Toolkit for Communities:

Considerations for Creating Lived Experience Circle on Homelessness

Audience:
This toolkit was created to support those looking to build a Lived/Living Experience Circle that serves to support an entire community. This guide seeks to provide some guidance and direction on key questions such as how to structure the group and how to engage with community.

Land Acknowledgement:
We gratefully acknowledge that this research was conducted on the traditional, ancestral, unceded territory of the Okanagan (Syilx) People.

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Forward

"Without a proper understanding of how and why people end up homeless, most people have no idea how broad... the risk of becoming homeless [is]. There is a huge fear of the homeless from the public at large. So many of us PWLLE have mental health issues coupled with addiction issues...It makes it hard for meaningful interaction for everyone. We need to destigmatize and humanize us (PWLLE) or it will keep failing. I feel that it is absolutely crucial that the input of peers and peer groups count. We are the ones that have first-hand knowledge. I have lived it. Not for us, but with us."

- Reflections of Shawn Kelly, lived experience co-researcher

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Overview of the Toolkit

This toolkit evolved from a community-based research project in the community of Penticton, BC. It was designed to support small cities and rural communities interested in creating advisory groups of people with lived or living experience (PWLLE) of homelessness to provide input/context on community policy, program development, or evaluation.

There are few resources available for communities looking to create Lived Experience Circles (LECs). While many organizations that support PWLLE of homelessness may have internal advisory groups, there are generally no such groups accessible to other community organizations or municipal governments.

This toolkit was created to help communities to:

- Review what is currently known about the use of LECs, the value of including lived experience voices and the pitfalls and barriers to creating LECs
- Identify the ways that an LEC can support a community
- Understand how an LEC could be constructed
- Utilize a model designed to identify what resources are required to support LEC engagement activities in a community
- Identify critical questions communities can consider to understand how to assess the success of a community LEC

The toolkit was developed by a collaborative research team that partnered individuals with lived experience of homelessness, student researchers and academics knowledgeable in LECs and community-engaged research approaches. The team was supported by a steering committee composed of local service providers, municipal government, and community funders.

USE OF THE TOOLKIT

This toolkit is meant as a guide for discussion. Through our research, participants reminded us that what works in one community may not work for others. They highlighted that any approach to creating a Lived/Living Experience Circle (LEC) in your community should always reflect your context and situation. Our participants highlighted the need to be open and flexible as the LEC may shift and change over time. They also want to remind you to take your time building the LEC and give thought to how it will be sustained. Developing relationships will take time, and once established, there will be an expectation that the LEC will endure beyond the initial phases.

We hope this toolkit sparks the creation of LECs supporting many communities across Canada and beyond.

What We Know About Lived Experience Circles

Consulting with individuals who have experienced a particular situation is not a new concept. In the medical field, consulting patients to build better processes and provide better service has been common practice for some time. In customer service situations, consumers are routinely surveyed to understand how they experience products or services in order for businesses to improve.

In the homeless serving sector, it is a relatively recent practice to involve the voices of those most impacted to create policy, develop programming, and to evaluate service provision. Research projects such as At Home/Chez Soi (https://www.homelesshub.ca/solutions/housing-first/homechez-soi) intentionally built the voice of lived experience into the multi-year, multi-site project. Governments have been working to add the voice of lived experience into their policy development processes. In a report written for the Metcalf Foundation, authors Stapleton and Soh (2019) provide a picture of what People with Lived or Living Experience (PWLLE) see as the benefits and challenges to participating consultation sessions.

How LECs Support Addressing Social Issues

Our research confirmed and added to what we know about how LECs can support communities to address social issues like homelessness. These contributions can be categorized into five key areas:

- Advocacy
- Addressing Stigma
- Systems Change Work
- Informed Decision Making
- Improved Provision of Support

Advocacy

LE's can *make visible* the voices that have so often been *made invisible*. These circles have a direct conduit to the multiple perspectives of a very diverse group of people. Access to this voice is rarely available to thought leaders, government entities and researchers who do not have existing relationships with PWLLE. LECs can directly advocate for change or action and can also educate others to join these efforts. Advocacy efforts support communities to acquire specific resources or supports which are needed to directly address homelessness. LECs work to provide a person-centred view on the situations faced in many communities. These stories can be effective in advocacy efforts.

Addressing Stigma

Utilizing the knowledge and experiences of PWLLE is an important way to address stigma within communities. Including PWLLE in this work is a way to connect them directly with other residents and provide structured opportunities to engage in conversation and promote awareness. During our research PWLLE identified anti-stigma work to be very important to create more compassion in the communities in which they live and to provide a more balanced and informed understanding of their reality. In addition, PWLLE described the positive personal effects of this advocacy work. They felt it would allow them to bring the "humanity" back to communities, to "reinforce the importance of treating people like humans (not animals)".

Systems Change Work

An LEC can support ongoing systems change work within communities by providing a valuable 'street' perspective to identify holes or gaps in service provision and highlight instances where systems overlap or provide conflicting/supporting service. This can increase the effectiveness of approaches to addressing homelessness by identifying the most pressing needs, silos in service provision, challenges to accessing service, and so forth. Participants in our study also indicated that they felt PWLLE could provide more insight into upstream (prevention) and downstream (maintenance/after-care) supports that may be under resourced or missing. This is possible because unlike organizations which may serve only certain aspects along a continuum of care, PWLLE will have experience across systems and over the entirety of a continuum.

