



ALBERTA  
REAL ESTATE  
FOUNDATION

# Enabling Housing Choice Project

## Guidebook Module 3

### Identifying Diverse Housing Needs

September 2024



RURAL  
DEVELOPMENT  
NETWORK

## LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Enabling Housing Choice (EHC) team wants to acknowledge our connection with the ancestral peoples who have been on this land for millennia.

RDN's physical office is located on lands traditionally known as amiskwachiwaskahikan (A Miss Gwa Che Wuss Sky Gun) - aka Beaver Hills House, or Edmonton, the historical land of Treaty 6 Territory, which is also within the Metis Nation District 9.

We acknowledge and confirm our commitment and responsibility to foster better relationships with Indigenous peoples, and to improve our own understanding of the unique and diverse cultures of local First Nations, Inuit and Metis people. We make this acknowledgement as an act of reconciliation and gratitude to those whose territory we gather on.

RDN is committed to connecting our programming to the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Report, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as benchmarks for our reconciliation journey.

It is our sincere hope that the information provided in this guide will help communities address their own unique and diverse housing needs, and provide greater housing security and inclusion for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, both in the community and the surrounding area.





## PROJECT ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, the Enabling Housing Choice (EHC) team wants to thank the Alberta Real Estate Foundation (AREF) for their funding and support in this research project.

We also want to acknowledge the 6 Alberta communities that participated in this research: (alphabetically) City of Airdrie, Town of Bow Island, Town of Claresholm, Town of Mayerthorpe, Town of Pincher Creek and Town of Trochu. These communities embraced the EHC team's mandate and research process, enabling them to collect practical and compelling information about current housing issues, barriers and opportunities in their community.

Finally, we want to express our gratitude to the housing stakeholders who participated in the various community engagement exercises that were conducted for this project. We appreciate the time and effort you dedicated to sharing your insights, identifying challenges, highlighting opportunities, and suggesting ways to improve housing diversity in your community. Your contributions have played a vital role in shaping the understanding of the current housing landscape and guiding the research towards meaningful solutions. Your generosity and willingness to collaborate have been instrumental in our goal to facilitate a more inclusive and diverse housing environment, both in your community and across Alberta.

# WHAT THIS MODULE EXPLORES

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<b>INTRODUCTION:</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>PURPOSE:</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1 Qualitative Approaches To Identifying Housing Needs</b>	<b>2</b>
1.1.1 Focus Groups & Interviews	2
1.1.2 Community Surveys	6
<b>1.2 Quantitative Approaches to Identifying Housing Needs</b>	<b>7</b>
1.2.1 Housing Needs & Demand Assessments	7
<b>MOVING FORWARD</b>	<b>9</b>

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# MODULE 3: IDENTIFYING DIVERSE HOUSING NEEDS

## MODULE 3 OF 8

### INTRODUCTION

Understanding different approaches for identifying and understanding a community's diverse housing needs is crucial for fostering inclusive and sustainable neighborhoods. Each community possesses unique demographic, economic, and cultural characteristics that influence its housing landscape. By employing various methodologies such as community surveys, focus group discussions, stakeholder interviews, and housing data analysis, stakeholders can gain comprehensive insights into the multifaceted housing needs and preferences of residents.

### PURPOSE

The purpose of this module of the guide is to provide municipalities and organizations with an overview of approaches and tools that can be used to identify a community's diverse housing needs.

**Note:** While the *Enabling Housing Choice Project* primarily employed the use of qualitative approaches to understanding each partner community's diverse housing needs, it is critically important for municipalities to obtain quantitative evidence for their housing needs through the use of research into Housing Needs Assessments or other statistics-based approaches.



## 1.1 QUALITATIVE APPROACHES TO IDENTIFYING HOUSING NEEDS

Qualitative approaches to understanding a community's diverse housing needs are essential for gaining nuanced insights into residents' housing experiences, preferences, and challenges. By engaging directly with community members through methods such as focus group discussions, interviews, and surveys, municipalities can uncover unique perspectives that quantitative data alone may overlook, enabling more targeted and locally-informed housing policies and initiatives.

