

A WAY HOME: YOUTH HOMELESSNESS COMMUNITY PLANNING TOOLKIT



*Developed with support from
the Government of Ontario.*

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Melanie Redman, A Way Home, Toronto

Mary-Jane McKitterick, A Way Home, Toronto

Stephen Gaetz, Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, Toronto

Dave French, Alberta Human Services, Edmonton

Sheldon Pollett, Choices for Youth, St. John's

Giri Puligandlia, Homeward Trust, Edmonton

Kim Wirth, Boys & Girls Clubs of Calgary, Calgary

Kelly Holmes, Ray, Winnipeg

Naomi Leadbeater, Brandon Neighbourhood Renewal Association, Brandon, Manitoba

Debbie Bentley-Lauzon, Wyndham House, Guelph

Greg Bishop, Saint John Human Development Council, Saint John

Iris Hamlyn, Sidedoor, Yellowknife

Albert McLeod, Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, Winnipeg

Christina Maes Nino, Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, Winnipeg

Mike Bulthuis, Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa, Ottawa

Deborah Hierlihy, Oriole Research & Design Inc.

GETTING READY

INTRODUCTION

To support the enhanced capacity to respond to youth homelessness in communities across Canada, A Way Home has developed this toolkit to help communities create plans to prevent, reduce and end homelessness among young people.

Considerable efforts are underway to effectively address youth homelessness in Canada. These efforts have culminated in the creation of [A Way Home](#) – a national coalition focused on mobilizing communities and all levels of government to take action on youth homelessness, locally and at systems level. A Way Home is committed to supporting communities to implement evidence-based solutions, including the development of plans to prevent, reduce and end youth homelessness. Such plans act as a stimulus for local and systemic change as part of a collective action to combat youth homelessness.

Ending youth homelessness involves a number of critical elements and actions. These include the implementation of innovative programs and housing solutions tailored for the specific needs of young people and structural changes within the operations of homeless-serving systems. The transformation of public systems, including child welfare, education, mental health, income supports and criminal justice and their enhanced integration, which can facilitate broad systems of care, is essential.

Dynamics unique to each community must be accounted for in local efforts and plans to end youth homelessness. For instance, the overrepresentation of particular demographics in the local homeless population, such as Indigenous youth, makes a difference in the design of interventions. Further, addressing the issue in rural or urban settings considerably impacts system planning approaches and resources needed.



A Way Home is committed to supporting communities to advance evidence-based and strategic solutions, including the development of plans to prevent, reduce and end youth homelessness.

THIS TOOLKIT:

- » Outlines the key elements of a systems approach to prevent, reduce and end youth homelessness using best and promising practices;
- » Provides guidance to local communities on a step-by-step approach to develop plans that advance solutions to end youth homelessness;
- » Highlights Canadian examples of innovation and locally developed resources to enhance knowledge exchange to advance the national movement to end youth homelessness;
- » Is not intended to reinvent the wheel; where resources are readily available it points the reader to these as appropriate and draws on existing research and materials throughout.

The toolkit is a resource for organizations and/or individuals considering or leading community efforts to develop strategic responses to youth homelessness. Most likely, you are working in or with non-profit, government, lived experience and private sector stakeholders to explore your next steps. This toolkit will help you map out what needs to be done to get you started, cross the finish line and beyond.

THE TOOLKIT IS ORGANIZED INTO FOUR MAIN SECTIONS:

1

GETTING READY

- » Background on this toolkit
- » Introduction to youth homelessness and youth plans
- » Essential elements of youth plans

2

GETTING STARTED

- » Collective Impact and ending youth homelessness
- » Determining community readiness
- » Developing your backbone infrastructure and workplan

3

GETTING GOING

- » Research, needs assessment, and data analysis
- » Consultation approach
- » Working with key stakeholders, including youth, government, etc

4

GETTING IT DONE

- » Writing the plan
- » Determining costs and performance measures
- » Implementation considerations

TOOLKIT DEVELOPMENT

The toolkit development process involved research and key stakeholder consultation to collect and review existing promising practices from a variety of communities across Canada at various stages of youth plan development and implementation. The research also draws on U.S., U.K. and Australian best practices literature to complement the Canadian findings.

Communities of different sizes are highlighted to ensure the toolkit's relevance across Canada; provincial approaches are also included. Key stakeholders with experience developing and/or implementing youth plans provided input into the final toolkit, along with materials that can be used as resources. Note that one of these plans (Alberta) is provincial in scope; though the primary focus of this toolkit is on local community plans it has applicability to provincial/territorial plans as well.



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Table 1: Youth Plans Across Canada and the U.S.

COMMUNITY	STAGE
Kingston, ON	Implementation
Kamloops, BC	Implementation
Seattle, U.S.	Implementation
Edmonton, AB	Implementation
Calgary, AB	Development after initial implementation
Cochrane, AB	Implementation
Wellington County, ON	Development
Saint John, NB	Development
St. John's, NL	Pre-development
Brandon, MB	Development
Yellowknife, NWT	Development
Winnipeg, MB	Development
Alberta	Implementation
Ottawa, ON	Pre-development

AN INDIGENOUS MODULE

We must acknowledge the experience of Indigenous people in Canada if we are to truly end youth homelessness, particularly in light of their consistent overrepresentation in vulnerable populations. Indigenous homelessness is notably different; the structural and systemic determinants associated with colonialism, the Indian Act, treaty making, residential schools and the Sixties Scoop have resulted in considerable discriminatory impacts that are in fact intergenerational (Plan to End Aboriginal Homelessness in Calgary, p. 1).

It is further important to highlight that being homeless can be experienced from diverse perspectives: cultural, spiritual or emotional. It is more than a loss of housing. The impact of colonization, residential schooling, intergenerational trauma, ongoing discrimination and racism in Canadian society has contributed to the ongoing systematic marginalization of Indigenous people, including Indigenous youth (Calgary's Updated Plan to End Homelessness, p. 23).

Recognizing these critical issues, A Way Home is working to complement this toolkit with a more robust Indigenous module, which includes resources specific to Indigenous youth homelessness.



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ABOUT A WAY HOME

A Way Home is a national coalition dedicated to preventing, reducing and ending youth homelessness in Canada. Through a 'collective impact' framework we inspire and enable communities and all levels of government to organize, plan and implement strategies to address youth homelessness in a coordinated, measurable and impactful way. By strengthening families and building the assets and resilience of youth, we can help young people avoid homelessness and make a healthy transition to adulthood.

As a coalition, we draw on the strengths of leading national organizations such as Raising the Roof, the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH), The Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, Egale Canada and the National Learning Community on Youth Homelessness. Each activity within the constellation allows for cross-sectoral partnership and the opportunity to get the 'unusual suspects' at the table. The work of A Way Home is achieved by building on existing strengths, community engagement and innovation. The coalition is dedicated to building a strong and emerging commitment, across the country, to end youth homelessness and encourage alignment of the strategies and resources of leading players seeking to address homelessness in Canada.

A Way Home offers communities across Canada a range of tools and strategies to support the national movement to end youth homelessness, including:

- » Collective impact, 'theory of change,' implementation support and opportunities for implementation grants delivered in partnership with the McConnell Foundation's Youth Collective Impact Initiatives;
- » Assistance to local communities and ongoing support for coordinators and backbone functions;
- » Program model resources – toolkits and technical support for adapting and implementing effective program models;
- » Increased connection to government systems to support community-driven responses.

Coalition members collaborate to provide a range of resources and technical supports to assist communities to plan and implement strategies to prevent, reduce and end youth homelessness and to adapt effective program models and interventions to support these plans. Technical supports include tools, toolkits, webinars, example plans and implementation strategies.

For more information on A Way Home's work and supports, see www.awayhome.ca.

A PRIMER ON YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

This toolkit is not intended to replace resources that already exist; rather, it is designed to provide an overview of the essentials involved in developing a plan to end youth homelessness. As a starting point, we will outline some basics on youth homelessness, along with approaches to address it. This will set the context for further guidance on developing a youth plan.

WHAT IS YOUTH HOMELESSNESS?

Considerable work has been done on defining youth homelessness consistently at a national level. The national definition of youth homelessness advanced by the COH is as follows:

“Youth homelessness” refers to the situation and experience of young people between the ages of 13 and 24 who are living independently of parents and/or caregivers, but do not have the means or ability to acquire a stable, safe or consistent residence.

Youth homelessness is a complex social issue because as a society we have failed to provide young people and their families with the necessary and adequate supports that will enable them to move forward with their lives in a safe and planned way. In addition to experiencing economic deprivation and a lack of secure housing, many young people who are homeless lack the personal experience of living independently and at the same time may be in the throes of significant developmental (social, physical, emotional and cognitive) changes. As a result, they may not have the resources, resilience, education, social supports or life skills necessary to foster a safe and nurturing transition to adulthood and independence. Few young people choose to be homeless, nor wish to be defined by their homelessness, and the experience is generally negative and stressful.

Youth homelessness is the denial of basic human rights and once identified as such, it must be remedied. All young people have the right to the essentials of life, including adequate housing, food, safety, education and justice.

We strongly urge communities to consider adopting the national [definition of youth homelessness](#) to ensure consistency across Canada.

HOW MANY YOUTH EXPERIENCE HOMELESSNESS?

Though no single definitive source on youth homelessness prevalence exists at this time, the [State of Homelessness in Canada 2013](#) report estimates that at least 35,000 young people experience homelessness annually – or 6,000 youth on any given night.

More reliable information on the prevalence and characteristics of homeless youth will emerge thanks to major research efforts underway, including:

- » [National Point-in-Time Homeless Counts](#) – to be undertaken in 2016 across Canadian communities using standard methods
- » [National Youth Homelessness Survey](#) – results from across Canadian communities expected for release in 2016 outlining detailed analysis of characteristics and needs of youth experiencing homelessness.



Youth experience homelessness in distinct ways; they are often less visible on the street and more likely to 'couch surf.'

WHY IS YOUTH HOMELESSNESS DISTINCT?

Research has consistently shown that the causes and impacts of youth homelessness are distinct from adult homelessness, thus the plans and interventions we use must be correspondingly distinct and tailored to youth. Youth experience homelessness in distinct ways; they are often less visible on the street and more likely to 'couch surf.' This is particularly common in smaller, rural and remote communities, where homelessness is generally less visible. Youth are often reported to be homeless as a result of abuse in the home, which leads to notable movement and transience as they seek a safe place to live outside of their familial home.

WHY YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IS DIFFERENT

Plan to End Youth Homelessness in Calgary (2011):

- » Youth are in the process of developing physically, socially, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually
- » Youth homelessness stems in large part from problems or conflict in families and homes
- » Youth under the age of majority have distinct legal entitlements and restrictions
- » Many youth entering homelessness are leaving lives that were previously governed by adult caregivers
- » Youth are served by a distinct infrastructure involving separate systems of justice, education, health and child protection/welfare
- » Many youth enter homelessness with little or no work experience,
- » Many youth are forced to abandon their education because of homelessness
- » Homeless youth – and many youth in general – experience high levels of criminal victimization

Alberta Plan to Prevent and Reduce Youth Homelessness (2015):

- » Youth are in the process of transitioning toward adulthood and may not have acquired personal, social and life skills that make independent living possible
- » Youth tend to seek, access and respond to services and supports differently than other homeless individuals
- » They often avoid the homeless-serving system out of fear of authorities
- » Youth have particularly challenging issues and require targeted responses to be rehoused
- » For youth under the age of 18, the situation is complicated by the obligation of families and/or the government to care for them and provide for their basic needs
- » For youth involved with the Child Intervention System, these issues are further magnified if healthy transitions are not prioritized

Youth are extremely vulnerable because they are at an early life stage, still developing cognitively, physically, emotionally and socially. For many young people who experience homelessness, these challenges are often complicated by the fact that they are simultaneously dealing with life-altering events such as recent trauma and/or violence. Youth homelessness exists within a broad and complex spectrum of circumstances. Youth experiencing homelessness are precariously housed – couch surfing, staying in youth and adult shelters or sleeping rough and are often discharged into homelessness from public institutions and systems, including child intervention and foster care.



LGBTQ2S youth experience the additional layer of challenges faced by those with sexual orientations and gender identities that are different from the mainstream.

In some communities, Indigenous, LGBTQ2S, immigrant and visible minority youth are overrepresented. With respect to Indigenous youth, the interrelated issues of poverty, domestic, violence, trauma and abuse and ongoing discrimination and lack of cultural connections further exacerbate the experience of housing stress.

Youth who identify as LGBTQ2S make up 25–40% of the youth homeless population, compared to only 5–10% of the general population. LGBTQ2S youth experience the additional layer of challenges faced by those with sexual orientations and gender identities that are different from the mainstream. LGBTQ2S youth are over-represented among the population experiencing homelessness as a result of homophobia and transphobia in the home and across the service and housing systems. This in turn impacts the development of responses and interventions.

As the [Homeless Hub](#) notes, youth often lack the experience and skills necessary to live independently, particularly those under the age of majority. Youth's physical, mental, social and emotional development impacts their needs and the type of interventions best suited to house and support them further. One cannot assume the needs of a 13 year old are equivalent to those of a 24 year old, for instance.

The causes of youth homelessness are distinct and primarily underlined by family conflict; many are fleeing abuse or leaving the care of child welfare services. Homelessness for youth goes beyond a loss of stable housing: it is the loss of a home in which they are embedded in relations of dependence. This creates an interruption and potential rupture in social relations with parents and caregivers, family members, friends, neighbours and community. A high percentage of homeless youth were also previously in the care of child protection services, making system responses a priority in any efforts to end youth homelessness.



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PLANS TO END YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

In [Coming of Age: Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada](#), Dr. Stephen Gaetz argues that ending youth homelessness is not simply assuming that youth will never need emergency services again, but rather that we develop strategies to resolve a broad social problem that traps young people in an ongoing state of homelessness. When young people come to depend on emergency services without access to permanent and age-appropriate housing and necessary supports, this leads to declining health and well-being and most certainly to an uncertain future. An alternative is to look at approaches that emphasize prevention and/or interventions that lead to appropriate housing options with supports (2014: 2).



When young people come to depend on emergency services without access to permanent and age-appropriate housing and necessary supports, this leads to declining health and well-being and most certainly to an uncertain future.

It's important to highlight that the main shift advanced by a plan to end youth homelessness refocuses our efforts on prevention as opposed to emergency supports. This represents a new way of thinking about youth homelessness, which may challenge the prevailing norm in a community. Rather than 'managing' homelessness through emergency services, we are proposing a concerted focus on prevention.

A strong prevention approach requires a coordinated and strategic systems approach and as a consequence, must engage, include and mandate action from mainstream systems and departments of government as well as the homeless-serving sector. No solution to end homelessness can or should depend wholly on the efforts of those in the homeless-serving sector.

Preventing youth homelessness, then, means doing things differently.

WHAT IS YOUTH HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION?

1

PRIMARY PREVENTION:

Working upstream to prevent new instances of homelessness through identifying and reducing risks that may increase the likelihood that individuals and families become homeless. Primary prevention strategies can be aimed at individuals, families or whole communities. Primary homeless prevention includes the following:

- a) **Broad, population-based approaches** intended to address risk factors well before they have an impact. This includes poverty reduction, ensuring an adequate supply of affordable housing, addressing interpersonal violence and anti-discrimination work.
- b) **Systems-based prevention** to stem the flow of individuals and families leaving institutional care and falling into homelessness. This includes a policy framework and discharge planning and supports targeting individuals leaving institutional settings such as child protection, corrections and mental health inpatient facilities.
- c) **Targeted interventions** aimed at sub-populations that are at higher risk of homelessness. These strategies are intended to address risk factors such as income precariousness, family conflict and violence, mental health or addictions, criminal involvement or dropping out of school, for instance. Interventions are targeted to those broadly at risk (but not necessarily imminently at risk) and can include school-based early intervention programs, Family First supports, conflict mediation, etc. that are usually delivered in the community.

2

SECONDARY PREVENTION:

Early intervention strategies when young people have recently become homeless or are at imminent risk. These early intervention strategies seek to keep young people 'in place' in their communities where they have natural supports, divert them from emergency shelters and mainstream homelessness services, help them stay in school and work with their families so that young people can safely remain/return home or move into their own accommodation in a safe and planned way.

Secondary prevention strategies typically require systems integration and coordination (coordinated intake, shared information management systems) as well as specific case management interventions designed to avoid the experience of homelessness and/or reduce the time spent homeless. In other words, the goal here is not to have young people avoid homelessness on their own ('bootstrap' their way up), but rather shore up their natural supports in the community to help them avoid entering and becoming entrenched in the homelessness 'system.' Emergency services and supports (shelters, day programs, soup kitchens, etc.) are important community resources and can be considered preventive (early intervention) if they proactively assist young people through case management to return home, address family conflict or move out of homelessness as quickly as possible.

3

TERTIARY PREVENTION:

Ensuring that young people who have experienced homelessness exit that situation as quickly as possible and do not return to homelessness. Housing First for Youth strategies are designed to provide stability, reduce the risk of future homelessness and help ensure a safe and nurturing transition to adulthood and independence.

For more on prevention see <http://homelesshub.ca/solutions/prevention>.

ELEMENTS OF YOUTH PLANS

A quick internet search will reveal a number of plans to end youth homelessness, several of which are from Canadian communities. Though research on successful youth plans does not exist at this time, we do know the characteristics of solid community planning apply to youth plans as well. Look to the [A Way Home](#) website to see the various youth plans currently published.

AN EFFECTIVE YOUTH PLAN:

- » Includes a statement of **guiding principles** and **core values**,
- » **Engages the necessary players** from the community, all levels of government and the non-profit and private sectors to work toward real reductions in homelessness
- » Depends on **collaboration** among a wide range of stakeholders including funders, governments, service providers (mainstream as well as homeless-serving organizations) and those affected by homelessness
- » Articulates **necessary actions** at the service, local and government levels
- » **Involves young people** in planning, delivery and evaluation
- » Has **clearly articulated** goals and objectives, timelines, responsibilities, benchmarks and measurable targets
- » Outlines the **resources** needed for implementation, including projected budgets and cost-savings
- » Provides direction on **implementation actions and governance options** to move actions forward
- » Leads to **real changes** in young people's lives in implementation
- » Is a '**living plan**' renewed on an ongoing basis to ensure relevance and progress is maintained

WHAT A PLAN CAN & CANNOT DO

It bears emphasizing that a plan will NOT in and of itself end youth homelessness. A plan should serve three purposes:

1

Validate good work that is occurring in response to this issue

2

Set clear direction for the necessary system changes and shifts required

3

Grant permission to move forward, innovate and create

Specifically, a plan can kick-start a systems response in your community that can transform how services are delivered and coordinated. A plan can be a vehicle for system reform as well, particularly given the role of child intervention, justice and health in the lives of youth.

It is also important to have the foresight to consider implementation from the start. Aligning the youth plan to other initiatives underway, such as general homelessness strategies, child intervention system reform efforts, poverty reduction strategies, etc. can ensure these opportunities are both leveraged and reinforced by the youth plan.

The plan can be a vehicle for action; as such, the planning process can be conceived as an intentional relationship and trust-building effort to support eventual implementation. Those leading the development of plans should keep an eye on how the process can align people and resources for implementation. This toolkit provides guidance on ensuring you are setting the right conditions to support plan implementation. Without a vigilant eye on implementation from the start, the best-laid plans remain just plans.



Effectively, without a vigilant eye on implementation from the start, the best laid plans remain just plans.

Those leading planning should manage expectations of stakeholders around what a plan can actually achieve. This means being very clear from the start on what the scope of the youth plan is and, importantly, is not. Ensuring that stakeholders are clear on the objectives of the planning process and can refer back to these throughout will be essential to staying on track.

Despite our best efforts however, barriers will emerge throughout this process. You are effectively competing for limited resources – and if youth win, it can be seen that other groups may have lost. How do we communicate and legitimize the focus on youth in a scarcity context?

In the process of developing a plan, you may:

- » Fail to include an important stakeholder in your consultations
- » Misinterpret the research
- » Not have data necessary for critical analyses
- » Have inadequate resources to develop and/or implement the plan
- » Fail to effectively engage a key public system partner
- » Lack a visible champion in community
- » Secure minimal support from the broader community
- » Experience changes in political leadership
- » All of the above

These experiences are not unusual; in fact, you should expect them. Building a supportive planning team and coordinating infrastructure, maintaining open lines of communication with stakeholders and having a strong foundation for the work based on a common vision and shared values will go a long way toward weathering such challenges.

DO YOU NEED TO HAVE A SPECIFIC PLAN TO END YOUTH HOMELESSNESS?

As noted, the needs of youth are distinct and there is evidence of improved impact when an explicit focus on age-appropriate housing and supports is in place. However, that does not always require a youth plan per se. Your community may already have measures underway to address youth homelessness as part of broader homelessness strategies. Arguably, those strategies are working well – or not.

A youth plan is very useful in particular circumstances such as:

- » There is interest in youth homelessness, but not necessarily knowledge of the specific actions needed to address it
- » Willingness to shift the homeless response from managing the crisis (through emergency services) to a prevention focus that includes moving young people out of homelessness rapidly
- » The community has the infrastructure and resources to take on the coordination and development of a youth-specific strategy
- » The community has a means of advancing implementation of a youth plan and monitoring progress
- » There is already significant movement on youth homelessness, which could benefit from strategic coordination to maximize impact
- » Political changes may be underway which could create a structural opening to advance system reform and funding asks to support an end to youth homelessness
- » An infusion of resources (government, private, etc.) has been introduced that could be molded to advance ending youth homelessness goals if community leadership coalesced

It is important to be mindful of your community's readiness and local context when selecting your course of action. A plan may even derail community efforts if undertaken without proper consultation and buy-in from critical stakeholders, if development is lacking a solid evidence base and/or there is no foresight to implementation.

In certain cases, you may find that the youth planning effort may be challenged by other initiatives underway – particularly those focused on ending chronic and episodic homelessness. These initiatives should not work at odds with one another. Communities and governments can have more than one priority in their efforts to address homelessness.

THE YOUTH PLAN AS COLLECTIVE IMPACT

‘Collective impact’ is a useful framework to help you consider the key facets of building a movement to end youth homelessness. However, building a youth plan is only one step in a collective impact initiative; collective impact is a much more complex, long-term cross-sectoral mobilization effort to bring about social change. The goal of collective impact in this instance is to end youth homelessness. A youth plan can certainly contribute to such an effort, but it will not in and of itself bring about the desired social change.

Collective impact provides the key conditions for success you want to consider in the plan development process. In many ways, the ultimate success of a planning effort is not the plan itself, but the collective stakeholders’ capacity to deliver on its articulated common goals, towards ending youth homelessness. This is an important consideration for communities embarking on this journey: your guidepost is NOT the plan itself, it is your ability to leverage the plan development – educating others and consolidating multiple policy levers and implementation processes to make a real impact on youth homelessness. If a plan is a hindrance to this ultimate objective, then it may not be the right means of engendering the desired change in your community.

Developing a ‘theory of change’ is useful at this stage and can be revisited throughout your planning process, to clarify the impact sought and how it will be achieved. The McConnell Foundation’s Innoweave provides an excellent exercise to develop your theory of change. Work through the short exercise with the planning group and consider introducing it as part of your consultation process.



In many ways, the ultimate success of a planning effort is not the plan itself, but the collective stakeholders’ capacity to deliver on its articulated common goals and ultimately end youth homelessness.

THEORY OF CHANGE

Target time for completion: 45 Minutes

MISSION	INTENDED IMPACT	
1. What problem are you trying to solve, or change do you aspire to see? <i>Identify the change you hope to see as a result of your activities.</i>	2. Who are your target beneficiaries? <i>Be specific (e.g. demographics, key stakeholders, geography.)</i>	3. What are the benefits you wish to create for them? <i>Identify the impact you would like to have on your beneficiaries.</i>
Assumptions	Assumptions	Assumptions

Table 2: Innoweave Theory of Change Exercise

www.innoweave.ca

THEORY OF CHANGE				
4. What changes are needed, or barriers that must be overcome, to achieve your impact? <i>Changes should be empirically plausible and evidence-based.</i>	5. Activity A <i>What you will do to make change.</i>	6. Outcome A <i>Desired outcome as a result of activity, to which you hold yourself accountable.</i>	7. Evidence A Evidence of the desired outcome.	Statement <i>Concise statement of your Theory of Change.</i>
	5. Activity B	6. Outcome B	7. Evidence B	
	5. Activity C	6, Outcome C	7. Evidence C	
Assumptions	Resources required for these activities			Context <i>External factors that impact your Theory of Change.</i>

What is Collective Impact?

As described by FSG, collective impact is the commitment of a group of actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a complex social problem.

In order to create lasting solutions to social problems on a large scale, organizations – including those in government, civil society and the business sector – need to coordinate their efforts and work together around a clearly defined goal.

Collective impact is a significant shift from the social sector's current paradigm of 'isolated impact,' because the underlying premise of collective impact is that no single organization can create large-scale, lasting social change alone. There is no 'silver bullet' solution to systemic social problems and these problems cannot be solved by simply scaling or replicating one organization or program. Strong organizations are necessary but not sufficient for large-scale social change.

Not all social problems are suited for collective impact solutions. Collective impact is best employed for problems that are complex and systemic rather than technical in nature. Collective impact initiatives are currently being employed to address a wide variety of issues around the world, including education, healthcare, homelessness, the environment and community development. Many of these initiatives are already showing concrete results, reinforcing the promise of collective impact in solving complex social problems.

CONDITIONS FOR COLLECTIVE IMPACT SUCCESS

FIVE CONDITIONS FOR COLLECTIVE IMPACT

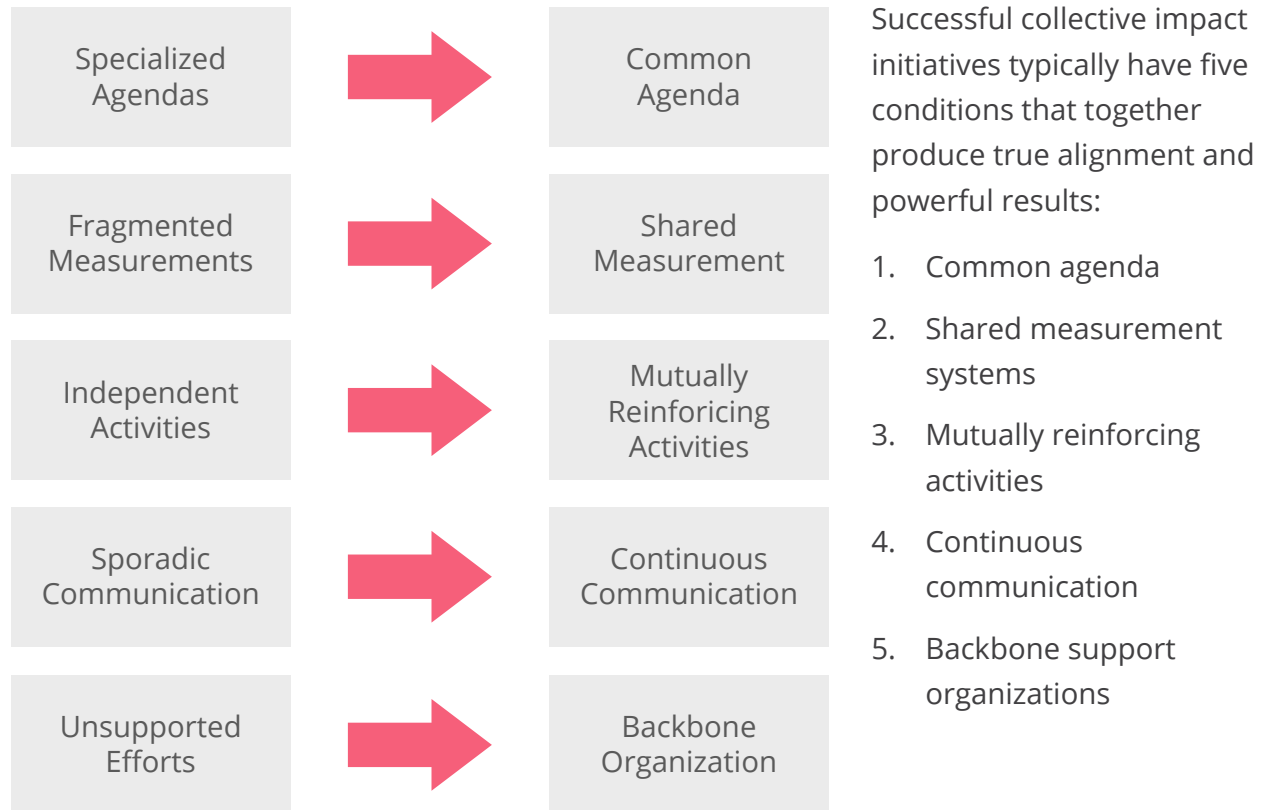


Figure 1: Five Conditions for Collective Impact

These conditions for success provide a useful roadmap for your plan development process. It is wise to build your approach in such a way that it creates the conditions for success of the movement to end youth homelessness, rather than strictly looking at the production of a plan as your only objective.

