

Community and Neighbourhood Engagement Program Guidelines for Community Engagement Leads and Community Liaison Workers

**Developed in partnership with the City of Toronto and the Toronto Shelter Network's
Welcome Home Project**

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Introduction

Purpose: This community engagement guide aims to provide a set of guidelines to support the work of Community Liaison Workers, Community Engagement Leads/Supervisors.

Neighborhood Engagement Program

The Neighbourhood Engagement Program is designed to improve the local community's understanding and acceptance of shelters and 24-hour respite sites, and help support people experiencing homelessness who are shelter residents. The Community Liaison Worker (CLW) is a community engagement specialist hired by shelter operators to lead the NEP process. This guideline document provides guidelines for the NEP and community engagement within shelter and related services.

The Neighbourhood Engagement Program, led by the Community Liaison Worker, has two fundamental aims at each shelter:

1. Managing relationships with community stakeholders, including:
 - a. Conduct an analysis of local stakeholders, opening lines of communication, by establishing contact with necessary stakeholders (government, police, councillors office), updating FAQs, ensuring messaging is up to date
 - b. Addressing community concerns and introducing the new shelter program to the local community. Providing information to help reduce stigma that community residents can have toward shelter clients.
 - c. The development of a formal Community Liaison Committee (CLC) focusing on supporting the new service of CLC Membership is composed of key community stakeholders and will include d terms of reference.
 - d. Proactive outreach and relationship building with local businesses, service providers, and neighbours. This includes opportunities for community residents to support, volunteer or donate to the shelter.
 - e. Enhancing communication with and between security teams (e.g. teams hired by homelessness services organization), resource information sharing, training and connecting them with outreach teams.
2. Coordinating community programming for shelter clients, including:
 - a. Seeking partnership opportunities with stakeholders to improve shelter resident well-being. This includes leveraging community assets and partnerships to create community programming opportunities for both the shelter clients and local stakeholders.

- b. Planning, or supporting community members to host events that bring community members and shelter residents together.
- c. Where possible (this will depend on the agency's capacity and the role of the specific person) helping to lead system navigation (e.g. connection to health care, social services, jobs and housing) and partnership development, including being the main contact for liaising with service systems (e.g. healthcare). This may include coordinating with the program manager or supervisor to organize harm reduction programming and support in shelters, in collaboration with partner agencies.

1. CLW Community of Practice Network

All Community Liaison Workers (CLWs) are invited to join a citywide community of practice network for shelter community liaison workers. The objective of this network is to provide a place where CLWs can share best practices and engagement strategies. The sessions will provide opportunities to co-develop solutions to complex community engagement issues.

2. Initial Engagement

Community Liaison Workers should start by conducting asset mapping of their local area to understand key near-by services, organizations, institutions and businesses. This can include, but is not limited to: Community Health Centres, faith communities, and Resident Associations. Where possible, it is always recommended to increase engagement prior to the shelter opening.

2.1 Set-up

- Connect with colleagues -- other staff in your agency, or other agencies -- who may be aware of the partners in the community and their contact information. Review previous/current relationships and work completed with them to date (for example, maybe they attended an open house or helped raise money)

2.2 Outreach

- Start by reaching out and setting up meetings (virtual, in person, or over the phone) with your local neighbourhood partners. Let them know you are here to support and work collaboratively.

2.3 Complaints & Compliments Management

- Develop an issue response protocol for complaints and compliments management to help prepare for issues that do arise (see section #4)

3. Community Liaison Committee

A Community Liaison Committee (CLC) is a formal committee connected to a shelter service made up of representatives of the community (condo boards, residence associations, business groups and local community organizations). CLCs meet on a regular basis to share information, discuss and collectively solve community concerns, and link shelter needs with community offers

of support. The committee will focus on supporting the shelter as a new service into the community.

3.1 Role of the Community Engagement Facilitator (if one is engaged; if not, the responsibilities below will be those of the operator)

- The CLC will be established by a Community Engagement Facilitator (CEF) prior to the shelter opening and will include clearly developed terms of reference and membership.
- The CEF leads the first term of commitment, which is typically six (6) months. The CLC may be extended if there is a collective desire by the committee and shelter operator to continue.

3.2 Role of the Community Liaison Workers

- If the CLC is not established by a CEF prior to the shelter opening, the CLW will be in charge of establishing a CLC
- The CLW is in charge of facilitating and coordinating the extended CLC after the post-occupancy handover from the CEF. The handover will occur approximately 2-3 months after the shelter opens.
- The CLW is responsible for ensuring there is open dialogue so that everyone's voice can be heard.
- The CLW should avoid being the only person representing the shelter operator at contentious meetings. This will allow the CLW to focus on building relationships which can be difficult if they are also the sole shelter representative.
- A CLC may transition into a structure that better suits the ongoing operations of the service post-opening, such as an EMBRACE committee.

