

APPENDIX 1: METHODOLOGY

A. Overview

1. Project Team

The San Mateo County 2007 Homeless Census and Survey (the “Census and Survey”) was conducted between January and March 2007. The San Mateo County Human Services Agency’s Center on Homelessness staff were responsible for developing the methodology and overseeing the data collection. The Center on Homelessness contracted with Applied Survey Research (ASR) for assistance with developing and implementing the project methodology and for preliminary analysis of the data. Kate Bristol Consulting and Debbie Greiff Consulting were responsible for completing the data analysis and production of the final report.

2. Census and Survey Components

The Census and Survey consisted of two components:

- **Homeless Census (“the census”)**, a point-in-time **count** of homeless persons living on the streets, in vehicles, homeless shelters, transitional housing and institutional settings on January 30th, 2007; and,
- **Homeless Survey (“the survey”)**, consisting of interviews with a representative sample of 422 homeless people conducted over a five-week period between February 7 and March 15, 2007. Homeless people who were interviewed were asked to respond to a two-page questionnaire designed to elicit demographic information (e.g. age, gender, disabilities, veteran status), as well as information about why they became homeless and what they need to end their homelessness.

In addition, data derived from the census and survey was used to arrive at an annual estimate of the number of homeless people in San Mateo County.

The methodology for each of these components is detailed in the sections that follow.

3. Definition of Homelessness

The Census and Survey used the definition of homelessness established in the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act as the basis for determining who to include and exclude:

1. An individual who lacks a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence, and,
2. An individual who has a primary nighttime residence that is:
 - a. A supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill); or
 - b. An institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized; or
 - c. A public or private place not designated for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.

This definition does not include people who are “at-risk” of homelessness (i.e. living in unstable housing situations) or those who are “couch surfing” (i.e. those who “float” from location to location).

B. Homeless Census Methodology

The Homeless Census consisted of three parts:

1. A Street Count, in which teams of enumerators counted homeless people who were visible on the streets, in encampments or in vehicles in the early morning hours of January 30th, 2007;
2. A Shelter Count, in which the organizations operating emergency shelters, transitional housing and other facilities housing homeless people reported on the numbers of individuals housed in their facilities on the night of January 29th, 2007, and;
3. A “Hidden Homeless” Survey, in which Applied Survey Research (ASR) conducted a random telephone survey of San Mateo County households in an attempt to identify “hidden” homeless people living on private property (e.g. in unconverted garages, basements, tents, etc.).

The complete census results are presented in Appendix 2.

1. Street Count Methodology

The Street Count was a “complete coverage” count that enumerated every homeless person visible on the streets, in encampments and in vehicles in every census tract in the county. The count was conducted by teams of volunteers who fanned out across San Mateo County in the early morning hours of January 30th. The volunteers included staff from social service organizations, city and county departments; community members; and homeless individuals. Homeless individuals received a \$10 per hour stipend for their work on the census.

Since homeless individuals often have the greatest knowledge about where other homeless individuals may be found, each team included at least one homeless person. The composition of the teams was also designed to maximize local knowledge -- volunteers were recruited from all over the county and team members were assigned to the census tracts with which they were most familiar. For census tracts that included state parks, park rangers served as enumerators.

Two weeks prior to the count, the Center on Homelessness and Applied Survey Research held trainings across the county to prepare volunteers for the count. The training included information about the purpose of the count, a review of the data collection tool and how to use it to record the numbers of people counted, and what to expect on the morning of the count.

On the morning of the count, the volunteers gathered at deployment sites at 5:00 AM for census tract assignments, maps, supplies, and a brief training review. During the enumeration, volunteers surveyed the streets, roads, highways and open spaces of the selected tracts (either by foot, bike, or car) and recorded their results on tally sheets. Volunteers returned to their

deployment sites prior to 9:00 AM. Upon their return, they turned in their census tally forms and were debriefed by the deployment captains to ensure the integrity of the enumeration effort.

Volunteers did not make direct contact with homeless people during the census enumeration. Due to the imperative to conduct a complete count within a narrow time frame and the reluctance of many homeless people to consent to interviews, visual-only enumeration strategies were employed. The Homeless people were counted and tallied according to these observed categories:

- Adult (over age 18)
- Youth (under age 18) Unaccompanied by Adult
- Youth (under 18) Accompanied by Adult

In addition, enumerators noted the household composition of the people they observed, dividing them into single individuals or households with children under age 18. The enumerators did not attempt to count the number of couples without children, since it was not possible to determine by visual enumeration whether two people on the street were a couple or just two single people.

