

An Action Plan for Santa Clarita

*Towards a Better Homeless Count in L.A.
County's 3rd-Largest City*

Michelle Viorato | Caio Velasco | Jenny Rees | Irma Livadic | Brian Harris



UCLA

Luskin School of Public Affairs



City of
SANTA CLARITA

Disclaimer

This report was prepared in partial fulfillments for the requirements for the Master of Public Policy degree in the Department of Public Policy at the University of California, Los Angeles. It was prepared at the direction of the City of Santa Clarita as a policy client. The views expressed herein are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Department, the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs, UCLA as a whole, or the client.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In a time when over 500,000 Americans are experiencing homelessness, cities around the country grapple with how to best provide needed services to the homeless community. Policymakers depend on periodic counts to determine the magnitude of the problem, but the accuracy of counts can vary widely.

In Los Angeles County, home to the country's 2nd-largest homeless population, Measure H, a ballot measure that added a one-quarter of a cent sales tax in the county, provides hundreds of millions of dollars annually to address homelessness. One of those taxpayer-funded efforts gave cities around the county grants for the development of homelessness action plans in late 2017.

The City of Santa Clarita, L.A. County's 3rd-largest city, received some of that grant funding. Its action plan, released in July 2018, identified accurately counting individuals experiencing homelessness as one of the city's major challenges. The allocation of Measure H funds is based in part on the reported counts of people experiencing homelessness in L.A. County cities. A widespread belief of Santa Clarita's city leaders and stakeholders is that the city's current count is inaccurate. The desire to increase accuracy is the motivation behind this project.

This report details our research and analysis to help Santa Clarita determine how to better count its homeless population. We provide recommendations in three larger categories: immediately implementable options that improve the accuracy of the count, options that can be implemented in the next one to two years, and options for advocating changes to the county's counting methodology to more accurately enumerate Santa Clarita's homeless population.

In the first category, we recommend three policy options that the city can immediately implement: improving the training of point-in-time (PIT) count volunteers, requiring a minimum of three volunteers per team, and placing volunteers with prior experience on all teams. In the second category, we recommend two policy options the city can implement in the next one to two years: conducting walking surveys in commercial areas and adopting the use of identifiers for people experiencing homelessness.

There are six options requiring advocacy for changes to methods at Los Angeles County Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA), L.A. County's lead agency on homeless services and managers of the count, that we recommend: conduct a multi-day count of wilderness areas, administer a service-based tally, assess citywide database of the homeless population options, administer the PIT count in the morning instead of evening, eliminate surveys of areas unlikely to have people experiencing homelessness, and provide incentives to homeless individuals to encourage participation in a survey.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, we would like to acknowledge the tens of thousands of people experiencing homelessness in this country. If our project can serve to help improve the lives of the homeless community in even a minor way, that will mean more than any other measure of success.

We would also like to thank the City of Santa Clarita for providing this opportunity to analyze a difficult policy question. In particular, we would not have been able to do any of our work without the assistance of the Office of the City Manager. Assistant to the City Manager Jerrid McKenna was an indispensable asset to our team.

We were also extremely fortunate to be afforded time in the busy schedules of countless experts and stakeholders around L.A. County and beyond. Thank you to each and every person who helped us find the answers we needed to move our project forward.

Finally, we would like to thank all those at UCLA who helped throughout this process. Professor Mark Peterson provided his expert advice at every stage of this project, which was absolutely indispensable. We thank him for his patience, commitment, and, perhaps not most importantly, his strident beliefs about that, which, and whether or not a city is a “they.” We also remain indebted to our fabulous Luskin classmates for their feedback, assistance, and words of support throughout this process.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS, ACRONYMS, AND INITIALISMS

Continuum of Care (CoC)

According to Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, “A term that serves dual purposes in the realm of homeless service delivery: 1) An integrated system of care that tracks and advises homeless individuals through a comprehensive array of housing and services that aim to prevent and end homelessness and 2) A regional or local planning body that coordinates housing and services funding for homeless families and individuals.”¹

Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)

According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development, “A local information technology system used to collect client-level data and data on the provision of housing and services to homeless individuals and families. Each Continuum of Care is responsible for selecting an Homeless Management Information System software solution that complies with the data collection, management, and reporting standards under the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development.”²

Identifier

A permanent and unique number generated by the Homeless Management Information System Application that is assigned to every client served within a Continuum of Care network.³ This is used to obtain an unduplicated count of persons served within a Continuum of Care network.

Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA)

An independent agency with joint powers authority granted by the City of Los Angeles and L.A. County.⁴ The County Board of Supervisors and L.A. Mayor and City Council each appoint five members to form a ten-member commission to govern LAHSA, which is responsible for homeless services and management of the annual homeless count.

McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act

According to the California Department of Education, “Federal legislation that ensures the educational rights and protections of children and youths experiencing homelessness. It requires all local educational agencies to ensure that homeless students have access to the same free, appropriate public education, including public preschools, as provided to other children and youths.”⁵

¹ Los Angeles Homeless Services Agency, “Los Angeles Continuum of Care,” accessed May 1, 2019, <https://www.lahsa.org/coc/>.

² U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, “Homeless Management Information System,” accessed May 1, 2019, <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/hmis/>.

³ Sacramento Steps Forward, “Glossary of HMIS Definitions and Acronyms,” accessed March 19, 2019, <https://sacramentostepsforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Glossary-of-HMIS-Definitions-and-Acronyms-20141.pdf>.

⁴ Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, “About LAHSA, <https://www.lahsa.org/about>.

⁵ California Department of Education, “Homeless Education,” accessed May 1, 2019, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/hs/>.

Point-in-Time Count (PIT)

A single-night count of sheltered and unsheltered people experiencing homelessness in a community.⁶

Santa Clarita Community Task Force on Homelessness (Task Force)

A group of community stakeholders in Santa Clarita that advises city government on methods of addressing homelessness in coordination with the Office of the City Manager.

Service Planning Area

A specific geographic region within Los Angeles County. Los Angeles County is divided into eight "Service Planning Areas" for health care planning purposes.⁷

⁶ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, "PIT and HIC Guides, Tools, and Webinars," accessed on May 1, 2019, <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/hdx/guides/pit-hic/#general-pit-guides-and-tools>.

⁷ County of Los Angeles Department of Public Health, "Service Planning Areas," accessed on May 1, 2019, <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/chs/SPAMain/ServicePlanningAreas.htm>.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In 1983, the largest-ever Super Bowl crowd of 103,000 fans filled the Rose Bowl.¹ Every day in America, over five times that many men, women, and children do not have a home to call their own. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), 553,000 people experienced homelessness in 2018.² Los Angeles County's homeless population of 52,765 is the 2nd-largest in the country.³

The size of the homeless population in a city, county, or state directly affects policy decisions and funding for programs to address homelessness. This makes accurately counting people experiencing homelessness extremely important; undercounting leads to underfunding critical programs and resources for vulnerable families and individuals.⁴

Our project aims to identify opportunities for improving homeless count efforts in Santa Clarita, the 3rd-largest city in L.A. County and 17th-largest city in California.⁵ Our goal is to answer this policy question for our client:

How can the City of Santa Clarita more accurately count its homeless population?

To answer that question, we first discuss our client and the policy problem we were asked to explore. Next, we present background on homelessness and homeless counts in America. We then explain our methods of data collection and analysis, policy alternatives considered, and our criteria for analysis. Finally, we provide eleven policy recommendations in three larger categories: immediately implementable options, options for implementation in the next one to two years, and options for advocating changes to the county's counting methodology.

¹ AJC Sports, "Top 10 Super Bowls by attendance," *AJC Sports*, accessed February 1, 2018, <https://www.ajc.com/sports/football/top-super-bowls-attendance/88EypjjWmHxGBLU1oypljN/>.

² Meghan Henry, Anna Mahathey, Tyler Morrill, Anna Robinson, Azim Shivji, and Rian Watt, "The 2018 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress," U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (December 2018), <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2018-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>.

³ Elly Schoen, "A 2018 snapshot of homelessness in Los Angeles County," University of Southern California, accessed February 23, 2019, <https://usc.data.socrata.com/stories/s/Homelessness-in-2018-A-Snapshot-of-Los-Angeles-Cou/g8ge-um6u/>.

⁴ See further discussion of Measure H below, which highlights one source of funds that is contingent on a city establishing that they have a need based on accepted homeless count numbers.

⁵ City of Santa Clarita, "Population," accessed February 23, 2019, <https://www.santa-clarita.com/city-hall/departments/community-development/demographics/population>.

2. OUR CLIENT: THE CITY OF SANTA CLARITA

Our client is the City of Santa Clarita, a city of over 200,000 residents 35 miles northwest of downtown Los Angeles.⁶ Incorporated in 1987, Santa Clarita is composed of four formerly unincorporated cities: Canyon Country, Newhall, Saugus, and Valencia.⁷ From 2000 to 2010, Santa Clarita's growth rate of 17.5 percent was almost twice the L.A. County average, and the city expects to grow to over 250,000 in the next decade.⁸ The city's median income of \$88,987 ranks in the top 20 percent of cities in L.A. County.⁹ The city's operating and capital budget for the 2019 fiscal year is \$227 million.¹⁰ A large, growing, and relatively affluent city, Santa Clarita's tax base and size provide it with the opportunity to be responsive to the challenge of homelessness.

Santa Clarita is governed by the Council-Manager form of government, which gives legislative power to an elected City Council and administrative authority to an unelected City Manager who is hired and fired by the Council (see Figure 1 for an illustration of Santa Clarita's Council-Manager form of government).¹¹ While we interacted with councilmembers, the mayor, and other city departments, we primarily worked with staff in the Office of the City Manager, which directly manages the city's homelessness efforts. Our recommendations will require support from the City Council, but execution will belong to the Office of the City Manager, which directs the subordinate city departments and acts as the primary liaison to the Santa Clarita Community Task Force on Homelessness (Task Force).

While the Task Force will discussed more thoroughly later, it is important to briefly explain its role in Santa Clarita's efforts to accurately enumerate its population of people experiencing homelessness. The Task Force was established by the city to bring together stakeholders from around the area to work together to find solutions to address homelessness. The Task Force is not an elected or legislative body, but its findings and recommendations are central to the decision making process of the City Council and City Manager. For that reason, we attended multiple Task Force meetings and the findings of our report will be delivered to them at the same time as the city.

SANTA CLARITA'S ROLE IN L.A. COUNTY

Key to discussing this issue is recognition of Santa Clarita's position as L.A. County's 3rd-largest city.¹² The size and economic power of Santa Clarita means its leadership is justified in expecting concerns of their citizens to be addressed by L.A. County leadership. As a contract city, one that receives a bulk of its services, including law enforcement and

⁶ City of Santa Clarita, "Population."

⁷ John Boston and the Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society, *Santa Clarita Valley*, (San Francisco, Arcadia, 2009), 124.

⁸ City of Santa Clarita, "Population."

⁹ Mapping L.A., "Median income," *Los Angeles Times*, accessed February 23, 2019, <http://maps.latimes.com/neighborhoods/income/median/neighborhood/list/>.

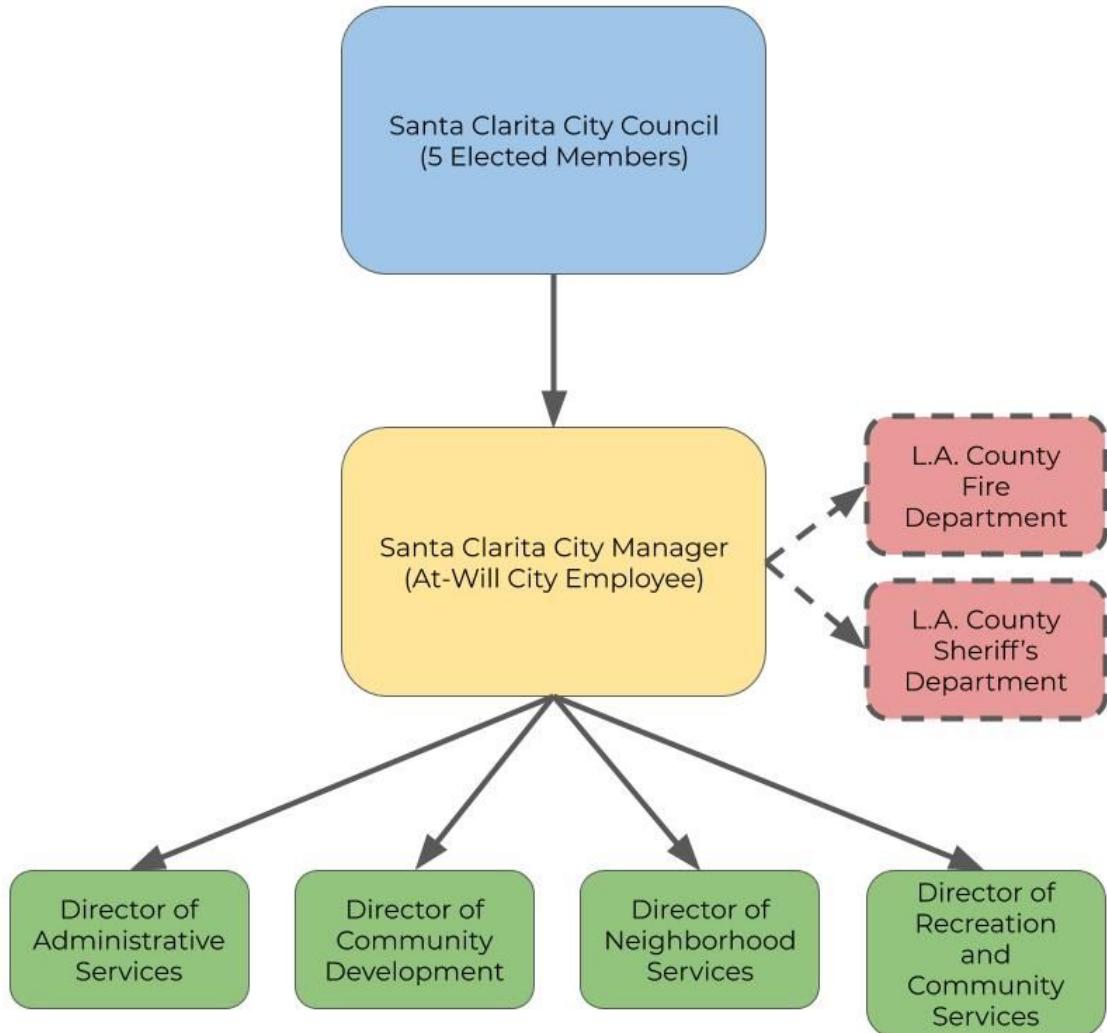
¹⁰ Santa Clarita Department of Administrative Services, "Comprehensive annual financial report for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2018," accessed February 23, 2019, <https://www.santa-clarita.com/home/showdocument?id=16436>.

