

E N G A G E M E N T  
T O O L K I T

People with Lived Experience in BC's Capital Region

June 2017





# TABLE OF CONTENTS

WHO IS THE TOOLKIT FOR? .....	1
BEFORE YOU BEGIN.....	2
HOW IS THIS TOOLKIT ORGANIZED?.....	2
1. INFORM .....	3
2. CONSULT .....	3
3. INVOLVE.....	3
4. COLLABORATE.....	3
5. EMPOWER.....	3
TOOLS FOR INFORMING.....	5
Word-of-Mouth .....	5
Peer Support Workers .....	6
Presentations .....	6
Printed Materials .....	7
Social Media & Messaging .....	8
Apps & Websites .....	9
Storytelling.....	9
TOOLS FOR CONSULTING .....	11
Focus Groups .....	11
Interviews & Conversations .....	12
Motivational Interviewing .....	13
Surveys .....	13
TOOLS FOR INVOLVING .....	15
Tenant Meetings .....	15
Workshops.....	15
Community Liaisons & Commissions .....	16
TOOLS FOR COLLABORATING.....	19
Partnerships in Decision Making.....	19
Advisory Committees .....	20

**TOOLS FOR EMPOWERING** ..... 23

Speakers’ Bureaus..... 23

Decision Making ..... 23

Participatory Budgeting ..... 24

Training ..... 25

**CONCLUDING COMMENTS**..... 26

We’d Like Your Feedback! ..... 26

---

The authors and contributors to this booklet acknowledge  
we are on the unceded traditional territory of  
the Lkwungen (Songhees), Wyomilth (Esquimalt),  
and WSÁNEĆ (Saanich) peoples of the Coast and Straits Salish.

---

*This project was funded in part by the Government of Canada’s Homelessness Partnering Strategy. The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada, or of the Capital Regional District of Victoria BC.*

**T**he booklet sets out tools and techniques that have been well received or recommended by people who are, or have been, homeless. The tools have also proven to be effective for the individuals and organizations that are undertaking various types of engagement. They were sourced from organizations in the capital region, as well as through a review of documents, and telephone calls, with organizations in North America that undertake regular and ongoing engagement with homeless people.

This booklet has a buddy – **Engagement Framework** – that sets out principles, levels of engagement, and practices for engaging people with experience of homelessness in a meaningful, respectful, and powerful way.

## WHO IS THIS TOOLKIT FOR?

Similar to the companion Engagement Framework booklet, this Toolkit was prepared primarily for staff members of organizations in the Capital Region who have frequent contact with people who have experienced homelessness, whether today or in the recent past. These include:

- Front-line workers and outreach staff in housing, health, corrections, youth aging out of care, and community-based organizations whose mandates includes assisting people who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness. Some of these include workers at:
  - Seasonal and year-round shelters;
  - Transitional housing;
  - Low barrier health clinics;
  - Harm reduction locations;
  - Agencies who are delivering the Homeless Outreach Program; and
  - Organizations whose focus is on people with special needs (e.g., AIDS/HIV, PEERS, youth-at-risk, brain injury).

Staff from municipalities and electoral areas, academics, and practitioner researchers may also find the material useful as they engage with people who have experienced being without a stable home; and who are currently or have been clients of housing, health, corrections, youth aging-out of care, and community-based organizations.



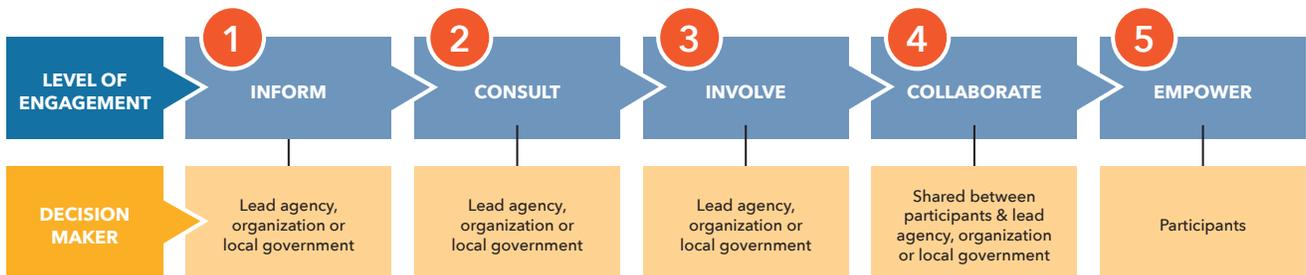
## BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Before you start, it is important to ask a few questions to help you set up your engagement process and select your tools:

