



Designing for Wellbeing

Community-centered tools for transforming shelter and other community spaces to promote mental health and healing

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Serving New Yorkers with Care and Compassion

Background

Beginning in 2019, the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and the New York City Human Resources Administration, supported through a Collaborative Innovation award by the New York City Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity, launched Environments Promoting Wellness and Resilience (EmPWR) to explore the role of the shelter's physical (or built) environment in supporting the healing and wellbeing of domestic violence (DV) survivors and their families.

EmPWR was inspired by initiatives such as Building Dignity, an initiative of the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, which encourages thoughtful DV shelter design that dignifies survivors by meeting their self-determination, security, and connection needs. Partnering with a team of architects, EmPWR engaged residents, staff, and leadership of nine New York City DV shelters as collaborators in making design changes in one communal space at each participating shelter.

EmPWR aimed to:

- Promote healing, wellbeing, and resilience of residents and their children
- Engage residents and shelter staff in a design planning process that centers their lived experience and expertise
- Support shelter staff capacity to foster a trauma- and resilience-informed shelter environment
- Build knowledge about strategies to promote mental health through changes in the physical space^{1, 2, 3, 4}

Purpose of the Guide

This guide shares information on how to change communal spaces in social service settings (e.g., drop-in centers, crisis centers, and family justice center models) to support the mental health and wellbeing of those who use them. This guide references the dynamics of a DV shelter (e.g., the space provides temporary shelter for residents); however, the guidance could be adapted for use in other social service settings.

This guide has been designed for any member of the DV shelter community, including individuals living in, working at, and leading a DV shelter and other community members who may be engaged in support design changes (e.g., architects, contractors). All community members can use this guide as a catalyst for creating change within the shelter.

This guide recognizes that each DV shelter has unique needs and resources. It shares strategies and activities that can be adapted to ensure that staff, resident, and stakeholder perspectives are included throughout the project. While this guide presents five project phases inspired by the sequence of planning and activities implemented during the EmpWR project, readers should review the document in its entirety to determine which activities are most appropriate for their setting.

Phases of Implementation



How to Use the Guide

The following icons appear throughout the guide to highlight additional resources and practice-based examples from the EmPWR project:



Additional resources to consult



Implementation strategies in action: practice-based examples from the EmPWR project



Examples of ways to center wellbeing throughout the project



Conversation starters to support discussion with residents, staff, and leadership (also provided in Appendix B and C)

Clarifying Terms

As described in the 2023-2025 Health Resources and Services Administration Strategy to Address Intimate Partner Violence,⁵ DV intersects with multiple forms of and experiences of violence within current and former romantic relationships, families, households, and communities, including (but not limited to):

- Intimate partner violence (IPV) includes physically and emotionally abusive behaviors by a current or former intimate partner, dating partner, or spouse (including physical or sexual violence, sexual coercion, stalking, controlling behaviors, and psychological aggression).^{6, 7}
- Interpersonal violence, which can include “the intentional use of physical force or power against other persons, and encompasses child abuse, community violence (e.g., among individuals who are not related, but may know each other), family violence (e.g., violence within or between family members), and DV and IPV (e.g., violence between current or former partners).”^{8, 9}
- Sexual violence, or sexual assault, is any nonconsensual sexual act proscribed by federal, tribal, or state law, including when an individual cannot consent (e.g., sexual harassment, rape, sexual exploitation, and unwanted sexual contact).^{10, 11}
- Gender-based violence (GBV) is defined as harmful acts directed at an individual based on their gender.¹²

- Human trafficking (HT) describes an individual performing labor or engaging in commercial sex by force, fraud, or coercion.¹³

Residents of DV shelters may use different terms to define their lived experience (e.g., self-identification as survivors, victims, people with disabilities, people who are deaf). When working with residents, take language cues from everyone to ensure that you use the language of their choice. The table below presents the terms that were used in this guide.

Term	Definition
Built Environment	The constructed area where people go about their daily routines, including living, working, and enjoying leisure activities
Community	Individuals living in, working at, and leading a DV shelter
Community Engagement Approach	A problem-solving strategy that centers the voices of those most closely impacted by the "problem" and, therefore, closest to the solution
Design Changes	A spectrum of modifications to the shelter environment, from small changes that build upon existing strengths (e.g., changing paint colors or furniture) to complete transformation of a space (e.g., more extensive construction projects to adjust lighting, layout, and structures)
Design Team	Architects, interior designers, landscape designers, muralists, a community-based arts organization, or creative members of DV shelter staff who took the lead on the design elements of the project
Human-Centered Design	The process of tailoring creations to the end-user's needs through empathy ^{15,16}
Project	The entire initiative, from determining site readiness to evaluating and sustaining the impact of the design changes
Project Lead	The individual who manages the project, budget, timeline, and contractual relationships with vendors to ensure that the project is implemented as planned
Project Vision	A shared idea of the end goal of the project
Residents	Individuals who live in DV shelters and who utilize the private and communal spaces there
Sustainability	The extent to which staff and residents can maintain the redesigned space
Trauma-Informed Approaches	Considerations of the myriad ways in which individual and collective trauma (including intergenerational and historical trauma) can manifest and how structural and systemic inequities can have compounding effects and shape how groups that are historically marginalized seek out and interact with care and service systems ¹⁸

Introduction

Domestic violence shelters provide vital services to help individuals and families reclaim their sense of safety and security. The built environment, or physical environment of a shelter, can potentially affect resident and child social-emotional wellbeing; by nature of the services they provide, shelters have clearly defined rules and processes for managing their facilities and spaces. Collaboratively enhancing these spaces can promote healing and support the social-emotional needs of shelter residents and their children by encouraging collective planning and autonomous decision-making.^{14,15}

EmPWR was planned and implemented around three interconnected underlying sets of assumptions: evidence on the role of the built environment on the mental health of individuals and communities; the importance of a trauma-informed approach that informs all activities, programs and services for survivors of DV; and the ability of community engagement practices to center the voices of survivors and share power in planning and decision-making. These principles and assumptions informed the design changes made by New York City shelters participating in EmPWR, and they underlie the guidance shared here.

Role of the built environment for health promotion. Successful initiatives to enhance, transform, improve, and redesign DV shelter spaces to apply human-centered design (or design with input from and empathy for users of the spaces) and use trauma-informed, community-based engagement approaches.^{16,17,18}

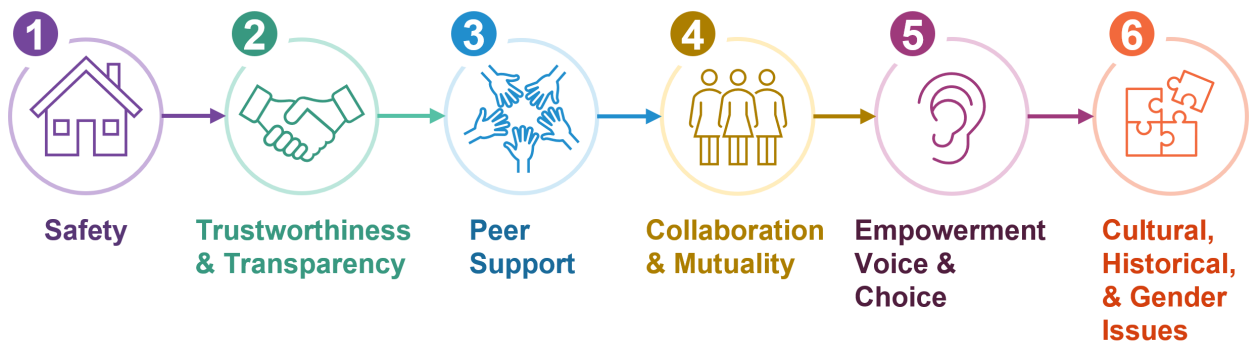


© 2023. Photo by Gina LeVay.
Staff enjoy the newly redesigned kitchen space.

Trauma-informed approaches acknowledge the pervasive impacts of trauma and opportunities for recovery, recognizing trauma signs and symptoms among not only residents and families but also staff and teams, preventing re-traumatization, and infusing trauma-informed principles across shelter practices and approaches to care.¹⁹ Trauma-informed approaches consider the myriad ways in which individual and collective trauma (including intergenerational and historical trauma) can manifest and how structural and systemic inequities can have compounding effects and shape how groups that are historically marginalized seek out and interact with care and service systems.²⁰

An initiative to create healing spaces in a shelter can utilize methods that mirror a shelter's trauma-informed approach to care: methods grounded in safety, trust, peer support, collaboration, empowerment, and culture (as shown below).