Furthermore, qualitative approaches offer the potential for not only identifying a community's housing-related needs, challenges and issues, but also for identifying other potential areas of opportunity for housing development within the community.

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### 1.1.1 FOCUS GROUPS & INTERVIEWS

Focus group discussions and stakeholder interviews are invaluable qualitative approaches for understanding a community's housing environment, as they provide opportunities for in-depth conversations and personal narratives. These methods allow participants to express their perspectives on housing needs in their community, while also articulating their own housing preferences and presenting potential housing opportunities.

When conducting focus group discussions and interviews, it's crucial to ensure representation from a diverse array of community members, municipal staff, and housing industry stakeholders. It is important for municipalities to leverage existing relationships with community members and local housing industry actors to bring them to the table for focus groups and interviews, as these established connections can facilitate trust, participation, and candid discussions.



**Suggestion: consider these housing stakeholder groups when conducting focus group discussions and interviews about housing in the community.**

## HOUSING INDUSTRY STAKEHOLDERS

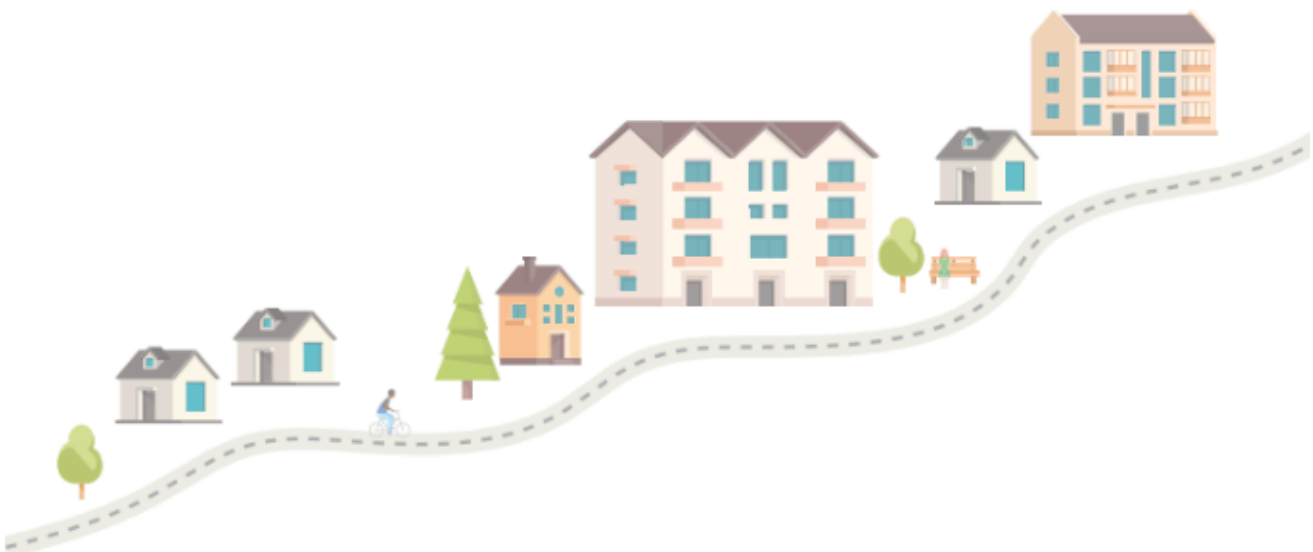
**Housing Developers & Homebuilders:** This group provides invaluable insights into market trends, construction costs, development challenges, and housing opportunities.

**Realtors:** Realtors provide understanding into local housing market trends, demand patterns, and affordability issues.

**Property Managers & Landlords:** Property managers and landlords provide firsthand knowledge about rental market dynamics and concerns, tenant needs, and housing affordability challenges in the community.