The enumerators also counted:

- the numbers of cars, vans, RVs, and campers that appeared to have homeless people living in them, and,
- the numbers of homeless encampments they observed.

Due to safety concerns, enumerators did not go inside homeless encampments or look inside vehicles to separately count the people in them. In order to estimate the numbers of people in vehicles and encampments, a multiplier was developed using data from the homeless survey (described in Section C, below), which asked respondents who had lived in vehicles or encampments to indicate the number of people they typically lived with. The multiplier was then used to estimate the numbers of people in vehicles and encampments. The multipliers used may be found in Appendix 2.

2. Shelter Count Methodology

The Shelter Count component of the Homeless Census was conducted on the night of January 29th. The Center on Homelessness compiled a comprehensive list of all facilities and programs providing short-term housing and shelter to homeless people. These facilities were divided into four categories:

- Homeless shelters
- Motel voucher programs
- Transitional housing
- Institutions (jails, hospitals, and inpatient alcohol and drug treatment programs)

Approximately one week prior to the count, the Center faxed each of the organizations operating these facilities a one-page data collection form and instructions for completing it. The form requested information on the number of homeless people residing in the facility or program on the night of the count, divided into the following categories:

- Adult Men (18 and over)
- Adult Women (18 and over)
- Male Youth (under 18) Unaccompanied by Adult
- Female Youth (under 18) Unaccompanied by Adult
- Child (under 18) Accompanied by Adult.

In addition, respondents were asked to report on the household composition of the people in their facilities and programs, dividing them into:

- Single Individuals
- Couples Without Children (under 18)
- Families With Children (under 18)

The respondents were asked to fax their data forms to the Center on Homelessness by January 31st. Staff from the Center reviewed the forms for completeness and accuracy and contacted providers if there appeared to be any missing information or discrepancies. Staff also contacted providers who did not provide any data to remind them to complete the form. All of the facilities and programs that were contacted provided the requested data.

3. “Hidden Homeless” Count

While many of the homeless people in San Mateo County are either residing in shelters or visible on the streets, there are also many homeless people in places that are not easily accessible to enumerators. These “hidden” homeless populations include:

- Chronically homeless people who rarely access social and health services;
- People living in vehicles who relocate every few days;
- People with children who stay “under the radar” because of the difficulty of having a family on the street;
- Homeless youth, who tend to keep themselves less visible than homeless adults;
- The “rural” homeless people living on the Coastside, in parks and other open spaces;
- People who live in structures not meant for human habitation, such as storage sheds, unconverted garages, shacks, etc.

In an attempt to count some of these “hidden” homeless people, the Center on Homelessness hired ASR to conduct a telephone survey of a randomly selected sample of San Mateo County residents to determine if there were any homeless people living on private property, in such places as garages, sheds, shacks etc., who would be missed during a visual street enumeration. ASR contacted 1,000 households, but the survey did not produce any statistically meaningful data on numbers of hidden homeless people, and so the results have not been included in this report. A separate report is being prepared summarizing those efforts.

C. Homeless Survey Methodology

As noted above, the Homeless Census collected only a very limited amount of data about the homeless people who were counted, all based on visual observation. In order to gather the more comprehensive qualitative information about homeless people that is needed to conduct effective program planning and implementation, the project also included a survey component. Over a five week period, about 40 to 50 volunteer surveyors conducted interviews with a sample of

sheltered and unsheltered homeless people. The homeless people interviewed were asked to respond to a two-page questionnaire designed to elicit information about such things as gender, age, veteran status, disability status, income sources, length and recurrence of homelessness, typical nighttime accommodations, causes of homelessness, and services needed.

This was the first comprehensive survey of homeless people ever conducted in San Mateo County, and provided critical information about who is homeless in this community, why they are homeless, and what they need to end their homelessness. It also establishes a benchmark from which to track progress made in ending homelessness as a result of the implementation of the HOPE initiatives.