- What are your reasons for engagement?
- Are you clear about the issue, concern, project, or program that you want feedback about?
- Has this project involved participants in the past? What were the outcomes?
- What support do you have from leadership to ensure engagement is successful?
- Do staff see the value and benefit in partnering with participants?
- Do staff have the time and resources to support participants in the engagement process?
- How will you communicate with participants about how you can act on their input?

## HOW IS THE TOOLKIT ORGANIZED?

The Toolkit is organized according to five levels of engagement, derived from materials developed by the International Association of Participation (IAP2), one of the most frequently cited sources for stakeholder and public engagement best practices.



# 1 INFORM

This type of engagement is essentially a one-way communication. Stakeholders told us that word-of-mouth, or being informed in-person by a staff member, are the preferred ways of communication. Posters, presentations, media releases, handouts, brochures, podcasts, video streaming, and social media posts are also widely used in this level of engagement.

- ▶ **YOUR COMMITMENT:** *"We will keep you informed."*
- ▶ **THE DECISION MAKER:** The lead agency, organization, or local government.

# 2 CONSULT

The preferred forms for consultation are interviews, focus groups, tenant meetings, surveys, and open houses. This method is typically used to seek feedback and comments on a topic of common interest.

- ▶ **YOUR COMMITMENT:** *"We will listen to your input; it will influence the final decision."*
- ▶ **THE DECISION MAKER:** The lead agency, organization, or local government.

# 3 INVOLVE

This method assumes continuing contact with participants throughout the process, and includes workshops, *World Cafés*, advisors, and liaisons.

- ▶ **YOUR COMMITMENT:** *"You will be involved in the process; your input will be reflected in the final decision."*
- ▶ **THE DECISION MAKER:** The lead agency, organization, or local government.

# 4 COLLABORATE

This level of engagement works with participants (stakeholders, public-at-large) during each part of the process, including the development of options, and identification of preferred outcomes. Collaboration can include task forces, advisory committees, or participatory decision making processes.

- ▶ **YOUR COMMITMENT:** *"We will look to you for advice, innovation, and solutions that will directly affect the final decision."*
- ▶ **THE DECISION MAKER:** Shared between the participants and the lead agency, organization, or local government.

# 5 EMPOWER

For this level of engagement, final decisions are made by the participants (stakeholders, public-at-large) through such methods as stakeholder votes or public referendums.

- ▶ **YOUR COMMITMENT:** *"We will implement what you decide, and empower you to influence the system."*
- ▶ **THE DECISION MAKER:** The participants.

nform INFORM inform **INFORM**

Inform

INFORM

**Inform**

inform

Inform

INFORM

Inform

**inform**

Inform

inform

inform

INFORM inform

Inform

**INFORM**

inform

**INFORM**

Inform

INFORM

INFORM

inform

**INFORM**

inform

**inform**

INFORM

Inform

Inform

INFORM

**INFOR**

orm

inform

# TOOLS FOR INFORMING

## Word-of-Mouth

The best way to spread the word about a program or event is through staff and volunteers already providing services, such as outreach teams and peer support workers. Partnering with organizations working directly with those who are homeless, and having them share information with the people they meet every day can be very effective.

If the people you want to inform are homeless, engage them where they are – in a shelter, a drop-in centre, a safe injection site, or food line-up. If they are recently housed, or on the verge of homelessness, the best locations for interacting are SROs (single room occupancy hotels), transitional housing, supportive housing, food line-ups, and drop-in centres.

Information is best when passed through a familiar way to communicate. For example, if there is a regional email list that includes all homeless service providers, request them to send it out. If there is a homelessness round table, outreach meetings, or other kinds of networking and partnership events for homeless providers, request that your information be added to their agendas.



