



TORONTO
NEIGHBOURHOOD
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TNC People-Centred Civic-Engagement Charter

The charter was prepared by Anna Kim, edited by Gayatri Kumar and laid out by Sarah Gledhill. This charter is part of the Community Voices for System Change series sharing practices and recommendation to strengthen people-centred approaches to the work of neighbourhood-based agencies in the non-profit sector, led by Toronto Neighbourhood Centres, with support from Maytree.

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Toronto Neighbourhood Centres' commitment to amplifying and supporting people-centred civic engagement (PCCE) in our member agencies is part of a larger vision of social justice and community change, one that empowers neighbours to work together to meet local challenges, and responds to the needs of local residents by integrating services, capacity building, and social reform.

Through our commitment to amplifying PCCE, we aim to support inclusive, healthy, and equitable communities. We recognize that PCCE is central to addressing systemic socioeconomic inequities, countering the historical and ongoing marginalization of oppressed communities, and creating meaningful and dignified democratic processes that enable all individuals, in all sectors of society, to participate fully in making the decisions that shape their communities.

Committing to PCCE means putting community voices at the centre of our efforts to support positive community change and deepen our democratic practice. This entails enabling the people we serve to have more control over their lives through civic engagement; enabling people to take part in decision-making processes that affect their lives; working in accordance with the rights, holistic needs, expectations, and expertise of people, communities, and their lived realities; consciously engaging the perspectives and lived experiences of residents and working together as co-pilots to bring about change; ensuring that people have the power, knowledge, support, and respect they need to actively and meaningfully participate in civic engagement; and supporting processes that build capacity for civic participation.

To realize this vision, we must work collectively to ensure that we implement structures, procedures, and practices within our agencies to support and enable PCCE.

As community organizations committed to social justice we are signing this charter to confirm our commitment to supporting and amplifying PCCE.



As community organizations working on behalf of communities and in partnership with them, we are signing this charter to confirm that we view PCCE to be an essential component of achieving our organizations' missions and intended impacts. Our commitment also signals our understanding that PCCE includes the staff persons, community members, and volunteers who work with us every day.

As leaders in our communities we will support and amplify civic-engagement practices that put community voices at the centre of our efforts to support positive community change. We will also collaborate with community groups, sector networks, unions, and funders to generate collective actions that support PCCE.

To guide our efforts, this charter will be based on the following value statements:

- We acknowledge that there is an inequality of power between our organizations and the people we serve. We further recognize that many of the people we serve come from marginalized communities created by historical and ongoing systemic oppressions.
- We recognize that our organizations should have power with—and not over—the people we serve.
- We recognize that we need to move away from thinking of community as object to thinking of community as subject.
- We recognize the need to dismantle and interrogate power structures that perpetuate inequities. We also recognize that organizations exist for the sake of the people they work with and serve.
- We acknowledge the lived realities and trauma of the people and communities we serve.

In signing this charter, we commit to intentionally embracing and amplifying PCCE in our organizational cultures, activities, and programming. We also show that we work in solidarity with diverse communities to strengthen neighbourhoods and enable residents to work together to promote justice and a healthy life for all.

Signed:

Dated:

Background and Action Plan

1. Rationale for Neighbourhood Centres' Commitment to PCCE

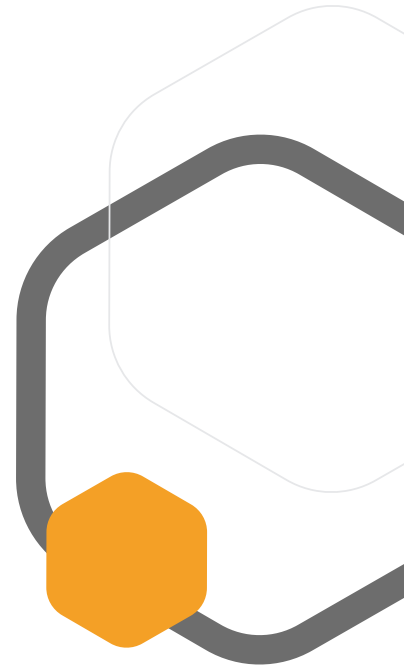
TNC member agencies aim to support inclusive, healthy, and equitable communities. PCCE, which puts community voices at the centre of agency efforts to support positive community change, is an integral part of that goal.

PCCE is central to addressing systemic socioeconomic inequities and to countering the historical and ongoing marginalization of oppressed communities. It helps create meaningful and dignified democratic processes that enable all individuals, in all sectors of society, to participate fully in making the decisions that shape their communities.

