

ON OUR TERMS



**Principles for engaging people
with lived experience of
homelessness in advocacy,
research, and policy-making**



OCTOBER 2025

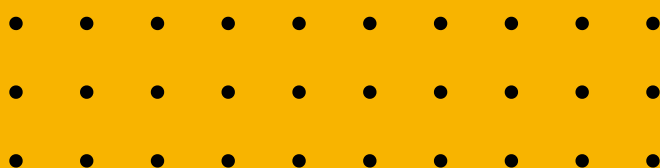


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ON OUR TERMS

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Principles for engaging people with lived experience of homelessness in advocacy, research, and policy-making



LEADERSHIP

1
Principle

Lived experience is expert knowledge

2
Principle

Nothing without us

RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS

3
Principle

Access to fair pay, training, and advancement opportunities

4
Principle

Accountability for equitable representation

JUSTICE, ACTION, CHANGE

5
Principle

Make change, not make work

6
Principle

Relationships of solidarity across the housing spectrum

The story of the Principles

In 2016, the Lived Experience Advisory Council (LEAC) released **Nothing about us without us: Seven principles for leadership & inclusion of people with lived experience of homelessness**, a key document that has helped guide engagement and inclusion for those with lived expertise for the last decade. This work came out of seeing a need to do better in how organizations, researchers, policymakers, and people in power interacted with those of us who had been unhoused, or had experienced homelessness.

In 2021, our team of 15 advocates with lived experience of homelessness came together through the Canadian Lived Experience Leadership Network (CLELN) to revisit the original Seven Principles and consider how they fit within the current landscape of housing rights and homelessness prevention advocacy. Some of us were part of the original drafting in 2016, and the idea to revise them grew out of conversations about how lived experts continue to be marginalized and tokenized at decision-making tables.

We were working in the midst of overlapping crises: a global pandemic, a toxic drug supply, the rapid financialization of housing, escalating racism targeting Black, Indigenous and racialized communities, restrictions on the rights of 2SLGBTQIA+ people, and brutal encampment clearings. In this context, using our lived knowledges to challenge these realities felt extremely urgent. We were moved to bring together our rage, our fear, our grief, our love and our care to create something that speaks to our experiences in communities witnessing deepening violence. Lived experts have increasingly been invited to take part in research and decision-making, but as the original Principles remind us, **we are not always given “enough say when the rubber hits the road” (LEAC 2016, pg 4).**



Nothing about us without us: Seven principles for leadership & inclusion of people with lived experience of homelessness

LIVED EXPERIENCE ADVISORY COUNCIL

During the 2014 Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness conference in Vancouver, a group of individuals came together with a common goal: to ensure that individuals with lived experience received equitable representation from service providers, researchers, policy makers, and others, so that they can better understand and tackle the problem of homelessness.

We believe that without including individuals with lived experience in the decision making process, in research, and in all other endeavours, it creates an unbalanced approach to ending homelessness in Canada.

To that end, our council was formed. Our first action was to articulate principles for the inclusion and leadership of people with lived experience in organizations and initiatives that aim to address homelessness. We presented these principles to the conference plenary under the banner, “Nothing About Us Without Us.”

These principles point to the importance of first voice inclusion in all endeavours to end homelessness. This is true of any social issue – the people who are living it usually have the best understanding about what the problem is and what needs to be done to address it. Inclusion is especially vital in the context of homelessness, though, because being excluded and silenced is a huge part of the experience of homelessness and poverty. The belief that people who are homeless do not have the competence to participate as equals in organizations is layered on top of the other stereotypes directed at us because of racism, sexism, ableism, poor-bashing, and other oppressions.

Many organizations are learning to value lived expertise, but overcoming outdated, paternalistic beliefs and practices doesn't happen overnight. Service providers, researchers and policy-makers need to work alongside people with lived experience to create new structures in which we come together as equals. We hope this document can provide support to professionals and people with lived experience as we all work together to plan and implement these changes.

