

SECTION 3

Participant Engagement and Governance

All drop-ins want to see their participants develop greater independence and self-sufficiency. Most of the tools required for this transition are structural – people need money, food, jobs, housing, health care, child-care, legal aid, and so forth. Drop-ins vary in their ability to provide participants with access to these types of resources; however, one resource that all drop-ins have to offer their participants is a sense of themselves as strong, self-reliant people with something to contribute.

The strategies for doing this are diverse. This Section will focus on engaging participants in the decision-making processes of the drop-in. It will provide examples of strategies that drop-ins in the TDIN and elsewhere have used, and discuss the advantages and issues to consider with each approach.

This Section starts with a general discussion of the philosophy behind the participation approach and of the practical considerations involved in its implementation, and then continues with a more detailed discussion of specific strategies for engaging participants:

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The items on this list are not exclusive, but are meant to work in combination with each other. Financial capacity, staff time, and organizational structure will affect the degree to which individual drop-ins are able to engage participants. However, as the UK-based organization Homeless Link points out, engaging participants in the governance of the drop-in is “more a process to work toward” than a “rigid or formulaic” approach.¹

¹ Homeless Link, “12: Participation into Practice,” *Day centres handbook: A good practice guide*, London (UK), 2004, page 12.3.

SUBSECTION 3A

The Participation Approach

Philosophy

People who are struggling with poverty, addictions, or mental health issues are sometimes treated as childlike dependents, because they do not have the resources to meet their own needs. Since they are often excluded from participating in the decisions that affect their lives, it is easy for them to lose confidence.² This helps to perpetuate the cycle, since lack of confidence can become a barrier to reclaiming control of their lives, overcoming addictions, and accessing the support needed to deal with past traumas or mental health issues. The participation approach builds on the concepts of **social justice**, **health promotion**, and **community development** discussed in Section 1.

The participation approach:

- Acknowledges that a person's health and well-being are influenced by their ability to identify and to realize goals, to feel in control of their life, and to have the tools to cope with their environment and social world;
- Works to foster a community within the drop-in that is inclusive and fair, and challenges the unequal power relationships between staff and participants;
- Gives participants the tools to question barriers to social equality outside of the drop-in;
- Empowers drop-in users by involving them in decision-making to the greatest degree possible; and
- Sees participants not as passive or dependent recipients of services, but as individuals who have the power to take control of their lives, and who also have significant expertise in poverty issues and can provide valuable suggestions for improving drop-in policies and practices.

Homeless Link notes that the key components in the participation approach are to understand that drop-in users:

- Are not “the problem,” and they must be part of the solution;
- Hold the key to the solutions in their experiences and knowledge;

² Homeless Link, “12: Participation into Practice,” *Day centres handbook: A good practice guide*, London (UK), 2004, page 12.4.

- Have a right to the information they need to make informed choices about their lives; and
- Can build communities and create positive change by acting together.³

Practical Considerations

The following discussion of the practical considerations is, in most cases, relevant not only to participants, but also to anyone else – staff, volunteers, and Board members (particularly those who have been newly hired or recruited)– whom you may engage in decision-making processes at the drop-in.

Boundaries. It is important to clearly set out the boundaries of participants’ role in the decision making process from the beginning, so that they do not feel “tricked” or lose trust if told that their suggestions are unrealistic or that a decision on a particular subject has already been made. This will include defining any constraints on the range of choices, providing as much information as possible about the range of choices and being clear about who else will be involved in the decision. Establish open and honest lines of communication, and ensure that decision-making processes are transparent.⁴

Barriers. Drop-in users may be interested in volunteering or participating in decision-making processes, but may find it difficult to make it to meetings regularly or to fulfill all of their commitments. Participants often lead stressful lives in chaotic environments, and this may make it difficult for them to adhere to the structure of committee work. It is a good practice to explore these barriers with participants to see whether there is anything you can do to remove these hurdles – for example, changing the meetings to a more convenient date or time; providing a child-care service during meetings and giving out TTC tokens to facilitate transportation to and from the meetings.

Drop-in users may seem at times to be apathetic, unmotivated, and unreliable committee or working group members. They may not show interest in getting involved in decision-making processes, or they may join a group and then not show up. (This is also true, of course, of many board members, committee members, and volunteers from outside the drop-in.) However, dismissing these behaviours as part of an individual’s personality is less productive than asking *why* they might not feel motivated:⁵

- **Do they believe that their participation is unnecessary or that real changes will never be implemented?** Try making public announcements about changes – for example, a change to the menu based on survey feedback – to show that the drop-in is committed to working *with* participants, not just *for* them. On a more long-term basis, ensure that you are being accountable to participants and regularly reporting on the results of their suggestions.
- **Do they think the task will be onerous or boring?** Try getting dedicated participants to recruit their friends, or making meetings more attractive by serving

³ *Ibid.*, list quoted verbatim from page 12.4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, page 12.5.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pages 12.13-12.14.

food or scheduling committee meetings just before or just after regular social events or well-attended activities at the drop-in. Or, suggest another group project or initiative with a focus more closely linked to an individual's interests and experiences.

Training. Depending on the level of participation, drop-in users (along with any other new Board or committee members) may need training to understand how to contribute to a formal decision-making body (such as a Board, a committee, or a focus group). You may want to hold an information session to discuss expectations, or, like any new staff member or volunteer, have the participant sign a Code of Conduct or a similar agreement that outlines their roles and responsibilities. Further, participants should be familiarized with the drop-in's vision statement and policies.