¹¹ International City/County Management Association, "Council-Manager form of government," accessed February 23, 2019, https://icma.org/sites/default/files/18-027%20Council%20Manager%20FOG%20Brochure_final%2010-16-17.pdf.

¹² City of Santa Clarita, "Population."

fire services, from the county, Santa Clarita is also its customer.¹³ One area where Santa Clarita is a customer of the county is in homeless counting efforts, which are managed by Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA), an independent agency with joint powers authority granted by the City of Los Angeles and L.A. County (see Figure 2 for a delineation of the agencies involved in Santa Clarita's homeless count).¹⁴

FIGURE 1. Santa Clarita Council-Manager Design



Santa Clarita's "Community Plan to Address Homelessness" and stakeholders around the city have identified issues with the current point-in-time (PIT) count, an annual count of the sheltered and unsheltered population of individuals experiencing homelessness.¹⁵ In our interviews, city leaders stated that the current tally severely undercounts Santa Clarita's homeless population.¹⁶ The count's inconsistency was also a regular topic in interviews, and

¹³ County of Los Angeles, "Cities within the County of Los Angeles," accessed February 27, 2019, http://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/lac/1043530_09-10CitiesAlpha.pdf.

¹⁴ Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, "About," accessed March 16, 2019, <http://www.lahsa.org/about>

¹⁵ City of Santa Clarita, "Community plan to address homelessness" (July 2018), accessed February 24, 2019, <https://www.santa-clarita.com/Home>ShowDocument?id=15984>.

¹⁶ Interview with Mayor Marsha McLean and Mayor Pro Tem Cameron Smyth, Santa Clarita City Council. Accessed February 20, 2019.

the significant drop from 2017's 242 homeless individuals counted to 2018's 161 stood out as disconnected from what stakeholders were observing while working in the city.¹⁷ Estimates we heard in interviews varied, but nearly every single interviewee believed the count was less than the actual homeless population in the city.¹⁸

FIGURE 2. Santa Clarita Homeless Count



If the current counting methodology is not providing accurate numbers for Santa Clarita, it is imperative that the city change the current system because the funding it receives to provide homeless services is contingent on official numbers. While we provide detailed policy options in this report, none of them work to best effect without Santa Clarita insisting that the needs of their community be recognized by L.A. County, which will potentially require countywide changes to homeless enumeration efforts. Most importantly, Santa Clarita's taxpayers contribute significant funds to the county's homelessness efforts, which means the county owes them the appropriate resources to get a count that is as accurate as possible, and that brings the appropriate funding for Santa Clarita's most at-risk residents.

¹⁷ Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, "Homeless count - count by city/community," accessed February 24, 2019, <https://www.lahsa.org/dashboards?id=13-count-by-city-community&ref=hc>.

¹⁸ Our interviews with city representatives, homeless-serving organization staff, hospital administrators, law enforcement officers, and community members consistently produced estimates that were significantly higher than LAHSA's official count for Santa Clarita. Importantly, many agencies have internal counts of only the clients they serve that exceed LAHSA's count for the entire city. For instance, schools keep extremely detailed, federally-mandated numbers, which often indicate a number of homeless students approaching or exceeding the Santa Clarita total.

3. THE CHALLENGE OF ACCURATE COUNTS AND L.A. HOMELESS SERVICES AUTHORITY'S KEY ROLE

In order to receive federal grant funds to address homelessness, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires local Continuums of Care (CoCs) to count homeless individuals and families.¹⁹ A CoC is an integrated system of care provided by county and city agencies that tracks and advises homeless individuals through a comprehensive array of housing and services aimed at preventing and ending homelessness.²⁰ In order to remain eligible for funding, HUD requires cities and counties to conduct an annual Point-in-Time (PIT) count. This tally is conducted on a single night in January by local volunteers and community leaders.²¹ This approach ensures that local jurisdictions understand the changing size of their homeless population and are able to act accordingly in terms of effective homeless service provision.

A crucial component of counting the homeless population centers around the definition of an individual experiencing homelessness. HUD defines a person who is homeless as someone who lacks a, “fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, which includes individuals who live in a place not designed or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation (i.e., abandoned buildings, cars, parks, under bridges, bus/train station stops, etc.) and individuals who live in publicly or privately operated emergency shelters or transitional housing projects.”²²

In Los Angeles County, the PIT count is organized by the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA), the lead agency in the L.A. CoC system.²³ Created in 1993, LAHSA is an independent agency with joint powers authority granted by the City of Los Angeles and L.A. County.²⁴ The County Board of Supervisors and L.A. Mayor and City Council each appoint five members to form a ten-member commission to govern LAHSA.²⁵ Critically, cities like Santa Clarita cannot independently conduct a homeless population survey without specific coordination and approval from LAHSA. Doing so would potentially exclude the city from L.A. County funding to address homelessness.

Each January, LAHSA’s Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count — L.A. County’s PIT count — is used to produce official estimates of the county’s homeless population.²⁶ These estimates are extrapolated from data obtained by the PIT street count of the unsheltered population, a

¹⁹ HUB for Urban Initiatives, “Why do we count and survey homeless people?,” accessed February 24, 2019, <https://www.urban-initiatives.org/resources/why-do-we-count>.

²⁰ Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, “Continuum of care,” accessed February 24, 2019, <https://www.lahsa.org/coc/>.

²¹ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, “PIT and HIC guides, tools, and webinars,” accessed February 24, 2019, <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/hdx/guides/pit-hic/#general-pit-guides-and-tools>. The unsheltered homeless population consists of individuals whose primary nighttime location is a public or private place not ordinarily used for sleeping, such as a vehicle, park, or street. The sheltered population refers to homeless persons residing in emergency shelter, transitional housing or Safe Havens.

²² National Alliance to End Homelessness, “Changes in the HUD definition of ‘homeless,’” accessed February 24, 2019, <http://endhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/changes-in-hud-definition-homeless.pdf>.

²³ University of Southern California, “2018 Los Angeles Continuum of Care homeless count methodology report” (August 2018), accessed February 24, 2019, <https://www.lahsa.org/documents?id=2564-2018-los-angeles-continuum-of-care-homeless-count-methodology-report>.

²⁴ Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, “About,” accessed March 16, 2019, <http://www.lahsa.org/about>

²⁵ Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, “Commission,” accessed March 16, 2019, <https://www.lahsa.org/commission>.

²⁶ University of Southern California, “2018 Los Angeles Continuum of Care homeless count methodology report.”

demographic survey of unsheltered adults, a youth count and survey of unsheltered youth, and administrative data from the data collection systems covering the sheltered population.

LAHSA organizes and helps facilitate the PIT count in cities across the county. Although local municipalities plan, coordinate, and carry out their annual tallies, LAHSA oversees the process by providing each city with the resources it needs to conduct their counts effectively.²⁷ Specifically, LAHSA prepares and administers the necessary forms to record those perceived as experiencing homelessness, designates which census tracts each city must search, and supplies maps of all census tracts.²⁸ In Santa Clarita, Bridge to Home, a local homeless services organization, coordinates with LAHSA to assign census tracts and collect all necessary forms from community volunteers, who are charged with searching within their designated census tracts.²⁹ The forms are then returned to LAHSA for processing.

In July 2018, the city identified a need to improve its LAHSA-directed counting methodology in its “Community Plan to Address Homelessness.”³⁰ Stakeholders around the city have raised concerns about the increasing homelessness they are observing versus the simultaneously declining annual PIT Count. Santa Clarita Mayor Marsha McLean and Mayor Pro Tem Cameron Smyth both believe that the city’s homeless population is significantly undercounted using the current methods.³¹

In addition, many observe that the official count has also varied widely over the years.³² For instance, according to the count, the number of people experiencing homelessness in Santa Clarita dropped from 242 in 2017 to 161 in 2018, without there being a plausible explanation.³³ Though the one-year decline between 2017 and 2018 may seem to represent a great achievement for the city, it does not align with what those working in the community and with the homeless population witnessed during that period. Local stakeholders anecdotally report that the actual number of people experiencing homelessness is likely closer to 1,500.³⁴

Homelessness has taken center stage for policymakers in L.A. County, home to the country’s 2nd-largest homeless population.³⁵ Ballot measures like Measure H provide hundreds of millions of dollars annually to address homelessness by funding tailored local programs and services to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness in cities

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹ 2019 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count Participant Observation: City of Santa Clarita. Accessed January 22, 2019.

³⁰ City of Santa Clarita, “Community plan to address homelessness.”

³¹ Interview with Mayor Marsha McLean and Mayor Pro Tem Cameron Smyth, Santa Clarita City Council. February 20, 2019.

³² Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority. “Homeless count - count by city/community.”

³³Ibid.

³⁴ While estimates vary, interviews with city representatives, homeless-serving organization staff, hospital administrators, law enforcement officers, and community members consistently produced estimates that were significantly higher than LAHSA’s official count for Santa Clarita. Importantly, many agencies have internal counts of only the clients they serve that exceed LAHSA’s count for the entire city. For instance, schools keep extremely detailed, federally-mandated numbers, which often indicate a number of homeless students approaching or exceeding the Santa Clarita total.

³⁵ University of Southern California, “A 2018 snapshot of homelessness in Los Angeles County,” accessed February 23, 2019, <https://usc.data.socrata.com/stories/s/Homelessness-in-2018-A-Snapshot-of-Los-Angeles-Cou/g8ge-um6u/>.

around the county.³⁶ Cities around the county were awarded grants for the development of action plans in late 2017.³⁷

Santa Clarita was one of the recipients of grant funding. Its action plan identified five key focus areas for the city and created a three-year plan to address the issues.³⁸ In addition, the city established the Community Task Force on Homelessness (Task Force) to bring stakeholders from around the city together to work on the action plan. The action plan and Task Force are signs of the importance Santa Clarita places on ensuring homelessness in the city is understood and remedied. Members of the Task Force are diverse, coming from schools, homeless-serving organizations, faith-based agencies, hospitals, and law enforcement, but they share a common view that homelessness is an issue the city's citizens want to see fixed.³⁹

A challenge Santa Clarita faces that most other cities in L.A. County do not is its large land area and significant wilderness space, which are both outside population centers and within them. Santa Clarita's 52.7 square miles make it the 4th-largest city in L.A. County by land area.⁴⁰ In addition, city residents enjoy one of the largest trail systems of any local city with 80 miles of trails and 20 miles of residential walking paths.⁴¹ While these provide great recreational opportunities, they complicate the process of counting people experiencing homelessness. The trail system largely follows the Santa Clara River, which has large areas of rugged terrain where members of the homeless population are likely to remain hidden during the annual PIT count.⁴²

³⁶ Los Angeles County Homeless Initiative, "The homeless initiative," accessed February 24, 2019, <http://homeless.lacounty.gov/>.

³⁷ Los Angeles County Homeless Initiative, "City homelessness planning," accessed February 24, 2019, <http://homeless.lacounty.gov/cities/>.

³⁸ City of Santa Clarita, "Community plan to address homelessness."

³⁹ Members of our project team attended Community Task Force on Homelessness meetings in November 2018 and February 2019. In addition, many of our interviews were with members of the Task Force, who consistently voiced this sentiment.

⁴⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, "QuickFacts Santa Clarita," accessed February 24, 2019, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/santaclaritacitycalifornia/PST045217>. /1. Los Angeles (468.7 miles²) 2. Palmdale (106 miles²) 3. Lancaster (94.3 miles²)

⁴¹ City of Santa Clarita, "City of Santa Clarita trails," accessed February 24, 2019, <https://www.santa-clarita.com/city-hall/departments/neighborhood-services/parks-division/trails>.

⁴² Ibid.

4. HOMELESSNESS EXAMINED

Santa Clarita's challenges in counting and providing services to its homeless population are not new; homelessness has been an important issue to policymakers throughout history and for contemporary city, county, and state leaders. In this section, we provide a brief overview of homelessness in America over the last half century, a review of historical counting methods, and explain the demographic diversity of the homeless population. This information provided us insights that helped guide our project on finding ways for Santa Clarita to improve its homeless count.

HOMELESSNESS IN THE U.S. AND LOS ANGELES COUNTY

Possibly the first attempt to enumerate the homeless population in America took place in 1933, but homelessness was mostly an ignored or dismissed issue throughout the twentieth century.⁴³ Public beliefs about homeless individuals centered on a mostly male population who were labeled "winos" or "bums."⁴⁴ The widespread belief that homelessness was self-inflicted meant that the public had little appetite for aggressive programs to get people off the streets and into homes.

The 1980s, however, brought widespread change in attitudes and beliefs about homelessness. A study of four major newspapers found that the number of articles on the topic of homelessness jumped from fewer than 50 in 1970 to nearly 900 by 1987.⁴⁵ Similarly, public opinion polling over the last quarter of the twentieth century showed a new understanding of what it meant to be homeless and the underlying causes. A national survey conducted in 1993 and repeated in 2001 found that, "respondents in 2001 had less stereotyped views of people experiencing homelessness and were more supportive of providing services for them."⁴⁶

Over the last decade, L.A. County mirrored this changing awareness and these new attitudes. In 2015, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors established the Los Angeles County Homeless Initiative, an organization tasked with developing strategies to combat homelessness.⁴⁷ Later, in 2016, the Board of Supervisors approved 47 strategies and allocated \$100 million to address the homelessness crisis in Los Angeles.⁴⁸ In March 2017, Measure H, a county-wide ballot initiative proposing a .25 percent increase on the county's sales tax passed with nearly 70 percent of the vote, well above the two-third requirement for enactment.⁴⁹ Measure H provides an estimated \$355 million per year for ten years for

⁴³ HUB for Urban Initiatives, "Why do we count and survey homeless people?," accessed February 28, 2019, <https://www.urban-initiatives.org/resources/why-do-we-count>.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Paul A. Toro and Melissa G. Warren, "Homelessness in the United States: policy considerations," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 27, No. 2, 119–136 (1999), <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/%28SICI%291520-6629%28199903%2927%3A2%3C119%3A%3AAID-JCOP2%3E3.0.CO%3B2-I>.

