

# ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

September 2016

# SSHA ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

## SUMMARY

### VISION

To increase and enhance engagement opportunities and support transformation to a more integrated and client-centred housing stability service system built on effective collaboration and partnerships

### DEFINITION

All of the ways that SSHA involves stakeholders in improving the housing stability service system. These stakeholders may include clients, shelter and homeless service providers, social and other affordable and supportive housing providers, private sector landlords, businesses and their associations, other community organizations, neighbours and the general public, the healthcare, corrections and youth care systems, City divisions and other orders of government.

### PRINCIPLES

**CONSISTENT**- Engage more regularly, and ensure that stakeholder input informs service changes and system planning processes

**INCLUSIVE**- Reflect the diversity of SSHA's clients and other stakeholders impacted by our work when selecting engagement participants, and involve stakeholders as deeply as possible in decision-making processes

**TRANSPARENT**- Be transparent about the engagement activity's goals, processes and scope, and report back about how participant input impacted the decisions made

**APPROPRIATE**- Tailor the design and implementation of an engagement activity to meet the project's specific needs

**SAFE**- Create safe engagement spaces and processes that promote thoughtful, honest information-sharing

### COMMITMENTS

To be a leader in the positive transformation of Toronto's housing stability service system by convening, informing and learning from those with critical insights and solutions

To apply the five principles of engagement articulated in this framework when planning and implementing engagement activities

To ensure that implementation of these principles results in improved engagement practice and more effective integration of stakeholder input into decision-making processes

To take a more broad and inclusive approach to identifying and engaging a project's key stakeholders

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Shelter, Support and Housing Administration's (SSHA) community engagement framework is intended to provide staff with guidance as they plan and implement client and community engagement activities, to provide community stakeholders with an understanding of our engagement commitments, and to provide a foundation on which to build policies and tools that address particular engagement issues and challenges. It was developed with the input of over 400 stakeholders, including SSHA staff, community agencies, housing providers and clients.

In addition to defining what SSHA means by "community engagement", this framework presents and describes five principles that we commit to following when engaging clients and community stakeholders: Consistent, Inclusive, Transparent, Appropriate and Safe. Together they frame an approach that supports the realization of engagement goals while emphasizing meaningful stakeholder participation.

The framework concludes with next steps for SSHA's engagement policy work. This work will strengthen client participation in decision-making processes, enhance relationships with stakeholders that are currently under-represented in our engagement practice, address the engagement training and support needs of SSHA staff, and support continuous improvement in our engagement performance.

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# INTRODUCTION

A key theme running through SSHA's 2014-2019 Housing Stability Service Plan is the important role that enhanced community engagement will play in transforming Toronto's housing stability service system. It describes a vision for a cultural shift in which we foster a more integrated and client-centred service system built on effective collaboration and partnerships.

In addition to defining what community engagement means in SSHA's specific context, this framework provides a set of engagement principles and presents some high-level planning considerations to help staff to begin translating those principles into practice.

This framework was informed by a literature review of engagement frameworks developed in comparable contexts, and by a stakeholder engagement process that included interviews with clients and SSHA managers, group consultation meetings with SSHA staff, and an online survey of community agencies. The themes that emerged most strongly from these sources are outlined below.

## Purpose

To effectively manage Toronto's complex housing stability service system, SSHA must regularly engage with clients, service providers, partners and others. This community engagement framework has been developed to help us to make informed and thoughtful choices as we

plan and implement engagement activities. Future phases of our engagement work will include the development of tools that support this framework's implementation.

It also speaks to stakeholders, providing them with an understanding of SSHA's engagement commitments and expectations. Finally, while it is not the framework's focus, it does also inform SSHA's engagement with our own staff.

## Public Service Context

The City of Toronto's mission statement speaks directly to community engagement. "The City strives to provide high quality and affordable services that respond to the needs of our communities..." and "Public participation is an integral part of the city's decision-making processes."

