

The Safe Shelter Survey is a human rights awareness-raising and accountability tool to document emergency shelter access, barriers, conditions and impacts.

The survey emerged through the concerns of people who are directly impacted by housing precarity and homelessness in the Peace Region. It was co-designed by West Coast LEAF and the Society for Opioid and Narcotic Wellness (SNOW) as part of the [BC Gender Equality Report Card](#) project. The survey was administered by a peer survey team in Dawson Creek and Fort St. John, BC, during two weeks in November 2023.

This document shares our community-based survey strategy so that others can learn from our process.

Key Principles

COLLABORATION

SNOW and West Coast LEAF co-designed the survey content and process.

SAFETY

Our process prioritized physical, emotional, and collective safety for surveyors and participants.

SUPPORT

We offered supports for people to participate, including things like food and necessities, confidential peer assistance, and access to counselling.

ONGOING CONSENT

At each step, we discussed risks and benefits, and choices to participate or not.

COMPENSATION

Community reviewers, peer surveyors, and survey participants received honoraria in recognition of the valuable time and knowledge they contributed to the project.

ACCOUNTABILITY

At each step, we shared draft materials, processes, and findings for community review and feedback.



1. COMMUNITY ISSUES DIALOGUE

At a community session, SNOW peers shared issues and concerns about homelessness, shelter access, barriers, conditions, impacts and calls to action. These topics became the sections for our survey. We also discussed the audience(s) and format for sharing our survey results.



2. SURVEY DRAFTING

We prepared a first draft of the survey with attention to ethical research practices.

- The first page was a letter of information with free local crisis and counselling supports.
- The survey was anonymous. All questions were optional, with opportunity to comment.
- Survey questions focused on the issues, not on people's personal characteristics or story.
- The tone and sequencing of questions reflected strength-based and trauma-informed principles.



3. SURVEY TESTING AND COMMUNITY REVIEW

We did trial runs of the survey to test the questions and length. Then, we held a community review session where peers gave feedback to make the survey clearer and more supportive.



4. CO-DEVELOP PEER SURVEYOR PROTOCOL

SNOW and West Coast LEAF worked together to develop a peer surveyor protocol, including:

- An outreach process and invitation script to respect people's privacy and informed choice.
- Identifying potential risks or safety concerns and how to mitigate them.
- A confidentiality process for collecting surveys and distributing honoraria.



5. CO-DELIVER PEER SURVEYOR TRAINING

West Coast LEAF and the peer survey team held a collaborative training session to review our protocol, practice, and troubleshoot concerns based on our collective research and community experience.



6. DATA COLLECTION

Peer surveyors used privacy and consent protocols to invite community members to participate.

- There were multiple options for completing the survey (on paper, online, or by phone.)
- Peer surveyors worked in pairs to ensure mutual support and safety.
- Peer relationships were crucial in connecting with survey participants. Peer surveyors were available to answer questions and provide confidential assistance if needed.
- Completed surveys were submitted in sealed envelopes without identifying information.
- Respondents could sign up to hear back about survey results.



7. DATA ENTRY

Members of the survey team entered responses from paper surveys into a secure online version of the survey.



8. DATA ANALYSIS AND DRAFT FINDINGS

West Coast LEAF analyzed survey data and worked with a graphic designer to create a survey fact sheet – with charts, quotes, and bar graphs for community review.



9. COMMUNITY REVIEW OF DRAFT FINDINGS

At a community session, SNOW peers reviewed the draft survey fact sheet. Peers suggested changes to the graphics and text to make the findings clearer and more accurate. We also debriefed and shared learnings about the survey process.



10. ACTIONING SURVEY RESULTS

SNOW is using the survey fact sheet to raise awareness and connect with allies to push for access to safe shelters in BC communities. SNOW and West Coast LEAF will also use survey findings to make a submission to a national human rights review panel on gendered homelessness.

For more information about the Safe Shelter Survey, visit <https://westcoastleaf.org/safe-shelter-community-survey>

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