⁴⁶ Carolyn J. Trompsett, Paul A. Toro, Melissa Guzicki, Manuel Manrique, and Jigna Zatakia, "Homelessness in the United States: assessing changes in prevalence and public opinion, 1993–2001," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 37 No. 1-2, 47-61 (2006), <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10464-005-9007-2>.

⁴⁷ County of Los Angeles Chief Executive Office, "Homeless initiative recommendations," accessed February 28, 2019, http://homeless.lacounty.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Board-Letter-final -Pkg_2-9-16.pdf.

⁴⁸ Los Angeles County Homeless Initiative, "Approved strategies to combat homelessness," accessed February 29, 2019, <http://homeless.lacounty.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/HI-Report-Approved2.pdf>. / Los Angeles County Homeless Initiative, "History," accessed February 29, 2019, <http://homeless.lacounty.gov/history/>.

⁴⁹ Elijah Chiland, "Updated: LA county voters approve Measure H—here's how higher taxes will help the homeless," *Curbed Los Angeles*, accessed February 28, 2019, <https://la.curbed.com/2017/3/8/14855430/los-angeles-election-results-ballot-measure-h>.

homelessness efforts. As of January 2019, nearly \$13 million in Measure H funds have already been allocated to cities for their city-specific plans to address homelessness.⁵⁰

COUNTING METHODS HISTORICALLY AND TODAY

One of the significant challenges of determining a better way to count the homeless population is the lack of research on counting methods or even a universally-accepted definition of what it means to be “homeless.” Despite focus on the issue from politicians, academics, media, and American citizens, there is no consensus on what counting methods work best and there is significant debate over what constitutes “homeless.”⁵¹ Due to these issues, national counts have diverged by hundreds of thousands and even millions.⁵² Compounding the problem, some experts estimate a broader definition of “homeless” would generate a count of people experiencing homelessness ten to twenty times larger than today.⁵³

The debate over how to define “homeless” continues, but three approaches have emerged as the standard for counting the homeless population, regardless of how that term is defined: indirect estimation, single-contact censuses, and capture-recapture studies.⁵⁴

Indirect estimation counts rely on information from knowledgeable informants to estimate the homeless population.⁵⁵ Collection of data is extremely economical using indirect estimation because it can be done efficiently through telephone calls, emails, or letters to homeless-serving organizations.⁵⁶ The issue of defining what qualifies a person as homeless, though, is a significant issue with indirect estimation.⁵⁷ Because researchers rely on information from a diverse group of informants, the individual definitions those informants use can bias the data.⁵⁸ For instance, a researcher may be receiving tallies from a well-meaning informant who includes precariously housed individuals when the study is focused exclusively on the unhoused. Additionally, ensuring that individuals are not counted more than once is extremely difficult to impossible using this method as it requires researchers to have extensive knowledge of the surveyed area and the agencies involved.⁵⁹ A number of homeless individuals may gain services from or have contact with several different agencies.

Single-contact censuses are done by individuals using surveys or following specified basic instructions about whom to contact on a single date or during a short-time window. Teams go into the community and identify people experiencing homelessness, usually at a date and time that is selected because the homeless population is likely to be stationary.⁶⁰ Generally, these censuses are done in the late evening and in winter months, which helps to increase sheltered homeless populations and make identifying unsheltered homeless

⁵⁰ Los Angeles County Homeless Initiative, “City homelessness planning,” accessed February 28, 2019, <http://homeless.lacounty.gov/cities/>.

⁵¹ Charles D. Cowan, William R. Breakey, and Pamela J. Fischer, “The Methodology of Counting the Homeless,” *Homelessness, Health, and Human Needs*, (1988), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK218229/>.

⁵² In the early 1980s, the Department of Housing and Urban Development estimated there were 250,000 to 300,000 homeless people in the country. At that same time, in their book “Homelessness in America: A Forced March to Nowhere,” researchers Mary Ellen Hornbs and Mitch Snyder estimated a full 1% of the U.S. population or 2 to 3 million Americans to be homeless.

⁵³ Peter H. Rossi, *Down and Out in America: The Origins of Homelessness*, (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 8-13.

⁵⁴ Cowan, et. al.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

populations easier.⁶¹ The benefits of a single-contact census are direct contact and an increased likelihood of identifying homeless individuals who meet the definition of the study.⁶² One disadvantage of this method is that the homeless population is not static, which means the true count has already changed almost immediately after collection.⁶³ In addition, confining the count to a single date and time can mean severely miscounting the population if that selected time frame is uncharacteristic of a typical date or time.⁶⁴ For instance, unseasonal weather, hot or cold, might change the makeup of the homeless population in ways that mischaracterize its numbers.

Capture-recapture studies involve matching data on an individual observed more than once.⁶⁵ This method requires the use of some combination of identifiers like name, Social Security number, or birth date to create a method to recognize an individual during interactions.⁶⁶ Using identifiers and repeat interactions across agencies or other locations allows the changing nature of the homeless population to be observed. Researchers enumerate people entering and exiting the homeless population and collect demographic data on the overall population of people experiencing homelessness.⁶⁷ The capture-recapture method is the only one of the three methods to use a statistical model to estimate the unseen homeless population.⁶⁸ The primary drawback to this method is its cost in effort and labor hours. Whereas a small number of researchers may be able to execute either of the other two methods, capture-recapture requires ongoing measurement, which necessitates a large research team with significant resources.

The current methodology used in Santa Clarita and led by the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) is best characterized as a single-count census with some elements of capture-recapture.⁶⁹ Santa Clarita participates in the annual Point-in-Time (PIT) count that forms the basis for estimates of the homeless population throughout Los Angeles County. The annual PIT count provides LAHSA with a single-count census, but it supplements that count with follow-up surveys throughout the county, including Santa Clarita, that are used to provide data for statistical estimation of missed individuals experiencing homelessness.⁷⁰

PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS: A DIVERSE POPULATION

Despite our use of the generic terms “the homeless population” or “people experiencing homelessness” throughout this report, it is important to note that this population is extremely diverse, which means achieving a precise count of different demographic groups may require different strategies. We identified some subpopulations to be of particular interest to Santa Clarita in our research.

One group that was front and center in our conversations with homeless-serving organization staff and school officials was women and children. Stakeholders noted that a common fear for women experiencing homelessness is that their inability to provide a

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ USC, “2018 Los Angeles Continuum of Care homeless count methodology report.”

⁷⁰ Ibid.

home for their children may result in losing custody.⁷¹ This fear leads to reluctance to seek support and makes it more likely that they will try to stay hidden. In addition, women who are escaping domestic violence have few places to turn. Many homeless-serving organizations are unable to support them due to the threat posed to their other clients, which can leave these women even more vulnerable. Studies find that more than 80 percent of homeless mothers with children have experienced domestic violence in the past, which makes focusing on their unique needs and the challenges of tallying them all the more important.⁷²

Just as fear can make women experiencing homelessness more difficult to find, it can also make undocumented immigrants experiencing homelessness invisible. One school official told us about a district social worker who found a student living in a two-bedroom apartment with five families. The adults in the home were all undocumented and too fearful to seek any type of public assistance, so none of them would be recorded as people experiencing homelessness using current methods.⁷³ The Latinx homeless population increased by as much as 63 percent in recent years, with those lacking legal status disproportionately represented.⁷⁴ Getting an accurate tally will require strategies to encourage undocumented immigrants to step out of the shadows.

College of the Canyons, a community college and Santa Clarita's largest college with over 17,000 students, works hard to assist homeless students, another challenging population to enumerate. In its most recent count, College of the Canyons' homelessness support staff found 62 students experiencing homelessness.⁷⁵ Staff often find students sleeping in parking lots or using school facilities late at night, but it remains difficult to identify all homeless students. Financial aid forms can help to identify some, but many do not qualify or apply for financial aid.⁷⁶ Some students move from one friend's home to another throughout the year, which keeps them sheltered, but provides another way of concealing homelessness.⁷⁷

A final group that requires attention are the newly homeless. Though public understanding of homelessness tends to focus on the chronically homeless, the most recent count in Service Planning Area (SPA) 2, the geographic area designated by the county government that includes Santa Clarita, finds that only 24 percent of the homeless population meets that definition.⁷⁸ As a result, a large number of people experiencing homelessness are either homeless for the first time or go in and out of homelessness over time due to job loss, increased rent, unexpected medical expenses, or other reasons.

⁷¹ Interviews with Christina Najarro, Director of Programs, Bridge to Home, November 9, 2018; Roche Vermaak, Executive Director, Family Promise, November 9, 2018; and Gina Rodriguez, Coordinator of Student Support Services, Newhall School District, December 20, 2018.

⁷² Yumiko Aratani, "Homeless children and youth: causes and consequences," *National Center for Children in Poverty*, accessed February 28, 2019, http://www.nccp.org/publications/pdf/text_888.pdf.

⁷³ This example was provided by a school district official from Santa Clarita, but we did not have permission to use their name/position here. In addition, identifying details of the family were withheld by him due to privacy laws for students and families.

⁷⁴ Esmeralda Bermudez and Ruben Vives, "Surge in Latino homeless population 'a whole new phenomenon' for Los Angeles," Los Angeles Times, June 18, 2017, <https://www.latimes.com/local/california/la-me-latino-homeless-20170618-story.html>.

⁷⁵ Interview with Larry Schallert, Assistant Director of the Student Health & Wellness/Mental Health Program, College of Canyons. January 11, 2019.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, "2018 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count - Service Planning Area 2," accessed February 28, 2019, <https://www.lahsa.org/documents?id=2029-2018-greater-los-angeles-homeless-count-service-planning-area-2.pdf>.

5. METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Our analysis of the homeless count issues and our policy recommendations are based on qualitative research, which includes stakeholder and informant interviews, a comprehensive review of the pertinent research literature, and participant observation of the 2019 Point-in-Time (PIT) count held in Santa Clarita. We used a multi-pronged strategy of qualitative data collection in order to determine how the city defines its homeless population and how people who fit that definition have historically been counted, and to identify other counting methodologies implemented elsewhere that could productively be replicated in Santa Clarita.

INTERVIEWS

Purpose

We relied on 16 stakeholder and informant interviews to determine the city's priorities and to direct our research (see Appendix 1 for our full interview list). The purpose of these interviews was to provide insight on how people experiencing homelessness are currently counted in Santa Clarita, the city's capacity to conduct a more accurate PIT count, and how homeless counts are conducted elsewhere in Southern California. Therefore, we divided our formal and informal interviews with key informants into two main categories:

TABLE 1. Interviews with Stakeholders from Santa Clarita

Government	K-12 Schools & Colleges	Service Organizations
Mayor & City Council	One Elementary School District	One Homeless Service Organization
City Manager's Office	One Middle School/High School District	One Family Service Organization
Sheriff's Department	One Community College	One Medical Service Organization

TABLE 2. Interviews with Municipal Representatives Outside the City of Santa Clarita

Cities & Counties	Other Organizations
City of Burbank	Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA)
City of Santa Monica	Los Angeles County Sheriff
Riverside County	San Bernardino County Sheriff

Recruitment

We relied on Santa Clarita's Community Task Force on Homelessness (Task Force) to recruit community stakeholders to participate in our interviews and followed up on referrals from our informants. The city convened representatives to this Task Force last year after their respective organizations contributed to the development of its Community Plan to Address Homelessness.⁷⁹ The report consisted of interviews with 30 organizations that conduct activities related to homelessness in the city. The City Manager's Office gave us access to notes from these interviews. After reviewing the interview notes, our team identified a list of stakeholders to interview for this project.

We also identified and interviewed representatives from municipal governments and organizations outside of Santa Clarita. All but one of these representatives is working in a city or county that conducts their own homeless count without support from LAHSA. However, a homeless services liaison and a grants coordinator were able to provide us with additional information about how LAHSA has supported their city's annual homeless count.

All the individuals we interviewed were informed that we would use the name of their organization when citing their responses, unless they told us that they would prefer to remain anonymous. Additionally, we asked informants we interviewed in person for permission to record their interviews. For the interviews we conducted over the phone or in-person, we relied on hand written notes. We also informed everyone that they could ask us for additional clarification and to let us know if they would prefer not to answer any question.

Analysis

Our interviews helped answer four questions, which informed the development of our policy alternatives. We were interested in understanding how each organization or government entity defined homelessness, whether these organizations had an existing method of data collection, and if there was any coordination between organizations when this information was collected. We were most interested in learning whether these organizations could identify any limitations they believed were getting in the way of counting this population. We developed a series of interview guides that made it easier to elicit responses to these broader themes (see Appendix 2). These guides were primarily used for formal interviews with representatives from homeless serving organizations, schools, and government officials in Santa Clarita, as well as with city and county representatives outside of LA County. There were a few people we chose to interview for the purpose of clarifying information that was shared during those formal interviews.

REVIEW OF EXISTING RESEARCH

Purpose

We sought insights for improving the homeless count in Santa Clarita by looking for existing research about the range of practices used to census people who have historically been difficult to reach. Members of the city's Task Force identified that they were most interested in learning more about how the existing methodology to count homeless persons could be improved to count the hidden homeless in Santa Clarita.

⁷⁹ City of Santa Clarita, "Community plan to address homelessness."

Therefore, we also identified and researched methodologies used to count the following three demographic groups:

1. Homeless Populations
2. Undocumented Populations
3. HIV+ Populations

Moreover, in order to identify additional best practices, our literature review expanded to include counting methodology reports published by local municipalities in Southern California. These reports were developed by municipalities that were currently implementing a PIT count outside of the Los Angeles Continuum of Care (CoC) network. These local entities included the City of Santa Monica, the City of Long Beach, Riverside County, and San Bernardino County. We also relied on the PIT count methodology reports published by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in 2014 and by Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) in 2018. These reports helped us interpret which policy changes were already approved by HUD and LAHSA. We were also interested in identifying whether there were methods that HUD encouraged but were not implemented by LAHSA.