Informed Decision Making

Including the voice of PWLLE at the table where key decision-making is happening supports work addressing homelessness by ensuring that decision makers have access to those most affected by their decisions. PWLLE can more readily identify the unintended consequences of decisions and can often highlight simple solutions for issues by benefit of being close to the situation.

Improved Provision of Supports

In addition to supporting systems change efforts, LECs can contribute to individual programs or supports through providing their expertise in evaluation and expertise as a voice of PWLLE. While organizations may reach out directly to participants for feedback, some PWLLE will feel unsafe to do so. They may fear the loss of supports if they provide information that appears critical of the program, staff, or organization. LECs can facilitate feedback by providing a safe space for conversation.

There are practical examples of LECs in action. In Kelowna, LECoH – Lived Experience Circle on Homelessness (the community LEC) acts to bring issues directly to policy makers and those proposing programs or interventions. While they are careful to say that they don't speak for those who are unhoused, they do serve as both a translator (Nichols & Gaetz, 2014) (Eversole, 2012) and a reporter of issues. In this instance the LEC is able to quickly and accurately provide information about how by-laws are being enforced, give perspective on problematic programs or interactions, and identify interventions which would be most effective during times of crisis (i.e. heat domes or extreme cold weather). LECoH has the trust of those living in outdoor sheltering sites as well as those in leadership or administration positions. LECoH has played a critical role in reducing the stigma associated with homelessness by attending community meetings about supportive housing units, shelters, and other interventions (CAEH, 2020). They also co-hosted anti-stigma events such as a viewing of the documentary "Us and Them".

> During a recent cold snap, LECoH provided feedback and insight on proposed solutions. This input during decision-making supported City Officials and Service Agencies in creating a cold weather response that met the needs of those sheltering outdoors.

Creating an LEC

There are several key things that should be considered when looking to create an LEC that serves a community. First, it is important to establish that the community (municipal government, key organizations, etc.) are supportive of an LEC. Second, it is important to have

clear expectations of what the community needs from the LEC and lastly, to structure the LEC in order to best meet those expectations. To facilitate this the community needs to identify:

- What does the LEC do, what do they provide input into and what kinds of activities do they undertake?
- How does the community want to work with the LEC, is the group convened on an 'as needed' basis or are they more formal?
- Who will be a part of the LEC? How will they work together?
- What supports and resourcing is available for the LEC?

What does the Community Expect from the LEC?

Most LECs are created to support the services of a specific organization or to create a policy or program. In these situations, the goals of the LEC are often quite clear and specific. In the case of an LEC that is designed to support the needs of a community, there may not be the same level of clarity in the tasks and expectations for success as the stakeholders will be far more diverse and the range of needs will have greater variety.

In order to create clarity and structure the LEC for success, it is important to engage in a series of conversations at the community level to establish need and create a shared understanding of LEC purpose and goals. Focus groups, design labs or any other means of collecting community input works well for this purpose. It is important to create a variety of ways for participation and careful consideration to ensure that sessions are accessible, comfortable, and safe for participants. During our research project we had separate sessions for PWLLE from social service organizations, public entities, and other stakeholders. This approach was co-designed with PWLLE and deemed the best approach for our community.

Questions that can guide the community conversation are:

- Where is the voice of Lived/Living experience missing in our community?
- What activities do we see the LEC contributing to? In what ways would they contribute?
- How would their contributions be used?

Operational Toolkits

Several guides have been created to guide organizations or communities to consider how operational elements such as coordination, group facilitation and internal structures. The following are some excellent resources to review for support.

Lived Experience as Expertise: Considerations in the Development of Advisory Groups of People with Lived Experience of Homelessness and/or Poverty (https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/PROMISING.PRACTICE.MANUAL.FINAL.pdf)

Engagement Toolkit: People with Lived Experience in BC's Capital Region, 2017, Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness (https://victoriahomelessness.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/170630_crd_toolkit.pdf)

Inclusion of People with Lived Experience (PWLE) in the Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness: Recommendations and Final Report – November 2018 (https://bfzcanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/TAEH-PWLE-Reference-Group-Nov-2018.pdf)

- What role do we see the LEC playing in the community (i.e., consultation or involvement in policy, program development, etc.)?
- Are there things that the LEC shouldn't be engaged in in our community? Why?

Potential LEC Structures

When a community considers the potential structure for an LEC, there are two components that should be determined: how the LEC will be structured from an organizational context, and how it will function once it is created. This toolkit will discuss organizational structure specifically. There are several toolkits and reports that talk about the mechanics of managing the day-to-day of LECs (see examples in the sidebar) and are excellent guides for those coordinating or facilitating these groups.

Our research and literature scans identified 3 general approaches to structuring an LEC: grassroots/ad hoc, organization supported, and stand alone/formalized.

Grassroots/ Ad Hoc → Organization Supported → Stand Alone/ Formalized
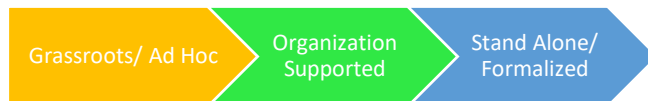
Grassroots/ Ad Hoc

For some communities, the need for a permanent LEC may be limited. An LEC that is grassroots or ad hoc can be defined as one that meets as needed, has limited operational supports and may be an offshoot of an existing group. You might see this in communities where there are similar groups of PWLLE gathering. For example, communities that already have poverty groups or drug user groups such as VANDU (Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users) that regularly bring together PWLLE may be able to function as a community circle that provides expertise from a lived experience of homelessness. This is not to say that all people within a poverty group or a drug user group will have lived or living experiences of homelessness, but there are often individuals in these groups who can provide insights about multiple issues.

