



# TogetherWise

## A trust based approach to consultation

### Introduction to this Resource Guide

**TogetherWise was developed in 2019** by a group of faith leaders, housing providers and community leaders in Edmonton. The resources and program developed aim to support quality consultation between developers and local communities for projects like affordable and supportive housing. We recognize that quality consultation makes for strong, successful projects and also serves to create a welcoming space for new neighbours—many of whom are hungry for warmth and connection in their new home.

**The TogetherWise program helps promote a good process** for both developer and community. All resources are free and openly accessible for all participants. TogetherWise is a project and a program of Edmonton’s Capital Region Interfaith Housing Initiative (CRIHI).

**Visit us online at:** [www.togetherwiseconsulting.ca](http://www.togetherwiseconsulting.ca)

### Five Heartbeats of Good Consultation

**Quality consultations move at the speed of trust.**

No two consultations unfold in exactly the same way. These core values or heartbeats were identified in our workshops as critical to a successful engagement. Keep them beating strong through the work you do together! Doing so builds the trust that all participants will need to carry through to the best result.



Sincerity



Transparency



Hospitality



Commitment



Consensus Building



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#### Our Three Touchpoints

1. **We help** frame the TogetherWise Good Relationship Agreement and plan.
2. **We hold** a mid-point check-in to hear how things are going.
3. **We host** a debrief conversation at the end of the process.

**Please note:**  
The TogetherWise program does not directly facilitate events or consultations.

## Sincerity (one of the five heartbeats)



**Be ready to both learn and/or teach with a genuine desire to build understanding and trust.**

### Are you a monster?

People love their communities and are worried when change comes knocking. As the developer, show them you will be a good neighbour by being clear about who you are and what you are trying to do. Make promises and keep them. Be honest about what's up for negotiation and what's not. Show them you will be the kind of neighbour they can trust to listen and respond if any concerns show up down the road.

*“Do it with service, love, honesty and sincerity. Build trust and then build more trust.” - Les Young, Elder at Westmount Presbyterian Church*

### Here's what's working!

Edmonton has seen a string of great consultations in the last few years. The TogetherWise approach has learned much from these stories.

Success has largely followed those projects where a strong and honest consultation process took place; one that built and kept a community's trust.

Some of those successes took over a year. Others took only a few months, but in each case, the approach to consultation mattered greatly.

#### The Best Examples:

- Made time and space for personal connections
- Honestly answered community questions
- Incorporated ideas and feedback from the community.
- Kept their promises
- Communicated well
- Built toward a shared understanding of the project.
- Created lasting relationships

## Why do consultation?

**Here are some *good reasons* for all parties to invest in a quality process of consultation.**

For the developer, landowner or housing provider:

- **Warm community relationships help tenants succeed.** By way of contrast, anger and hostility from local neighbours works against their success.
- **Winning community support pays off in the long run** by raising a housing provider's profile and respectability with political partners and with potential funding partners.
- **Local communities provide valuable insights and ideas** that help identify potential issues, and/or solutions and opportunities that may strengthen the project.
- **Strong local opposition can be very costly.** The local community cannot legally veto a project, nor are they required to give consent before a project proceeds. BUT... communities in Edmonton have shut down projects by mobilizing a vigorous and well-reasoned opposition. In some cases, this involved intensive lawsuits and appeals to funders and political entities.

For local neighbours and the community:

- **Quality participation in the process (in line with the five heartbeats) builds credibility** with eventual decision makers. Ideas, questions and concerns are much more likely to get a fair hearing, supporting better results.
- **Participants gain an informed understanding** of what the project proposes. Gaining that understanding strengthens a person's ability to make a meaningful and/or impactful contribution.
- **Participants can shape their community positively** by identifying potential challenges and opportunities. They actively contribute to ensure the project is a quality design and integrated well in the local setting.
- **Participation builds community, grows local skills, and deepens relationships** with existing and new neighbours.