Table 3: *Collective Impact Success Factors & Youth Plans*

KEY CONDITIONS FOR COLLECTIVE IMPACT SUCCESS	RELEVANCE TO YOUTH PLAN
<p>Common Agenda:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » All participants to have a shared vision for change » Common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions » Differences discussed and resolved » Participants agree on the primary goals for the collective impact initiative as a whole » Funders play an important role in getting organizations to act in concert 	<p>The planning process can create opportunity for diverse stakeholders (youth, government, funders, service providers, researchers and the private sector) to develop a shared vision around ending youth homelessness, a common understanding of the issue and agreement on a collaborative approach to solving it. The plan becomes the common agenda moving forward. A common agenda is about collective goals, rather than the interests of particular groups or individuals.</p>
<p>Shared Measurement Systems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Shared measurement systems are essential to collective impact » Agreement on ways success will be measured and reported » Collecting data and measuring results consistently on a short list of indicators at community level across all participating organizations » Common systems for reporting performance and measuring outcomes 	<p>Plan development creates agreement across stakeholders on system-level metrics and key performance indicators for ending youth homelessness as well as the means of tracking and reporting progress and performance on an ongoing basis across stakeholders.</p>
<p>Mutually Reinforcing Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Diverse group of stakeholders working together » Coordination of their differentiated activities through mutually reinforcing plan of action » Each stakeholder takes on specific set of activities where they excel in a way that supports/is coordinated with others 	<p>The plan development process brings diverse stakeholders together to define common objectives as well as their particular roles in meeting these. Plan implementation guidance outlines necessary coordination infrastructure to execute the plan across diverse groups.</p>

<p>Continuous Communication:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Trust among non-profits, corporations, and government agencies » Several years of regular meetings to build up enough experience with each other » Monthly or biweekly in-person meetings among the organizations' CEO-level leaders » Creating a common vocabulary takes time, essential to shared measurement systems » Time to see interests treated fairly, decisions made on evidence and best possible solution to problem, not to favouritism 	<p>Plan development, done well, will create opportunities for diverse stakeholders to develop common language around youth homelessness, surface and/or resolve tensions and enhance communication and mutual understanding. To create a plan, stakeholders rise above personal and organizational agendas to find best solutions. This helps build a foundation of trust and sets up essential coordinating infrastructure for implementation.</p>
<p>Backbone Support Organizations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Coordination requires supporting infrastructure » Separate organization/staff with specific set of skills » Ongoing facilitation, technology and communications support, data collection and reporting, logistical and administrative details » Embody principles of adaptive leadership: focus people's attention, create a sense of urgency, apply pressure without overwhelming, frame issues as opportunities and difficulties, mediate conflict » Highly structured process that leads to effective decision making 	<p>Dedicated, highly capable human resources are essential to plan development. Plan development requires backbone supports to provide necessary administrative support to the development process, but also a project manager to quarterback the entire process. Adaptive leadership from a group of decision makers representative of the key sectors involved guides the overall direction of the plan and the work of the project manager. Plan champions (leaders who advance plan goals) are engaged strategically to advance common objectives and external expertise is brought in as necessary. Don't underestimate the work required to build and sustain trust with plan champions.</p>

ESSENTIAL PLAN ELEMENTS

What does it take to end youth homelessness? The answer to this question should shape the main tenets of your plan and how you go about developing it. While there are a wide range of options, there are common elements that should be included in your plan, whether you're a small rural community or large urban centre; whether Indigenous youth or LGBTQ2S youth are overrepresented, etc.

If your community believes the answer is to develop more emergency services, such as shelters, or that the homeless-serving system can do it independently without changes to the operation of the wider public systems, your plan will be incomplete, which will lead to gaps in implementation and hinder your efforts to end youth homelessness.

The [Reimagining our Response](#) report contains a commonly used strategic framework for developing and implementing plans to end youth homelessness. Edmonton, Kamloops and St. John's specifically cite this report as grounding to their youth plans.

Gaetz proposes the following steps towards ending youth homelessness:

- » Develop a plan
- » Create an integrated system response
- » Facilitate active, strategic and coordinated engagement by all levels of government and interdepartmental collaboration
- » Adopt a youth development orientation
- » Incorporate research, data gathering and information sharing

Gaetz's framework, a reorientation of the current response, involves three key approaches: a strong emphasis on prevention and strategies that move people quickly out of homelessness into appropriate accommodation with supports, reinforced by emergency services.

Figure 2: Prevention-focused Approach

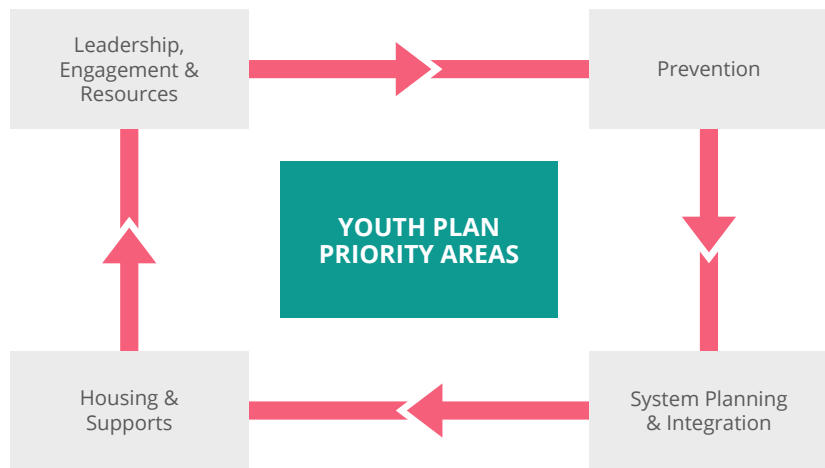


To operationalize a prevention-focused approach, your youth plan must cover the four Youth Plan Priorities. These four elements are synthesized from the existing body of

evidence and are commonly found in existing plans. While you should adapt these locally, according to your community's priorities and needs, the general approach should remain consistent across communities.

Figure 3: Youth Plan Priority Areas

Prevention can include measures that specifically target youth at risk of homelessness, through such programs as family mediation/reunification, working with the education system to identify those at risk earlier and developing policy options that can ensure youth are better supported in



transitioning from foster care. The focus here is working upstream to identify those at risk of homelessness and putting in place interventions that effectively mitigate such risks.

System planning and integration refers to the type of reorganization actions you will need to introduce to ensure your local system serves youth effectively and efficiently. This includes introducing ways of managing the flow of clients better through coordinated entry, having consistent performance management and quality assurance standards in place, but also developing processes to link the youth-serving system to the public systems as well. Discharge protocols for youth coming out of treatment or finding ways to coordinate services between diverse systems can be included in this priority area.

Housing and supports refers to the network of services and accommodation options necessary to end homelessness for youth; diverse and appropriate housing and supports (case management, income assistance, education, health care, etc.) ensure that once rehoused, youth do not fall back into homelessness. To achieve this, you may need to expand particular program types or introduce new program models and housing stock. You may also need to rethink how services are delivered in practice. The way your emergency shelters and transitional housing program operate can also be re-envisioned to move youth into permanent housing quicker, for instance. The [Housing First Framework for Youth](#) provides guidance on housing options and supports designed to meet the needs of young people in a way that supports not only housing retention but also a supportive transition to adulthood.

Leadership, engagement and resources are needed to execute the vision set out in the plan. This includes funding, organizational infrastructure, champions to promote the solutions to diverse audiences and shared accountability among stakeholders for ending youth homelessness. Additionally, you may include public education measures to raise awareness about preventing and ending youth homelessness. You may also plan for a research agenda to enhance knowledge about the issue and advance a policy agenda to various levels of government.

Table 4: Priority Areas Resources

PRIORITY AREA	FURTHER READING
Prevention	Coming of Age: Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada Youth Homelessness in Canada: Implications for Policy and Practice Prevention Framework Youth Employment Toolkit Toolkit: Early intervention programmes to prevent youth homelessness - some examples from the UK Reconnecting with Family & Community: Pathways Out of Youth Homelessness
System Planning & Service Integration	Beyond Housing First: Essential Elements of a System-Planning Approach to Ending Homelessness Performance Management in a Housing First Context: A Guide for Community Entities System Planning 101
Housing & Supports	Coming of Age: Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada A Safe and Decent Place to Live: Towards a Housing First Framework for Youth Live, Learn, Grow: Supporting Transitions to Adulthood for Homeless Youth – A Framework for the Foyer in Canada Homeless Young Adults Ages 18–24 Examining Service Delivery Adaptations Youth Transitional Housing Toolkit Toolkit for Practitioners/Researchers Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ) Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) Housing and Outreach Strategies for Rural Youth: Best Practices from the Rural Youth Survey
Leadership, Engagement & Resources	Time for Action: Report of the Homeless Voices Youth Action Squad

SYSTEM PLANNING & INTEGRATION IN BRIEF

What does a system planning and integration approach to youth homelessness entail? Efforts to end homelessness using system planning have been documented generally, but less has been done on youth-specific system planning.



As per the definition, a system is the integrated whole comprised of defined components working towards a common end. [System planning](#) requires a way of thinking that recognizes the basic components of a particular system and understands how these relate to one another as well as their basic function as part of the whole. Processes that ensure alignment across the system are integral to ensure components work together for maximum impact.

Processes that ensure alignment across the system are integral to ensure components work together for maximum impact.

Applying this concept to youth homelessness, a homeless-serving system comprises a diversity of local or regional service delivery components serving youth who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness.

Integration is about working together to improve results, which can take the form of a collaborative arrangement. System-level integration can entail centralized management and funding, while at the service level it can involve the coordinated delivery of services both within (vertical integration) and/or between (horizontal integration) sectors and agencies.¹

A plan to end youth homelessness is a call to address service and policy coordination and integration differently; it entails the restructuring of an entire local system's approach to youth homelessness following a new vision, as well as the integration of that system with others targeting homeless and at-risk youth. System planning requires a reorganization of the service delivery landscape using these shared principles, tying together the activities of diverse stakeholders across diverse systems toward the shared goal of reducing and preventing youth homelessness.

1. Browne, Gina, Dawn Kingston, Valerie Grdisa, and Maureen Markle-Reid. 2007. "Conceptualization and measurement of integrated human service networks for evaluation." *International Journal of Integrated Care* no. Oct.-Dec.:e51.

Housing and Urban Development’s evaluation of homeless-serving systems in the U.S. found that successful integration was achieved when specific strategies were applied between systems, such as common policies and protocols, shared information, coordinated service delivery and training. In addition, the following were also recommended:

- » Having staff with the responsibility to promote systems/ service integration;
- » Creating a local interagency coordinating body;
- » Having a centralized authority for the homeless assistance system;
- » Co-locating mainstream services within homeless-specific agencies and programs; and
- » Adopting and using an interagency information management system.



The scale at which integration efforts are implemented will determine which strategies are best suited to achieve intended outcomes; further, the types of services that require integration will further impact the tailored approach moving forward

These integration strategies can be applied in a range of contexts to improve outcomes, for instance programs within the same agency, between different agencies and between sectors of agencies.

The scale at which integration efforts are implemented will determine which strategies are best suited to achieve intended outcomes; further, the types of services that require integration will further impact the tailored approach moving forward. Several U.S. studies suggest that service coordination closest to the client is more effective than broader top-down structural integration measures in terms of individual housing and health outcomes.² Ultimately we need to ensure client and structural strategies are aligned first and foremost with impacting client-level results.³

2. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research. 2002. *Evaluation of Continuums of Care For Homeless People Final Report*. Hambrick, Ralph, and Debra Rog. 2000. “The Pursuit of Coordination: The Organizational Dimension in the Response to Homelessness.” *Policy Studies Journal* no. 28 (2):353-364.

3. Evans, T., Neale, K., Buultjens, J., & Davies, T. (2011). Service integration in a regional homelessness service system. Lismore, New South Wales, Australia: Northern Rivers Social Development Council. p. 30.

Table 5: *Integration Strategies*

CLIENT (SERVICE DELIVERY LEVEL)	STRUCTURAL (PROGRAM/ORGANIZATION/POLICY LEVEL)
Shared information system	Shared guidelines
Co-location	Common targeting strategies
Joint staff training	Joint/pool funding arrangements
Interagency meetings	Protocols
Common application/referral processes	Memorandums of understanding
Joint delivery processes	Joint strategic/policy documents
Staff secondments	Agency /program amalgamations
Staff recruitment and volunteer programs	Shared resources (inc. transport)
Case conferencing/review	Joint administrative processes
Local resource registers	Joint planning
Provider-produced good practice guidelines	Cross and peer training
Monitoring and evaluation	Local forums/seminars/conferences
	Integration pilots or demonstration projects
	Monitoring and evaluation
	Regular promotions and publications

The table below summarizes the essentials of system planning and integration through a youth lens.

Table 6: *System Planning Elements*

FOCUS ON INTEGRATION WITHIN HOMELESS-SERVING SYSTEM	FOCUS ON INTEGRATION BETWEEN HOMELESS-SERVING & OTHER SYSTEMS
Planning & Strategy Development	
Local strategy follows shared vision and principles grounded in evidence-based practice to end youth homelessness.	Development of shared planning approaches across systems targeting common target population.
Organizational Infrastructure	
Organizational infrastructure is in place to implement youth homelessness plan and coordinate the homeless-serving system to meet common goals.	Coordinating infrastructure to lead integration efforts across systems is established.
System Mapping	
Making sense of existing services serving youth and creating order moving forward.	Extending service mapping to document populations experiencing homelessness and housing instability touch points across systems.
Coordinated Service Delivery	
Ensuring key system alignment processes including coordinated entry, assessment and prioritization are in place to facilitate access and flow through services for best individual and system-level outcomes.	Development of coordinated access, assessment and prioritization to determine service matching for clients across systems using shared processes & facilitate integrated service delivery.
Integrated Information Management	
Shared information system aligns data collection, reporting, coordinated entry, assessment, referrals and service coordination in the homeless youth-serving system.	Extending the use of a shared information system or developing data bridges among existing systems to enable information sharing for service coordination and planning purposes.
Performance Management & Quality Assurance	
Performance expectations at the program and system levels are articulated; these are aligned and monitored along set service standards to achieve best outcomes for youth. Resources are in place to support uptake across organizational levels.	Common indicators are developed across similar service types and at system levels to articulate how components fit as part of broader whole. Service quality standards are in place across systems providing similar function, reinforced through monitoring and capacity building.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR REGIONALIZED APPROACHES

Effectively, the key elements of homeless-serving systems will have to be reformulated and conjoined with partner regions to develop a streamlined, integrated response to youth homelessness for rural areas. The key homeless system components will need to be extended across the target region in service delivery. This may mean a further reach from existing community providers into other rural areas, rural providers delivering locally or via urban-rural partnerships.

To interpret system of care components for youth in a regional context, a number of issues should be considered.

Table 7: Homeless-system & Regional Integration Elements

FOCUS ON INTEGRATION WITHIN HOMELESS-SERVING SYSTEM	FOCUS ON REGIONAL INTEGRATION IN RURAL COMMUNITIES
Planning & Strategy Development	
Local strategy follows shared vision and principles grounded in evidence-based practice to end youth homelessness.	Development of shared planning approaches across defined regions targeting a common target population of youth.
Organizational Infrastructure	
Organizational infrastructure is in place to implement youth homelessness plan and coordinate the homeless-serving system to meet common goals.	Coordinating infrastructure to lead integration efforts across regions is established.
System Mapping	
Making sense of existing services serving youth and creating order moving forward.	Extending service mapping to document youth experiencing homelessness and housing instability touch points across defined regions.
Coordinated Service Delivery	
Ensuring key system alignment processes including coordinated entry, assessment and prioritization are in place to facilitate access and flow through services for best individual and system-level outcomes.	Development of coordinated entry, assessment and prioritization to determine service matching for youth across systems using shared processes & facilitate integrated service delivery. Likely, decentralized but coordinated access will best support regionalization.

Integrated Information Management	
Shared information system aligns data collection, reporting, coordinated entry, assessment, referrals and service coordination in the homeless youth-serving system.	Extending the use of a shared information system or developing data bridges among existing systems to enable information sharing for service coordination and planning purposes.
Performance Management & Quality Assurance	
Performance expectations at the program and system levels are articulated; these are aligned and monitored along set service standards to achieve best outcomes for youth. Resources are in place to support uptake across organizational levels.	Common indicators are developed across similar service types across region to articulate how components fit as part of broader whole. Service quality standards are in place across participating region partners, reinforced through monitoring and capacity building.

Regional Coordination: To fully implement a regional system planning approach, particularly in small rural communities, coordination infrastructure must be developed to enable system planning and integrated service delivery. Certain functions may be centralized to maximize impact, though each regional partner will maintain an autonomous role in the consortium. The backbone supports involved in implementing a regional plan to end youth homelessness will need to be responsive and representative of a broader collective of stakeholders across localities.

System Planning & Integration: A regional youth plan will have to address system coordination, research, best practices, HMIS/HIFIS, funding coordination and policy analysis to support an end to youth homelessness across localities. The plan will also have to focus strategies on integration within regions and across public systems relevant to youth.

Funding Coordination: You may also need to think about how the plan can advance processes related to program performance management and improvement that are regional in nature to ensure system planning occurs across communities.

Regional HMIS/HIFIS Operations: If implementing HIFIS or HMIS for a larger region, appropriate staffing and training support will be needed. Analysis of system data regionally will need to be undertaken to enable performance management and ongoing strategy development in support of the youth plan.



Assessment and referral protocols, standards of service quality and indicators of success can be developed with a regional lens, even if locally key funders take on appropriate monitoring in the day-to-day work.

Research & Homeless Counts: You may want to engage regional partners to develop and implement a research agenda to provide a better understanding of youth homelessness across the region and its unique dynamics in each locality. This will include analysis of HMIS and homeless count data, but will be enhanced by additional population-specific research on key issues, such as LGBTQ2S homelessness, Indigenous youth homelessness, migration trends, etc.

Training & Capacity Building: In terms of training and capacity building, assigning common training and technical assistance needs to the broader regional consortium can ensure local needs are met without adding to the burden on a single agency.

Quality Assurance & Performance Management: Quality assurance pieces that are common to regional partners can also be strengthened by collective work on implementing the youth plan. Assessment and referral protocols, standards of service quality and indicators of success can be developed with a regional lens, even if locally key funders take on appropriate monitoring in the day-to-day work.

Regional Service Delivery: The key elements of homeless-serving systems will have to be reformulated and conjoined with partner regions to develop a streamlined, integrated response to youth homelessness for rural areas. The key homeless system components will need to be extended across the target region in service delivery. This may mean a further reach from existing community providers into other rural areas, rural providers delivering locally or via urban-rural partnerships.

To interpret system of care components for youth in a regional context, a number of issues should be considered:

- » Is there sufficient demand for a service component in a particular site?
- » Is it cost efficient to centralize or decentralize service?
- » Can outreach services be provided across communities?
- » Which services are best centralized in the urban centre?
- » Are there sufficient capacity/resources to deliver services locally?

BUILDING ON BROADER HOMELESSNESS PLANS

It's essential that you consider how the proposed direction of the youth plan aligns with the broader community's work on homelessness. If there is a plan to end homelessness, you will need to outline how the youth plan aligns with it. You will have to be sensitive to the politics involved vis-à-vis other groups who may be advancing solutions for other populations, like women or, Indigenous people. It is an unfortunate reality that such priorities are often pitted against each other in the competition for limited resources and visibility.



Since the youth plan is focused on addressing homelessness, it is important to also consider what general homelessness plans call for in terms of essential elements.

Your community likely has, at minimum, an HPS community plan in place. Given the focus on chronic and episodic homelessness, you will have to make a case that funds should be allocated to youth even in cases where they don't fit the federal definition of chronic and episodic. However, it is likely that your plan will include a funding ask for your provincial/territorial and local government as well, where the accountability for youth services, homeless supports, income assistance, etc., often lies.

If your community does not have a plan to end homelessness, you may be able to leverage the youth plan development process to highlight the need for this. You can make the case that by addressing youth homelessness first, your community can build an approach that can be revised and applied to other populations over time as well.

Since the youth plan is focused on addressing homelessness, it is important to also consider what general homelessness plans call for in terms of essential elements. In its document [A Plan Not a Dream](#), the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness provides guidance around four key elements of plans to end homelessness. The CAEH built its approach on the National Alliance to End Homelessness' [Ten Essentials Toolkit for Ending Homelessness](#).

CAEH ELEMENTS OF PLANS TO END HOMELESSNESS

Plan for outcomes

In order to end homelessness, you need a plan. Successful community plans are evidence-based; have measurable and ambitious outcomes and key milestones; are learning, living and adaptive documents; cover the 10 Essentials; and, critically, are the product of an inclusive community process that engages key players in the local homeless system, including people with lived experience.

Research and data management are central to developing effective responses, coordinating systems and measuring outcomes. If you want to move forward, you need to understand the problem. You also need to be able to tell if you are having an impact. Basic research on homelessness in terms of causes, lived experience and solutions makes for better policy and practice. Information management systems, such as Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS), are being applied in Canada. HMIS allow for system-wide data collection and sharing across the system and ensure that you can really measure progress. Instituting a culture of program evaluation within the system means that we can highlight practical and effective program models and practices, and also demonstrate results.

Close the front door

The most cost-effective way to end homelessness for people is to stop it before it begins with effective prevention. Homeless people travel a predictable path into homelessness. On their way into homelessness, every single individual or family comes into contact with a person, program or system that could prevent their homelessness. In order to end homelessness, communities need a thoughtful and methodical prevention strategy that includes: early detection; emergency assistance; policy and practice reforms to mainstream systems that inadvertently contribute to homelessness; system coordination; housing and support services; and access to income necessary to sustain housing through employment or mainstream income support as required.

Open the back door

For the vast majority of homeless Canadians, homelessness is a short-term phenomenon. A small but significant minority become trapped in homelessness or cycle in and out of homelessness throughout their lives. There are effective initiatives that move people from homelessness to a stable home. These need to be a cornerstone of a plan to end homelessness. Successful community plans include strategies for rapid re-housing, housing support services and coordinated systems with the express intent to shorten the duration of homelessness.

Core to effective community plans is the concept of Housing First. Housing First is a successful and transformational housing model used in a number of Canadian and American communities. Housing First puts the priority on a rapid and direct move from homelessness to housing, instead of requiring people to graduate through a series of steps before getting into permanent housing. Housing First is not housing only. Integral to the Housing First philosophy are the services and supports necessary to sustain that housing and create long-term independence.

Build the infrastructure

While systems can be changed to prevent and shorten the experience of homelessness, ultimately people will continue to be threatened with instability until the supply of affordable housing is increased; incomes of people living in poverty are sufficient to meet their basic needs; and disadvantaged people receive the support services they need.

DETERMINING COMMUNITY READINESS

How do you know your community is ready to undertake a large-scale initiative to end youth homelessness? Given that ending youth homelessness is a collective impact endeavour, your group can benefit from a readiness assessment to identify deficits you may need to address before moving the planning process forward.

The [FSG Collective Impact Readiness Assessment](#) is an excellent tool to gauge whether your community currently has critical elements/processes in place. It can help you identify whether significant time and resources will be needed to either begin or complete critical processes. A similar [tool from FSG](#) also points readers to resources to complement their efforts. Another self-assessment was developed by [Innoweave](#) to help members of a collaborative reflect on their readiness to take on collective impact. These tools are useful to give you a sense of readiness and identify areas of strength or where additional efforts are needed as you take on the actual planning work from a collective impact lens.

The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness has developed a Community Self-Assessment intended to stimulate thinking around key concepts critical to ending homelessness. This tool uses factors identified through the [U.S. 100,000 Homes Campaign](#) to be associated with higher housing placement rates for chronic and vulnerable homeless people and [essential elements of system planning](#) in a Housing First context. It aims to gauge a community's current status against the framework, but also acts as a means of beginning the long-term work to set up new ways of delivering service and coordinating local homelessness responses. The resource is set up as a [workbook](#) with pointed questions that are intended to prompt these strategic conversations to occur in your community.



These tools are useful to give you a sense of readiness and identify areas of strength or where additional efforts are needed as you take on the actual planning work from a collective impact lens.

The following characteristics of communities that are effective at ending homelessness can be useful to help you think through community capacity around ending youth homelessness, as opposed to taking on plan development. The list below is intended to help you think through elements of a youth plan based on CAEH's Community Self-Assessment. These can also help you think through community readiness locally to take on the youth plan work.

You may find the following self-assessment useful to gauge 'readiness' for collective impact by identifying which preconditions the group is well prepared for or will need further investment in.

Current Situation Strong: These elements/processes are either fully in place or sufficient progress has been made in them so that they are operationally functional in the context of the initiative.

Significant Investment Needed: The group does not currently have these elements/processes in place. There is an incomplete or unclear plan to accomplish this goal and/or significant time and resources will need to be allocated to either begin or complete this process.

Some Investment Needed: While these elements/processes are not fully in place, significant thought and planning has gone into these elements. Time and resources have been allocated and clear progress is being made.

The first assessment highlights key elements supporting readiness to take on the plan development work, versus the second assessment focuses on implementing a plan to end youth homelessness. Together, these tools will give you a sense of the work ahead and may be useful to come back to as you continue this journey.

Table 8: Community Readiness for Collective Impact Work on Developing & Implementing a Plan to End Youth Homelessness

COMMUNITY READINESS FOR COLLECTIVE IMPACT WORK ON DEVELOPING A PLAN TO END YOUTH HOMELESSNESS	SIGNIFICANT INVESTMENT NEEDED	CURRENT SITUATION STRONG	SOME INVESTMENT NEEDED
Backbone Support Organizations			
Is the backbone actively supporting aligned activities through convening partners, providing technical assistance and recruiting new partners?			
Has a structure for the backbone been clearly decided (i.e. planning group consisting of project coordinator, steering committee, working committees)?			
Have resources been allocated to support the backbone infrastructure over the course of plan development?			
Has the backbone supports group begun to build public will with consensus and commitment through communications management, articulating the call to action and supporting community member engagement activities?			
Is the backbone supports group advocating for an aligned policy agenda around ending youth homelessness?			
Is the backbone supports group actively aligning public and private funding to support the initiative's goals?			

Continuous Communication			
There is an up-to-date map of the players, strategies and work underway relevant to youth homelessness.			
A workplan has been established to see the plan development through, with clear deliverables, timelines and accountabilities.			
Planning group has a formalized Terms of Reference document outlining common objectives, roles and decision-making processes.			
Plan working group has established all necessary committees by locality or activity areas.			
Have meeting schedules been established for activity-focused sub-groups? Will these meetings occur yearly? Monthly? Weekly?			
Has a list of prioritized activities and next steps been written so that the different groups working on the youth plan are coordinated around a common agenda?			

Common Agenda			
Do we have all of the necessary, high-level system leaders at the table? These include priority systems from service providers, Indigenous leadership and public systems including: education, child protection, mental health, health, criminal justice, etc.			
Do we have authentic representation of diverse perspectives within this group, including youth with lived experience who have directly experienced the challenges we seek to solve?			
Does the planning group have an explicit definition of the problem in agreed-upon language to refer to?			
Has the planning group agreed upon the scope of consultations? (i.e. which stakeholders need/do not need to be involved? What is the best means of engaging them?)			
Has the planning group written a vision, mission statement and guiding principles for the youth plan work?			
Has the group defined system-level strategies as well as program-level strategies as part of the youth plan work?			

Shared Measurement			
Resources are allocated to develop and implement a shared measurement strategy as part of the youth plan.			
Research to develop a thorough understanding of youth homelessness in the community is in place/underway to ground the plan.			
Diverse sources of information and data are located and analyzed to build plan priorities.			
Plan development includes costing analysis, projected impacts, measurable targets and performance indicators.★			

★ Note that the COH is working to develop a national definition of “Functional Zero” that will help you think through the key elements needed and measures you may want to include in developing plan targets. Also look to examples of performance measures in the [Developing Targets and Performance Indicators section](#).

COMMUNITY READINESS FOR COLLECTIVE IMPACT WORK ON IMPLEMENTING A PLAN TO END YOUTH HOMELESSNESS	SIGNIFICANT INVESTMENT NEEDED	CURRENT SITUATION STRONG	SOME INVESTMENT NEEDED
Planning & Strategy Development			
A plan to end youth homelessness is in place.			
A consistent definition of youth homelessness is used.			
An end to youth homelessness is defined.			
Plan includes common objectives and target dates for completing them.			
Plan uses data on total numbers of homeless youth, annual inflow and outflow and the housing placement rate needed to end youth homelessness during a specific time period.			
Plan is used to guide services and interventions.			
Plan has buy-in from other providers and related systems i.e. mental health, health, criminal justice, child protection, etc.			
Ongoing processes are in place whereby stakeholders plan their response to youth homelessness in a coordinated manner.			
Strategic reviews are done regularly to assess progress against common objectives and adjust approach in real time.			

