



SECTION 4

Volunteer Training & Debriefing

Guidance and Tips

PLANNING

When recruiting volunteers, organizers of previous youth counts identified that one of the most important steps they took was taking the time to consider and estimate their staffing needs. Sites need to consider the number of planned activities and roles volunteers could take in them because it is critical that all volunteers are utilized appropriately and are not left without a role/job.

Identifying what roles/jobs volunteers could fill will allow organizers to identify the types of volunteers needed (adults and/or youth), and whom would be appropriate for certain roles (outreach, collecting sensitive information, surveying). Matching the volunteer with the appropriate role/job can better ensure a successful volunteer experience occurs between the organization and the volunteer.

TIP:

Organizations that are successful in volunteer recruitment increase their chances of finding well-matched volunteers by:

- Being clear and identifying the skills and background needed for the role/job
- Engaging their entire staff and board in recruitment efforts
- Using multiple approaches and mediums to reach out to potential volunteers
- Using unique and creative signs/listing to grab the attention of potential volunteers and create excitement about the opportunity to volunteer

IMPORTANCE OF DIVERSITY

The homeless youth population is diverse. Organizations should consider acknowledging the diversity by recruiting volunteers that represent the differences in the population. Consider differences such as: rural/urban locations, ethnicities, age clusters (younger than 18 and 18 to 24), LGBT, school attendance (high school and college), and youth who may live in vehicles.

TIP:

As part of a 2013 federal initiative, nine pilot sites across the country surveyed youth and made strong efforts to engage LGBT service providers in the youth counts. As a result, these sites had a strong focus on reaching this population and more easily interacted and asked them survey questions. LGBT service providers often can offer information about how to increase coverage strategies by counting in locations where LGBT youth congregate, promoting the count within the LGBT youth community, and creating an environment where LGBT youth feel welcome.

Depending on the diversity of the area, it is important to have many types of providers as partners to learn from their experiences with homeless youth.

RECRUITING HOMELESS YOUTH TO VOLUNTEER

Benefits and challenges exist to using homeless youth as volunteers during the *Youth Count Texas!*. Some organizations highly recommend their use, while others have concerns. A benefit to recruiting homeless youth is their expertise and knowledge in finding a population that often wants to remain hidden. Because of youths' vulnerability, peer-to-peer youth relationships can be one of the best ways to interact with youth and encourage them to be counted. However, some organizations have concerns about the accuracy of survey responses given if a youth administered the survey. Some count organizers are concerned that homeless youth might give different responses to their peers than they would to organizational staff.

TIP:

Organizations participating in citywide youth counts have expressed reluctance to recruit homeless youth to administer youth count surveys; however, they recognized the importance of including youth and asked the youth to participate in other ways. Other forms of involvement included inviting youth to participate in the planning process or in other activities related to the youth count.

ONLINE VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT

Using the Internet to find volunteers is becoming more popular with organizations and people looking for an opportunity to give back to their community. Many online resources are now available to connect potential volunteers with organizations in search of their skills/interests. Potential volunteers can search these sites by: location, skill/interest, and length of volunteer commitment needed.

TIP:

Consider recruiting for volunteers on these sites:

- [Idealist.org](https://www.idealist.org)
- [NetworkforGood.org/volunteer](https://www.networkforgood.org/volunteer)
- [Volunteer.truist.com](https://www.volunteer.truist.com)
- [VolunteerMatch.org](https://www.volunteermatch.org)
- [AllforGood.org](https://www.allforgood.org)

VOLUNTEER TRAINING

Training is provided by most organizations that recruit volunteers to assist with a youth count. The topics volunteers are trained on vary by an organization's planned activities to count youth. The federal government recommends that training be mandatory for volunteers. Assumptions about a volunteer's knowledge or ability to engage youth should not be made regardless of their affiliation with school or youth service providers. Separate trainings are recommended for volunteers administering surveys or census materials.

TIP:

Common topics for trainings include: (1) purpose of the youth count, (2) safety and courtesy protocols, (3) strategies for asking sensitive questions, (4) supervision/location assignments, and (5) survey protocols. It is also important to conduct trainings at times and locations convenient to volunteers.