit and you must return to questions in red and enter responses.

What to do if someone drops out halfway through

Participants may decline to answer additional questions while you are conducting the survey. If this happens, follow the guidance provided in the survey or select “dropped out of survey”. The survey is designed so that once a respondent drops out, you are directed to enter your zone, location and name. Once this is complete, the survey ends.

Inputting your location

Before you complete the survey, you will be prompted to include your approximate location. The mobile version does have the ability to automatically recognize where you are located. Please select the small GPS icon to automatically select your location. If the GPS selection does not work, you can select the Map icon instead and manually select your location. After you've selected your location then you need to pick the zone that you conducted the survey. Once the zone is selected, type in your name and finally we ask that you add cross streets to help us confirm the accuracy of the system. A street address or name of landmark with cross streets is preferred. Do not simply write "Starbucks" or "Subway" because there are multiple locations of these establishments within zones and throughout the City.

Survey Navigation

Advancing Questions

You have the option to scroll through questions, but most questions will auto advance once a response is recorded, the exception being questions where you can select multiple responses and questions where you enter text. For these questions, click the green button that says "ok" with a check mark next to it to advance to the next question.

Returning to Questions

If you accidentally enter an incorrect response or advance the survey before responding to a question, you can scroll up or select the left arrow at the bottom of the screen. If you select a new response, you may notice that new questions pop up due to the conditional logic built into the mobile format.

Selecting "Other"

For several questions, you are given the option to select "other." If you choose this option, be sure to follow these steps:

1. Click "other"
2. Enter text where the word "other" used to be
3. Click the check mark to the right of the text entered

If you do not click the check mark, upon submission the form will read as incomplete and you must go back to that question and click the check mark.

Important Survey Questions

Place of Stay

One of the first questions we ask people is where they will sleep (evening) or where they have slept (morning). We have added all the locations that we anticipate you finding in Pasadena. As a reminder, for the purpose of the Count, we are limited to including people who meet HUD's definition of homelessness:

HUD Definition of Homelessness: An individual or family is considered homeless only when he/she lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and resides in public or private places not meant for human habitation such as a car, park, vacant lot, sidewalk, abandoned building, etc.

Some of the options given do not meet the HUD definition of homelessness but include situations you may encounter. If a person does not fit the HUD definition, the survey will automatically end. If you feel you've encountered someone that meets this definition but does not fit one of the categories, please select "other" and be as descriptive as possible to help us understand how their location fits the HUD definition.

Age

We ask that volunteers include an exact or estimated age (when conducting an observational survey). We realize for some observation-only surveys this may be difficult. Please just do your best, as it allows us to better understand the age composition and categorize the data with different age groups if needed at a later date. If a person drops out, responds "don't know" or states they prefer not to say, please answer based on observation.

Race

For the full-survey questions, we offer the option for respondents to select multiple races. Please select as many races as people indicate. For observation-only surveys, please include your best guess.

Health Conditions/Disability (Please read all options)

We ask that you read each of the disabilities listed as an option one by one, selecting any disabilities indicated by the respondent. To start, read the question followed by the first disability and let the respondent answer in their own words. If their response aligns with the corresponding option, then please check the box. Continue by reading the second disability and let the participant respond, so on and so forth until each potential disability is asked. The disability question text reads as follows:

"Have you ever been told or do you think that you might have any of the following permanent or long-term health conditions?" (check all that apply)

Submitting the Survey

Submitting the survey

Upon completion of the survey, a green "Submit" button will appear. If your survey is complete, the page will change to let you know your information is submitted. After five seconds, the popup window will disappear and you can start a new survey.

Missing responses

If you click the submit button and have missing responses, the button will change to red and read "Review" with text above letting you know how many answers need completing. To fix this, click "Review" and it will automatically bring you to the first missing response. Simply answer the question (or select "don't know") and then click "OK." If you have more than one missing question, scroll down to the next question that has a missing response and complete it (there will be a red box that reads "Please fill this in" below the question). Once you've fixed all the problems, scroll back down to the bottom and click submit.