Organizational Infrastructure & Funding			
Leaders in the community serve key coordination roles of:			
» Head of organization(s) working on ending youth homelessness locally			
» Data/information management lead			
» Public policy advocate			
» Lived experience advocate			
Diverse stakeholders have strong, pre-existing relationships that strengthen the community's work on ending youth homelessness.			
Mechanisms are in place to coordinate funding streams.			
Community decision making is being done on a coordinated, system-wide level regarding coordinated entry, acuity assessment and prioritization, performance management and service standards.			

Coordinated Service Delivery			
Community can organize diverse programs and housing serving youth by clearly defined program types, with specific eligibility criteria, target groups and performance measures.			
Community can perform system-wide gap and performance analysis in terms of program types and population groups, including youth.			
Community has mechanism in place to quickly determine if a young person experiencing homelessness is eligible for services and benefits and can quickly refer them appropriately.			
Those experiencing homelessness, including youth, are known by name and tracked throughout the homeless-serving system.			
Programs have established effective links with complementary community and mainstream services (e.g. employment, health, treatment, education, community integration, family reunification, counselling, child protection, probation, etc).			

Integrated Information Management			
A system/process is in place to maintain an unduplicated real-time list of all youth experiencing homelessness.			
A database(s) exists to track the progress/movement within the system of all youth experiencing homelessness.			
A system-wide privacy policy is in place that accounts for the needs and legal circumstances of youth.			
A process is in place to assess youth homelessness trends including inflow, housing placement, client characteristics and needs and impacts of interventions.			
Performance Management & Quality Assurance			
Common standards of care across various housing and programs serving youth experiencing homelessness are in place.			
Capacity exists to assess performance between like programs and across the homeless-serving system.			
Standardized outcome targets for emergency shelter, transitional housing and permanent supportive housing are established regardless of funder.			

System Integration			
Formalized processes are in place to work with public system partners to avoid discharging youth into homelessness; priority systems include: child protection, health and justice.			
Community stakeholders have regular contact with elected officials within the various levels of government.			
Community is active in advancing public policy asks to support an end to youth homelessness to various levels of government.			
Government Support			
Government prioritizes ending youth homelessness; this can be evidenced by high level direction-setting policy/plan to end homelessness, etc.			
Government provides adequate resources to enact its direction.			
A point of accountability is identified within government on ending homelessness and youth homelessness.			
Government has taken steps to enhance policy coordination across departments to advance ending homelessness goals.			
Government direction advances service integration at the community level.			
A specific government department is a natural fit for the work required. This natural fit includes a champion.			

Community Engagement			
Mechanisms are in place ensure those with lived experience are meaningfully engaged in plan development and implementation. This includes models of peer support in service delivery.			
Research evidence and data is consistently used to inform plan implementation and adjust approach in real time.			
Communication among plan stakeholders is effective ensuring activities across diverse groups move a common agenda forward.			
There is public awareness and support for the plan.			
Community members, including religious groups and volunteers, are actively engaged in implementation.			
The plan is being championed by diverse groups and individuals with influence.			

SO DO YOU REALLY NEED A PLAN?

After all that, how do you know that a youth plan is the right thing to do for your community? Alternatively, when does a plan NOT make sense?

Though there is no yes/no quiz to tell you a definitive answer, a Collective Impact Community Readiness Assessment (see Section 2) can inform your decision. The important point is that you are aiming to build a movement, not strictly a plan. You may also consider alternatives to a youth plan, as other communities have successfully done to move the agenda on ending youth homelessness forward.

1

A PLAN FOR A PLAN

In St. John's, Newfoundland, Choices for Youth – a lead service delivery agency – worked with national experts to convene a roundtable on youth homelessness responses and developed a call to action to the provincial government asking for a strategy and resources aligned with best practices.

St. John's approach leveraged existing research in a relatively short timeframe (about one year) to create a sense of urgency, engage provincial stakeholders, propose an evidence-based direction and advance system reform. In this case, rather than developing a city-specific youth plan, [Choices for Youth](#) and its partners launched a document calling for a provincial plan, which laid out the essentials of what that provincial plan should also entail.

2

A YOUTH STRATEGY WITHIN A PLAN TO END HOMELESSNESS

Another option is to develop a youth strategy within the context of a broader community plan to end homelessness. [Edmonton's approach](#) was to work with stakeholders to develop the broad directions of a youth-specific strategy that dovetailed the pre-existing plan to end homelessness, rather than create a parallel plan.

This approach allowed the community to focus on implementation fairly quickly, as it built on the infrastructure already developed by Homeward Trust on system planning and integration, information management and service design.

3

PILOTING WHILE PLANNING

Another option to consider is to begin implementation while developing the plan. In Alberta's case, when the [7 Cities](#) began experimenting with Housing First, there were no formal plans to end homelessness in place. That did not stop communities from adapting innovative, evidence-based practices while working on the research and development of their longer-term strategies.

Of course, there is a risk involved as the new pilot initiative may not fit perfectly with the eventual plan priorities – yet the benefits of demonstrating success while developing a plan cannot be underestimated either. In many ways, Alberta's 7 Cities were successful in advancing the needs of enhanced provincial funding for Housing First because of the success of these early pilots and reinforced through the provincial commitment to end homelessness.

4

A PLAN WITHIN A PLAN

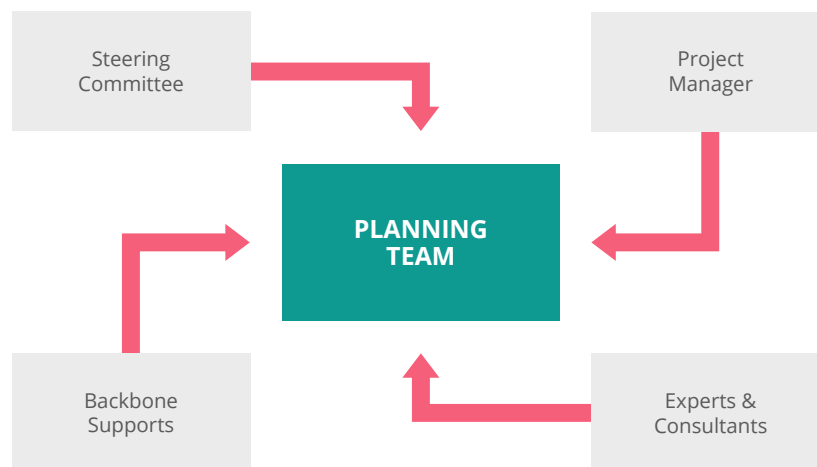
Alberta has experienced success in addressing homelessness through the 10-Year Plan. Since its inception in 2009, more than 12,250 homeless Albertans have received housing and supports and approximately 73% remain successfully housed, but we can do more. The 10-Year Plan states that Albertans from specialized groups, including homeless youth, are dealing with particularly challenging issues and require targeted responses to be rehoused. [Supporting Healthy and Successful Transitions to Adulthood: A Plan to Prevent and Reduce Youth Homelessness](#) aligns and is integral to work being led through the 10-Year Plan. The Youth Plan represents the next step in the 10-Year Plan and is a targeted response to a specialized population.

GETTING STARTED

BUILDING THE PLANNING TEAM

There are four main components of the planning team that you will want to consider: note, that you may have all of these roles or a combination thereof depending on local context and resources.

Figure 4: Planning Team



1. THE BACKBONE SUPPORTS

An essential early decision in the plan development process involves the selection of the 'backbone support' organization. At times, this can be a straightforward matter as various groups or individuals may already play a convening role in your community on similar issues. Common backbone supports for youth plans include Community Entities, United Ways, local governments and service provider agencies.

Backbone supports play convening roles in the plan development process. While they may have a stake and opinions with respect to the ultimate plan direction, they are not making decisions unanimously; rather, they provide the infrastructure necessary to undertake the research, consultation and solution-generating work of the broader community. These organizations have the capacity to organize meetings, bring together stakeholders, undertake research and analysis and write the actual plan document.

Table 9: Backbone Supports Activities & Outcomes

BACKBONE SUPPORTS ACTIVITIES	SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES
Guide vision and strategy	Stakeholders share a common understanding of youth homelessness and how to end it.	Stakeholders' individual work is increasingly aligned with the common agenda outlined in the Youth Plan.
Support aligned activities	Stakeholders increasingly communicate and coordinate their activities toward common plan goals.	Stakeholders collaboratively develop new approaches to advance an end to youth homelessness.
Establish shared measurement practices	Stakeholders understand the value of sharing data.	Stakeholders increasingly use data to adapt and refine their strategies on an individual and collective basis.
Build public will	Community members are increasingly aware of youth homelessness.	More community members feel empowered to take action on the issue of youth homelessness.
Advance policy	Policymakers are more aware and supportive of the plan's policy agenda.	Policy changes increasingly occur in line with the plan's goals.
Mobilize funding	Funding is secured to support the plan's goals.	Community and government funds are increasingly aligned with plan goals.

It is critical that the group responsible for the backbone supports is respected, trusted and capable of delivering on these essential functions. It is always a good sign when diverse stakeholders approach a potential organization to take on this work versus the organization self-selecting without community support.

This was the case in Edmonton, where Homeward Trust was approached by diverse groups to take on the backbone organization role and deliver a local plan with the input of a steering committee. Communities where organizations assume this leadership role without broader stakeholder buy-in have found their ultimate success hampered by the decisions made in the early stages of the plan development process. There is a need to carefully balance the need for action and leadership in community while respecting diverse views. While this may be obvious, it is often not done in practice. Plan development is fraught with tension as stakeholders wrestle with pre-existing issues of contention and legitimate threats to the status quo related to determining a new vision and managing funding implications of the plan.

This is why the role of backbone supports is so essential. Lead staff often negotiate this tension in community, act as the 'glue' pulling people together at the same table and move the process forward, while respecting diverse viewpoints.

Backbone supports are not necessarily located in one particular agency, however; in some communities, several stakeholders come together to share accountabilities for these functions. In Wellington County, three organizations worked together to perform the functions of backbone supports and included both public and non-profit partners. In Calgary, the Calgary Homeless Foundation, City of Calgary (FCSS) and United Way provided funding for the human resources needed to develop a renewed youth plan, while service providers and funders shared the workload involved in setting up consultations and overseeing the workplan and budget for the process.

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE BACKBONE LEADERSHIP

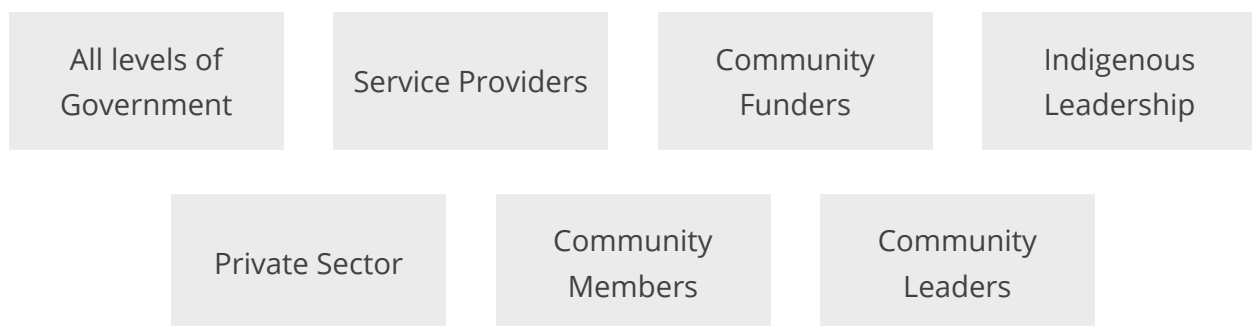
Visionary
Results Oriented
Collaborative Relationship Builder
Focused but Adaptive
Charismatic and Influential Communicator
Political
Humble

2. THE STEERING COMMITTEE

The group taking on backbone supports does not work on its own. The youth planning process is often led by a collaborative of stakeholders that come together to provide essential leadership for the plan. The committee's role is to provide community leadership to advance the youth plan by overseeing the consultation process with key stakeholder groups, research and analysis, plan development and launch.

Ideally, committee members are leaders from government and non-profit sectors, including public systems, community funders, the private sector and community. Membership should consist of representatives of key funders and public systems essential to ending youth homelessness, such as child protection, social services, education, corrections, health, etc. Members should include both on- and off-reserve Indigenous leadership, government representatives, those with lived experience, researchers and community members at large. For rural and remote communities, you will need to balance the representation regionally.

Figure 5: Steering Committee Stakeholders



Below is a list of groups you should consider representation from. Try to keep the committee between 10–20 members with scheduled meetings monthly and on a need-to basis for the duration of the plan development process.

Engaging the right people on the steering committee can help you access critical information for the plan development work, but also open doors to potential allies in government that can push the plan forward in implementation.

Engaging influential public servants, for instance, can help champion the plan internally. This can go a long way toward ensuring your efforts land on the right decision makers' desks. Strong advocates from the private sector can similarly champion the plan publicly and engage their respective networks to support plan activities during the early stages of development as well as into implementation. Such champions can help elevate the community's understanding of youth homelessness and how to end it and can advance innovative solutions, policy and systems change in their respective circles of influence and with government.

Table 10: *Key Stakeholder Member Sources*

SECTORS	POTENTIAL MEMBER SOURCES
Service Providers	Youth-serving agencies Homeless-serving system agencies (adult and youth) Poverty alleviation/prevention services
Public System Partners	Police service/RCMP Public & Separate School Boards of Education Child, youth and family services authority Metis child and family services authority Health services (mental health, addictions, emergency/ambulatory care) Correctional services Young offender programs Youth/adult probation Poverty reduction initiatives

On- and off-reserve Indigenous leadership & government	<p>Local associations/formal groups working on youth, housing and homelessness issues</p> <p>Neighbouring Nations</p> <p>Nations within regional scope of the youth plan</p> <p>Nations whose members migrate to the community developing plan</p>
Government of Canada	<p>Indigenous Affairs & Northern Development</p> <p>Economic and Social Development</p> <p>Canada Immigration & Citizenship</p> <p>Justice Canada</p> <p>Public Health Agency of Canada</p>
Provincial/Territorial Government	<p>Child protection</p> <p>Indigenous relations</p> <p>Education</p> <p>Health</p> <p>Human/social services</p> <p>Housing</p> <p>Homeless supports</p> <p>Justice</p> <p>Domestic violence</p> <p>Income assistance</p> <p>Persons with disabilities</p> <p>Employment</p> <p>Municipal/intergovernmental affairs</p> <p>Status of women</p>
Local/Regional Government	<p>Community/neighbourhood services</p> <p>Social housing corporation</p> <p>Income assistance/rent subsidies</p>

Community Funders	<p>Lead organization on local plan to end homelessness</p> <p>Community Entity (if different from above)</p> <p>Municipal government community services</p> <p>United Way</p> <p>Local community foundations</p> <p>Philanthropists with interest in youth</p>
Youth	<p>Existing youth tables (Youth Advisory Committees, etc.)</p> <p>Key populations: Indigenous, LGBTQ2S, immigrant, etc.</p>
Private Sector	<p>Chamber of Commerce</p> <p>Landlords</p> <p>Landlords Association</p> <p>Homebuilders Association</p> <p>Philanthropists with interest in youth</p>
Broader Community	<p>Research community (university, college)</p> <p>Faith community</p> <p>Influential community members at large</p>

Steering committee members should have key competencies which align with the previously identified collective impact principles, including:

1. **Commitment to ending youth homelessness:** Passion and belief that youth homelessness can be ended and the resolve to making this a reality.
2. **Collaborative leader:** Demonstrated personal and/or professional leadership in multi-stakeholder efforts by building consensus and drawing people into a process of change.
3. **Politically astute:** Broad non-partisan understanding of political and social issues influencing the public policy environment.
4. **Social change agent:** Desire to deepen understanding of complex social and economic issues that take complex solutions and willing to take action to address these within their sphere of influence.
5. **Strategic:** Understands the lay of the land and can work within it to advance collective goals.
6. **Decision maker:** Has the capacity, authority and willingness to make/influence decisions that advance an end to homelessness.
7. **Practical:** Has the ability to manage the details and get things done, while effectively managing shifting circumstances and arising risks.
8. **Influential communicator:** Able to share ideas and can serve as a bridge between the various communities and groups with an interest in the initiative.
9. **Knowledgeable:** Has demonstrated knowledge of relevance to ending youth homelessness.

A NOTE ON RECRUITMENT

An individual may be an excellent champion, but unable to commit the time required to sit on the steering committee. You may therefore want to structure your steering committee into an overarching high-level group, with working committees that take on the bulk of the workload. The steering committee would have higher profile leaders meeting less frequently and providing general guidance, open doors to key decision-makers and maintain public visibility of the issue. Conversely, working committees take on key activities involved in plan development, such as research and consultations. This provides you with an opportunity to recruit members for your working group that provide additional technical expertise around policy, evaluation, youth voice, service provision, research, etc.

In this model, recruiting high profile champions will be essential. Your ability to secure commitment will be influenced by a number of factors:

- » Approaching the right individuals with a passion for ending youth homelessness at the right time, being mindful of their time commitments
- » Providing a compelling vision for the work ahead and demonstrating the potential contribution of the individual to ending youth homelessness
- » Leveraging social networks to seek members using existing relationships – in many ways, it's who you know and finding personal connections that can help you recruit the right champions will be more effective than a cold call
- » Having a clear set of expectations laid out before you begin recruitment will be essential to help potential champions have a sense of the proposed workplan and expectations.



The steering committee would have higher profile leaders meeting less frequently and providing general guidance, open doors to key decision-makers and maintain public visibility of the issue.

As is evident, someone has to oversee this recruitment process for the steering committee. It will likely fall to the backbone supports and dedicated project manager, with the assistance of other interested individuals on a more informal basis.

Put concerted efforts into recruiting a chair for the steering committee, who can then reach out to the larger pool of identified candidates for recruitment. This will require you to help identify target individuals early on and use a snowball technique to identify additional potential members as you go through the recruitment process.

Once the steering committee and working committees are established, Terms of Reference should be agreed upon. You may have already developed a draft used in the recruitment phase, but it is now up to the steering committee to finalize these.

The Terms of Reference for the steering committee essentially acts as the guiding document for the plan development process, as such they should have clearly delineated:

- » Purpose and activities for the steering committee
- » Membership and core competencies
- » Roles and responsibilities for steering committee members, backbone supports, working committee and the project manager
- » Workplan and budget with clear timelines for plan development and launch
- » Meeting schedule
- » Guiding principles for the work of the committee,
- » Committee approach to decision-making process, attendance requirements, confidentiality and conflict of interest.

3. THE PROJECT MANAGER(S)

Without doubt, the role of the project manager is essential to the development of the youth plan. Ideally, your project manager is almost exclusively dedicated to supporting the plan development process for a set period of time, though this may not always be feasible. Acting as the quarterback for the duration of the process, the person charged with this role will have tremendous impact on the overall success of the effort.

Ideally, the project manager will have experience providing leadership at the community level and will understand local community processes and youth homelessness. They are effectively responsible for overseeing all aspects of the planning process and delivering the workplan activities. Their role can include:

- » Ongoing liaising with the steering committee
- » Organizing community consultations
- » Completing key stakeholder interviews/ meetings
- » Providing project coordination support (note taking, meeting space, ongoing communication)
- » Undertaking research and best practice analysis
- » Preparing briefing documents, reports and proposals

The ideal candidate has experience in the non-profit environment and leadership experience with the ability to mentor, coach, engage and inspire colleagues and stakeholders. They have demonstrated capacity to negotiate with a variety of community stakeholders, excellent written and oral communications skills and interpersonal skills.



Acting as the quarterback for the duration of the process, the person charged with this role will have tremendous impact on the overall success of the effort.

General competency requirements:

Project Management Skills: Proven strong project management skills with ability to multi-task and set priorities within tight timelines.

Anti-discrimination Orientation: Recognizes the need to be inclusive to women, LGBTQ2S, racialized minorities, Indigenous people, ethnocultural communities, etc.

Credibility: Demonstrated ability to build organizational trust in his or her professionalism, expertise and ability to create solutions and deliver desired outcomes.

Culturally Congruent: A passion for, belief in and communication of the vision, mission and guiding principles driving the plan to end youth homelessness. Will promote a transparent, ambitious, goal- and achievement-oriented culture. Demonstrates a strong work ethic and youth-centred approach.

Building Effective Teams: Creates strong morale and spirit in her/his team; shares wins and successes; fosters open dialogue; delegates appropriately to team; defines success in terms of the whole team; creates a feeling of belonging in the team.

Collaborative and Collegial: Works well with others, whether at the most senior levels, with direct reports or with others across the organization. Understands how to work with the community in a collaborative manner.

Managing Change: Ability to adapt and thrive in a changing environment; capable of maintaining high levels of performance under pressure.

Results Oriented: Sets high standards of performance including setting goals and priorities that maximize available resources to deliver results against the initiative direction, objectives and public expectations. Will monitor progress and make adjustments as necessary on an ongoing basis.

Effective Facilitator: Can manage the feedback process, engage multiple stakeholders, identify and lead critical conversations and build consensus.

Project managers require a high level of support from their home organizations in cases where the youth plan is added onto their existing workload. This means, first and foremost, that they are provided with the time to deliver on the youth plan. Having someone add the youth plan to their workload without taking something off will create an unrealistic expectation and ultimately impact the quality of the plan.

Another option is to second a staff to the project for a limited period or to hire an external contract project manager to oversee the process. In cases where the project manager role is being divided amongst steering committee members, the expectations of each contributor should be made clear to ensure mutual accountability is maintained as members depend on one another to deliver key activities. The role of the project manager can also be divided among several positions within the backbone supports, leveraging technical skill-sets and managing workload demands more effectively.

4. WORKING WITH CONSULTANTS & EXPERTS

As you contemplate resources, you will need to decide who will write various aspects of the plan. Communities often contract out part of their plan to consultants; while there are benefits to this approach, you should keep some considerations top of mind if you are moving in this direction.

There are definitely benefits to bringing in an external expert to help you with technical aspects of the plan such as cost modelling, which you may not have the on-hand capacity to undertake. Consultants can also lessen the time required of lead staff by taking on the research and consultation pieces or parts thereof. They can be important members of the planning team who work alongside lead staff and the steering committee.

However, consultants can also become barriers in the plan development process. First consider if you can do the work without external assistance. Ask yourself what benefits a consultant brings to the process. You have to do your homework to ensure you bring in the right person as well; someone who is divisive in community, has a history of missing timelines and/not delivering, etc. would obviously be a hindrance. Unfortunately, we don't always realize we have the wrong consultant until problems emerge. It would best to put in place processes that ensure you are not in this position in the first place.



You have to do your homework to ensure you bring in the right person as well; someone who is divisive in community, has a history of missing timelines and/not delivering, etc. would obviously be a hindrance.

A Way Home and the COH are useful resources for identifying and selecting consultants you may want to leverage in this process as well.

Depending on what aspects you are looking to contract out, you'd look for a consultant with the following attributes:

- » Recognized expertise in the issue of youth homelessness
- » Able and willing to support your team's capacity building on technical issues
- » Respected and trusted by the diverse stakeholders involved in the plan
- » Excellent organizational, communication and interpersonal skills
- » Track record of outstanding work, delivered on time and on budget

In some instances, you may consider bringing in an external expert (paid or unpaid) to deliver key messages in your community – such as a keynote address during a community event to rally support for the plan. It can be useful to have a recognized, well-respected person in this role to kick-start the community's thinking in a new direction. However, depending on how the message is delivered and received, the external expert can also be discordant and cause further tension in the community. The planning group will have to consider risks when moving in this direction very carefully. It may be wiser to bring the external expert in on a more informal basis to give you advice on your proposed direction and 'look over your shoulder,' pointing out potential pitfalls and promising directions you may be unaware of.

A kick-off event with key officials and the external expert can get the issue in front of the media from the beginning. You can leverage this event to get to know your media contacts, raise awareness about the initiative with them and begin their engagement in the process. Having a media presence throughout the planning and implementation process will help keep the issue top of mind within the broader community, ultimately enhancing its likelihood for support and impact.

Some considerations in hiring consultants:

- » Does the plan team have capacity (expertise and time) to do the work without a consultant? This includes members of your steering committee who can take on pieces of the work.
- » What workplan items can be assigned to a consultant?
- » Do you have the resources to hire the right consultant?
- » Does the plan team have the capacity to manage a consultant and support the necessary knowledge gathering the consultant might require?
- » What items should not be done by a consultant? Are we missing out on building relationships ourselves by contracting out the community consultations?
- » How can we leverage the consultant's expertise to build our internal capacity to take on the technical aspects of the plan so we don't rely on external experts on an ongoing basis?
- » What are the drawbacks of relying on external expertise for this work?

If you hire a consultant, ensure an executed contract is in place that clearly outlines your respective roles and responsibilities in the project, their estimated scope of work, budget, timelines and deliverables.

At minimum, the contract should lay out:

- » Project scope
- » Proposed approach
- » Detailed workplan (tasks, timelines and hours)
- » Itemized budget

Ensure the contract includes a clause that enables you to use the knowledge generated by the consultant without their future permission. It is important for you to understand that the consultant owns the rights to the intellectual property they develop, even under contract with you, unless they explicitly allow your use of their product. It is advisable that you have ownership of the intellectual property developed; it would be recommended that you do not engage in agreements that do not ensure this.

An example of such a clause could read as follows:

Any copyrightable works, ideas, discoveries, inventions, patents, products or other information developed within this project will be the exclusive property of "Your Organization Name."

Another example that may be useful is including a clause around Open Source in your contracts. This would ensure that a shared understanding of Open Source is built into contractual agreements with facilitators and consultants and understood at the local level. Sharing and documenting includes sharing of local models, templates, data collection tools and other resources with the A Way Home program staff and the participating communities as they are developed, including those developed by partners or contracted partners, consultants and facilitators.

Use your legal counsel in these matters to ensure your organization is fully protected. If you do not have a standard contract form, have your lawyers draft one for you.

When you do run into troubles, consider whether the relationship is salvageable and take steps to redress your concerns. If these are not remediated, move quickly and explore your options for terminating the contract.

DEVELOPING A WORKPLAN & BUDGET

Develop a workplan that gets you from start to finish in terms of plan development and gives some consideration to implementation and evaluation after its launch.

There are some major factors that will impact your timelines and workplan:

- » **Available Resources:** Without dedicated human resources to oversee the plan's development, it will be difficult to develop a solid plan in timely fashion. If developing the plan is an 'add-on' for staff, it will likely compete for their time with other priorities, impacting the work's quality and timeliness. It is advisable that you have a lead project manager dedicated to seeing the plan through to completion and overseeing various aspects of the process even if they are not necessarily doing all the work themselves. You will have to build a team to provide guidance to the project manager as well and may want to bring in external expertise where you need it. This, of course, has budget implications and may not be feasible with limited resources.
- » **Consultation Needs and Approach:** The number of stakeholders you need to engage and the level of engagement they require will impact timelines significantly and have budget implications. If your community is regionally spread out, you will have to develop a consultation strategy that reaches across communities as well. You may also have stakeholder groups that need to be approached individually for political reasons, thereby increasing the time you have to spend on engagement.
- » **Data and Research:** In some communities, data and information are abundant and readily available. This is unfortunately the exception rather than the norm; barriers to accessing the needed information to develop the plan will impact your capacity to deliver the final document. It will also impact its quality, especially if data is unavailable or poorly analyzed. In some cases, the plan development process will necessarily include a data collection component to make up for the lack of information – such as a youth survey or homeless count. Again, this impacts resource needs and timelines. Communities can engage the COH for support on this issue as well as local researchers where possible.
- » **Political Changes** that may impact the government's receptiveness to the plan should be considered. If a major change is afoot, such as a looming election, there may be opportunities to leverage these shifts to engage political players in the issue. Candidates may be willing to consider your asks around youth homelessness and may even incorporate them into their election platforms, giving you a critical entry into discussion about policy change and funding requirements to support implementation.

A typical workplan spans approximately one year from start to the launch of the plan, though communities, depending on various factors, can see these timelines be as long as two years in practice due to the complex various moving parts and approvals involved in finalizing the plan.

A solid workplan will outline the key components of the work involved, estimate hours needed to complete and identify responsible individuals and timelines. A sample workplan is provided below based on plan efforts completed in community.