The City defines civic engagement as:

- All of the ways in which relationships are developed and supported between local government and the public (e.g. deliberative, advisory, advocate, collaborative)
- Includes the public in all of its forms (individual, collective and sectoral stakeholders) in local decision-making and the development of public policy, as well as providing the public with opportunities to learn about and participate in local government
- Includes purposeful, appropriate, formal and informal engagement methods (e.g. legislative, electoral, visioning, consultative, educational)

Our engagement framework was influenced by and is consistent with these City-wide policy statements, while reflecting the specific context in which SSHA operates.

## Service Planning Context

SSHA manages a complex housing stability service system, and we recognize that we do not have all the answers required to maximize its effectiveness. We deliver some services directly, but many are delivered by agencies and housing providers with expertise and insights about clients' needs and experiences, and about the service system's gaps and challenges. More effective client and community engagement is critical to supporting more effective collaboration with our service delivery partners, and improved client outcomes.

SSHA has made significant strides in demonstrating our commitment to engagement, in part by developing strong collaborative relationships with two community coalitions that have emerged in recent years. The Toronto Aboriginal Social Services Coalition (TASSC) and the Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness (TAEH) have been named SSHA's community reference groups for the purpose of housing stability service planning and implementation. We meet regularly to share information and discuss both immediate and longer-term service delivery and planning issues. This has not diminished our commitment to the continued engagement of well-established sector-specific bodies including the Immigrant and Refugee

Housing Committee, Rental Housing Advisory Committee and the Housing Help Network, or with the frontline staff-focused Housing and Homelessness Services Network.

## ENGAGEMENT POLICY TRENDS

A review of engagement frameworks, policies and strategies at the City of Toronto, other Canadian cities and provinces, a federal government department and several public sector organizations (see Appendix 2) found that a number of principles and practices are commonly applied. They include:

- A view of public service that frames government's role as emphasizing the facilitation of deep and consistent public involvement in issue identification, priority setting, solutions development and decision-making
- Adoption of the International Association for Public Participation's (IAP2) Spectrum of Public Participation (see Spectrum of Engagement, P4)
- Promoting inclusivity and transparency in all aspects of the engagement process
- Anchoring accountability for engagement performance to council and senior management, while naming the person or team responsible for the engagement policy's implementation
- Incorporating or developing tools that support excellence in undertaking engagement activities

# CONSULTATION SUMMARY

Consultations with clients, agencies, partners and SSHA staff highlighted several shared perspectives and priorities.

## More Engagement

The importance of SSHA engaging more frequently emerged as a consistent theme. While there was broad agreement that SSHA has already made progress here, it was seen as the beginning of an ongoing process.

## Decision-Making Transparency

A consensus emerged that too often consultation processes conclude without SSHA clearly articulating to the participants how their input influenced decisions, or how decisions were made. There is a clear desire to see this change, while it was also noted that SSHA needs to develop greater capacity to effectively and transparently convert client input into policy and program decisions.

## Service Plan

SSHA needs to better communicate its service plan goals, and the work being done to achieve them. Stakeholders want to know where they fit into the plan's implementation, and how they might be impacted by the results.

SSHA staff made the related point that their work, including client and community engagement, would be more effective if the

whole team developed a better understanding of the division's service plan and the policy and program changes being implemented. As an inter-connected system, changes made in one service area frequently impact others, and it is important that silos continue to fall to facilitate greater inter-unit communication, learning and collaboration. The general manager's staff town hall meetings were noted as being important information-sharing and discussion opportunities.

