



Stakeholder Engagement Methodology

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1 PURPOSE OF ENGAGEMENT FOR AN HNA

Engagement is a key component of a Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) because it brings lived experience, local knowledge, and system-level insight into what might otherwise be a primarily data-driven exercise. While quantitative data can identify trends, such as rising rents, low vacancy rates, affordability pressures, or population change, it cannot fully capture how these issues are experienced by residents, service providers, housing providers, employers, and other local actors.

Engagement helps validate findings, surface hidden or underreported needs, and identify gaps that may not be visible in standard datasets, such as overcrowding, accessibility barriers, discrimination, hidden homelessness, or challenges accessing appropriate housing. It also builds trust, supports transparency, and fosters a sense of shared ownership, which is especially important when the HNA is intended to inform future policy, planning, funding, and investment decisions.

2 OVERVIEW

A well-rounded stakeholder engagement approach should reflect the full housing system, including the people who experience housing need, the organizations that respond to it, and the public, private, and non-profit actors that shape housing supply and affordability. Engagement should include residents across a range of tenures, incomes, household types, and life stages, as well as housing providers, developers, landlords, service providers, employers, local governments, and other system partners.

Qualitative data collected through the engagement process plays an important role in validating findings, identifying gaps, and explaining how housing pressures are experienced locally. It may further help surface issues that may not be visible in standard, quantitative datasets, including hidden homelessness, overcrowding, discrimination, accessibility barriers, and challenges accessing appropriate or affordable housing.

Engagement should also be designed intentionally to include underrepresented and equity-deserving groups, recognizing that housing need is often experienced most acutely by households and communities that may be less likely to participate through standard public engagement channels. This may include low-income households, seniors, youth, persons with disabilities, Indigenous communities, newcomers, renters, people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, and others facing housing insecurity.

The appropriate engagement approach will vary depending on the scale, geography, budget, and objectives of the HNA. Common methods may include public surveys, stakeholder interviews, focus groups, municipal questionnaires, employer surveys, and targeted outreach through trusted community organizations.

2.1 Key Target Audiences

The target audiences for HNA engagement should reflect the diversity of households that interact with the housing system, including those who are securely housed, those experiencing affordability or suitability pressures, and those who may be excluded from conventional housing options. Because housing need is experienced differently across income levels, household types, life stages, tenure, and identity groups, engagement should be designed to capture a range of

perspectives rather than rely on a single “general public” lens. The audiences listed below are not exhaustive, but provide a starting point for identifying residents and population groups whose experiences may be relevant to understanding local housing conditions.

Some key target audiences include:

- Renters (long-term, short-term, and those in informal arrangements)
- Homeowners (including those facing affordability pressures)
- Prospective residents (people looking to move into the community)
- First-time homebuyers
- Low- and moderate-income households
- Seniors and older adults (including those looking to age in place)
- Youth and young adults (including students and early-career workers)
- Families with children
- Single-person households
- Persons with disabilities
- Indigenous peoples and communities
- Newcomers, immigrants, and refugees
- People experiencing or at risk of homelessness
- Individuals in core housing need or housing insecurity
- Tenants in subsidized or supportive housing
- People living in overcrowded or inadequate housing
- Seasonal workers or transient populations (where relevant)

2.2 Sectors & Stakeholder Types

In addition to residents and households, HNAs benefit from engagement with organizations and institutions that shape, deliver, finance, regulate, or respond to housing need. These stakeholders can provide system-level insight into supply constraints, service gaps, development feasibility, homelessness pressures, infrastructure limitations, and policy or program barriers. The appropriate mix of stakeholders will vary by jurisdiction, but should generally include representatives from the housing and development sector, community services, government, health, education, economic development, and infrastructure-related organizations.

Housing & Development Sector:

- Non-profit and community housing providers
- Private developers and builders
- Landlords and property management companies
- Real estate professionals and associations
- Housing co-operatives

Social & Community Services:

- Homelessness support organizations and shelters
- Mental health and addictions service providers
- Social service agencies
- Food security organizations (e.g., food banks)
- Community outreach and advocacy groups
- Equity & Population-Specific Organizations:
- Indigenous organizations and leadership groups

- Newcomer and settlement agencies
- Seniors' organizations
- Disability advocacy organizations
- Youth-serving organizations
- Women's shelters and gender-based violence support organizations

Government & Public Sector:

- Municipal staff (planning, housing, social development, infrastructure)
- Elected officials
- Provincial departments (housing, health, social services)
- Federal housing agencies (where relevant)
- Health & Education:
 - Hospitals and health authorities
 - Public health organizations
 - Schools, school boards, and post-secondary institutions

Economic & Workforce:

- Local employers (major industries and institutions)
- Chambers of commerce and business associations
- Workforce development organizations
- Infrastructure & Utilities (as relevant):
 - Transit providers
 - Utility providers (water, wastewater, electricity)

3 APPROACH

Public-facing engagement focuses on creating clear, accessible, and meaningful opportunities for residents to learn about housing issues and share their perspectives. These opportunities should be simple, inclusive, and designed to reach a wide cross-section of the community. The goal is not only to gather input, but also to build awareness, ground data in lived experience, and ensure the final assessment reflects local realities. A strong engagement approach typically combines online and in-person methods, examples of which are outlined in this section.