## How should we as participants play our role in the process?

### Community Leagues and other community leaders

- Play the role of host for community perspectives and feedback and then communicate all feedback (including questions, concerns and supportive comments) clearly to all stakeholders.
- Model openness and a willingness to engage constructively throughout the consultation process, especially when there are bumps in the road.
- Encourage community members to engage with the consultation process, whether they are supportive or opposed. Local community leadership can be instrumental in reaching residents.

### Faith community landholders and housing providers

- View local stakeholders not as *opponents*, but as *partners*—they bring an important perspective that can strengthen the project.
- Keep local stakeholders informed every step of the way, and let them be involved in problem solving.
- Practice patience and make the appropriate investment of time, money and energy in doing consultation well. This will pay off in a stronger and healthier relationship with the community for the long term. This is a benefit to everyone, including the new tenants.
- Do your homework! Show your dedication to the health and vitality of the development and the surrounding neighbourhood in the long term.

## From the TogetherWise Creation Story

The agreement below framed by ICA Canada served the design team very well as we worked to create the TogetherWise approach and resources. It even inspired the title! We began each design workshop with it, and refreshing it each time reinforced a sense of safety and welcome to all participants.

**GUIDELINES FOR PARTICIPANTS**

- Everyone has wisdom.
- We need everyone's wisdom for the wisest result.
- There are no wrong answers.
- The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.
- Everyone will hear others and be heard.

### Local neighbours

are encouraged to keep an open mind and attend the meetings, even if they are supportive or have few concerns. If you do have questions and concerns, please share them with the project proponent quickly, so that they can be addressed as soon as possible. Try to participate whenever you have the opportunity.

### Local businesses

should be clear about the information they want and how they think this development may affect their business. We encourage you to trust that other stakeholders and neighbours are acting in good faith on behalf of the community.

**Media** covering the development are encouraged to do their homework and to try to include the context and back story to the event they are reporting on. If community voices or the developer have some publicly available links and reports, the media should consider them as part of the story.





## Transparency

Transparency in all presentations and communication efforts. Providing enough detail to give people a strong understanding of the dynamics of the project.

### Do your homework!

Supporting a free and open exchange of information, questions, concerns and insights takes some work from everyone; but it is critically important. It helps people participate and is a powerful demonstration of your commitment to excellence.

The homework in between matters too!

Keep the work being done honest and open and readily available.

## First Steps

### 1. Define your goals and objectives

- Clarify what is possible on the land you have available and understand the challenges or hurdles you face.
- Have a clear idea what you would like to accomplish with this project and what your needs and motivations are. Try working it together in a story that you can tell as you move forward.
- Be honest with yourself: is your idea really a good fit for the community on that parcel of land?
- As you clarify your goals and objectives, begin creating a list to separate negotiable and non-negotiable items. What is open for community input and feedback? And what is core to the project? (But be ready to revisit this list to make sure you are still on the correct path.)

### 2. Start thinking about process

- Are there consultants who can help you chart a path? If you are going to enlist some formal help, ensure they honour the principles and the-ory of engagement of this resource (the five principles or heartbeats)
- Look at the good relationship agreement and planning guide (p.6-7) and consider whether you are willing and able to infuse each value in your process and practice.

### 3. Do your homework!

Consider the fit of your project by exploring neighbourhood demographics, culture, and access to local services (including grocery stores, schools, pharmacies, day-cares). Here are some suggestions:

- Go for a coffee (and a walk) with a long-time resident or community knowledge keeper to learn about how the community works, thinks and in-teracts. In your conversation, draw out and record community assets and liabilities. What does the community have going for them (assets)? What are they missing, and what hinders local vitality (liabilities)? Consider what the community is passionate about or worried about.
- Build relationships with people who would be good sponsors for your consultation process. Consider who has political clout or social capital in the community.
- Try going for a Jane's Walk ([janeswalk.org](http://janeswalk.org)) with a group of residents to better understand the area and issues of the site in question.
- Talk to social workers rooted in that area.
- Explore online resources.



