POPULATION HEALTH INITIATIVE
UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON

Tier 3 Pilot Grant Letter of Intent: Scaling for Greater Impact
Spring 2024

Project Information
Please provide the following information.

Proposed Project Title	Community-driven Enumeration and Needs Assessment of People Experiencing Homelessness: A high frequency method for enumeration and needs assessment of the unsheltered population of people experiencing homelessness
Approximate Budget Request	$200,000

Applicant Information
Please provide the following information for each member of the proposed project team:

UW Investigators
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Junhe Yang (Senior Personnel)
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Community Investigators
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Overview of Proposed Research Plan

Please provide a description of how you intend to scale your efforts and/or expand the scope of your work. Limit your description to no more than 500 words.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)'s 2023 Annual Homeless Assessment Report suggests 653,100 people in the U.S are without homes, a 12% increase from 2022. The national count requires each U.S. "Continuum of Care" (COC) jurisdiction to conduct a local "Point-in-Time (PIT) count." Two tallies are made: (1) the emergency shelter report from administrative records, and (2) a count of unsheltered people living in tents, vehicles, etc. (the unsheltered count is mandated biennial by HUD). PIT counts are conducted by volunteers.

In 2022, King County Regional Homelessness Authority (KCRHA) – the COC for King County – invited UW faculty to innovate new methods for its unsheltered PIT count[1]. UW and KCRHA designed and implemented a novel, network-based respondent-driven sampling (RDS) method for counting unsheltered people experiencing homelessness. Endorsed by the CDC, NIH, and World Health organizations, the RDS method also enjoys endorsement from ethical review boards, as participants opt in.

Rather than visually locating unsheltered people on a single night, RDS relies on volunteers to interview people in the unsheltered community to estimate the characteristics of their social networks, generating data to estimate the total size of the unsheltered population. Seattle's 2023 RDS-based PIT count was partly funded by a PHI Tier 2 grant, which funded UW graduate students to develop pioneering RDS software. UW led the 2023 count using RDS, and KCRHA and UW worked closely together to complete the 2024 HUD-mandated PIT count. KCRHA has proposed making this method the standard for King County, to serve as a national model.

This work with KCRHA demonstrated RDS is better than the classic unsheltered PIT, because it includes active participation from the community of people experiencing homelessness and collects more data than just a count. The UW team formed a strong and trusting relationship with the KCRHA staff by conducting three rounds of RDS surveying together. To expand on our innovative partnership, we propose another innovative step in developing the reliability and validity of our RDS methods.

Here, we propose conducting RDS surveying at regular intervals rather than just biennially as mandated by HUD. Our expansion plan requires: (1) piloting a quarterly the RDS survey , (2) developing/expanding the current statistical methods to predict total population size based on this high-frequency RDS design, (3) building the software to both be more user friendly (UX development) and adapting it to manage the new survey framework for regular surveying, (4) developing a set of sustainable implementation and maintenance procedures with KCRHA for the future; and (5) developing a plan for further funding, e.g.,

[1] The initial work is under peer review and can be found here, https://arxiv.org/abs/2309.03875.

NIH funding sources. A follow-on goal is to package our software and statistical methods into a toolkit for other jurisdictions.

PIs McCormick and Almquist will work on new methods for accounting for duplicate participants and refine statistical methods; PI Almquist, Yang, and graduate student Ihsan Kavechi, who co-created the current App, will standardize, and document the software required to capture data and generate referral tickets for respondents.