

## Enhancing Homeless PIT Count through Technology & Collaboration

**Overview** – *Survey 123* app and collaboration with a local university to collect and analyze Homeless Point-In-Time Count data resulted in improved data quality, accuracy, and publication.

**Challenge** - Data collected from the Point-In-Time (PIT) Count and Survey provides a *snapshot* of homelessness and is used to determine state and federal funding; however, not much more is usually done with the data collected. If the goal is to reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness, PIT count data should be used to further inform service and outreach agencies about geographical patterns and trends of individuals experiencing homelessness in Riverside County. The data can also identify the location of difficult to reach subpopulations like veterans, youth, and victims of domestic violence. Traditional paper-based PIT Count and Survey methodology does not allow for this level of detail in the data. Previous PIT reports were not user-friendly and historical PIT Count data is archived in such a way that it is difficult to effectively communicate insights from the data (across years, for certain populations, geographies, etc.). Specific follow-up questions from stakeholders regarding PIT data were difficult to answer based on individual year data files. Improved data analytics is crucial in developing a county-wide coordinated response to homelessness that can enhance collaboration between law enforcement, service providers and the community at large to better serve individuals and families experiencing a housing crisis.

**Solution** - In 2018, the *Survey 123* app was piloted in four cities and in 2019 was implemented countywide. Use of the mobile survey improved data collection and accuracy through survey automation and use of geo-location. Data was processed by a team of seven undergraduate students from UC Riverside Bourns College of Engineering who worked under the close guidance of a faculty member from the Department of Computer Science. This collaboration allowed students to be civically engaged while also receiving invaluable educational, technical, and workforce related training and experience. The result of this collaboration was a portable model/platform of user-friendly dashboards which can be leveraged to assist in funding and service planning decisions responsive to local needs.

**Innovation** – Use of a mobile survey and application through *Survey 123* coupled with the UC Riverside collaboration is an innovative solution to address the issue of accurately counting homeless individuals and using the data obtained from the count in meaningful ways. This technology and collaboration provide an opportunity for community partners to benefit more from the data collected than in prior years. Riverside County is at the forefront of developing a portable model and platform that will enable other counties, large or small, to collaborate as well. Riverside County is now able to share more meaningful data collected in the field to enhance collaboration between service agencies and provide them with the information necessary to more efficiently impact the issue of homelessness. As the County continues to produce maps based on annual PIT count data this will allow for a multi-year geographic analysis of the patterns and trends of the homeless population in Riverside County.

**Results** – The mobile survey in 2019 eliminated all the issues related to the use of the paper survey: the skip logic was automatically applied; the need for multiple versions of the paper-based survey was eliminated because all versions were included in the app and the appropriate survey was automatically detected; coordinators were able to accurately assess for duplicative data using the digitally mapped geographic coordinates of where surveys were conducted; and, survey responses were immediately uploaded and entered into a database upon submission. The interactive data dashboards produced by UC Riverside provide stakeholders with informative and actionable data visualized in a user-friendly manner.

**Replicability** – Use of the *Survey 123* app and collaboration with a local university can be easily implemented in other counties. The cost to Riverside County associated with collecting the PIT data using the *Survey123* app includes the cost of obtaining an ESRI Geographic Information System (GIS) enterprise account. Riverside County's contract provides for utilization of the *Survey 123* app and an unlimited number of user accounts. The County also negotiated and executed a multi-year contract with UC Riverside with a scope of work inclusive of consultation; training; research; and data analytics, mining, and reporting.

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