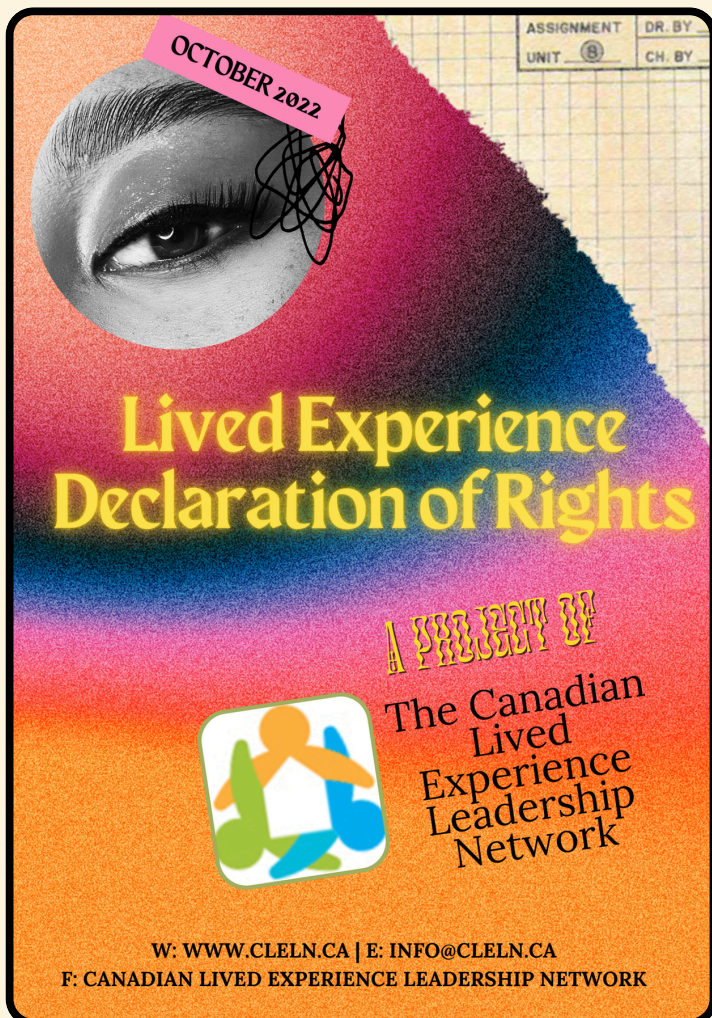
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NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US:
SEVEN PRINCIPLES FOR LEADERSHIP & INCLUSION OF PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE OF HOMELESSNESS

Honouring our histories

We offer this document as a resource for social justice organizing around housing, for those who seek to deepen their engagement of lived experts. It should be used in conversation with the 2016 Principles, instead of a replacement, representing two moments in the ongoing movement to advance lived experience engagement.

Honouring the knowledge and contributions of the original Principles team, we wish to acknowledge how essential the 2016 Principles have been in advancing lived experience work across the country over the last decade. We are moved by the words of Black feminist thinker Audre Lorde, who shared the teaching, **“There are no new ideas, just new ways of giving those ideas we cherish breath and power in our own living” (Lorde 1982).**



In addition to these Principles, we also drafted the Lived Experience Declaration of Rights, which we launched in 2022. While we were dreaming and imagining the revised Principles, we wanted to create a resource that described the kind of rights in engagement roles we would want for ourselves and our peers. The Declaration, in the format of a zine, was something we imagined lived experts could bring with them into engagement roles as a self-advocacy tool. The revised Principles are organized into the same categories we describe in the Declaration of Rights: **leadership; access to resources and supports; and justice, action, and change.** The Declaration can also be used in dialogue with both sets of Principles, giving us another tool to help advocate for advancing practices of lived experience engagement.

Our team

We are a team made up of people with lived experience of being unhoused, from many different communities across lands of so-called Canada. The Canadian State and its systems have been a site of many experiences of harm for our team and others whose access to housing has been disrupted. Where we come from has radically shaped our experiences of housing, and we offer a reminder that homelessness in Canada unfolds on Indigenous lands. For Indigenous Peoples, colonial violence has left many communities and nations with **“No Home on a Homeland”** (NIFHWG 2022). The legitimacy of Canada as a nation cannot be separated from the way colonial dispossession, displacement and exclusion continues through the housing system.

As a team, we come from different backgrounds and professions, and bring many different kinds of knowledges, including and in addition to our lived knowledges. Together, we have over 150 years of lived experience advocacy expertise that informs these Principles. Even though we use the language of “we” and “our”, not all of us share the same experiences. The use of a collective voice instead stands as a gesture of our solidarity with one another and our unique housing journeys as individuals. As a reader, we invite you into this collective. All the contributions of our team members, peers, collaborators, colleagues and allies throughout the lifespan of the project have been essential to the Principles we present today.

The work presented here was undertaken by Rene Adams, Sam Blondeau, Michelle Bilek, Cheyanne Fath, Nancy Henderson, Mel Lusted, Jayne Malenfant, Daniela Mergarten, Debbie McGraw, Alex Nelson, Veronica Snooks, Pamela Spurvey, Phoenix Winter, and others. The Principles were also supported with contributions from Laura Norin, and funded with thanks to the Maytree Foundation, the Wenner-Gren Foundation, and United Way Edmonton.