### EXAMPLES

- When **Extreme Weather Shelters** are open in Greater Victoria or on the Lower Mainland, a network of partners are notified to immediately begin spreading the word to those who need it. Drop-in centre staff, outreach teams, safe injection site workers, library staff, and members of faith-based organizations begin to let people know when and where the shelters are open. Once people on the street are informed, they share the information with those they know.
- The **North Shore Homelessness Task Force** (Vancouver) has an email list that includes all shelters and homeless service providers in West Vancouver, the District of North Vancouver, and the City of North Vancouver. When new information is shared with the list, it is up to each recipient organization to ensure its staff is informed, and prioritize the sharing of information with clients.

## Peer Support Workers

Peer support workers are important parts of the informing process. The trust they have developed with clients, and their knowledge of services puts them in an ideal position to keep people informed. It is important to know which organizations have peer support workers, and create a system for keeping them informed, because the more they know, the more people on the streets will know!



### EXAMPLE

**Coast Mental Health** employs peer support workers with lived experience of mental illness and its treatment. These workers are a vital resource to clients, providing information about services, assisting with accessing services, and sharing their own stories.

## Presentations

Preparing a short presentation to inform people takes time, but can be well worth the effort in terms of information actually being heard and understood by the community. Presentations can be online videos, podcasts, or in-person.

- Presentations can piggyback on events already happening in the community, such as tenant meetings, drop-in centre events, or even food line-ups. Meant to inform, presentations should be short (less than eight minutes), to the point, and share practical information, such as when, where, and how the community can be involved.
- Presentations can also be made in places where people congregate, such as parks, community centres, and libraries. Use your presentation to share the vision of why this issue/project is important, and why people should want to take part.
- Whenever possible for in-person or video presentations, use visuals to express information. The more creative your presentation, the more likely people will notice and remember it.



### EXAMPLE

Megaphone's **Hope in Shadows** calendars in Victoria and Vancouver feature photography that highlights the lives of the people who sell the calendars. The community is invited to vote on the final 13 photos to be included in the calendar. A presentation tent showcasing the photos travels to different parts of each city where community members gather.

## Printed Materials

Printed materials are a common method for sharing information, and can include posters, pamphlets, handouts (postcard or business card size), and small flyers, as well as ads in newspapers, on billboards, and in Megaphone Magazine. Printed materials should include the text needed to communicate the necessary information: who, what, when, where, why, and how.

- In the Capital Region, English is the language most widely used. If, however, an engagement involves participants whose first language is not English, consider having materials translated. For example, the City of Vancouver and the City of Richmond print communication materials in several languages.
- As with all communications, print materials should contain only essential information, and have a compelling graphics that attract attention.



### EXAMPLES

- The **Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness (GVCEH)** uses many avenues to reach out to those who are, or have been, homeless, as well as to other stakeholders and the community at-large. Two of the GVCEH's documents are highlighted here:
  - The **Street Survival Guide** is a one-stop resource for those experiencing (or at risk of) homelessness in Greater Victoria. Created by a group of dedicated individuals with street-life experience, the document is updated annually. [www.victoriahomelessness.ca/street-survival-guide/](http://www.victoriahomelessness.ca/street-survival-guide/)
  - The **Messaging Toolkit** was written for stakeholders and staff of organizations working with homeless people to ensure consistent messaging when communicating with the public, volunteers, or the media. [www.victoriahomelessness.ca/community-resources/messaging-toolkit/](http://www.victoriahomelessness.ca/community-resources/messaging-toolkit/)
- **Megaphone Magazine** shares information with the homeless, and those who support the homeless, and provides opportunities for advertising in its issues. [www.megaphonemagazine.com/](http://www.megaphonemagazine.com/)

## Social Media & Messaging

Non-profit groups, aid organizations, and rights advocates are increasingly using social media to connect with people who are homeless. Those without a stable home, especially youth and young adults, also put a high value on the devices that keep them connected. Even though people in the Capital Region use social media in their personal lives, they are not yet using it as a means of engaging with service providers. However, this situation is likely to change, and organizations should be prepared to communicate this way.