1. Training and Compensation of Survey Workers

About 80% of the interviewers who conducted the survey were current or formerly homeless people. Evidence from other communities suggest that this approach is most successful, because homeless people are often more comfortable speaking candidly to another homeless person. This approach proved very successful in San Mateo County, where about 40 current and formerly homeless individuals conducted over 300 interviews with homeless people living in the streets and shelters. Due to confidentiality and privacy issues, some interviews with sheltered homeless people were conducted by employees of the emergency shelters and transitional housing facilities in which the respondents lived. No self-administered surveys were accepted.

All interviewers received training from Applied Survey Research on topics including respondent eligibility (i.e. the definition of homelessness), interviewing protocol, prompting for detailed responses, and confidentiality. Homeless interviewers were compensated at a rate of \$5.00 per each completed survey. In addition, it was determined that survey data would be more easily collected if an incentive gift was offered to survey respondents in appreciation for their time and participation. A \$5 face value pre-paid phone card was selected as an incentive to participate in the survey. These cards were easy to obtain and distribute, were thought to have wide appeal, and could be provided within the project budget.

2. Sampling Methodology

Developing a truly random sample of homeless survey respondents is challenging. An important consideration is that there is not enough information about the population to develop a sampling strategy that effectively represents the target demographics and diversity. Applied Survey Research considered a randomized “every third or fourth encounter” survey approach, but felt that it would be too challenging to administer within the homeless peer interview methodology. Instead ASR selected a “convenience sample” approach, in which respondents were selected based upon their availability and willingness to participate.

The Center on Homelessness monitored the locations where interviewers were conducting interviews to ensure there was sufficient representation of people from the different geographic areas of the community and also sufficient balance between sheltered and unsheltered homeless people. Approximately 54% of all valid surveys were completed by sheltered homeless people, with the remaining 46% completed by unsheltered homeless people. This sample skews slightly towards the sheltered homeless people, who represented only 47% of the people counted in the census.

Strategic attempts were made to reach individuals of various sub-groups such as homeless youth, people of color, veterans, domestic violence victims, and migrant workers. Because random sampling was not employed, the extent to which the survey respondents compare to, or differ from, the homeless population in general is unknown.

It should be noted that while the survey results are the product of a non-random survey, and therefore are not scientifically representative of the homeless population, this methodology has been used in many communities and is approved by HUD as one of the most effective methods of obtaining data on the characteristics of homeless people.

3. Data Collection and Analysis Process

The interviews were conducted over a period of about five weeks, beginning on February 7th, 2007. During the interview process, the interviewers took care to ensure that respondents felt comfortable, regardless of the street or shelter location. Respondents were encouraged to be candid in their responses and were informed that these responses would be framed as general findings, would be kept confidential, and would not be traceable to any one individual. Workers were asked to remain unbiased at all times, make no assumptions or prompts, and ask all questions but allow respondents to skip any question they did not feel comfortable answering.

Overall, the interviewers experienced excellent cooperation from respondents. This was likely influenced by the fact that nearly all of the street interviewers had previously been, or are now, fellow members of the homeless community. Another reason for interview cooperation may have been the gift of the pre-paid phone card, which was given to respondents upon the completion of the interview.

In order to avoid potential duplication of respondents, the survey requested respondents' initials and date of birth, so that duplication could be avoided without compromising the respondents' anonymity. Upon completion of the survey effort, an extensive verification process was conducted to eliminate potential duplicates. This process examined respondents' date of birth, initials, gender, ethnicity, length of homelessness, and consistencies in patterns of responses to other questions on the survey.

A total of 427 surveys were completed, of which 5 were determined to be duplicates, leaving a total of 422. The complete results of the 422 surveys are presented in Appendix 3. The Survey instrument is provided in Appendix 4.

D. Methodology for Annual Estimate of Homeless People

In order to estimate the annual number of people who are homeless in San Mateo County, ASR used an "annualization" formula developed by the Corporation for Supportive Housing and approved by HUD.

The point in time formula used incorporates three data elements:

A = Number of Homeless People (Point in Time Count). The data source for Element A was the Homeless Census, which found 2,064 homeless people.

B = Number of People Became Homeless Within the Last 7 Days. The data source for Element B was the Homeless Survey, which found that 7.5% of those surveyed became homeless during the last 7 days. This means that 154.8 people (7.5% of 2,064) became homeless in the last 7 days.