Analysis

We were each able to take the lead in reviewing existing research about the populations listed above. However, most research we found about counting undocumented communities and HIV+ populations was not fruitful. The methods used statistical modeling based on inferences derived from smaller populations. The research on how to count these populations was limited or was not applicable to the people who Santa Clarita is most interested in counting.

The most compelling ideas were derived from city or county reports that described how their respective cities have attempted to improve their annual PIT counting methods. These reports helped direct us to contact city or county representatives leading the efforts covered in these assessments. Many of the representatives we interviewed recommended others from whom we could learn.

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

Purpose

Our team had the opportunity to participate in and observe how the homeless count was conducted in Santa Clarita on January 22, 2019. Four members of our team joined other volunteer teams in conducting the PIT count, while another member received training to participate in the Westwood PIT count. Bridge to Home, one of Santa Clarita's largest homeless-serving organizations, was responsible for leading the training and tools to each volunteer team. When our team held an informal interview with a representative from this organization, we were able to garner its support to participate in this PIT count. Therefore, as the PIT count organizers, Bridge to Home was fully aware that we would describe our experience in this report. In doing so, we were able to gain empirical information by directly observing how LAHSA guides cities to conduct a PIT count.

Analysis

Our participation in Santa Clarita's PIT count was a crucial part of our data gathering. By volunteering in this count, we obtained information that was not skewed by a desire for a particular outcome. It would have been unreliable if we depended only on testimonies

from volunteers who participated previously. A few interviews we conducted before the PIT count helped us determine what we were going to focus on during the night of the count. We each took field notes and then met in person to do a collective assessment of the information derived from this participant experience. Our observations helped us identify several ways in which the practice of the PIT count had embedded biases sure to produce an under-count due to missed areas and missed observations.

6. HOMELESS COUNT CHALLENGES, PREVAILING VIEWS AND EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

Despite the decrease in the official count reported by the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) over the past year, homeless service providers and other institutions have cited an increase in homeless activity in the community.⁸⁰ Improvements to the city's homeless count can ensure that local institutions possess a more informed understanding of the homeless population. These improvements can in turn enable the city to advocate for the appropriate level of funding it needs to effectively provide services for this population. Using our data collection and analysis, we identified the central challenges unique to Santa Clarita with LAHSA's current Point-in-Time (PIT) count, how various stakeholder groups perceive the enumeration, and what effective practices other municipalities use in their respective homeless counts.

LAHSA'S PIT COUNT AND METHODOLOGY

LAHSA utilizes a comprehensive methodology to provide PIT count estimates of the homeless population in the L.A. Continuum of Care (CoC) geographic area.⁸¹ This methodology fulfills the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) mandated PIT Count during the last ten days in January, to enumerate and estimate demographic characteristics of persons experiencing homelessness.⁸² Given this information, we identified the following challenges that are unique to Santa Clarita.

Challenge #1: Time of Count Hinders Visibility

As mandated by HUD, the PIT count for both unsheltered and sheltered populations must be conducted on a single night during the last ten days in January.⁸³ Despite this federal requirement, each municipal entity within a CoC has the autonomy to determine the hours in which a PIT count will be conducted in one night.⁸⁴ This year Santa Clarita held its enumeration between the hours of 7 p.m. and 10 p.m.⁸⁵ While participating in the count, we found it difficult to see beyond areas covered by our headlights. Most of the census tracts we were assigned to visit included areas with rugged terrain and little to no street lighting.⁸⁶ Searching these areas without adequate lighting drastically hindered our efforts to see and therefore, adequately enumerate those experiencing homelessness.

Challenge #2: Current Implementation Practices Are Limited

In Santa Clarita, the tally is conducted by volunteers who drive around their designated census tracts and record the number of individuals they perceive to be homeless. Currently, LAHSA recommends that volunteers exit their vehicles and walk in areas that cannot be seen or searched from a car.⁸⁷ This year representatives from Bridge to Home

⁸⁰ City of Santa Clarita, "Community plan to address homelessness," 1.

⁸¹ University of Southern California, "2018 Los Angeles Continuum of Care homeless count methodology report," 2.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, "Point-in-Time Methodology Guide" (2014): 6, accessed February 27, 2019, <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/PIT-Count-Methodology-Guide.pdf>.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, "2019 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count," accessed February 27, 2019, <https://www.lahsa.org/homeless-count/>.

⁸⁶ 2019 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count Participant Observation: City of Santa Clarita. January 22, 2019.

⁸⁷ Interview with Christina Najarro, Director of Programs, Bridge to Home. December 13, 2018.

were only made aware of this recommendation days before the 2019 count and as a result, volunteers conducted the census solely from their cars.⁸⁸ In contrast, in previous years representatives from Bridge to Home were specifically instructed to only facilitate a visual driving count.⁸⁹

Without exiting their vehicles, volunteers are restricted from looking for people in areas that are not accessible by car. For instance, during this year's count, we noticed that there were many small, uneven roads and alleyways that were inaccessible unless we physically exited the car and walked the area by foot.⁹⁰ We also discovered how we could not check behind dumpsters or in more obscure areas like alleys from a car. As a result, we were not able to thoroughly search within our designated census tracts and were limited in our ability to record accurate numbers.

In addition, the current tally in Santa Clarita only takes place on a single night. Although Bridge to Home is responsible for coordinating with LAHSA to conduct the count, neither organization has sent volunteers to the uncultivated and inhospitable wilderness areas within the city boundaries in the past.⁹¹ Individuals residing in these areas are part of the unsheltered homeless population that should be captured during the PIT count.

The Santa Clarita Sheriff's Department has all-terrain vehicles, which are required to access most of the wilderness areas.⁹² This year for the first time, deputies worked with LAHSA representatives the day after the PIT count to census those experiencing homelessness in a single wilderness area.⁹³ One city Deputy Sheriff estimated it would take closer to three to four days to survey the unsheltered population in all wilderness areas in the city.⁹⁴ Because these areas are not thoroughly searched, many individuals are not enumerated in the current counting methodology.⁹⁵

LAHSA counts all census tracts within each city and Service Planning Area (SPA).⁹⁶ HUD, however, allows each CoC to choose whether it will eliminate areas that are unlikely to have unsheltered homeless people.⁹⁷ During this year's count, we found that certain census tracts in Santa Clarita were unlikely to have any homeless individuals, such as those comprising of higher-income neighborhoods. This is because people living in these areas are more likely to call the police when they perceive a person to be homeless.⁹⁸ While counting all census tracts is comprehensive, the time and effort required to do so would be more effective by focusing on other areas of Santa Clarita.

Challenge #3: Lack of Effective Volunteer Training and Team Composition

Based on our participant observation, volunteers currently receive training via a 15-minute video created by LAHSA that delineates how to properly participate in the PIT count in L.A.

⁸⁸ Interview with Christina Najarro, Director of Programs, Bridge to Home. December 13, 2018.

⁸⁹ Interview with Christina Najarro, Director of Programs, Bridge to Home. December 13, 2018.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Interview with Christina Najarro, Director of Programs, Bridge to Home. December 13, 2018.

⁹² Interview with Betsy Shackelford, Kevin Duxbury, and Brian Rooney, Deputy Sheriffs, and Danial Dantice, Sergeant, City of Santa Clarita Sheriff's Department. January 29, 2019.

⁹³ Phone Interview with Betsy Shackelford, Deputy Sheriff, City of Santa Clarita Sheriff's Department. January 29, 2019.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Interview with Clementina Verjan, Associate Director of Community Engagement, Policy & Systems Department, LAHSA. March 13, 2019.

⁹⁷ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. "Point-in-Time Methodology Guide," 6.

⁹⁸ Interview with Betsy Shackelford, Kevin Duxbury, and Brian Rooney, Deputy Sheriffs and Danial Dantice, Sergeant, City of Santa Clarita Sheriff's Department. January 3, 2019.

County.⁹⁹ Volunteers are shown the short video right before they divide into groups and drive around designated areas to enumerate those experiencing homelessness. The video briefly discusses various topics, including what homeless encampments or individuals may look like and what rules of engagement should be followed during the official tally (i.e., do not interact with or approach homeless individuals).¹⁰⁰

As first-time volunteers, we found the training video to be insufficient in ensuring that volunteers know how to read their maps and effectively record those they observe to be homeless, leading to the distinct possibility of compromised accuracy. We struggled with tracking where we were on maps with curving roads. We also had questions about the maps that we did not encounter until we were already in the field. For instance, certain roads on the maps were highlighted in yellow with no legend to explain the meaning of the highlighting. When we returned and asked what the highlighting meant, the local organizers from Bridge to Home conveyed to us that they had not been informed by LAHSA on the meaning of the highlighting.

Additionally, LAHSA's training video delineates that there are three essential roles that are necessary to produce an accurate PIT count: one driver to safely drive the team, one navigator to direct the driver and track progress on the map, and one recorder to log the number of homeless individuals seen.¹⁰¹ All of these tasks require focused concentration, which means that a volunteer has limited attention left for other tasks. When participating in this year's enumeration, there were multiple volunteer teams that only had two members.¹⁰² This was the case for one of the two teams our group formed. With only two people, one individual had to serve as both navigator and recorder. As a result, we found it difficult to focus on two complex tasks and accurately count the number of homeless individuals in our census tracts.

Challenge #4: Lack of Information about Those Accessing Services

One critical component of LAHSA's current methodology involves the inclusion of administrative data from the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), a data collection system that assists with tracking the services used by people experiencing homelessness in a particular area.¹⁰³ HUD requires that all organizations receiving funding for homelessness support or intervention use an HMIS-type software that complies with HUD's collection requirements.¹⁰⁴

HMIS has several important functions. When organizations enter information about those they serve, HMIS creates a Personal Identifier, also known as a Unique Identifier.¹⁰⁵ The Identifier is specific to an individual, but is designed to maintain the confidentiality of the person receiving services. An example of an Identifier and how it is created is presented in Table 3 below.

⁹⁹ 2019 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count Participant Observation: City of Santa Clarita. January 22, 2019.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ 2019 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count Participant Observation: City of Santa Clarita. January 22, 2019.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ University of Southern California, "2018 Los Angeles Continuum of Care homeless count methodology report," 2.

¹⁰⁴ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, "HMIS Requirements," accessed February 27, 2019, <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/hmis/hmis-requirements/>.

¹⁰⁵ Sacramento Steps Forward, "Glossary of HMIS Definitions and Acronyms," accessed March 19, 2019, <https://sacramentostepsforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Glossary-of-HMIS-Definitions-and-Acronyms-20141.pdf>.

TABLE 3. Identifier Creation Instructions

To Create an Identifier Use:	Example: JSmi01/01/1990MWY
First initial from First Name	J (John)
First 3 initials from Last Name	Smi (Smith)
DOB	01/01/1990
Gender	M (Male)
Race	W (White)
Veteran or Not?	Y (Yes or N = No)

Identifiers allow LAHSA to include information collected by CoC providers. Each Identifier represents the number of people a CoC serves without creating a duplicated count of people accessing services by other CoC providers.¹⁰⁶ An identifier is a highly effective tool for tracking individuals but is contingent upon all organizations actively using HMIS. Without proper usage, LAHSA's reported count will not reflect the most precise number of homeless individuals in a particular area.

HMIS is also designed to provide information about how services are used, the effectiveness of services provided, and an understanding of those who are experiencing homelessness in a specific area.¹⁰⁷ This information is critical for organizations and municipalities to design services and allocate funds effectively.

During an interview, a representative from Bridge to Home reported difficulties with the current HMIS software.¹⁰⁸ Bridge to Home and its staff currently does not have the bandwidth to handle the complexities of a system like HMIS when they barely have the capacity support the city's homeless population. The organization is also entering data into their own software that they can easily manipulate for its own needs. Due to these complex issues, it is likely that adequate records of the city's homeless population are not being properly documented and updated through HMIS.

SANTA CLARITA ORGANIZATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS

After interviewing community stakeholders that interact with sub-sectors of the city's homeless population, we identified a number of general trends regarding concerns about the current enumeration.

Trend #1: Count Perceived as an Undercount

The first observation we noted was that the current enumeration is believed to be greatly undercounting the number of homeless individuals in the city. According to the city's

¹⁰⁶Sacramento Steps Forward, "Glossary of HMIS Definitions and Acronyms," accessed March 19, 2019, <https://sacramentostepsforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Glossary-of-HMIS-Definitions-and-Acronyms-20141.pdf>.

¹⁰⁷ Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, "About HMIS," accessed March 18, 2019, <https://www.lahsa.org/hmis/about>.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Christina Najarro, Director of Programs, Bridge to Home. December 13, 2018.

community report on homelessness, various stakeholders and service providers, including local school districts and businesses, have brought up concerns to the city about an upsurge in homeless activity.¹⁰⁹ These service providers felt that this increase was not represented in the annual PIT count. For instance, the 2017 enumeration accounted for 242 homeless individuals residing in the city.¹¹⁰ However, one local school district reported that the number of homeless students it serves alone is over 300.¹¹¹

This discrepancy underscores a significant shortcoming of the current count: it is not capturing a large portion of the homeless population in the city. When interviewing a representative from Family Promise, a local homeless service provider, we were able to affirm this information.¹¹² He shared that although the city's official homeless count has decreased in the past year, he has observed a rise in homelessness in the area and in the number of individuals seeking services through his organization.¹¹³

Trend #2: Count does not Capture the “Hidden Homeless”

Many of the individuals we interviewed claimed that the way the count is administered does not account for those who are classified as the “hidden homeless.” For instance, a representative from Bridge to Home stated that since volunteers are only designated to search within their assigned census tracts, the PIT count does not capture individuals who are residing in the wilderness or rugged terrain of the city or those that are couch-surfing with friends or family.¹¹⁴

A representative from one of the local school districts in Santa Clarita also shared this same observation.¹¹⁵ As a public educational institution, school districts must strictly abide by the definition of homelessness mandated under federal law in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.¹¹⁶ The law states that children qualify as “homeless” if they “lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.”¹¹⁷ Under this definition, children and families that are couch-surfing or “doubling-up” in residences, for instance, are considered to be homeless individuals because their arrangements are not permanent and therefore, not “fixed.” However, the current PIT count does not take into account such individuals who are couch surfing or “doubling up” in residences.