*Don't rush to give answers in these initial engagements. Just collect and record community concerns and questions, and give yourself time to prepare a response.*

## Community Connections

**Designate one or more people who are effective communicators** to talk with community partners. Have this person meet with a few key stakeholders in the community (such as a community league, business or home-owners association) to:

- Tell the story of what you are considering doing.
- Gather initial questions that the local community is likely to have.
- Check the temperature in the community. Ask these stakeholders what level of worry or concern they think the community is likely to have. Higher concern means you may need to gear up for a stronger consultation process.
- Ask for their advice on process, including how best to spread the word and engage the community.



*There is no one right answer. Every consultation is a learning experience.*  
- Cam McDonald, Right at Home Housing Society

## Framing Agreements

***It's time to talk to each other about how we talk to each other!***

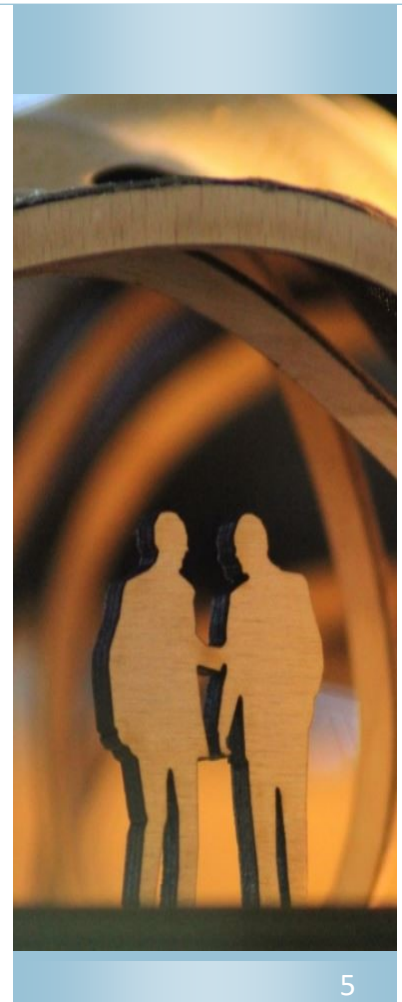
Good consultations regularly encounter hurdles. If the developer and the community make the plan together they will be able to steer a safe path through potential obstacles. Consider the following story from Edmonton's North Glenora community:

*"In our first meeting with the Westmount Presbyterian Church (WPC) and Right at Home we established that our objective was to have a best-in-class, inclusive community engagement process in order to deliver the best possible outcome for all parties. We agreed that it would take time, but that WPC would commit to listening to the community and incorporating their feedback into the design.*

*I believe that everything good that followed hinged on this first understanding... and that enormous credit is due to WPC and Right at Home for having the courage to engage in this process with the community. Having this shared understanding in place up front gave us a touchstone when discussions got heated or when shortcuts began to look appealing." - Andrew Gregory, community lead in the North Glenora consultation in 2015-16*

**Inspired by this example** TogetherWise developed two tools to help both parties commit to shared values and make a plan together.

(See pages six and seven)



# The TogetherWise Good Relationship Agreement



*Quality consultations occur when proponents and participants build and sustain trusting relationships.*

## Commitment

Stay dedicated to creating and seeing through a good process. Stick to the rules you agreed on (especially when the going gets tough.)

### Unlosing your cool

A good plan anticipates bumps in the road.

Tools like relationship agreements, and good neighbour agreements help the developer and the local community make that plan together.

Then when bumps show up both parties have something to hold on to.

**This agreement** helps lay the groundwork for a trusting relationship between developers and community partners by:

1. Providing opportunity to commit to shared values.
2. Helping clarify expectations.
3. Planning for healthy engagement in the community.

**The TogetherWise approach is rooted in five core values (heartbeats) that are critical for success.**

**Hospitality.** Stay open towards each other (including making intentional efforts to hear from diverse voices) and be respectful, despite differences.

**Sincerity and authenticity.** Be ready to both learn and teach with a genuine desire to build understanding and trust.

**Transparency.** Be honest in all presentations and communication. Give enough detail for people to truly understand the dynamics of the project.

**Commitment.** Stay dedicated to creating and seeing through a good process. Stick to the rules you agreed on (especially when the going gets tough).