## More Effective Engagement

Numerous suggestions spoke to ways that SSHA's community engagement might be more effective. The most common included:

- Clients should be at the centre of policy and program decision-making processes
- Offer multiple engagement opportunities of different types to accommodate diverse stakeholder preferences, schedules and capacities
- Try to "walk in clients' shoes" to inform the creation of safe engagement spaces and processes that facilitate open participation without fear of criticism, discrimination or negative consequences
- Facilitate problem-solving opportunities that are more inclusive of and collaborative with clients, agencies and other community stakeholders by establishing, for example, client tables and working groups, and by more effectively involving frontline staff in these processes
- Share relevant information in appropriate forms and using plain language to help

participants make the most of the engagement opportunities, to enhance the relevance and value of stakeholder input, and to make engagement processes more transparent

### **Innovation**

Promoting innovation, supported by the identification, documentation and dissemination of best practices, is critical to the housing stability service system's improvement. Effective engagement that fosters collaboration in identifying issues and developing solutions will support best practice development.

### **Data**

Data required to track client trends is critical to informing service delivery and planning decisions, while SSHA's Shelter Management Information System (SMIS) requires enhancement and should be more consistently rolled out across the service system. It was particularly noted that SMIS should have more capacity to track and measure client outcomes.

## **SPECTRUM OF ENGAGEMENT**

IAP2 illustrates the concept that the degree to which decision-making influence or control is delegated to stakeholders is linked to the degree to which those stakeholders feel empowered to shape the institutions that impact their lives. The spectrum is presented here as SSHA's commitment to plan decision-making processes that are based as much as possible

on stakeholder input and involvement, while recognizing that the complex and legislated governance context in which we operate will often limit stakeholder influence.



## **DEFINING SSHA'S COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

The input and other data gathered and analyzed to develop this framework points to the need for SSHA to define community engagement broadly. The diversity found among our clients, partners, suppliers, programs and services, and the range of activities required to manage the housing stability service system, reinforce that need. We define community engagement as:

*All of the ways that SSHA involves stakeholders in improving the housing stability service system.*

*These stakeholders may include clients, shelter and homeless service providers, social and other affordable and supportive housing providers, private sector landlords, businesses and their associations, other community organizations, neighbours and the general public, the healthcare, corrections and youth care systems, City divisions and other orders of government.*



## PRINCIPLES

SSHA commits to being a leader in the positive transformation of Toronto's housing stability service system by convening, informing and learning from stakeholders with critical insights and solutions. We will live up to this commitment by putting the following five principles of effective engagement into practice.

### **Consistent**

Engage more regularly, and ensure that stakeholder input informs service changes and system planning processes

### **Inclusive**

Reflect the diversity of SSHA's clients and other stakeholders impacted by our work when selecting engagement participants, and involve stakeholders as deeply as possible in decision-making processes

### **Transparent**

Be transparent about the engagement activity's goals, processes and scope, and report back about how participant input impacted the decisions made

### **Appropriate**

Tailor the design and implementation of an engagement activity to meet the project's specific needs

### **Safe**

Create safe engagement spaces and processes that promote thoughtful, honest information-sharing

## PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE

SSHA commits to ensuring that implementation of these principles results in improved engagement practice and more effective integration of stakeholder input into decision-making. While achieving this will require supporting staff with new tools, training and guidance, some key basic expectations are noted here.

### **Consistent**

SSHA engages more regularly to ensure that stakeholders more consistently inform significant service planning and delivery decisions. We also strive to consistently and effectively apply the other four principles of engagement.

### **Inclusive**

SSHA seeks to engage all stakeholders significantly impacted by a project, and as reflected in our community engagement definition we commit to taking a broader view of who those stakeholder groups are. SSHA promotes inclusivity when engaging by:

- Ensuring that client groups systemically impacted by homelessness and housing instability, and the organizations that serve them, are considered when planning an engagement process. These include Indigenous peoples, people identifying as LGBTQ2S, women, seniors and older adults, youth and people with mental health and/or substance use issues. This is an important part of SSHA's advancing the City's commitment to promote equity and diversity

in its service planning and delivery processes (for more information please visit [www.toronto.ca/edhr](http://www.toronto.ca/edhr)).