3.3 Community Liaison Committee participants

- CLCs participants should include local businesses, services, and residents. There may be a need to alternate between day and evening meetings to ensure everyone can participate.
- There should be one representative from all major community groups that want to participate. Participants should come from diverse backgrounds and interests
- Shelter residents can be part of the CLC if the community, operator and shelter residents feel comfortable. They can help bring a new perspective and lived experience to the issues.
- City of Toronto and shelter senior management presence and participation during contentious meetings can help show communities that issues are being taken seriously.
- Other City staff (e.g. Streets to Homes) and divisions should be asked to attend if a topic relevant to their fields of expertise is being discussed
- Councillors and their staff should be invited to the meeting but are not required to attend
- All CLC members should sign a terms of reference and be commit to a term of at least 6 months

3.4 EMBRACE Committee

- This is a committee co-led by community members to help support the success of the shelter in the community through volunteerism. Discussions should focus on identifying and working toward ways the neighbourhood can come together to welcome the program into the community

- Groups are or can be smaller and easier to manage.
- Engage with existing groups in the community related to fundraising and volunteerism
- CLC is a more neutral term for a group that addresses both support and complaints. EMBRACE can be a second-stage group created once the initial phase of engagement is complete and is more focused on positive interaction.
- Provides a more welcoming name than CLC, and more focus on supporting rather than discussing potential issues. Community members may choose the name of the committee
- Can be co-chaired by community resident (to reflect co-ownership by the community)

3.5 Meeting Guidelines

- Ensure meetings are structured and document all key issues discussed
- Use terms of reference created by the CEF and review with CLC participants to ensure participants are following the agreed upon objectives of the meetings
- Take detailed minutes with action items.
- One of the first things to do is help the community and clients name the shelter. This will help establish community buy-in. The City can provide the established shelter program naming process.
- Large CLCs can be broken down into smaller tables for discussion and problem solving
- All Community members should be given an opportunity to speak. This is a formal space for all concerns/questions/offers to be heard.
- A formal setting can help focus the problem solving and can prevent angry or discriminatory behavior.
- Determine action items at the end of each meeting to identify what next steps the operator or City is committing to, and actions that other CLC members will take, such as presenting to the respective associations about the CLC

3.6 De-escalating Contentious Meetings

- Develop a plan to deal with difficult dynamics. In the appendix is a more detailed tip sheet on preventing, managing and de-escalating contentious meetings. Generally speaking it is important to:
 - First, try your best to understand your audience before going into a CLC meeting. While this is not always possible, it may help you prepare for what people might say and general program information
 - At the start of the meeting state your intentions clearly and set the stage and expectations
- If people do become upset, do your best to acknowledge and appreciate people's concerns and feelings. Active listening can help address this. The statements like the ones below can help convey that you are listening to what they are saying by summarizing what you have heard:
 - "I just want to make sure I understand what you're saying so we can work towards a solution, what I've heard you say is..... Is that what you've said?"
- Let them know what the next steps are going to be. People usually want to know that something is going to be done. This does not necessarily mean that you need to provide them with exactly what you are going to do, but acknowledges that you value their concerns
- Avoid "that is not true, you're wrong". Try not to shut people down, which can escalate the situation.

- Look for areas of collaboration - there are often common threads (even with the staunchest opponents) that you can draw upon
- Follow up, if needed, offer to have a one-on-one conversation.
- As a last resort, you may have to mute (if virtual) or ask someone to leave the room (if in person) if they continue to make derogatory statements

4. Complaints and Compliments Management

Develop a plan for dealing with different types of complaints and compliments, including a protocol for who should be contacted in different circumstances. Key components of a good complaints and compliments management include: timely responses, non-defensive language, understanding and using consistent key messaging. It is also important to develop a tracking system of communications.

4.1 Community Complaints Form

Create a standardized community complaints form that can be used and accessed by staff at the site and forwarded to the appropriate person, which may vary depending on the situation. We have included a template that you can adapt for your own site in the appendix. It should include:

- What the issue was
- Who submitted the complaint
- Who has been assigned to address the issue
- How the issue was addressed
- What the outcome was
- Date resolved

4.2 Creating an Action Response Plan

- Aim to create a pointed action response plan (e.g. if scenario X happens, Y should be the response), for various issues (drug dealing, aggressive panhandling, substance use, and trespassing).