Advantages:

- Saves Time – if PWLLE can be pulled from existing groups, there is less time spent identifying appropriate members
- Builds Relationships – relationships may already be formed and the group will have a comfort level already
- Reduces Costs – group does not need the same level of coordination or facilitation and may be able to share resources

Disadvantages:

- Lack of Diversity – by using existing groups, the LEC may not gather a diverse group of PWLLE
- Confusion/Lack of Focus – members may be confused as to the different roles they play within different groups and their advocacy work may overlap
- Membership Concerns – it may be difficult to regularly convene and to have consistency with membership because the group is less formal and structured

When does this work well?

- When the community is small and getting people to join the group is difficult
- When there are few resources or relationships within the community
- As a starting point – this structure can act as a pilot to test out how an LEC might be used within a community

Organization Supported

An LEC can be embedded within an organization while still having the goal of supporting an entire community. Communities with a backbone or central organization that is tasked with addressing social issues like homelessness are ideally suited to provide organizational support to an LEC. Other organizations may also be ideally positioned to host an LEC especially if they are trusted by PWLLE and other community groups.

Advantages:

- Have the advantages of an established organization (established websites, access to staff, policies and procedures already built)
- More stability than ad hoc organizations because some funding and staff in place
- Quick to establish as credible. There is no need to become a society or charity for legitimacy

Disadvantages:

- LEC is linked to another organization which can create confusion as to role or purpose in the larger community
- Can be seen as being controlled by an organization and policies that were not created by the LEC
- Can be less flexible and adaptable, may have to restrict their activities to meet the organizational purposes of the organization that houses them

When does this work well?

- When the host organization is closely linked in purpose to the goals of the LEC. Hosts like backbone organizations or neutral organizations such as foundations or funders with a community focus are ideal because they have a 'community' focused relationship.
- When the community is smaller and access to resources, volunteers may be limited
- When a formal organization structure is needed to access grants or other funding sources.

Stand Alone/Formalized

In some cases, creating an LEC as its own organization with a formal structure may be the most advantageous model. This structure would require the LEC to work towards taking control of all aspects of the organization and would manage its own finances, governance and operations.

Advantages:

- This structure shares a similar level of autonomy and control for the LEC membership with the Ad hoc structure, however the formal structure can provide a more legitimate or credible reputation in the community. The element of becoming a stand alone organization gives the community a sense of permanence.

- Funding can be received directly by the LEC and distributed without an intermediary, and all staff are working for the goals of the LEC
- They are guided by a board/committee which was recruited specifically to support the LEC (not a host organization)

Disadvantages:

- This structure requires significant administrative support to maintain and likely requires more funding than the other two models to be sustainable
- Not all communities will have the resources to support a stand alone organization
- Takes a great deal of time to establish (this can be shortened if the group existed in another format prior to becoming a stand alone organization).

When does this work well?

- When a community or the LEC group is sufficiently large that it has many members willing to take on the work
- When there are resources available to sustain the group, or opportunities which might require a stand alone organization. A specific example may be if there are opportunities to run parallel social enterprises to support the work of the LEC. In this instance, it could be beneficial to have stand alone status to simplify reporting and operations
- When the group is likely to remain active and engaged for some time into the future. When an LEC group has become strongly embedded within the community and has a status similar to other community entities (i.e. social servicing organizations, faith groups, etc.), it may be a good time to consider this structure.

How does the Community Engage with the LEC (LEC Engagement Framework)?

Once a community has determined a structure, each community, depending on its need, will determine how they will engage with an LEC. Engagement in this context is really referring to how a community will interact with an LEC and what they will request from the LEC. This framework consists of two pieces: key elements of the LEC framework and a continuum of engagement.

The framework presented in this section will assist communities to match their needs with the type of engagement most appropriate to support those needs. This model also provides ways to estimate the resources, time and cost required for each level of engagement. There are specific and direct costs associated with engagements with PWLLE. Communities looking to have LECs must consider how to distribute those costs throughout community partners and other fund generating activities. A quick reference guide is provided.
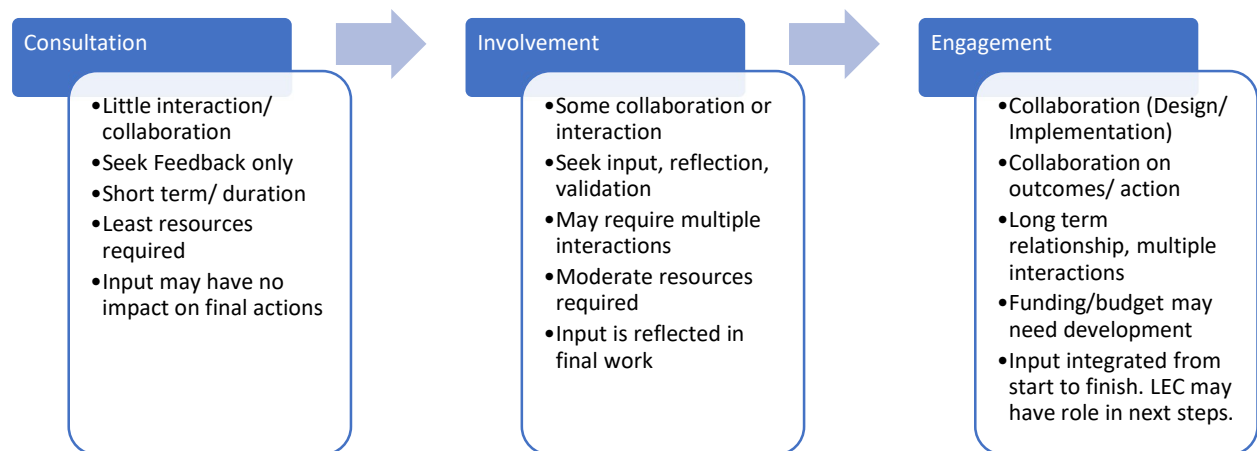
In the following section we will describe the LEC Engagement continuum, discuss its core elements, pull all of the pieces together to describe a community LEC framework, and finish with some suggestions on how to use the framework to support a new LEC.