Principles team portrait, artist credit: Joey Lavictoire

Terminology

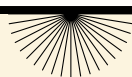
As a team with diverse lived experiences, language was something we talked about often. Words can change the way people see or feel about a topic, especially something as personal as housing. We will use both “unhoused” and “homelessness” in this document, though throughout our team and our work we primarily used the word “homelessness”. Many of us experienced disruption in our housing while having access to some kind of shelter, but for many reasons, the places we stayed were not “homes”. Having access to “four walls and a roof” is not enough for housing to be considered adequate. When someone experiences “hidden homelessness”, like couch-surfing, staying with friends or family, staying in a relationship to remain housed, or living in a place where their safety is at risk, they may have access to a “house”, but they do not have a permanent, safe, stable, accessible, and affordable place to call “home”. For others whose lived experience includes not having access to a shelter of any kind, “unhoused” could feel like a more accurate description.

We understand that there are many terms used to signify being without a home, and that the choice of what term people use can be very personal. It is important for people to choose terminology that feels aligned with their own experience, and rejects the stigma that continues to exist for people in our communities that don’t have a place to live.

As one member of the Principles team explains, when we use the term “lived experience”, we mean: **“positioning oneself as someone with lived experience means being able to self identify as someone who has experienced life from a less than adequate standpoint, or has firsthand knowledge of the subject at hand (homelessness, poverty, etc.)”**.

In other words, we know about homelessness because we have lived it. The truth of that experience is in our bodies, and our minds, giving us a unique perspective from those with other kinds of professional, learned, or indirect expertise.

Language can be used to challenge or reinforce ideas about the world, but so often we are not the people who determine what words are used to describe us, and how. Throughout this project, team members worked to redefine or add context to the use of words like “homelessness”, and “lived experience” from our own perspectives.



How you can use these principles:

Our work doesn't end with this document. The Principles have always been, and will always be a living tool, rather than the end point of our action and advocacy. While working on this project together, team members held webinars, meetings, roundtable discussions, and workshops to share the knowledge we were creating as we were creating it. You may have been part of this process, and you still can be: **help apply these Principles of meaningful lived experience engagement by using them.**

You can reflect on and integrate these principles as active practices in research, service provision, and policy advocacy spaces. We hope you will join us in this mission, because it is our shared responsibility to make sure lived expertise is valued and respected as the vital resource that it is.

We invite you to use these principles as an opening for dialogue, reflection, and action wherever you or the organizations you are connected to are at with your engagement of lived experts. The questions we ask here can be a starting point, or they can be a new path for work in progress. As long as there is still homelessness and housing injustice, we will not reach an end to this advocacy. Our work can never be done, because the future can always be better than the past and the present. This is not something you have to take on alone: **the Principles were envisioned as a way for people to build communities, and work in solidarity and collaboration with each other.**

Solidarity, not charity

This work should always be part of a dialogue with other movements for change and justice. The meaningful engagement of those with lived experience must happen in alignment with other efforts, including anti-poverty, anti-oppression, and anti-racist movements, equity for 2SLGBTQIA+ people, decolonization efforts, and disability justice. To again quote Audre Lorde, **"there is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives"** (Lorde 1982). Many of us sit at intersections of communities that have been pushed to the margins, and we know that working together makes us stronger.

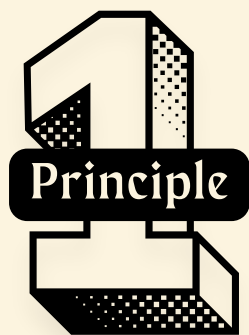
While we always begin with our individual experiences and the experiences of those in our communities, we want to push for urgently needed changes to systems. It is clear that we need to be working together to ensure every person across our communities has access to housing.

Inclusion is not enough

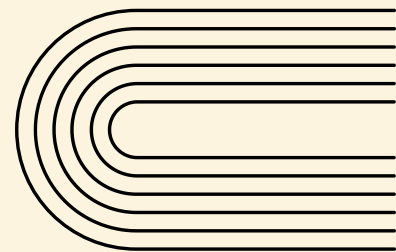
Lived experience leadership is essential in all levels of housing advocacy, and how we all think and act on issues of housing rights. We advocate for the inclusion of people with lived experience of being unhoused across decision-making, programming, policy, and research spaces, but we know that we cannot stop there.

Inclusion is an important first step, but we hope these principles will support changes to the economic and social structures in Canada that contribute to ongoing housing injustice. As lived experts, and people who are allied with us, we have to fight for a standard of living for everyone that supports permanent, safe, accessible, and affordable homes, and resist the financialization of housing in Canada and abroad. Change to policies, programs, and structures have to come from those who are most impacted by unstable housing.

Change is possible and it needs to happen now.



Lived experience is expert knowledge

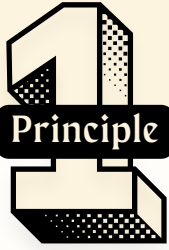


Our voices are starting to be heard and valued across more forums, but there is still a lot of work to be done. To transform the housing system, impacted communities have to be heard and uplifted in ways that challenges the status quo and redistributes power. As a collective of lived experts, we have witnessed spaces where our knowledge is still marginalized, and not used in meaningful ways. Lived experts are frequently included in tokenistic ways, or are not provided adequate resources or compensation to undertake work that draws on knowledge gained from living the consequences of an unjust housing system. We are motivated by the examples of positive practices and settings we have seen and experienced, which give us hope that another system, that maximizes the impact of our knowledge and labour, is possible.