Table 11: Sample Workplan

ITEMS	ESTIMATED HOURS	LEAD RESPONSIBLE	TIMELINE
Research & Policy Review <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Review and incorporate best practices and research » Review emerging policy documents in relation to current plan to identify areas of alignment 	40	Project Manager	January to February
Synthesize available local data specific to youth homelessness	20	Project Manager/ Consultant	January to February
Once research, policy, data review is complete, draft document to share during consultations with emerging findings	30	Project Manager/ Consultant	March
Key Stakeholder Interviews <p>It is very likely that some key stakeholders will need to be consulted on a one-on-one basis, particularly those in decision-making roles. We will need to build in time to ensure input of key individuals is appropriately sought before the plan is drafted. An estimated 20 interviews may be needed based on initial scoping.</p>	50	Project Manager/ Steering Committee	February to June

Community Roundtables Facilitate a Roundtable session with all stakeholders to seek input on the proposed plan and affirm the shared accountability framework and actions. Hosting several discussion roundtables will solicit input from diverse groups of individuals (youth, funders, non-profit sector, public system partners, government and Indigenous leadership).	30	Project Manager/ Steering Committee	June to July
Youth Voice Facilitate sessions with youth with lived experience to gather their feedback on draft plan	20	Project Manager	June to July
Draft Plan Development Once input and research is complete, develop draft plan.	80	Project Manager/ Consultant	September to October
Plan Feedback Facilitate a full-day roundtable session with all stakeholders to seek input on proposed plan and affirm shared accountability framework and actions	15	Project Manager/ Steering Committee	November
Finalize Plan Revise plan based on stakeholder feedback into final draft ready for layout and design	10	Project Manager/ Consultant	November
Launch Plan » Finalize layout and print materials » Develop communications strategy, media release » Organize launch logistics and complete plan launch	60	Project Manager/ Steering Committee	December

The next steps are to develop a budget to execute the proposed workplan. The main costs of plan development are outlined below for a range of plans.

Table 12: Sample Budget

ITEM	COST HIGH END	COST MODERATE	COST MINIMAL
Staff time (0.5 FTE/0.25/0.1 FTE)	\$30,000.00	\$15,000.00	\$6,000.00
Consultation fees	\$10,000.00	\$5,000.00	\$0.00
Consultation & meeting expenses (catering facility rental)	\$4,000.00	\$2,000.00	\$1,000.00
Youth honoraria/incentives	\$2,000.00	\$1,000.00	\$200.00
Incidentals (printing, parking, travel)	\$500.00	\$300.00	\$100.00
Report layout & design	\$2,500.00	\$500.00	\$0.00
Plan launch event (catering, facility rental)	\$2,000.00	\$500.00	\$200.00
Total budget	\$51,000.00	\$24,300.00	\$7,500.00

Account for the approximate in-kind value of community contributions to the effort as well. Pending what's available, you may be able to reduce your budget accordingly.

IN-KIND CONTRIBUTIONS
Steering committee time
Working committee time
Researcher contributions
Key stakeholders participation
Charismatic and Influential Communicator
Facility costs provided in kind for consultations/meetings
Backbone supports administration/hosting costs
Backbone supports in-kind secondment of project manager time

LAYING THE FOUNDATION

Your planning team should work out the foundational elements of the plan early on, particularly the vision, mission and guiding principles of the initiative. Even if these are developed as drafts to be verified in community subsequently, having a common agenda early on will be critical.

The youth plan should have a clear vision statement, which succinctly articulates the long-term desired end-state resulting from the proposed work. A mission statement describes the reason for the initiative or organization; the statement guides ongoing decision making about priorities and actions. You are likely familiar with vision and mission statements, but keep in mind that these should be concise, inspirational and memorable – ideally between five and 15 words.

In the example from Edmonton, you will note clear alignment between the community and Alberta’s provincial plan to end homelessness, though this may not always be the case – particularly if your provincial/territorial government does not have a plan in place.

Table 13: Vision/Mission Statement Examples

EXAMPLES	EDMONTON	GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA
Vision	An Edmonton where all youth have a safe, supportive and nurturing home.	An Alberta where all youth have a safe, supportive and nurturing home.
Mission	To reduce the number of youth experiencing homelessness and prevent further youth from becoming homeless by ensuring youth and their families have the services and supports they need.	To reduce the number of youth experiencing homelessness in Alberta and prevent further youth from becoming homeless by ensuring youth and their families have the services and supports they need.

Again, not all plans have these elements clearly articulated, though it is recommended you include their development in your process explicitly to ensure diverse stakeholders can hold themselves and each other accountable to the agreed-upon vision and mission.

There will need to be agreement among diverse stakeholders to adopt these elements, thus it is imperative that you seek input on these notions early in your consultation process. These elements can be effective points of discussion in your consultation process, particularly at the onset, to support creating a sense of co-ownership among diverse groups.

Though not everyone will agree with the proposed vision and mission, being transparent about the foundational thinking that grounds the plan will ensure stakeholders are clear about the proposed direction. Your planning group should be familiar with these concepts and constantly check in to ensure your approach is being developed in alignment with your proposed vision and mission.

DEVELOPING GUIDING PRINCIPLES

While the vision and mission statements are forward-looking and aspirational, the guiding principles of plans to end youth homelessness begin to frame the proposed approach. Guiding principles articulate the norms or ethics guiding stakeholders' actions in this work. These should be made explicit and serve as guidelines for decision making.

The principles we propose to uphold through the work of the plan will guide the type of strategies and actions we aim to undertake. As such, these principles not only have to resonate locally, but they also have to align with the existing body of evidence on effective responses to youth homelessness.

Table 14: *Guiding Principles Examples*

EXAMPLES	EDMONTON	ALBERTA	KAMLOOPS
Guiding Principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Housing First approach » Stakeholder engagement » Positive youth development » Individualized & youth-centred supports focused on prevention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Engaging youth » Family support » Building on successful existing initiatives » Collaboration » A proactive approach, focused on prevention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Shift from managing homelessness to preventing and ending homelessness » Housing First philosophy » System planning » Healthy transitions to adulthood » Data collection and information management » Youth voice » Diversity » Wise use of resources » Private sector involvement

Existing research has consistently affirmed several concepts to be foundational to good planning and practice. In this toolkit, we are highlighting a number of key concepts for you to consider as you develop the guiding principles that underpin your local approach to end youth homelessness. These are by no means the only options available; however, we strongly urge you to consider their applicability to your plan given the supporting evidence affirming their effectiveness. You are not limited to picking one principle to ground your plan – there is no reason why you cannot adopt a combination of the above, add to it and make it your own.

Housing First: Housing First as a philosophy emphasizes that everyone has the right to safe, secure and stable housing without any preconditions of readiness, with access to the supports needed to maintain it. As a programmatic intervention, Housing First can be an effective intervention for youth through appropriate adaptations focused on life skills development, meaningful engagement, access to education and employment, and strengthening social relations. [For more on Housing First for youth, see link.](#)

A Human Rights Approach: Youth plans generally set goals and standards for addressing homelessness, but rarely frame the issue in terms of human rights. The human rights approach would reframe ending youth homelessness as a long-term goal as a step towards realizing the right to adequate housing. Canada without Poverty provides an excellent guide to incorporating human rights in your plan. Building on the notion of the right to housing, consider linking your plan to other rights such as the right to education, personal security and privacy, equal access to justice and civil and political rights. In this case, you can make specific reference to human rights, articulate goals and standards in terms of human rights and ensure those responsible for implementing and executing the plan are trained in human rights. For more on human rights in planning, [see link](#). Note that A Way Home is working with the COH and Canada Without Poverty to develop a human rights guide specific to youth homelessness community planning that will be launched in 2016.

Prevention-focused System Planning & Integration: The response to youth homelessness must be coordinated among the diverse agencies, governmental bodies and systems that youth need and/or access. System planning proposes that we build intervention responses to homelessness in a coordinated fashion to ensure best outcomes at the system level, versus a program-by-program basis. Because the homeless-serving system cannot solve youth homelessness on its own, a youth plan must necessarily address the roles of mainstream services in an integrated fashion, such as child welfare, education, health care, housing services and corrections. Similarly, integration at the policy level must be re-aligned to meet ending youth homelessness objectives.

A prevention-focused system planning and integration approach to youth homelessness focuses on measures within the homeless-serving and mainstream systems at the service and policy levels to ensure that youth do not become homeless in the first place. When it does occur, responses are in place to ensure homeless is as brief as possible. Preventing youth homelessness has better long-term outcomes for youth, families and the community and is a more cost-effective approach than reactive interventions.

Cross-sectoral Collaboration: Ending youth homelessness is a collective responsibility achieved through collaborative action and solutions. Youth, government, academia, private, non-profit and faith sectors are directly impacted by youth homelessness and share responsibility for addressing it. Cross-sectoral collaboration and leadership will be essential to any sustained effort to address youth homelessness. By acknowledging good work already being done and building on existing knowledge, expertise, effective practices, partnerships and resources we can foster cross-sectoral collaboration further. Strong linkages and alignment with relevant policy levers can further system-level solutions with government as well.

Youth-centred Approach: Ending youth homelessness requires youth participation and shared decision making. The perspectives and voices of youth must shape proposed solutions. As such, youth should be engaged throughout all levels of planning, implementation and evaluation in a meaningful and productive manner.

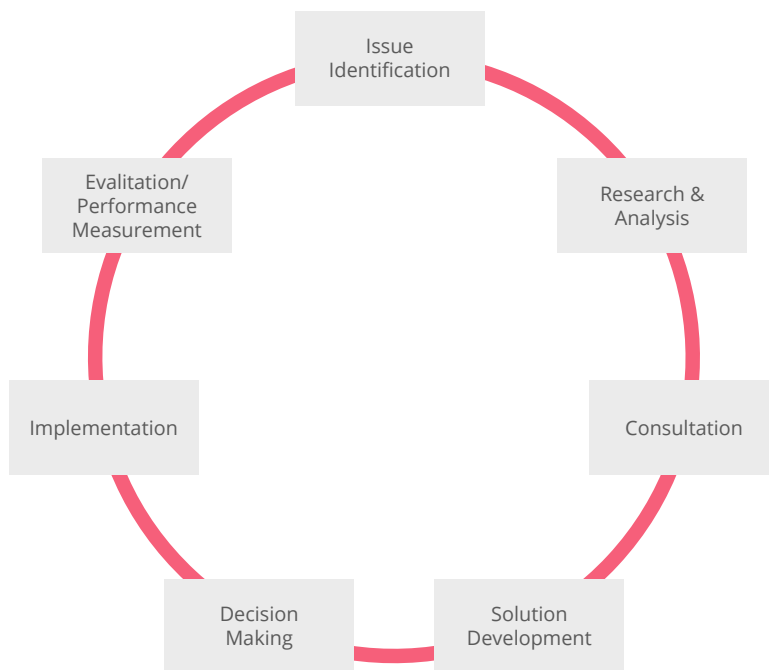
Proposed interventions should be individualized, culturally appropriate, flexible and adaptable in response to the changing needs of youth. Young people at risk of and experiencing homelessness are not a homogeneous group; their diverse, complex and unique identities need to be recognized throughout. This includes the needs of Indigenous, immigrant and LGBTQ2S youth and youth with developmental disabilities, mental health and/or addictions issues.

Rather than simply moving young people toward independence, our approach should be tailored to their needs, preferences and developmental circumstances. Youth and their families must be supported and connected to ensure that whenever possible youth are able to stay with their families or with a caring, safe and nurturing adult. A comprehensive approach supports youth to empower themselves, form meaningful relationships with adults, build skills, develop leadership and contribute to their community as they transition to adulthood. As a strengths-based perspective, Positive Youth Development focuses on enhancing the social, cognitive, psychological and physical well-being of young people.

GETTING GOING

Once you have the infrastructure in place to develop the plan, you're ready to begin. To help you frame the process, it is helpful to consider the policy development cycle. Like public policy, developing a plan to end youth homelessness involves research, analysis, consultation and synthesis of information. It should also involve an evaluation of implementation and course correction. You don't have to go through these steps in sequence but consider each as complete the plan development process.

Figure 6: Policy Development Cycle



Likely, you've already identified youth homelessness as an issue and have a sense of what research is currently available. You may have conducted consultations to determine your community's readiness to develop and implement a plan to end youth homelessness. Additionally, you may know what solutions the plan should include. An effective plan pulls this knowledge together into a coherent strategy – a strategy supported by community stakeholders.

In some cases, the process may seem to move in reverse, from solution development back to research and consultation. This is common and not a sign of failure; you should be prepared to go back to the drawing board as new information emerges or the community context shifts. You will also have to consider what resources you have to complete these various activities.

As you consult, develop a means to share findings with stakeholders. Develop a ‘what we heard’ document summarizing learning and implications. Present results through a community forum or by seeking written feedback on the ‘what we heard’ document.

AN EXAMPLE FROM THE GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA

Governments developing a youth plan may find it useful to consider the policy cycle process in Alberta. This comes from David French, manager, homeless supports initiatives, family violence prevention and homeless supports, Alberta Human Services who led the development of the Alberta Youth Plan (2014).

ISSUE IDENTIFICATION

A Plan for Alberta – Ending Homelessness in 10 Years was approved as a direction-setting document to address homelessness in Alberta in 2011.

This plan identifies youth as one of the populations considered to be part of the ‘hidden homeless.’ It goes on to state that Albertans from specialized groups, including homeless youth, are dealing with particularly challenging issues and require targeted responses to be rehoused.

The broader provincial plan not only allowed government to become immersed in the groundswell of good work happening in the sector at the local level, but was a key opportunity for administration staff leading the plan’s development to build trust with the sector.

RESEARCH & ANALYSIS

An MLA-lead internal review of youth homelessness resulted in five options for policy consideration. These efforts initiated mandate alignment within the Government of Alberta to promote increased focus and a more integrated response to youth homelessness.

Within this phase, and as an outcome of the internal review, the Youth Homelessness Cross-Ministry Committee was created and would go on to achieve the following critical outcomes:

- » Agreement of a definition of youth homelessness that was accepted across Government;
- » Early prioritization of the issue within departments; and
- » Early discussions about the reality of the issue. The need for a holistic response across government and our role as 'teachers' began within government.

Extensive research was undertaken to review programs and services across Canada and globally to identify promising and best practices for addressing and ending youth homelessness.

A research focus was also on identifying policy levers. Calgary released a dedicated youth homelessness plan in 2011, which closely aligns to the provincial youth plan. Both speak to a coordinated system required to prevent and end youth homelessness, emphasize the need for an expanded housing continuum to meet the current need and encourage an improved data system to assist with knowledge mobilization to influence public policy.

In 2013, the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate released a special report on youth transitioning from care. We worked to ensure the plan met all five recommendations within the report; including (but not limited to):

- » Ensuring young people leaving care have affordable, safe and stable housing options; and
- » Supporting young people leaving care with access to counseling and/or mental health services.

<p>CONSULTATION</p>	<p>Conversations with community, including youth who have experienced homelessness, identified the priorities that the plan would have to address to effectively respond to youth homelessness.</p> <p>In total, over 400 Albertans were consulted during the development of the plan. Albertans engaged included youth who had been or were currently homeless, service providers and cross-ministry partners.</p> <p>This is where Albertans ‘got the pen’ and had the opportunity to take control over the work and ensure it met their community’s needs. This component was critical for the government, who recognized that solutions to the issue lie in community.</p>
<p>SOLUTIONS DEVELOPMENT</p>	<p>Continuous engagement of stakeholders occurred throughout the dissemination of the information collected through consultation. A ‘what we heard’ document was produced and shared with consultation participants as a means of validating input and facilitating ongoing engagement. Government remained accessible to community throughout the plan’s development to ensure we were always listening and evolving as community evolved.</p> <p>The Youth Homelessness Cross-Ministry Committee was engaged throughout the development of the plan given they were going to be assigned key roles.</p> <p>Key government strategies were leveraged to inform the breadth of the issue across government – hence the early focus on identifying policy levers in the research phase. Key policy levers/strategies were referenced throughout the plan articulating that many components of this work weren’t new; they existed in current strategies/plans and just needed focus on the youth homeless population.</p>
<p>DECISION MAKING</p>	<p>The decision-making phase is where contextually each province/state/ community will be different. In Alberta, this is where we were well positioned based on the work we did leading up to this point. Alberta moved forward with Cabinet policy approval for the youth plan given it was identifying new policy related to the issue and was requesting new dollars to enhance the response.</p> <p>Within this phase, significant education was required. Briefing leadership, ministers and premiers to defend policy at the various tables was critical. Here, knowing your stakeholders and having strong relationships with them pays off.</p> <p>Some sound advice to keep in mind: “Be as resilient as the youth we work with.”</p>

GROUNDING YOUR PLAN IN EVIDENCE

You must develop a solid understanding of the body of evidence on youth homelessness and what it takes to end it. This involves not only becoming proficient in the existing research on youth homelessness and available local information, but also taking on additional data collection and analysis if needed. You will need to tap into any available information that can shed light on the local youth homelessness situation by firstly becoming familiar with ‘what’s out there.’

So, what type of information do you need and how do you get it? This will depend on the level of coordination and data sharing in your community, as well as your research and ‘detective’ skills to get a hold of necessary information. However, there are certain pieces of data you will be able to access as a starting point. Use this information to paint a comprehensive picture of community capacity and gaps, which you can confirm in the consultation phases further.

A RESEARCH AGENDA

Engage local researchers in the beginning of the process. Researchers can be part of your steering committee or working groups, as noted previously. Consider developing a local research agenda that identifies key research questions, aimed at enhancing your community’s understanding of youth homelessness. Develop the research agenda collaboratively with the community and researchers. The research agenda should support planning and implementation of the plan by addressing gaps in knowledge, developing program evaluation capacity and by bolstering data collection systems and practices.

A common starting point is to host a forum bringing together various researchers from your local universities and colleges, those working in government, public systems and service agencies. Refer to A Way Home for an example of [a youth homelessness research agenda](#). The COH can provide additional examples from Canadian communities, as well as provide support and technical assistance to develop your own research agenda.



The research agenda should support planning and implementation of the plan by addressing gaps in knowledge, developing program evaluation capacity and by bolstering data collection systems and practices.

LOCATING INFORMATION

You may locate these key sources of information on your own or with the help of your steering committee members and contacts in the community and government. Be comprehensive, but be mindful not to become overwhelmed by information.

Table 15: Information Sources

INFORMATION	SAMPLE SOURCES	RELEVANCE TO YOUTH PLAN
Housing market information	CMHC rental report, housing market analyses	Gives you a sense of current market conditions impacting youth's ability to access housing and overall housing indicators for your community
Demographics	Statistics Canada, National Household Survey	Provides analysis of trends in your community around age cohorts, immigration, population growth, Indigenous people, income and housing affordability as context to youth homelessness
Extreme core housing need	Statistics Canada, National Household Survey	Ability to hone in on most at risk for homelessness groups (very low income, paying 50%+ on shelter), to provide you an estimate of overall youth groups vulnerable to homelessness
Homeless counts	Local Homeless Point-in-Time Count	If available, provides a snapshot of overall population experiencing homeless at a point-in-time, can be used to analyze proportion of youth and their characteristics
Shelter utilization	HIFIS, HMIS, local shelter reports	Annual shelter use rates can be analyzed to deduce what proportion is used by youth as well as their needs and characteristics
Service use	HIFIS, HMIS, local providers reports	Analysis of available data from local information systems and/or individual service providers can be mined to provide a sense of youth needs and scope of the issue locally; gaps may be identifiable in these reports as well

Best practice reviews	Homeless Hub search engine	Reviews of effective service models and community strategies are available in key documents available on the Homeless Hub; your role will be to distill this information for your local community
Policy review	Local, provincial/territorial, federal government reports and websites	Scan the policy environment impacting youth homelessness. This includes Speeches from the Throne, Budgets, Ministry Strategic Plans and Business Plans, key policy documents and reports from departments connected to youth homelessness
Strategic Initiatives	Reports, plans, strategic documents produced by local funders, agencies, collaborative initiatives	Local plans to end homelessness, youth strategies, poverty plans, etc. that you need to be aware of and connected to in developing the youth plan
Local research	Academic or grey literature, surveys, workshop/consultation results.	Research efforts may have already produced excellent information on youth homelessness locally; you should build on these efforts and complement them with additional research rather than duplicating.

Local researchers may have already produced an analysis of trends, gaps and resources on youth homelessness that you can use to build your plan. However, it is equally common to find very little synthesized information to help you. In some cases you may need to develop a research initiative, as part of your planning process, to gather critical missing information.

For example, in Wellington County, a report on rural youth homelessness identified the need for a youth-specific strategy and was the impetus for the County to apply to Mobilizing Local Communities for support to develop a youth plan. Their first step was to hold youth focus groups with 60 youth in nine locations across rural Wellington County. A report was generated from these consultations to identify gaps. The planning group synthesized key findings from both reports and two Point-in-Time (PiT) Homeless Counts and brought these findings to a community roundtable for input. In this manner, local research was a key part of the Wellington process to develop a youth plan.



local research was a key part of the Wellington process to develop a youth plan.

Similarly, in Edmonton, HMIS data and PiT Count reports were mined for youth-specific data, which was in turn used to develop the rationale for the local youth strategy. Edmonton Homeward Trust, who provided backbone supports to the initiative, conducted a literature review that they presented at a planning forum to kick-start the consultation process. Research and data on youth homelessness is important for two reasons. First, you must build a rationale for action. Why should youth homelessness be a local priority? Second, the solutions contained within your plan must be based on evidence. To prioritize youth homelessness, you must have a sense of the issue.

- » How many youth are experiencing homelessness?
- » What are their needs?
- » What are their demographics?
- » What are their pathways into homelessness?
- » What would work best for whom and when?
- » What are emerging trends we need to be aware of?
- » What solutions work well?
- » What solutions have proven to be less effective?
- » How do policies and practices within agencies and government departments impact youth homelessness?
- » What is the cost of the status quo?
- » What is the cost of resolving the issue?

While existing research can provide some important clues to help you answer these basic questions, the better your local data is, the more likely that your plan is appropriately tailored to make an impact.

CONDUCTING RESEARCH

In some communities, the lack of available local research has meant that the planning process had to include data collection and analysis. It is not uncommon for communities to undertake a homeless PiT Count during the plan development phase and use the results to inform the process.

This was the case for Saint John, Kingston, Wellington County, Yellowknife and Brandon. For instance, Saint John conducted a youth-focused homeless count that engaged schools and other key stakeholders. The homeless count process can be adapted strategically to simultaneously engage key stakeholders but also gather critical information. Be mindful to adapt the homeless count methods to ensure the youth population is adequately enumerated given the underrepresentation of youth common in the adult shelter system that standard count methodologies tend to focus on.

For more on homeless counts and adapting these for youth, the COH has developed a Youth Count Toolkit. Additional information is available from the [Homeless Hub and USISCH](#) and on homeless counts and engaging youth. For rural communities engaging in homeless counts, another useful [resource](#) provides information on PiT Count methods, challenges and best practices. Communities that conduct regular homeless counts will have some data on youth; this should be analyzed in a manner consistent with the Canadian Definition of Youth Homelessness (that is, unaccompanied youth 24 and under).

Administrative data, collected through HIFIS or HMIS, can be effectively leveraged to identify youth shelter and service trends. Such data will be more comprehensive than a homeless count and, where reliable and accurate, should always be your primary data source for analysis. Where administrative is not available, you can solicit local shelters for data on occupancy, service use, demographics, etc. during a designated time period. This can produce useful data to get things started in lieu of formal data management system.

With respect to best practices, it's important that you don't reinvent the wheel. There is significant research on best practice programs and strategies for ending youth homelessness; such analyses are readily available online through the Homeless Hub and are even developed as toolkits for communities. Section one outlines best practice resources. In section three, we will delve deeper into promising approaches. Remember, your role is not simply to cut-and-paste such recommended approaches, but to synthesize the available information, consider its relevance to your local context and develop specific solutions that will resolve youth homeless in your community.

Finally, consider these best practices within your local context. For example, it may be best practice to build new affordable housing, but is it realistic given the socioeconomic and political context in your community? Your job is to develop a strategic youth plan that is visionary and grounded in best practice, but can be practically implemented in your community.



There is significant research on best practice programs and strategies for ending youth homelessness; such analyses are readily available online through the Homeless Hub and are even developed as toolkits for communities.

POLICY ANALYSIS

You should be looking at government reports and information closely as well. Has child protection undergone a major review recently? Has the Speech from the Throne mentioned vulnerable youth or homelessness? Does the province have strategies for addressing youth in general or, more specifically, youth employment, involvement with the justice system, education engagement and achievement, etc.? Where does youth homelessness fit among government priorities? What are the key policy levers which you can tie the youth plan to? Have other strategies and plans been crafted that have direct intersections with the key systems youth experiencing homelessness may access?

Answer these questions by building on existing relationships with public servants and political allies and strategizing with your planning group. Incorporate a review of existing policy as part of the plan development process and present this information to your steering committee. Through this process you may identify additional stakeholders to consult. This will also provide you with a framework for policy changes and funding requests to support the implementation of the plan.

In your conversations with government representatives, probe for which areas are most likely to garner buy-in, develop an understanding of who's who and identify the most effective process for advancing change. An excellent example of funding 'policy levers' for ending youth homelessness can be found in the Government of Alberta's [Plan to Prevent and Reduce Youth Homelessness: Appendix 1 and 3](#), which outline how the proposed direction aligns with broader government initiatives and the mandates and of various departments.

If you have committee members who are in government, leverage their expertise. They can point you to information, provide critical background context, facilitate access to reports and introduce you to key contacts. They can also point you in the right direction in terms of building support in government for the plan and advise on how best to approach the right decision makers. Of course, such allies may not be on your formal steering committee; you may have other relationships you can leverage to this end.



The way you take on policy work should leverage and enhance your relationships with government, rather than strain them.

As a non-profit organization taking on an advocacy role, you may be diving into unfamiliar territory and may even feel uneasy about being perceived as adversarial to government. Or, you may be concerned about losing charitable status. Familiarize yourself with Canada Revenue Agency's regulations on charitable advocacy. A useful overview from Imagine Canada is [available here](#).

If you are able to tie your activities and asks to existing government policy and direction, in many ways you are re-affirming their direction rather than 'calling them out.' By positioning your asks within existing frameworks, the youth plan can be a means of helping government enact their vision in community. The way you take on policy work should leverage and enhance your relationships with government, rather than strain them. We will look at this further in the coming section on Engaging and Influencing Government.

ALIGNING WITH LOCAL INITIATIVES

Align with other local initiatives such as broader community plans to end homelessness, poverty reduction plans, additional and mental health strategies, etc. Connecting with such coalitions/lead organizations and developing a sense of their work and potential areas of alignment will help your plan development process while ensuring these groups are informed about your initiative.

When it comes to local homelessness initiatives, it is imperative that you are able to articulate how the youth plan ‘fits’ within the broader goals of the community. Where the potential for misalignment exists, a clear message developed ahead of time can go a long way toward alleviating misunderstandings and tensions in community.

Here are some thorny questions that can arise in these situations, which you may want to think about ahead of time:

- » Why do we need a youth plan? We already have a local plan to end homelessness.
- » What’s different about a youth plan?
- » Won’t this take away from other groups?
- » What about other populations, like women or families, do we need a special plan for them too?

As an example, let’s look closely at Alberta, a province with a provincial youth plan in place. Alberta has a broader provincial plan for ending homelessness and all seven cities have local plans to end homelessness, but only Edmonton and Calgary have specific youth plans. Calgary was the first city to develop a youth plan, which was followed by the provincial government’s youth plan in 2015 and then Edmonton’s soon thereafter.

In Calgary’s case, the initial plan was launched in 2011 and positioned as an extension of the Calgary Plan to End Homelessness focused on youth; it was launched as a collaborative endeavour between the Calgary Homeless Foundation (CHF) and the youth sector. However, for a number of reasons, the actual implementation of the proposed actions was limited from 2011 to 2015 and the local youth sector sought to ‘refresh’ the plan given a number of key local changes. There was a general sense from participating stakeholders that the plan did not represent the collective will of the community to the fullest extent.

Since the plan was launched four years ago, considerable changes ensued that needed to be considered as the planning group embarked on the refresh process. These include the launch of the [Alberta Plan to Prevent and Reduce Youth Homelessness](#) (2015), which sets provincial policy direction and is driving new dollars to community to respond to the issue as well as the renewed [Updated Calgary Plan to End Homelessness](#) (2015). Both of these plans emphasize the critical role community ownership and joint accountability play in order to fully implement priority actions on homelessness.



The change in political leadership in Alberta to an NDP government also presented a unique opportunity to inform a new course for the province around social policy that advances an end to youth homelessness

The change in political leadership in Alberta to an NDP government also presented a unique opportunity to inform a new course for the province around social policy that advances an end to youth homelessness. The provincial youth plan signalled a new level of openness in government around policy and practice changes to advance common objectives, particularly relevant in the work with Child Intervention Services and Corrections.

The 2013 *Child and Youth Advocates Special Report* and the Human Services, Child and Family Services Division's work on a revisioned Child Intervention Practice Framework point to significant reform underway at a systems level around natural supports and transitions that aligns with our ending youth homelessness objectives. At a regional level, Calgary and Area Child and Family Service's work on developing a *Permanency Framework*, rolling out *Outcomes-based Service Delivery* and implementing the *Signs of Safety* approach further affirmed the need for re-thinking the local approach to ending and preventing youth homelessness leveraging this direction at the system level.

The work on the ground has also shifted as new learning emerges, particularly around family reunification, prevention and healthy transitions. There is unprecedented data and research available to inform a renewed direction and there are new partners at the youth sector table.