- Providing honoraria to clients we engage to acknowledge the value of their input, and their economic vulnerability
- Making stakeholder involvement in decision-making processes as deep and meaningful as possible, consistent with the application of IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation
- Engaging regularly with TAEH and TASSC, with a focus on service planning and implementation
- When selecting stakeholders to include in an engagement process it's useful to consider:
  - Who the decisions are intended to impact
  - Who else is likely to be significantly impacted
  - Who is likely to be interested enough in the issue to participate

### **Transparent**

SSHA has a responsibility to make key engagement-related information available to stakeholders at the project's outset, including its purpose and goals, opportunities for engagement, questions that are and are not under consideration, roles that stakeholders will and will not play in decision-making, and anticipated project outcomes. It is important at a project's conclusion that SSHA tell stakeholders how their input informed key decisions.

### **Appropriate**

Each engagement process should be planned with the project's specific needs and goals in

mind. Considering the following factors will support success:

- The project's data needs
- Whether relevant engagement data already exists
- Roles for subject matter experts
- Background information that participants might need to support their participation
- The value of leveraging the networks, access to clients and tenants, and other resources that community agencies can offer
- Anticipated stakeholder interest in the issues being addressed, and how greater interest might be generated
- Appropriate notice periods for the planned engagement activities
- Timing and order of engagement activities to best support decision-making
- Optimal engagement locations and spaces
- Potential roles for the use of technology (eg. online surveys, social media)
- Potential stakeholder participation barriers, including language and literacy skills, physical or cognitive disabilities and childcare needs, and how to address them
- The cultural preferences of stakeholder groups likely to participate

### **Safe**

SSHA serves a vulnerable population, so it is important to create engagement environments in which people feel safe. Everyone should feel that they can participate without fear of criticism, discrimination or negative consequences. Some engagement planning considerations include:

- Group size, as larger groups can be intimidating due to fear of judgement or conflict
- Group composition, as some discussions may be most comfortably held with people sharing similar backgrounds and circumstances
- Participant preferences for loosely or tightly structured activities
- The importance of offering anonymous input opportunities
- The facilitator's profile, which may include skill at managing contentious discussions, lived experience of using SSHA services, being a respected community leader or other attributes
- Getting agreement from participants on ways they will create a safe engagement space, for example by being respectful of others and keeping an open mind

## CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

SSHA's five-year Housing Stability Service Plan envisions a service system that more effectively responds to the needs of its users, in part by more frequently and deeply engaging them and the agencies that serve them in key program and service decisions. This framework supports that shift by broadly defining SSHA's community engagement and who it involves, and by presenting five core principles that our practice should consistently reflect. SSHA staff will use this framework, and related tools to be developed, when planning engagement

activities. Partners and clients will use it to better understand our work and processes, and where they fit into them.

Next steps in our engagement work include:

1. Promoting consistent application of the engagement principles by developing a policy that provides clear direction to staff regarding when and how SSHA will engage clients to inform our work, and how the resulting data will be managed and used
2. Developing supports and resources, led by SSHA's Strategic Policy and Service Planning team, to provide coordination, training and support to staff who are planning and implementing engagement activities
3. Identifying stakeholders who may be underrepresented in SSHA's current engagement practice, and developing a strategy to address these gaps
4. Developing an evaluation plan that supports continuous improvement in SSHA's engagement practice

As these next steps are completed the engagement framework itself will be reviewed and updated to ensure that it responds to changing circumstances within SSHA and in the community.

## APPENDIX 1: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This framework is the product of many voices and numerous generous contributions of time and thought. Formal contributions include:

### **47 clients interviewed at the following sites:**

Adelaide Resource Centre for Women  
Family Residence  
Seaton House  
Streets to Homes Assessment and Referral Centre  
Women's Residence

### **130 agency representatives who completed the anonymous community survey**

#### **Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness**

Sharon Allen-Elliot, Second Base Youth Shelter  
Mark Aston, Fred Victor  
Keith Hambly, Fife House  
Leslie McDonald, Habitat Services  
Louise Moody, Toronto Christian Resource Centre  
Bruno Scorsone, Good Neighbours Club  
Mark Shapiro, Habitat Services/The Dream Team  
Jean Stevenson, Madison Community Services