In addition to bridging the gap between policies and their outcomes, engaging impacted communities is a way to increase accountability and transparency around how decisions get made. Our communities have lived experience of policies and decisions that have been made for us and about us, without us being present. It is vitally important that people from impacted communities are brought into discussions where decisions are being made that will hold implications for our lives and futures.

Within human rights-based framework, meaningful engagement is not just a “nice to have”, it is a necessity. We agree with the words of the former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, who called effective and inclusive participation **“a concern of deep global urgency” (OHCHR 2020)**. The future involves all of us, and we demand to be a part of writing it.

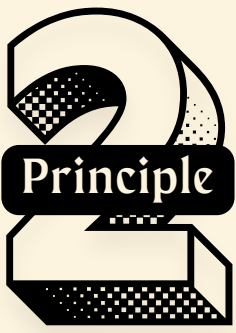
Lived experience engagement can signal a change in the methods, practices, and ideas that guide collaboration on housing. This is an invitation to begin at a different starting point, where every participant at a table is equipped with tools to understand their own viewpoint, standpoint, and relationship to power regardless of their housing experience. Everyone has a perspective, but not everyone recognizes that the way they see the world is shaped by who they are and what they have experienced in their life. This process of critical reflection can help to shift the terrain of the conversation on housing, where policies and practices are imagined by people who understand that their own experiences influence the way they think about housing.



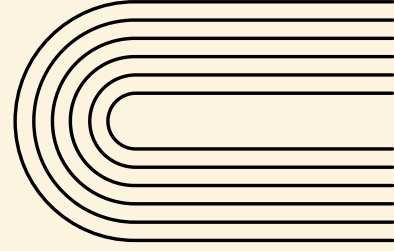
Principle

How to do it

- Openly discuss power relationships within your group, and establish clear practices to address disagreements or conflict early, transparently, and collaboratively
- Create clear shared agreements for the group as an important practice for long term sustainability
- When discussing homelessness, focus on the structural pressures and system failures that create homelessness instead of focusing on individual factors
- Review your organizational policies and practices and ask: do they align with the goal of achieving housing justice?
- Bring people into making decisions about their lives, futures, and communities: for this to be possible, informed choice and deep participation are essential
- Pay attention to the words lived experts use to describe themselves: addressing people with preferred language and terminology is a matter of care and respect
- Change the way you think about lived expertise. Treat peers and lived experts as equals in your organization or movement, and our expertise as a specialty



Principle 2 Nothing without us



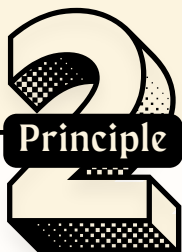
Meaningful engagement involves the inclusion of people with lived experience at all levels of an organization, project, or movement. Inspired by our allies in the Disability Justice movement who call for **“nothing about us, without us” (Charlton 1998)**, we urge “nothing without us”. Our knowledge about housing and homelessness holds value beyond just our direct lived expertise.

Engagement is still often seen as taking place at a particular moment, or at a table that is separate from the “real work” of decision-making. We have frequently experienced engagement that is limited to one-time events, or in brief consultations, rather than an ongoing or essential practice. Anybody can internalize harmful ideas limiting who “deserves” to be in particular spaces or roles. We can hold each other accountable by challenging those biases. Changing these dynamics requires that power is shared. Power-holders have to share opportunities, resources, and platforms so others can have a seat at the table. Being part of a community means that we have to broaden the networks of who we consider “peers”, and share responsibility for providing care and support towards everyone’s safety and wellbeing.

Meaningful engagement looks like giving support for lived experts to advance into positions of power and leadership. Providing mentorship and training opportunities is essential to break out of patterns of systemic exclusion. Lived experts should also be given all the information they need to participate in their role, including knowledge about how decisions get made, budgeting and finances, and communicating the results of our shared work. Bring us in from the ground, up, from writing project proposals, to applying for funding, analyzing data, and mobilizing knowledge.

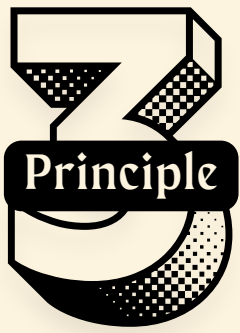
In the absence of appropriate resources, lived experts can hold undue burden to make change, while not being adequately supported to do this work. When people come from under-resourced communities, they may not have had access to the kinds of training and development opportunities that others have. The added pressure of having to correct for systemic disadvantages results in burnout and high rates of turnover. Spaces need to be structured to support lived experts as their whole selves. To be truly accessible and inclusive, we have to work together to reorganize the overall systems within which this work takes place. Normalize taking breaks, having check-ins, and giving time and resources to create a shared culture where people feel safe and respected.