**Non-Profit Housing Organizations:** These organizations offer valuable insights into the specific challenges faced by vulnerable populations, provide expertise for affordable housing solutions, and often serve as key stakeholders in creating inclusive and equitable housing policies and initiatives.

Information from these groups help municipalities make informed decisions to address local housing needs and promote sustainable community growth. Furthermore, their input will help develop relevant and realistic incentives, policies and strategies to help address development barriers and address diverse housing needs within the community.



## MUNICIPAL STAKEHOLDERS

**Elected Officials:** It is important to understand this group's perspectives and priorities regarding housing policy, as their decisions directly influence the allocation of resources and implementation of initiatives that shape a community's housing landscape

**Municipal Planners:** Planners possess invaluable knowledge and experience about municipal policy, land use regulations, and development trends. As subject area experts in municipal land use, they contribute essential context for understanding the feasibility and implications of housing initiatives within a community.

**Municipal Planning Commission (MPC):** Discussing potential changes to housing development with the municipal planning commission is critical as they possess significant decision-making power over housing development and initiatives in the community.

**Development Officers (DO):** Similar to the MPC, the municipal development officer holds significant decision-making power in the development approval process. They can also offer insights into the regulatory landscape that shapes the trajectory of housing development within the community.

**Economic Development Officers (EDO):** EDO's possess valuable insights into local economic trends, employment opportunities, and growth projections, which are important for understanding the housing needs of a community and informing housing development strategies.

**Housing & Community Development Committees:** Discussions with these committees is important because they provide firsthand insights and perspectives from key stakeholders who are directly involved in shaping housing policies and projects in the community.



## COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS

**Community Residents:** Discussions with community residents, including long-time residents, new residents, local workforce members, and prospective homebuyers, is essential for gaining firsthand insights into the diverse housing needs, wants, and aspirations in the community. Engaging with residents that have different backgrounds and perspectives can provide valuable information about housing preferences, affordability concerns, neighborhood dynamics, and quality-of-life considerations.

**Local Businesses:** Similarly, conversations with local businesses is important for understanding a community's diverse housing needs because businesses often have insights into the housing challenges faced by their employees and customers. Business owners can provide valuable information about factors such as commute times, housing affordability, and workforce retention.

**Community Service Providers:** These local groups – CFSA, AHS, FCSS, food banks, etc – provide valuable information and understanding about the specific housing challenges and needs faced by vulnerable populations within the community.



### 1.1.2 COMMUNITY SURVEYS

While surveys are typically considered quantitative research tools, they can also serve as a valuable qualitative approach for understanding housing needs and preferences in a community. Surveys allow for the collection of structured data while also providing opportunities for open-ended responses, allowing participants to elaborate on their housing experiences, preferences, challenges and opportunities in their own words.

**Suggestion: When preparing a community survey, consider the following elements:**

**PROVIDE CONTEXT:** Offer background information about the purpose of the survey and how the data will be used. This can encourage participation and help respondents understand the importance of their input.

**SURVEY DESIGN:** Include a mix of closed-ended and open-ended questions to gather both quantitative data and qualitative insights into housing needs, preferences, opportunities and challenges.

**INCLUDE RELEVANT TOPICS:** Cover a range of topics related to housing needs, wants, and challenges. This may include affordability, housing type preferences, accessibility to amenities, transportation options, housing conditions, and any specific concerns or challenges faced by the community.

**KNOWLEDGE-SHARING :** Use the survey as a knowledge-sharing opportunity with the community to inform them about housing-related issues, policies, and resources. Include informational sections or links to relevant resources within the survey.

**PROMOTE PARTICIPATION:** Use various channels to promote the survey within the community, such as social media, community newsletters, local organizations, or public events.

**FEEDBACK MECHANISM:** Provide a mechanism for respondents to offer feedback or additional comments beyond the structured survey questions. This can capture insights that may not have been addressed in the initial questionnaire.