Empowerment. Many drop-in users have been marginalized by years of poverty, disability and social exclusion; they may have very low self-esteem. They may not feel empowered to express their opinions or to speak up in a public setting, particularly when others in the group express themselves confidently and hold strong views.

Drop in staff need to begin by acknowledging the power imbalance that exists between drop-in participants, staff, board members, professionals and others in the community. Careful consideration needs to be given to strategies to overcome the power imbalance and give participants a voice. **Techniques** include providing separate groups for drop-in participants to share their views, going around the room in meetings to give each person a chance to speak and educating the more powerful members about their responsibility to listen and hear the voices of the drop-in users.

Compensation. TTC tickets or **tokens** may be given to those who take public transportation to get to the meetings. Depending on the financial resources of your drop-in, you may also consider giving participants an **honorarium** as an indication of your appreciation of their time and expert opinions. Honoraria need to be handled delicately, however. Some drop-ins report that once you give honoraria for one volunteer task, participant-volunteers start to expect remuneration for every volunteer task. Given the limited financial means of most drop-ins, this often is not feasible, so care must be taken to establish transparent and systematic honoraria guidelines. For example, one drop-in limits honoraria to long-term commitments, such as volunteering on a planning committee (see Subsection 3E, below).

Capacity. Financial resources will be a limiting factor in what drop-ins are able to accomplish in terms of participant engagement. Also, many drop-ins are a branch of a larger organization, and as such do not necessarily have absolute decision-making power. The umbrella organization may have a different philosophy about participant engagement, and may not support the strategies suggested here.

SUBSECTION 3B

Feedback and Consultation

Even when resources are an issue, soliciting feedback is a must for drop-ins that are committed to being responsive to the needs of participants. It is important for drop-in staff to hear participants' input on the programs, facilities, services, and activities⁶ provided and to implement recommendations wherever possible. You will likely not be able to act on all changes suggested by participants, but you can be accountable to them by discussing with them why it is or is not possible to offer particular services.

Informal mechanisms include:

- Conversations with participants
- Submissions to a suggestion box

More formal mechanisms include:

- Written surveys or questionnaires
- Regularly scheduled meetings

Benefits and Challenges

The advantages of soliciting feedback are:

- **Validation** – participants feel their suggestions are being heard and valued;
- **Empowerment** – participants develop an increased stake in the drop-in centre community and more control over their experience;
- **Advice** – staff gain a better understanding of how the programs are received and how to improve their service;
- **Praise** – staff get a morale boost when feedback is received on what they are doing well;
- **Communication** – channels for constructive dialogue between staff and participants are developed; and
- **Funding** – if minutes are taken at meetings or written surveys are collected, the drop-in has documents that can be used to support their application to certain funders.

⁶ For a discussion of the good practices involved in inviting participant feedback on staff performance, see Subsection 4F: Performance Evaluations.

The issues to consider when soliciting feedback are:

- **Creating a safe space** – In order for participants to be open with their feedback, they need to know that criticism will not affect their service or be used against them later. This is especially important in meetings. In written responses, one way to do this is to keep surveys anonymous (or, provide a space for the individual to write their name, but indicate that this is *optional*, not required.)
- **Going further** – Listening to what participants have to say and taking it into consideration is the minimum level of engagement; ideally, the feedback process will include productive discussion and negotiation among staff and participants. The role of participants can also expand from simply advising to involvement in decision-making and implementing changes.

Surveys

Many funders require documentation of participant feedback and evaluation of programming, so it may be worth the time and energy to do written surveys. Several drop-ins solicit general feedback once a year, and more detailed feedback on specific programs more frequently. A sample of survey questions is attached in **Appendix 3B.1**.

Helpful tips for written surveys include:

- **Ask specific questions** – Asking participants to rate the “quality” of a particular service – for example, meals – is vague and will not necessarily help you understand how to improve. Asking specific questions will give you more useful feedback. For example: Was the food served hot? On time? Was it nutritious? Is there a variety? These questions will be based on your program’s goals and objectives. It is not useful to ask participants if there is a good variety of choices at meal times if this is a factor beyond your control (for example, if you are relying on donations).
- **Give the rationale** – Tell participants what the purpose of the survey is (for example, “This survey will help us improve the services we offer”). Give a brief explanation for any questions that request sensitive or personal information (for example: “These questions are intended to get a snapshot of our community. We want to know what’s going on in your lives so that we can better respond to your needs.”).
- **Protect confidentiality** – Ensure that the design of the questions preserves the participant’s anonymity (for example, don’t ask so many specific questions that it will be obvious to you which person filled out which survey). If you plan to use the survey findings in a report or in a funding application, indicate to the participants that the results will be grouped together and no individual responses will be singled out. Make sure that respondents know that their participation is

voluntary and if they are uncomfortable answering any question they do not have to. Develop an anonymous way for participants to pass in their completed surveys – for example, collect them in blank envelopes or set up a box where participants can submit them without handing them to a staff person.

Meetings

The drawback to conducting written surveys is that not all participants will be able to read or have the English language skills needed to complete written surveys. Depending on the people in your drop-in, formal meetings or informal conversations may be the best way to solicit feedback.

One drop-in has a designated table in the common room where participants meet every other week. Meetings are held on the same day and at the same time so that any interested participants can plan to be there and voice their opinions. A drop-in worker facilitates the meeting, takes minutes, and brings the concerns raised in the session to the next staff meeting. The manager reports back at the next participant meeting on the actions the drop-in plans to take in response. From time to time a representative from the Board of Directors will come to a meeting to present a report. These meetings are seen as a vehicle for communication between participants and drop-in staff and volunteers from all levels of the organization.