As a result, the planning group working on refreshing the youth plan undertook an initial policy scan to assist them in identifying levers for their work. The table below summarizes the key policy directions they identified with relevance to the youth plan refresh.

Table 16: Policy Lever Analysis Example

KEY POLICY/ STRATEGY DOCUMENT	DIRECTIONS RELEVANT TO YOUTH PLAN REFRESH
Social Policy	
Alberta Social Policy Framework	<p>Safe: Youth live free from fear of abuse and violence.</p> <p>Healthy: Achieve the highest attainable standards for rehousing or family reunification</p> <p>Secure and Resilient: Youth support themselves and their households through safe work and career opportunities, with access to effective income supports when in financial need</p> <p>Lifelong Learners: Youth develop the knowledge, skills and commitment to learning necessary to realize their potential and participate in society</p> <p>Included: Youth feel welcomed in the communities where they live, learn and work</p> <p>Active and Engaged: Youth have opportunities to participate in recreational activities and cultural experiences and to engage in Albertan society</p>
Homelessness	
A Plan for Alberta - Ending Homelessness in 10 years	<p>Rapid Re-housing: Moving homeless youth from streets and shelters into permanent housing quickly</p> <p>Client-centered: Help youth obtain the assistance they need to restore their stability and maintain their housing</p> <p>Prevent Homelessness: Emergency assistance and adequate and accessible government programs and services for youth stem flow into homelessness</p> <p>Better Information: Collecting, researching and sharing essential information that focuses on outcomes</p>

	<p>Aggressive Assistance: Making sure youth have the resources they need to secure and keep stable homes</p> <p>Coordinated Systems: Ensuring governments, agencies and communities work together in an integrated, efficient way toward shared objectives</p> <p>More Housing Options: Increasing the quantity and variety of housing options so that every youth has a home</p> <p>Effective Policies: Implementing government policies that bring down barriers to re-housing and actively promote the goal of ending youth homelessness</p>
Plan to Prevent and Reduce Youth Homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Youth have increased housing stability through rehousing and family reunification » Increased resiliency in homeless youth and youth at risk of becoming homeless » Prevention of youth homelessness through education and enhanced family and natural supports » Healthy transitions to adulthood
Child Protection	
Office of the Child and Youth Advocate – <i>Youth Aging out of Care Special Report</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Young people leaving care should have affordable, safe and stable housing options and the financial resources to support themselves independently » Dedicated and trained caseworkers are in place to meet the unique needs of young people leaving care » Youth are effectively transitioned to the adult system to meet their service and support needs » Young people leaving care have access to counseling and/or mental health supports » Enhanced awareness of caseworkers, caregivers and service providers about resources for young people leaving care and support young people to access them » Young people leaving care have supportive adult relationships

<p>Calgary Region Child and Family Services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Partnering with communities to deliver right services at right time » Focus on preventative actions to enhance resiliency and reduce interventions » Recognize importance of relationship with families, communities and service delivery partners » Focus on supporting families using strength-based approach as best placement outcome for children; family unit as essential to children's long-term outcomes. <p>Five key outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Vulnerable children are supported to live successfully in the community » Children in temporary care are reunited quickly with their family » Children in permanent care are placed in permanent homes as quickly as possible » Youth transition to adulthood successfully » Indigenous children live in culturally appropriate placements
<p>Child Intervention Practice Framework</p>	<p>Six practice principles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Aboriginal experience » Preserve family » Strengths-based » Connection » Collaboration » Continuous improvement
<p>Permanency Framework</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Child- and youth-centered permanency planning as soon as family is engaged » All children and youth are entitled to a permanent family relationship » All permanency options for the child/youth are concurrently considered » The four domains of permanency planning (relationship, culture, legal and home) are honoured » Meaningful permanency planning for every youth, regardless of age, is continuous

Signs of Safety	» Increasing safety and reducing risk and danger by focusing on a family's strengths, resources and networks
Outcomes-based Service Delivery	» Collaborative practice » Flexible contracting and funding » Data about the outcomes of services provided
Other	
FASD 10-Year Strategic Plan	» Individuals with fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD) require improved access to housing – including places to live that are affordable and provide structure and support » Improve access to services for individuals affected by FASD, including vulnerable populations who are not receiving the support they need, with a particular focus on youth in transition to adulthood
2015 Revised School Act	Section 16.1 specifically allows for organized activities that promote equality and non-discrimination with respect to, without limitation, race, religious belief, colour, gender, gender identity, gender expression, physical disability, mental disability, family status or sexual orientation, including but not limited to organizations such as gay-straight alliances, diversity clubs, anti-racism clubs and anti-bullying clubs

Source: Calgary Plan to End Youth Homelessness Refresh Strategy Overview Briefing, Jan. 16, 2016. Calgary Youth Sector – Refresh Committee.

SERVICE SYSTEM MAPPING

Mapping out the current service system for youth experiencing homelessness will give you a good starting place for understanding current resources and a basis for analyzing gaps. A system mapping exercise can be useful in identifying the potential organizations you need to engage. How you access the information to develop this system map can vary.

You may be in a small community where you know who the players are; you may be in a community where the resources are already well analyzed and organized in a youth street survival guide. But you may also work in a context where such information is not readily available. Devise a way to collate it anew. Consider an online survey to assess current capacity and perceived needs around youth homelessness. You can also host gatherings among diverse providers to collect this information and gather input on current trends, gaps and emerging opportunities.

Be strategic about how you engage with and assess youth homelessness when it comes to adult-serving agencies. It is essential that your plan address youth homelessness, not the youth-serving system. Homeless youth often access adult shelters and services. Failing to recognize and include such providers in your planning work will hinder your initial assessment of the local situation and the solutions you generate.

System mapping does not have to be an overwhelming endeavour – in fact, you may already have a solid inventory of various services developed – such as a Youth Street Survival Guide, a 211-resource directory or even your HPS Community Plan. Look to the St. John's System Mapping Survey as an illustration of how to collect this information in an online format (see the Resource section).

THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

Understandably, you will want to engage as many stakeholders as possible in your plan development. However, timelines, resources and levels of interest from stakeholders will dictate the scope of your consultation process. Carefully consider the ‘who, what, when, where, why and how’ of stakeholder involvement as you develop the consultation process.

DEVELOPING YOUR CONSULTATION PROCESS	
Who	Determining who needs to be consulted
What	What the subject matter of the consultation is
When	Determining the timing of consultations and when you have consulted enough
Where	Determining appropriate location(s) to hold consultations
Why	The purpose of the consultation helps shape the ‘how’ and ‘where’ of consultation
How	Determining best methods for consultation

For each stakeholder, consider the following:

- » Are you simply letting them know that a youth plan is being developed?
- » Are you seeking input into proposed strategies?
- » Do you want the stakeholder to co-own the solutions?

There are distinct levels of consultation:

1. Inform;
2. Gather information;
3. Discuss or involve;
4. Engage; and
5. Partner.

Regardless of your approach, use the consultation process to build trust and goodwill.

Table 17: Consultation Levels

CONSULTATION LEVELS				
1. Inform	2. Gather Information	3. Discuss or Involve	4. Engage	5. Partner
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » No opportunity to influence the final outcome/ No decisions required » Need for acceptance of a proposal or decision before a decision may be made » Information is necessary to abate concerns or prepare for involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Purpose is primarily to listen and gather information » Decisions are still being shaped » No firm commitment to do anything with the views collected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Two-way information exchange » Individuals and groups who have an interest in the issue and will likely be affected by the outcome » Opportunity to influence final outcome » Encourage discussion among and with stakeholders » Input shapes direction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Stakeholders need to talk to each other regarding complex, value-laden issues » Capacity for stakeholders to shape policies and decisions that affect them » Opportunity for shared agenda setting and open time frames for deliberation on issues » Options generated together will be respected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Empower stakeholders to manage process » Stakeholders accept challenge of developing solutions themselves » Planning group ready to assume the role of enabler » Agreement to implement solutions generated by stakeholders

There are diverse strategies you can employ depending on the stakeholder in question and the purpose of the consultation. Consider what would be most effective given your goals.

Table 18: Consultation Strategies

CONSULTATION LEVELS & STRATEGIES					
	1. Inform	2. Gather Information	3. Discuss or Involve	4. Engage	5. Partner
Consultation Strategies	Communication Advertising Calls for input Community mapping Fact sheets Information fairs/kits Media events Open houses Press releases Meetings				
	Consultation Community meetings Stakeholder panels Polling Public hearings/seminars Survey questionnaires Focus groups Interviews				
	Advisory committees Web-based surveys E-conferencing Online discussion groups Issue conferences Workshops				
	Engagement Charrettes Roundtables Retreats Panels Conferences Steering committees Study circles/groups Think tanks				

Use the table below as a template. Identify organizations and stakeholders in each category, determine at what level they'll be consulted and which strategies you'll employ.

Table 19: Consultation Stakeholders

STAKEHOLDER GROUPS	WHO? KEY GROUPS/ INDIVIDUALS	WHAT? CONSULTATION LEVEL	WHERE? LOCATION	WHEN? TIMING	WHY? PROPOSE	HOW? CONSULTATION STRATEGY
Youth						
Indigenous leadership & government						
Service Providers						
Government of Canada						
Provincial/ Territorial Government						
Local Government						
Community Funders						
Public System Partners						
Private Sector						
Researchers						
Broader Community						

CONSULTATION CONSIDERATIONS

Do your homework

It is important to get grounded in the evidence first; don't begin consultations if your planning group (backbone supports, project manager and steering committee) is not familiar with the evidence on ending youth homelessness, does not have a general sense of the issue in community, or is unsure about the potential solutions required to address the issue. This does not mean you've developed a plan and are simply 'shopping it' in community for a stamp of approval. It simply means you've done your homework and are taking on consultations from a solid foundation.

A sound understanding of the issue does not mean your research is complete; rather, your data collection process should include reviews of existing literature, policy, data and consultations themselves. The consultation process will likely include a diversity of methods to collect information: one-on-one interviews, small informal/formal meetings, large community forums, surveys, etc. Your job will be to collate the diverse sources of information into a coherent synthesis that shapes the proposed response.

Help stakeholders prepare for consultations by providing backgrounders, research summaries and a resource guide for further reading.



A sound understanding of the issue does not mean your research is complete; rather, your data collection process should include reviews of existing literature, policy, data and consultations themselves.

Phase-in consultations

Consider how you want to break the information out to communities in a logical fashion. Most communities have at least two community sessions where broad input is sought for planning. During the first session, the focus is to set the stage: outline research findings, best practices and a synthesis of findings about youth homelessness locally. These events are generally larger in scale, inviting representatives across stakeholder groups to get informed and participate in an early dialogue about the youth plan. You can consider bringing in speakers from outside the community to give participants a sense of what is happening elsewhere in terms of promising practices and ultimately to inspire action locally. Winnipeg recently hosted such an event, where research was presented along with emerging areas of focus (see Resource section for their materials).

You can develop a facilitator's guide to outline areas where you want input early on from participants at the event. Ideally, participants should be broken into small groups and given questions to prompt discussion. A facilitator can either be selected ahead of time or by participants. These sessions are useful to get the participants engaged in emerging areas that will drive the content of the final plan. You can set up these sessions to delve into discussions about potential solutions as well, rather than going over the issue again. Over-engagement within this phase can streamline the authoring of the plan and the steps in the following phases.

Check what you heard

The more inclusive and mindful of your biases you are, the more the plan will authentically reflect stakeholder input. This will ensure the plan is grounded in evidence and increases the likelihood that it will be successfully implemented. At times it will be difficult to look past your own opinions. Other times, stakeholder feedback will contradict the research body of evidence. Additionally, you may think you've heard affirmation of your direction, when in fact you've missed a key point entirely. Remain open-minded and flexible throughout the plan development process.

You can consider coming back to community to affirm what you've heard in consultations. A 'what we heard' document summarizing community input is often used in plan development to ensure accurate reflection of input. This also provides community stakeholders with another source of communication about the process, keeping them abreast of plan development.

Fix it before you launch it

Once you have a draft of the plan, or a good sense of your direction, it is a good idea to go back to community stakeholders and 'check-in' on your assumptions. Again, you can ask for input on the proposed strategies and goals, but also begin the discussion on implementation issues and foster buy-in before you release the final plan.

This can provide excellent input on areas you missed or didn't consider adequately. The tone of the plan or even the way a particular group is written about can at times raise concerns. It is better to correct these issues in the draft stage than for these to grow into divisive points post-launch. These conversations can also serve as early testing ground for implementation as stakeholders begin to see themselves in the plan and may step up to 'own' particular actions before the plan is finalized.

Mind the buy-in gap

Do not frame consultations from a deficit lens. While it is important to articulate gaps and delve into the issues that contribute to youth homelessness, blaming is not conducive to buy-in or collaboration. Stakeholders need to see themselves in the plan; they need to see their role being valued and part of the vision for the future. Coming in ‘guns blazing’ on the faults of government, emergency shelters or other stakeholders will not do the broader movement any service. You need everyone willingly at the table; the tone of community and stakeholder consultations can make or break how certain groups buy-in to the plan. Alienating a key service provider early on can hurt implementation and it may cost you years of progress. Be mindful of the local politics as you set out on your consultation process.

Depending on where and when the backbone supports come in will determine if you are ‘leading’ or ‘partnering.’ For example, Alberta’s youth plan was developed following strong leadership and innovation in the community. The Alberta government viewed themselves as ‘partners’ and not ‘leaders’ with respect to the transformation required to respond to youth homelessness.

Conduct separate discussions, early on, with potential stakeholders who do not support the plan and make headway on difficult conversations before the larger group meetings take place.

You can also consider how you want to celebrate local progress and expertise, rather than simply focusing on what’s not working. A collaborative ending youth homelessness effort will be built on the foundation of existing efforts. Consider a way of acknowledging what is going well in your community and using conversations about the plan as an evolution of good work being done better, rather than labelling the existing efforts as entirely ineffective. While it is true that the status quo is no longer acceptable, blaming and faulting the stakeholders you need to build a reimaged response will undermine the new vision and way forward.

Maintain open communication

While you may have a formal schedule of meetings and community consultations, sometimes critical information will come to you through informal channels or happenstance. Make concerted efforts to be constantly available and open to communication with stakeholders. This will demonstrate that the planning group is open to collaboration and feedback thus, building trust and buy-in. Of course, formally communicating on plan progress through newsletters, email updates, verbal updates during stakeholder meetings, etc. is essential to maintain momentum in the community.

Excellent resources are available to help you develop your consultation approach, while taking account of best practice approaches for engaging groups such as Indigenous people, youth, government, the private sector and the media. This toolkit references these resources throughout.

The rest of this section outlines specific consultation strategies for the aforementioned groups. It draws on learning from communities who have developed or are developing youth plans to provide practical strategies for engagement.



Make concerted efforts to be constantly available and open to communication with stakeholders. This will demonstrate that the planning group is open to collaboration and feedback thus, building trust and buy-in.

ENGAGING YOUTH

It is essential to meaningfully involve youth throughout the development of your plan. Create a youth engagement strategy at the outset of the process and engage youth from planning through implementation.

As the real experts on their experiences, needs and interactions with organizations and systems, youth have unique perspectives on issues, are innovative problem solvers and can pose tough questions. Engaging youth will lead to more responsive and appropriate decisions to meet their needs.

From a human rights perspective, the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (UNCRC) acknowledges the right of a child or youth to express their views, to be heard and to have their views given due weight according to their age and level of maturity. This promotes respect for children as active participants in their own lives and acknowledges their evolving capacity and gradual progression into adulthood. Further, it acknowledges the importance of a child or youth's input to informing the decisions affecting their lives, at both an individual and systemic level. A Way Home is working with the COH and Canada Without Poverty to develop a human rights guide specific to youth homelessness community planning that will be launched in June 2016.

For information on engaging youth effectively, the *Youth Engagement Toolkit for Youth Homelessness Community Planning* produced by A Way Home and A Way Home Kamloops based on their planning process is available. Another resource is the [Youth Engagement Toolkit Resource Guide](#), which provides useful guidance on engaging youth with diverse backgrounds. [The Youth Voice section](#) of the A Way Home website showcases the amazing work communities are doing to engage youth on the issue.

The resource provides guidance on:

- » Establishing a clear framework and definition of youth engagement;
- » Defining youth engagement;
- » Outlining the characteristics, benefits and models of youth engagement practice;
- » Ethical considerations; and
- » Practical strategies to youth engagement, with special focus on those of diverse backgrounds (Indigenous, LGBTQ2S, newcomer youth, youth with special needs, young parents and youth in care or custody and experiencing homelessness).

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Effective youth engagement is undertaken in an ethical, respectful way. Tokenistic or superficial activities can make youth feel like they are not respected or involved. The following principles ensure youth engagement is ethical and effective:

1. **Youth engagement is not a program:** Youth engagement should be viewed as a natural way of working in the ending youth homelessness initiative rather than as a special program.
2. **Contributions match the initiative:** Young people and adults who are working with the planning group should be recruited for their knowledge, skills, interests and commitment to the initiative's mission.
3. **One person cannot represent many:** A young person should not be considered 'the youth voice' at the table – it should be acknowledged that everyone at the table brings different perspectives to the issue.
4. **Debate as a learning tool:** Debate is a key element of personal and organizational growth. The initiative should foster an environment where ideas can be raised freely, challenged and valued.
5. **Dignity and safety:** Under no circumstances should young people or adults feel that placing themselves in an emotionally, spiritually, physically or cognitively unsafe space is expected or required by the initiative.
6. **Avoiding false expectations:** It is important to be honest about the changing role of youth as a result of their engagement in the initiative, including recognizing that there are limitations that correspond to age, experience, education and training.
7. **Balance and accessibility:** Most people require workplace accommodations in order to support them in making the optimal contribution to their organization, including young people.

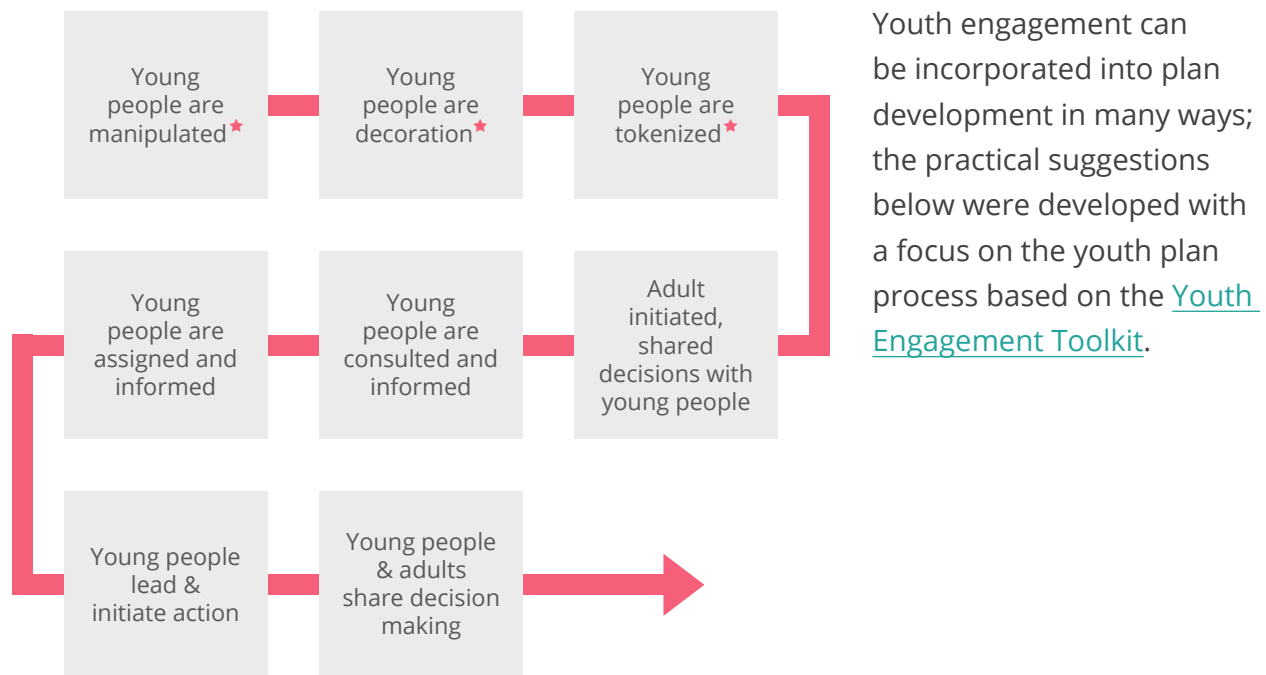
When thinking through your youth engagement approach, consider how you can facilitate:

- » Opportunities for skill development and capacity building
- » Opportunities for leadership
- » Reflection on identity
- » Development of social awareness
- » Mutual ownership
- » Positive youth-adult partnerships
- » Organizational support;
- » Achievable goals are celebrated

WAYS OF ENGAGING YOUTH

Be reflective of the level of participation you are creating through your approach; Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's participation outlines various levels you can assess your proposed approach against. Note that the first three steps are non-participation (adapted from Hart, R. (1992). [Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship](#))

Figure 7: Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation



Governance and policymaking: Youth can take part in key organizational decision making by serving on the steering committee or working groups. Youth can also participate in policy making, allowing their input to shape the policy agenda advanced in the plan.

Advice and guidance: Youth can offer their insights into different issues concerning the plan through youth advisory councils or youth forums. Youth can provide regular input to the planning team, can work on specific projects or can identify community needs and suggest service improvements.

Organizing and planning: Youth can help design and plan projects in lots of ways including determining service needs, developing action plans, conducting community outreach and evaluating outcomes.

Activism and outreach: Young people can work with the planning team to organize community members around issues. Youth often know how best to recruit other youth to get and stay involved.

Communication and media: Youth can help communicate key messages around the plan to the public by contributing to press releases, facilitating public forums, creating newsletters or using alternative media to tell a story.

Fundraising and philanthropy: Young people can become involved in raising and giving money through fundraising efforts. They can also become involved as volunteers during the plan development process, contributing particular skill sets to the effort.

Research and evaluation: Young people can contribute to research and quality improvement efforts by contributing their feedback. They can also be involved as evaluators and researchers by interviewing other youth or community members, working with staff to analyze data or presenting it to stakeholders.

Common strategies communities have used to involve youth in developing their youth plans include:

- » Ensuring your representatives are part of the plan steering committee
- » Encouraging a youth-led approach – create space for youth to generate ideas and take leadership roles in consultations
- » Working with existing youth groups to gather information, seek input on solutions and confirm plan direction
- » Creating space for dialogue on personal experiences and solutions with youth separate from broader tables through focus groups and/or individual interviews
- » Ensuring youth are invited, welcomed and supported to participate in public forums, conferences, roundtables, etc.
- » Providing access to multiple means of communicating input – including social media (Twitter, Facebook, etc.)
- » Ensuring an accessible, safe space for consultation
- » Providing incentives and recognition for participation
- » Ensuring representation from key populations of youth – particularly Indigenous, LGBTQ2S, immigrant youth, etc.

Note that you may experience pushback or even false impressions as to the level of previous/existing engagement. Service providers may report they engage youth all the time or very often, but when you probe this further, there may be few providers who have empowered youth in this way.

It's important to consider this as you build the infrastructure for engaging people with lived experience. Also, and possibly because of this, there may be pushback from agencies (or one's own staff) to engage youth, but you have to take a leap of faith and dive in: the payoff is huge as long as the underlying motivation is to flip the power structure and have those that should be leading playing a significant and substantial role (versus tokenism).

Engaging Youth in Edmonton

In Edmonton, youth were immersed in the plan development process in a unique way. Homeward Trust asked youth-serving agencies to identify and recruit youth who were experiencing homelessness or at risk of becoming homeless. Homeward Trust provided participating youth with \$25 honoraria in recognition of their expertise and time.

To ensure the 20 youth could access the consultation space, the downtown library was selected as the location for the dialogue. After an initial presentation outlining key concepts addressing youth homelessness, the youth were divided into small tables to discuss:

What has stopped you from getting housing, healthcare, legal aid, school and jobs?
What has helped you get housing, healthcare, legal aid, school and jobs?
In a perfect world, what do we need to end youth homelessness?

Youth input was synthesized along with the broader stakeholder consultation to develop the plan's priority directions. Youth also led guided neighbourhood tours for broader stakeholder groups to help shed light on their daily realities. The youth-led tours were viewed as a catalyst for youth empowerment and a unique opportunity for youth to be at the forefront of service planning.

Before taking on these tours as a youth-led activity, Homeward Trust consulted with youth-serving agencies to determine the feasibility of the idea and identify any potential ethical issues. In preparation for the tours, four weekly meetings were held to develop the walking routes, personal narratives and ideas of how to address systemic issues and barriers. Meetings also resulted in trust and relationship building between Homeward Trust and youth and amongst youth. To incentivize and support participation, youth were provided with dinner, transit tickets and a \$125 honorarium.

To be inclusive of those youth who wanted to participate and share their stories through alternative mediums, Homeward Trust offered the opportunity to share their viewpoints through Photovoice, which combines photography with community development and social action. Youth represented their perspectives by photographing scenes capturing the realities of youth homelessness. Again, youth were supported through honoraria and bus tickets to participate.

To help youth frame their story, we asked youth four questions. For each question, the youth took one photo and provided a written response.

- » What places or things have meaning to you and that you think are important to youth around issues of youth homelessness?
- » What are places you feel safe and don't feel safe?
- » What are places and things that you would like to see changed?
- » What does a 'home' mean to you?

For examples of the work produced by youth using Photovoice, see yegyouthstrategy.ca.

Table 20: *Practical Youth Engagement Tips*

TIPS ON PRACTICAL YOUTH ENGAGEMENT	
Youth-friendly Meetings	<p>Consider providing food, transportation and childcare.</p> <p>Break the ice. Provide lots of opportunities for group members to get to know each other (ice breakers, check-ins, etc.) and personalize the experience.</p> <p>Send out meeting reminders via a combination of text, email, phone call and social media sites, e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter.</p> <p>Provide paper, pens and other materials to promote full participation.</p> <p>Keep resources for youth so that they do not have to carry binders of information with them to each meeting.</p> <p>Provide items for youth and adults to play or draw with as some people struggle to concentrate without them.</p>
Youth-friendly Materials	<p>Consult with youth and get their ideas on how to catch young people's attention.</p> <p>Use straightforward wording and keep it brief.</p> <p>Use examples and stories to emphasize key points.</p> <p>Use tables and graphs to summarize points.</p> <p>Include interesting quotes and consider pulling these points out of the document.</p> <p>Be clear and descriptive with your titles and headings to help focus the document.</p> <p>Provide details about where to find more information.</p> <p>Make documents available online.</p> <p>Ask youth to help format and design the layout of the document.</p>

Incentives	<p>Cash honorariums/gifts or gift certificates – the amount given will depend on the type and length of meetings and involvement.</p> <p>Transportation – youth may not have the financial resources to cover transportation costs so it's a good idea to have a ready supply of public transit tickets or to provide the transportation directly.</p> <p>Childcare – some youth may be parents and require funding to cover childcare costs.</p> <p>Food/refreshments – sharing food is a great way to build relationships and helps out many youth who may be having difficulty making ends meet.</p> <p>Non-financial incentives include job experience, mentoring, references and letters of support.</p>
Creating Safe Spaces for LGBTQ2S Youth	<p>Have a clear and consistent set of rules that draw boundaries of behaviour and respect, creating a safe and protected space for all.</p> <p>Use proper gender pronouns that the youth identifies with.</p> <p>Put up posters showing racially and ethnically diverse, same-sex couples or families, LGBTQ2S friendly stickers and symbols posted in offices or doors (e.g. safe zone stickers, rainbow flag, etc.)</p> <p>Provide at least one universal, gender inclusive or gender neutral restroom, so that people are not faced with the issue of choosing the right or wrong bathroom</p> <p>LGBTQ2S Toolkit is an excellent resource for more information relevant to this.</p>

CONSIDERATIONS FOR ENGAGEMENT WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

It is important to acknowledge the experience of Indigenous people in Canada if we are to truly end youth homelessness, particularly in light of their consistent overrepresentation in vulnerable populations. Indigenous homelessness is notably different; the structural and systemic determinants associated with colonialism, the Indian Act, treaty making, residential schools and the Sixties Scoop have resulted in considerable discriminatory impacts that are in fact intergenerational.⁴

A sense of being homeless can be experienced from diverse perspectives: cultural, spiritual or emotional. It is more than a loss of housing. The impact of colonization, residential schooling, intergenerational trauma, ongoing discrimination and racism in Canadian society has contributed to the ongoing systematic marginalization of Indigenous people, including Indigenous youth.⁵

This is illustrated by the higher than average proportion of Indigenous people experiencing poverty, violence, core housing need, low educational attainment and poor access to services and housing. As Indigenous people move into cities from reserves, their settlement and cultural reconnection needs must be addressed, along with the jurisdictional vacuums that impact their significantly reduced access to basic services both on and off reserves. This is notably relevant to Indigenous youth as well.