- Start by finding out what social media platforms your participants/clients are using. Are they using text messages through their phones, or messaging apps like *Messenger*, *WhatsApp*, or *Slack*? They may use social media platforms, such as *Facebook*, *Instagram*, *Snapchat*, *Twitter*, or *YouTube* to stay informed or in touch. The key to successful digital communication is to keep checking in to make sure you are using the best methods for your messages. **Be agile and open to multiple paths.**
  - Do not assume you are connecting with everyone. Recognize that this is only an important method of communicating for some participants.
  - Increasingly, non-profits use social media (e.g., *Facebook*, *Twitter*) to communicate with donors and community supporters. Consider having a page for your clients and those you serve. Even better, find a volunteer or person with lived experience that can partner with a staff member to manage the page.
  - Create a social media policy that outlines communication “dos and don’ts” for your organization. These guidelines should provide guidance for dealing with negative online feedback, and help ensure your posts reflect the values of the organization.
- A 2011 study by the University of Southern California School (USC) of Social Work found that 62% of homeless teens had a phone, and a data plan. They viewed the device to be as important for them as food. While the study focused on teens, homelessness advocates and organizations are convinced that connecting by social media is the wave of the future.
  - Five years later, the USC of Social Work found that use of social media was accelerating – 96% of 436 homeless individuals had a cellphone (62% had a smartphone). Based on interactions with homeless people, the authors concluded that both cellphone and internet access can keep people from social isolation, and help them integrate back into society.



### EXAMPLES

Visit these websites to see the power of social media for connecting with those who are experiencing homelessness. The videos are especially relevant, practical, and compelling.

[www.invisiblepeople.tv/about/](http://www.invisiblepeople.tv/about/)

[www.projecthomelessconnect.org/about/videos/](http://www.projecthomelessconnect.org/about/videos/)

## Apps & Websites

Cell phone apps and websites can be a creative way of sharing information with participants about services and opportunities, especially for youth and those with smart phone access.

Many organizations have websites, but most are directed to potential funders, community members, and other organizations. Consider creating a section dedicated to clients, or potential clients, that includes an easy to understand description (or map) of how to access your organization's services and where to start.

To create an app, you need a good understanding of who the app is for, and what you want those people to get from using it. The following article by **Techsoup** includes app development resources for non-profit organizations: [www.techsoup.org/transforming-communities](http://www.techsoup.org/transforming-communities).



### EXAMPLES

- **NoAppFee.com** is used in Portland, Oregon to share affordable housing opportunities with homeless people. In partnership with the Portland Housing Bureau, the app is part of an online affordable housing application system. [www.noappfee.com/noappfee/#/](http://www.noappfee.com/noappfee/#/)
- **We Are Visible** is a social media site that explains how easy it is to set up a *Gmail* account, a *Facebook* page, a *Twitter* account, and how to blog. [www.wearevisible.com/index.html](http://www.wearevisible.com/index.html)

## Storytelling

Storytelling is a way for people who are homeless, or precariously housed, to help others who are travelling the same journey. Stories can be shared through social media, online, in writing, or in-person. It is important to be thoughtful as you tell individual's stories. Have honest discussions about how anonymous storytellers would like to be, and the potential consequences of having their stories public. If they want to remain anonymous, you can

change their names, include pictures without their faces (it could be their environment or just their hands), or only share their stories in person.

Look at why you want to share certain stories. Are you hoping to tell people about your services through a story? Will it inspire others to change? Once you understand your why, you can find the right people, and mentor them through the storytelling process.



### EXAMPLES

- 25,300 people follow **Mark Horvath**, a previously periodically homeless man in Los Angeles. His Twitter handle is [www.twitter/hardlynormal](https://www.twitter/hardlynormal)
- [miraclemessages.org](http://miraclemessages.org) posts short unedited video messages to loved ones from individuals who are homeless.
- **Salvation Army ARC Women's Transition House** uses storytelling to inform women about its services, including stories of *Resilience* and *The Faces of Domestic Abuse* videos.



# TOOLS FOR CONSULTING

Focus groups and face-to-face interviews are the preferred means for consulting with people who are homeless.

## Focus Groups

A focus group is a gathering of a small number of people (ideally, 6 to 8), who are then led through an open discussion by an experienced facilitator who is trusted by the participants. The group needs to be large enough to generate a thorough discussion, but not so large as to dilute the meeting, or not give everyone opportunity to participate.

The open format covers a series of 8 to 10 pre-determined questions, with the goal of generating the maximum number of opinions and ideas from all participants, within the allotted time frame. It is the facilitator's job to create an environment where it is safe to talk freely.