Continuum: Levels of Engagement

Three types of interaction with an LEC are described below. They could be placed on a continuum from least to greatest engagement and similarly from least to greatest resource requirements. A description of each type is below. This continuum is loosely based on the five

levels of engagement developed by the International Association of Participation (IAP2) (International Association for Public Participation, 2018)[1]

Figure 1 Continuum of Consultation/Engagement

Consultation
- Little interaction/ collaboration
- Seek Feedback only
- Short term/ duration
- Least resources required
- Input may have no impact on final actions

Involvement
- Some collaboration or interaction
- Seek input, reflection, validation
- May require multiple interactions
- Moderate resources required
- Input is reflected in final work

Engagement
- Collaboration (Design/ Implementation)
- Collaboration on outcomes/ action
- Long term relationship, multiple interactions
- Funding/budget may need development
- Input integrated from start to finish. LEC may have role in next steps.

Consultation

The first level of contact with an LEC, called *Consultation*, involves the lowest level of time and engagement. These are generally short-term or single interactions where the LEC is being consulted to provide input on an idea, policy, program, or opportunity. It is most appropriate for organizations seeking feedback with no expectation of follow-up. This level of interaction requires little to no relationship building between the organization and the LEC.

Interactions at this level could be conducted at a regular LEC meeting, via written submission, or through a video enabled call. It is recommended that groups looking to access the LEC at the *Consultation* stage consider getting onto the regular LEC agenda. If a special meeting is required to facilitate a quick response, organizations may want to consider providing compensation to LEC members for their time.

To prepare LEC members to engage in *Consultation* activities some level of training may be required. They may need to understand how to use video conferencing technology, be able to read/access materials in writing and be coached on providing feedback. In particular, giving (new) LEC members supports/training to feel comfortable providing their perspective and addressing perceived power differences will help them to add their voices to the conversations.

LEC groups would be advised to have a structure that allows for regular meetings supported by a convenor or coordinator to gather and distribute pre-reading materials and facilitate community interactions.

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[1] In the IAP2 model, there are 5 levels of engagement: Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate and Empower. Our model skips the first level, is loosely aligned with levels 2 and 3, and combines levels 4 and 5 into our category called Engagement. For more information on the IAP2 spectrum, you can view it at https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/pillars/Spectrum_8.5x11_Print.pdf

Examples of *Consultation* might be:

- Provide feedback to a land developer who is seeking ideas on suitable seating for a common use park
- Provide input to a faith group looking to provide free meals. LEC may provide feedback on potential types of food and days/times/locations for food distribution
- Provide thoughts on a grant proposal for a project which will include PWLLE

Involvement

At the midpoint of continuum is *Involvement*. This level is characterized by a deepening of the commitment required from LEC members and the organizations seeking their input. These interactions are generally expected to take more time and most likely multiple interactions. A group seeking initial feedback may come back multiple times to gather additional feedback and show how original input had been incorporated. At this level of interaction, organizations should have an existing relationship or be looking to create a deeper relationship with the LEC. Organizations should understand that there will be an expectation for them to follow-up with the LEC and provide closure to the interaction.

Depending on the project or initiative, LEC inclusion could happen at a regular LEC meeting, or may be done by a smaller task group of the LEC. In the case of a smaller working group, they may need to establish how they will continue to inform the core LEC group of their work. This type of interaction may also require the LEC to connect directly with individuals who are unhoused. Organizations should expect that this consultation process will take more time than anticipated and should plan accordingly. It is important for organizations to remember that most LEC groups are formed by volunteers who may have constraints on their ability to respond immediately or in a rapid fashion.

Due to the increased expectation for LEC time, it is recommended that organizations plan for some form of compensation to LEC members. If financial compensation is difficult, consider providing additional resources such as transportation (bus tickets), childcare, as well as the provision of food at meetings.

To prepare LEC members to undertake *Involvement* activities, some training may be required. They may benefit from training on meeting facilitation, dealing with conflict, use of computer technology such as word processing/presentation programs and email.

Having a structure that supports LEC members to form small working groups would be beneficial as working with a larger LEC group can be difficult. LEC members may need to have easy access to internet connections and a device for attending online meetings and contributing to electronic documents.

Examples of *Involvement* might be:

- Provide input into a new by-law regulating activity in a public park
- Work with a social service organization to provide input on a new program they are creating to support individuals looking for employment while they wait for permanent housing
- Collaborate with a professor and a group of students working on a social innovation project

Engagement

At the far right of the continuum, the deepest level of interaction is *Engagement*. Organizations wishing to interact with the LEC are seeking to build (or have existing) substantive and deep relationships. There is an underlying expectation of shared ownership at the engagement level. Both the LEC and the organization(s) are looking to co-create or collaborate on a project, activity or initiative. The time required for *Engagement* is usually substantive and generally will need to be supported with resources, financial and otherwise.