Indigenous people's economic, spiritual and social development has been and continues to be negatively impacted by government policies and practices at the local, provincial, territorial and federal levels. In particular, the establishment of residential schools, reserves and the Indian Act resulted in a widespread and intergenerational loss of culture, language, community and identity still impacting today's Indigenous people.⁶

Some Indigenous youth respond to discrimination and stereotypes by distancing themselves from this part of their identity. Others have not had the opportunity to experience or develop a strong cultural identity due to the loss of teachings and traditions within their families or communities.⁷ This is especially so for many urban Indigenous youth and those growing up in the child welfare system.

Recognizing these critical issues, A Way Home will, in the future, complement this toolkit with a more robust Indigenous module, which will include resources specific to Indigenous youth homelessness.

4. [Plan to End Aboriginal Homelessness in Calgary](#), 2012:1

5. [Calgary's Updated Plan to End Homelessness](#), p. 23

6. [Youth Engagement Toolkit Guide](#), p. 41

7. [Youth Engagement Toolkit Guide](#), p. 41

Key terms used:

Indigenous Peoples: Indigenous is a term used to encompass a variety of Aboriginal groups. It is most frequently used in an international, transnational or global context. This term came into wide usage during the 1970s when Aboriginal groups organized transnationally and pushed for greater presence in the United Nations (UN). In the UN, "Indigenous" is used to refer broadly to peoples of long settlement and connection to specific lands who have been adversely affected by incursions by industrial economies, displacement and settlement of their traditional territories by others. This the term we recommend using in the context of community planning.

Aboriginal: A collective name for the original peoples of North America and their descendants. The Canadian constitution recognizes three groups of Aboriginal people: Indians (commonly referred to as First Nations), Métis and Inuit (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada).

First Nations (non-status): People who consider themselves Indians or members of a First Nation but whom the Government of Canada does not recognize as Indians under the Indian Act, either because they are unable to prove their status or have lost their status rights. Many Indian people in Canada, especially women, lost their Indian status through discriminatory practices in the past. Non-status Indians are not entitled to the same rights and benefits available to Status Indians (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada).

First Nations (status): People who are entitled to have their names included on the Indian Register, an official list maintained by the federal government. Certain criteria determine who can be registered as a Status Indian. Only Status Indians are recognized as Indians under the Indian Act, which defines an Indian as "a person who, pursuant to this Act, is registered as an Indian or is entitled to be registered as an Indian." Status Indians are entitled to certain rights and benefits under the law (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada).

Inuit: An Aboriginal people in Northern Canada, who live in Nunavut, Northwest Territories, Northern Quebec and Northern Labrador. The word means "people" in the Inuit language — Inuktitut. The singular of Inuit is Inuk (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada).

Metis: People of mixed First Nation and European ancestry who identify themselves as Métis, as distinct from First Nations people, Inuit or non-Aboriginal people. The Métis have a unique culture that draws on their diverse ancestral origins, such as Scottish, French, Ojibway and Cree (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada).⁸

Due to the significant overrepresentation of Indigenous people among homeless populations in Canada, Indigenous communities should play a major role in all efforts to address youth homelessness. The planning process can create new opportunities for meaningful collaboration between mainstream and Indigenous communities, enabling diverse groups to come together to better understand the needs and experiences of marginalized community members.

The Homeless Hub has developed a summary on Indigenous homelessness in Canada and an overview of the causes of Indigenous homelessness.

Communities like Winnipeg and Yellowknife have pointed us toward resources that can help you in developing your engagement approach with Indigenous peoples. However, these communities have only recently engaged in the planning work. Their learning will greatly benefit our collective knowledge on this issue in the future.

One emerging insight from Winnipeg is that because many youth in the city have come from rural and remote areas across Manitoba, the engagement process must be broadened to include the region. Web-based and in-person consultations are being planned with Indigenous communities and youth across the province, which comes with additional resource needs but will ultimately enhance the effectiveness of the plan.

Another point to note here is that on-reserve Indigenous people may see rural and urban places as an extension of their traditional territories; as such, when we consider our approaches we can't simply assume we are assisting 'migrant' Indigenous youth not otherwise connected to urban centres. In reality, Indigenous people may not be 'migrating' to the city, "but rather returning to a place that they have always known, historically, economically and spiritually," says Albert McLeod of the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg.

Further, we have to also be cognizant that the paradigm from which youth-serving agencies approach their work remains grounded in Western post-colonial legislation and policy. In other words, we can't assume that the established organizations that play a key role in addressing youth homelessness are necessarily aligned with Indigenous infrastructures' relations with governments economic development on and on-reserve and urban reserve development, etc. (Albert McLeod, Social Planning Council of Winnipeg).

The following list highlights just a few of the things to consider when engaging with Indigenous peoples. Currently, there are limited youth plans with a concerted focus on Indigenous people. This is key priority for future iterations of this toolkit.

Table 21: *Considerations in Developing an Engagement Approach with Indigenous People*

CONSIDERATIONS IN DEVELOPING AN ENGAGEMENT APPROACH WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLE FROM THE <u>YOUTH ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT</u>	
Purpose	<p>Are you clear about why you are engaging with Indigenous peoples?</p> <p>Do you have support for the level of engagement you are proposing?</p>
Focus	<p>Have you considered all relevant Indigenous voices on the matter?</p> <p>Are there overlapping interests on the issues(s) among Indigenous people?</p> <p>Ask those you hope to engage whether there are other people whom you should consider inviting to the table. This will help you better understand traditional social structures.</p> <p>Review the governing systems of those Indigenous communities you hope to engage to have a working understanding of any protocols that should be considered and followed.</p> <p>What are their protocols of engagement?</p>
Youth	<p>Youth may require additional orientation to help them prepare and contribute to discussions with those already familiar with and involved in specific projects. Keeping the orientation youth friendly and offering a variety of formats to familiarize them with the information is useful (online, written, verbal briefings, etc.).</p> <p>Try to make sure you include representation of both male and female Indigenous youth.</p> <p>Acknowledge the discrimination faced by youth due to both their age and their ethnicity.</p> <p>Another useful resource for engaging Indigenous youth that can be reviewed as you develop your approach is Engaging and Empowering Aboriginal Youth: A Toolkit for Service Providers.</p>

Elder involvement	<p>Consider a face-to-face meeting with an Elder for introductions before the meeting.</p> <p>Have you allowed Elders the opportunity to speak first and last?</p>
Gifting	<p>You may want to consider gifting your distinguished and/or invited guests in addition to honoraria.</p> <p>Seek advice from communities of origin as to what might be considered appropriate.</p>
Respect, reconciliation and the relationship	<p>Acknowledge the traditional territory where a meeting is being held.</p> <p>Have you considered a 'neutral' location if you are involving multiple Indigenous communities?</p> <p>Do you know the traditional name of the group?</p> <p>If you are meeting with one Indigenous group, try to have the meeting in the location of that group.</p> <p>Traditional introductions are common among Indigenous cultures. Prepare to share your own family background at meetings.</p> <p>Ask as many questions as required in order to remain informed and respectful.</p>
Urban	<p>If your engagement issues impact urban Indigenous people, are you engaged with Friendship Centres?</p> <p>Are you mindful of other organizations, apart from Friendship Centres, that serve urban Indigenous communities and could be included in your engagement?</p> <p>Are you respecting local protocols even within the urban setting?</p>
Women	<p>Are you recognizing the role of women within Indigenous communities?</p> <p>Are you making efforts to capture the individual and collective perspectives of Indigenous women in your engagement?</p> <p>Are you ensuring that Indigenous women's political leadership and political organizations are being engaged?</p>

Based on the Homeless Hub's [toolkit](#) for building partnerships with Indigenous communities in the context of a PIT Count, the following strategies are useful in considering your consultation during the youth plan development. These were adapted to include the input of communities consulted in the development of the toolkit, as well as learning from the Aboriginal Plan to End Homelessness in Calgary.

Table 22: Indigenous Engagement Strategy Examples

STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION	RATIONALE
Inform Indigenous communities about the youth plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Build relationships with Indigenous services, Community Advisory Boards (CABs) and umbrella organizations » Distribute information at Indigenous cultural events and community/agency meetings » Distribute posters and pamphlets to organizations & agencies serving Indigenous community members » Utilize social media and email to distribute information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Indigenous Peoples have the right to know about and be involved in research and responses impacting their communities » Informing community members early will increase Indigenous engagement, participation, and volunteerism »
Partner with local organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Partnerships should begin early and be ongoing » Partnerships should be based in shared interests, benefits and goals <p>Partner with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Indigenous CABs » Indigenous umbrella organizations » Indigenous governments » Organizations/groups that represent the interests of urban Indigenous Peoples » Agencies/organizations serving Indigenous community members experiencing homelessness » Indigenously owned businesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Increases Indigenous participation and thus data quality and count accuracy » Partnering with multiple organizations and agencies will better reflect the diverse views of Indigenous community members » Partnerships can be mobilized in future efforts to address youth homelessness

<p>Include Indigenous community leaders in your planning committee</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Indigenous Peoples should play leadership roles in the youth plan » Your steering committee should include as many Indigenous community members as possible » The steering committee should include or be led by an Indigenous community member who is well-known and recognized by local Indigenous communities » Partner with Indigenous community leaders to plan and implement Indigenous consultation events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Indigenous leadership will likely increase Indigenous participation » Indigenous leaders are best positioned to anticipate and plan for engagement challenges
<p>Ensure Indigenous feedback</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » During consultations, communities should be asked how the youth plan research approach can reflect their concerns » Community meetings should be in a highly accessible location and provide childcare (organizers may want to provide transit tokens) » Community members should have multiple ways of providing feedback on the count (phone, email, office hours, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Assists organizers in identifying and addressing local Indigenous communities' concerns about participation » Will help determine what additional research might be needed for the plan » Will help determine how the youth plan can provide benefits to both Indigenous participants and local Indigenous communities

<p>Plan content that addresses Indigenous homelessness specifically</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Guiding principles, vision and mission of initiative account for First Nations principles of Ownership, Control, Access and Possession; these are reviewed and agreed-upon by Indigenous community members in consultation rather than assumed by the working committee » Indigenous homelessness is highlighted in the plan, with focus on history of colonization, inter-generational trauma and relation of these to overrepresentation among homeless population » Research and analysis has an Indigenous lens to discern uneven access issues, overrepresentation, etc. » Proposed plan direction and goals are considered with an Indigenous lens and specifically designed to meet unique needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Ensure Plan is tailored to meet the unique needs of Indigenous youth. » Increases Indigenous control, ownership, interest and benefits in the youth plan
<p>Ensure no harm to Indigenous communities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Equitable partnerships with local Indigenous communities is a key step in preventing harm <p>Key considerations include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Mitigating any risks of harm » Consent and confidentiality » Providing benefits » Returning research to the community » Ensuring respect for participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Increases Indigenous control, ownership, interest and benefits in the youth plan

<p>Share plan with local Indigenous communities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Work with mainstream and Indigenous media to disseminate the final youth plan » Youth plan should be sent to all Indigenous organizations, networks and agencies that serve Indigenous people experiencing homelessness » Translate findings into multiple report formats and languages (e.g. pamphlet, PDF, PowerPoint, video, website) to increase knowledge translation » Present findings at meetings of Indigenous umbrella organizations, Indigenous CABs, and Indigenous governments » Host a public meeting to share findings and receive feedback » Invite participation of Indigenous communities in activities to implement the Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Improves public knowledge about Indigenous homelessness » Informs program and policy development » Findings can be used by organizations, advocates and agencies to advocate for additional funding
<p>Partner with Indigenous communities to improve media coverage</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Partner with Indigenous CABs and umbrella organizations to craft media messages » Ensure Indigenous voices are included in media accounts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Media coverage will reflect the interests and concerns of Indigenous communities » Message will reach a broader audience

WORKING WITH FUNDERS

Engaging funders early in the plan development process can ensure they have awareness and input into the plan, while creating space to discuss their potential involvement in the implementation of the plan.

Depending on your local context, you may be better off testing the waters first rather than approaching with a funding ask from the get-go. If you have a steering committee member or other engaged stakeholder who can help you bridge a connection with a funder, you may want to work through such existing relationships.

You're unlikely to get a positive response by 'calling out' funders during public meetings. You're better off approaching them on a one-on-one basis with clear asks. You may want a representative to sit on a committee or you may want the funder to co-sponsor the plan development costs. This is the approach taken in Calgary, where diverse provincial, municipal and local funders agreed to provide resources toward the youth plan.

Consider developing a 'funders table' that you can brief independently of other stakeholders. The funders table can be a vehicle to inform the group of developments and seek input into the plan. Funders' perspectives are different in many ways to those of service providers and at times it is useful to engage them in separate discussions where they can offer insights they may not readily share in open forums.

A Way Home is working to align national and provincial funders with a stake and interest in youth homelessness to strengthen the local funding relationships. As an example of the value of this alignment, A Way Home's partnership with the Home Depot Canada Foundation has enabled a concerted investment in various communities to advance local youth homelessness objectives.



A Way Home is working to align national and provincial funders with a stake and interest in youth homelessness to strengthen the local funding relationships.

Potential funders with a stake in youth homelessness include:

- » All levels of government,
- » Lead organization on local plan to end homelessness,
- » HPS Community Entity,
- » Local United Way,
- » Local community foundation and
- » Local Home Depot Stores or other local businesses.

From a funder's perspective, a youth plan can be an attractive investment particularly when they:

- » Already have an interest/prioritize youth homelessness or vulnerable youth;
- » Are looking to leverage collaborative, system change efforts versus programmatic interventions;
- » Recognize the potential impact of a youth plan effort on their broader funding portfolios;
- » May be looking to divest/recalibrate funding envelopes but require strategic direction and research; and/or
- » Seek enhanced public profile, which the planning process can provide through media attention, public consultation opportunities, etc.

Funders often have multiple priorities, of which youth homelessness is but one. Be strategic in your messaging. Highlight why addressing youth homelessness is important, socially and financially. But also, identify the ways in which the funder will benefit from involvement in the process. How will their participation contribute to their own goals and overall mandate? Again, discussing your approach and key messages with individuals who know the funding organizations and key decision makers can go a long way in preparing a successful pitch.

Leverage your external experts in these contexts; a national advocate with a high profile can help you approach funders and bring public attention to the issue thus, raising its profile. In St. John's, Choices for Youth hosted a roundtable of local and national experts from A Way Home to do just that. They successfully leveraged the onsite presence of leading experts on youth homelessness calling for provincial action on the issue and gained enhanced participation from key decision makers. Funders Together to End Homelessness from the U.S. has some [excellent resources](#) for convening funders on the issue of homelessness; there is now a Canadian chapter as well.

There are inherent power imbalances involved in engaging funders, including government, in the planning process. Yet, without their involvement and ultimately alignment of resources to the plan, there will be little chance of enacting the type of transformative change needed to end youth homelessness. While community groups may wait to engage funders in the initial stages, the earlier you bring these stakeholders to the table, the better.

ENGAGING AND INFLUENCING GOVERNMENT

Prioritize engagement with the following government departments and system partners. Note that depending on your local community, the departments will differ and the functions may be delivered through varying levels of governments. You should ensure you map these out.

Provincial/Territorial Government

- » Child Protection
- » Education
- » Health
- » Human Services

Public System Partners

- » Police service
- » Public & separate boards of education
- » Child, youth and family services authority
- » Health services
- » Correctional services & young offender programs

On and Off-reserve Indigenous Leadership & Government Government of Canada

- » Indigenous Affairs & Northern Development
- » Economic and social development
- » Justice Canada

Local Government

- » Community & neighbourhood services
- » Social housing corporation

CREATING ALLIES

We have identified the key government departments you should engage when planning your consultation approach, but who within those departments should you contact? Unfortunately, there is no set rule for the right person to engage and best approach to doing so. There are however some considerations. Firstly, it's important to prioritize the target departments and decision makers you want to engage. You may have internal champions who have an interest in the issue or even have a mandate as part of their job to advance it. You likely know representatives of the key departments and public systems you want to engage, or you've started making those connections during the research phase of the plan. For an example of how provincial government can build a clear direction across departments, look to the Alberta Youth Plan under [Appendix 3](#) for an example.

Identifying these allies and working to flesh out your engagement strategy with insider knowledge will be more effective than cold calls. However, in some cases you will have to make those calls in the absence of a facilitated introduction. If there is a person or group in government working on a related issue, include a meeting with such individuals early on to exchange information and potentially save each other unnecessary duplicate efforts and/or surprises. Identify potential allies through your personal networks or your planning team.



By fostering personal relationships with ministers, you can increase their ability to move certain issues.

Develop a strategy to engage elected representatives and various levels within the administration. By fostering personal relationships with ministers, you can increase their ability to move certain issues. They may frequent the same social scene for example. Ministers are also part of interest groups as well. You can also try to influence public opinion, which in turn gains attention from the government.

Politics is all about people. While bureaucratic processes are designed to be open, fair and non-discriminatory; as with many other transactions, building positive relationships with the right people is helpful. It's much easier to ask for something from someone who already has a positive impression of you than from a complete stranger. The more you understand what motivates politicians, their staff and public servants as well as their plans and priorities, the more readily you'll be able to determine effective approaches to influence them.

In developing your approach, review available resources on advocacy plans and ensure you understand the policy making process.

To raise awareness of your ask and build relationships within administration, consider:

- » Starting with who you know and work your way up
- » If you're not getting the response you want, let your contact know you're going to the next level so they're not blindsided
- » Taking new ideas to the executive level responsible for that area (usually a director or above)
- » Finding someone who can make decisions, think outside the box and see the big picture
- » Regional officials may not always be plugged into head office developments so ask them who might have the latest information or is the decision making-authority

KNOWING THE KEY PLAYERS

The [Be HIPP](#) manual provides useful summary of description of ‘who’s who’ and their role in decision making.

Members of Provincial Legislatures

- » Always best to start with the representative elected from your area
- » Can help bring attention to your issue through making statements, asking questions in the legislature or lining you up with a minister or their staff
- » Can assist in getting answers from the bureaucracy or advising on how things work

Ministers

- » First and foremost, they are members of a legislature elected by constituents from a specific geographic area
- » Influenced by their constituents, party values and platform, citizens’ groups, community opinion leaders and the media
- » Accountable to the legislature (provincial) or Parliament (federal) for the actions of his/her ministry
- » Selected by the premier or the prime minister for various political reasons, not necessarily an issue expert
- » Sets overall direction and priorities for the department based on government’s agenda; tends to have a shorter-term perspective (e.g. one to three years)

Political Staff

Can offer political advice to you on departmental and party matters

Serve as a gatekeeper to how the minister uses their time, who the minister meets and how the minister might view people, issues and organizations – it can be helpful to develop a good rapport with those assistants responsible for your areas of interest

Usually have political connections and have been active in politics or bring specific related expertise

They look out for their minister's interests (e.g. their re-election, power and influence, constituency issues and party politics)

Can help get information from the bureaucracy, reconsideration of an issue or reversal of a decision

Can help ensure bureaucracy is accessible if you feel you're not being treated properly

Will look at issues from the perspective of how they will be received by the media, public and stakeholders

Public Servants

- » Support and are accountable to the government of the day
- » Analyze, consult, advise, evaluate and formulate policies for consideration by the government
- » Carry out government decisions, administer and enforce laws and provide government services; hired and promoted based on merit (the skills and qualifications needed for the job) which excludes favouritism or political affiliation
- » Are guided by such values as political neutrality, accountability, anonymity, responsiveness, fairness and equity, integrity, efficiency and effectiveness
- » Have different levels of accountability and decision making depending on position in the hierarchy and whether in a national or regional office
- » Are also differentiated by their role or function (e.g. may be in management, policy, operations or a specialist such as a legal advisor)
- » As each may appreciate your issue from a different perspective, you'll need to find the right one in terms of function, level in the hierarchy and approach (e.g. are willing to consider opportunities and alternatives and remove possible barriers)
- » Don't assume discussions with one public servant will be passed on to others you may be dealing with

Deputy Minister

- » Provides managerial, technical and financial advice to the minister; is expected to take a longer term and government-wide view (e.g. impact of decisions on society over the next five to 10 years)
- » Expected to be politically neutral, yet politically sensitive
- » Has various levels of management reporting through a hierarchy (e.g. assistant deputy minister, director, manager, analyst, officer, clerk)

The Media

- » Some political analysts and commentators believe that the media drives government agendas
- » Public opinion is a powerful influencer and the media is often the most influential catalyst of public opinion
- » Newspapers are widely read by politicians, their political staff and public servants to gauge public reaction to and the profile of various issues

Other Stakeholders

- » The more credibility, resources, connections and profile, the easier it is for a stakeholder to get attention
- » Governments often deal with alliances, coalitions and associations – these groups can serve as an intermediary for obtaining the perspectives of many others with similar interests and can offer a broader perspective than dealing with just one organization

BUILDING SUPPORT

So what do you want from government?

In an ideal world, government would commit to ending youth homelessness and co-develop an evidence-based approach with community stakeholders to achieve this vision within an aggressive timeline supported by adequate resources. Of course, that may not be feasible at the outset of the planning process. In fact, your plan may raise a new vision of what the government's role should be.

Carefully consider what you are seeking from various stakeholders in government during the plan development process. You may simply want to keep them informed and seek their participation in consultations. Or, you may indeed develop a covalent advocacy strategy around ending youth homelessness alongside your plan. You can develop a funding ask to support your plan process, test an innovative programmatic intervention or create a new funding stream specifically dedicated to implementing the plan. You may also have specific asks emerging around changes to policy in various ministries that you can advance.

You can also ask government to develop their own ending homelessness plan in conjunction with your community plan and even develop infrastructure mechanisms to facilitate cross-departmental dialogue and policy coordination to advance solutions.

The role of the government should be to:

- » Establish a shared vision, provincial priorities and policy directions amongst all ministries;
- » Facilitate collaboration among individuals, families and communities to prevent youth homelessness through education and awareness;
- » Support the provision of coordinated and integrated supports and services at the community level;
- » Provide the legislative and policy framework and funding support to address youth homelessness;
- » Support opportunities to share knowledge between policy makers, academics and service providers; and
- » Support existing best and promising practices and innovative research and programming.

In Alberta, a cross-ministry committee made up of key provincial departments supported the plan to end youth homelessness and to promote integration. See the Resource section for the Terms of Reference from this committee.

Consider that many people who work in government or within public systems are well aware of the system gaps and barriers youth face. Many share your frustration and want to support change. Personal, one-to-one meetings with casework supervisors or frontline managers (i.e. people connected to the frontline but also involved in systems/high-level work/strategy) can be great starting points for building allies. This, tied with alignment with system planning, can connect the dots between what is happening on the ground and what is being planned at higher levels. Also, if there are resources being allocated specifically to housing for youth this is a great carrot for systems to align, as most can dish out for supports but few can actually deal with housing. Another part of this is the potential reduction in workload for caseworkers/therapists – so many spend a large portion of their time working on housing issues. It's all about framing their involvement as 'what in it for you,' because as a community, there is a lot to be gained by developing more effective responses to youth homelessness.

You're more likely to have success if you:

- » Develop a well-defined advocacy plan focused on one or two policy issues
- » Adjust tactics to engage government, depending on how interested the government is in addressing homelessness in general and youth homelessness in particular
- » Align your asks with existing government activities and priorities to increase the likelihood of government buy-in
- » Focus on solutions-oriented advocacy. Either pointing out what government is doing wrong or just raising awareness are useful only if the government is not addressing homelessness, and even then, offer help, rather than simply identifying mistakes and shortcomings
- » Align yourself with other communities doing similar work, and coordinate your asks and messages. This is more effective than having each community act on its own, especially given the competition between advocacy groups
- » Produce well-researched positions and data to aid your ability to influence, especially if the government does not already have this information
- » Recruit charismatic, well-positioned leaders who are respected by government and administration to help deliver your messages and requests
- » Identify the right elected officials and administrations to approach. Work your networks for someone you already know in your community who might open a door for you, particularly with government ministers
- » Leverage solid relationships fostered with policy-makers at different levels of government
- » Be mindful of the economic environment: no matter how well-prepared you are, if you ask for funding during a time of restraint, you are less likely to get it
- » Cultivate a reputation as a useful and credible source of information

Here is a useful example from Newfoundland and Labrador where Choices for Youth analyzed the new government's mandate letter relevant to youth homelessness. By understanding where government is at with respect to diverse social issues relevant to youth homelessness, you can find levers to hook your issue into as opportunities arise.

Table 23: Provincial Ministers' Commitments

HONOURABLE MINISTER SHERRY GAMBIN-WALSH

Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services

Minister of Seniors, Wellness and Social Development

Minister Responsible for the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation

Minister Responsible for the Status of Persons with Disabilities

These combined departments and mandates are central to coordinating the collective efforts across all government departments in ending youth homelessness. Their mandates serve to support vulnerable and marginalized populations within our province. To effectively deliver a provincial plan to end youth homelessness, the role of provincial policy, specifically under the Youth Services Program, the provincial housing strategy and the Poverty Reduction Strategy, must maximize their combined impact.

To ultimately drive long term positive outcomes for youth a plan must also include tools and policies to complement existing child protection and apprehension models. These models are much needed crisis intervention tools but lack the support structures to help families stay together and avoid crises where possible. The addition of prevention, as well as housing and support policies would provide an overall better suite of solutions made available to the community.

The most effective way to tackle homelessness is to first house the individual. The Housing First Approach designed specifically for Youth is well established, successful and is already being effectively applied in St. John's. While a set of defined supports follow the youth as they secure housing, the first step is to ensure the young person has access to a range of affordable housing options. There is a demonstrable need for additional affordable housing options across the province, and the development of these units should form a key component of a provincial plan to end youth homelessness.

The upcoming legislative review of the Child, Youth and Family Services Act is a critical opportunity to integrate new ideas and best practices through community consultations and by applying a strong prevention, housing and support lens to the act.

Our analysis of the ministerial mandate letters suggest that a provincial plan to end youth homelessness would align and propel the following departmental commitments:

- » Youth Services Program review
- » Deaths and Critical Incidents - Children and Youth
- » Health Promotion and Healthy Living Strategy
- » Housing Strategy - Seniors and Youth as priority housing options
- » Poverty Reduction Strategy
- » Disabilities Act

HONOURABLE MINISTER GERRY BYRNE

Minister of Advanced Education and Skills

As the lead agency governing the Provincial Income Support system, this department has an existing mandate to act in the best interest of vulnerable populations. Additionally, this department's role in supporting and accessing the emergency shelter system is critical to broader coordinated efforts to end youth homelessness. Low-barrier access to educational opportunities (literacy) and employment have also been identified as foundational components in assisting youth transition to healthier, more stable and successful lives. Consistent with Alberta Plan to End Youth Homelessness, this department's commitment to family friendly policies will lay the groundwork to ensure the inclusion of a Family First approach.

Our analysis of the ministerial mandate letters suggest that a provincial plan to end youth homelessness would align and propel the following departmental commitments:

- » Skilled Labour Force - Youth training programs
- » Development of an Adult Literacy Strategy
- » Improving supported and supportive employment for persons with disabilities, and implementation of family-friendly policies to promote gender diversity with a focus on affordable and accessible child care

HONOURABLE MINISTER DALE KIRBY

Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development

Building on the Australian Geelong project, early education and childcare are key preventative components of a provincial plan to end youth homelessness. As identified in the Australian example, there are critical opportunities within the education system for early identification and intervention to prevent and end youth homelessness.

Working in collaboration with AES, providing low-barrier access to learning opportunities will minimize disruptions to education and ensure better outcomes as youth transitioning into adulthood. Our experience and current research supports the fact that access to stable education, employment and housing are foundational components to ending youth homelessness.

Our analysis of the ministerial mandate letters suggest that a provincial plan to end youth homelessness would align and propel the following departmental commitments:

- » Early Learning and Child Care
- » Premier's Task Force on Education – improving educational outcomes
- » Inclusive education on affordable and accessible child care

HONOURABLE MINISTER JOHN HAGGIE

Minister of Health and Community Services

Accepting the long-standing knowledge regarding the Social Determinants of Health, a plan to end youth homelessness must include policy and program approaches to ensure the physical, mental and emotional wellbeing of vulnerable youth. Building on the concept of primary healthcare - providing mental health, addictions, and physical health supports in a community-based and accessible environment that focuses on improving existing support mechanisms will ensure these efforts maximize the impacts derived. The policy opportunities represented in the commitments below must be combined with recognizing the challenges of making strategic decisions regarding the future health care spending.