Trend #3: Differences in How Homeless Population is Tracked

We also discovered there is a distinct difference in how public organizations like schools and hospitals approach tracking the number of homeless individuals they serve. As a result, the accuracy of the numbers they gather, and record can vary widely. For instance, the local school districts keep extensive records of their homeless students through a comprehensive student information system.¹¹⁸ During an interview with a representative from a local school district, we learned that the district manages a log for each student

¹⁰⁹ City of Santa Clarita. “Community plan to address homelessness,” 2.

¹¹⁰ Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, “Homeless count - count by city/community,”

¹¹¹ City of Santa Clarita. “Community plan to address homelessness: Santa Clarita homelessness strategic planning stakeholder interview notes,” accessed February 25, 2019.

¹¹² Informal Interview with Roche Vermaak, Executive Director, Family Promise. November 9, 2018.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Interview with Christina Najarro, Director of Programs, Bridge to Home. December 13, 2018.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Jan Daisher, Director of Special Programs and Professional Development, William S. Hart High School District. November 28, 2018.

¹¹⁶ McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987 (Pub. L. 100-77, July 22, 1987, 101 Stat. 482, 42 U.S.C. § 11301 et seq.)

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Interview with Jan Daisher, Director of Special Programs and Professional Development, William S. Hart High School District. November 28, 2018.

within the information system.¹¹⁹ Each log is regularly updated to reflect follow-up interviews with family members regarding the most current housing status of each student.

The district also has a comprehensive process in place that is effective in identifying which students may be experiencing homelessness.¹²⁰ At the beginning of each school year, students are required to fill out surveys that ask questions about their housing status, including if they live in a hotel, motel, or with numerous other family members. Students are flagged if their answers indicate they may be homeless and are later interviewed by a social worker or counselor to gather more information about their particular situation.

Other organizations in the city have a different system in place for identifying and tracking the homeless individuals they serve or interact with. For instance, Bridge to Home internally tracks its homeless population using its own tracking system, in addition to HMIS.¹²¹ Although the use of HMIS encourages uniformity across different organizations within a community and CoC, as mentioned previously, it appears that the information is not being updated or tracked extensively. Furthermore, organizations who serve those who are considered chronically homeless, including Bridge to Home, serve a more transient subgroup of the homeless population. These individuals are seeking out support and services in a less consistent manner than homeless students, for instance, who are attending school more consistently and are identified directly by school staff.¹²²

MUNICIPALITIES IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

In order to identify which effective practices lead to more accurate tallies of homeless populations, we interviewed representatives from municipalities across Southern California. These interviews revealed a number of commonalities among cities and counties that utilize different methods from Santa Clarita to facilitate their official enumerations. For a visual summary of these counting methods see Table 4 below.

Practice #1: Different Times of Count

First, we discovered that some municipalities conduct their counts during different times, which has enabled them to capture more homeless individuals in their final tallies. For instance, Riverside County, which shares Santa Clarita's geographic challenges (i.e., large spans of wilderness areas and rugged terrain), conducts their count in the morning from 5:30 a.m. to 10 a.m.¹²³ A CoC can request and receive a waiver from HUD that authorizes them to facilitate their enumeration outside the HUD-designated time period.¹²⁴ Once PIT count volunteers complete their training and drive to their areas, the sun is rising so volunteers can see individuals experiencing homelessness. As a result, this morning tally leads to an official count that effectively captures more homeless individuals in the area.

San Bernardino County also conducts its count in the morning from 6 a.m. to 10 a.m.¹²⁵ The County Sheriff's Department sends out a team called the Homeless Outreach and Proactive Enforcement (HOPE) Team to seek out and identify homeless individuals when

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Interview with Christina Najarro, Director of Programs, Bridge to Home. December 13, 2018.

¹²² Interviews with Christina Najarro, Director of Programs, Bridge to Home. December 13, 2018; and Jan Daisher, Director of Special Programs, William S. Hart High School District. November 28, 2018.

¹²³ Interview with Rowena E. Concepcion, Administrative Services Manager, Riverside County Department of Public Social Services. January 18, 2019.

¹²⁴ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. "Point-in-Time Methodology Guide," 63.

¹²⁵ Interview with Clementina Verjan, Associate Director of Community Engagement, Policy & Systems Department, LAHSA. March 13, 2019.

there is sufficient daylight.¹²⁶ According to representative from the Sheriff's Department, counting in the morning not only increases visibility but it is also a time when individuals experiencing homelessness are usually in the place they have sought shelter for the night or are just beginning to move around.¹²⁷ A morning enumeration addresses the issue of decreased visibility that can hinder the ability of volunteers to identify and record the number of homeless individuals they observe.

TABLE 4. Counting Methods by Municipality

	Cities		Counties	
	Burbank	Santa Monica	San Bernardino	Riverside
Practice				
Time of PIT Count				PIT Count 5:30 a.m. – 10 a.m.
Service-Based Count	8 p.m. – 12 a.m.	10 p.m. – 2 a.m.	6 a.m. – 10 a.m.	Service-Based 7 a.m. – 2 p.m.
Multi-Day Count	Outreach Teams	Beach Count 1 – 2 Days	2 – 7 Days	3 Days
Method of Count (Driving & Walking)	Driving & Walking in Alleys/Small Streets	Walk All Areas	Walk All Areas	Walk & Conduct Survey with Incentive Bags
Volunteer Training	LAHSA Video	Specialized Live Training & Experienced Team Leaders	Specialized Live Training	Specialized Live Training
Software Used	HMIS	HMIS	Survey123 by ESRI	Survey123 by ESRI
Volunteers Use Phone App	No	No	Yes: Survey123 by ESRI	Yes: Survey123 by ESRI
Survey During PIT Count	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mapping	No	Yes	Yes: GIS heat maps & Survey123 by ESRI	Yes: Survey123 by ESRI

¹²⁶ Interview with Mike Jones, Deputy on Homeless Outreach Proactive Enforcement Team, San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department. February 5, 2019.

¹²⁷ Interview with Mike Jones, Deputy on Homeless Outreach Proactive Enforcement Team, San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department. February 5, 2019.

Practice #2: Multi-day and Service-Based Counts

Second, we noted that many local entities manage multi-day counts and utilize methods that rely on more than just community volunteers. In particular, these municipalities facilitate their PIT count on one night and on a different day(s) send out trained professionals, along with law enforcement, to explore areas inaccessible to volunteers due to safety concerns and time constraints. Riverside County's Department of Social Services (DPSS) uses this approach along with the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department.¹²⁸

A San Bernardino County sheriff's deputy revealed to us that its HOPE Team facilitates an effort to map the locations the PIT count covered the night before and overlay it with their map of known locations where homeless individuals tend to congregate.¹²⁹ The team follows that effort by visiting the areas it missed during the following week to ensure the County includes as many individuals as possible in its census.

According to a DPSS representative from Riverside County, the County facilitates a three-day enumeration to allow enough time for law enforcement teams and health professionals to search difficult-to-reach areas.¹³⁰ Up to a month prior to the count, these teams observe uninhabitable areas within the county to determine where homeless persons are likely to reside.¹³¹ Following the PIT count, the homeless individuals in these areas are surveyed within a seven-day period.¹³² HUD allows the numbers these teams collect to be included in the official count as long as their outreach is done within a week of the large scale PIT count.¹³³ This thoroughness allows local entities to establish a more accurate count by ensuring that individuals who may be missed during a single-day count are accounted for.

Furthermore, including additional days also allows local entities to capture homeless individuals who receive support or services from organizations or agencies. Currently, HUD allows CoCs to conduct a multi-day PIT count if the purpose is to enumerate unsheltered people experiencing homelessness who are accessing services.¹³⁴ This method is known as a Service-Based count. A Service-Based count is conducted in "locations frequented by people who are homeless," including soup kitchens, libraries, and other community locations.¹³⁵ A 1999 study of two cities showed that most, if not all, people experiencing homelessness are likely to request services in the community in which they reside.¹³⁶ An earlier study had also indicated that focusing on counting homeless persons visiting soup kitchens, meal distribution sites, and shelters "significantly improved the unsheltered

¹²⁸ Interview with Mike Jones, Deputy on Homeless Outreach Proactive Enforcement Team, San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department. February 5, 2019; Interview with Rowena E. Concepcion, Administrative Services Manager, Riverside County Department of Public Social Services. January 18, 2019.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Interview with Rowena E. Concepcion, Administrative Services Manager, Riverside County Department of Public Social Services. January 18, 2019.

¹³¹ Riverside County Department of Public Social Services "Riverside County Homeless Count & Survey Report" (2018): 24, accessed February 8, 2019,
<http://dpss.co.riverside.ca.us/files/pdf/homeless/2018-rivco-pit-report-revised-6-6-18.pdf>.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. "Point-in-Time Count Methodology Guide," 50.

¹³⁴ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, "Point-in-Time Count Methodology Guide," 50.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Paul Toro et. al (1999). "Obtaining Representative Samples of Homeless Persons: A Two-City Study." *Journal of Community Psychology* 27, No. 2, 162, accessed February 1, 2019.

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/%28SICI%291520-6629%28199903%2927%3A2%3C157%3A%3AAID-JCOP4%3E3.0.CO%3B2-2>

count, finding that most unsheltered people were using at least one service center at least once a week.”¹³⁷

According to an interview with a Riverside County DPSS representative, the County currently implements a Service-Based Count during their annual enumeration. In addition, the County’s PIT count volunteers survey individuals experiencing homelessness, which enables the assignment of an identifier. This process ensures the final count information County representatives send to HUD does not contain duplications of the same individuals.¹³⁸ This past year, the County implemented its PIT count and Service-Based count on the same day but followed up for two additional days to gather more information about people accessing services.¹³⁹

Practice #3: Comprehensive Volunteer Training

A third conclusion we drew from our interviews was the fact that a number of municipalities provide in-depth training sessions for their PIT count volunteers. In particular, the City of Santa Monica provides training modules that familiarize volunteers with what individuals appearing to be homeless may look like, where they may tend to congregate, how to fill out appropriate paperwork (i.e., recording the number of homeless families and homeless encampments seen), and other pertinent information that ensures volunteers are well equipped to participate in the official tally.¹⁴⁰

We also found that local entities designate experienced individuals on each volunteer team to provide support for questions or complications that may arise during the count. The City of Santa Monica reaches out to experienced individuals to invite them to serve as official team leaders.¹⁴¹ These individuals are identified based on their knowledge and experience working with the local homeless population, such as those who work at homeless service organizations, as mental health providers, and at other CoC organizations. Team leaders are also recruited from those who have several years of prior experience in participating in the city’s official count. Santa Monica officials provide these team leaders with a separate training session with guidance specific to Santa Monica to ensure they can manage and facilitate their teams and conduct the enumeration as smoothly as possible.¹⁴²

Representatives from the City of Santa Monica indicated that new volunteers are often unclear about how to differentiate between someone who is leaving work after providing cleaning services, a student who has been studying late, or someone who is experiencing homelessness.¹⁴³ They all may be wearing worn clothing, carrying a backpack, and sitting on a bus bench late at night. Providing more comprehensive training sessions and enlisting experienced team leaders can help clarify who should be counted as experiencing homelessness. This clarification can then reduce the risk that volunteers will misconstrue who is perceived as homeless, therefore increasing the accuracy of the count.

¹³⁷ National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, “Don’t Count on It: How the HUD Point-in-Time Count Underestimates the Homelessness Crisis in America” (2017), accessed February 1, 2019. <https://nlchp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/HUD-PIT-report2017.pdf>

¹³⁸ Interview with Rowena E. Concepcion, Administrative Services Manager, Riverside County Department of Public Social Services. January 18, 2019.

¹³⁹ Riverside County Department of Public Social Services, “Riverside County Homeless Count & Survey Report,” 23-24.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Margaret Willis, Human Services Administrator and Deidre Mumford, Administrative Analyst, City of Santa Monica. December 10, 2018.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Interview with Margaret Willis, Human Services Administrator and Deidre Mumford, Administrative Analyst, City of Santa Monica. December 10, 2018.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

Practice #4: Comprehensive Methods to Facilitate Count

We also identified more comprehensive methods used to facilitate official enumerations, with many local entities requiring their volunteers not only to drive through their designated census tracts, but also to exit their vehicles, walk areas by foot, and interact with homeless individuals. As mentioned previously, each volunteer team typically has a driver and a group of individuals who help record the number of people perceived as homeless.¹⁴⁴ Burbank and Santa Monica, for example, have their respective community volunteers travel together to an assigned area and walk in groups to count people who may be living in their cars, on the street, or in an alleyway.¹⁴⁵

Riverside County goes even further, having volunteers actually interact with people experiencing homelessness.¹⁴⁶ In order to gather more information about the homeless population, Riverside County volunteers offer these individuals incentives to participate in a survey.¹⁴⁷ The incentives consist of bags with personal care items and snacks. These are offered during the PIT count and at locations where homeless people seek services.¹⁴⁸ The items for bags are collected through a community-run donation drive or purchased with funds from HUD. With such methods, volunteer teams are able to access areas that may be missed while driving through census tracts. Teams are also better equipped to provide local entities with more information on the number of those experiencing homelessness.

Practice #5: Use of Mapping

Lastly, we discovered that a number of municipalities use mapping software to identify areas where homeless individuals are most likely to reside. Using this software enables volunteers and law enforcement teams to know what locations they should canvass during the PIT count and on any additional days. In turn, this method ensures that more of the homeless community is identified.

Riverside County, for example, uses a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping software from Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI), a company based in Redlands, California.¹⁴⁹ During its 2018 count, the County's DPSS partnered with ESRI and the City of Riverside to develop a comprehensive mobile survey pilot test for its PIT count.¹⁵⁰ The County relied on a GIS application called Survey123 to capture homeless locations in the county to include on maps provided to volunteers.¹⁵¹ Volunteers were then required to download the Survey123 application on their cellular phone, enabling them to access maps easily and identify which locations to search while out in the field. The application also contains a list of prepared questions volunteers use to survey homeless individuals and input their responses.

¹⁴⁴ University of Southern California, "2018 Los Angeles Continuum of Care homeless count methodology report," 4.