Another drop-in has monthly “town hall” meetings which are run by the participants themselves. Chairs are organized in a circle and there is a microphone set up to record participants’ comments.

ATTACHMENT:

- **Appendix 3B.1 – Sample Participant Survey Questions**

Appendix 3B.1 Sample Participant Survey Questions

Note: The survey below incorporates elements from several surveys collected from TDIN drop-ins during the Good Practices Toolkit consultations (May-July 2006). It is presented here as a resource of different types of questions rather than as a recommended template. To be used effectively, this survey should be shortened and adapted to address the specific questions your drop-in would like to answer.

PARTICIPANT SURVEY

Please take a few minutes to contribute to the drop-in by filling in this evaluation form. It will give us a chance to learn what you like and don't like about our programs and how we can improve them. Please rate your experience by circling one of the responses below each question.

1. MEALS

How would you rate the meals that are provided in the Drop-in?

	<i>Strongly disagree</i>		<i>No opinion</i>		<i>Strongly agree</i>
<i>Meals are good overall</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>There is a variety of food served</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>The food is nutritious</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>I get enough to eat</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Servers are courteous</i>	1	2	3	4	5

Please provide comments or suggestions for improvement.

2. BASIC SERVICES

How would you rate the services that are provided by the Drop-in?

	<i>Needs improvement</i>				<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Never accessed</i>
<i>Overall</i>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
<i>Showers</i>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
<i>Laundry</i>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
<i>Mail service</i>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
<i>Telephones</i>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
<i>Computers</i>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
<i>Food bank</i>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
<i>Clothing bank</i>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

Please provide comments or suggestions for improvement.

3. SPECIALIZED SERVICES

How would you rate the specialized services that are provided by the Drop-in?

	<i>Needs improvement</i>				<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Never accessed</i>
<i>Overall</i>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
<i>Health clinic</i>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
<i>Legal aid</i>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
<i>Housing help</i>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
<i>Referrals to other agencies</i>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

Please provide comments or suggestions for improvement.

4. RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

How would you rate the recreational activities that are provided by the Drop-in?

	<i>Needs improvement</i>				<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Never accessed</i>
<i>Overall</i>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
<i>Movie nights</i>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
<i>Speakers / workshops</i>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
<i>Trips</i>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
<i>Arts & crafts</i>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
<i>Yoga</i>	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

Please provide comments or suggestions for improvement.

5. INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE

To what degree do you feel that your involvement with [Drop-In Name] has improved the following?

	<i>Made things worse</i>		<i>No effect</i>		<i>Helped a lot</i>
<i>Quality of life</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Sense of community</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Your self esteem</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Your housing situation</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Your legal situation</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Your health situation</i>	1	2	3	4	5

Has coming to [Drop-In Name] made a difference in your life? If so, how?

6. GENERAL COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

What do you like about [Drop-In Name]?

What do you dislike about [Drop-In Name]?

Are there any other comments you would like to make that have not been covered by the questions above?

7. PERSONAL INFORMATION

It helps to know something about you, so that we can make sure that the different needs of participants are met.

About how long have you been coming to [Drop-In Name]?

- Less than 6 months 6 months to 1 year 1 to 2 years
 2 to 4 years 4 to 6 years 6 to 10 years More than 10 years

About how often do you come to [Drop-In Name]?

- Most days About once a week About once or twice a month
 Every month or so Hardly ever

Do you have any problems getting to [Drop-In Name]?

- Yes No If Yes, what problems do you have? _____

How old are you?

- 16 to 24 years 25 to 34 years 35 to 44 years 45-54 years
 55-64 years 65 to 75 years 76 years and older

Where were you born?

- Canada Other country, please specify _____

If you were not born in Canada, how many years have you been here? _____

What is your housing situation?

- Shelter/streets Boarding house Rooming house
 Subsidized/RGI housing Supportive housing Market rent housing
 Other, please describe _____

Who do you live with?

- By myself With family With friend/s With others

How long have you had this housing situation? _____

What is your main source of income?

- Ontario Works (OW) Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)
 Family Employment Savings Old Age Security
 Canada Pension Plan (CPP) Other, please describe _____

It also helps to know if you have any trouble participating because of language or other issues. We can use this information to make its services more accessible.

What is your preferred language?

- English Other, please specify _____

**Thank you very much for taking the time to fill out this survey!
We appreciate your input.**

SUBSECTION 3C

Board of Directors

Different drop-ins have different structures of accountability. Some answer to a local church, or to a Diocese, or to an umbrella non-profit organization, or to a branch of government. Depending on your organizational structure, you may or may not have a Board of Directors; or you may have a Board, but the organization does not permit participants to become Directors. In this case, you may want to consider initiating a Participant Council or Advisory Committee to make recommendations to the Board.

This Section assumes that your organization has been formally incorporated and you have a Board in place that allows participants to join. If you are a new drop-in and are thinking about starting a Board, there are many books written on the subject and a number of laws that you should be aware of (see **Appendix 3C.1** for a list of resources and **Appendix 3C.2** for an overview of the basic purpose, functions, and composition of a Board).

It is, in principle, a good practice to make space for participants on the Board of Directors. However, in practice, participants may be included in only token ways. Sitting on the Board does not automatically mean playing an active and respected role in the decision-making process. This strategy requires a lot of thought and hard work to be a truly “good” practice.

Education and Training

Both existing Directors and would-be participant-Directors need guidance in integrating participants into a meaningful decision making role. Discussion with existing Directors should focus on being respectful and patient, and understanding that drop-in users will undergo a learning curve. Depending on the background of the existing Directors, it may also be a good idea to do a training session with them on poverty issues, and how to diminish the barriers to effective participation generated by the unequal power dynamic between existing Directors and participant-Directors.