People with lived experience themselves should be the ones to decide how their voices are heard, whether through leadership roles, research, front-line work, advocacy roles, peer support, or other modes of community organizing.

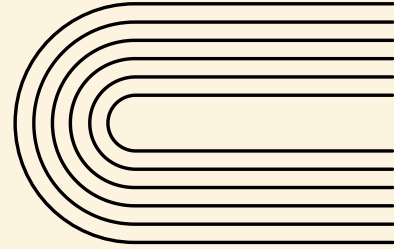


How to do it

- Provide mentorship and supports to prevent lived experience staff or team members from experiencing burnout, or leaving their roles prematurely. Make sure these supports are determined by us, not for us!
- Identify communities and perspectives that are underrepresented in your spaces. Reflect on why those gaps exist, and seek to address them
- Help those around you see lived experience as an important form of knowledge and expertise
- Diversify the number and types of roles lived experts fill in your space to resist tokenization. One person can't speak to all experiences, and being the only lived expert at a table is a lot of pressure
- Shift engagement from "consultation" to genuine and deep collaboration
- Create different kinds of roles that allow people to contribute non-traditional types of knowledge and skills (or develop new ones)
- Use concrete goals and targets to measure the progress you are making on engagement
- Create a space that is safe for people to share their lived experiences and that support all parts of someone's identity
- Incorporate people with lived experience into decision-making roles, and fund our integration across all aspects of your work
- Advocate for learning from lived experts in all spaces: as instructors in social work programs; as storytellers and artists changing narratives about housing and homelessness; as equal partners in every place where knowledge and decisions on housing are being shaped



Access to fair pay, advancement opportunities, and training

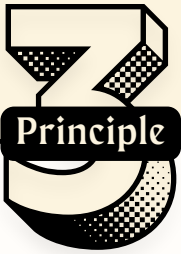


Our time and labour is valuable. Providing adequate compensation is important to honour our contributions as experts with critical insight. Most lived experts have undertaken roles where they have not been compensated appropriately, or they have done work for free, including performing the challenging work of educating others from personal and painful lived experiences.

Organizational payment processes can be difficult to navigate. Organizational payment policies may impose significant barriers for lived experts, like needing to file an invoice, having to cover expenses upfront and then be reimbursed at a later date, or having limited or inaccessible payment format options. It is ideal to have multiple options to make payment as easy as possible, and to make sure receiving payment doesn't result in someone losing essential resources. In some cases, people have lost their housing because of clawbacks in assistance, and no one's housing should be disrupted from participating in making a better world. Providing cash payments is often a best-practice, though e-transfers can also be a more convenient method of payment. Gift cards are sometimes requested as a way for people to receive payment, but should be an option rather than a requirement: gift cards can be perceived as paternalistic, because they place limitations on the ways that people can spend their money. Rules around compensation must adhere to guidelines set out in legislation around taxation, income, and honoraria, but the application of specific compensation practices falls to the discretion of organizations and institutions that are providing payment. This means that organizations have a broad range of options for lived expert compensation, and should always aim to remove obstacles wherever possible.

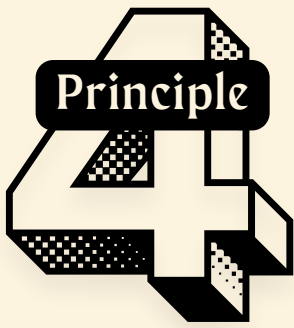
Support should not end at fair compensation, however. Support us in other ways that remove barriers, like offering training and opportunities for advancement. Dismantling barriers can help attract and maintain people with lived experience, ensuring we have the resources necessary for full and equitable participation. Supporting us as whole people can help make sure we do not leave or burn out. Training and opportunities should be available to people with lived experience who engage with organizations, recognizing the opportunities to learn from the diversity of knowledges and skills already at the table. We also need to develop greater collective understanding around the barriers that people may face to participate in lived experience roles, including access to transportation, having a fixed address, having a government ID, requiring criminal record checks, needing a bank account to receive compensation, or requiring credit checks.

Lived experience roles are often precarious within organizations and movements. Rather than being hired into full-time, permanent positions, lived experts are primarily connected to advocacy spaces through work that is infrequent, informal, and precarious in nature. This work is often compensated through honoraria or stipends, if it is compensated at all. Though this precarious labour status is a structural issue, it contributes to the economic marginalization of lived experts.