As with *Involvement*, interactions at the *Engagement* end of the continuum will generally span a significant time frame and require multiple interactions to complete. It is also likely that both a smaller working group and the entire LEC group will be needed. Additionally, the LEC may want to engage in consultation with a broader group of PWLLE.

Initiatives that are well suited to *Engagement* are ones that will involve the LEC from design through to implementation and are likely characterized by a shared ownership and leadership. Grant or other funding may be required to support the activities both in planning and implementation. These initiatives may be system wide endeavors, large scale research projects, significant advocacy activities or other large-scale actions.

Preparing LEC members to work on *Engagement* activities, training and preparation is likely required. In addition to the skills necessary for *Preparation* projects, LEC members may also need more advanced facilitation skills to support gathering information from a broader PWLLE audience as well as team building skills. They may also need support and training in organizing and managing projects, doing basic internet searches and support in working with professionals such as researchers or librarians to help gather information or videographers or graphic designers to help create reports or videos. LEC members may also need to gain basic research skills to support grant writing, ethics applications, and the planning and execution of research.

Engagement interactions require that the LEC have a more complex or fulsome structure. In addition to a convenor or coordinator, the LEC may have an 'on call' group of supports that provide training or professional support as required. The group may also need to have access to file storage, access to online collaboration tools and common online storage for files. LEC email addresses for individual members may also help address barriers to collaboration.

Examples of *Engagement* might be:

- Working with community service providers, local government and funders to plan for extreme weather supports to those living on the streets
- Hosting a conference or community gathering in collaboration with an organization or post-secondary institution looking to address stigma
- Engaging with community organizations and local government to create a plan to end homelessness
- Working as co-researchers alongside academics to plan and execute community-engaged/based research projects
- Collaborating with service providers and/or researchers to apply for multi-year grant funding

Elements of the Framework

The following components were identified as important aspects to consider when advising groups on how and when to engage with an LEC to gather feedback or work on a project: time; relationship, types of input, need for follow-up, skills/training, admin support/structure and technology required.

The first four elements help to clarify relationship requirements and how those differ with each project or activity. They set expectations regarding the responsibilities for feedback and connection which necessarily change based on the level of engagement needed. The last 3 elements help with planning for LEC engagements and community connections. They can assist in identifying what training might be useful/helpful, predict when additional resources might be needed and can help with writing funding requests.

Table 1:Key Elements of the LEC Framework

	LEC Members	**Community Groups**
Time	Budget the time required to prepare for and conduct each type of engagement.	Identify how much time will be dedicated to their project by the LEC.
Relationship	Assess community inquiries to ensure that there is appropriate trust and relationship developed to engage in the request.	Allocate an appropriate amount of time to building a relationship with the LEC and to reflect on their approach to engagement.
Types of Input	Identify how much feedback and which kind of feedback is being requested.	Critically consider and choose the desired level of feedback from the LEC.
Need for Follow-up	Allows the LEC to clearly indicate situations where they expect community groups to return to provide information on how LEC input was used.	Outlines the expectations for when community groups should expect to reconnect with updates or provide examples of how the input was used.
Skills/Training	Understand that as the expectation for engagements increase, additional skills or capacity may be needed by LEC members	Recognition for community groups that they may need to build in time and resources to assist LEC members to participate in deeper engagement.
Admin Support/ Structure	Identify when additional or new support may be required to work on some projects. Can help with budgeting.	Recognition for community groups that they may need to build in time and resources to assist LEC members to participate in deeper engagement.
Technology Required	Identify requirements to support/ sustain the LEC	Recognition for community groups that they may need to build in time and resources to assist LEC members to participate in deeper engagement.

Pulling the Pieces together

The continuum of engagement and the elements of design work together as a framework to paint a fulsome picture of how LEC engagement could occur. It is recommended that this framework be provided to any community organization prior to their first meeting(s) with the LEC.

Below is the framework outlined in table form. The elements of design run down the side, the continuum of engagement runs across the top. There are suggestions to consider in each category. Following the table, we outline how LECs and the community would use the framework.

Table 2: LEC Engagement Framework

Elements	Consultation	Involvement	Engagement
Time	Little time required, generally 1-2 hours including prep time	Moderate time required, 5 – 15 hours including prep time	Extended time required – likely occurs over months
Relationship	No prior relationship required, no expectation of ongoing relationship	May have existing relationship, or may be start of relationship building	Requires prior relationship, if new relationship, it is recommended that sufficient time is allocated for relationship development
Types of Input	General feedback, review	Iterative process of review and validation. May involve guidance and/or support for data gathering	Provide guidance, feedback, critique, and idea generation. Is likely an iterative process. Likely involve gathering feedback/input from PWLLE
Need for Follow-up	No expectation of follow-up	Some expectation that the interaction will have a process for wrap-up and finalization	Expectation for full integration into the planning, execution and evaluation of the initiative
Skills/Training* *Assume that skills build from left to right and are cumulative.	Soft Skills • Providing feedback Technical Skills • Use of technology (including online meeting software) • Accessing online materials/ documents	Soft Skills • Meeting facilitation • Dealing with conflict Technical Skills • Computer skills including word processing, spreadsheet and presentation software • Email	Soft Skills • Advanced meeting facilitation and organization • Team building Technical Skills • Project management • Internet searching • Grant writing Research Skills • Basic research design • Data analysis skills • Ethics application