Key Principles of Trauma Informed Care²¹



For example, the design element for the shelter environment, such as new L-shaped bench seating for parents in the backyard playground, might have the mental health objective of encouraging community connection to diminish the sense of isolation that so many DV survivors experience. A trauma-informed approach centers peer support as one of its six key principles: Shared seating might create opportunities for survivors to build relationships, connect through shared lived experiences, and offer mutual support.

Community engagement approaches uplift community members (in this case, residents and staff) as advisors and collaborators in each activity.²² Community engagement approaches (such as those highlighted in Appendix A) will not only ground solutions in the wisdom of the people most closely impacted, but the process itself may achieve many of the objectives of the design changes (e.g., share power, diminish isolation, offer choice, increase access, promote healing, etc.). The community engagement process itself invites survivors to come together in conversation, speak about their experiences in the shelter, and listen to and support their peers' visions.

Examples of Engagement Approaches

When determining readiness, define project goals with community members (residents, staff, and leadership).

Example: Conduct two focus groups, one with residents and one with staff, to assess readiness to participate in the project, discuss initial concerns, and gather ideas for potential improvements to the physical space.

When assessing the site, facilitate activities to learn how residents use the space and how its existing design supports or impedes resident healing.

Example: Conduct site assessment surveys to gather insight into resident and staff preferences and renovation needs. Pay attention to demographics (e.g., age ranges, family compositions, length of stay) and current interactions (e.g., engagement schedules).

When planning the design, invite residents and staff to review and provide input on design ideas and make connections between proposed design elements and residents' mental health.

Example: Host workshops with residents and staff to present design options informed by input gathered during the initial site assessment and design planning activities. Gather feedback on proposed design changes.

When installing design changes, maintain open communication with residents and staff to share information about who will be in the shelter to conduct work at various times, potential delays in installation, and places to hold gatherings or meetings during the installation process.

Example: Post information in a public area and provide updates during currently scheduled staff and resident meetings.

When sustaining any changes or enhancements (e.g., repairing any damages made to new furniture), invite community members to share their reflections on the process and the new space.

Example: Gather resident reflections through interactive posters hung in the completed space. Hold community engagement opportunities for residents and staff to review assessment tools and provide real-time feedback.



Phase 1:
Determining
Readiness



Phase 1: Determining Readiness

Engaging with residents and staff to redesign a shared space can be an exciting endeavor and a catalyst for changing physical spaces within the shelter. However, completing the project requires time, resources, and bandwidth from participants (e.g., leadership, staff, and residents).

This section of the guide will prepare you to:

1. Assess organizational readiness, capacity, and commitment.
2. Assess readiness to engage community members.
3. Identify and engage architects and design consultants.



Determining readiness is a team endeavor. Your planning team should involve key decision-makers within your shelter (e.g., the shelter director, a program director, and a board member). There is no perfect combination of people to start with.

Most importantly, they must be committed to and able to make time for the effort.

For example, representatives from three New York City agencies collaborated with shelter leadership to determine the shelter's readiness for participation in EmPWR. They considered numerous readiness criteria, including staffing to support resident engagement, the facility's physical condition, and the availability of appropriate communal space(s) to re-design, while considering the impact of temporarily taking those spaces "off-line" during installation.



before



after

© 2023 Photo by Gina LeVay.

Photographs illustrating conditions before and after the design changes at a participating shelter: Moveable, weather-proof seating encourages socialization and connection in the shelter's backyard, where a new mural, created with resident input, depicts themes of strength and renewal.

Assess Organizational Readiness, Capacity, and Commitment

There are important practicalities to consider when assessing readiness. Consider these questions to generate conversations on assessing readiness.



Project timing

- What is the best time to initiate the project?
- Does the shelter have any upcoming events, seasonal fluctuations in the resident population, or other time-sensitive activities that could conflict with the project schedule?
- How will the shelter accommodate potential delays and adjust the original timeline if there are delays in any phase of the project?



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Staff requested storage to organize and maintain backyard materials.

Staff and Leadership Availability

- Can current staff levels support the project without affecting daily operations?
- Who will be the project lead? Does this person have sufficient time available to serve in this role?
- Is there a person in a leadership role who can advocate for this project?
- Who can conduct outreach and share information about the project with current and new residents?
- Who is the point person for installation-specific questions?
- Is there someone available to develop contingency plans to support any potential delays or unintended adverse events that may occur due to delays or things not going as planned?



Designate one or more individuals (internal staff or an external stakeholder) as the project lead.

EmPWR found that the project lead—a person with dedicated staff time to oversee all aspects of the project—is key for facilitating activities, managing relationships, monitoring progress, staying organized, and ensuring all objectives are met. This team member can also help maintain continuity in the event of staff and leadership turnover.

Existing DV Shelter Facility

- Are there policies regarding who can come on-site (e.g., external vendors and contractors)?
- Are there any communal spaces that cannot be closed for a remodel (e.g., a space essential for daily activities)?
- What rules currently govern how and when residents can use certain communal spaces?

Budget

- What funds are available for the project? How long will those funds be available?
- What are the fiscal management considerations? For example, does a grantor or agency require certain funds to be spent on the project during the calendar/fiscal year? How will that impact the project schedule?
- What systems are in place for preparing contracts with vendors and ensuring prompt payment?

Note that assessing your budget is not a one-time event. Revisit the budget throughout each Phase to ensure sufficient resources are available to execute your project plan.



Payment delays can impact timelines. Shelters participating in EmPWR did not pay contractors directly; rather, City agency partners managed all contracts and payments to vendors.

Delays in these processes posed challenges for general contractors, who often balance multiple jobs simultaneously, contributing to scheduling challenges.

Be aware that advanced payment for materials and mobilization is common for many contractors, and develop a realistic schedule for payment and deliverables to avoid delays.

Assess Readiness to Facilitate Community Engagement

This guide recommends engaging community members throughout the process of transforming spaces in the DV shelter to establish meaningful collaboration between the design team and residents, staff, and leadership. Draw upon the list provided in Appendix A to identify the appropriate community engagement strategy for our setting and community. Select activities that best align with your organizational culture and values (e.g., an organizational willingness to share power, listen to diverse voices, and engage in collaborative decision-making) and shelter-specific rules and policies (e.g., how and when residents and staff can use certain spaces and organizational willingness to consider resident feedback on rules).

Before implementing community engagement approaches, consider the following:



Roles and Responsibilities:

- Who on your team will lead the engagement activity, document input/feedback, and report back?
- Are there any training and capacity building needs (e.g., whether staff, residents, architects, and designers need training or capacity building to gather and use community input effectively)?



Webinars can support shelter staff knowledge and skill development.

The EmPWR model held a webinar series for shelter staff on the intersection of trauma and the built environment of DV shelters to boost capacity across all nine participating shelters.

Resident Participation:

- Will residents be compensated for their time?
- Are residents encouraged to provide feedback about how these rules impact them?
- How does the organization respond to resident feedback about the impact of these rules?
- How will you engage all staff in the project in some way, beyond the team members who can typically be counted on to show up for all events and requests?
- Is there enough interest in the project to believe that most residents will get involved?
- How will you encourage participation by residents who don't typically participate in shelter activities?
- How might you offer residents choices about how they can contribute? E.g., group vs. individual activities, or more active methods for residents to provide input vs. more passive methods.
 - Have you asked residents if they have skills or experiences that they would like to use to contribute to this project?
 - Do residents have any concerns about making design changes?



Resident engagement was crucial for EmPWR success.

Providing gift cards, food, and activities for kids to show appreciation helped encourage ongoing participation throughout all project phases.

Communication:

- How will you support clear communication and engagement throughout the project, including communicating with residents and staff who are not present for all activities or phases?
- Are there any translation needs to ensure accessibility?

Documentation:

- How will you document feedback? For example, does the activity require notetaking, taking photos, saving posters, or writing summary documents?
- Will you create templates for documenting various activities?
- Will you document summary ideas shared in workshops or transcripts? Will you include direct quotes?
- Will you take photographs of existing conditions and change over time?
- Will participants' names be recorded, or will their input be anonymous? How will you summarize responses to surveys?
- Where will documentation be saved, and who can access it?



Keeping documentation of community input is a helpful tool to reference when evidence is needed for reconciling disagreements between resident and staff input.

For example, if leadership and resident opinions are divergent, and a majority of residents prefer transforming a certain space, you can show the “power” around the majority preference and help your team come to a consensus.

Decision-Making

- How will decisions get made?
- Does your organization have conflict resolution strategies that can be used to ensure productive discussions where all participants feel heard?
- How will decisions be reported back to participants?