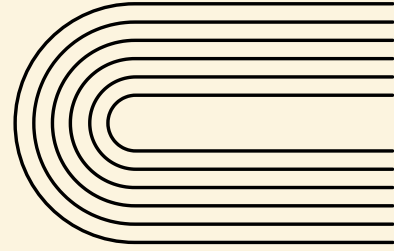


How to do it

- Organizations need to be aware of barriers in the hiring process in order to recruit and maintain people with lived experience, problem-solving together to remove barriers
- Advocate for structural changes to the systems that result in homelessness in the first place, changing policies around taxation and thresholds for clawing back benefits for recipients of government assistance
- Advocate for overlapping systems of benefits and care, without abrupt cutoff thresholds
- Support people with documentation around compensation if needed. This could include letters of employment or participation agreements that clearly describe the nature of the work and the compensation provided
- Meet people where they're at: avoid making unnecessary rules that make it hard to participate, especially for people who are actively experiencing homelessness (for example, rules around kicking people out of spaces for missing meetings, or punishment-based practices)
- Ensure lived experts feel good about their participation, not be re-traumatized or exploited. Work with people to know what social and emotional care they would find helpful (don't assume!), like debriefing sessions with peers, access to Elders and cultural supports, or mental health supports
- We need training too. If you are providing staff training, especially if it is about lived experience or anti-oppression, make sure all levels of your organization (including peers, board members, and part-time staff have access to it)
- Value us through adequately-compensated positions, and review compensation rates to make sure they align with the increasing cost of living



Accountability for equitable representation



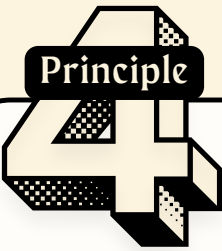
Equitable representation means that we can see ourselves in the spaces we enter and the tables we sit at. This is just as much about numbers and proportion of people around the table, as it is about voice, power, and community. Ask yourself: is this a space that allows for people to show up as their full selves, in a way that honours and respects their identities? Rather than including people into spaces where they may experience harm, there are concrete measures that can be put in place to offer robust support, including training and resources. A question we need to be actively engaged in answering is, how do lived experts hold themselves accountable for one another, and to communities around which our struggles against oppression are connected? Equitable representation requires practices that actively identify, evaluate, and dismantle barriers. Think about who does that identification, and what criteria they use.

Tables should be representative of the communities that are most impacted by housing injustice, with thought and consideration to support the participation of people who are low income, Indigenous, racialized, disabled, queer, newcomers, or are parts of communities that are underrepresented. If you are having trouble building relationships with people from underrepresented groups, it is important to reflect deeply on why that may be the case. Are there things you are doing, even unintentionally, that could be undermining trust with these communities? Solidarity is a long process of learning, growing, and showing up!

Engagement of lived experts should involve processes of onboarding and shared learning as essential aspects of building strong relationships and trust. Make sure you have practices in place for people to safely bring concerns forward so that growth and progress can be ongoing to ensure people's needs are met.

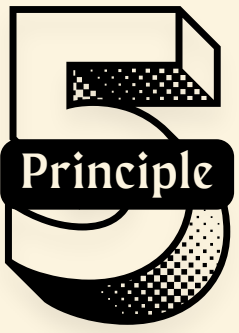
Collective goal-setting at the beginning of a project or table helps to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to shape the space. Lived experts are often brought in after these important decisions have already been made, meaning that the possibilities for our knowledge and labour to influence outcomes are already limited. To make sure lived experts can participate as fully as possible in all aspects of decision-making, research, and advocacy, providing opportunities for training and professional development helps to support deeper engagement. However, this has to be balanced by a recognition that the pressure to conform to traditionally valued forms of professional expertise is not inherently equitable.

Equitable representation is as much about who is at the table as how the table itself was created. It's also about the content of the work being done: what is it for? What will this make possible in the world? If we're at the table, that work should be in the interest of transformative change.

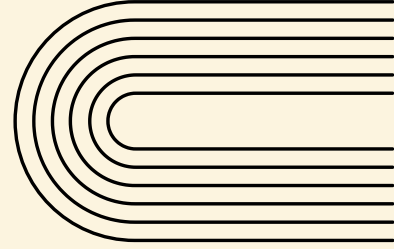


How to do it

- Put equity into practice by supporting the participation of people who are low income, Indigenous, racialized, disabled, queer, newcomers, or are parts of communities that are underrepresented in decision-making
- Think deeply about whose voices are missing, and consider how your space could be in greater solidarity with those communities
- Work together to establish clear structures, processes, and timelines at the formation of a table or project. Make sure everyone feels their needs and voices have been heard, and that there is transparency and justification when this is not possible
- Identify pathways for just conflict resolution at the beginning of a group forming, and make sure members of your team have the skills, knowledge, and experience to support in instances where harm occurs or tension arises
- Provide access to training and professional development opportunities for people with lived experience as you would for other staff or team members
- Evaluate and assess the impact of your practices and policies. The creation of evaluation process should be guided by people with lived experience
- We can all engage in harmful behaviour, and have to hold each other accountable for doing better and being better
- Create group processes to care for people in both cases when they have experienced or caused harm. Remember, no one is disposable