### A focus group is NOT:

- A debate
- A conflict resolution session
- A problem solving session
- An education session
- Group therapy

© Eliot & Associates

A successful, and well executed focus group, or series of focus groups, requires thoughtful planning:

- Recognize that it can take up to **four or more weeks** from beginning to plan a focus group to the actual event.
- **Recruiting participants** may involve word-of-mouth, or posters in places frequented by people who are homeless, such as Our Place, Rock Bay Landing, libraries, and community and seniors centres. A cash incentive should be noted on the poster.
- **Sixty to 90 minutes** is an ideal timeframe. Any longer than this and some participants may lose interest, or need to leave for other commitments; any less does not anticipate latecomers, and does not leave sufficient time for rich discussion and follow-up probing.
- Ideally, the focus group is **conducted by a facilitator and an assistant**. The moderator facilitates the discussion, while the assistant takes notes and, *if the group agrees*, organizes a voice or video recorder. Explain why the focus group is being recorded, and who will have access to the data.
- **Questions** should be short, easily understood, open-ended, non-threatening or embarrassing, and each question should be focused on one aspect of the topic. Following introductions and reiterating the purpose of this focus group, there are three types of questions:
  - **Ice-breaker**, such as "Have you lived somewhere other than Greater Victoria?"
  - **Exploration**, such as "Could you tell us what it's like trying to find affordable housing in Victoria?"
  - **Closing**, such as "Just before we wrap-up, are there any other thoughts you'd like to share?", or "Have we missed something that needs to be discussed?"

- Focus groups work best when participants **build on one another's comments** rather than continually responding directly to the moderator. As participants share experiences, debate ideas, and offer opinions, the moderator should begin to play a less central role. Some groups arrive at this point quickly, while others never quite get there.
- Consider providing a certificate of appreciation to acknowledge their participation.



## EXAMPLES

- The **City of Victoria** held focus groups with Rock Bay Landing residents during the update of the Neighbourhood Plan for the Burnside-Gorge community.
- Both **Rock Bay Landing** and **Sandy Merriman House** hosted micro-housing consultations involving the Coalition to End Homelessness, the Committee to End Homeless Victoria, and the Greater Victoria Public Library.

## Interviews & Conversations

Meeting face-to-face with individuals is often the best way to consult, especially when you need to explore a topic and learn new information. This method lets people tell their stories more freely than in a group setting, and avoids the impersonal nature of a survey. The following are a few tips for successful interviews sourced from social planning researchers.

- Ask agencies for permission to conduct interviews with their clients/residents, and find out what they recommend for recruiting interviewees about the specific topic.
- If there are several interviewers, have a training session with them to review the goals, purpose, method, and approach for the engagement process, including the interview questions. Training will also address matters, such as confidentiality, anonymity, body language, clothing, interviewee compensation, recording, and note taking.
- Consider having each interviewer sign an *oath of confidentiality*.
- Consider having each interviewee sign a *consent form*, which includes a statement of how their responses will be reported and used.
- Ensure that interviews take place somewhere where both parties feel safe and comfortable. Ideally, the location will be reasonably quiet, private, and have few distractions.
- Ensure your budget for interviews includes an honorarium to show respect for the time and information provided by the participant.



## MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING

Motivational interviewing is a tool that focuses on allowing the client to direct change, rather than telling the client what they need to do – this is a conversation about changing their lives. This is a “person-centred, goal-oriented, guided method to enhance motivation to change”.

- This video talks about the concepts and successes of motivational interviewing – [www.youtube.com/watch?v=wepwLY-YsXs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wepwLY-YsXs).

## Surveys

Surveys are efficient ways of gathering information from larger numbers of participants, usually 30+. There are five components of every solidly built and administered survey:

1. Who is the “universe” (the target group)? This anticipates all people who could be involved. Is the universe everyone who has lived experience of homelessness in the Capital Region, or a sub-group (e.g., youth, seniors, people with physical disabilities, etc.), or tenants of an existing shelter or supportive housing?
2. Once the universe is established, develop the questionnaire specifically for the target group.
3. Keep the questionnaire to as few questions as possible to achieve the intended purpose. It could be as short as a few questions, for example in a shelter facility that has shared amenities, “Are the showers suitable for your needs? If not, why?” “Are the showers available at convenient times? If not, why not?”
4. Share the questionnaire on paper, on a tablet, or online. If the person who is administering the survey is doing so via paper or a tablet, they should ask a potential respondent to say which format they prefer. Ensure respondents that their input is strictly confidential and will only be used along with other respondents.
5. Report the results to those who participated, but withhold any comments that would specifically identify the respondent or another person.