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Photographs illustrating conditions before and after design changes in the basement lounge of a participating shelter. Participants wanted a brighter space that made residents and their children feel welcome at all times of day, creating comfortable areas for them to play, rest, do laundry, use computers or attend shelter groups and activities.

Determining Success

- How will you measure the success of the community engagement process?
- How will you measure the success of the changes made to the physical environment?
- How will the team assess the project's impact for ongoing improvement and adaptation?
- How will you regularly gather feedback from shelter stakeholders participating in the project?
- How will you demonstrate to project participants that their feedback is valued?



The report-back is an essential element for fostering trust and transparency, which are pillars of any trauma-informed approach.

During the design phase, community engagement should aim to center the voices of those most closely impacted by the "problem" and, therefore, closest to the solution.

Residents should be able to recognize their input in the proposed design solutions. The project team should deliberate about presenting that input to the community, drawing connections between what was learned and what is proposed.

Establish a Partnership with a Design Team

The composition of your design team will depend on the scope of the project. It might include architects, interior designers, landscape designers, muralists, a community-based arts organization, or even just creative members of staff taking the lead on the design elements of the project. The design team will facilitate site assessments, lead the design planning activities using a community engagement approach, develop design plans tailored to the input gathered at each shelter, and oversee installation by a general contractor and other vendors.

Your design team partners should have the following:

- Experience designing for residential spaces.
- Experience collaborating with community members on design projects.
- Ability to translate technical design concepts and planning tools for a general audience.
- Knowledge about universal design and accessibility.
- Proficiency in the primary language(s) used by community members, and the culture of the community.



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A brightly colored ceiling grid was installed to obscure pipes and wiring overhead while accommodating new, brighter lighting, and creating a safer, more secure place from which staff can hang decorations for parties and holidays.

When selecting these partners, consider the following:



Roles and Responsibilities:

- Which phases of the project will the design team be expected to participate in?
- What role will the design team have in creating, facilitating, documenting, and interpreting input gathered from the participatory design planning tools and activities?
- Will the design team be responsible for providing materials for workshops and other activities, or will the shelter provide them?
 - Will the design team be responsible for providing materials for workshops and other activities, or will the shelter provide them?
 - How should they present the design options for the shelter community to consider?
- What role will the design team have in evaluating bids from contractors and vendors needed for installation?
- What are the design team's responsibilities once installation is underway?
 - How frequently should they conduct site visits to monitor the construction?
 - How should the design team document the progress they observe?
 - How should they communicate with shelter stakeholders about delays, challenges, or decisions to be made while installation is underway?
 - What information will the design team be expected to share with the shelter once installation is complete? E.g., guidance on using, maintaining, cleaning, or replacing elements of the newly renovated space.

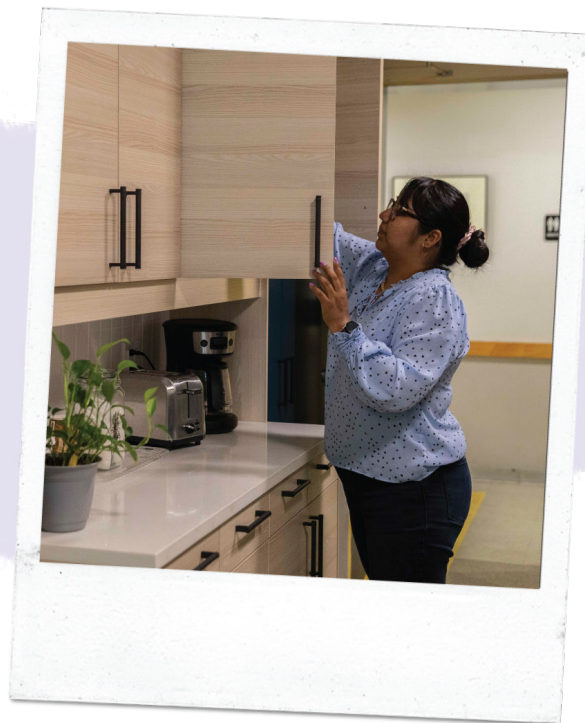
Identifying Design Team Members:

- Does the design team have experience working in community-based settings, and designing spaces for families and children?
- Does the design team have experience designing spaces incorporating trauma-informed, human-centered (e.g., approaches that center on the end-user's needs), and inclusive (e.g., accessible by all residents and staff) lenses?
- Are past clients willing to act as references on the quality of their work, reliability, professionalism, responsiveness, and communication?

Engagement Guidance:

- Are there any shelter rules the design team must adhere to when visiting the shelter, and when interacting with residents? For example, does the design team know the expectations around maintaining confidentiality, privacy, safety, and respect for residents?
- How should they present the design options for the shelter community to consider?

Visit Appendix D: Shelter Engagement Considerations for an example of the worksheet EmPWR used to identify considerations at the start of the project.



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Shelter staff using redesigned storage space.

Onboard the Design Team

Establish contracts that outline project roles, timelines, and payment schedules. Be sure to detail: expectations for the design team during site assessment and design planning activities (for example, will the design team facilitate these activities, or will they be provided with documentation that summarizes community input?); the role of the design team in advising on the search/selection of contractors and vendors to be hired; and their role in construction administration once the installation is underway.

Create engagement guidelines that include expectations for communication, requirements for preserving confidentiality and safety, and status updates throughout the project. Consider creating an onboarding workshop with the design team to train them on the shelter environment, safety considerations, language to use and avoid, and cultural norms within your shelter. Training on trauma-informed and community engagement approaches (using tools like the [Trauma Informed Design Quick Reference Guide](#)) can provide a helpful orientation. Allow them a safe space to ask questions and prepare to work with residents.

The design team may also have their own lived experiences of DV. Be prepared to provide all partners with resources if they experience an emotional reaction to engaging in this work.



Rather than providing strong recommendations about aesthetic choices, architects and design consultants must be flexible, open-minded, and active listeners responsive to staff and residents' feedback.

Visit the American Institute of Architects website (<https://www.aia.org/>) for more on architects and a list of local professionals.

Here, you can also:

- [Post a job](#)
- [Identify and contact your local chapter of architects](#)



Phase 2:
Site
Assessment



Phase 2: Site Assessment

Conduct a site assessment to understand the existing conditions of communal spaces within the shelter and learn about staff and residents' needs, preferences, and wishes regarding the shelter environment. Learnings from this phase can prepare shelter-specific activities and design planning tools to be used during the Design Planning phases of the project, and alert the project coordinators specific building conditions, rules, or other challenges that might impact how a selected space can be used or modified, or how it might affect shelter operations to limit access to the space while installation is underway.

This section of the guide will prepare you to:

1. Establish a project vision.
2. Prepare for site assessment.
3. Identify the most appropriate space(s) for design changes.
4. Assess the current conditions of the space(s).



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Before and after photos showcasing a redesigned community space within a shelter.

Establish Project Vision

Before the Site Assessment, acknowledge the inherent differences in how residents and staff relate to the shelter. The shelter may be a staff member’s workplace, but it is where residents live. These differences may cause tension or disagreements in the assessment process. A shared vision can help to keep all parties aligned to a shared end goal.

Continually revisit the vision throughout each phase to ensure that activities and decisions align with the vision.



When considering enhancements or changes to the physical spaces in a shelter, it can be tempting to focus on spaces that need repairs or renovations.

Creating a project vision for your assessment and design can help keep wellbeing and mental health promotion at the center of the project.

Prepare for Site Assessment

Drawing upon the “Strategies for Gathering Community Feedback” in Appendix A and Readiness to Facilitate Community Engagement checklist in Phase 1, work in partnership with the design team to:

- Decide how you would like to gather (and document) feedback from staff and residents.
- Reflect on what you learned in the assessment: Look for patterns, trends, and areas of particular concern or importance.
- Communicate the results. Share the results with staff, residents, and the wider shelter community (e.g., funders and board members). This helps build support and ensures transparency in the process. Document the input from stakeholders, questions that need to be answered, and potential next steps.



Questions to ask at this step:

- Describe the condition of the overall facility. For example,
 - How old is the building?
 - Who owns the building?

- In addition to program leadership, who must be consulted to approve design plans?
- Are architectural plans/floor plans of the building available for review by the Design Consultant (digital or paper files)?
 - Indicate where/from whom these plans can be accessed, including name and contact information.
- Are there any planned or needed building repairs the design team should be aware of?
- Who is responsible for maintaining the building, including cleaning, caring for plants, making repairs, setting up rooms for activities, etc.?