Participants interested in becoming Directors should also have information sessions, where the Board’s formal nomination, election, and decision-making procedures and responsibilities are explained to them (see **Appendices 3C.2, 3C.3, 3C.4, and 3C.5** for samples). (Making this kind of information and training available is a good practice for all new Board members, not just participants).

Discussion should focus on the important difference between the individual’s role as a private citizen and drop-in participant, and the individual’s role as public figure and Board Director. Although personal experiences as a drop-in user will play a large part in

their participation at the Board, personal interests need to be set aside so that the person can conscientiously represent the needs of the community and drop-in as a whole.

Policies and Procedures

If participants are going to be included on the Board of Directors, a policy will be needed which addresses issues such as:

- **Eligibility** for membership (for example, time involved in drop-in and good standing requirements), and
- **Selection process** (for example, election by other drop-in users, selection by staff, and recruitment by board).

See **Appendix 3C.3** for sample guidelines for election.

The drop-in should have a Directors' Code of Conduct and a list of Directors' Responsibilities written up as a resource for all Directors (see **Appendix 3C.4** and **Appendix 3C.5** for samples of these documents); the drop-in may want to consider making these documents into an agreement form to be signed by all Directors. Two key issues are confidentiality and conflict of interest; these issues are especially important for participant members of the Board, since they access drop-in services regularly and know its users intimately, and so the risk for a conflict of interest or breach of confidentiality is high.

Conflict of interest policies and protocols should be developed which define when a conflict of interest exists and how the Board will deal with conflict of interest. (See **Appendix 3C.6** for a Sample Conflict of Interest Policy.) Finally, the Board should evaluate its own performance on a regular basis to assess how well it is doing and what areas could be improved.

ATTACHMENTS:

- **Appendix 3C.1 – List of Suggested Board Resources**
- **Appendix 3C.2 – Board of Directors' Purpose, Functions, and Composition**
- **Appendix 3C.3 – Sample Guidelines for Participant-Directors' Election Campaigns**
- **Appendix 3C.4 – Sample Directors' Code of Conduct**
- **Appendix 3C.5 – Sample Directors' Responsibilities**
- **Appendix 3C.6 – Sample Conflict of Interest Policy**

Appendix 3C.1 List of Suggested Board Resources

If you intend to set up a Board of Directors, or are interested in reading tips on how to organize and operate one more effectively, there are many online resources that may be easily accessed.

The Charity Village web site, for example, has links to a number of useful resources related to board development and governance. These include the following:

- **A to Z Directory for Board Governance – Volunteer BC**
www.vcn.bc.ca/volbc/resources/governance/index.html
- **Board Development – United Way of Canada**
www.boarddevelopment.org
- **The Effective Board Member’s Orientation Manual – Ginsler and Associates**
www.ginsler.com/documents/bdman.pdf
- **Board Responsibilities for Human Resources Management – HR Council for the Voluntary/Non-Profit Sector (HRVS)**
www.hrvs-rhsbc.ca/hr_overview/pg002_e.cfm

For a longer list of resources, see:

- **Canadian Online Resources for Nonprofits – Charity Village**
www.charityvillage.com/cv/ires/ires19.asp

Many non-profit organizations have started to use the “Carver model” of Board governance. For more information on this model, see:

- **The Policy Governance Model – John and Miriam Carver**
www.carvergovernance.com/model.htm

Appendix 3C.2 Board of Directors' Purpose, Functions, and Composition

Source: City of Toronto, *Toronto Shelter Standards*, 2005, page 8. Available at: www.toronto.ca/housing/pdf/shelter_standards.pdf.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Purpose and Responsibilities

The Board of Directors is responsible for:

- Ensuring the mandate, mission, values, and strategies of the organization are being followed;
- Setting agency priorities;
- Reviewing and approving policies;
- Evaluating services;
- Ensuring that the organization meets funder expectations and contract conditions;
- Reviewing budgets and expenditures;
- Reviewing and approving accounting and reporting procedures;
- Conducting an annual performance review of the Executive Director
- Convening regular meetings;
- Convening an Annual General Meeting (AGM); and
- Maintaining written records (minutes) of all meetings.

Composition

The Board must:

- Have a sufficient number of Directors with the range of skills required to fulfill this role;
- Be composed of volunteers; and
- Not have any paid staff members as Directors (this would be a conflict of interest).

Appendix 3C.3 Sample Guidelines for Participant-Directors' Electoral Campaigns

Source: Adapted from documents collected from TDIN drop-ins during the Good Practices Toolkit consultations, May-July 2006.

GUIDELINES FOR ELECTORAL CAMPAIGNS

1. **Nomination.** To be nominated for the Board, you must:
 - a. Be a [Drop-In Name] member in good standing who has not been barred or suspended from accessing [Drop-In Name] in the last twelve months;
 - b. Fill out and sign a Nomination Form with signatures from at least three [Drop-In Name] members who nominate you.
2. **Commitment.** You must then agree to your name being placed in nomination for election to the Board. You must also agree that, if elected, you will do the tasks required of a Director to the best of your ability.
3. **AGM.** At the Annual General Meeting (AGM) you and the other nominees will be introduced to the members of the Board. If you like, you may talk for 2 or 3 minutes about why you want to be a Director and what you would do if elected.
4. **Campaign.** Each member candidate who is nominated to the Board of Directors should follow the guidelines listed below to create an individual election campaign platform (what you want to do if you are elected).

