



GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
INTERAGENCY COUNCIL ON HOMELESSNESS

HOUSING SOLUTIONS COMMITTEE

CLIENT ENGAGEMENT FOCUS GROUP INSTRUMENT DEVELOPED BY
OP FOR DEEPLY AFFORDABLE HOUSING PILOT

BACKGROUND

The District has many programs to help low-income individuals and families find and keep affordable housing. We're also making progress towards the mayor's goal of 12,000 more units by 2035.

Still, many can't find affordable housing even when they have vouchers. To better understand and address the needs of one group in particular – those experiencing homelessness – the District is making one-time resources available in 2022.

The District's Office of Planning (OP) is working with the Interagency Council on Homelessness (ICH) to develop a plan for deeply affordable housing. What's certain is that rent will be 30% of an individual's income, whatever it may be. For example, if they earn \$500 per month, their rent will be \$150.

Some of the questions we need to answer during this planning phase:

- Explaining site-based housing and assistance that does not move
 - This is not a program, it's housing
 - You can move but we cannot assure that the next unit you move into is at 30% of your income
- Where should the housing be located?
- Is there a greater need for single- or double-bedroom units?
- Questions exploring shared options for Families:
 - Are shared opportunities of interest for smaller families?
 - Shared bedrooms between family members? Each member in their own room vs. kids sharing bedrooms or kids sharing with parents/guardians?
- Questions exploring shared housing options for Individuals:
 - Do individuals prefer to live alone or with roommates?
 - What are your concerns about shared living?
 - What kind of assurances or protections do you need before you will consider shared living?
 - Are full kitchens and private bathrooms needed or will shared amenities do?
- Will tenants trade-off top choices for lower rent or a better neighborhood?

Commented [ST(1)]: Question need to be evaluated from a family pilot perspective!

We'll meet with individuals currently experiencing homelessness to better understand their housing needs and desires, and what it will take to address them. Timing will make it unlikely that they benefit directly. But their input is invaluable if we want the program to succeed. It also will help us and others serving this group do a better job of meeting their needs.

METHODOLOGY

The OP will gather information through in-person interactive exercises and conversations at local shelters, temporary short-term housing, or transitional housing facilities. The ideal approach is one or more sessions for each client group identified by the ICH Housing Solutions Committee. OP plans to conduct all sessions, but we may recruit shelter staff if needed. All session leads will use the approach and questions outlined here for consistency.

TOPIC A - LOCATION

Approach

- The session lead will use a map of the District to capture responses to the questions below.
- Participants will have 10-15 minutes to “record” their responses by placing colored dots/sticky notes on the map.
- The lead will tell them which color to use for their first, second and third choices. They can use a dot/sticky note with an “X” to mark an area they wouldn’t choose.

Commented [KC2]: Seems like sticky notes will work best if you want them to add notes. I’m thinking it will help to have the lead decide which colors for consistency.

Questions

1. Where in the District would you want to live if you had a choice?
2. Is there anything special about these areas – things like a bus line, schools or services? (If there is, they should write it on the sticky note before putting it on the map.)
3. Is there an area you wouldn’t want to live in?
4. Do you have any questions or comments – or do you want to tell us why you chose the areas you did?

Commented [KC3]: I added this question in each section. I was thinking you might want to have some discussion with each topic.

TOPIC B – PRIVATE OR SHARED LIVING SPACE

Approach

- The lead will use a large piece of paper with three columns: Live Alone, Choose Roommate(s), Roommate(s) Assigned
- They explain what each choice means and participants place their dots/sticky notes in the appropriate columns
- For this and the next two topics, the lead reminds them which color dot/sticky note to use for their first and second choice, and how to mark a response they wouldn’t choose

Commented [KC4]: I included possible labels here but you also could provide the prepared sheets to anyone else called on to do a session. Or just give them an 8.5 x 11 sample so the approach is consistent.

Question:

1. Would you want to live alone, live with roommates you choose from a list, or live with roommates someone chooses for you?
2. Do you have any questions or comments – or do you want to tell us why you made the choices you did?

TOPIC C – KITCHENS

Approach

- Same approach as above, but the choices are: Full Kitchen, Kitchenette, My Own, Shared
- The lead explains the difference between the choices and participants place their dots/sticky notes in the appropriate columns

Questions:

1. Which do you prefer – a full kitchen with a stove and full-sized refrigerator, or a kitchenette with a hot plate, stovetop or microwave, and mini-refrigerator?

2. Would you want your own kitchen or kitchenette, or would you share with other units?
3. Do you have any questions or comments – or do you want to tell us why you made the choices you did?

TOPIC D – BATHROOMS

Approach

- Same approach as in B and C, but the choices are: My Own Bathroom or Shared Bathroom.

Questions

1. Would you need a bathroom in your unit, or would you share with other units?
2. Do you have any questions or comments – or do you want to tell us why you made the choice you did?

TOPIC E – DISCUSSION AND TRADE-OFFS

Approach

- Discuss the patterns that result from the exercise with the group.
- Find out if they'd trade off certain features for lower rent or a better neighborhood.

Questions

The questions about the patterns likely will come naturally from the exercise. For example:

1. Most of you chose/didn't choose [X neighborhood] as your first choice. Why?

Questions like these can get the trade-off conversation started:

2. What's more important to you – living alone or living in a better neighborhood?
3. Would you agree to roommates or live in an area that wasn't your first choice if you could have a full kitchen? What about a private bathroom?
4. Would you accept a kitchenette or shared kitchen for a lower rent?
5. Would you accept a higher rent to be in a certain neighborhood or live alone?
6. What would you give up for a lower rent?

TOPIC F – WRAP UP

A "thank you" and the open question will wrap things up:

7. Do you have any final questions or comments – or anything else you'd like to share?