

# Point in Time Count General Volunteer Description



## **About ECHO:**

The Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO) is a coalition of stakeholders that plans, develops, prioritizes, and implements systemic, community-wide strategies to end homelessness in Austin and Travis County, Texas. Its work is grounded on collaborative partnerships, strategic and data-driven decision making, as well as innovation, bold thinking, and creativity.

The Point in Time (PIT) Count is a survey of the unhoused population in Austin and Travis County that happens every other year at the end of January. Hundreds of volunteers load up with care packages and head out early in the morning to find as many people experiencing unsheltered homelessness as possible. Point in Time Counts matter most because they are the primary way the federal government tracks the overall number of people experiencing homelessness in the U.S. Plus, they're a great way for you to get involved in our community's efforts toward our shared national goal of ending homelessness! **General Volunteers are needed in Austin/Travis County to play a vital role in a successful Count every other January!**

## **Description of General Volunteer Role:**

ECHO is seeking at least 1,000 Point in Time Count General Volunteers for the Count. Volunteers are instrumental in Austin's ability to carry out a successful count each year. Volunteers are asked to complete a required training, participate in an unsheltered count on a team of no less than 3 people (supported by a Team Lead), and talk with persons experiencing homelessness to conduct a survey that helps ECHO to better understand the scope of unsheltered homelessness in Austin / Travis County at a single point in time.

## **Time Commitment:**

- Count preparation time commitment: Approximately 2 hours of mandatory training. You may also be invited to scout your assigned area with your team lead in the weeks leading up to the count.
- Day of Count time commitment: Approximately 5 hours

## **Key Responsibilities:**

- Help ECHO prepare for the Count by being accessible:
  - Your team lead will be in communication with you in the weeks leading up to the count. It is important to maintain an open line of communication, as your team may be reassigned (sometimes more than once) as changes are made to ensure count quality.
  - Your team lead will create and communicate a Count Day plan for you and your team. This plan will cover your defined geographical section on the morning of the Count to survey people who slept outside, as well as, safety protocol. You may be asked to help inform this plan if you are familiar with the area.
  - You will be asked to confirm your participation and communicate any conflicts that arise in the weeks leading up to the count.
- Help ECHO carry out the Point in Time Count:
  - Participate in the count in shifts between 3am and 9am the morning of the count.
  - Work with a team of no less than 3 volunteers (supported by a team lead) to ensure your geographic area is covered. ECHO will ensure that there are enough volunteers on your team.
  - Interact with and survey people experiencing homelessness in a safe, respectful, and impactful way that upholds the belief that all persons should be treated with dignity.
- Complete Point in Time Count Training:
  - Complete a mandatory General Volunteer Training



## Skills

- Adaptable to last minute changes
- Comfortable talking to strangers
- Strong organizational and communication skills
- Friendly, positive attitude
- Accessible via phone and/or email to volunteers and Team Lead
- Ability to walk several miles
- Ability to use the online survey system on your phone (Training provided, smart phones required, paper back up surveys available)
- Comfortable with ensuring respectful treatment and safety of volunteers on your team and the people they survey.
- Experience working in homeless services or doing the count before is great, but not required

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## Frequently Asked General Volunteer Questions

1. ***Can I count with my friends or coworkers?*** Yes! We encourage it, actually! General Volunteer registration will begin late November and go until the Count. We suggest that larger teams register early and all preferences can be noted in the volunteer registration system. Due to the flow of volunteer registration, ECHO sometimes must move volunteers from one team to another to ensure that every geographic area is covered. We will do everything in our power to keep you with your requested team, but we ask that volunteers be adaptable to these changes as they may arise.
2. ***Can I choose my count section/shift?*** Yes. We suggest that if you have a preference, you register early and note your preferred co-volunteers/Team Lead when registering. Please keep in mind that not every geographic area has every shift available. ECHO will do everything in our power to keep you in your requested section/shift, but we ask that volunteers be adaptable to changes as they may arise.
3. ***Will I need to supply any materials on the morning of the Count?*** ECHO will make sure each team has the materials they need for the Count. Often, volunteers are encouraged to bring their own flashlight or extra pens, though. This year's survey will be via a digital application on your smartphone. If you do not have a smartphone or you are not comfortable using the survey application, paper surveys will also be available.
4. ***Should we bring things to hand out to people (socks, blankets, etc.)?*** The Point in Time Count Committee is responsible for securing donations for the Count. If you are interested in collecting donations for the count, please email [pitcount@austinecho.org](mailto:pitcount@austinecho.org) for information on what items are needed and where to take them. Donations have to be packaged prior to the event, so please do not bring any donations on the day of the count.
5. ***How many volunteers do the Point in Time Count?*** ECHO strives to recruit 800 volunteers this year. This includes 100 Team Leads and 700 general volunteers.
6. ***When will I know my team assignment?*** The ECHO Volunteer Coordinator will begin assigning volunteers to teams as quickly as they register for the Count. General Volunteer registration will begin late November and go until the Count. Due to the flow of volunteer registration, ECHO sometimes must move volunteers from one team to another to ensure that every geographic area is covered. Ultimately, the goal is that your team lead will contact you no later than two weeks prior to the count (depending on when you register).
7. ***Will there be someone I can reach out to if I have questions about being a General Volunteer?*** Absolutely. If you have any questions at all, you should contact you Team Lead. Additionally, if you have not heard from your team lead in a timely

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manner, the ECHO Volunteer Coordinator is available to answer questions and bridge any communication gap (email [pitcount@austinecho.org](mailto:pitcount@austinecho.org)). ECHO will also ensure that you have been trained in being a General Volunteer.

8. ***I want to help, but I can't do the count. Are there other ways to volunteer?*** Yes! ECHO will need a minimum of 10 volunteers to assist at Headquarters on the morning of the Count. These responsibilities include welcoming team leads as they return their materials and ensuring count surveys are completed in full before the team lead leaves headquarters for the day. This full shift is from approximately 5am until 11am (or until all materials have been returned). Training will be provided at headquarters the morning of the count. When you register for the count, select "HQ Volunteer" as your preferred volunteer role
  
9. ***Is there a bad weather plan?*** Yes. In the case of dangerous weather conditions, ECHO will notify all volunteers of a back-up Count Date.