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As leaders in our communities we will support and amplify civic-engagement practices that put community voices at the centre of efforts to support positive community change. We will also collaborate with community groups, sector networks, unions, and funders to generate collective actions that support PCCE.



2. Defining PCCE

TNC's commitment to PCCE is part of a larger vision of social justice and community change, one that empowers neighbours to work together to meet local challenges, and responds to the needs of local residents by integrating services, capacity building, and social reform.

Amplifying and supporting PCCE requires that TNC member agencies commit to working collectively to ensure that their structures, procedures, and practices support community participation in decision-making.

To that end, TNC will seek to support—in the areas of organizational governance, organizational procedure, and organizational culture—structures, procedures, and practices that help to promote PCCE.

Our member agencies will:

- Work towards removing barriers so people can have more control over their lives through civic engagement.
- Promote a vision of civic engagement that includes not only political decision-making processes (like government elections) but also inclusive decision-making practices where community members have a say in organizational services, initiatives, and other activities. This includes community input into organizational governance, organizational design, and so on.
- Organize around the rights, holistic needs, expectations, and expertise of people, their lived realities, and their communities.
- Work with communities in ways that consciously engage the perspectives and lived experiences of community members.
- See community members as co-pilots in designing community change as well as individuals who have the right to access community services that respond to their needs.
- Ensure that people have the power, knowledge, support, and respect they need to actively and meaningfully participate in civic engagement. Active and meaningful participation includes defining their own vision and priorities, co-shaping decisions, and co-leading initiatives to carry out those decisions.
- Institute processes that build capacities to enable civic participation.



3. Values to Guide Our Action

The following value statements will guide TNC members as they promote and implement PCCE.

- We acknowledge that there is an inequality of power between our organizations and the people we serve. We further recognize that many of those people come from marginalized communities created by historical and ongoing systemic oppressions.
- We recognize that our organizations should have power with—and not over—the people we serve.
- We recognize that we need to move away from thinking of community as object and move toward thinking of community as subject.
- We recognize the need to dismantle and interrogate power structures that perpetuate inequities. We also recognize that the people we serve are community leaders who embody power, and that organizations exist for the sake of the people they work with and serve.
- We acknowledge the lived realities and trauma of the people and communities we serve.

4. TNC Commitments and Actions

In pursuing our vision for infusing PCCE into the culture of non-profit organizations in our network, TNC will act on three levels:

1. TNC member agencies' board members;
2. TNC member agencies' senior leaders; and
3. TNC member agencies' frontline, program, and service-delivery staff.

1. In collaboration with agencies' board members, TNC will promote:

- 1a. Practices that enable community voices to be part of governance;
- 1b. Procedures and processes that ensure community voices can influence governance; and
- 1c. Actions that bring community voices to the fore and advocate for issues voiced by community members.

2. Acting as a network, TNC will leverage the diversity and scope of our membership and work with senior leaders to strengthen our member agencies' capacity to implement PCCE. This will include:

- 2a. Creating ongoing opportunities for member agencies to discuss, highlight, and popularize PCCE across their diverse workplaces;
- 2b. Sharing knowledge about best practices; and
- 2c. Sharing ways to integrate best practices into agencies' daily work.

3. Individual TNC member agencies will strive to implement PCCE practices that promote:

- 3a. An understanding of PCCE and its importance among frontline, program, and service-delivery staff;
- 3b. Opportunities and resources for frontline, program, and service-delivery staff to build capacity in order to support PCCE and integrate it throughout the agency's work;
- 3c. Opportunities and resources for frontline, program, and service-delivery staff to work in partnership with the people and communities they serve.

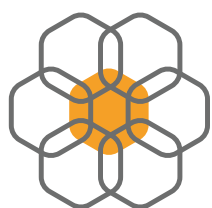
5. Moving Forward: A TNC Action Plan for PCCE

By adopting this charter, TNC members are marking the start of a process of infusing PCCE into the culture of their organizations.

To move these charter commitments forward, TNC members will now seek to:

- Obtain the adoption of the PCCE charter by their individual board of directors.
- Provide capacity-building support for members to develop their own PCCE action plans, including:
 - processes and templates for implementation and evaluation so members can identify areas of focus and strategic goals to advance PCCE
 - effective mechanisms for member agencies to document and share their successful PCCE practices with each other
- Evaluate our charter, action plans, and efforts on a periodic basis to improve their clarity, respond to emerging challenges and opportunities, and evaluate the impacts of our individual and collective efforts to advance PCCE.
- Assemble a PCCE Action Team composed of member agencies' Executive Directors and board volunteers to help guide the implementation of our PCCE commitments, and to pursue funding opportunities to support our ongoing networking and capacity-building efforts in this area.





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