¹⁴⁵ Interviews with Marcos Gonzalez, Grants Coordinator and Nicholas Sundback, Homeless Services Liaison, City of Burbank. January 8, 2019; and Margaret Willis, Human Services Administrator and Deidre Mumford, Administrative Analyst, City of Santa Monica. December 10, 2018.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Rowena E. Concepcion, Administrative Services Manager, Riverside County Department of Public Social Services. January 18, 2019.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Riverside County Department of Public Social Services, "Riverside County Homeless Count & Survey Report," 22.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

The San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department also uses the Survey123 software to identify the likely locations of homeless individuals.¹⁵² Representatives from the Department conveyed that the software is user-friendly and easy to customize.¹⁵³ To protect privacy and safety, the Department uses the software to create maps and share them with other organizations.¹⁵⁴ These maps can be printed in a way that obscures exact coordinates but still provides general locations. Specific location details are retained so that intervention and follow-up with identified homeless individuals can be ongoing.

¹⁵² Interview with Mike Jones, Deputy on Homeless Outreach Proactive Enforcement Team, San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department. February 5, 2019.

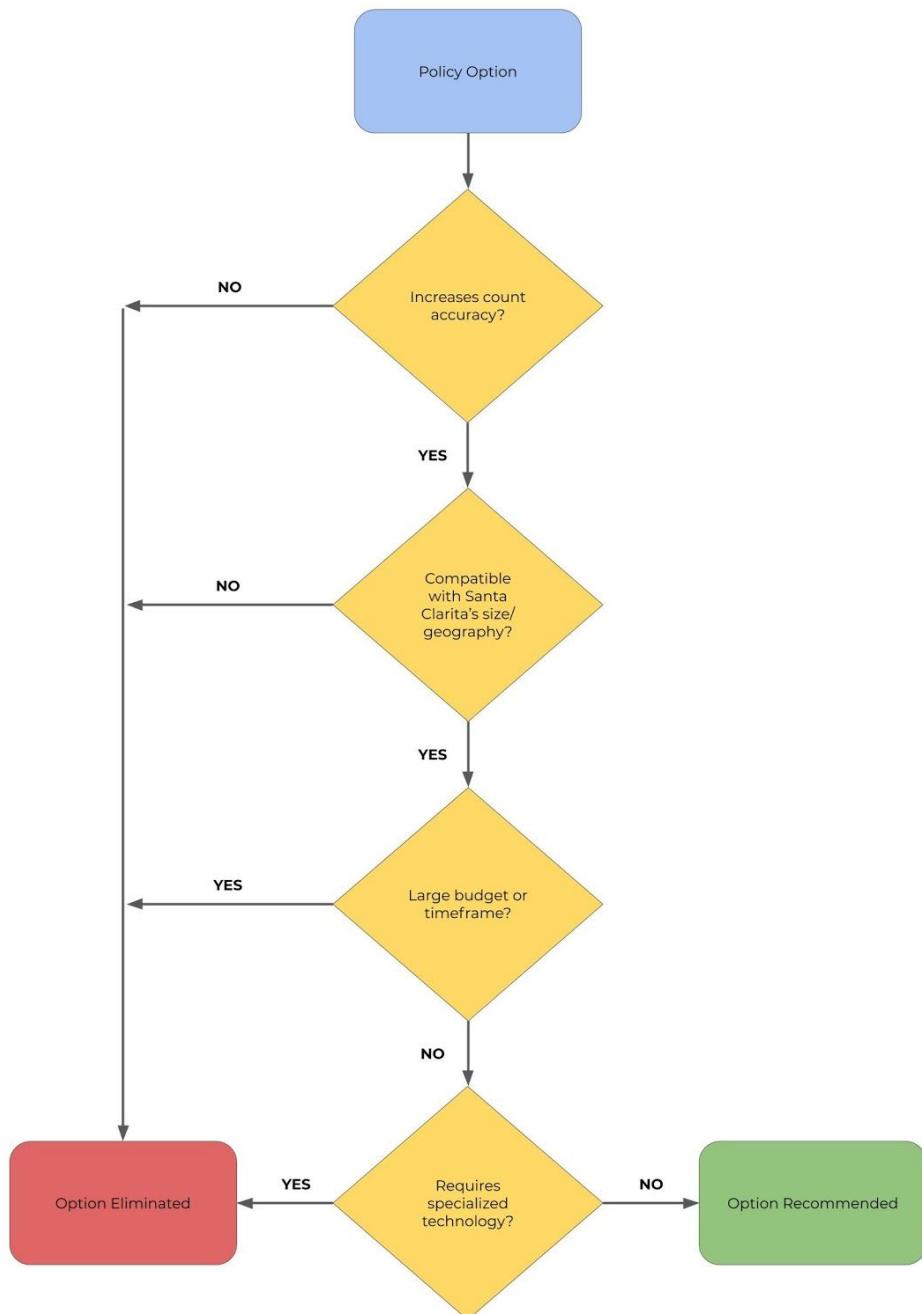
¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

7. PRE-SCREENING OF POLICY OPTIONS

Our research provided us with a wide variety of options to consider. In order to identify the most reasonable and effective options, we first eliminated those that did not increase the accuracy of the homeless count. Next, we eliminated options that do not work with the city's geography and size, are not within the current city budget and time frame, or required technology that is not currently being used to identify those experiencing homelessness. Figure 3 illustrates our pre-screening process.

FIGURE 3. Pre-Screening Process



Our pre-screening criteria are outlined in Table 5. Within each criterion there is an explicit definition of options that were considered and those that were eliminated. The following sections explain the criteria used for pre-screening of policy options.

TABLE 5. Pre-Screening Criteria

Criteria	Accuracy	Geography	Budget/ Timeframe	Technology
Recommended	Options that: 1) Eliminate duplicates by using identifiers 2) Enable CoC providers to record and share identifiers of people served 3) Subpopulations included in overall count 4) Some increase in accuracy mostly resulting from easy modifications	Practical for Santa Clarita's land area and topography	Costs less than \$50,000 up front or continuing revenue and Requires two years or less to implement	Does Not require technology that has not been studied for use in quantifying those experiencing homelessness
Eliminated	Fails to do any of the four items above	Impractical for Santa Clarita's land area and topography	Costs more than \$50,000 up front or continuing revenue Requires more than two years to implement	Requires technology that has not been studied for use in quantifying those experiencing homelessness

ACCURACY

Because people without homes, by definition, lack a permanent location, counts are considered to be 100 percent accurate only under special conditions.¹⁵⁵ For example, a walking count that covers every street, alley, and open space is generally considered to be nearly 100 percent accurate. In areas where this is not possible, it is still possible to conduct a count that stakeholders and those interacting with the homeless population consider to be highly accurate. These more accurate tallies utilize methods that do one or more of the following:

- Allow for the identification and elimination of duplicate counts of the same person.
- Enable well-trained Continuum of Care (CoC) providers to comprehensively record and share information about those they serve while protecting individual privacy.

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Clementina Verjan, Associate Director of Community Engagement, Policy & Systems Department, LAHSA. March 13, 2019.

- Ensure that subpopulations are captured and included in the overall count, which is accomplished through the two prior steps and by broadening counts beyond a Point-in-Time (PIT) survey.

Options that accomplished one or more of the three items above continued in the pre-screening process. In addition, options that did not accomplish any of these three items, but increased accuracy with minimal effort required were retained (e.g. improved volunteer training). We eliminated any option that we assessed would not increase accuracy over the status quo in any of these ways.

GEOGRAPHY

In cities like Santa Monica the PIT count involves teams walking every single street and alley.¹⁵⁶ This method works well in geographically small and mostly urban areas where there is good lighting, paved walkways, and large numbers of volunteers. Santa Monica is only about 8 square miles while Santa Clarita is close to 53 square miles.¹⁵⁷ While this method produces a very accurate PIT count, it is not a method that would be practical for a large city like Santa Clarita. In addition to a large footprint, a significant part of the city is wilderness, which is often treacherous to navigate.

We eliminated any option that was incompatible with Santa Clarita's geography. Options we assessed as practical given Santa Clarita's geography continued in the pre-screening process.

BUDGET/TIMEFRAME

Other options we considered already exist in other states and municipalities, such as the "Right to Shelter."¹⁵⁸ The first law mandating a right to shelter for all homeless individuals was passed in 1979 in New York State. Since then other states have passed similar laws, citing that remaining on the streets during cold weather can result in bodily harm or death.¹⁵⁹ Due to this risk, people experiencing homelessness are more inclined to use shelters and locations are obliged to provide enough beds for all those who need them.¹⁶⁰

Advocating for a right to shelter would dramatically increase the accuracy of the count by ensuring all homeless individuals are in a shelter and can thus be easily counted. However, this option is also expensive and would take time to implement and build enough shelters. For these reasons, options with similarly high costs and long time frames have been eliminated from our evaluation. For the analysis we conducted, high costs were those that exceeded the \$50,000 threshold city officials indicated would cause an expenditure to require City Council approval.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁶ City of Santa Monica Interview.

¹⁵⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, "QuickFacts Santa Clarita," accessed February 24, 2019, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/santaclaritacitycalifornia/PST045217>. /1. Los Angeles (468.7 miles²) 2. Palmdale (106 miles²) 3. Lancaster (94.3 miles²)

¹⁵⁸ In the Landmark case of Callahan v. Carey, the New York Supreme Court ruled in Dec. 1979 that the state was required to provide emergency shelter for the homeless even if there weren't funds set aside for the shelters. "In particular, the lawsuit pointed to Article XVII of the New York State Constitution, which declares that 'the aid, care and support of the needy are public concerns and shall be provided by the state and by such of its subdivisions....'

<http://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/our-programs/advocacy/legal-victories/the-callahan-legacy-callahan-v-carey-and-the-legal-right-to-shelter/>, accessed February 14, 2019.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ The law says that anyone who is homeless by "reason of physical, mental or social dysfunction" be provided shelter. <http://www.streetsheet.org/?p=4072>, accessed February 14, 2019.

¹⁶¹ Off-the-record conversation with city officials.

TECHNOLOGY

We also initially explored options outside of current PIT count practices that are used effectively for other purposes, but are unproven for use in counting people experiencing homelessness. For example, drones and airplanes equipped with infrared cameras provide a highly effective tool for identifying how many people are living in wilderness areas like those in Santa Clarita.¹⁶² The U.S. Forest Service uses infrared equipped planes to identify where people are living so that if there is a forest fire these people can be evacuated.¹⁶³ In San Bernardino County, the Department of Public Works is using infrared drones to map where homeless people live when river levels rise and fall.¹⁶⁴

We eliminated this and similar options because further research is required into the capacity and capability of drones and the expense and availability of equipped airplanes. At this time, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department is only permitted to use drones in crisis situations because of public privacy concerns.¹⁶⁵ While drones would only be used in wilderness areas, using them as part of the PIT count would require more study.

Our pre-screening process eliminated a total of seven policy options. Those options are listed in Table 6.

TABLE 6. Policy Options Eliminated in Pre-Screening

Point-In-Time (PIT) Count with 100% Walking Teams
“Right to Shelter” Laws
Using Technology: Drones and Infrared-equipped Airplanes
Housing First Model
App / Survey 123 / ESRI
Hire a Data Management Coordinator
Creation of a Santa Clarita Homelessness Agency

¹⁶² Interview with Mike Jones, Deputy Sheriff, San Bernardino County Sheriff Department, Homeless Outreach and Proactive Enforcement (H.O.P.E. Team). December 17. 2018.

¹⁶³ Ibid

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Interview Santa Clarita Sheriff's Homelessness Team, Jan. 3, 2019 & Interview with Mike Jones of San Bernardino County Sheriff's HOPE Team, December 2018.

8. EVALUATION OF PRE-SCREENED POLICY OPTIONS

We assessed all options that passed our pre-screening process as viable recommendations to Santa Clarita. However, we needed to further analyze options to prioritize our recommendations and allow city leaders to strategically employ them now and in the future. To do that, we used two criteria, LAHSA Approval Status and Organizational Capacity, which are discussed in the following sections.

LAHSA APPROVAL STATUS

The Santa Clarita Mayor and Mayor Pro Tem conveyed to us that they favor methods that are approved by Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) or that LAHSA will accept as part of the PIT count.¹⁶⁶ Since the city contributes significant support to Los Angeles County through tax revenue, council leadership believe that LAHSA has the capacity to implement changes to the city's annual enumeration.

Because the city does not have a full-time city council, the Santa Clarita Community Task Force on Homelessness (Task Force) has been given the decision making authority to determine which policies related to the issue of homelessness to pursue and implement.¹⁶⁷ Through interviews, we found that members of the Task Force are highly motivated and interested in finding ways to produce a more accurate tally of people experiencing homelessness in Santa Clarita. This motivation is driven by their shared desire to plan and seek funding for long-term solutions to address and end homelessness. There may be some difference of opinion about how exactly this should be done, but the group is motivated and engaged in collaborative decision making.

Pre-screened policy options were evaluated against this criterion as the first step in our process illustrated in Figure 4. Options that are not currently approved by LAHSA fall into two categories: 1. Policy options approved by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and used in other municipalities in Southern California, but not currently being used by LAHSA. 2. Policy options that are appropriate for locations like Santa Clarita, but would require advocating for a HUD waiver or taking some other action to get the needed approval from either LAHSA or HUD.

Policy options that do not currently have LAHSA approval due to either of the two reasons identified above are recommended for advocacy to LAHSA. As a large city that significantly contributes to county funds, Santa Clarita and its stakeholders are in a strong bargaining position to advocate for adjustments that work better for its location. For this reason, we expect that advocating to LAHSA will be successful.