Our analysis of the ministerial mandate letters suggest that a provincial plan to end youth homelessness would align and propel the following departmental commitments:

- » Primary Health Care
- » Health Promotion and Healthy Living - Innovative youth wellness program
- » Innovative Youth Wellness
- » Mental Health and Addictions Care - All party committee on mental health and addictions
- » Eliminate the use of IQ70 to determine service needs and provision of autism related services

HONOURABLE MINISTER ANDREW PARSONSE

Minister of Justice and Public Safety Attorney General Government House Leader

It is well established that for youth who have experience with the Criminal Justice System, it is the end product of inconsistent responses and supports that begin at an early age. Additionally, 80% of individuals - including youth, who exit the prison system into homelessness - reoffend within a short period of time. The combination of social marginalization, poverty, addictions, low education levels, etc. are significant determinants in triggering what is ultimately a crisis response by the Criminal Justice System. In order to increase overall public safety, this department must add a focused effort to work in partnership across government to tackle these root causes.

Our analysis of the ministerial mandate letters suggest that a provincial plan to end youth homelessness would align and propel the following departmental commitments:

- » Improve Social Services – Legislation - Supported Decision-Making
- » Family Violence Intervention Court

HONOURABLE MINISTER PERRY TRIMPER

Minister of Environment and Conservation
Minister Responsible for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency
Minister Responsible for the Multi-Materials Stewardship Board
Minister Responsible for the Labour Relations Agency
Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs

For families and youth living in poverty, or at-risk of poverty, the pressures created by the elevating cost of living are compounded with financial instability. For these individuals, many of whom make up the unskilled labour force in the province, minimum wage and subsequently housing affordability are key factors in maintaining supportive and stable family environments.

Our analysis of the ministerial mandate letters suggest that a provincial plan to end youth homelessness would align and propel the following departmental commitments:

- » Provincial Greenhouse Gas Reduction Strategy
Energy Retrofits - To Develop Pay-As-You-Save Programs
- » Minimum Wage - Consistent formula for calculation

HONOURABLE MINISTER EDDIE JOYCE

Minister of Municipal Affairs
Minister of Service NL
Minister Responsible for Fire and Emergency Services –Newfoundland and Labrador
Minister Responsible for the Government Purchasing Agency
Minister Responsible for WorkplaceNL
Registrar General

With a clear need for the additional affordable housing options across the province, it is important that Crown lands and land transfers be judged as viable options to support these developments. Working in conjunction with the NLHC such developments should be pursued as part of a Housing First Approach to ending youth homelessness in the province.

Additionally, by working in partnership with community organizations and the Department of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development, updates to the public procurement framework would unlock greater impact, innovation and opportunities for social enterprise.

Our analysis of the ministerial mandate letters suggest that a provincial plan to end youth homelessness would align and propel the following departmental commitments:

- » Premiers forum on Local Government
- » Crown Lands - Land Transfer
- » Public Procurement Framework

HONOURABLE MINISTER CATHY BENNETT

Minister of Finance

President of Treasury Board

Minister Responsible for the Status of Women

Minister Responsible for the Human Resources Secretariat

Minister Responsible for the Public Service Commission

Minister Responsible for the Office of the Chief Information Officer

Minister Responsible for the Newfoundland and Labrador Liquor Corporation

Family violence, domestic abuse, trauma and sexual assault are often the tragic and preventable experiences of young women who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness. Prevention of violence against women, as well as specialized, flexible and diverse supports that work for all women are pivotal pieces to not only reducing violence and providing safety, but also furthers the creation of a province where women can and do engage, contribute and participate effectively in society. For women who are mothers, combining this approach with family friendly policies can have massive inter-generational effects to create positive outcomes that directly tackle poverty, marginalization and homelessness.

Looking broadly at the community sector, multi-year funding arrangements are smart investments that provide long-term positive outcomes for our province. Good planning inevitably drives great impact. This is true for business, for government as well as for community serving agencies. By committing to multi-year funding arrangements with youth serving community based organizations, agencies can focus on long-term changes and systemic solutions to issues facing at-risk and homeless youth.

Our analysis of the ministerial mandate letters suggest that a provincial plan to end youth homelessness would align and propel the following departmental commitments:

- » Shared Priorities - Multi-year funding arrangements with community based organizations
- » Family-friendly policies for the workforce
- » Prevention of violence against women and vulnerable populations

HONOURABLE MINISTER CHRISTOPHER MITCHELMORE

Minister of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development
Minister Responsible for the Forestry and Agrifoods Agency
Minister Responsible for the Research and Development Corporation

Social enterprises provide youth serving agencies an avenue to directly showcase the potential of their youth clients. At-risk and homeless youth are often stigmatized and unable to secure employment. The social enterprise approach tackles both by providing meaningful training and employment, while breaking down stigma by providing services that the broader community can engage with. To sustainably create new opportunities for youth, having access to support and resources to launch and grow new social enterprises will be an important component of a provincial plan to end youth homelessness.

To allow this approach to flourish there is a need to accompany tools and resources for social enterprises with new social enterprise friendly changes to the public procurement framework.

Our analysis of the ministerial mandate letters suggest that a provincial plan to end youth homelessness would align and propel the following departmental commitments:

- » Develop Provincial Social Enterprise Strategy in partnership with not-for-profit sector
- » Young entrepreneur retention program

HONOURABLE MINISTER SIOBHAN COADY

Minister of Natural Resources
Minister Responsible for the Office of Public Engagement
Deputy Government House Leader

A provincial plan to end youth homelessness must consider the whole province and the needs of our diverse communities. We know that the development and implementation of this plan must include working in close partnership with identified experts in government and other youth serving agencies. By working in partnership with the Office of Public Engagement, we can effectively gathering critical information, consult with groups across the province, and effectively articulate its vision and purpose to the community and government at large.

Our analysis of the ministerial mandate letters suggest that a provincial plan to end youth homelessness would align and propel the following departmental commitments:

- » Public Engagement

HONOURABLE MINISTER PREMIER DWIGHT BALL

**Office of the Premier
President of Executive Council
Minister for Intergovernmental Affairs
Minister of Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs**

A provincial plan to end youth homelessness must specifically address our diverse communities. Aboriginal and LGBTQ2S* individuals are over-represented in homelessness statistics across Canada. As we develop a deeper understanding of their unique challenges in Newfoundland & Labrador, they must be met with unique approaches and solutions embedded within a broader focus on all youth.

Plans and policies across the country that tackle youth homelessness are shifting towards long-term and systemic solutions. The traditional approach of focusing on emergency responses is now understood to be important but insufficient. There is recognition across the sector and governments, backed by rigorous research, that homelessness can be ended by focusing on prevention and on housing and supports.

Our work and deep partnerships in the youth serving and homelessness sectors across Canada suggests that the development and implementation of a provincial plan to end youth homelessness requires first for us to believe that better is possible, and an internal call-to-action from the highest and most respected leaders in government. Such a plan would require a collective rally of ministers who believe in the plan, led by the Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador. We see this leadership and this vision within your government.

Our analysis of the ministerial mandate letters suggest that a provincial plan to end youth homelessness would align and propel the following departmental commitments:

- » Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs - Ensure programs and services reflect the needs of Aboriginal people
- » Government leadership

PUBLIC POLICY TACTICS

Effective advocates develop deliberate messages, use savvy lobbying techniques and build organizational capacity. Key strategies include press conferences, op-ed pieces and guest articles, phone calls and letters to elected officials. They also plan local events such as site visits and ceremonies.

You can increase support for the ending youth homelessness initiative by:

- » Raising concerns; for example, point out the negative consequences of existing or planned actions,
- » Swaying decision makers' thinking,
- » Letting other opinion leaders know where you stand,
- » Finding out about the priorities, concerns and interests of decision makers and who has decision-making power,
- » Building new relationships, create a positive image, raise profile, build ongoing support and new allies,
- » Offering solutions, exploring options and partnership opportunities,
- » Raising public awareness and concern to build wider spread support for your cause.

PUBLIC POLICY TACTICS

The Be HIPP manual to engaging in public policy advocacy provides a number of useful tips for selecting your public policy tactics.

COMMUNICATIONS

Phone Calls

- » When relaying a simple message
- » As a follow-up to letters, concerns, invitations
- » Alert to upcoming actions
- » To try and secure a meeting date
- » To relay the importance of an issue
- » To get information (e.g. identifying who's the best person to deal with)

Letters

- » Use to formalize invitations; advise of your interest in meeting; raise a concern; give recognition or show appreciation; pass on congratulations or thanks

Emails

- » Can reach several people at once with the same message, making it easier to reply if your message is not complicated
- » Useful as a quick reply to those comfortable with this technology

Strategic Mailings: Quarterly Updates/Newsletters

- » Raises awareness, ensuring others know about your ongoing contributions to the community
- » Keeps your organization on the radar screen
- » Creates a positive impression
- » Don't create information overload by sending irrelevant information that appears unprofessional

Invitations To A Special Event

- » Opportunity to show what you do, others can see what success looks like and better understand what is required to succeed
- » Allows politicians to hear firsthand from the front line and those affected by your issue
- » Include politicians in fundraising efforts, educate them on how your work links to their constituents

Sharing Research Findings

- » Adds legitimacy to your issue
- » Gets your issue on the government's radar screen
- » Reinforces other messages by demonstrating evidence, especially if it adds to existing evidence

Local Newspapers

- » Write an op-ed piece, an opinion piece that appears opposite the editorial page, to raise public awareness and understanding about your issue
- » Send a letter to the editor to correct any information that is wrong or to show your organization's support or position for an issue raised in the newspaper

EVENTS

Organizing A Tour Visit

- » Raises awareness and understanding, builds relationships
- » Invite politicians for breakfast or lunch or to see a part of your organization they would not normally see
- » Allows people to see first-hand the impact of your work, especially if personal testimonials are included

Hosting A Community Forum

- » Positions you as a leader, builds momentum
- » Draws in others and gains their commitment and support
- » Raises community awareness and concern
- » Provides a venue for those affected to speak to decision makers

Attending Public Presentations, Hearings or Consultations

- » Opportunity to provide technical information and advice and share knowledge or research
- » Good for raising awareness, increasing support

Mobilizing Citizens/Rallies/Demonstrations

- » Good for generating media attention, showing strength if other tactics are not getting desired attention

FACE-TO-FACE CONTACT

Meeting Public Servants

- » Gain information about what's happening
- » Helps to better understand constraints, concerns, possible competing interests
- » Explore possibilities; raise profile; build relationships

Bringing Program Participants To Meet Politicians

- » Helps politicians put a human face to the situation and to see first-hand the realities
- » Helps build greater commitment to addressing your issue

Meeting With Politicians

- » Provides a forum to make your views heard and to raise any concerns
- » Enables you to find out more about the government's perspective on an issue; to hear first-hand their concerns, priorities and interests
- » To look for common issues and win-win opportunities; can explore opportunities for partnership
- » Good opportunity to make your case and position your organization in their minds
- » Recognize that meetings rarely lead to tangible commitments

Meeting With Political Aides

- » Can help increase attention to the issue
- » Can assist with securing a meeting with key people
- » Can help build internal supporters or champions
- » Get advice on how to proceed, other contacts and possible strategies
- » Gain a political perspective for an issue raised in the newspaper

Meeting With Leaders In Other Sectors

- » To gather support and build allies by building cross-sectoral support for your issue
- » To raise awareness and increase understanding
- » To line up representatives from sectors that normally would not be involved, to speak out, showing how widespread and mainstream is the support

BUILDING COMMUNITY SUPPORT



Leverage the media and the private sector in the development of your plan. The media in particular can play a powerful role in bolstering initiatives to end youth homelessness. Thinking through your media strategy and being deliberate about when and what to communicate out can help build momentum for the issue, which can in turn, increase attention from government, funders and the broader community.

Thinking through your media strategy and being deliberate about when and what to communicate out can help build momentum for the issue, which can in turn, increase attention from government, funders and the broader community.

Knowing when and how to engage with media, getting your story covered in a meaningful way and cultivating long-term, positive relationships can go a long way toward supporting the plan and its implementation. There is an art to writing effective communications plans and media releases while cultivating a brand for your initiative. This [guide](#) for building your communications strategy provides guidance. For specific advice on social media, another useful [resource](#) for non-profits is also available. Leverage opportunities such as meetings or if you release research results. Learn to write a good ‘hook’ to engage the media (they are in the news business and want something newsworthy). Cultivate relationships with interested reporters in your community – they can become ‘go-to’ people. Finally, it is important to develop a social media strategy (Twitter, Facebook, etc.) as this will this become a vehicle for directly engaging your community and help you to engage mainstream media, who tend to look to social media for leads and interesting stories.

Private sector foundations, corporations and individuals are another key source of knowledge, influence and resources for the initiative. Often, such allies and champions are already involved in committee and on non-profit boards. [It’s Everybody’s Business: Engaging the Private Sector in Solutions to Youth Homelessness](#) provides an overview of how to work with the private sector in this manner.

In Kamloops, private businesses provided early implementation support for the youth plan. Funds raised from these stakeholders were used to fund housing opportunities for youth. This leveraged private funds, but also allowed for the plan to be implemented in short order, without the need for major investment from government. It also showed results to the community, reinforcing support for the initiative.

GETTING IT DONE

WRITING THE PLAN

So, what does a youth plan actually look like? You've probably seen examples from other communities (see the resource section on the A Way Home website). This section will walk you through the key elements of a youth plan and provides you technical guidance on how to develop one based on best practices and information you gathered locally. It will point you to further reading, where available.

In some ways, knowing what a youth plan could look like – or working with the end in mind – can help you think through your consultation and research processes and inform your workplan.

A plan to end youth homelessness is not drastically different from a strategic plan or business plan; however, its scope is much wider than that of a single agency or government department/ministry. The plan takes a systems view and provides guidance to a particular community (city, region, province, country) on tackling a complex social issue. Thus, while elements of the plan content may seem familiar at first glance, the scope is much broader because of the diverse systems and stakeholders it aims to coalesce into a coherent strategy.

SAMPLE PLAN OVERVIEW

Plans tend to be between 50-100 pages. They usually include significant information and analysis; thus, communities often develop executive summaries and other complementary communication materials based on the plan. These complementary materials ensure that the information effectively reaches a broad audience.

While every plan is distinct, the sections remain more or less consistent. Below, we provide you with a sample outline of a fictional plan.

Table 24: Sample Plan Overview

SECTION	INTENT
Executive Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Succinctly summarizes plan key points: facts, solutions, costs, implementation actions » Short (2-5 pages) document, grabs reader attention; used in wider communications
Section 1: Setting the Stage Outlining the Vision Guiding Principles Business Case for Action Key Facts on Homelessness & Youth Homelessness Plan Development Process Overview of Plan Strategies & Costs/Cost Savings Celebrating Success Key Risks & Challenges Ahead, Costs of Inaction	<p>This section aims to present the basic premise of the plan: it paints a picture of the current state of youth homelessness in the community and presents the vision resulting from the proposed direction.</p> <p>The section introduces key elements of the plan: proposed strategies, costs, implementation options and risk assessment highlights.</p> <p>The section also celebrates current efforts, highlighting that while the plan proposes significant changes, it is built on a foundation of efforts already underway.</p> <p>You can also make the case for continuing the status quo – the cost and human implications of inaction.</p> <p>You can include an overview of the plan development process here as well, though this should be kept at a highlights level – you can add more details in an appendix.</p>

Section 2: Making the Case

Local Youth Housing and
Homelessness Trends

Housing Market & Affordability
Analysis

Extreme Core Housing Need

Shelter Use Patterns

System Interactions

Homeless Count Results

Youth Homelessness Prevalence

Key Subpopulations:
Indigenous, LGBTQ2S, rural,
newcomer, etc.

Revisioning the Response to
Youth Homelessness

Summary of Best Practice
Analysis Results

Implications for Local
Community

Consultations Results:

- » Youth
- » Government
- » Public Systems
- » Service Providers

Analyzing Needs

Projecting Future Needs

Current System Capacity and
Performance for Youth

Emerging Housing and
Program Gaps

Policy and Practice Issues

The section summarises your research findings, depending on the type of information you were able to secure for analysis.

You can include a summary of the best practices around ending youth homelessness, highlighting how these impact the local response.

A section summarizing consultation feedback helps you build the evidence for proposed actions later in the plan; note that you should have this distilled to main points; use the appendices as means of including more information.

The analysis of needs and current system capacity is technical as it requires you to develop a projection of needs into the future, analyze how the system can respond under the status quo and how impact can be improved under alternative scenarios.

You can begin to identify program and policy barriers here based on the synthesis of information already presented from research and consultations.

<p>Section 3: Presenting Solutions</p> <p>Priority Directions in Detail</p> <p>Priority 1</p> <p>Objective 1 – Rationale</p> <p>Objective 2 – Rationale</p> <p>Priority 2</p> <p>Objective 1 – Rationale</p> <p>Objective 2 – Rationale, etc.</p> <p>Projected Results, Costs and Cost Savings</p> <p>Targets and Progress Indicators</p> <p>Implementation Considerations</p> <p>Policy Recommendations</p> <p>Risk Management</p> <p>A Living Plan: Process for Renewal</p>	<p>Based on the previous sections, you can now begin to lay out the proposed directions of the plan. You may want to summarize the overall direction, then go into each strategy and its accompanying goals in further detail. For each strategy and goal, you should summarize the rationale for making the recommendation recalling evidence from previous sections.</p> <p>The milestones and progress indicators will be developed once the strategies are fully worked out, along with the needs and performance analysis. You can include them after you outline your strategies and goals to show how you will track progress. You can pull these key indicators earlier in the document (executive summary, setting the stage section) to give readers a sense of your vision from a performance management perspective as well.</p> <p>The sections should also provide guidance on how the plan is to be implemented. You may not have this set in stone, but you should provide some recommendations on selecting a group or organization to provide backbone supports to lead implementation, considerations on governance and tracking progress and plan renewal.</p> <p>The section can include policy recommendations specific to government as well – and this could be presented as a policy agenda in further detail as an appendix.</p> <p>A risk assessment is recommended to ensure readers are aware of your key assumptions building the plan and potential risk mitigation measures to consider in implementation.</p>
<p>Appendices</p> <p>Acknowledgements</p> <p>Methodology Points</p> <p>Consultation Notes</p> <p>Plan Development Process</p> <p>Implementation Plan</p> <p>Policy Agenda</p>	<p>The appendices can include detailed information on a number of topics to ensure your plan can be as succinct as possible.</p>

Remember, drafting the plan is not a linear process. You may find yourself having to return to the research or consultation phases to fill in gaps or re-examine your assumptions.



Often, the lead writer(s) of the plan hold(s) the reins on pulling the various sources of information, collected throughout the process, into a coherent direction. However, the plan writer does not wholly determine the suggested course of action. It is their role to work with the broader planning group to affirm the direction taken and even go back to community stakeholders for further input.

You will likely have a number of authors that contribute to the plan content, but it is wise to have a lead writer accountable for pulling it all together in a timely fashion, ensuring there is a common thread tying various content pieces

If you consider the key elements of the plan at the same time as building your research and consultation processes, you will be able to develop the content of your plan as you go through the development process, rather than waiting until the end. For instance, it is best to gain input on the vision for the initiative from a broad stakeholder group rather than having the plan writer come up with it on their own, then try to shop it out in the final editing stages.

Carefully consider who will write the plan. Is it the project manager? The steering committee members? The consultant? Or a combination thereof? You will likely have a number of authors that contribute to the plan content, but it is wise to have a lead writer accountable for pulling it all together in a timely fashion, ensuring there is a common thread tying various content pieces. The ideal plan writer is an effective communicator and able to distil complex concepts into concise communications.

The plan is largely a technical report. Therefore, it is important that your writer has the skills to develop the content based on the quantitative and qualitative data available. It is always a 'bonus' to have someone who can actually take on the financial and performance modelling. If this is not feasible, you can consider bringing in outside technical assistance. Nonetheless, the lead plan writer must be sufficiently proficient in these areas in order to develop a cohesive, sensible narrative.

To develop broader communication materials, look to individuals with communications and marketing backgrounds to assist you. They can turn the content of the plan into brochures, websites, at-a-glance documents and infographics. Develop these marketing materials as part of the launch of the final report, once the plan is complete.

DEVELOPING PLAN GOALS

As you work through the data you gathered from your research and consultation process, consider emerging themes that are common throughout the material and examine these against the aforementioned priority areas. There may be variations on the priority areas outlined in this toolkit, but in some way you will need to address these issues in your plan's proposed approach.

Various communities use different terms to highlight the broad priority areas and associated actions. There is no standard but what is key is that you have a way of differentiating between the two and ensuring that your shorter term activities feed into larger priorities.

The detailed actions associated with your goals break down the priorities into smaller pieces that can be operationalized. These should be action oriented and reflect both best practices and community-identified needs. In other words, just because a national report identifies a particular program as a promising practice, doesn't mean it necessarily fits within your local context. It is the job of the planning team to articulate relevant goals for your community. Be strategic and succinct in how these are presented, but provide sufficient rationale as to why the goals within the plan are priorities. Further, build on existing efforts and link with ongoing government or community initiatives where possible.

The table below, adapted from the *Calgary Plan to End Youth Homelessness Refresh Strategy Overview* (2016), provides examples of the types of goals often found in youth plans. If your plan has a specific focus on Indigenous homelessness, LGBTQ2S youth, newcomers, etc., you may want to delve in deeper into these issues throughout the plan. In the case of recommended actions, you can also consider having a separate strategy on Indigenous youth, for instance, or integrate the focus throughout the goals.

Table 25: Common Plan Objectives

PRIORITY AREA	COMMON OBJECTIVES
Leadership, Engagement & Resources	<p>Mobilize diverse stakeholder groups to enhance collective impact on youth homelessness and develop a theory of change to guide the planning and implementation process.</p> <p>Develop the infrastructure and governance necessary to implement the youth plan.</p> <p>Develop and advance a policy and funding agenda to end youth homelessness.</p> <p>Coordinate diverse funding sources to maximize impact on youth homelessness.</p> <p>Champion an end to youth homelessness.</p> <p>Introduce strategic education and awareness campaigns to support plan implementation.</p> <p>Use research and knowledge mobilization to support ending youth homelessness.</p> <p>Support youth's meaningful engagement in plan development and implementation.</p> <p>Build private sector partnerships to support plan goals.</p>
Prevention	<p>Introduce targeted prevention measures to support youth at risk of or experiencing homelessness. This includes shelter diversion and prevention supports to keep youth housed or rapidly rehouse them when they do become homeless.</p> <p>Promote family reunification and mediation supports.</p> <p>Ensure single youth and youth in families have access to available social housing and rent subsidy supports as well as income assistance to maintain housing stability.</p> <p>Ensure youth are not discharged into homelessness from housing programs, child protection services, health and correctional systems.</p> <p>Develop effective supports for youth aging out of government care.</p> <p>Work with schools to educate youth about homelessness and available supports.</p> <p>Enhance youth's access to education, training and job skill development.</p>

System Planning & Integration

Ensure the diverse services for at-risk and homeless youth have well-articulated roles in the broader system of care; ensure program type, target population, eligibility criteria and outcomes are well articulated for each program, whether delivered by the non-profit or public sector.

Introduce measures to enhance service integration within and between youth-serving, homeless-serving and key public systems, including child protection, domestic violence, education, correction and health to implement the plan. Measures to improve coordination and integration among key stakeholders serving homeless and at risk youth can include:

- » Collective vision and guiding principles,
- » Collaborative planning processes,
- » Coordinated access and assessment processes,
- » Data and information sharing, including use of common information system performance management and quality assurance,
- » Coordinated service delivery,
- » Capacity building and training and
- » Captured information about youth is used effectively in research and initiatives, including homeless counts and HMIS/HIFIS.

<p>Housing & Supports</p>	<p>Use a Housing First Framework for youth and a range of effective program models to support the prevention, reduction and ending of youth homelessness. This incorporates various housing solutions that will respond appropriately to the broad range of the homeless youth's needs (including family-style homes, transitional housing, independent apartments, supportive housing, etc.).</p> <p>Revise and enhance the role of youth-specific and adult shelters and transitional housing in ending youth homelessness.</p> <p>Introduce and/or reform transitional housing for youth, such as Foyer, to ensure best outcomes.</p> <p>Provide outreach services to connect youth with housing and support.</p> <p>Ensure accessible and affordable transportation options are available to youth to access supports and housing, particularly in rural communities.</p> <p>Introduce independent housing options for youth, including adaptations of the Housing First approach.</p> <p>Increase affordable housing options appropriate for and accessible to youth.</p> <p>Develop a targeted landlord recruitment strategy to enhance youth's access to private rental units.</p> <p>Tailor interventions to meet the needs of diverse youth groups, including Indigenous, LGBTQ2S, immigrant, parenting, sexually exploited youth and youth with developmental disabilities, mental health and/or addiction issues.</p> <p>Promote relationship-based approaches to supporting youth.</p> <p>Explore innovative models of peer-based support and mentorship.</p> <p>Ensure youth have access to necessary treatment and recovery supports to address addiction, mental and physical health issues.</p>
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CONSIDERATIONS FOR A FOCUS ON INDIGENOUS YOUTH

An example of a youth plan that focuses on Indigenous youth is Calgary's 2011 Youth Plan. During consultations for the plan's development, the Aboriginal Standing Committee on Housing and Homelessness provided the backbone supports leading the work (Calgary Homeless Foundation). It includes several elements that should be considered in any plan involving Indigenous people, as outlined in the [Calgary Plan to End Aboriginal Homelessness](#) (note that the original input from the ASCHH was specific to Aboriginal people, not Indigenous – hence we kept the original term):

- » To end Aboriginal homelessness and other housing issues while understanding cultural competencies and ensuring cultural sensitivities through collaborative community efforts and awareness of cultural identity; maintain safe and culturally appropriate housing... allows for not just purchasing, but renting and maintenance as well
- » Expand and support existing organizations and agencies that provide housing to homeless Aboriginal youth and children
- » Centralize the intake system to ensure Aboriginal identification is captured and utilized;
- » Establish Aboriginal transition/halfway houses/group homes for Aboriginal youth leaving institutions, like ILS home or Wellington House, when leaving foster care, CYOC, hospitals, etc.
- » Establish safe, culturally relevant and sensitive discharge plans, so no Aboriginal person is discharged into homelessness or unsafe housing; do not want to discharge anyone into an unsafe (physically, or otherwise) situation
- » Initiate greater consultation with Aboriginal organizations and agencies in the creation of HMIS (and incorporation of culturally sensitive questions at intake)
- » Talk to and learn from the Aboriginal people who have been previously or are currently homeless or have faced housing issues

- » It is far too subjective to measure success, instead we should find out from our people what they feel is and is not working, best practices and where improvements can be made
- » Increase competent Aboriginal workforce and treatment facilities, with cultural, spiritual and emotional perspectives (harm reduction)
- » Ensure all four levels of government are involved in ensuring Aboriginal inclusion
- » Create an urban Aboriginal cultural support system/centre, with culturally specific wrap around programs
- » Cannot just be managed on a case-by-case situation – should be available for prevention – proactive rather than reactive approach
- » Provide more opportunities for urban Aboriginal people to earn income and receive education
- » More engagement and involvement with stakeholders, leaders, committee members and First Nation communities. Discussions around off-reserve funding availability
- » Educate the community about poverty, homelessness and Aboriginal issues through Alberta-specific workers at community resource centres
- » Will need to hire more Aboriginal people to work with existing centres
- » Build a physical epicentre, like Thunderbird Lodge in Winnipeg or the Anishnabe Health and Wellness Centre in downtown Toronto
- » Ensure Calgary Homeless Foundation includes two Aboriginal positions on its board – one on-reserve and one off-reserve to ensure a voice

In response to these recommendations, [Calgary's Youth Plan](#) places specific emphasis on Aboriginal youth homelessness in Calgary. The plan calls for engaging key stakeholders in a collaborative community-response model, with critical attention given to meet the needs of diverse communities including Aboriginal people, youth with disabilities, newcomers and LGBTQ2S youth.

There is a focus on increasing supports, awareness and services dedicated to Aboriginal young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness in Calgary, including:

- » Conducting further research about the pathways into Aboriginal youth homelessness to help ensure services dedicated to Aboriginal young people (at risk of or experiencing homelessness) will be carried out in consideration of structural factors.
- » Recognizing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal young people that are at risk of or experiencing homelessness, the youth plan adopts the following major milestone:
 - » By 2018, Aboriginal homeless young people will not be overrepresented in the homeless population. According to The City of Calgary 2008 Biennial Homeless Count, Aboriginal young people and children represent 28% of the homeless population under 24 years old. Census Canada 2006 data revealed that two percent of the Calgary population self-identify as Aboriginal.
- » In conjunction with the broader Calgary 10 Year Plan, the youth plan ensuring continued implementation of case management standards for ensuring that:
 - » Young Aboriginal people have control over the planning of their lives,
 - » Young Aboriginal people are receiving services with contextual considerations, including pathways into homelessness for Aboriginal people. Specifically, the role of intergenerational trauma specific to the effects of colonization must be addressed to ensure adequate cultural connectedness and therefore healing for Aboriginal people.

PLAN COSTS & PERFORMANCE

As you develop your plan goals, you may want to go a step further and develop a funding ask as well. Considering developing an evidenced-based cost argument. If the vision set out in the plan were to be realised, what would the impact be? This will help you build a solid business case to funders and government, but will also help you distil your goals.