Reminders

Have links ready

Make sure your live link to the survey is ready to go. Either bookmark the pages, have access to the links via email or create a note that you can use to access the links. Do not use the test link and do not share these links with anyone other than your team members.

Bring devices

All team members with a smartphone or tablet should have their devices available as a backup.

Charge batteries and bring backup power

Fully charge all of your devices and bring a backup power bank if you have one.

Technical support: If at any point you have trouble with the mobile survey, please call us at (626) 643-1043 or (626) 399-4640 and we can troubleshoot you through it.

Spreadable Illness Safety Protocols

We want to be able to complete this year's count as safely as possible for both the volunteers and our neighbors experiencing homelessness. We especially want to keep our neighbors experiencing homelessness as safe as possible considering that they make up a part of our city's most vulnerable demographic and we will be, in essence, entering their living spaces to fulfill our task. Therefore, we are requiring all volunteers to adhere to the health and safety guidelines outlined in this document.

Feeling Sick on Day of Count?

We ask that all volunteers self-monitor for symptoms of spreadable illnesses on the day of the count. If you are experiencing any of the following symptoms, we ask that you would not participate in the count:

- Fever
- Cough
- Sore Throat
- Difficulty Breathing
- Loss of taste / smell

General Safety Guidelines

1. Good sense and sound judgment should be used at all times. Never go into any location or situation that does not appear or feel safe. Make a note of any such location and report this location to Headquarters upon your return.
2. Do not count in parks or areas outside your zone. Professional teams will cover these.

3. Volunteers must always stay with their assigned team member(s). Volunteers will be assigned to work in sub-teams of two or three people. Never stray out of sight of your team.
4. One or two team members should conduct the survey, while the other team member(s) navigate and keep an eye on the area.
5. Always be polite and do not be overly aggressive. If you encounter someone who declines to participate, thank them for his/her/their time, fill out the observation only survey, and move on.
6. Remember, volunteers should not go into any vacant or abandoned buildings or any encampment locations known for fostering drugs or other illegal activities.
7. For information and safety purposes, the City's Police Department has been notified of Count activities scheduled for January 22 and 22, 2026.
8. Please refrain from giving out anything other than the cold weather kits.
9. Bring a flashlight, but do not shine light in people's faces.
10. Always be respectful of people's space.

What to do in the event of an emergency

Please call 911 first or the Pasadena Police Department at (626) 744-4241 or (626) 744-4501 (we suggest you enter these phone numbers in your mobile devices) to report the incident, then call Headquarters to appraise Count organizers of the situation.

How to refer someone to services

Please go to the Los Angeles Homeless Outreach Portal (LA-HOP) to enter the person's information, which will be forwarded to the nearest service location.

<https://www.lahsa.org/portal/apps/la-hop/>

Do's and Don'ts

Do

- Introduce yourself and explain what you are doing
- Approach people, even if you are uncertain if they are experiencing homelessness
- Honor requests not to participate or to skip questions
- Be sincere and thank people for their time
- Offer people a cold weather kit, even if they decline to participate in the survey

- Remain calm and de-escalate any tense situations
- Remain aware of your surroundings and stay out of tight or enclosed spaces
- Maintain appropriate distance and respect people's space
- Ask every question in the survey in the order provided
- Dress appropriately and warmly. Wear bright-colored or white clothing, comfortable shoes, and minimal accessories
- Carry your ID and cell phone with you, but leave other valuables behind
- Check with your team leader and refer to the contact numbers provided if you need assistance of any kind
- Bring flashlight(s)

Do Not

- Touch people to wake them up or invade their space
- Mandate participation in the Count
- Put anyone in danger
- Be judgmental
- Promise housing or services
- Give money or offer rides
- Deviate from the survey instrument
- Separate from your team
- Wear all black or dark colored clothing
- Share any confidential information provided to you during the survey
- Take photos
- Speak with the media (please refer them to our designated media volunteer)