Make change, not make work

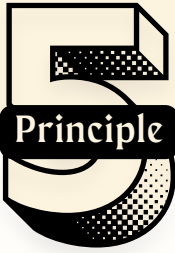


We can't forget that we're talking about housing justice and our demands for democratic participation. We're talking about the advancement of human rights, the alignment of systems, and ultimately, the unjust organization of society. Our movement must be intersectional, and we are responsible for upholding justice for each other. This work should do something concrete, and not just check an institutional box.

It takes a lot of work to unlearn common assumptions about how people come to experience homelessness and houselessness, and the society we all exist in is rooted in colonization and ideals of white supremacy that we all need to identify and unlearn. Homelessness is a societal failure, not an individual's failing. There needs to be a move away from the charity model of inclusion of lived experience voices towards an empowerment model that focuses on supporting people in all the things they can achieve. Individuals face blame, stigma, and punishment when they are unhoused, or in situations of homelessness. Because the systemic injustice and oppression that shapes housing insecurity, like colonization, white supremacy, ableism and sanism, homophobia and transphobia, is sometimes hard to pinpoint, individuals face the assumption that they are to blame for their housing status. These attitudes about personal responsibility hold a lot of power in shaping how people relate to and treat unhoused people, even influencing policy, programs, and budgets.

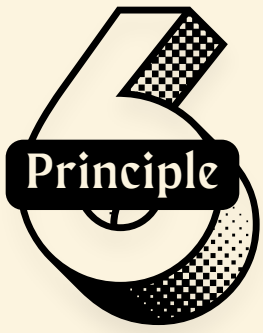
People with lived experience have long advocated to become part of processes to transform the housing system, using their firsthand lived knowledge as a unique vantage point from which to make change. We have shared our knowledge, with care and vulnerability, so that we can build a better world. Lived experience is one powerful form of knowledge that can complement other types of expertise, such as formal training, education, or professional experience, but by comparison to formally recognized kinds of expertise, it can be dismissed, overlooked, or devalued. Lived knowledge demonstrates how the outcomes of decisions are experienced by real people, and it shifts unequal power dynamics that have silenced and marginalized people.

Examining our own relationship to housing injustice, whether or not we have experienced housing precarity, can help us acknowledge and respond to power and privilege. This is essential for lived knowledge to challenge colonialism, white supremacy, ableism and sanism, and patriarchal values. If not made explicit, those forces hold a lot of power to shape tables and their outcomes. The spaces we enter (especially when power-holders are present) sometimes resist changing to meet our needs, but this change is crucial for equity. As one of our team members shared, **"we are always uncomfortable in your spaces"**.

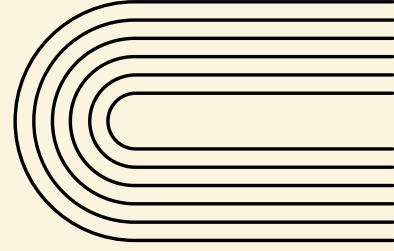


How to do it

- Review organizational policies and practices that individualize, criminalize, or stigmatize homelessness. Champion the voices of people with lived experience to be at tables where decisions are being made that impact our communities
- Advocate for practices like revising social assistance rates, combatting evictions or housing loss, preventing "renovictions," and establishing policies that promote affordable, accessible, and safe housing for all
- Prepare your organization for the inclusion of lived experts to make sure the resources, understanding, education and learning are in place for us to feel as safe and respected as possible
- Build in resources to recognize the added time and emotional labour of lived expertise to make sure people can be well and supported, including other people within your networks and organizations who may have lived experience (like members of staff, board members, or people in other leadership roles)
- Move away from charity models that view us through a lens of pity and disadvantage, towards strengths-based models that empower us. Work with us to consider what is possible, rather than assuming what we can achieve
- Make plans for how your space can support, instead of punish people during conflict
- We are whole human beings! Honouring our identities and needs means showing up for us as Indigenous people, racialized people, queer people, disabled people, and people connected to communities that exist beyond our housing experience
- Organizations that hire lived experts should educate their staff about lived experience and "doing justice at the intersections of power" (Reynolds 2019)
- Practice compassion with yourself and others, this journey is ongoing!