Before you make a final decision, invite the design team to visit for a day to see how the residents use the space.

For instance, one site observed that everyone preferred to pull the dining table to the TV area or closer to the windows, pushing aside the small coffee tables and round chairs. Most families preferred using the dining table while watching TV, and not many people opted for the round chair or the small coffee tables.

The design team explored orienting the TV differently and restructuring the area in front of it to enhance its usage. Inviting the design team to see how the space was used earlier could have mitigated the need for extra time post-installation.



Leadership and staff also played an important role (and cast the deciding vote) when design teams considered making changes that conflicted with site rules/policies regarding space usage and safety.

Residents at one site requested that a door be added to a shared space. Staff were concerned that adding a door would be a safety hazard. Rather than ignoring the request, shelter staff and leadership needed to pause to discuss the feasibility of the request and why it would not be possible.

Identify the Most Appropriate Space(s) for Design Changes and Assess Their Conditions

- Use the input gathered from community members to identify the most appropriate communal space(s) to transform.
- The design team may struggle to navigate conflicting opinions among residents and staff. The shelter point of contact will need to support the design team in reconciling conflict through consensus building using tools discussed in “Strategies for Gathering Community Feedback.”

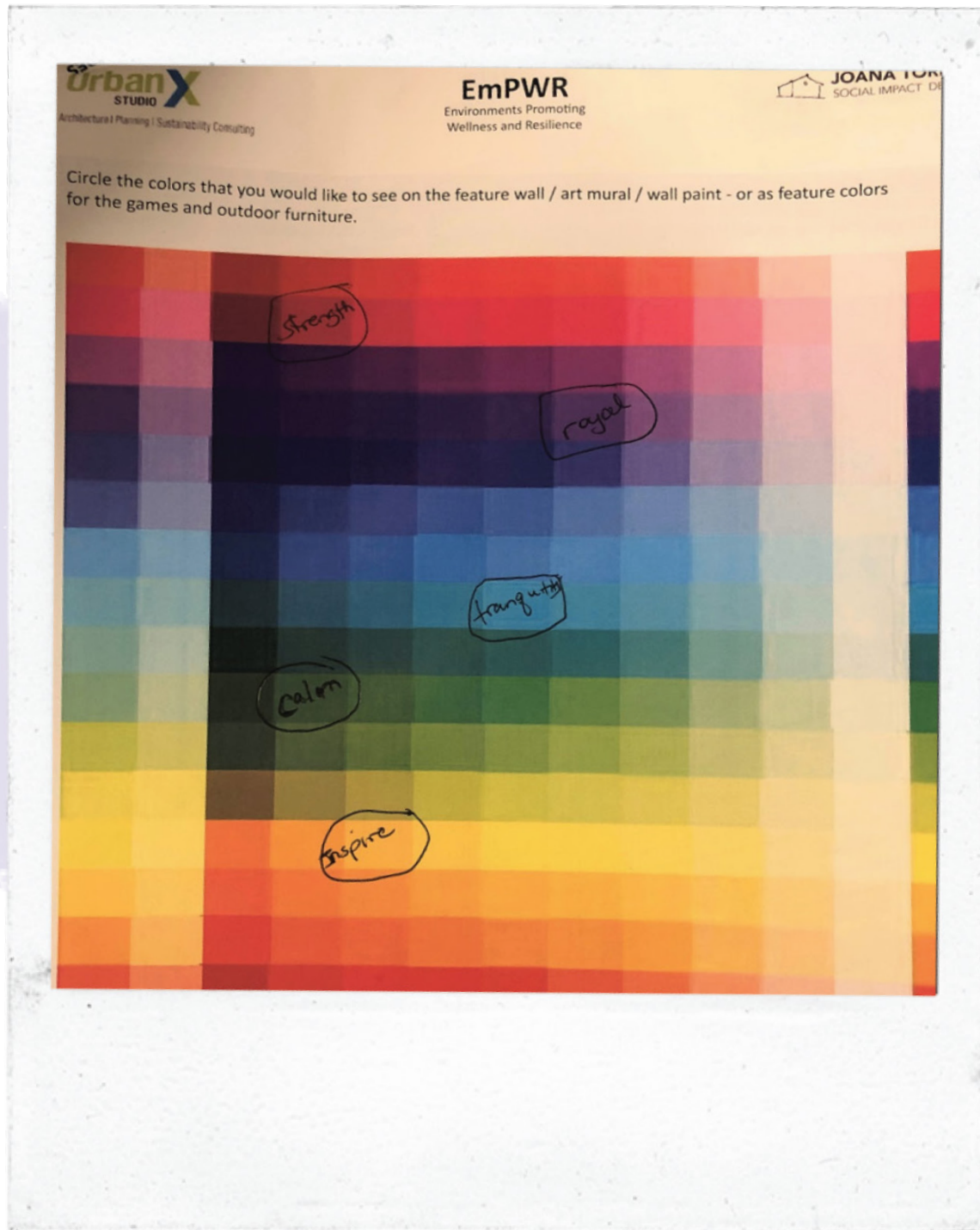


Assess the challenges and opportunities associated with each space. When assessing challenges and opportunities, consider the following:

- Which spaces in the shelter make you feel a sense of ease and wellbeing? What about spaces that make you feel uncomfortable? What are the differences?
- Are there any communal spaces that are not easy to access for everyone? (e.g., a space in a basement that can only be accessed by stairs)?
- Which communal areas of the shelter do you feel need the most improvement and why?
- How does the current shelter design affect your daily routine and interactions with others?
- Identify the communal spaces in the facility that are being considered for enhancement:
 - Name of room/area
 - How is this space currently used (who uses it, when is it used, what types of activities and/or programming require it)?
 - How would residents and staff like to use the space? What activities would they like to do that they cannot do now?
 - What design elements of the existing communal space(s) do you like and want to stay the same?
 - Are there outdoor views or privacy considerations that need to be considered?
 - How does the size of the room or space impact current or future abilities to socialize or share the space?

When assessing the space, consider the way that current colors influence the experience of the space and how colors could be used.

During the EmPWR project, the design team collected feedback on colors that could be used and the feelings that could be evoked.



EmPWR asked all residents to share the feelings that were evoked through different potential mural colors to guide their redesign.

- Describe site rules and policies regarding the use of the space (e.g., it can only be used with site staff present and can only be accessed during certain hours).
 - Are there any limitations or rules that must be followed for how the space is used before, during, or after installation (e.g., how or when residents use the space, is staff supervision needed)?
- Describe the current space (windows, design features, furniture, appliances, storage, etc.) and the quality and condition of the space.
- Are there any implications for taking a space “offline” (i.e., are any spaces essential and critical for daily service delivery or resident safety)? What alternative spaces are available during installation to allow for continued operations?
- Are there other areas that can be used while the selected space is under construction or if the timeline is delayed?
- What realistic changes can be made to focus on residents’ needs, healing, and wellbeing?
- Is outreach needed to landlords and building owners to see if building plans are available to help inform the process?



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An interactive feature wall was added to a shelter’s communal kitchen: a magnetic and chalkboard-paint surface can be notices, recipes, or instruction by the occupational therapy team during cooking classes. An electronic raisable table supports participation in activities by people with a variety of mobility and access needs.

The design team must assess the practicality, feasibility, and safety of making structural changes to the selected space. For example, residents and staff may wish to remove a large pillar from the center of a cramped room. However, the design team should recognize that this would require substantial, expensive, and time-consuming construction that could pose safety risks. During the Site Assessment phase, the design team should consult building plans, conduct site visits, and alert shelter leadership to any safety or facility concerns in the selected space (e.g., leaks, electrical issues, masonry problems, or other damage). Identifying these issues may change the budget available for and the timing of design changes.

- Identify potential storage and utility space that can be used by the Design Consultant and contractors during project planning and installation (note the size and type of storage, whether it can be secured, availability of refrigerator, outlets, sink, and other prep areas, etc.).
- Note any other characteristics about the facility that are important considerations for the Design Consultant when preparing for workshops, design plans, and installation.



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A redesigned kitchen space highlights accessible cutting boards that can be easily stored when not in use.



Phase 3: Design Planning



Phase 3: Design Planning

The design team will review input gathered from residents and staff (Phase 2) about the conditions of the selected space and identify opportunities for design changes that will better support resident healing and wellbeing. They will develop a set of design proposals that reflect that input, presenting them for feedback and additional creative input from the community before issuing the final design plans.