Elements	Consultation	Involvement	Engagement
Admin Support/ Structure* *Assume that structure/ support builds from left to right	• LEC would benefit from regular meetings that allow outside groups to access the LEC easily. • A convenor/ coordinator would support the administrative functions of the LEC	• Access to meeting space may be advantageous	• Access to a team of supporter for training of specialized skills • LEC specific emails for key LEC members
Technology Required* *Assume that technology builds from left to right	• Location/support for reliable internet connection • Some team members may need access to personal technology devices	• Location/support for reliable internet connection • Some team members may need access to personal technology devices	• Online, common, storage space • Access to online collaborative tools (software and hardware)

How LECs Could Use the Framework

The LEC can use the framework to consider requests for assistance or meetings with the community. Once the LEC has determined that a particular request is something they are both interested in working on and it fits their overall mandate, then they can determine:

- Which level of engagement suits this request?
- Does the LEC have the capacity and time for this request at this time?
- Does the LEC have the necessary resources, knowledge, and skills to support this request at this time?

In situations where an LEC may not have the capacity, time, or resources to meet all of the community requests, some additional questions they might consider are:

- Does the LEC have an existing relationship with the community group?
  - If yes, will this project support existing work and should it be prioritized over others?
  - If no, are there any concerns with deferring this request to a later time? Are there any concerns with building a relationship with this group?
- What do we think will be the outcome of working with this group?
  - Is this a unique opportunity that should be prioritized?

How Communities Could Use the Framework

The community can use this framework to help gauge the level of commitment they are asking from the LEC. This step is important because members of an LEC related to homelessness, poverty, and related issues are likely to be individuals who are or have been marginalized. These individuals may have been volunteering their time and expertise and they are not

employed fulltime to do this work. The capacity to engage in projects will be directly related to the number of LEC volunteers and their relative interest/connection to the work being proposed.

Community groups must also understand that it may take much longer to execute projects or gather feedback from an LEC than they would expect. This is not because the group is not experienced or capable, but instead has to do with the nature of the work being conducted, the individuals involved and the structure of an LEC. These groups may meet infrequently or may have limited hours to dedicate to projects. The LEC will choose projects that are most relevant to them and their goals.

Finally, community groups should ask themselves how the knowledge and recommendations gathered from an LEC will be used. Will their contribution be recognized formally in documentation? Will the LEC need to review how their feedback has been used. Consulting or working with an LEC is unlike working with a consultant or other paid expert. It is more akin to working with an Indigenous partner in that you are asking for and utilizing their lived/living experience. Thoughtful consideration of how knowledge is used and shared should be undertaken.

Who is Invited to the LEC? How Do They Work Together?

We continue to recommend that the LEC is designed and structured in a way that supports the community it is embedded in. This same flexibility should be used when considering who is involved in the LEC and how those individuals work together.

Based on literature and feedback from the PWLLE that we interviewed during the creation of this toolkit, there are several recommendations that are offered when thinking about who is invited to participate in an LEC.

Recommendations

1. Inclusion is key, Diversity should be welcomed
2. Expect participants to engage and disengage
3. Make time for relationship building
4. Construct mutually determined codes of conduct/terms of reference
5. Involve a Coordinator as soon as possible

Inclusion is key, Diversity should be welcomed

For social issues like homelessness, many different people with very different experiences are affected. Because of this, it is recommended that the recruitment approaches taken to gather PWLLE interested in joining an LEC be inclusive. Spend time understanding who is experiencing or at risk of homelessness within your community.

- Are there geographic elements to homelessness? This can indicate where you might want to host recruitment events.
- What about the demographics? Should the LEC strive to be representative? The populations identified below are either over-represented in the homeless community or are representative of marginalized communities.
    - Is the voice and perspective of the Indigenous community represented in your outreach efforts?
    - Will youth be welcomed into your LEC or are there risks and concerns with their inclusion?

- o Other demographics to consider are immigrants, seniors, LGBTQ2S+, drug users, and those who have been previously incarcerated.
- Will you target only lived experience[2] or will living experience[3] be included as well? Are there time limits on lived experience?
    - o Is there a point at which someone's lived experience is no longer relevant to the LEC?

Expect participants to engage and disengage

While some individuals recruited for the LEC will be able to participate regularly, not all individuals will. It is recommended that this flexibility be recognized and built into the LEC model. Our discussions with existing LECs, PWLLE and existing literature have identified that participants in an LEC can face many barriers to regular participation in this type of group. Some of the barriers to be aware of are:

- Nature of their work –individuals can be working irregular hours or shifts and may have limited ability to plan their schedules in advance due to the scheduling of employers.
- Health and Mental Health – individuals may have existing health or mental health conditions that may make it difficult to consistently attend meetings.
- Transportation and childcare – participants may rely on public transportation or may have challenges arranging for childcare. In some cases, these barriers can be reduced if the LEC provides bus passes, helps to organize carpools or provides childcare during meetings
- Some individuals may be in active addiction – this can impact their ability to participate regularly

While we bring up these barriers as examples, they will not apply to all members and certainly not all the time.

Make time for relationship building

Because of the diversity of members in an LEC, it is strongly recommended that there are intentional opportunities to build community and relationships between LEC members. Creating space during and after the recruitment process for individuals to share meals, engage in sharing circles or other trust building activities will support the group later. Relationship building was seen as important because the work of LECs can be difficult. LEC members can provide support for each other because they share common experiences.