**Consensus-building.** Work toward a shared understanding of the project from all angles, and toward a consensus on what will make for the strongest and best result (not necessarily 100% agreement). All sides should be willing to compromise and discover common values.

**In this agreement, we (as representatives of the developer and local community members) commit** to promoting these values to all participants and adopting practices that align with these values to the best of our ability for the duration of this consultation.

*This agreement and the accompanying plan is **open for revision and amendment** as both developers and participants deem appropriate.*

## Planning for a Quality Consultation

*The following questions serve to help both the developer and the local community make a plan together, putting principles into practice.*

### **Work together to find answers to the following questions:**

1. Let's begin by clarifying expectations. What is this process meant to achieve?
  - ⇒ What is up for discussion and what is not?
  - ⇒ What is the community hoping to see happen? What does that look like?
  - ⇒ Are there key questions the community want to ask up front?
  - ⇒ What kind of timeline makes sense for this engagement?
  
2. Who do we most need to reach in this engagement? (Identify key stakeholders)
  
3. How can we best talk to each other?
  - ⇒ What channels of communication work best to help people connect with each other and stay informed in this community?
  - ⇒ How should engagements be promoted or advertised?
  - ⇒ Where should reports and updates be made publicly available?
  - ⇒ Where and how should questions and feedback be submitted?
  
4. What kind of events and logistics do we think will work best to make it easy for people to engage?
  - ⇒ What local venues are accessible and comfortable gathering places for the community?
  - ⇒ Are there cultural elements we recommend incorporating? (Music, food, styles of conversation, languages)
  
5. What process will we use to handle conflicts?
6. How are we going to recognize success? What will it look and feel like?

**Now write up this plan** using simple, clear language and make it publicly available alongside the Good Relationship Agreement.

**Appoint three people to serve as keepers of this agreement and the connected plan.** They will keep it publicly accessible at every event and take the lead on making amendments if necessary. *Recommended: two community members and one developer representative.*

*“Let’s also give people space to make mistakes and be forgiven.”  
- Fraser Porter, Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues*



## Hospitality

Stay open towards each other (including making intentional efforts to hear from diverse voices) and be respectful, despite differences.

**Show people that their time, energy, ideas and perspectives matter.**

Show them by providing a warm and accessible space with food and childcare.

Show them by taking time for conversations at their front door, in receiving ideas and feedback in person and online, and by finding a way to hear the quieter folk who don't say as much.

Extend your hand, with warmth and respect, and trust that the other will extend theirs in the same spirit.

## Practice Hospitality

**Choose a natural, local venue** that people feel comfortable gathering in like a community hall, a local school, or faith community. If possible, it should be close to the site you wish to develop. This space should:

- Be fully accessible to people with mobility issues and auditory challenges.
- Have ample (free) parking available.
- Be large enough to comfortably accommodate your audience.
- Have good sound and lighting to facilitate strong and clear presentations and communication with the audience.
- You can also consider alternative venues like a mobile information booth, perhaps accompanied by a food truck or ice cream vendor.

### Make the space welcoming with:

- Good signage.
- Food and refreshments.
- Greeters and an information table. Have trained greeters who make people feel heard and their presence immediately appreciated.
- Childcare (to enable young families to participate).
- Enough seating for your anticipated audience, with flexibility to add more if necessary.
- Play some music to make the space warmer and more relaxing.
- Have a clear agenda and accessible information.
- Bring nametags for all event hosts and speakers (and possibly participants as well).



### Accommodate your audience as best you can by:

- Scheduling the event at a time when most will be able to attend. Offering multiple dates and times may be appropriate.
- Considering the needs and experiences of local cultural groups. For example, make information available in other languages if possible or try different ways of hearing or engaging with people such as talking circles or table conversations.
- Having community supporters and project advocates (perhaps those that speak the language, even if it's the language of the street) to help "navigate" the project.