This section of the guide will prepare you to:

1. Review and respond to proposed design ideas.
2. Finalize the design plans.
3. Finalize the project budget.



A variety of activities should then be facilitated to gather community members' reactions, questions, feedback, and preferences regarding the design choices presented.

The activities should offer opportunities for community members to provide additional creative input into the plans and encourage them to draw connections between the proposed design changes and residents' mental health and wellbeing.

Review and Respond to Proposed Design Ideas

The design team will present a set of proposed design strategies incorporating input gathered from shelter stakeholders during previous phases. Please note that not all the activities suggested here need to be offered, nor do they need to happen in the order in which they are listed. Consider instead what makes the most sense for your shelter and timeline while offering residents and staff choices in how they can contribute to the design plans.



© 2023. Photo by Gina LeVay.

Before and after photos of a redesigned kitchen space. The redesigned space showcases increased storage, new appliances, and a communal dining space.

Design Presentation

The design presentation aims to ensure that the designs are informed by the community's needs and preferences and presented transparently and understandably to all involved. Ideally, the design team will lead the presentation. Should they not be available, the design team should sufficiently brief the project lead so they are prepared to present themselves.

When creating your presentation, be sure to accommodate the needs of the audience by:

- Minimizing architectural language or jargon.
- Using clear, concise descriptions.
- Including visual aids such as diagrams and images.

The presentation should be in person, so shelter community members can reflect on the proposed design strategies while interacting with the selected space. The design presentation may also be conducted virtually or shared as a recorded video. However, if conducted virtually or via recorded video, you will need to consider the best way to gather feedback, questions, preferences, and other creative input from community members on the proposed design strategies. Be mindful that some shelter staff and residents may not have access to computers or other devices to view the presentation or may find accessing technology a barrier to participation.



© 2023. Photo by Gina LeVay.

A slatted wood panel creates a sense of privacy in a communal dining room, separating the space from the shelter's busy main hallway. Windows are treated with a privacy film that allows daylight into the room while preserving safety and confidentiality for the families within. Outdoor views are boosted with a "green wall" attached to the wood panel.

Gathering Feedback on the Design Presentation

Following the presentation, gather feedback through ideas proposed in “Strategies for Gathering Community Feedback,” including workshops, written feedback, and hands-on activities.

Design Workshops



Individual Feedback



Hands-on Creative Activities

- **Workshops.** Ask residents and staff to envision how they would use the space in various scenarios. Participants can provide feedback on the design's practicality and usefulness by exploring daily use, special events, or potential challenges.
 - **Workshops can also be a time to conduct consensus-building activities:** Engage participants in activities that aim to reach a consensus on contentious or critical aspects of the design ideas. Through facilitated discussion and exercises to build consensus, residents, and staff work together to find agreeable solutions to incorporate into the ideas for design changes. You may not be able to accommodate all requests at once, so build consensus on key design elements and determine what could be modified in the future.
 - One example of a consensus-building exercise is Priority Voting: After reviewing the design, give participants a set number of votes to allocate to the design features they consider most important or areas they believe require further revision. This activity helps identify priorities and consensus areas among participants.

EmPWR design teams asked residents to share their feedback on spaces using green, yellow, and red dots (as shown in the photo below).

Do this space give you a feeling of **safety**?

Yes It's OK No

Overall, do you feel **positively** or **negatively** about this space?

Positively OK Negatively

- **Written feedback:** Surveys, feedback forms, and digital comment boards can act as a bridge to in-person feedback, allowing those who may not have fully expressed their thoughts during workshops or prefer to reflect individually to contribute their insights. They can also allow those who could not attend the workshop to have their voices heard. Questions can range from the overall aesthetic appeal to the functionality of proposed features, ensuring comprehensive feedback is collected.
 - Use free and easy-to-navigate digital platforms (e.g., Google Docs) where participants can post comments and suggestions on the design schema.
 - To invite participation by community members with limited access to technology, have images from the design presentation printed in a large, easy-to-read format and hung alongside the selected space in a central location. Secure a page of blank poster paper beside the images and encourage community members to add their feedback to the page.
- **Feedback Stations.** Set up stations around the room, each focusing on different design aspects, such as lighting, furniture, spatial layout, and color schemes. Participants move between stations, providing targeted feedback on each element. This structured approach allows participants to consider specific features in detail and offer concrete suggestions.
- **Hands-on, creative activities:** These activities facilitate a deeper understanding of the design proposals and empower stakeholders to contribute their unique perspectives and ideas tangibly and visually. They can be incorporated in many ways, including as an add-on to the survey, facilitated during a workshop, or offered as an activity to be completed at the convenience of the residents and staff weeks after the schema presentation.



One EmPWR site engaged residents and their children in a two-part workshop to co-design a mural for their backyard space.

The artist instructed residents on originality, intuition, and color theory in visual art and led a discussion on mural themes. Residents contributed drawings and concepts, which inspired the artist's proposed design options.

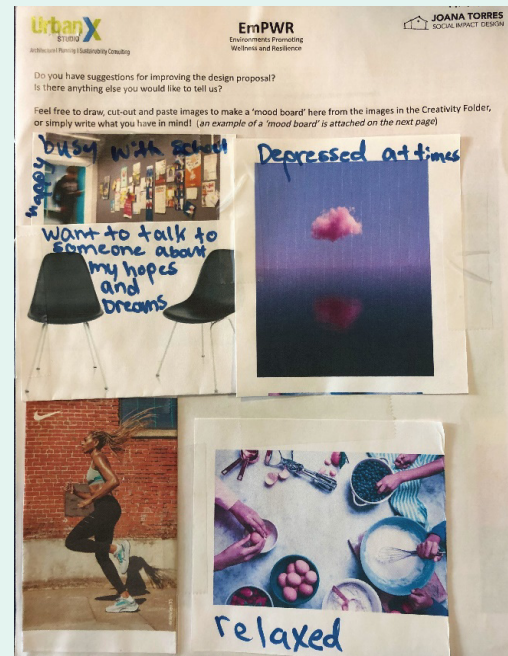
Examples of creative activities include:

- **Mood Board Collages.** This activity collects individual and group insights on design preferences, including colors, textures, materials, and overall ambiance desired for the space. During the activity, participants are given access to various magazines, fabric swatches, paint chips, and images representing different design elements. They create collages that reflect their vision for the space, focusing on the atmosphere, color schemes, and material preferences. These mood boards visually represent the community's aesthetic preferences, which can be directly translated into the design.



Several EmPWR sites used “mood boards” (examples below) to capture the array of residents' feelings and experiences of the chosen space and their hopes for the design changes.

Participants were asked to visually describe how the space made them feel, how they wanted the space to make them feel, and what design elements foster feelings of peace, privacy, safety, and empowerment.



As you review the feedback received, balance it with the most important needs of your shelter (e.g., safety and privacy). Sometimes, recommendations may appear at odds with the space's most important needs. In these cases, consider the ways you can creatively accommodate both perspectives. For example, if residents would like a large window installed in the recreation room that faces a public sidewalk, you might consider installing the window with a one-way privacy film so that natural light can enter the space, but people outside the building cannot see it. The design team needs to be familiar with the site's rules so that they can be factored into the plan, as required.



When reviewing the plan, ask residents, staff, and leadership to consider the following:

- In what ways do the proposed changes address the needs identified by residents and staff?
- Are there elements that do not address the needs identified or elements that are missing?
- What proposed design changes are you looking forward to?
- What are your concerns about the proposed design changes?
- What can be done to improve the proposed design changes?
- In what ways could the proposed design changes improve your mental health and wellbeing?

Finalize the Design Plan

The design team will develop a design development package based on feedback and preferences collected from the design presentation activities and aligned with the project budget and timeline. The package is a comprehensive set of documents detailing the finalized design plans and typically includes detailed drawings, material specifications, color schemes, furniture layouts, technical descriptions, a timeline for the project, and an itemized list of costs. It should ensure that the design plans comply with relevant building codes and regulations and note where any permits are required.

While the design team drafts the package, it is a collaborative effort that requires close communication between the team, shelter leadership, and key stakeholders to address final questions, concerns, or adjustments needed in the plan. The final package will be the construction phase blueprint, ensuring all parties understand the expected outcomes.

- **Have the shelter's leadership team review and approve the plan.** Ensure that the final plans align with the community's vision and the shelter's operational requirements, budget constraints, and strategic goals. Their sign-off marks the transition from the planning phase to the execution phase of the project. It signifies a commitment from the shelter to move forward with the renovations or construction as outlined in the design development package.



EmPWR found that many individuals (e.g., managers, directors, partner organizations, etc.) were involved in decision-making.