Guidelines for Creating a Good Election Campaign

- a. Please run a positive campaign. Make constructive suggestions rather than hurtful criticisms – make suggestions for improving programs, policies, organizational structures, and so forth, but avoid making *personal* criticisms of your opponents, drop-in participants, staff, or Board members.
- b. Please follow [Drop-In Name]'s policy and refrain from making racist, sexist, or otherwise discriminatory comments.
- c. Please use respectful language. Obscene language will not help you in your campaign.
- d. Be honest and don't offer any type of bribe.

Appendix 3C.4 Sample Directors' Code of Conduct

Source: Adapted from documents collected from TDIN drop-ins during the Good Practices Toolkit consultations, May-July 2006.

DIRECTORS' CODE OF CONDUCT

All people who sit on [Drop-In Name]'s Board of Directors must understand, support, and follow this Code of Conduct.

As a Director:

1. You use your position on the Board to represent the interests of all people served by [Drop-In Name].
2. You focus your efforts on the mission of [Drop-In Name] as an organization and not on your own personal goals.
3. You declare any potential conflicts of interest (situations where you may stand to benefit in some way from an issue being discussed by the Board), and, if necessary, leave the room during discussions of the issue in question.
4. You do not use [Drop-In Name] or its programs or services for your own personal gain or the individual advantage of friends, family and/or supporters.
5. You keep confidential information confidential.
6. You approach all Board issues with an open mind, prepared to make the best decision for all of [Drop-In Name].
7. You are loyal to [Drop-In Name] and its goals.
8. You are loyal to the board, stating your views openly at Board meetings and supporting whatever decisions that the board makes.
9. You act in accordance with [Drop-In Name] policies and procedures (for example, anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies).
10. You do nothing to violate the trust of those who elected you to the Board.
11. You serve [Drop-In Name] in an honest, open, careful, and committed manner.
12. You exercise your authority as a Director:
 - When acting in a meeting with the full Board, or
 - As delegated by the Board, or
 - When you are listening to [Drop-In Name] members who want their voices heard at the Board.

The Board enforces this Code of Conduct. How the Code is enforced and how a violation of the Code is resolved is the Board's decision.

Appendix 3C.5 Sample Directors' Responsibilities

Source: Adapted from documents collected from TDIN drop-ins during the Good Practices Toolkit consultations, May-July 2006.

DIRECTORS' RESPONSIBILITIES

The following applies to all Directors of the Board. If you are unable to meet one or more of these responsibilities, please talk to one of the Co-Chairs so that we can work something out.

As a Director on the Board of [Drop-In Name], you are expected to:

1. Attend Board meetings regularly.
 - If you will be unable to attend, please contact _____
2. Be on time for meetings.
 - If you cannot be on time, please inform _____
3. Be prepared to participate in discussions at meetings.
 - Understand the meeting minutes well enough to be able to use the information in them at future Board meetings or when talking with [Drop-In Name] members or staff.
 - Be familiar enough with the policies, vision, and objectives of [Drop-In Name] to be able to apply them as necessary to issues that come before the Board.
 - Ask questions if you do not understand what is being discussed, voted on, etc.
4. Serve on at least one committee or working group. If this is your first term as a Director, try to be ready to volunteer for a committee no later than four months after you begin. (If you aren't ready by then, that's okay, too – talk to one of the Co-Chairs.)
5. Report as soon as possible any conflict of interest or suspected conflict of interest you might have in relation to Board work.
6. Keep confidential any information brought to the Board for discussion in closed (*in camera*) session.
7. Act without bias and in the interests of [Drop-In Name]. Put away your personal agenda.

Please note: Directors need to be able to read minutes and other material. If reading is in any way difficult for you, please talk with a Co-Chair to discuss a solution. This is not an impossible or unsolvable issue. It is your responsibility, however, to take the step of letting someone know that this is something that needs to be worked out.

Appendix 3C.6 Sample Conflict of Interest Policy

Source: Adapted from documents collected from TDIN drop-ins during the Good Practices Toolkit consultations, May-July 2006.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Preamble. Board Directors are expected to conduct themselves with personal integrity, ethics, honesty, and diligence in performing their duties for the organization. Board Directors are required to support and advance the interests of the organization and to avoid placing themselves in situations where their personal interests conflict with the interests of [Drop-In Name] as a whole.

Definition. A conflict of interest is a situation that results in personal gain for a Director because of something s/he does or knows as a member of the Board. The gain may be direct or indirect; it may be a financial gain or some other type of benefit. It may also involve a gain for a Director's family, friends or supporters. Some examples of conflicts of interest by a Director include:

- influencing decision-making processes or otherwise using their position to advance their own interests or give friends or family members special treatment;
- receiving gifts, money, discounts, or favours for their own personal use or for the use of family members or friends;
- using [Drop-In Name] property, facilities, equipment, supplies, or other resources for activities not associated with their work as a Director; or
- using confidential information to advance the interests of themselves or their family or their friends.

Policy. A Board Director must declare any conflict of interest that s/he has with an issue being considered by the Board. A Director with a conflict of interest may not take part in any future process, discussion, decision-making (including voting), or in any other way that could influence the outcome of the issue.

Procedures. Determining a conflict of interest should involve, minimally, the following two criteria (other criteria that are specific to the issue at hand may exist and should also be used):

1. Will the participation of any Board member in a process, discussion, or decision be viewed as acting in the specific interest of that Board member? In other words, will that Board member directly or indirectly stand to benefit from the outcome of the process?
2. Will the participation of any Board member in a process, discussion, or decision be in the service of interests other than the interests of the drop-in as a whole?

Once a potential conflict of interest has been identified:

1. The potential conflict of interest must be reported (whether by the individual with the conflict of interest, or by any other Board, staff, or drop-in member) to the Board Chair.