3.1 Online Surveys & Digital Tools

Online surveys often serve as the foundation of HNA engagement, allowing residents to share experiences and priorities in a convenient format (see [Template X: Public Survey](#)). Surveys should run for a minimum of two weeks and be thoughtfully promoted through local governments, service providers, and other housing sector or community organizations. Where appropriate, surveys can be supported by tools such as interactive mapping, allowing participants to identify location-specific issues such as affordability concerns or areas lacking housing options. A dedicated project website or platform can also act as a central hub for information, updates, and participation opportunities.

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3.2 In-Person & Community-Based Engagement

In-person engagement can help reach residents who may be less likely to participate online, though it may be limited by geography, budget, or staff capacity. Depending on the local context, this may include community pop-ups, facilitated conversations, intercept surveys, or partnerships

with libraries, community hubs, and service providers. Where in-person engagement is not feasible, practical alternatives such as paper surveys, postcards, flyers, or assisted survey access can help extend reach and maintain visibility.

3.3 Targeted Outreach & First Voice Engagement

Targeted outreach is essential for connecting with groups that may otherwise be underrepresented in broad public engagement. Working through trusted community organizations and service providers can help reach individuals experiencing housing insecurity, homelessness, discrimination, accessibility barriers, or other forms of exclusion from the housing system. This can include small group discussions, intercept surveys, interviews, or facilitated sessions delivered in trusted settings. Plain language materials and multiple formats, including digital, print, and verbal options, can further improve accessibility. Where engagement asks individuals to share lived or First Voice experience, it is highly recommended participants be compensated for their time and expertise wherever possible, in which case project budgets should include a line item for honoraria or stipends.

3.4 Systems-Level & Sector Stakeholder Engagement

Systems-level and sector stakeholder engagement can provide insight into housing supply, service gaps, development feasibility, infrastructure constraints, policy barriers, and emerging local pressures. This may include interviews, workshops, roundtables, municipal questionnaires, employer surveys (see [Template X: Business Sector Survey](#)), or discussions with housing providers, developers, landlords, service organizations, employers, infrastructure providers, and government staff. These methods can help validate quantitative findings, identify data gaps, and clarify how housing issues are being experienced across the broader housing system.

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4 KEY ENGAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

4.1 Trauma-Informed Approach to Engagement

Engaging with vulnerable communities requires a thoughtful, inclusive, and trauma-informed approach. At its core, this means recognizing and addressing barriers to participation - such as language, transportation, digital access, and time constraints - by offering flexible and accessible engagement options (e.g., in-person sessions in familiar locations, partnerships with trusted community organizations, honoraria, childcare, and translation services). Building trust is essential, particularly for groups who may have had negative experiences with institutions; this requires transparency about how input will be used, clear communication, and a commitment to follow through.

Fundamental principles for engaging vulnerable populations include meeting people where they are (both physically and socially), working through trusted intermediaries, and ensuring cultural safety and respect. Engagement should be designed to minimize power imbalances, using plain language, informal formats, and opportunities for anonymous input where appropriate. It is also important to avoid extractive engagement practices - participants should see value in their involvement, whether through compensation, access to information, or tangible outcomes. Finally, engagement should be iterative and ongoing, not one-time, allowing for feedback loops that demonstrate how community input has shaped the HNA and any resulting actions.

4.2 Clarity & Transparency

Clarity and transparency should guide all engagement efforts. Participants should understand what an HNA is, why it matters, what topics are open for input, and how their feedback will be used. This is especially important where the HNA may inform future policy, planning, funding, or investment decisions.

Sharing updates, such as “What We Heard” summaries, key findings, or final report materials, helps close the loop and reinforces the value of participation. Ultimately, effective engagement helps ensure the HNA is not only a technical report, but a shared resource that supports informed decision-making.

4.3 Coordinating Engagement with Related Data Collection

Stakeholder engagement may also provide an opportunity to collect or validate information for related tools, such as a Non-Market Housing Inventory (see Appendix Template X). If opting to develop such an inventory, engagement with housing providers, service organizations, and government partners can help identify existing non-market, supportive, subsidized, and community housing assets that may not be fully captured in public datasets.

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Relevant stakeholders may include government departments and agencies responsible for housing programs and policy, non-profit and community housing providers, co-operative housing organizations, supportive housing operators, municipal or regional governments, and organizations involved in homelessness response systems, including coordinated access systems, By-Names Lists, or administrative systems such as HIFIS, where available.

Where feasible, coordinating such data requests with broader stakeholder engagement may help reduce duplication and avoid overburdening organizations. However, collection of non-market housing inventory data should be treated as optional and dependent on local priorities, available resources, and data access. Early identification of relevant data holders can improve completeness, accuracy, and consistency.

5 LIMITATIONS

Engagement findings should not be interpreted as statistically representative unless the engagement design and sampling approach support that interpretation. Instead, engagement should be understood as qualitative and contextual evidence that helps explain, validate, and nuance quantitative findings referenced within the broader HNA.

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