4.3 Responding to Community Members Complaints

- CLWs should maintain a neutral position. While you are there to manage and acknowledge the concerns of the community, you are also there to support guests/clients at the shelter/respite.
- In maintaining a neutral position, make sure not to accept blame, without receiving all of the information.
- While CLCs and group meetings may be a place to acknowledge, document, and work towards solutions oftentimes working one-on-one with individual community stakeholders can be more effective and productive. For example individuals or small groups can examine an issue and bring it back to the CLC for feedback/decision-making

5. Communication and Messaging

5.1 Staying Calm and Consistent

- Do your best to stay calm, consistent and neutral with your messaging even when people say things or write things that are inappropriate and disrespectful.
 - Hear their concerns and reply with objective and factual information.

5.2 Sharing Wins and Successes

- While it may be obvious, sharing wins and successes is an excellent way to build momentum and demonstrate the important role the shelter plays in the community.
 - “It is because of the support that we’ve received from the community and landlords that we’ve been able to support our clients.”
 - “It’s been the welcoming atmosphere that you all have contributed to”
- Discuss the great resources that you have been able to connect your clients with, such as community health centres and social services.
- Highlight the contributions of the community and community members, including those on the CLC.

5.3 Privacy

- It is important to be cognizant of privacy of the shelter residents and understand what you can and cannot share with people outside of the shelter
 - In some instances community members or others may request private information about guests/clients, such as their name, how long they have been at the shelter, personal issues they may be facing. It is important to make clear that this is private information that cannot be shared - just like the person asking for that information would not want that type of information about them shared publicly.
- CLWs should understand the policies and procedures of their organization when it comes to the privacy of their clients and staff.

6. Pro-active Community Outreach

Proactive community outreach will likely involve different stakeholders and different issues. Being proactive and anticipating what community members may want is essential. One area of proactive community outreach is safety; residents and other community members will want to know what safety plan you have in place to address issues.

6.1 Safety

- Connect with various security teams in the area (e.g condos, local hotels). Have them identify hot spots (areas that might be of specific concern such as laneways where drug dealing and the use of drugs may be happening)
- Engage with the local Toronto Police Service to find out what community safety teams are available
- Engage with your own community safety teams and connect them to outside safety teams mentioned above.

6.2 Community Outreach Resources

- A community resource pamphlet that could be given to local stakeholders (church, businesses) that provides which resources are available to people experiencing homelessness (what drop-in resources are available, where you can get a meal, legal help etc.)
- A Community Contact Flyer. [Here](#) is an example created by Dixon Hall
 - [Here](#) is a template that can be used.
 - Distribute this to the CLC
 - Go in person to businesses within a close proximity to the shelter or respite location and drop off this information. Depending on your shelter this could also be the role of the site supervisor.

7. Using Community Space

Community rooms at the shelter can be a great way to engage with the community and it provides an opportunity for engagement and allows the community to familiarize themselves with the space/shelter. This can build rapport between community members and the shelter, as well as with shelter residents.

7.1 Providing Space in the Shelter

- Inviting folks to meetings (e.g. people from a neighbouring church you may want to meet). provides a great opportunity to engage and allows the community to familiarize themselves with the space/shelter.
- Consider client confidentiality when inviting community members into shelter spaces.

7.2 Providing Space Outside the Shelter

- Where possible, CLWs should explore what opportunities might be available outside the shelter such as using outdoor space for gardening - inviting both residents of the shelter and community members to participate together.

7.3 Encourage groups using meeting spaces to get further involved

- Take the group on tours within the organization, if possible.
- Encourage the group to volunteer before or after their meeting.
- Have staff team members and/or clients speak directly with the group about their experiences with the organization. Be open to answer questions.
 - Note: Clients are not always open or willing to speak about their experiences

8. Community Participation and Volunteering

Community participation and volunteering are key ways to develop rapport and relationships with community members, groups and other local organizations. There are different ways to do this.

8.1 Community Meal Programs

- Some sites provide community meal programs, which can engage peer volunteers (shelter residents) from the shelter as well as neighbours outside the shelter. Food provides a great opportunity to engage with people and build relationships.
- CLWs could look to invite corporate groups and others to providing/funding with meal distribution and facilitating different programs

8.2 Community events

- Invite the community to participate in information sessions, fundraisers, BBQ's, AGM's and/or other community events.
- Allow community members to take an active role in these events (eg: games operators, fundraisers, booth operators, registration desks, sanitization stations, etc.)
 - Note: Volunteers should receive a certain level of training

8.3 Formation of Committees

- Invite your most active/engaged volunteers/donors to form a volunteer working committee within your organization. (eg: Events committee, Young professional Committee, Lived Experience Committee, etc.)
- Determine the scope of this committee. (eg: Events committees will help support with fundraising or community events, Young professionals Committee might lead events that engage with a young population, Lived Experience Committee might support with community engagement and program feedback)
- Allow this group to spearhead certain events with the support of a staff representative; whether this be a community event, an event with your clients, or 3rd party fundraisers.