2. The Chair must discuss the potential conflict of interest with the individual in question and come to an agreement.
3. If the conflict of interest is real, it must be announced to the rest of the Board at its next meeting and recorded in the minutes.
4. From that point on, the Director may continue his or her activities on the Board, except when the discussion pertains to the Director's conflict of interest. The Director will not participate in the discussion on the matter in question and may be required to go to another room for the duration of the discussion.

SUBSECTION 3D

Committees

Committees can be an excellent way for participants to get involved at a more hands-on, small group level. A drop-in may have a wide range of committees, designed to make decisions or to provide input to decisions made by staff or by the Board of Directors.

Types of Committees

Board committees are sub-groups of the Board of Directors. They contain a certain number of Board members and they make regular reports to the Board about their activities. **Advisory committees** are formed to give advice to staff or to make decisions directly related to the operation of the drop-in. Types of **standing committees** (which can be either Board committees or advisory committees) include: advocacy, building, executive, finance, fundraising, human resources, programming, and special events. Participants may also join **ad hoc committees**, or committees that are struck to make decisions concerning one particular event or situation and are subsequently dissolved; for example, staff hiring committees.

Terms of Reference

For all standing committees, “Terms of Reference” will be required. Depending on the committee, the Terms of Reference may be defined by another body (e.g. Committees of the Board and other advisory committees) or may be developed by the committee itself. Once the Terms of Reference have been developed they need to be written up and discussed with committee members.

These documents spell out the purpose, function, and composition of the committee. Depending on their function, committees may be more or less formal in their organization. See **Appendix 3D.1** for two samples: the first (the Terms of Reference for a Social Events and Outings Committee) is on the less formal end of the scale, while the second (the Terms of Reference for a Program and Advocacy Committee) is more formalized.

Hiring Committees

Inviting drop-in participants to be part of a staff hiring committee gives them a role of authority, fosters a sense of ownership of the drop-in space, and can offer valuable insights into what kind of relationship applicants would have with participants. According to one drop-in, participants are able to pick up on subtle clues and subtexts and “their instincts are right on” when assessing potential staff members.⁷

As with other members of the hiring committee, drop-in participants need to be briefed on how your drop-in’s formal hiring process works, what their specific role is, and how much influence they will have over the final choice. Participants should be advised to

⁷ Participants are also interested in contributing to the staff performance evaluation process; see Subsection 4F: Performance Evaluations for further discussion.

consider the needs of the drop-in as a whole, and to try to avoid letting personal biases affect their recommendations. As one drop-in noted, “It’s a very subjective experience for them, so they don’t always realize that they have to be professional.”

All committee members should also be informed of the relevant points of applicable employment legislation and the principles of confidentiality. To protect applicant confidentiality, you may want to show the résumés to participants only on the day of the interview, rather than handing them out in advance.

The following questions should be considered and clarified before inviting participants to join a hiring committee:

- Does participants’ contribution stop at advice and recommendations, or does it continue into the decision-making discussion? Will the participants have veto power over the final decision?
- What kind of role will the participants play during the interview? Will they ask pre-planned questions? Will they have the opportunity to ask unscripted follow-up questions?

Compensation. It is a good practice to reimburse participants their TTC fare and give them an honorarium, though this may not always be possible within the drop-in’s budget. One drop-in gives \$20 to each participant who participates in a half-day hiring process, and \$30 for a full-day hiring process (see Subsection 3E below for further discussion of honoraria).

ATTACHMENT:

- **Appendix 3D.1 – Sample Terms of Reference**

Appendix 3D.1 Sample Terms of Reference

Source: Adapted from documents collected from TDIN drop-ins during the Good Practices Toolkit consultations, May-July 2006.

SAMPLE #1 TERMS OF REFERENCE SPECIAL EVENTS AND OUTINGS COMMITTEE

Purpose of the Committee

- Plan and organize special events
- Plan and support outings
- Organize and facilitate member volunteer involvement in special events and outings
- Communicate and provide information to the general membership about upcoming events and outings
- Support seasonal and advance planning of special events and outings (3-6 month time periods)

Roles of the Committee

- Encourage a wide range of members to talk about what kind of outings and special events they would like to have
- Encourage program activity in the community
- Encourage [Drop-In Name] to be a healthy and welcoming place
- Encourage discussion and dialogue between members that supports self-help and member leadership of outings and special events

SAMPLE #2 TERMS OF REFERENCE PROGRAM AND ADVOCACY COMMITTEE

Purpose of the Committee

- Ensure that the programs at [Drop-In Name] are developed, implemented, monitored, and evaluated according to the agency's mission, goals, and objectives
- Work together as advocates with the Board and staff as well as with other organizations and groups in support of issues that impact on [Drop-In Name]'s participants

Functions of the Committee Related to Programming

- Assist with program development and approve annual program plans
- Ensure that a system of evaluation is in place
- Monitor program outcomes against established goals and objectives
- Remain current on community and program trends in relation to the needs of participants at [Drop-In Name]
- Make recommendations to the Board on future program development

Functions of the Committee Related to Advocacy

- Ensure that the issues that affect [Drop-In Name]’s participants are championed in the wider community
- Remain current on changing social and political trends that affect [Drop-In Name] and its participants
- Support the development of policies, as necessary, related to those priority issues
- Develop and support the implementation of an advocacy action plan in keeping with [Drop-In Name]’s strategic plan
- Monitor and assess the outcomes of the advocacy action plan

Composition of the Committee

The committee will consist of at least two Board members, two drop-in participants, the Program/Advocacy Director, two staff members, and at least two members from the community at large. The committee encourages a rotation of the chairing of meetings. The President of the Board and the Executive Director are ex officio members of all committees.