These individuals often had full plates and competing priorities. It could take months to get final approvals for design plans.

- **Identify necessary approvals.** Your project might involve changing paint colors and furniture, tearing down walls, or remodeling spaces. If you are pursuing more extensive design changes, secure approvals from funding/oversight agencies, landlords (if applicable), and city permitting offices before initiating any changes on site.
- **As you draw up your final plans, consider the sustainability of your project,** including the materials you can use to keep the area clean and looking new (e.g., easily washable furniture). Consider potential challenges to sustainability, including costs (e.g., costs to replace specialty lightbulbs or furniture) and challenges replacing customized design elements (e.g., custom paint). You should make plans to address these challenges.

Finalizing the design plan may be a time-consuming step. Plan enough time to review each option's details, respond to resident and staff concerns, and revise the plan as necessary. If you rush this step, you may move forward with a design that doesn't meet the needs of residents or staff!

Finalize the Project Budget

Once your team has an initial design plan, create a draft budget. Consider the fees of the design team and the contractors you will hire for construction and the cost of materials, new furniture, paint, and other finishes. Consider what resources are available to support the design planning process: e.g., workshop materials, refreshments, incentives for resident participation, and whether there will be costs associated with staff time, such as when additional childcare staff time is needed during evening workshops for residents.

The draft budget should include line items for:

- Staff time (e.g., the project lead, overtime for childcare staff if needed for evening workshops)
- Consulting fees for the design team or any other experts helping to facilitate the design planning process and develop the final set of design plans
- Community engagement costs, such as materials, translation, printing, refreshments, incentives for participation by residents
- The installation itself, including a general contractor (including their labor, materials, and any sub-contracts) and furniture and finishes vendors needed to complete the renovation.



EmPWR found that the design team was an essential partner in budget development and finalization.

The design team assessed whether the contractor's bid was appropriate given the total budget, whether "value engineering" was needed to revise the scope to align with available resources, and whether the contractor's examples of prior work demonstrated their quality and skill.

Once the initial budget is created, collaborate with the design planning team to make any necessary modifications to ensure that the initial budget is affordable and that money is available for necessary modifications during installation (e.g., supply or labor changes). Budgets will need to be continually revisited and refined once there are design plans in place that call for specific materials and specific types of skilled contractors, but it's important that the design team have at the project's outset a clear idea of the total budget available for the renovation to create design plans that are reasonable in scope and achievable given the resources available.



For more guidance on developing and managing a project budget, visit the Community Toolbox: <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/finances/managing-finances>



Phase 4: Installation of Design Changes



Phase 4: Installation of Design Changes

During installation, contractors will install the final design plans developed in Phase 3.

This section of the guide will prepare you to:

1. Identify needs that may arise during installation.
2. Collaborate with the design team to manage the installation.
3. Communicate throughout the installation.



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Bright colors and a new furniture layout support community building and conversation among residents and staff.

Identify Needs that May Arise During Installation

Create a plan for maintaining safety, continuity of services, and community connection throughout the installation.



Consider:

- If programs or services like support groups are typically held in the re-designed space, where will they be held while installation is underway? What steps can be taken to maintain similar confidentiality, privacy, and comfort levels in the alternate space?
- If this is a space where the shelter community gathers for events, holidays, or other celebrations, what alternate space can be used until installation is complete?
- Will residents or staff need to access anything stored in the space or move through it during installation? How will that be done safely?
- How will contractors secure the space to minimize disruption from noise, construction dust, fumes, etc.?



It is important to tend to the wellbeing of residents throughout the installation. During installation, continually communicate with residents about installation progress and any needs they may have while a space is unusable.



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Photographs illustrate conditions before and after the design changes in a shelter's communal dining room. Modern, lightweight furniture is easy for residents to push together for group activities or push apart for family meals.

A colorful painted feature wall creates a fun, modern and uplifting focal point in the dining room.

Collaborate with the Design Team to Manage the Installation

The design team is a valuable partner across all phases of the project. During installation, design team members can lend their expertise to manage the installation process.

Design team responsibilities during installation may include:

- Provide all necessary drawings and technical specifications to contractors and vendors
- Conduct site visits to monitor the progress of the general contractor and other vendors
- Communicate with contractors and vendors throughout installation, to ensure adherence to the plans, and advise when they have questions or propose deviations
- Obtain approval from shelter leadership for any proposed deviations from the original plans, and informing the project lead about any other challenges or delays
- Keep project lead and shelter leadership informed throughout installation
- Determine whether contractors and vendors have satisfactorily completed their work, and follow up where correction is needed
- Provide guidance to shelter leadership on how to use, clean, replace, and otherwise maintain new design elements so that the objectives of the new space can be sustained over time

Communicate Throughout the Installation

Facilitate ongoing communication with the design team, contractors, and vendors to maintain an updated installation calendar and execute the design plans. The project lead is the main coordinator throughout the installation and is responsible for gathering information from and sharing information with all parties.

Shelters work to create community, connection, and continuity. When a shelter space is taken “offline” for the installation, residents can experience disruptions in their experiences of community, connection, and continuity. Residents need to understand when vendors will be onsite and the timeline for installation. Staff should be knowledgeable enough about the installation plans to update residents daily.

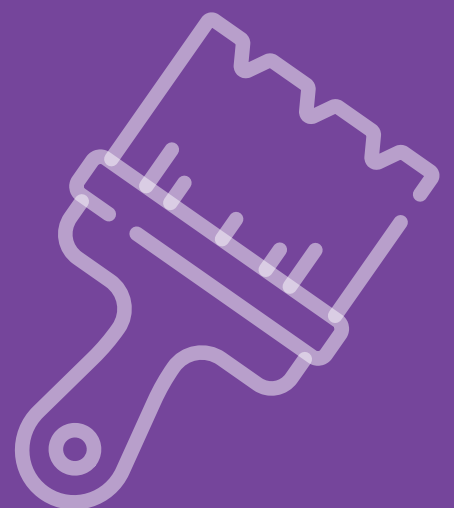
During this phase, it can also be helpful to create a list of staff members responsible for tasks related to the installation (e.g., planning on-site activities, outreach to residents, design plan advisors, final decision-makers). You should consider also naming a backup staff member for each role in the event of staff turnover.



One EmPWR site shared that it was important to balance patience and persistence. Many factors outside the site’s control (e.g., availability of materials and COVID-19-related delays) required patience. At the same time, sites needed to be persistent when asking questions of the design team and contractors to get updated timelines.



Phase 5: Sustaining the Design



Phase 5: Sustaining the Design

Congratulations on completing the installation of your design changes! This marks a significant milestone in your project. Once the excitement of unveiling a new communal space dies down, it's time to implement your sustainability plans. This encompasses not just the physical upkeep of the space but also sustaining the intentions and visions that shaped its transformation. In this Phase, we explore strategies to maintain the space's integrity and intended uses.



Remember to celebrate!

An EmPWR site had a ribbon-cutting ceremony to allow residents to celebrate their new space and to thank them for being part of the design changes.

This section of the guide will prepare you to:

1. Create instructions for maintaining the redesigned space.
2. Consider ways you can sustain the intentions of the project.
3. Assess alignment with project vision.



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This redesigned room supports multiple resident needs, including a larger table space and individual workstations, reflecting the different ways that residents use the space.

Maintain the Space

The space's continued durability and aesthetic appeal rely upon regular maintenance and care. This begins with clearly understanding the maintenance instructions for materials and furniture. Each element was selected not only for its functionality and appeal but also for its longevity. To best maintain the space:

- **Develop maintenance instructions:** Work with the design team and contractors to draft written guidance detailing cleaning and maintenance instructions. If custom paint colors are used, include the paint brand, a sample, and instructions for reordering. This guide will be a valuable resource for the maintenance staff, ensuring they have the information needed to care for the space properly. Instructions could cover everything from the recommended cleaning products to the frequency of maintenance tasks.
- **Ensure instructions are accessible:** In addition to equipping staff with maintenance instructions, it's beneficial to make these instructions accessible to all users of the space. Posting a simplified version of the maintenance guide within the space serves a dual purpose: it informs residents and staff about how to care for the environment and encourages collective responsibility for its upkeep.



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Before and after photos highlight how lighting, wall colors, white boards, and furniture layout can be used to enhance a communal space.