8.4 Volunteers

- Consider specialized volunteers for programs (eg. ESL, financial literacy, resume building, yoga teachers etc.)

9. Developing Partnerships

Developing partnerships often comes from asset mapping (see Initial Engagement above) and finding out what community groups, and businesses are located in the area.

9.1 Connecting with Outside Groups

- Connect with already established groups and committees in the neighbourhood. This can be done through CLC members, connecting with your Agency Review Officer or by reaching out to local councillors.
- Do your best to connect with other social service providers for successful connections to: employment, voluntary trusteeship and dental clinics

9.2 Supporting Local Business and Restaurants

- Where possible, see what opportunities may exist for local procurement. This can demonstrate to the community that the shelter wants to contribute to the success of the neighbourhood in different ways.
 - Do your best to keep track of local dollars spent, which can be a useful statistic in demonstrating impact and the commitment that the shelter brings to the community

9.3 Major Donors

- Determine at what level a donor qualifies as a major donor and create a list. (eg: \$1,000+)

- Invite major donors to events, fundraisers, info sessions, and on tours of your organization on a yearly or bi-yearly basis. Highlight the impact of their donations this year.
- Invite these donors to volunteer onsite, if possible, so they can experience the impact of their donations.

9.4 Prospect

- Prospect other businesses that might have a CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) Policy that aligns with your organization's mission and values.
- Invite this corporation for a tour of your facility. Highlight how this corporation can help you meet your goals and who your mission aligns with their CSR policies.
- Have a list of engagement opportunities for corporate groups.
 - Note: Many corporate groups have a budget to help cover the cost of projects. (eg: bedroom painting project, meal projects, mentorship project, employment supports, etc.)
- Have your staff team and/or clients speak with this group and highlight the benefits of your organization.
 - Note: Clients are not always open or willing to speak about their experiences.

10. Client and Community Programming

10.1 Responding to the Needs and Interests of Clients

- Community programming should support the needs and interests of clients
- Begin by conducting a needs assessment with shelter residents to determine the types of programming in which they are interested.
 - For example: art classes, cooking, gardening etc.
- Work with the existing case-management team to identify gaps in programming services.
 - Find local community groups to help fill in these gaps

10.2 Connecting Clients with Community Members

- Explore ways you can connect clients with community members who provide programming. You can engage people on your CLC to help support with these initiatives
 - This could include a community garden or community clean up

10.3 Minimize Barriers to Services

- Minimize barriers for clients to access community services. When possible, bring community programming and resources into your organization.
 - Shorter distances can yield higher attendance rates and better support for clients.
- If service is unavailable to come onsite, ensure that you are able to support clients with local resources. The less travel between local resources the better.
- Allow drop-in to services and programming to support accessibility

11. Training

Oftentimes community groups will be looking for different types of training related to de-escalation, mental health and addictions.

11.1 Training for CLW Workers

- CLW should explore what opportunities may be available for conflict management/resolution training. Here are some resources^{1,2}

11.2 Training for Community Groups

- CLWs can engage with their local community and CLC members to explore what additional educational or training opportunities they would like to explore.
 - For instance, Community Safety Walks, often facilitated by local law enforcement, are a great way to provide support to the community.

12. Peer Support Programs

Peer support programs are a key part of the new shelter service [model](#). Peers, such as those with experience of homelessness, who are trusted and have built relationships with the shelter program and clients can be essential team members who contribute to the overall success of the shelter and its programs.

12.1 Peer Support Program Examples

- Peer Support Programs can vary by site and location, but can include:
 - Harm reduction programs
 - Connections to community-based opportunities
 - Post-housing community integration, orientation and stabilization

More information is available [here](#).

13. Assessment and Evaluation

While you should be checking in regularly with CLC members and your community partners, it may also be helpful to conduct a more formalized survey to monitor progress.

13.1 CLC Evaluation

- To help assess the effectiveness of the CLC you could develop and distribute a short CLC survey. Questions can include: has your knowledge improved since joining the CLC, do you have access to more resources than when you first started attending, do you feel more connected to your community?

¹ <https://www.sschto.ca/Conflict-Resolution-Training>

² <https://animaleadership.com/training/afo/>

14. Common Challenges

Many CLWs have noted some common challenges in this role.