## EXAMPLE

**Victoria Youth Empowerment Society’s** youth services users participated in a feedback survey about the **Alliance Club** program. They were asked questions like, “If you could change anything about the Club, what would it be?”



# TOOLS FOR INVOLVING

## Tenant Meetings

Regular (monthly) meetings are opportunities for two-way conversations with tenants – to listen to them, and also to tell them about what is happening with the organization. Build a process into the meeting format that ensures your accountability to the tenants, and lets them know how their feedback will be used, or if it is not, why not.



### EXAMPLES

- In Victoria, the Salvation Army ARC's holds a **Community Feedback Forum** four times annually. This is an opportunity for those who attend to voice their opinions about available resources, gaps in service, and challenges in their facility. Courtesy guidelines help everyone participate effectively. The Salvation Army's Arc Promise is: " We will respect what you have to say and answer any questions that we can. While we might not be able to address everything, we promise to listen to you and do the best we can to turn your feedback into action."
- At San Francisco's **Community Housing Partnership** (CHP), the **CORE Program** (Community Organizing and Resident Engagement) gives residents a voice in building policies and agency-wide decisions. There is a strong focus on Resident Engagement and Tenant Councils in each building, as well as a system-wide Community Congress.

## Workshops

Workshops are larger engagement sessions that serve to educate, collaborate, and prioritize within a group of multiple stakeholders. Three hours to full-day sessions, workshops often start with education around the topic area, and transition to small groups. A **World Café** is a simple, effective, and flexible workshop format that creates collaborative dialogue and knowledge sharing for larger groups. The five principles of a World Café are:

1. **Setting:** Create a *special environment*, possibly modelled after a café. Small round tables, table cloths, paper/notepads, coloured pens, and a group of only 4 to 5 people at each table.
2. **Welcome & introductions:** A warm welcome that defines the event's context, and Café etiquette can help put participants at ease.
3. **Small group rounds:** There will be three or more rounds of conversations for each table group. Each conversation lasts 20 minutes, and then the group moves to a different table. One person stays at the initial table, filling the next group in on what was discussed, and hosting the new discussion.
4. **Questions:** Each table has a prepared question that reflects the desired purpose of the World Café.
5. **Harvest:** After the small groups are complete, individuals are invited to share insights or results from the conversations with the larger group. Results are visually reflected in a variety of ways.



## EXAMPLE

In Vancouver, the **Lookout Society** used the World Café format to engage with members of the **LivingRoom Drop-In Centre**. The input gathered was used to redesign the programming of the Centre, and the Society made sure the voices and values of the participants were reflected in the redesign

## Community Liaisons & Commissions

A community liaison is an expert *bridge builder*, who advises organizations or municipalities about underrepresented communities. Liaisons have lived experience with the community they are providing advice about, and they foster and develop community relationships. Liaisons provide feedback and expertise regarding cultural concerns and barriers, advise staff on the needs of the community, and provide technical assistance.



## EXAMPLES

- The **City of Seattle's Department of Neighborhoods** hires independent contractors to liaise with the City's underrepresented communities, including those with English as a second language, immigrants and refugees, the LGBTQ2S community, those with disabilities, seniors, and people experiencing homelessness.
- The **City of Seattle** has multiple **Community Involvement Commissions** that advise City Departments on coordinated, city-wide outreach and engagement activities. These commissions also provide advice on priorities, policies, and strategies related to public participation in the City's decision-making process. Each Commissions has 16 volunteer members.





# TOOLS FOR COLLABORATING

## Partnerships in Decision Making

This approach is premised on partners with shared interests of eradicating homelessness working closely together to make decisions.

A minimum of two to three seats on all decision making bodies (Boards of Directors, Advisory Committees, Task Forces) should be allocated to clients or people with lived experience – one voice is easily drowned out or intimidated; having more than one voice can help provide confidence.