## 1.2 QUANTITATIVE APPROACHES TO IDENTIFYING HOUSING NEEDS

Quantitative approaches are critical for determining a community's housing needs as they provide systematic collection and objective data that can be analyzed to identify trends, patterns, and disparities within the housing market. By collecting quantitative data on key indicators such as housing supply, affordability, vacancy rates and demographic characteristics, municipalities can gain a comprehensive understanding of the scope of housing challenges facing their community.

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### 1.2.1 HOUSING NEEDS AND DEMAND ASSESSMENTS

A **Housing Needs and Demand Assessment** outlines a community's current housing environment by examining various economic, social, and housing factors, and from that analysis, provides quantitative deductions about ongoing and future housing needs in the community. The importance of this report is multi-faceted as it gives an overview of various important metrics. These assessments can assist housing developers and municipalities in identifying or confirming housing needs in their community, while also serving as evidence-based support to engage external funders and partners.

Common elements that are typically included in a Housing Needs and Demand Assessment:

**Demographic Analysis:** An analysis of the community's current demographic characteristics, including population size, age distribution, household composition, income levels, and socioeconomic indicators. This provides insight into the housing needs of different demographic groups within the community.

**Housing Stock Analysis:** An inventory and analysis of the existing housing stock, including the number, type, size, condition, and tenure of housing units. This helps identify gaps in the housing market and assess the adequacy and suitability of the current housing supply to meet the needs of residents.

**Market Analysis:** An examination of housing market trends, including supply and demand dynamics, vacancy rates, rental and homeownership affordability, housing prices, and sales trends. This provides insights into market forces influencing housing availability and affordability within the community.

**Affordability Analysis:** An assessment of housing affordability, including housing cost burden, rent-to-income ratios, mortgage affordability, and access to affordable housing options for low- and moderate-income households. This helps identify affordability challenges and prioritize interventions to address housing affordability issues.

**Special Needs Analysis:** An evaluation of housing needs for special populations, including seniors, persons with disabilities, veterans, homeless individuals and families, and other vulnerable groups. This helps identify gaps in housing and support services for these populations and informs targeted interventions to address their specific needs. (Note: the ability to examine this data varies, since Statistics Canada's ability to collect the data is limited by privacy considerations.)

**Community Consultation:** Engagement with stakeholders, including residents, community organizations, housing developers, government agencies, and social service providers, to gather input, insights, and perspectives on housing needs and priorities.

**Policy and Regulatory Review:** An examination of existing housing policies, regulations, and planning documents to assess their alignment with identified housing needs and goals. This helps identify opportunities to revise or develop policies and programs to better address housing needs and promote housing affordability and diversity.

**Forecasting and Projections:** Projection of future housing needs based on demographic trends, population growth projections, household formation rates, and economic forecasts. This helps inform long-term planning and decision-making in municipal governance around housing development, land use, and infrastructure investment.

**Action Plan Development:** Development of an action plan with specific strategies, goals, and recommendations to address identified housing needs and priorities. This may include recommendations for housing development, zoning changes, incentive programs, policy reforms, and funding priorities to support the implementation of housing solutions.

## Moving Forward

Is your municipality or organization eager to better identify and understand your community's diverse housing needs?

At the Rural Development Network, our Sustainable Housing Initiative (SHI) team specializes in conducting research that will help your municipality understand these needs. Our SHI Team specializes in conducting Housing Needs and Demand Assessments to help provide a comprehensive understanding of your community's housing landscape.

Whether you're grappling with affordability issues, accessibility, or the need for more diverse housing options, our team is excited to start the conversation and explore tailored approaches that will respond uniquely to your housing aspirations.

Furthermore, at RDN, we believe in the power of collaboration and innovation to drive meaningful change. Our Sustainable Housing Initiative is designed to assist your community in enabling housing diversity and choice through comprehensive assessments, strategic planning, and actionable recommendations.

We also offer expertise in policy development, regulatory adjustments, and identifying funding opportunities, ensuring that your community can achieve its housing goals. Let us help you build a stronger, more inclusive community where everyone has a place to call home. Contact us today to learn how we can partner with you to create lasting, positive impacts in your community.





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