Like any group, conflict between members will also occur. Having regular relationship building opportunities will support the group when conflict arises. The LEC may also consider de-escalation training and provide opportunities to build conflict resolution skills.

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[2] There are many definitions of lived experience. As a guide, lived experience can be thought of as any individual who has been unhoused for a period of time in their lives. Some definitions also indicate that to have 'lived experience', individuals should be suitably or stably housed as their current state. Most lived experience definitions exclude people whose 'experience' is through a close connection to someone who has been unhoused.
[3] Living experience is commonly defined as individuals whose current state is unhoused or precariously housed. This can include those living in shelter, those on the streets as well as those individuals who are couch surfing or temporarily housed (living week to week with friends/family).

Construct mutually determined codes of conduct/terms of reference

There are many existing examples of codes of conduct or group expectations that can be utilized as a starting point for an LEC. We offer that these be used only for idea generation. Because each LEC is different and will engage in unique types of activities, it is important for them to build expectations as a group.

LECs may reach out to trusted advisors to assist in the discussions that form the basis for formal documents, but the content should be created and agreed to by the founding members of the LEC. It is also recommended that regular review of these documents occur to ensure that they still resonate with members and are supportive of the goals of the group.

A code of conduct allows LEC members to set out, in writing or otherwise, the boundaries of conduct that is acceptable within the group. These codes can be as formal or informal as suits the LEC. Some examples of items in a code of conduct could include:

- Attending meetings only when you feel well
- Listening to everyone
- Being respectful
- Being willing to walk away
- Being supportive of members
- Speaking with care about the LEC
- Share only your story unless given permission
- Speak up

This is not an exhaustive list. Reach out to other lived/living experience groups for additional examples to draw from.

Involve a Coordinator as soon as possible

We have mentioned several times in this toolkit that the role of a coordinator or facilitator is critical to supporting an LEC. If possible, we would recommend that a coordinator is involved from the beginning of the group. This would allow for someone to be responsible for handling the logistics of the initial recruitment. It would also allow for the process to be documented and archived for future review.

Having a coordinator initially means that members can focus on the work of the LEC rather than gathering and convening the group.

As mentioned previously in this document, there are many excellent examples of toolkits and guidance to support and design how LEC members will connect and interact. The following table is a list of open-source resources which could serve as a starting point for more learning. As much as possible, we have tried not to duplicate work that has already been published. Within these resources are examples of how the day-to-day operations of other lived/living experience groups have been conducted and provide an overview of the successes and pitfalls of different approaches.

Table 3: Additional Resources for Lived/Living Experience Circles

Document	Online Location
Inclusion of People with Lived Experience (PWLE) in the Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness: Recommendations and Final Report – November 2018	https://bfzcanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/TAEH-PWLE-Reference-Group-Nov-2018.pdf
Moving Forward, Together: Why Integrate People with Experiences of Homelessness, 2011, The Homeless Hub	https://www.homelesshub.ca/resource/moving-forward-together-why-integrate-people-experiences-homelessness
Nothing about us without us: Seven principles for leadership and inclusion of people with lived experience of homelessness, 2016, The Homeless Hub	https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/LEAC-7principles-final.pdf
Homeless System Response: Paying People with Lived Experience and Expertise, 2022, Department of Housing and Urban Development	https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/COVID-19-Homeless-System-Response-Paying-People-with-Lived-Experience-and-Expertise.pdf
Built for Zero Canada – links to additional resources for involving people with lived experience	https://bfzcanada.ca/peers-and-lived-experience/
Engagement Toolkit: People with Lived Experience in BC's Capital Region, 2017, Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness	https://victoriahomelessness.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/170630_crd_toolkit.pdf
Lived Experience as Expertise: Considerations in the Development of Advisory Groups of People with Lived Experience of Homelessness and/or Poverty, 2012, Regional Municipality of Waterloo	https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/PROMISING.PRACTICE.MANUAL.FINAL.pdf
10 Engaging People with Lived/Living Experience, 2019, Alison Homer (Tamarack Institute)	https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/library/ten-2019#:~:text=Informed%20by%20the%2010%20Lived,empowered%20to%20drive%20antipoverty%20work.

What Supports and Resourcing are Required for the LEC?

Not all LECs require all resources or budgeted items listed in this section. As mentioned earlier, the design of LECs is flexible and should reflect the needs of the community and the structure of the group. Depending on the work that each LEC undertakes, different costs or support needs will arise. When considering how much to budget for an LEC to be sustainable or operate over the course of the year, we provide some considerations below. See Table 2: Categories and Examples of Costs for an LEC for a summary of costs that could be incurred.

Structure/Administration

The more formalized the structure and the more facilitation/coordination required to support the needs of the LEC, the higher the costs. This is due not simply to more hours being required, it is also a reflection of the overhead costs that formalized structures require. If the LEC is a formal

stand-alone entity, it will need to cover the costs related to the structure of the organization. For society's it can be as simple as the meeting the filing requirements for CRA, hosting an Annual General Meeting and tracking membership. For LECs which consider gaining charitable status or becoming a Community Contribution Corporation[4], there can be additional costs related to audits and reporting.