Your research and consultation may have told you new housing and supports were needed, but how much of what program/housing? How much would this cost and to what effect? These are basic questions decision makers will ask, but so too will the public. Releasing a youth plan without an indication of the resources required to execute it will pose a legitimacy risk. You may be able to mitigate this by noting you will work on such questions in implementation, but there is no reason why you can't consider including this piece of analysis during plan development.

Though other plans make it look easy, with infographics and simple dollar figures, the analysis that goes behind such business cases is no easy feat.

Here is what you need to know to get started:
First, know your limits. You and/or your team may not have the technical background to develop the necessary analysis. You may need to bring in an external expert, while making sure they walk you through the methods so you can learn for future needs. You may also not have the necessary data to complete the modelling – in such a case, you may want to suggest such analysis is done during plan implementation.

Know however, that without a solid articulation of the impact that the proposed measures will have and the cost of these, it is going to be more difficult to credibly approach decision makers to support and invest in the plan. Budgeting and impact assessment, along with scenario building, are to a large degree interconnected and are in many ways different ways of interpreting the same information, building on one another as you go.

1. PREVALENCE OF HOMELESSNESS & YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN YOUR COMMUNITY

First, figure out local homelessness prevalence rates and calculate the youth prevalence from this general figure. The prevalence rate refers to the total number of sheltered and unsheltered homelessness person in your community during the course of one year. Cities usually represent this rate as a percentage of their general population – in Calgary, it is 1.4% and in Red Deer it is 0.8%.

Note that you are estimating the number of rough sleepers who would otherwise not be captured at any point during the year in the shelter data used. Ensure you account for possible duplication among diverse facilities as well.

You will also have to estimate how many of these individuals are youth (up to 24 years old). It is best to use actual shelter and rough sleeper demographics from your HMIS or HIFIS for this and if these are unavailable at least general population demographics to generate an estimate.

Below is an example of what the results of this exercise can look like.

Table 26: Estimating Youth Homelessness

SHELTER	ALL UNIQUE INDIVIDUALS	UNIQUE YOUTH	
Singles Emergency Shelter	468	20%	94
Women's Emergency Shelter	403	3%	133
Youth Emergency Shelter	40	100%	40
Sub-total Shelter	911	29%	267
Estimated Duplication	13%	13%	35
Re-calculated Shelter	791	29%	231
Rough Sleepers	40	10%	4
Total Individuals Experiencing Homelessness	831	28%	235
Estimated Prevalence Rate (2015 General Pop. 100,000 total)	0.8%	25%	0.2%

2. ESTIMATE OF THE AT-RISK POPULATION

Calculate an estimate of the total number of youth at risk of homelessness in your community. You can do this through an analysis of extreme core housing need using Census data to determine the number of individuals renting and paying more than 50% of income on shelter with low incomes (under \$20,000). Break this figure out by age groups to gain a sense of the youth component.

You may also be able to complement this data with available information from public systems on youth discharges into homelessness from corrections, child protection, health, treatment, etc.

Note that because Census data is dated (2011), you will need to project current totals based on historic population growth. You can also estimate the total number of individuals from the household data by looking at census information on average household size. In this example, it was 2.3 individuals per household.

Table 27: *Estimating Youth At Risk Population*

AT-RISK POPULATION	COMMUNITY TOTAL	YOUTH UNDER 18		YOUTH OVER 18		ALL YOUTH	
Extreme Core Housing Need Household	1,735	Percent	Total	Percent	Total	Percent	Total
Estimated Individuals in Extreme Core Housing Need (2.3 individuals/household)	4,236	13%	226	12%	508	25%	1,059

3. HOMELESSNESS TYPE AND ACUITY AMONG AT-RISK GROUPS ESTIMATES

Using the available data, you can develop an analysis of the at-risk and homeless youth population to estimate the breakout of level of acuity.

You can use HMIS or HIFIS information to generate this estimated acuity breakout based on the most recent annual data or provide a placeholder until you have actual data from community input and service provider reports. Ensure you project population growth for the entire implementation time period to ensure adequate resources are allocated.

Looking at both calculations, we can see that we have a total of about 1,242 youth at risk of experiencing homelessness and/or who experience transitional homelessness and 53 youth who use shelters or sleep rough for a total of 1,295 total youth who may need an intervention by 2018.

Table 28: Projecting Need

HOMELESS POPULATION				
	2015	2016	2017	2018
Rough Sleepers	20	20	21	21
Youth Rough Sleepers (10%)	2	2	3	3
Shelter Users	235	240	246	252
Youth Shelter Users (20%)	47	48	49	50

AT-RISK HOMELESS POPULATION								
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Total Individuals	4,236	4,333	4,433	4,535	4,639	4,746	4,855	4,967
Total Youth Individuals (25%)	1,059	1,083	1,108	1,134	1,160	1,187	1,214	1,242
Growth Rate: 2.3%								

After we split out the acuity levels by homeless/at-risk groups, we have a good sense of what capacity would be needed to serve projected demand by 2018. The estimated need gives you a sense of what kind of interventions will be needed to match demand to program types.

Table 29: Estimating Need Levels

ACUITY LEVELS	HOMELESS YOUTH		AT-RISK YOUTH		POSSIBLE PROGRAM INTERVENTIONS
High	26	50%	248	20%	Housing First ICM, Supportive Housing, Prevention
Moderate	16	30%	373	30%	Transitional Housing/Foyer, Independent Living, Prevention
Low	11	20%	621	50%	Prevention, Rapid Rehousing, Rent Supports, Family Reunification
Total	53	100%	1,242	100%	

4. SYSTEM CAPACITY AND PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS

Provide a breakdown of current homeless services and housing youth access per program type or specifically target youth and their most current performance indicators where possible. This includes such indicators as turnover rates annually, caseload capacities, bed/unit inventory, negative exits, length of stay and cost per program/housing space. Note any eligibility requirements that have an impact on youth.

To classify programs, you can use local definitions, or look to the Performance Management Toolkit for consistent definitions and benchmark indicators of performance. The turnover rate reflects how many new clients in any given year went through the program as a percentage of the total caseload capacity of the program. Negative exits represent total clients who exited to homelessness (rough sleeping, shelter, jail, etc.) as a percent of total exits in a particular year. The program space cost is calculated by dividing the annual funding by the total caseload.

In the example below, you can see, by comparing the youth caseload to the total caseload, not all programs serve youth exclusively. In fact, average caseload for youth of all programs is 29%. You will need to consider if this level of access is proportional to the estimated need, but try to dig even deeper to determine how outcomes for youth compare to those of adults. Are there subgroups of youth (Indigenous, immigrants, etc.) that differ in access and outcomes? How does this play out from a cost analysis perspective?

Table 30: System Capacity Analysis

PROGRAM NAME	PROGRAM TYPE	HOMELESSNESS HISTORY AT INTAKE	ELIGIBILITY RESTRICTIONS	TOTAL CASELOAD	YOUTH CASELOAD	TURNOVER RATE	PERCENT NEGATIVE EXITS	TOTAL ANNUAL FUNDING	\$/PROGRAM SPACE
Program 1	Supportive Housing	Chronic	Sobriety required	39	20	25%	20%	\$800,000	\$20,512.82
Program 2	Supportive Housing	Chronic	Adults only	8	2	50%	25%	\$200,000	\$25,000.00
Program 3	Intensive Case Management	Chronic/Episodic	Families with children	6	1	10%	10%	\$100,000	\$16,666.67
Program 4	Transitional Housing	Chronic/Episodic	Sobriety required	80	15	30%	31%	\$1,500,000	\$18,750.00
Program 5	Intensive Case Management	Chronic/Episodic	Downtown focus	50	5	100%	N/A	\$500,000	\$10,000.00
Program 6	Prevention	At-risk	Families with children	20	5	58%	35%	\$150,000	\$7,500.00
Program 7	Prevention	At-risk	Must have job	10	9	200%	10%	\$100,000	\$10,000.00
Program 8	Rapid Rehousing	Chronic/Episodic	Adults only	50	5	100%	50%	\$1,300,000	\$26,000.00
Program 9	Rapid Rehousing	Episodic	Youth up to 24 years old	25	25	59%	33%	\$200,000	\$8,000.00
Program 10	Rapid Rehousing	Episodic	Adults exiting corrections	20	1	33%	25%	\$180,000	\$9,000.00

5. MODELLING SOLUTIONS

Based on the previous steps, you will need to evaluate what type of interventions are best suited to ending homelessness in your community in your particular timeframe (ex. Two, five, 10 years), as well as the associated costs and capacity needs.

Surprisingly, you may find that you have adequate capacity to meet the needs of certain groups, but have performance issues that need addressing in other areas. Without this analysis, you are likely to make overly generalized recommendations, without a solid sense of cost and impact.

From the example below, you can see there will be a total of 113 youth served by 2018 if the system continues as is. We know higher acuity youth with longer homelessness histories will likely benefit from supportive housing and intensive case management (ICM). Conversely, youth who experience transitional homelessness or are at-risk of homelessness are more likely to benefit from rapid rehousing and prevention services. As a result, we can estimate that lower acuity youth at-risk/experiencing transitional homelessness will remain underserved with the current performance and capacity in the system.

By playing with the numbers, we can estimate what it would take to eliminate youth homelessness in terms of new program capacity, but also what impact enhanced performance might have on turnover and negative exits. The turnover in the model, for instance, assumes that current negative exits and turnover rates remain consistent, but what if these improved? We can model what impact enhanced performance would have. Improvements to service quality or access for youth would likely not require the same level of funding.

Once you work out some scenarios, you can also model costs for maximum impact. Capital solutions will likely be the costliest, though may be critical for particular groups of youth. You can also play with program costs to potentially create efficiencies in some cases. In the scenario below, new ICM spaces are modelled to estimate the costs of the enhancement over the set time period. This can be done with all program types, depending on need.

Table 31: Estimating Impact

	2016				2017			
	Existing Spaces	Turnover in Existing Spaces	New Spaces Created	Total New Clients Served	Existing Spaces	Turnover in Existing Spaces	New Spaces Created	Total New Clients Served
Supportive Housing - Place Based	47	12	0	12	47	12	0	12
Supported Housing - Place Based	35	11	0	11	35	11	0	11
ICM - Scattered Site	85	28	15	43	100	33	0	33
Prevention - Scattered Site	40	33	0	33	40	33	0	33
RRH - Scattered Site	90	37	0	37	90	37	0	37
Total	296	121	15	136	311	126	0	126
	2018				TOTAL INDIVIDUALS			TOTAL YOUTH
	Existing Spaces	Turnover in Existing Spaces	New Spaces Created	Total New Clients Served	Existing Spaces	New Spaces Created	Total New Clients Served	Average Based on Status Quo - 29%
Supportive Housing - Place Based	47	12	0	12	47	0	36	10
Supported Housing - Place Based	35	11	0	11	35	0	33	10
ICM - Scattered Site	100	33	0	33	100	15	109	32
Prevention - Scattered Site	40	33	0	33	40	0	99	29
RRH - Scattered Site	90	37	0	37	90	0	110	32
Total	311	126	0	126	311	15	387	113

Table 32: Calculating Costs

	COSTS	2016		2017		
New Spaces	Per Program Space	New Spaces Created	New Costs	New Spaces Created	Previous Added Spaces	New Costs
Permanent Supportive Housing - Place Based - Operations	\$36,470	0	-	0	0	-
Supported Housing - Place-Based - Operations	\$7,540	0	-	0	0	-
ICM- Scattered Site - Operations	\$14,470	15	\$217,050	0	15	\$217,050
Prevention - Scattered Site - Operations	\$3,600	0	-	0	0	-
RRH- Scattered Site -	\$12,600	0	-	0	0	-
Total		15	\$217,050	0	15	\$217,050
	COSTS	2018			TOTAL	
New Spaces	Per Program Space	New Spaces Created	Previous Added Spaces	New Costs	New Spaces Created	New Costs
Permanent Supportive Housing - Place Based - Operations	\$36,470	0	0	-	0	-
Supported Housing - Place-Based - Operations	\$7,540	0	0	-	0	-
ICM- Scattered Site - Operations	\$14,470	15	15	\$217,050	15	\$651,150
Prevention - Scattered Site - Operations	\$3,600	0	0	-	0	-
RRH- Scattered Site -	\$12,600	0	0	-	0	-
Total		0	15	\$217,050	15	\$651,150

Once you've completed the analysis, develop a summary with a proposed course of action but also outline at least three scenarios for the consideration of the broader planning group. Ensure you provide a full assessment of risks and record all your assumptions so future work can build on your calculations in implementation. On the next page is a sample risk register from Calgary's Plan to End Homelessness.

6. DEVELOPING YOUR FUNDING ASK

Ensure you are explicit about the costs of new operations and capital over the course of the plan's implementation – see example below.

Table 33: Developing Funding Asks

SUMMARY NEW COSTS					
	2015	2016	2017	2018	Toal
Operations	\$0	\$731,861	\$1,902,392	\$2,568,493	\$5,202,746
Capital	\$690,000	\$2,070,000	\$2,070,000	\$0	\$4,830,000
Total New Cost	\$656,487	\$2,801,861	\$3,972,393	\$2,568,493	\$10,032,746

Ideally, you will be able to outline who is expected to cover these costs – in other words, what is the ask to various government and community funders?

A solid case to funders can be made by showing the cost savings realized through implementing the plan. Unfortunately, we do not have good data at this time to develop this analysis with a youth focus. For examples for how this can be undertaken for broader populations, the [Chez Soi](#) project and several community plans are available for review such as [Calgary's plan](#), though these are not specifically targeted at youth.

DEVELOPING TARGETS & PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The above section provides you a means of developing the plan progress. You can create targets around funding using this work and proposed actual number of youth you can serve pending resources. You do have the option not to include this information and instead stick to a high-level visioning document that would call for this level of analysis in implementation. However, It will be a harder sell, as you will not be able to paint a picture of how to resolve the issue in a measureable way.

Targets and progress indicators draw on these analyses to propose targets for the number of youth housed, days spent in shelter, percent discharges into homelessness from systems, etc. If you don't have a current sense of performance in these areas, you can instead use general indicator descriptions that you can populate with real data over time. Without setting some measurable indicators however, your plan will not trigger any evidence-based means of implementation tracking either. It is best to set some performance expectations from the start.

This is also another way of showing what you mean by ending youth homelessness – how do you know you're making progress? Ensuring stakeholders have input on this issue will also be essential to buy-in for the plan. In fact, this is one of the essentials of collective impact (shared measurement).



Indicators should be evidenced-based and aligned with your vision, but also realistic from a data collection perspective.

Nevertheless, such targets and indicators should be included in your plan. Here are some examples of plan targets: note they are very specific and build on each other. It goes without saying that these are developed using the research and analysis you have undertaken, versus ‘being pulled out of thin air.’ In fact, you should be able to provide a description of the methods used and rationale for coming up with the targets in the first place.

Indicators should be evidenced-based and aligned with your vision, but also realistic from a data collection perspective. Give thought as to how these are collected and reported to the community moving forward. Stakeholders that provide data into this effort should have a say in what is being collected and how it’s interpreted for wider audiences, particularly when it impacts funding allocation.

Target examples:

1

House 123 youth in shelters to bring their average length of stay in shelters from 20 to 12 days by 2019

2

House 15 youth sleeping rough who are not connected to shelters, eliminating youth street homelessness by 2018

3

Develop targeted prevention, diversion and rapid rehousing measures to stem the flow into homelessness for 500 vulnerable youth by 2020.

Meeting Targets 1 and 2 would eliminate shelter use and rough sleeping among youth in the community by 2019.

Here are some more examples of performance measures that indicate progress on youth homelessness is being made by an optimized homeless youth-serving system. Note that the COH is working to develop a national definition of ‘functional zero’ that will help you think through the key elements needed and measures you may want to include in developing plan targets.

Performance measures:

- » Total number of youth experiencing homelessness (rough sleeping/shelter) decreases.
- » Average length of stay in shelter/street for youth is less than seven days on average. This performance is maintained for a minimum of 12 months.
- » The incidence of youth exiting public systems (corrections, child protection, health, etc.) who become homeless is reduced and eventually eliminated.
- » Turnover rate and occupancy levels in current homeless system capacity allow access to appropriate housing and supports to youth experiencing homelessness and at imminent risk within 10 days of referral. This performance is maintained for a minimum of 12 months.
- » No more than five percent of youth who exit through intervention programs return to homelessness within 12 months.
- » Youth program and housing participants report high satisfaction using standard survey tool re:
 - » Housing quality, security of tenure affordability and safety;
 - » Case management services received;
 - » Access to appropriate supports to address diverse needs within homeless system & mainstream public systems (addiction, trauma, mental and physical health issues, employment, education, etc.);
 - » Process of referral and intake into programs & housing;
 - » Discharge planning and transition supports;
 - » Perception of quality of life, including sense of belonging, participation in community activities and connection with friends and family.
- » Supporting healthy transitions to adulthood and include increasing level of education, employment, life skill development and connections to natural supports.

LAUNCHING THE PLAN



Once you have a draft of the plan, consider how you will release the final document to the community. Many communities organize launch events, celebrating the culmination of the effort with stakeholders from across sectors. Consider the launch as another opportunity to engage with youth – including those who participated in your consultation; youth can take active roles in planning and hosting the launch.

Consider the launch as another opportunity to engage with youth – including those who participated in your consultation; youth can take active roles in planning and hosting the launch.

Involve media and politicians, leveraging it as an opportunity to raise awareness about youth homelessness broadly. You can be creative in your launch event design; consider how you can effectively engage youth, for instance, in the design and delivery of the event.

Prepare communication materials that are easy to read, catchy and to the point. While you may have the full report ready, it may be more effective to launch short summary documents, briefs, infographics and use social media to get the word out. News releases are essential and you may consider hosting a media conference. Leveraging social media will be important as well; prepare blog posts ahead of time, tweets and Facebook posts. Ensure your website is updated with the plan content as well.

Your spokespeople should be well prepared with key messages and have worked through potential 'hairy' questions that might arise. Again, developing a communications plan for the release can ensure you are prepared.

The launch can be a part of your advocacy strategy with government, engaging decision makers in conversations about the plan during the release and in the media. Ensure the plan is shared with key departments ahead of its release, allowing adequate time for administration to prepare ministers with issue briefs. You may want to have meetings ahead of the release to connect with decision makers around plan asks and propose endorsement of the plan. Often, government and other stakeholders will respond to a plan release by noting they will review it and consider their role in various aspects of your proposed direction.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

Certain plans include a detailed implementation framework that outlines accountabilities and timelines for achieving the proposed outcomes. This will be an important consideration as you develop your plan. Will you give direction regarding governance matters, for instance? How will progress be reviewed and communicated? The following chart provides a template as you develop an implementation framework for your plan.

Table 34: Developing an Implementation Framework

PRIORITY 1	KEY PLAYERS	PROGRESS	ACTIONS NEEDED	LEAD/ SUPPORT	TIMELINE
	List specific agencies, government, funders, etc.	What's happening in support of this priority?	What's missing that we need to make this happen?	Who is doing the heavy lifting & who is helping?	By when will actions be completed?
Objective 1:					
Objective 2:					

You may also want to consider other items that we have already touched on, though depending on your local capacity that may need to be left to the implementation phase.

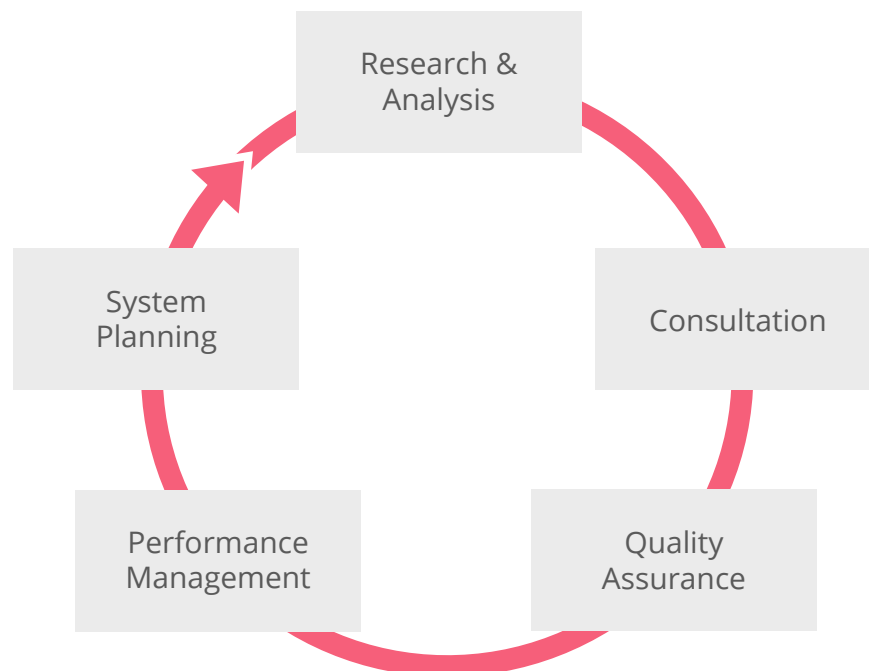
Table 35: Planning vs. Implementation

	PLANNING	IMPLEMENTATION	RATIONALE
Target Population Estimates	Essential	Essential	Difficult to make a case without estimate of scope of issue.
Projected Intervention Needs	Recommended	Essential	Needed to help develop priority direction, assess program gaps, develop funding ask.
Current and Future System Performance Analysis	Recommended	Essential	Shows current gaps and system performance with proposed changes introduced against status quo.
Modelling Proposed Solutions	Recommended	Essential	Shows due diligence on assessing best course of action; allows flexibility in implementation to adjust approach in real time.
Targets and Performance Indicators	Essential	Essential	Essential elements of solid plans – emphasis on measurable results, with timelines.
Funding Ask	Essential	Essential	Essential to have this in place for advocacy to implement the plan, even if it adjusts over time.
Governance Model	Recommended	Essential	You may only have ability to give broad direction on governance, though this will be essential to actually execute the plan.
Risk Register	Recommended	Recommended	This is a useful tool to check against your assumptions and adjust your strategy depending on a changing environment. It can help you identify potential pitfalls early on in the planning process to be mindful of as you implement.
Implementation Plan	Recommended	Essential	You can sketch an implementation action plan out broadly or dive into details from the start; ultimately, whoever leads implementation will likely have to shift these details depending on capacity and other factors.
Implementation Resources	Recommended	Essential	Without resources to oversee implementation, it is tough to action your plan. Ideally, your planning group is able to make enough inroads with funders and government to locate at least some start-up funding to support implementation resources needed, particularly around backbone functions.

Build a process for reviewing and updating the plan and reporting on progress. A strategic review and business planning process is useful to apply in the case of the youth plan in order to:

- » Document learning over the past year to ensure implementation of the plan as a living document
- » Use data from research, program and housing data, environmental scanning and implementation learning
- » Seek input and feedback from key stakeholders, including mainstream partners
- » Propose focus areas to shape business planning in the coming fiscal year
- » Consider implications on priority areas of action and investment moving forward
- » Discuss system-level priorities moving forward, such as information management system implementation, shelter closures, adding capacity, etc.
- » Identify policy-level changes required to further priorities, address emerging gaps and progress
- » Consider any risks associated with meeting priorities (i.e. inability to reach goals/targets due to factors such as increasing rental prices, etc.) and provide risk mitigation strategies.

Figure 8: Plan Review Cycle



This review cycle can be undertaken on an annual or even three-year basis to ensure that implementation of the plan is consistently reviewed and adjustments to implementation are made. Ultimately, it is the linking of the seemingly mundane activities of plan implementation to broader systems thinking that is one of the hallmarks of a systems approach to ending homelessness.

Evaluating implementation

For communities considering implementation options in further detail, A Way Home has developed a draft evaluation framework to be used in exploring implementation learning from communities with youth plans already underway. The Evaluation Framework (developed by Oriole Research & Design) offers useful questions that communities can use to reflect as they prepare and engage in plan implementation.

What are the critical factors and variables in the environment that need to be tracked so that the implementation plan can adapt to emergent conditions?

- » What cultural, social, economic and political factors in each community influence the implementation of the youth homelessness plan?
- » Which factors will likely hinder implementation efforts?
- » Which factors may enhance or boost implementation efforts?

What process is each community following in their implementation phase?

- » To what extent have key stakeholders and partners embraced a common vision for the plan's implementation?
- » Has the community established an effective and adequately resourced backbone infrastructure to guide the implementation phase?
- » Is a responsive governance structure in place, with an advisory capacity and action groups?
- » What processes and mechanisms are in place to ensure continuous and open communication about the implementation efforts and to inspire stakeholders?
- » What evidence is there of partners aligning their own activities with elements of the implementation plan and seeking increased inter-agency coordination?
- » How do the implementation processes and activities foster a learning culture, including opportunities for experimenting, reflecting and discussion?

What has been learned during the implementation of this initiative that might inform similar efforts elsewhere?

- » What has worked well/not so well in the steps toward implementation taken to date?
- » What 'quick wins' have you had?
- » What else is needed to support implementation?

How are the communities evaluating and tracking their own implementation process?

- » What evidence is there of a process and resources for local monitoring and evaluation to support the implementation process?
- » In what ways are partners assisting in the development of a shared measurement system?
- » What evidence is there of outcomes in the early to middle stages of implementation?

How can A Way Home better support communities during the implementation phase?

- » What needs exist in your community that can potentially be addressed by building capacity through A Way Home and provincial partners?

How do we share these findings out more broadly, so others can learn from the experience?

- » What opportunities exist to share the experience of communities who are implementing plans to address youth homelessness more broadly?
- » What are the best ways to share the learning, products, challenges and successes of these initiatives?

At regular intervals in implementation (6, 12, 18 months, etc.) you may consider your assessment of the following in relation to the plan:

- » *Community endorsement of plan and agenda for change:* Does there continue to be widespread or growing endorsement? A continued sense of urgency? Other comments?
- » *Communication systems:* What systems are working well to facilitate communication among stakeholders? How are you keeping key stakeholders engaged?
- » *Infrastructure to support implementation of the plan:* What human, financial and other resources are in place to support implementation at this stage? How have the support needs in terms of infrastructure changed since you began working on implementation?
- » *Evidence of partners coordinating activities to align with the community plan:* What evidence have you seen in terms of reduced duplication of efforts? What evidence is there of more streamlined approaches to meeting the needs of at-risk or homeless youth? What evidence is there of outcomes in the early to middle stages of implementation?
- » *Plans for a process to design and manage a shared measurement system:* What progress has been made toward a shared measurement system?
- » *Local activity to promote continuous learning:* Is there evidence of a learning focus at the local level? Systematic approach to monitoring and evaluation at the local level? Do stakeholders trust the quality of the data that is already available?

Strategies to effectively Implement a youth plan, including how to identify opportunities and navigate challenges, will be explored further in A Way Home's forthcoming technical assistance materials.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Examples of Plans to End Youth Homelessness:

<http://awayhome.ca/resources/plans-to-end-youth-homelessness>

Resources provided by communities working on/who have developed plans.

TOPIC	RESOURCE
Community Readiness	Community survey - St. John's System Mapping Survey
Steering Committee	Lists of Members (Winnipeg , Edmonton) Terms of Reference (Winnipeg)
Coordinator	Youth Plan Coordinator Job Description (Ottawa)
Consultants	Consultant Contract Example
Workplan/Budgets	Examples of Work plans and Budgets (Calgary)
Provincial Planning	Alberta Cross-Ministry Terms of Reference
Consultation Materials	Edmonton Homeward Trust Consultation presentations Consultation with stakeholders Youth Consultation Presented at the Launch
Useful Manuals/Guides	Be HIPP Manual on engaging in public policy advocacy Youth Engagement Toolkit Resource Guide Engaging and Empowering Aboriginal Youth: A Toolkit for Service Providers Public Consultation Guide Homeless Hub Point-in-Time Count Toolkit (youth and Aboriginal content focus) Youth Homelessness Developing Plans to End Homelessness and End Homelessness Engaging the Private Sector in Solutions to Youth Homelessness Performance Management in a Housing First Context

PRIORITY AREA	FURTHER READING
Prevention	Youth Employment Toolkit Toolkit: Early intervention programmes to prevent youth homelessness - some examples from the UK Reconnecting with Family and Community: Pathways Out of Youth Homelessness
System Planning & Service Integration	Beyond Housing First: Essential Elements of a System-Planning Approach to Ending Homelessness Performance Management in a Housing First Context: A Guide for Community Entities System Planning 101
Housing & Supports	Coming of Age: Reimagining the Response to Youth Homelessness in Canada A Safe and Decent Place to Live: Towards a Housing First Framework for Youth Homeless Young Adults Ages 18–24 Examining Service Delivery Adaptations Youth Transitional Housing Toolkit LGBTQ2S Toolkit Toolkit for Practitioners/Researchers Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ) Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) Housing and Outreach Strategies for Rural Youth: Best Practices from the Rural Youth Survey
Leadership, Engagement & Resources	Time for Action: Report of the Homeless Voices Youth Action Squad