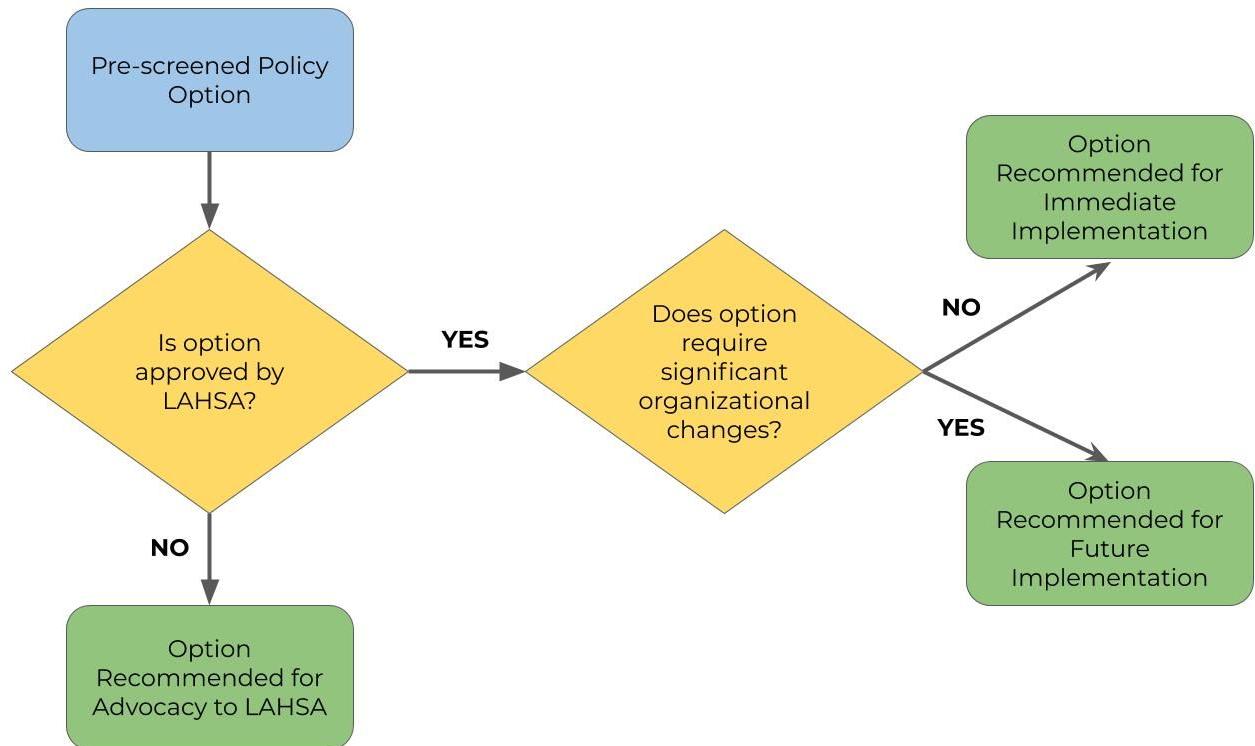
Policy options that are already approved by LAHSA would not require Santa Clarita to provide additional funding and are viewed favorably by members of the Task Force.¹⁶⁸ These options continued in our evaluation process to be assessed for organizational feasibility.

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Mayor Marsha McLean and Mayor Pro Tem Cameron Smyth, Santa Clarita City Council. February 20, 2019.

¹⁶⁷ Santa Clarita's Community Homelessness Task Force Meeting. November 28, 2018.

¹⁶⁸ Santa Clarita's Community Homelessness Task Force Meeting. November 28, 2018.

FIGURE 4. Pre-Screened Option Evaluation Process



ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY OF CITY AND SERVICE PROVIDERS

This criterion assesses the feasibility of implementing policy options given the organizational capabilities and constraints of the city and the homeless-serving organizations it works with to track the number of homeless individuals. We assessed the city's organizational capabilities by analyzing the present city leadership and administrative structures of community service providers.

Options that do not require changes to staff numbers or the current budget are recommended for immediate implementation. There are two categories of options recommended for future implementation: 1. Policy options that require some outside training or short-term budget increases. 2. Policy options that create a need to hire new staff members or full-time outside support and a long-term increase in the budget.

9. RECOMMENDED POLICY OPTIONS

Table 7 illustrates our recommendations for the City of Santa Clarita and each of the options is explained in detail below. We recommend implementation of all of the policy options, but this table allows for prioritization. For city leaders attempting to prioritize efforts, the columns require progressively more investment in time and resources moving from left to right.

All of the methods in the first column are approved by Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) and are already being used by at least one of the municipalities in L.A. County.¹⁶⁹ Options in this category can be enacted in Santa Clarita immediately without approval from LAHSA or L.A. County and with minimal organizational change. These policy options are recommended for immediate implementation. The second column lists options that are approved by LAHSA, but that require moderate organizational change for execution. These options are recommended for implementation over the next one to two years. The final column lists options that are not currently approved by LAHSA for use in Santa Clarita, which means they will require Santa Clarita's advocacy to LAHSA for implementation. We recommend that Santa Clarita use its position as one of L.A. County's largest cities to push for the implementation of these options.

TABLE 7. Prioritization of Recommendations

Immediate Implementation	Future Implementation	Advocacy to LAHSA
LAHSA Approved / Minimal Organizational Change	LAHSA Approved / Moderate Organizational Change	Not Currently Approved by LAHSA
Improved Volunteer Training	Partial Walking PIT Count	Full Survey of Wilderness Areas
		Service-Based Count
Minimum Three-Person Teams	Encourage Client Tracking	Study Database Options
		Daytime PIT Count
Experienced Team Leaders		Search Area Prioritization
		Provide Incentives

POLICY OPTIONS RECOMMENDED FOR IMMEDIATE IMPLEMENTATION

These three policy options are already approved by LAHSA and require minimal organizational change to implement. Based on Santa Clarita city councilmembers' preference for solutions that already work under LAHSA's guidelines, these options are the most useful for immediate and low-effort implementation.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Margaret Willis, Human Services Administrator and Deidre Mumford, Administrative Analyst, City of Santa Monica. December 10, 2018.

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Mayor Marsha McLean and Mayor Pro Tem Cameron Smyth, Santa Clarita City Council. February 20, 2019.

Comprehensive Volunteer Training

To address the PIT count training deficiencies we identified, we recommend that the concepts highlighted in LAHSA's 15-minute training video are reinforced with hands-on training. This practice will ensure volunteers have an informed understanding of how to accurately count individuals while out in the field. For example, volunteers should have example maps and forms in their hands when they are being explained. Next, they should take turns explaining the process to a partner. Then sample scenarios should be provided with volunteers filling out the forms and marking the maps appropriately. Answers should be checked and explained if there is any confusion.

Based on our interview with representatives from the City of Santa Monica, we identified this practice as an effective way to address minimal volunteer training.¹⁷¹ There is also substantial educational and business research which concludes that the most effective teaching and training includes participation.¹⁷²

Team Composition: Minimum Three-Person Teams

To rectify the challenges we found with fulfilling our team roles during our participation in the PIT count, we propose that future teams have a minimum of three and up to five people.¹⁷³ This change will ensure that teams have at least one individual to fill each necessary role (navigator, driver, and recorder) to the best of their ability during the officially tally.

Team Composition: Experienced Team Leaders

Based on our interview with representatives from the City of Santa Monica, we recommend using the city's approach of enlisting experienced team leaders to provide extra support and assistance for volunteers during the PIT count.¹⁷⁴ This person could be someone who has participated in prior PIT counts or a representative from organizations that work with those experiencing homelessness.

POLICY OPTIONS RECOMMENDED FOR FUTURE IMPLEMENTATION

The following two policy options are approved by LAHSA, but require moderate organizational changes. Because of the organizational changes required, they are recommended for implementation over the next 12 to 24 months.

Enact LAHSA's Recommendation: Partial Walking PIT Count

To remedy the limits of conducting a PIT count solely from cars, we propose that volunteers follow LAHSA's recommendation and walk in areas that cannot be adequately seen from a car, therefore ensuring that homeless individuals in more obscure places are enumerated. We based this recommendation on evidence from Riverside County, the City of Burbank, and the City of Santa Monica in which walking is a key component of their PIT count.

¹⁷¹ Interview with Margaret Willis, Human Services Administrator and Deidre Mumford, Administrative Analyst, City of Santa Monica. December 10, 2018.

¹⁷² Stephen Billett, *Learning in the Workplace: Strategies for Effective Practice* (Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2001).

¹⁷³ Ibid, We split up into two cars with three people in one and two in the other car. The team with only two members quickly discovered that the passenger had to do two complex jobs, navigate and watch for potentially homeless people in the open or in vehicles.

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Margaret Willis, Human Services Administrator and Deidre Mumford, Administrative Analyst, City of Santa Monica. December 10, 2018.

Encourage Tracking of Individuals Served

An essential part of obtaining a more accurate count is to track those experiencing homelessness in Santa Clarita. This can be done by either using the HMIS software designed by LAHSA or using a program like Microsoft Excel[©] to create Identifiers and report the services provided to each individual, while also ensuring they are not double counted. LAHSA offers equipment, training, and support for Continuum of Care (CoC) providers to implement HMIS and assistance with setting up other programs so that HUD required demographics are captured.¹⁷⁵ We recommend that the City of Santa Clarita prioritize and encourage the tracking of individuals through one of these methods in order to ensure individuals are accurately tallied.

POLICY OPTIONS RECOMMENDED FOR ADVOCACY TO LAHSA

Some options that increase accuracy require the City of Santa Clarita or the Community Task Force on Homelessness (Task Force) to request authorization from LAHSA. Most of these options are already being used across L.A. County with LAHSA's approval.¹⁷⁶ Therefore, we recommend investing political effort in advocating for these options.

Establish Multi-day Count of Riverbeds & Wilderness Areas

Being that there are people experiencing homelessness who are residing in wilderness areas, we recommend encouraging LAHSA to increase the number of days these areas are surveyed during the PIT count. LAHSA is already using special teams to survey all of the riverbeds and wilderness areas in East Los Angeles.¹⁷⁷ We propose that LAHSA's special teams also conduct a count of all riverbeds and wilderness areas where people experiencing homelessness may be residing in Santa Clarita. Since Riverside County shares similar geographic challenges as Santa Clarita, we recommend using their approach of surveying these areas for around three to four days.¹⁷⁸

Allow Santa Clarita to Conduct a Service-Based Count

Based on an interview with representatives from Riverside County, we recommend that Santa Clarita encourage LAHSA to allow and provide services for the city to conduct a Service-Based count.¹⁷⁹ This method will ensure that people who are unsheltered or difficult to reach, but are accessing services are represented in LAHSA's annual census. The city currently has about 20 organizations that directly and indirectly serve people experiencing homelessness (see Appendix 4). With additional instructional support from LAHSA, these organizations will be able to include the people they serve in the PIT count.

Along with HUD, the U.S. Census Bureau also allows for a Service-Based Enumeration (SBE) of homeless persons for every census. Census officials coordinate with various homeless-serving organizations to conduct the enumeration.¹⁸⁰ In 2000, the Bureau

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Clementina Verjan, Associate Director of Community Engagement, Policy & Systems Department, LAHSA. March 13, 2019.

¹⁷⁶ Interview with Clementina Verjan, Associate Director of Community Engagement, Policy & Systems Department, LAHSA. March 13, 2019.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Interview with Rowena E. Concepcion, Administrative Services Manager, Riverside County Department of Public Social Services. January 18, 2019.

¹⁷⁹ Interview with Rowena E. Concepcion, Administrative Services Manager, Riverside County Department of Public Social Services. January 18, 2019.

¹⁸⁰ Cara Brumfield, "Counting People Experiencing Homelessness: A Guide to the 2020 Census Operations," Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality: Economic Security and Opportunity Initiative (2018): 1, accessed February 5, 2019.

administered its census over the course of four days.¹⁸¹ Santa Clarita may not need four full days to participate in its own SBE, but the flexibility to have multiple days can support its effort to effectively capture its hidden homeless population.

Ask LAHSA to Conduct an Assessment of HMIS

To address issues reported with the use of HMIS, we recommend the City of Santa Clarita ask LAHSA to conduct an assessment of HMIS and compare it to other available software solutions. CoC providers are often short on time because of the high need for services. Therefore, an effective software should be evaluated on ease of use in addition to effectiveness. Software that can be customized for different organizational needs would also be an asset. As a result of this change, organizations working with homeless individuals would more be more equipped to track its clientele, thus leading to a more precise enumeration.

Time of PIT Count: Conduct Count from 5 a.m. to 10 a.m.

To address visibility and geographic challenges, we recommend the City of Santa Clarita advocate to LAHSA to hold their PIT count in the early morning. Currently, LAHSA has a waiver from HUD to allow for morning enumerations, which various cities across L.A. County have already used to host earlier counts.¹⁸² We recommend hosting the count from 5:00 a.m. to 10 a.m based on the effective use of this time by Riverside and San Bernardino Counties. The sun rises at about 6:55 a.m. in L.A. County in January.¹⁸³ By the time volunteers register, receive training, and drive to their designated areas, there is enough light to conduct the count. This change will ascertain that homeless individuals that may be missed due to a lack of visibility are captured in the official tally.

Eliminate PIT Count in Areas Unlikely to Have Homeless People

To remedy the difficulties with conducting a PIT count in a geographically large area, we recommend that the City of Santa Clarita eliminate areas where there is no past evidence of homeless individuals. This approach is already permitted by HUD, therefore we recommend Santa Clarita ask LAHSA to implement this change.¹⁸⁴ The elimination of such areas would decrease the amount of time needed to finish the PIT count without diminishing the accuracy of the count.

Provide Incentives to Encourage Survey Participation

In order to incentivize individuals experiencing homelessness to share information with volunteers, we recommend bags with personal care items be offered during the PIT count and at locations where homeless people seek services.¹⁸⁵ At the point of distribution, individuals experiencing homelessness would be asked to voluntarily participate in survey efforts. We based this recommendation on the same practice used in Riverside County, in

<http://www.georgetownpoverty.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/GCPI-ESOI-Counting-People-Experiencing-Homelessness-20180904.pdf>.

¹⁸¹ U.S. Census Bureau, "Service-Based Enumeration: Final Report" (2002): iv, accessed February 5, 2019. <https://www.census.gov/pred/www/rpts/E.6.pdf>.

¹⁸² Interview with Clementina Verjan, Associate Director of Community Engagement, Policy & Systems Department, LAHSA. March 13, 2019.

¹⁸³ "Sun Graph for Los Angeles," Time and Date, accessed February 15, 2019, <https://www.timeanddate.com/sun/usa/los-angeles?month=1>.

¹⁸⁴ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, "Point-in-Time Count Methodology Guide," 6.