The committee meets once a month, approximately 10 times per year.

Term of Office

Two years with the opportunity for reappointment for up to three years.

SUBSECTION 3E

Volunteer and Employment Opportunities

It is a good practice to involve participants in the running of the drop-in. Many participants come to feel a sense of ownership of the drop-in and may want to give back or help out in various ways. Participants at many drop-ins help to prepare meals, serve on planning committees, fix computers, clean rooms, hire new staff members, develop programs, review policies, and so forth. These activities are recognized and organized in different ways.

Participants may contribute to the drop-in in:

- **Volunteer positions** – These tend to be the odd jobs that are involved in running the drop-in, such as preparing meals and cleaning rooms. Participants may also volunteer to serve on various types of committees.
- **Honoraria positions** – If the drop-in receives funding or has the resources to compensate participant volunteers, individuals who perform these odd jobs may be offered an honorarium. An honorarium is a small amount of money that is not a full payment, but a token of appreciation for the work that has been done. For example, a participant who serves coffee may receive \$10.00 at the end of a shift.
- **Staff positions** – Participants may be hired as part-time or full-time members of the staff team with the same rates of pay, responsibilities, and privileges that other staff members have.

Distinguishing between Volunteer and Paid Positions

The positive side to providing an honorarium is that it acknowledges and respects a participant's skills and labour. The drawback is that providing honoraria can foster a situation in the drop-in where participants may expect money for everything they do. Most drop-ins do not have enough money to pay an honorarium for all odd jobs, so resentment can occur when one task receives an honorarium while another does not.

It is important to have a **clear and transparent process** for how participants are recruited or hired, since this may easily be perceived by other participants as favouritism. It is useful to implement a **consistent system** that categorizes which jobs are volunteer positions, and which are honoraria positions. For example, one drop-in pays an honorarium for any task that requires a longer-term time commitment – for example, serving on a committee or helping to plan an event – but not for activities which rely on volunteering in the moment – for example, helping the cook prepare and serve a meal.

Other drop-ins do the opposite, providing honoraria for regularly scheduled shifts in the kitchen, but not for committee work.

A job that is not regularly scheduled, but which requires a significant time commitment (e.g. a half-day or a day) and relies on the participants' expertise, is often remunerated with an honorarium where resources permit – for example, if participants contribute to a hiring committee process or to a focus group.

Accounting Practices

If you would like to offer participants payment for their contributions to the drop-in, there are four important points to consider:

- 1. Method of payment.** Where possible, participants should be **paid with cheques rather than with cash**. This is not the simplest or easiest course of action, but it can have many positive benefits. First, it makes the money “official” and avoids the perception of the work as an under-the-table job. Second, it facilitates life skills development. Participants who receive cheques must have bank accounts in order to cash them. If they do not have a bank account, staff should help them open one. Having a bank account can be an important step in achieving stability.
- 2. Book-keeping.** It is important to discuss book-keeping issues with participants and advise them of their **obligation to report their income** to any social assistance program from which they may be receiving money (e.g. OW, ODSP). Whether the participant is on **social assistance** or not, they should be advised of their duty to report this income (however small) when they file their **taxes**.

If a participant commits to doing a task regularly and receives an honorarium each time, they are technically a staff member and must be given a **T4** (annual statement of earnings and deductions provided to the employee and to Revenue Canada by the employer). If participants do not have regular shifts, but accumulate a significant amount of honoraria over the course of a year, they should also be given a T4.

- 3. Source and stability of funding.** If you are planning to start offering participants honoraria for jobs that were previously volunteer positions, it is important to consider where the money will come from, how stable that source is, and what its limits are. For example, have the funders of particular projects built in honoraria? If you are applying for a grant for the funding, what will happen to the honoraria system when the funding runs out? If you are paying participants from petty cash, how will this be accounted for in your records? And how much money from petty cash can be realistically ear-marked for this purpose? If you are initiating a practice of distributing honoraria, you should be able to keep this system going for the foreseeable future. A related point is book-keeping – how will you record the honoraria paid out?

- 4. Exploitation.** Finally, exploitation of the participant by the drop-in should be carefully considered. If participants are putting in regular shifts, for example, in the kitchen, and are doing the job of a part-time cook but are being paid significantly less, this is a problem.

Role within the Drop-In

Volunteer and honoraria positions place participants in a potentially awkward or complicated position between the drop-in community and staff. They do not belong to either category fully, and they should undergo some kind of orientation or training session to facilitate their transition into their new role, responsibilities, and code of conduct.

The complications of belonging both to the participant community and having a position of authority within the drop-in are compounded when a participant is hired in a **staff position**. This appointment may be full-time or part-time; but the individual is a staff member in the sense that there is no differentiation between them and other staff members, in terms of contract, remuneration, and benefits; access to confidential information; use of office space, staff rooms, and any staff-exclusive areas; use of computers, fax machines, photocopiers, or other staff equipment; and so forth.

To become a staff member, a participant must gain some distance from the drop-in community. If a participant still needs the services and resources that the drop-in provides, they are in a potential conflict of interest as a staff member, since there may be a temptation to use their increased access (for example, to locked food cabinets, to confidential information, etc.) to their own benefit. Some drop-ins require that the participant cease receiving services from the drop-in within six months after their appointment; others require that the participant must have not received services from the drop-in for at least a year before they may join the staff.