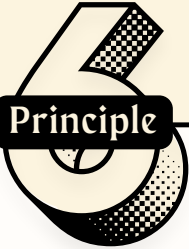
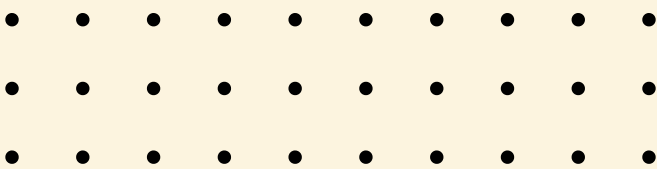
Relationships of solidarity across the housing spectrum



Success in our work will mean the housing system will look very different than the one we currently have. We have to pool our resources, strategies, tools and knowledge across communities with different experiences to build alternate futures where no one is disposable, and no one is left behind. This work will be challenging, and that challenge requires all of us to show up for each other. The kind of relationships that can sustain rights-based and community-led work are formed through ongoing, transparent, and reliable engagement, rather than one-time, encounters that extract our knowledge but do not bring us in as users of that expertise. We have a collective responsibility to “lift while we climb”, helping others access the spaces we enter into, and building ongoing relationships and commitments into the future.

Don’t treat us as disposable, as an inconvenience, or as a box-checking exercise. We have to share responsibility for successes, and be accountable when our work does not unfold the way we planned. Lived experts often shoulder blame when something fails. Strong and genuine relationships help provide the ground for building sustainable policy and practice change together, and can help move past tokenistic inclusion. Supportive relationships between peers is a strength of engaging multiple lived experts in an organization, where we can offer each other guidance and mentorship. These relationships can provide a model for the kinds of relationships of deep mutual understanding that can be built between those with experiences across the housing spectrum. Allyship requires those who have not experienced homelessness ensuring their practices align with the needs of lived experts. The work of housing justice should not fall exclusively on those with lived experience. Understand that lived experts have knowledges that can support work of those without direct firsthand experience. Our knowledge of navigating the housing system can expand existing knowledges in a given training, organization, or structure.

Most importantly, relationships take time, time to build trust and strong bonds, including with decision-making. Rushing often leads to those with lived experience being excluded from decisions and actions. Time should be devoted to getting to know and understand each other, with this time being understood as necessary to the work. Checking in, listening, and sharing a meal together, for example, can be ways of building relationships, also making engagement more accessible.



Principle

How to do it

- We can't do this alone. Engage with communities that are impacted in different ways by housing insecurity. Build processes for mutual aid and solidarity across movements
- Build relationships with people with living experience in way that is grounded in justice and care
- Move past one-time encounters and engagements that take our knowledge but don't give us something meaningful in return
- Support the actions we need to take in our peer networks to build meaningful relationships, get to know each other, and to take care of each other as people. Help us access space, resources, or time to do this.
- Take the time to build decisions together, and act on what we say. If the outcome looks nothing like our feedback, that engagement is not meaningful
- Make sure we have access to peer support and opportunities for mentorship
- Be good accomplices (allies). Don't expect people with lived experience to carry the burden by ourselves. We have to succeed and stumble together
- Good things take time! Take that time to build trust and relationships, and add time into the process so that voices of lived experts can be heard at all stages. Sometimes rushed processes lead to decision-making being taken out of the hands of people with lived experience

Creating community spaces of care

These Principles provide ways to think differently about how people with lived and living experience of being unhoused can be collaborators, partners, and important knowledge holders in shaping responses to the right to housing in Canada.

Through working together for several years to revise the original Principles, we learned a lot about how (and sometimes, how not to) structure spaces for collaboration and engagement that are grounded in care, healing, and learning together. While we had many successes in working together, there were also points during this project where we learned through conflict, disruption, and failure. Things did not always go to plan, and the work did not always feel good. We want to emphasize for those who want to start, or continue, building their meaningful engagement with people with lived experience, the way we meet, learn, and work together is important. Process is important. Compassion and patience are important. We need to organize spaces where everyone can come as they are, shape decision-making, navigate conflict and trauma, and heal from the systems that have harmed them. These spaces need to be grounded in a commitment to housing justice, anti-racist work, decolonization and honouring Indigenous knowledges, accessibility, and love. Continuing to show up for each other and pursue this challenging work is equal parts radical and beautiful. Through creating new processes and ways of working together, we believe we can change systems.

Creating spaces of community care is an important tool for housing justice. We think this is an important point for moving beyond inclusion, or inviting people with lived experience to table, to strong and meaningful ways of co-creating new spaces for housing rights and housing justice in Canada. Only through building new ways of working together can we challenge and change spaces of exclusion, injustice, and harm.

WE ARE STRONGER TOGETHER:

This is your invitation to join us, as peers, allies, and collaborators.

Reflection questions

1. Who was involved in deciding the **structure and goals** of this space?
2. What work was done to **make this table more accessible**?
3. Were sufficient **resources, compensation, and information** provided to those participating?
4. Who is **in this space**, what are their **needs**, and why have they **chosen to be here**?
5. How is this work **accountable to people with lived experience**?
6. How is this work **accountable to achieving housing justice**?

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