To help prepare them for this task, potential members should be provided training that includes governance, financial literacy, and meeting etiquette. An Advisory Committee or Task Force position would be great starting points for transitioning to a seat on a Board of Directors.



### EXAMPLES

- Locally, the **Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness** has almost 50 business and organizations' members who contribute to the Coalition as directors, members of the management committee, and participating in Working Groups. The governance framework has four management levels with decision making authority within their terms of reference: Board of Directors, Executive Committee, Finance and Audit Committee, and Steering Committee. Individuals who are, or formerly, homeless participate in several of these committees.
- The **Chicago Lived Experience Commission** includes individuals who were formerly homeless, at risk of homelessness, or are experiencing homelessness. They contribute as significant partners to promote public awareness about homeless services and policies, and provide input on direction, funding priorities, issues, and programs around ending homelessness.
  - Seven members of the Commission are voting members on the *Planning Council to End Homelessness*, which is responsible for setting policies and priorities for how Chicago allocates \$56+ million in federal Housing & Urban Development (HUD) funding each year.
- San Francisco's **Community Housing Partnership (CHP)** has three Board positions filled by people who have lived experience of homelessness. CHP operates more than 16 buildings that house 1,500+ formerly homeless people, and deliver programming and engagement opportunities for their residents

COLLABORATE

## Advisory Committees

Advisory committees are becoming increasingly common in North American cities. If your organization is thinking about establishing an Advisory Committee which includes individuals who are homeless or formerly homeless consider developing a “Charter”. The following matters are often included in a Charter:

- What is the purpose and role of the committee?
- To whom does the committee report?
- Does the committee have the ability to make decisions within its scope?
- Is the committee time-defined or ongoing?
- What size should it be?
- How often will it meet?
- How are members recruited?
- How are the Chair and Vice Chair selected?
- Are meetings open to the public?
- Are agendas and minutes of meetings easily accessed by members and the public?
- Is a vote required to make a decision, or will this be achieved through a consensus process?
- What are the meetings’ courtesy guidelines?



### EXAMPLES

- The **Social Inclusion Advisory Committee** (SIAC) comprises individuals experiencing homelessness, or who have experienced homelessness, and who participate in informing the *Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness’* research, policy, and communications initiatives in the community.
- The **Region of Waterloo** created a checklist for starting an advisory group called *Lived Experience as Expertise: Considerations in the Development of Advisory Groups of People with Lived Experience of Homelessness and/or Poverty*.
- The **Lived Experience Advisory Council** (LEAC) – a Canada-wide network of people with lived experience of homelessness – launched a report called *Nothing About Us Without Us: Seven Principles for Leadership & Inclusion of People with Lived Experience of Homelessness*.



ower  
Empower  
Empower

# EMPOWER

empower  
EMPOWER  
Empower  
empower  
EMPOWER  
empower  
EMPOWER  
empower  
EMPOWER  
Empower  
Empower  
EMPOWER  
EMPOWER  
empower  
EMPOWER  
EMPOWER

# TOOLS FOR EMPOWERING

## Speakers' Bureaus

There are a number of speakers' bureaus associated with umbrella organizations in North American cities.



### EXAMPLES

- Locally, the **GVCEH Speakers' Bureau** is a group of individuals who have experienced homelessness, and want to share their stories. Through funding provided by the United Way, the Coalition has provided training for these individuals to speak publicly about their personal experiences, putting a face to homelessness. The speakers address a variety of issues from mental illness, drug addiction, domestic violence, disabilities, and unemployment. In addition to the problems surrounding homelessness, the speakers will also discuss their personal successes.
- In 2013, the **Corporation for Supportive Housing**, a US-wide organization, launched the **Speak Up Program**. The Program focuses on formerly homeless residents of permanent supportive housing to advocate for themselves through coaching sessions and training. The curriculum combines monthly sessions on housing policy, advocacy, storytelling, and public speaking. Participants have advocated at local, state, and federal levels, and have met with the decision makers for supportive housing funding.

## Decision Making

This process occurs when participants are involved in decision making, and their input determines directions and outcomes. While not specifically related to homeless people, examples where final decisions are made by the "stakeholders/shareholders" include peer organized and operated social enterprises, and cooperatives.