#### **Toronto Aboriginal Social Services Coalition**

Larry Frost (President), Native Canadian Centre of Toronto  
Steve Teekens (Vice-President), Native Men's Residence  
Andrea Chrisjohn (Treasurer), Toronto Council

Fire Native Cultural Centre  
Frances Sanderson (Secretary), Nishnawbe Homes  
Art Zoccole, 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations  
Johnathan Rudin, Aboriginal Legal Services of Toronto  
Christa BigCanoe, Aboriginal Legal Services of Toronto  
Nancy Martin, Miziwe Biik Aboriginal Employment and Training  
Kenn Richard, Native Child and Family Services Toronto  
Sarah Midanik, Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto

### **The more than 200 SSHA frontline and management staff who took part in consultation meetings and interviews at the following sites:**

Birkdale Residence  
Family Residence  
Fort York Residence  
Metro Hall  
Robertson House  
Seaton House  
Streets to Homes Assessment and Referral Centre  
Social Housing Unit  
Streets to Homes

#### **SSHA Staff Working Group**

Patricia Anderson, Partnership and Community Outreach  
Mary-Anne Bédard, Housing Stability Policy and Strategic Investments  
Deirdre Boyle, Hostel Services

Sheila Coad, Hostel Services  
Elaine Ebach, Housing Stability Policy and Strategic Investments  
Emily Gaus, General Manager's Office  
Geoff Gillard, Housing Stability Policy and Strategic Investments  
Sue Goodfellow, Streets to Homes  
Claude Kent, Program Support  
Leif Lahtinen, Social Housing Unit  
Carla O'Brien, Hostel Services  
Jaicyea Smith, Housing Stability Policy and Strategic Investments  
Joseph Stalteri, Housing Stability Policy and Strategic Investments  
Tammy Waugh-Stewart, Housing Stability Policy and Strategic Investments

## **APPENDIX 2: JURISDICTIONAL REVIEW**

The review focused primarily on engagement documents specific to public sector contexts.

### **City of Toronto**

City Planning, Growing Conversations- Making Conversations Work toolkit  
Parks, Forestry and Recreation, Community Engagement Framework  
Children's Services, Child and Family Network Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, Innovators' Council: Engaging People with Experience of Homelessness Event, Nov. 26, 2007  
Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, Report from the Facilitator: Cornerstone Place Shelter Community Working Group

City Manager's Office, Planning for Civic Engagement (Course Materials)

### **Canadian Cities**

City of Vancouver, Engaged City Task Force Report  
City of Calgary, Engage Framework and Tools  
City of Winnipeg, Public Engagement Office (Website)  
City of Guelph, Community Engagement Framework  
Halifax Regional Municipality, Community Engagement Strategy

### **Province of Ontario**

Ministry of Labour, Engagement Framework

### **Federal Government**

Public Health Agency of Canada, Public Involvement Framework: Involving the Public in Public Health Decision-Making

### **Non-Governmental Public Sector Institutions**

Central East Local Health Integration Network, A Framework for Community Engagement and Local Health Planning  
Fraser Health, Community Engagement Framework

The following documents do not speak to specific organizational or jurisdictional contexts but were reviewed because they address current trends in public and community engagement.

## **Canadian**

York University Human Participants Review  
Committee, Guidelines for Conducting Research  
with People Who Are Homeless

Susan Delacourt and Don Lenihan (published  
in Options Politiques, Decembre 2010-Janvier  
2011), The Consumer Model of Politics- A Bad  
Idea

## **International**

Community Places Scotland, Community  
Planning Toolkit  
Involve (UK, on behalf of the Local Government  
Improvement and Development's Healthy  
Communities Programme), Not Another  
Consultation! Making Community Engagement  
Informal and Fun

Robert B. Denhart and Janet Vinzant Denhart  
(published in the Public Administration Review,  
Nov/Dec 2000), The New Public Service:  
Serving Rather than Steering

