Hundreds of volunteers walked for miles after dark on Feb. 23 and Feb. 24 to count people experiencing homelessness throughout Sacramento County. The biennial count coincided with record-breaking cold temperatures. Many people were counted as they sought warmth inside various respite centers, including one in the lobby of Sacramento City Hall.

Participants in the 2022 Point-in-Time (PIT) count used a mobile app to record the number of people they encountered who said they would be sleeping outdoors, in tents, or vehicles. They also conducted a brief survey with those willing to participate in order to better understand who is experiencing homelessness in Sacramento, for how long and what kinds of services could best assist them.

The Point-in-Time (PIT) count is required by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The data provided by the PIT count will be used to allocate funding and design programs to address homelessness.

Volunteers focus on counting people living unsheltered outdoors, but the overall PIT count includes those staying in respite centers or shelters such as the City of Sacramento's X Street or Meadowview navigation centers.

“I’m so grateful to the community for coming together to help us in this effort,” said Lisa Bates, executive director of Sacramento Steps Forward, the non-profit that organizes the PIT count. “Our volunteers really came through for us, and it looks like we had an effective count over the two-night effort. We’ll have the data collated and analyzed in a couple of months, but based on reports from our staff and volunteers, we got a good count.”

The volunteers all received prior training, and they met at several starting points throughout the county to pick up lists of known encampments and maps with routes to follow.

Counting crews included Sacramento State University students, local citizens, non-profit leaders and many elected officials and staff members from city and county government, including Sacramento Mayor Darrell Steinberg and several members of the Sacramento City Council and Sacramento County Board of Supervisors.

The last PIT count, conducted in 2019, tallied 5,570 people experiencing homelessness in Sacramento County over a two-night period. Of those, 70 percent, or 3,900 people, were staying outdoors, including those sleeping in vehicles. That number likely has risen over the past two years, officials said. The COVID-19 pandemic is almost certainly one reason more people are experiencing homelessness, but many factors can come into play.

“COVID is one factor, but people experience homelessness for a variety of reasons,” said Bridgette Dean, director of the City's, Department of Community Response. “That's why the PIT Count is so important. When we know why people are experiencing homelessness, how long they've been without a permanent home, and other basic information about who they are, we and our partners can design programs and services that can help them progress toward stability.”

It will take some time to collate all the information collected over the two nights of the PIT Count, of cials said. Sacramento Steps Forward said it plans to issue a report detailing the data by late spring or early summer.
Sacramento in February experienced a stretch of near-freezing overnight temperatures, and City Hall was one of the several locations that opened as a respite center so people experiencing homelessness could come in from the cold. City Hall served a total of 112 people over three nights, starting Feb. 23.

The City of Sacramento in February also opened a new safe ground site in Miller Park, applying lessons learned from the now-closed safe ground location at W/X streets. The new site can serve up to 110 people. Read more about the Miller Park safe ground here.

The City also began working on its newest land acquisition, a 102-acre site in South Sacramento purchased from the federal government. The site is large enough that it could host a variety of amenities, which will depend on community input. In the shorter term, a few acres likely will be used as a safe parking site for people experiencing homelessness.