To estimate costs, consider the following:

- How many hours will your coordinator/facilitator work weekly, and at what rate? Are there any benefits which must also be covered for the role?
- If an AGM is required, how much should be budgeted?
- Any costs related directly to starting and maintaining the structure of the organization (filing costs, book-keeping, audits, etc. as required).
- Estimate the costs required to keep membership records (i.e. tracking software if needed)
- Is a physical space required? Can it be shared with other organizations? What costs are required to support a space (think overhead costs, office supplies, etc.)

Technology/Communication/Archiving

The coordination/facilitation of the LEC can also create additional expenses that should be considered. While grassroots LECs may find some of these costs unnecessary at the beginning, a discussion of the following items should be considered if there is an intention or the possibility of becoming more formal into the future.

Communication between members is likely to take place with technology. This means that the LEC should consider how people find out about them, communicate with them and facilitate meetings. LECs should also consider whether additional costs or arrangements need to be made to support members to access information from the LEC.

To estimate costs, consider the following:

- Will all LEC members have access to a data-enabled device for communication of meetings, minutes, reports, etc. If not, will the LEC have space or relationships with other organizations that give folks access to this technology?
- Will the coordinator/facilitator have access to the devices and technology that enable them to create documents, reports, presentations, etc.?[5]
    - Does the LEC coordinator/facilitator have access to a cell phone? Will one be provided?
    - Does the LEC coordinator/facilitator have access to high-speed internet? Will that be provided?

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[4] Community Contribution Companies, also known as C3's, exist in British Columbia. These hybrid organizations combine aspects of both for-profit and non-profit entities. More information can be found at https://www.centreforsocialenterprise.com/community-contribution-companies/

[5] The Google suite of products is a low cost alternative that works well and can support online meetings, shared space for documents, control privacy, etc. The Microsoft Office suite also works well and with Office 365 and Microsoft Teams, there is a great deal of flexibility for meetings, document storage, communication and more.

o   Will the coordinator/facilitator be required to update social media and/or a website to support the LEC? What are the costs associated with an online presence?

Archiving and document storage were flagged in our research as important things to consider that often go unrecognized when LECs are starting up.

Table 4: Categories and Examples of Costs for an LEC

Category	Description	Examples[6]
General Costs	These are costs all LECs will likely need to operate.	• Honoraria (at living wage if possible) (LEC) • Bus tickets/Gas money (LEC) • Food for meetings (LEC) • Facility fees for meetings
Coordination/ Admin	These costs are related to coordinating LEC work and individuals.	• Coordinator (paid work) (C) • Organizational fees (expenses related to starting up group and maintaining legal status) • Email (C) • Computer (C) • Network Storage (hosted online such as MS Teams or Google) (C) • Internet (C) • Access to office/supplies (periodically to support activities)
Communication/ Promotion	These costs support bringing awareness of the LEC to the community.	• Website/online presence • Social media • Cell phone (C) • Business Cards • Name badges (ID LEC members)

Technology	These costs address the technology needs of an LEC.	• LEC members may need access to technology to support the work of the group:
		  o Cell phones (including data plan)
		  o Computer/tablet
		  o Internet connections
		• Software (Google Suite or MS Office)

Training	Training costs will vary significantly by group and by individual member.	• Computer Skills for:
		  o Online meetings
		  o Accessing online documents
		• Website development
		• Social media
		• Trauma informed practice (C)
		• Conflict de-escalation
		• Public speaking

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[6] Items marked (C) are expenses specific to the Coordinator role

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Appendix A: Researcher Bios

Shawn Kelly

Journeyman Chef. Want to use my experiences in homelessness that I experienced in my life, to shed more light on this situation from my perspective. A person who has lived it. Experienced homelessness in my teenage years and other points in my life. For example when I lost my wife in 2015 from multiple sclerosis. As well as suffering a major injury falling from the roof of a 2 story building. In which I had a major relapse into my addictions. I lost everything.

Bobby Hines

I was introduced to the research team through my employer, Ask Wellness Society. I wanted to contribute to meaningful solutions to homelessness. I have lived experience with homelessness and addiction. I now work with vulnerable individuals who are recovering from homelessness.

Annika Kirk

Annika Kirk is going into her fourth year as a Business Administration student at Okanagan College specializing in accounting. She works as a Research Assistant at Okanagan College on different projects, including comparative tax policy for local industry, lived experience circles on homelessness, and social enterprise work within the alcohol industry. She feels passionately the LEC work from her own lived experience and understanding the importance of the lived experience perspective within policy and program development.

Stephanie Griffiths, Ph.D., R. Psych.

I am a College Professor in the Psychology Department of Okanagan College, based in Penticton, and an Adjunct in the School and Applied Psychology Program in the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary. As a clinician, I think applied research is important both at the individual and societal level. As an instructor and a researcher, I can think of few social issues more important than homelessness, mental health, and addiction. We need to do everything we can to help our communities address these issues. Fortunately, the Vancouver Foundation, Okanagan College, and our community partners provided an opportunity to explore how lived experience could help the community address these problems.

Kerry Rempel, PhD (Candidate), MBA, BPE

I am a College Professor at the Okanagan School of Business, Okanagan College based in Kelowna. I am a founding member of the Kelowna Homelessness Research Collaborative and a Board member for the Institute for Community Engaged Research at UBC-Okanagan. As a practitioner/academic, I focus my research and teaching on social change, trying to understand how organizations and systems work together to address pressing social issues. Through applied research and course projects, I bring social issues into the classroom and provide opportunities for students to explore how to make change and use their knowledge of business and organizations to create good within their communities.