*Demonstrating openness and a will to patiently answer people's questions makes room for trust, and for the community to also give of themselves to the health of the project and their new neighbours.*



## Nuts and bolts of good engagements

*Advice for the developer*

### Key Points to Clarify Before an Event

1. Work through all the questions you anticipate the community asking (based on your initial conversations with stakeholders). Try to frame clear and honest answers to each question.

**A piece of advice:** Consult whoever can answer the question with authority *before* the consultation. For example, if the community is concerned about school pressures, have the school administrator write a letter stating the school is able to handle the pressure. Having this letter in hand will resolve the question immediately and show the community you have done your homework. It demonstrates your commitment and builds trust.

2. Prepare a final draft of the good relationship agreement and the plan you have created with community partners and have ready for public viewing.

3. Have the story of “what you hope to accomplish and why” polished and ready to go.

4. Prepare printed materials with the basic details and answers to key questions. Provide enough detail to give people a strong understanding of the project.



### Ingredients for a Good Agenda

A straightforward agenda helps build trust and soothes anxiety. Be sure to give people a clear and simple overview of the agenda at the start of the meeting and ensure you finish on time.

#### Be sure to cover these points in your agenda:

1. Recognize, in an authentic way, treaty relationships with indigenous communities that share their home with us.
2. Introduce yourselves—explain who you are and what drives you to do what you do. This helps establish trust and openness.
3. Explain what you hope to accomplish in this meeting. (I.e. This meeting is to hear your questions or take a look at initial ideas...)
4. Provide a clear presentation of the project. Use clear and accessible language. Don't drown people in information, but don't oversimplify things either.
5. Distribute an information sheet at tables before the meeting to proactively answer some questions. Use experts and speakers to educate the group on particular concerns.
6. Guard time for questions. These can be handled in a large group setting (town hall), but be sure to also make time for smaller settings as well for those uncomfortable speaking in a large gathering.
7. What people can expect next and how to stay connected with the process moving forward.

## Promotion

**Advertise consultation events with flyer drops, road signs, newspaper articles and local social media groups.**

Share your message through local stakeholders and their networks as much as you can. Put posters and flyers in local coffee shops, schools, faith communities and the library.

**Design your informative flyer to be simple and clear and easy to share.**

Do not do things last minute! Send them out at least two to three weeks in advance in case people are going on vacation.

Try to be very thorough with your flyer drop to reach local apartments. Have messaging in multiple languages if appropriate.

Make a strong effort to invite all stakeholders (and do not exclude people who are impacted).

Knock on doors to explain the project and deliver flyers to connect with close neighbours one-on-one. This will also make it easier to get a sense of who will most feel the impacts of your project.

Seek out media coverage by contacting specific journalists who have a demonstrated interest locally or municipally. Seek out a radio interview to reach the local area.

## Practical Tips for an Informative and Accessible Consultation Event

### Be prepared to address people's questions.

- Have people submit questions ahead of time so you can prepare answers in advance.
- Choose good communicators who feel comfortable talking and can clearly express ideas.
- Prepare and distribute handouts with community questions and answers.

### Communicate in more than one way.

*Do not rely only on a verbal presentation in town hall with a single speaker because...*

- Different people often hear things differently, and not everyone is an auditory learner.
- The people who are confident about speaking in public or who have powerful voices can dominate the airspace at the expense of others
- Not everyone is comfortable expressing themselves in a large public conversation.

### Save time and space for smaller conversations around tables or information boards

- Be sure to have people in the room who are able to speak to their experience of success (as tenants, as neighbours, or as participants in other consultations).
- Encourage people to connect personally about any questions or concerns they have.
- Give enough time to take questions if you use a town hall format, and don't rush. Setting time limits on open-air group questions may be helpful to guard time for smaller private conversations. (Again, not everyone is comfortable to speak in a large public setting, and you want to ensure everyone has an opportunity to share their thoughts and questions.)

### Be creative in your presentation

- Use visual information to reinforce the message and help people absorb what you have to share.
- Use pictures and facts and statistics, alongside stories.
- Use media creatively.