14.1 Responding to Complaints and Concerns in a Standardized Way

- CLWs should document and respond to complaints and concerns in a standardized way. Keep a log of complaints and concerns. There is a template at the end of this document.

14.2 Ensuring Shelter Residents are Treated with Respect

- A frequent challenge often cited by CLWs is ensuring that shelter residents are spoken about and treated with respect. CLC or community members can sometimes make or say derogatory/disrespectful comments about shelter residents.

14.3 Managing the Expectations of Community Members

- Community members may feel that you and/or the shelter has all the answers and/or is the cause of issues, such as vandalism, discarded needles or garbage piling up, in the neighbourhood. As noted above it is important to make clear the role of the shelter and what the shelter is and is not responsible for.

15. Definitions and Acronyms

Shelter, Support, and Housing Administration (SSHA): The Division within the City of Toronto that manages the coordinated system of shelter and housing services to improve the housing stability of people who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness in Toronto.

Community Engagement Facilitator (CEF): A professional third-party consultant retained by the City of Toronto to facilitate the engagement process in a community before the opening of a new service for people experiencing homelessness. They represent the City at arms-length and as such develop and implement each new shelter's engagement plan in consultation with City staff, councillors, shelter operators and other stakeholders. They have expertise in managing complex and potentially contentious community engagement processes and ensure ongoing communication with stakeholders. The CEF facilitates conversations between the City and community members, promoting active listening, clear dialogue and a focus on solutions.

Community Liaison Committee (CLC): A formal committee for all new shelter development projects focused on supporting the shelter and its residents as a new service into the community. Membership is comprised of a range of community stakeholders including (but not limited to): condo boards, residents associations, business groups and local community organizations.

Issue Response Protocol: The system for triaging, responding to, and escalating community and media inquiries regarding a site-specific shelter development. The process relies on the City of Toronto's Shelter Support & Housing Administration (SSHA)'s complaints tracker for analysis and assessment of complaints.

Community Liaison Worker (CLW): A community engagement specialist hired by new the shelter operators to manage and support relationships with community partners. This includes coordinating community engagement programming and peer support opportunities for shelter clients.

Transition Plan: A plan written by the Community Engagement Facilitator for transitioning community engagement activities to the shelter operator and the Community Liaison Worker.

Final Summary Report: A report written at the end of the facilitator-led community engagement process. It summarizes inquiries, concerns, and feedback received from stakeholders and community members throughout the engagement process, including information sessions, CLCs, stakeholder meetings. The report also highlights key learnings and recommendations to facilitate ongoing community engagement by the Community Liaison Worker.

Municipal Shelter: Supervised residential facilities that provide temporary accommodation and related support services to assist people experiencing homelessness to move into housing.

Appendix A

A. Resources:

1. [List of Wards](#)
2. [Toronto Police Divisions](#)
3. [SSHA Contact List](#)

B. CLC Evaluation Survey - 3 Month Mark

1. As a result of being part of the CLC, I feel more knowledgeable about the role shelter programs play in supporting people experiencing homelessness.

- a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither Agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree
2. As a result of being part of the CLC, I feel more supportive of this shelter program.
- a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither Agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree
3. As a result of being part of the CLC, I feel more connected to the community and community members.
- a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither Agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree
4. I believe I have the tools and resources to take what I am learning on the CLC and relay this to my neighbours and other community members.
- a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither Agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

5. My questions and concerns have been addressed in a timely and professional manner after I have raised them.
- a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither Agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree
6. I have had an opportunity to contribute and provide my perspective.
- a. Strongly Agree

- b. Agree
- c. Neither Agree nor disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

7. Guest speakers and community agencies and organizations (e.g. Toronto Police, The Works) who have presented on the CLC have been worthwhile and informative.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither Agree nor disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

8. I feel the CLC membership is reflective of local community representation and different perspectives.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neither Agree nor disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

9. How might we improve the overall (including your own) experience of the CLC?

Sample Template for Tracking/Monitoring Community Concerns

Tracking/Monitoring Community Complaints Template								
#	Date of Complaint	Complain t Made By	Description of Complaint	Site Address	Status (Not started, Just Opened 1-3 Days, Ongoing, 3-7 days, Indeterminate 7+, Closed)	Actions Taken (by who)	Closed?	Additional Notes
1	July 1st 2021	John Smith	Aggressive Panhandling outside shelter program	New Shelter Program 123 Yonge Street	Closed	Spoke with Community Safety Team, scheduled on-one-conversations with John	Yes	John Smith has made multiple complaints before