### EXAMPLE

**The Bidders' Project** in Vancouver has a monthly meeting with its core group (\$20 honorarium per participant). This group carries out key contact and outreach tasks within the larger community, and makes strategic decisions for that community. The group rotates its four-person membership regularly to give more bidders opportunities to participate. They also have weekly meetings where all bidders are invited to give input (\$5 travel stipend/meeting). Of the Project's seven staff, two are bidders with lived experience.

## Participatory Budgeting

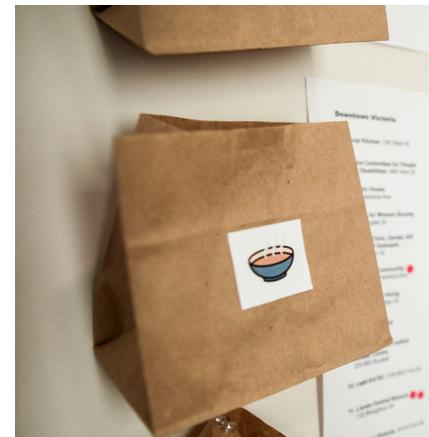
Participatory budgeting is a democratic process in which community members directly decide how to spend part of a public or organizational budget. Though each experience is different, most follow a similar process: residents brainstorm spending ideas, volunteer budget delegates develop proposals based on these ideas, residents vote on the proposals, and the government or organization implements the top proposal.

There are now 1,500 participatory budgets around the world, most at the local government level, involving the municipal budget. The method has also been used for counties, states, housing authorities, schools and school systems, universities, coalitions, and other public agencies.



### EXAMPLES

- The **City of Toronto's** three-year participatory budgeting process began in 2015, and seven projects were selected for a total cost of \$435,000.
- **Toronto Community Housing Co-op** introduced a participatory budgeting process in 2002. Since then, approximately 164,000 social housing tenants, from 58,500 residential units, have had the opportunity to lead and participate in the budgeting process with staff support. In 2011, \$9 million (10% of the budget) was allocated for projects and improvements that led to growing tenant participation, local ownership, and new civic space.
- In 2005, **Ridgeview Elementary School's (West Vancouver)** participatory budgeting process enabled students to improve their school experience and environment. Students voted to allocate their \$2,000 to create a school store, partly because it could help generate additional money for other projects.



## Training

Increasingly, training programs are being set up to help people who are, or have been, homeless to develop their advocacy and leadership skills.



### EXAMPLES

- The **Massachusetts Housing & Shelter Alliance Leadership Development Program** for young adults who have experienced homelessness is co-facilitated by a youth service worker and a young adult peer leader. The course helps participants develop their leadership skills, and use their voices to shape public conversations to end homelessness.
- At San Francisco's **Community Housing Partnership (CHP)**, the CORE program (Community Organizing and Resident Engagement) offers a community scholars field training program called *We Are All Organizers*. CHP also offers a community organizing program, which builds the leadership skills of their tenants so they can advocate successfully on issues critical to ending poverty and promoting social justice.
- Seattle's Department of Neighborhoods ensures all voices can participate, and engage in civic and community action through the **People's Academy for Community Engagement Program**. The training includes conflict resolution, accessing government, meeting facilitation, public speaking, community organizing, inclusive outreach and public engagement, sustaining involvement, and approaches to leadership.

EMPOWER



## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

As is evident throughout the Toolkit, a number of organizations in Greater Victoria have been proactive in engaging people who are or have been homeless through a wide range of consultative practices. We have much to learn from each other. And, as referenced in the Toolkit, other communities and organizations across North America are refining the way they engage. Some are “pushing the envelope”, offering innovative and creative tools for homeless people to be empowered through direct involvement in making decisions directly impacting their lives, as well as taking on leadership roles to advocate for societal change.

Not every engagement will achieve its intended outcomes, but don't be discouraged. If so, it is valuable to debrief among your co-workers *immediately after the engagement* to identify what went well, and what did not. This learning will inform the next engagement.



### WE'D LIKE YOUR FEEDBACK!

With a view to keeping the Engagement Toolkit as useful and current as possible, we need your help. If you have comments and suggestions, please pass these along to the Executive Director, Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homeless.



Prepared by



COMMUNITY SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCIL  
research·insights·solutions

CITY  SPACES