### Find more resources at: [togetherwiseconsulting.ca](http://togetherwiseconsulting.ca)

- The TogetherWise Roadmap
- Consultation FAQs
- Good examples to learn from
- Iris Court's Good Neighbour Agreement
- How to understand and respond to Nimbyism in the local community.
- How TogetherWise was created.



## Following Through

### Between sessions...

- Do the research! Analyze the concerns. Evaluate the values underlying the comments and questions. Frame clear and specific answers to the best of your ability.
- Create an event summary or *What we heard* report and make it publicly available. Be sure to include the key questions and insights (positive and negative) the community shared, as well as updates on the process.
- Have transparent announcements about which process is currently underway (perhaps an update on a website).
- Keep momentum! Don't set too much or too little time between sessions and follow up consistently with feedback.
- Be supportive and encouraging of community efforts to engage.
- Reflect periodically with both developer and community voices on the process; how is it working and what are we learning?
- Have a communications plan that includes people who have not attended to encourage their participation.
- Create a clear picture of how you organized and used input from previous sessions. This shows community members how and where what they shared has influenced the journey together. If people submitted an idea, share (or at least be prepared to share) why you did or did not use it.
- Have a person who can be the consistent face for the project—someone who is available and can answer questions, even over a cup of coffee.

### A consultation may go through several cycles of the following process:

1. Display
2. Collect questions
3. Give answers
4. Refine or modify the display
5. Collect new questions
6. Prepare new answers

*Continue until the questions and concerns are "well-mined."*

## Keeping Trust Long Term

### (Good Neighbour Agreements!)

Iris Court has a "Good Neighbour Agreement" which includes information about tenants, services, house rules, and how the organization planned to respond to community complaints. (*You can check out Iris Court's agreement on our website!*)

In developing your own Good Neighbour Agreement, ask the community what they are looking for. Bring your own ideas forward. Then ask the community for feedback on the agreement and what you can do to strengthen it.



### Consensus-Building

Work toward a shared understanding of the project from all angles, and toward a consensus on what will make for the strongest and best result (not necessarily 100% agreement).

All sides should be willing to compromise and discover common values.

### Toe-stepping to Two-stepping!

"Good consultation is community building. As we work through a process the mountains of differences get whittled down to a place of equilibrium and we feel like we have accomplished something together.

We now share something that we never would have thought we shared."



### About TogetherWise

**TogetherWise** is a program of Edmonton's Capital Region Interfaith Housing Initiative (CRIHI)

*Religious and spiritual communities working together to address homelessness in Edmonton's Capital Region.*

[www.interfaithhousing.ca](http://www.interfaithhousing.ca)

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 780.554.2703



### From CRIHI's Interfaith Statement (2011)

*"Our religious and spiritual communities share important values: respect for human dignity, solidarity with those who are poor and vulnerable, and an affirmation of the importance of inclusive and welcoming communities where individuals and families can thrive."*

## How the TogetherWise Program Works

The TogetherWise program provides the following key resources to lay the foundation for both a healthy relationship and a quality consultation:

**The TogetherWise Good Relationship Agreement** to help the developer and the community clarify expectations and plan together for good process. (pages six and seven)

### Facilitated conversations at three stages of the consultation process:

1. We help frame the initial TogetherWise Good Relationship Agreement and plan.
2. We hold a mid-point check-in to hear how things are going.
3. We host a debrief conversation at the end of the process to bring closure and gather learnings to help other consultations.

### The website [togetherwiseconsulting.ca](http://togetherwiseconsulting.ca) featuring:

- Five heartbeats of good consultation
- A roadmap with advice for the journey
- Consultation FAQs

**This TogetherWise Resource Guide** with key points and resources to aid the process.

*Please note:* the TogetherWise program does not facilitate events or directly support consultation efforts.

## Who supports this program?

**TogetherWise** was developed out of a recognition that a quality consultation with the local community is critical both to the strength of the local project and to the welcoming of new neighbours; many of whom are hungry for warmth and connection in a new home.

**This program is made freely available** to both community and to housing providers with the support of the following partners who contribute in different forms to this project and program:



**Diocese of Edmonton**  
 Anglican Church of Canada