¹⁸⁵ Interview with Rowena E. Concepcion, Administrative Services Manager, Riverside County Department of Public Social Services. January 18, 2019.

which County representatives conveyed its use played an important role in counting its homeless population.¹⁸⁶

MAXIMIZING ACCURACY

While our recommendations above are prioritized by the effort required for implementation, it is important to note that leaders aiming to improve count accuracy may need to focus on the options that would require more effort. For instance, one policy option that would significantly increase accuracy is the creation of identifiers that are used by every CoC provider. While this increases the organizational change required, the resulting improvements in accuracy, particularly for various subpopulations, is assessed to be very high.

Other options would require advocacy to LAHSA, but are already approved for other areas of L.A. County. Gaining approval for these options would only require making the request of LAHSA and determining the process for implementation. These options include conducting a full survey of the wilderness areas by LAHSA teams, conducting a daytime count, conducting a service based count, and providing incentives during the PIT count so that identifiers can be created and duplicates of the same individual can be eliminated.

Ultimately, our recommendations are meant to provide maximum flexibility to Santa Clarita's leaders. All of the policy options above offer increased count accuracy, but determining the best strategy for implementation is best done by those working in the city every day. Our recommendation is for the Task Force and Santa Clarita officials to review all of these recommendations and determine a comprehensive strategy to improve future counts by selecting whichever options best meet their requirements and goals.

¹⁸⁶ Interview with Rowena E. Concepcion, Administrative Services Manager, Riverside County Department of Public Social Services. January 18, 2019.

10. CONCLUSION

While two-thirds of Americans earning \$30,000 or less per year worry about hunger and homelessness, less than half of those earning more than that amount share that concern.¹⁸⁷ However, one-third of Americans are only one paycheck away from being unable to pay their mortgage or rent, which puts nearly 100 million Americans dangerously close to experiencing homelessness.¹⁸⁸ This reality makes public policy decisions about addressing homelessness critically important.

Like cities around the country, Santa Clarita is on the frontline of the battle against homelessness, which makes having an accurate understanding of the size of its homeless population crucial. City officials and community stakeholders have demonstrated a commitment to making the city a model for proactively addressing homelessness, but what they believe is an inaccurate count of people experiencing homelessness in the city has hampered their efforts.

With this project, we aimed to provide recommendations for improving the accuracy of Santa Clarita's measurement of its homeless population. We reviewed literature on homelessness and counting methods, analyzed best practices in other cities, and talked to stakeholders in Santa Clarita to allow thorough analysis of policy options.

After prescreening options, we recommended eleven options for potential adoption. These options provide Santa Clarita with five it can implement without outside approval. Three of them can be implemented immediately with minimal organizational change: improved volunteer training, minimum three-person teams, and use of experienced team leaders. Two others require moderate organizational change, so they are recommended for implementation in the next one to two years: partial walking PIT count and encouraging client tracking. Another six options Santa Clarita can advocate for to Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) to request changes in homeless count methods: a full survey of wilderness areas, a service-based count, a study of database options, a daytime PIT count, search area prioritization, and providing incentives to people experiencing homelessness for survey completion.

Finally, we identified the policy options that we assessed as having the greatest effect on increasing accuracy. This list of options provides Santa Clarita's leaders another way to move forward if increasing accuracy takes priority over ease of implementation.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

We identified two areas we recommend for further research. First, Santa Clarita is one of the few of L.A. County's largest cities that has chosen to stay within the Los Angeles County Continuum of Care (CoC) network. The County's Public Health Department has assigned each city within the county to a total of eight Service Planning Areas (SPAs).¹⁸⁹ Santa Clarita is within SPA 2, the largest service area in all of L.A. County.¹⁹⁰ Currently, SPA 2 includes

¹⁸⁷ Jeffrey M. Jones, "Worry About Hunger, Homelessness Up for Lower-Income in U.S," *Gallup*, March 30, 2017, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/207521/worry-hunger-homelessness-lower-income.aspx>.

¹⁸⁸ "1 out of 3 Americans are 1 Paycheck away from being Homeless," *Medium*, August 29, 2018, <https://medium.com/@baxleyjames/the-homeless-are-lazy-bums-so-i-used-to-think-f911dedc4cc5>.

¹⁸⁹ County of Los Angeles, Department. of Public Health, "Cities Health Snapshot: A Collection of Community Health Profiles by City in Los Angeles County" (2016), accessed February 5, 2019. <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/chs/Docs/CITIES-FINAL.pdf>.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

three cities with populations between 100,000 and 192,000.¹⁹¹ Glendale, one of the other cities in SPA 2, established its own CoC to conduct a count that best represents the needs of its residents.¹⁹² We recommend that Santa Clarita research whether or not this type of arrangement might better serve its specific requirements and priorities.

Additionally, we recommend that Santa Clarita look into researching law enforcement interactions with those experiencing homelessness and whether or not these interactions are a factor in how those experiencing homelessness are represented during its annual PIT count. As noted earlier, CoCs find that it is easier to count people who are located in a shelter during the time of the count.¹⁹³ This is also the reason why these counts typically occur in January, when winter shelters are at their fullest.¹⁹⁴

However, individuals who do not have access to a shelter bed year-round are more likely to make their own shelter in a public space.¹⁹⁵ This situation has been the case in the City of Los Angeles because it has historically not had enough shelter beds to serve its total population.¹⁹⁶ Most cities, including Los Angeles and Boise have laws prohibiting people from living in public spaces. However, an appellate court judge has ruled that these laws, and enforcement of the laws, are unconstitutional when a city does not have enough shelter beds for those experiencing homelessness.¹⁹⁷

In Santa Clarita, many people experiencing homelessness attempt to live in the washes and wilderness within the city. They may be less inclined to reside in public areas to avoid direct interactions with law enforcement. We recommend an additional study on this topic to determine whether the enforcement of laws which have been ruled unconstitutional play a role in those who chose to live in these areas or if there is another reason why people experiencing homelessness choose to survive out of sight.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² City of Glendale, "2015 City of Glendale Homeless count," (2015): 5, accessed February 14, 2019, <https://www.glendaleca.gov/home/showdocument?id=22891>.

¹⁹³ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, "Point-in-Time Methodology Guide.."

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty "No Safe Place: The Criminalization of Homelessness in U.S. Cities (2014): 13-15, accessed February 18, 2019, https://nlchp.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/No_Safe_Place.pdf

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, 15.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, 13-15.

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12. APPENDIX 1 - INTERVIEW LIST

Date	Name	Position	Representing Entity
11.9.18	Christina Najarro	Director of Programs	Bridge to Home
12.13.19	Christina Najarro	Director of Programs	Bridge to Home
11.9.18	Roché Vermaak	Executive Director	Family Promise
11.28.19	Jan Daisher	Director of Special Programs and Professional Development	William S. Hart High School District
12.10.18	Margaret Willis	Human Services Administrator	The City of Santa Monica
12.10.18	Deidre Mumford	Administrative Analyst, Human Services Division	The City of Santa Monica
2.5.19	Mike Jones	Deputy Sheriff, Homeless Outreach Proactive Enforcement (HOPE) Team	San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department
12.17.18	Mike Jones	Deputy Sheriff, HOPE Team	San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department
12.20.18	Gina Rodriguez	Coordinator of Student Support Services	Newhall School District
12.20.18	Larry Brunson	Director of Student Support Services	Newhall School District
12.20.18	Amie D. Panicacci	Social Work Department Supervisor	Henry Mayo Newhall Hospital
1.3.19	Betsy Shackelford	Deputy Sheriff, Crime Prevention Unit, Zone 6 Leader - Newhall	Santa Clarita Valley Station, L.A. County Sheriff's Dept.
1.3.19	Kevin Duxbury	Deputy Sheriff, Crime Prevention Unit	Santa Clarita Valley Station, L.A. County Sheriff's Dept.
1.3.19	Danial Dantice	Sergeant	Santa Clarita Valley Station, L.A. County Sheriff's Dept.
1.3.19	Brian Rooney	Deputy Sheriff, Crime Prevention Unit, Youth Activity League	Santa Clarita Valley Station, L.A. County Sheriff's Dept.
1.8.19	Nicholas Sundback	Homeless Services Liaison	City of Burbank
1.8.19	Marcos Gonzalez	Grants Coordinator	City of Burbank
1.11.19	Larry Schallert	Assistant Director, Student Health & Wellness/Mental Health Program	College of Canyons
1.18.19	Rowena E. Concepcion	Administrative Services Manager	County of Riverside - Department of Public Social Services
2.16.19	Jim McDonnell	Former Sheriff	LA County Sheriff's Dept.
2.20.19	Marsha McLean	Mayor	City of Santa Clarita
2.20.19	Cameron Smyth	Mayor Pro Tem	City of Santa Clarita
3.5.19	Ken Striplin	City Manager	City of Santa Clarita
3.13.19	Clementina Verjan	Associate Director, Community Engagement, Policy & Systems Department	Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA)

APPENDIX 2 - SAMPLE INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR LOCAL SCHOOLS

School District Sample

INTRODUCTION:

Hello, our names are _____ and _____. We are both Master of public policy students at the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs.

We are currently working with the City of Santa Clarita to improve the methodology used to count the homeless population in the area. Our aim is to work with you to help define an improved count for this community. We will use the name of your organization unless you identify whether you would prefer that it remain anonymous. If you mention the names of other organizations or individuals outside of your organization, their names will either be masked or removed. Additionally, we will be recording this interview to ensure that we are able to properly interpret your responses to these questions. If there is anything you would prefer to share off the record, please feel free to let us know and we will pause the recorder.

You are not expected or required to answer every question. Feel free to ask us for clarification when you do not understand a question or say that you would prefer not to answer. Please be aware that this interview may take as long as an hour. You can interrupt me at any time if you need a break. Should we run out of time we may contact you for a follow up interview.

Recording: Yes / No

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

I. DEFINING HOMELESSNESS

- a. How would you/describe the homeless population in the City of Santa Clarita?
- b. How would you describe the homeless population that William Hart School District supports most often?
- c. How does the school district determine whether a student is experiencing homelessness?
 - i. When does the school district typically collect this information? How many times a year?

II. STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS & DATA COLLECTION

- a. Can you share how many students and their families self-identified as homeless last year?

- i. Do you believe that number accurately represents the number of students experiencing homelessness in your school district?
 - ii. What do you see as the obstacles for students/families to self-report?
 - iii. How has the school district attempted to mitigate the mismatch between the number of people who identify as homeless and the number of students you actually support?
- b. Can you walk me through an instance when a student (or family) self-reported that they were experiencing homelessness without using the district survey?
 - i. Are there ways of tracking this kind of less formal information?
 - c. Can you estimate how many students were given direct support from a district social worker within this past year?
 - d. Does your organization keep a record of the gender, race, and age breakdown of the students who receive support from your district?
 - e. Do you have a data management system to access how many people you have the district has supported over the course of several years?

III. LIMITATIONS TO SUPPORT STUDENTS

- a. Can you tell me more about how the school district is able to fund programs or services to support these students?
 - i. Does the district have a permanent source of funding to pay for these programs?
- b. Given your current budget, how many people are you able to serve?
 - i. Do you have an estimate of how many students you can serve per month? Per year?
 - ii. Has the district identified when homeless students need the most support?
- c. How many students does a district social worker typically support at a time?
- d. Can you describe a moment when a school/social worker was unable to assist a student although they were likely to experience homelessness?
 - i. Why were they unable to support this student?
 - ii. Has a social worker identified the need for additional support staff to serve these students? If so, who?
 - iii. In an Ideal world, how many staff members would you have to support these students?
- e. Are there other staff members who are responsible for addressing the needs of homeless children within the school district?

IV. REFERRALS TO HOMELESS SERVING ORGANIZATIONS

- a. Does your organization refer individuals or families to other organizations in the City?
 - i. Can you tell me more about an instance when a student was referred to another organization?
 - ii. How long did it take for this student to get the support they needed?
- b. Which organization(s) do you refer students to the most?
 - i. Can you describe an instance when the school district referred someone who was ineligible to receive services from that organization?

V. CONCLUDING QUESTIONS

- a. Is there anything you feel I have missed?

- b. Do you recommend that I reach out to another organization or have a contact with someone who can tell me more about _____?
- c. Would you like me to send you a recap of our conversation?

Thank you:

Thank you for your time today. We value your expertise and support for this project. We will reach out to you if we need clarification or have any further questions. Please feel free to contact us at anytime if you also have any additional comments or questions.

APPENDIX 3 - POLICY OPTIONS CONSIDERED

In order to identify the most reasonable and effective policy options, we eliminated those that were not compatible with the city's geography and size, were not within the current City of Santa Clarita budget and time frame, or because they required technology that is not currently used for identifying homeless individuals and required more study, technical expertise, and time than is possible for this project. The table below provides a list of all options considered.

Policy Options Considered		
Prescreened	LAHSA Approved	Advocacy Required
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Point-In-Time (PIT) Count with Walking Teams• “Right to Shelter” Laws• Using Technology: Drones and Infrared-equipped Airplanes• Housing First Model• App / Survey123 / ESRI• Hire a Data Management Coordinator• Creation of a Santa Clarita Homelessness Agency• Decriminalization of Homelessness• Build more low-cost housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improved Volunteer Training: Map and Form Orientation and Practice• Team Composition: Minimum Three-Person Teams• Team Composition: Enlist Experienced People as Team Leaders• Conduct PIT Count with Walking Teams in Shopping Areas• Encourage or Require Use of Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establish a Multi-day Count of Riverbeds & Wilderness Areas• Establish a Multi-day Service Based Count• City-Wide Database – HMIS or Alternative (Excel would even work)• Time of Point-in-Time Count: Conduct Count from 5:00 a.m. to 10 a.m.• Eliminate PIT Counts in Areas Unlikely to Have Homeless People• Provide Incentives and Conduct a Survey

APPENDIX 4 - SANTA CLARITA ORGANIZATIONS PROVIDING HOMELESS SERVICES

- Assistance League
- Avenues of Supported Living Services
- Bridge to Home
- Child and Family Center
- College of the Canyons
- Domestic Violence Center
- Family Promise
- Help the Children
- Newhall School District
- Santa Clarita Public Library
- The Salvation Army
- Samuel Dixon Family Health Center
- Santa Clarita Food Pantry
- Saugus Union School District
- SCV Mental Health Center
- St. Kateri Parish
- Sulphur Springs School District
- Valencia United Methodist Church
- Valencia Health Center
- William S. Hart School District