Sustain the Intentions of the Project

The space is more than just a physical location; it embodies the collective vision and intentions of the shelter's residents and staff. Preserving this is as valuable as maintaining the space's physical aspects. Some ways you might consider sustaining the intentions of the space include:

- **Signage:** In Phases 1 and 2, residents and staff collaborated to share their initial goal for the project (e.g., a space for collaboration, group meals, relaxation, etc.). Consider installing a sign or plaque within the space that encapsulates its intended purpose. For example, if the space was designed for communal dining, the signage might read, "A Place to Connect and Eat Together in Harmony." This serves as a constant reminder of the community's aspirations and guides the use of the space in a way that aligns with these goals.
- **Community Involvement:** Engaging residents and staff in the ongoing narrative of the space can further sustain its intended use. This could involve regular meetings or feedback sessions within the space to discuss how well it serves its purpose and any adjustments that might enhance its functionality or atmosphere in line with the original vision.
- **Orient new residents to the intention for the space:** New residents need to understand the intentions of the space to sustain the effort.

By adopting these strategies, the shelter ensures that the space remains a vibrant, functional, and meaningful part of the community long after the initial excitement of its unveiling has faded. It becomes a living space, continually reflecting the needs, aspirations, and collective care of those it serves.



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A designated play area was created in the dining room, placing it directly in the line of sight of the communal kitchen in order to support parents to monitor small children while preparing meals. Alongside the play area, a set of right-sized dining furniture was provided for children, as residents expressed that children should feel welcome and as if the room is designed for them, too.

Assess Alignment with Project Vision and Reflect on Project Success

You don't need to conduct a formal research project to determine if the final installation matches the initial project vision. Revisit conversations from the Design Planning phase, e.g., the design team asking community members something to the effect of "How will we know if the project is a success?"

This is a valuable way to ensure that the project effectively enhances the living environment for residents, aligns with the shelter's mission, and fulfills the community's needs. Gathering (and sharing!) community input at this phase validates the current project's success and informs future efforts to create supportive and empowering environments for all community members.



When assessing community engagement, consider:

- Do residents and staff feel their voices were heard throughout the project?
- Did residents and staff feel well-informed throughout the project?



When reflecting on the installation, consider:

- Are people using the space more frequently?
- What types of activities are people using the space for?
- How do current uses align with the initial intention?
- Do residents and staff feel a sense of mental health and wellbeing in the space?
- Are refinements needed to use the space as designed/intended?



If you do choose to conduct a formal evaluation, you could use key informant interview and focus group guides used to evaluate EmPWR ([included in the EmPWR Evaluation Report](#)).

Conclusion

Community engagement practices can be an important catalyst for change within your social service settings. We hope that this resource inspires you to create new and complement existing meaningful engagement opportunities with residents, staff, and leadership within your settings.



© 2023. Photo by Gina LeVay.

Resigned spaces include new lighting and furniture, creating a welcoming and bright space to meet and collaborate.

Appendices

Appendix A: Strategies for Gathering Community Input

Below, we share more information on strategies for gathering community feedback, when to use each strategy, and resources for more information.

Phase	Strategy	When to use	Resource
1: Determining Readiness 2: Site Assessment	<p>Focus Groups are small, focused, and facilitated discussion groups to delve into specific topics or issues. These groups allow for detailed feedback and brainstorming.</p> <p>Focus groups are most effective when the participants are organized by some commonality (e.g., a group of residents and a separate group of staff). When organizing a focus group, aim to provide childcare so participants have time and space to focus and contribute. At the beginning of a focus group, set up group agreements, allowing all voices to be heard without fear of being punished or reprimanded.</p>	<p>Focus groups are helpful when you seek feedback from a larger group of people but want more detail than a survey can provide. They are also appropriate when participants would feel comfortable sharing reflections with each other (i.e., the discussion would not violate confidentiality or encourage disclosures of sensitive lived experience).</p>	<p><u>Conducting Focus Groups (University of Kansas Community Toolbox)</u></p>
	<p>Interviews are one-to-one conversations with individuals who can represent the groups whose feedback you seek or who can provide valuable insight into specific project elements. For example, if you seek resident feedback, you might select a mix of parents and non-parents, genders, and ages. You might also</p>	<p>Interviews enable deeper conversations but with fewer people. Consider interviews when the topic is sensitive or when you want to discuss a topic at length with an individual.</p>	<p><u>Conducting Interviews (University of Kansas Community Toolbox)</u></p>

Phase	Strategy	When to use	Resource
	<p>choose to do interviews with individuals who have a unique perspective or experience with a topic making it difficult to group them with others, such as a shelter director.</p>		
	<p>Separate brainstorming sessions or creative workshops allow staff and residents to freely suggest ideas and solutions. Techniques like <u>mind mapping</u> can be particularly effective.</p>	<p>Idea generation sessions can be helpful whenever you seek a wide variety of creative ideas from a large group. They can also benefit staff and residents who feel uncomfortable providing written feedback (for confidentiality reasons or due to language barriers).</p> <p>Keeping resident and staff sessions separate is a trauma-informed approach that allows residents to have a protected space for sharing critical feedback, preserves confidentiality, promotes a sense of safety, and helps underscore the community-based engagement philosophy of sharing power and placing resident voices at the center of the project.</p>	<p><u>Brainstorming (Northern Illinois University CITL)</u> <u>Tools for Brainstorming (University of Akron)</u></p>
	<p>Surveys use a written set of predetermined questions and response options to gather feedback and opinions from a large group. They can be anonymous to ensure honesty and confidentiality.</p>	<p>Surveys can be beneficial for those less comfortable expressing their opinions in person. These can be on paper or online to accommodate different preferences and abilities.</p>	<p><u>Tips for Writing Good Survey Questions (University of Pittsburgh)</u> <u>Conducting Surveys (University of Kansas Community Toolbox)</u></p>
	<p>Interactive Boards or Posters can be placed in common areas, where staff</p>	<p>This form of engagement allows for ongoing, casual participation. It can be helpful if finding a time to gather</p>	<p><u>Tools and Resources for Project-Based Community Advisory Boards (urban.org)</u></p>

Phase	Strategy	When to use	Resource
	and residents can leave feedback and ideas or vote on specific options.	people is challenging or if you've already collected information from a set group of people and want to provide the opportunity for feedback to a larger group.	Creative Ways to Solicit Stakeholder Feedback (Public Profit LLC, see "Feedback Wall" section on page 31)
3: Design Planning	To make collective decisions, use voting or dotmocracy (where participants place dots or stickers on their preferred written options).	Collaborative decision-making sessions are helpful after idea generation. They provide time and space for large groups of people to consider and vote on their favorite ideas.	Best Practices for Convening a Community Advisory Board (Community Engagement Infographic 12.17.19 (chcs.org))
4: Installation of the Design Changes	'Lunch and Learn' Sessions: Organize informal sessions over lunch where staff and residents can learn about process aspects and discuss informally, fostering a relaxed and open environment.	This is useful when decisions have been made that impact the project's rollout or at set intervals throughout the project. Providing food will increase attendance and ensure your information is more widely disseminated.	Dissemination as Dialogue: Building Trust and Sharing Research Findings Through Community Engagement (cdc.gov)
5: Sustaining the Design	Community Meetings and Forums: Organize regular meetings where staff and residents can discuss issues, share ideas, and provide feedback. Ensure these meetings are held at convenient times and are accessible to all residents.	These can be used when decisions impact the project's rollout or at set intervals throughout the project. Regular meetings are valuable alternatives to Lunch and Learns when providing food is not possible or when attempting to diversify session times for inclusivity.	Conducting Effective Meetings (University of Kansas Community Toolbox)

Appendix B: Questions to Assess Organizational Readiness

As you assess readiness, you can populate this checklist to keep track of your findings, notes, and action items.

Assess Organizational Readiness, Capacity, and Commitment	Notes 
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Project Timing

What is the best time to initiate the project?

Does the shelter have any upcoming events, seasonal fluctuations in the resident population, or other time-sensitive activities that could conflict with the project schedule?

How will the shelter accommodate potential delays and adjust the original timeline if there are delays in any phase of the project?

Staff and Leadership Availability

Can current staff levels support the project without affecting daily operations?

Who will be the project lead? Does this person have sufficient time available to serve in this role?

Is there a person in a leadership role who can advocate for this project?

Who can conduct outreach and share information about the project with current and new residents?

Who is the point person for installation-specific questions?

Is someone available to develop contingency plans to support any potential delays or unintended adverse events that may occur due to delays or things not going as planned?

Existing DV Shelter Facility

Are there policies regarding who can come on-site (e.g., external vendors and contractors)?

Are there any communal spaces that cannot be closed for a remodel (e.g., a space essential for daily activities)?

What rules currently govern how and when residents can use certain communal spaces?