C = Percentage of Homeless People With A Previous Homeless Episode in the Last 12 Months. The data source for Element C was also the Homeless Survey, which determined that 41.97% of homeless people surveyed had a previous homeless episode in the past twelve months.

The formula used for estimating the annual number of homeless people was:

$$A + [(B*51)*(1-C)]$$

or

$$2,064 + [154.8*51]*(1-41.97\%) = 6,646$$

E. Strengths and Weaknesses of the Methodology

1. Improvements Over 2005 Methodology

As noted in the body of this report, the 2007 Census found a significantly larger number of homeless people than the previous homeless count, which was conducted in January 2005. The main reason for this increased number of homeless people was that the 2007 Census used a vastly improved methodology than the 2005 count. The major methodological differences were:

- The 2007 Census employed almost three times as many volunteer enumerators, which allowed for every Census tract in the County be thoroughly counted. In 2005, the limited number of volunteers meant that not every tract was counted.
- Unlike the 2005 count, the 2007 Census included many homeless people as enumerators. Because of their familiarity with the locations where homeless people tend to congregate, these homeless enumerators were better able to find and count homeless people living in the streets, vehicles or encampments than non-homeless enumerators.
- The 2007 Census also included a count of people living in vehicles and encampments, an element that was not included in the 2005 count. In 2007, enumerators counted the numbers of vehicles and encampments that they observed that appeared to have homeless people living in them, and then a multiplier was applied to estimate the number of people occupying those vehicles and camps. The multiplier was based on data derived from the Homeless Survey. A multiplier was needed because although enumerators counted the numbers of cars and encampments found, they did not attempt to look inside cars or go into encampments to count their occupants, due to safety concerns and also to respect the privacy of homeless people.

The other major significant improvement in the 2007 Census and Survey was the survey itself, which was the first of its kind in San Mateo County. In the 2005 count (as well as prior counts), there were no interviews of homeless people conducted and only minimal information collected

on the characteristics of the people counted. In order to comply with HUD requirements, the 2005 count included an estimate of the number of homeless people in particular subpopulations (e.g. chronically homeless people, homeless people with mental illness, homeless people with domestic violence issues, etc.). However, these figures were based on rough estimates provided by emergency shelter and transitional housing providers about the people residing in their facilities. Since the figures are only estimates and do not include any unsheltered homeless people, the subpopulation data gathered in 2005 is not very accurate and has limited use for planning purposes.

2. Undercounting

Even through the 2007 Census and Survey represented an improvement over the 2005 count and was conducted using a “state-of-the-art,” HUD-approved methodology, it was not possible to achieve 100% accuracy. As previously noted, there are many “hidden” homeless people who are very difficult to find and count through visual enumeration. The hidden homeless telephone survey that attempted to address this problem did not produce any meaningful results. As a result, the 2007 census in all likelihood still represents an undercount of the actual homeless population. The Center on Homelessness should explore methods for capturing data on “hidden” homeless people that might be implemented in the 2009 Census and Survey to further address the undercounting problem.

3. Survey Design Problems

There were some flaws in the design of the survey questionnaire that led to some needed data not being available. These issues should be addressed in the 2009 Survey.

Household Composition

There were some problems in the design of the survey that made it impossible to compare the information on household composition with the data gathered in the census:

- In the census, enumerators counted both the numbers of people they observed as well as the numbers of households, but the survey collected information only on people and did not attempt to determine how many unduplicated households were interviewed. The survey collected identifying information sufficient to determine that all the respondents were unduplicated adults, but did not incorporate any information that would allow for an analysis of how many unduplicated households these adults represented.
- The census enumerators divided the households observed into 3 mutually exclusive categories (single person, couple, or family with children), but the survey did not. Instead, the survey asked people to indicate whether they lived alone or with other individuals, and allowed respondents to choose from among 6 different categories of other people (spouse, partner, child, friend, other family member or “other”), and allowed multiple responses. As a result, the data on household type gathered in the survey was completely inconsistent with the data from the census.

Age

The survey did not include Transition Age Youth (age 16-25) as one of the age categories.

Income

The survey asked respondents to indicate how much income they earned from government benefits and from non-government sources, but did not ask for the respondent’s total income.