Orientation and Training

Most drop-in workers have been trained on concepts such as confidentiality, setting boundaries, professionalism, and so forth. They leave their homes in the morning, come to the drop-in to work, then leave at night to return home. Participants, on the other hand, whether they are housed or not, use the drop-in as a kind of living room. It is a space where they come to socialize, to relax, and to get away from the stress of the streets or a troubled home situation.

For these reasons, care needs to be taken that as the role of a participant changes, their understanding of their role within the drop-in also changes. Two strategies for fostering participants' awareness of new professional obligations are:

1. Asking participants to sign a **code of conduct** agreement (see **Appendix 3E.1** for a sample participant-worker/volunteer code of conduct), and
2. Providing participants with **orientation and training**. Training should not be understood as a one-time session; care should also be taken to provide **ongoing and intensive job coaching** as needed.

On-going support is especially important for participants who take on positions where they are in charge of distributing resources, for example, clothing or food. There is significant potential here for conflict of interest, where a participant may be under pressure to favour their friends rather than making the resource equally available to all participants. One drop-in resolves this problem by assigning a staff member to work in the kitchen at the same time as a participant, so that if the participant is asked to make a special exception to the rules and give somebody food outside of designated mealtimes, they can refer the request to the staff member. It is a good practice as well to have very clear rules for tasks that participants perform, so that when these types of requests occur, they can let other participants know that it is not their decision to make.

The supervisor of the newly hired participant should ensure that the participant receives appropriate training in the particular duties of the job, and a general orientation to their position that includes:

- A discussion about the need to maintain **confidentiality** and what that entails. The participant staff, like all staff and volunteers, should be asked to sign a statement that promises confidentiality (see **Appendix 3E.1**).
- A review of the main organizational **policies and guiding principles**, including:⁸
 - The drop-in's Mission Statement,
 - Harassment and Discrimination Complaints Policy,
 - Code of Conduct and Workplace Relationships Policy,
 - Human Resources policy manual,
 - Health and safety protocols,
 - Cultural competence principles, and
 - Policies concerning participants as staff.
- A discussion concerning the **boundaries between personal and professional obligations**, and the important difference between the role of a participant with specific friends in the group, and the role of a drop-in worker who must treat everyone equally (particularly if the worker's job is to distribute resources like clothing, TTC tokens, food, etc.).
- A discussion of **expectations of behaviour** while at work in the drop-in and potential impacts of behaviour while not at work (violence, alcohol or drug use, participation in illegal activity, and so forth). It is a good practice to ask the participant to sign a code of conduct agreement that indicates that they understand what is expected of them in their new role and that they have been familiarized with the drop-in's key policies (see **Appendix 3E.1**).
- If the participant has been hired into a paid position (whether the payment is an honorarium or a more substantial sum), they should be advised of their **obligation**

⁸ For sample policies and procedures in these areas, please refer to Section 4: Volunteer and Staffing Practices.

to report their income to any social assistance program they may be receiving money from and to Canada Revenue when they file their taxes.

- An overview of **emergency procedures** in the case of a fire, or other safety concern, including who to contact for support or assistance.
- A demonstration (where necessary) of **how to use drop-in equipment**, such as photocopiers, faxes, office telephones and computers, and a discussion of any guidelines regulating their use.
- Training in de-escalation techniques and **crisis intervention**.
- Any **job-shadowing** or on-the-job training necessary to familiarize the new staff with their duties.

Job Opportunities Outside of the Drop-In

Some participants may be hired through the drop-in to do work outside the drop-in. Some drop-ins have partnerships with stores and restaurants in the neighbourhood, or with the local BIA (Business Improvement Area), or with OCAB (Ontario Council of Alternative Businesses), an organization dedicated to creating employment opportunities for psychiatric consumer / survivors.⁹

The Toronto Enterprise Fund also supports a variety of “social purpose enterprises” – from a restaurant to an urban farm to a print shop to an artist studio to a landscaping company – that offer job opportunities to low-income or homeless people. Funding is provided for start-up and operating costs, training, staffing, materials, and facilities.¹⁰

ATTACHMENT:

- **Appendix 3E.1 – Sample Peer Worker / Volunteer Code of Conduct**

⁹ For further details and contact information, please see the Community Resource Connections of Toronto’s (CRCT) entry on OCAB: www.crct.org/choices/show.cfm?id=71.

¹⁰ Toronto Enterprise Fund, “About the Toronto Enterprise Fund,” n.d. Available at: www.torontoenterprisefund.ca/program.html.

Appendix 3E.1 Sample Peer Worker / Volunteer Code of Conduct

Source: Adapted from documents collected from TDIN drop-ins during the Good Practices Toolkit consultations, May-July 2006.

PEER WORKER / VOLUNTEER CODE OF CONDUCT

Primary Obligation

Our primary obligation is to maintain an environment that is welcoming and safe, and programs that are responsive to the needs and interests of all participants.

Limits to Professional Relationships

No peer worker or volunteer is to exploit the relationship with another participant for personal benefit, gain or gratification. Peer workers and volunteers have a responsibility to not exploit their position of power to benefit some participants more than others.

Confidential Information

Peer workers and volunteers will protect the confidentiality of all information acquired from or about participants, volunteers, staff, and [Drop-In Name].

Policies & Procedures

The policies and procedures of [Drop-In Name] are to be followed at all times.

Peer workers and volunteers take direction from their staff supervisor(s) at all times.

Peer workers and volunteers are expected to be on time and tell [Drop-In Name] if they can't make a shift.

I have read the above code of conduct and a staff person has discussed [Drop-In Name]'s main policies and procedures with me. I understand the above code of conduct and its associated policies and procedures, and I agree to abide by them.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Staff Witness: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____