Budget

What funds are available for the project? How long will those funds be available?

What are the fiscal management considerations? For example, does a grantor or agency require certain funds to be spent on the project during the calendar/fiscal year? How will that impact the project schedule?

What systems are in place to prepare contracts with vendors and ensure prompt payment?

Assess Readiness to Facilitate Community Engagement

Roles and Responsibilities

Who on your team will lead the engagement activity, document input/feedback, and report back?

Are there any training and capacity building needs (e.g., whether staff, residents, architects, and designers need training or capacity building to gather and use community input effectively)?

Resident Participation

Will residents be compensated for their time?

Are residents encouraged to provide feedback about how these rules impact them?

How does the organization respond to resident feedback about the impact of these rules?

How will you engage all staff in the project in some way beyond the team members who can typically be counted on to show up for all events and requests?

Is there enough interest in the project to believe that most residents will get involved?

How will you encourage participation by residents who don't typically participate in shelter activities?

How might you offer choices to residents about the ways they can contribute? E.g., group vs. individual activities, or more active methods for residents to provide input vs. more passive methods.

Have you asked residents if they have skills or experiences that they would like to use to contribute to this project?

Do residents have any concerns about making design changes?

Communication

How will you support clear communication and engagement throughout the project, including communicating with residents and staff not present for all activities or phases?

Are there any translation needs to ensure accessibility?

Documentation

How will you document feedback? For example, does the activity require notetaking, taking photos, saving posters, or writing summary documents?

Will you create templates for documenting various activities?

Will you document summary ideas shared in workshops or transcripts? Will you include direct quotes?

Will you take photographs of existing conditions and change over time?

Will participants' names be recorded, or will their input be anonymous? How will you summarize responses to surveys?

Where will documentation be saved, and who can access it?

Decision-Making

How will decisions get made?

Does your organization have conflict resolution strategies that can be used to ensure that there are productive discussions where all participants feel heard?

How will decisions be reported back to participants?

Determining Success

How will you measure the success of the community engagement process?

How will you measure the success of the changes to the physical environment?

How will the team assess the project's impact for ongoing improvement and adaptation?

How will you regularly gather feedback from shelter stakeholders participating in the project?

How will you demonstrate to project participants that their feedback is valued?

Establish a Partnership with a Design Team

Roles and Responsibilities

Which phases of the project will the design team be expected to participate in?

What role will the design team have in creating, facilitating, documenting, and interpreting input gathered from the participatory design planning tools and activities?

Will the design team be responsible for providing materials for workshops and other activities, or will the shelter provide them?

What role will the design team have in evaluating bids from contractors and vendors needed for installation?

What are the design team's responsibilities once installation is underway?

How frequently should they conduct site visits to monitor the construction?

How should the design team document the progress they observe?

How should they communicate with shelter stakeholders about delays, challenges, or decisions to be made while installation is underway?

Identifying Design Team Members

Does the design team have experience working in community-based settings, and designing spaces for families and children?

Does the design team have experience designing spaces incorporating trauma-informed, human-centered (e.g., approaches that center on the end-user's needs), and inclusive (e.g., accessible by all residents and staff) lenses?

Are past clients willing to act as references on the quality of their work, reliability, professionalism, responsiveness, and communication?

Engagement Guidance

Are there any shelter rules the design team must adhere to when visiting the shelter and interacting with residents? For example, does the design team know the expectations around maintaining confidentiality, privacy, safety, and respect for residents?

How should they present the design options for the shelter community to consider?

Appendix C: Questions to Assess the Site

As you assess the site itself, you can populate this checklist to keep track of your findings, notes, and action items.

Preparing for Site Assessment	Notes 
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Describe the condition of the overall facility. For example,

- How old is the building?
- Who owns the building?

In addition to program leadership, who must be consulted to approve design plans?

Are architectural plans/floor plans of the building available for review by the Design Consultant (digital or paper files)?

Indicate where/from whom these plans can be accessed, including name and contact information:

Are there any planned or needed building repairs the design team should be aware of?

Who is responsible for maintaining the building, including cleaning, caring for plants, making repairs, setting up rooms for activities, etc.?

Identifying the Most Appropriate Space(s) for Design Changes and Assessing Their Conditions

Which spaces in the shelter make you feel a sense of ease and wellbeing? What about spaces that make you feel uncomfortable? What are the differences?

Are there any communal spaces that are not easy to access for everyone? (e.g., a space in a basement that can only be accessed by stairs)?

Which communal areas of the shelter do you feel need the most improvement and why?

How does the current shelter design affect your daily routine and interactions with others?

Identify the communal spaces in the facility that are being considered for enhancement:

- Name of room/area

- How is this space currently used (who uses it, when is it used, what types of activities and/or programming require it)

- How would residents and staff like use the space? What activities would they like to do that they cannot do now?

- What design elements of the existing communal space(s) do you like and want to stay the same?

- Are there outdoor views or privacy considerations that need to be considered?

- How does the size of the room or space impact current or future abilities to socialize or share the space?

- How do colors, materials, sounds, and smells impact the space?

Describe site rules and policies regarding use of the space (e.g., can only be used with site staff present, can only be accessed during certain hours)

Are there any limitations or rules that must be followed for how the space is used before, during, or after installation (e.g., how or when residents use the space, is staff supervision needed)?

Describe the current space (windows, design features, furniture, appliances, storage, etc.) and the quality and condition of the space.

Are there any implications for taking a space “offline” (i.e., are any spaces essential and critical for daily service delivery or resident safety)? What alternative spaces are available during installation to allow for continued operations?

Are there other areas that can be used while the selected space is under construction or if the timeline is delayed?

What realistic changes can be made to focus on residents’ needs, healing, and wellbeing?

Is outreach needed to landlords and building owners to see if building plans are available to help inform the process?

Appendix D: Shelter Engagement Considerations (Example from EmPWR)

External stakeholders, such as the design team, contractors, and vendors, will visit the shelter throughout the design planning process and installation. EmPWR utilized this tool to document shelter-specific items to consider when planning engagement with these external project stakeholders. There are blank spaces for you to adapt to fit the needs of your site.

Once completed, the project lead can share information with external stakeholders in advance to ensure they engage shelters safely and respectfully.

Confidentiality

- Do you have a confidentiality form that all visitors are required to sign?
- ___ Yes (please attach) ___ No
- How is the shelter's location typically shared with new visitors? Please describe:
- Can photographs be taken of the shelter environment (no photos that identify residents or the location) before and after the design enhancement? Yes/No
- What considerations or limitations should be shared to take safe and respectful photos of residents, staff and the space? Please describe:

Accessibility

- What is the primary language(s) used by staff?
- If a workshop is facilitated in English, are interpreters needed for staff to participate fully?
- What are the primary language(s) used by residents?
- If a workshop is facilitated in English, are interpreters needed for residents to participate fully?
- Are there any other considerations related to accessibility that should be shared (e.g., related to effective communication, room set-up for workshops, materials for low vision, chemical sensitivity, etc.)?

Scheduling

- Please describe what methods are used to recruit staff and residents to participate in activities at your program:
- What are the preferred rooms/spaces in the shelter facility for hosting project activities?
- Which rooms/spaces in the facility are restricted from access by visitors?

- Which days/times are preferred for scheduling project activities with staff? Which are NOT preferred?
 - Please consider the timing to encourage participation across all departments, including staff working evening and weekend shifts. Please also consider reoccurring staff meeting times that might be utilized occasionally for project activities:

Preferred days/times for <u>staff</u>	NOT preferred

- If a workshop is held during typical business hours, what type of support might be needed to encourage participation by staff who work evening and weekend shifts?
- Which days/times are preferred for scheduling activities with residents? Which are NOT preferred?
 - Please consider timing that encourages participation by residents who are caregivers of children or other family, and residents who work or have other conflicts during the day. Please also consider reoccurring resident meeting/activity times, that might be utilized occasionally for project activities:

Preferred days/times for <u>residents</u>	NOT preferred

- Please describe any policies or practices that guide the use of incentives/appreciations for residents who participate in on-site activities (e.g. Refreshments? Metrocards? Gift cards? For what denomination? For specific vendors? How do you ensure incentives/appreciations are advertised & distributed equitably?):

Next steps

- Who is the point person(s) at the shelter for all planning and communication about the project? Please include name(s), email and phone:
- What is the best way to share information about this project with residents and staff?
- Will additional assistance be needed to inform residents and staff about the project?
- Is there anything else you'd like others to know about your building, residents, or staff as you plan project activities for your site?

Include other items to consider during preparations below:

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