



PROJECT CASE STUDY

OF THE HOUSING SOLUTIONS LAB



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CASE STUDY: NORTH SHORE SENIORS HOUSING SOLUTIONS LAB

Topics: Housing, aging in place, social connection and wellbeing, gentle density, accessory dwelling units, seniors, home sharing, secondary suites

INTRODUCTION

The North Shore Seniors Housing Solutions Lab¹ aimed at reimagining options for housing seniors on Vancouver's North Shore that are more affordable, climate-friendly and socially supportive. The project was a collaborative effort led by SFU Renewable Cities and Hollyburn Community Services Society, with funding from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and Vancity Credit Union. The project leveraged community insights and expert knowledge to address the growing mismatch between the current housing stock and the evolving needs of the senior population.

"WHAT IS A SOLUTIONS LAB?"

[Excerpts from CMHC's NHS Solutions Lab Program, 2020.](#)

This project was undertaken as a lab because it aimed to tackle the complex societal challenges facing Canadians that require systems change and that have not been solved using conventional methods.

Part of the lab's role was to deepen stakeholder understanding of the specific challenge by exposing them to perspectives of other stakeholders. By enabling groups to work together, the lab aimed to develop collective, relevant and responsive solutions, as well as identify potential "champions" who are best positioned to scale-up those solutions. What sets this innovative approach apart is that the solutions are developed by stakeholders for consideration by governments, rather than the other way around.

A Solutions Lab allows for and provides tools and experts to guide stakeholders to co-develop solution ideas, prioritizes those ideas so they can be prototyped and tested together, and if they work, be implemented.

A lab creates a safe zone for a diverse and inclusive group of participants to explore, question assumptions, be bold, be agile enough to adapt as learning emerges, and to experiment with solutions.

GOVERNANCE AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Hollyburn Community Services Society oversaw the project, with Renewable Cities as the Solutions Lab consultant that designed and delivered the lab. The project brought together an advisory board composed of experts from diverse fields including local government, social and senior services

¹ Original project title: Seniors Hidden Housing Solutions to Affordability and Climate Change

groups, housing providers and finance. This board played a crucial role in guiding the project's strategic direction, ensuring that all activities aligned with the broader goal of creating sustainable and inclusive housing solutions.

Throughout the lab, the project engaged with a range of stakeholders including older adult homeowners, renters, local community organizations, housing advocacy groups, policy makers, elected officials and the construction sector, fostering a collaborative environment conducive to innovative problem-solving.

Program goals and context

The lab's primary goal was to explore and develop housing solutions that could accommodate the unique needs of seniors living on the North Shore, addressing the mismatch between the existing housing stock and the needs of the older adult population. Recognizing the challenges posed by high living costs, limited housing options and the desire of many seniors to remain in their communities, the project sought to identify and remove barriers to adoption of alternative housing options. With a significant portion of seniors living in low-occupancy single-detached homes, the project aimed to explore three specific housing options: home sharing, secondary suites and coach houses. By focusing on these alternatives, the lab sought to alleviate housing affordability issues, reduce building-related greenhouse gas emissions and combat social isolation among seniors.

Objectives and methodologies

The lab used a phased approach with iterative, design-thinking that prioritized stakeholder engagement. This process began with understanding the current housing landscape as well as the preferences, barriers and potential incentives for senior homeowners. Subsequent lab stages involved the development and testing of solution prototypes, with continuous feedback from stakeholders to refine and adapt the approaches based on real-world applicability and impact.

The methodology included using surveys, statistical analysis, interviews and community workshops to gather qualitative and quantitative data. The insights gained from the initial phase informed the design and development of housing solution prototypes and a pilot program, which were tested with stakeholders and evaluated for effectiveness, scalability and replicability.

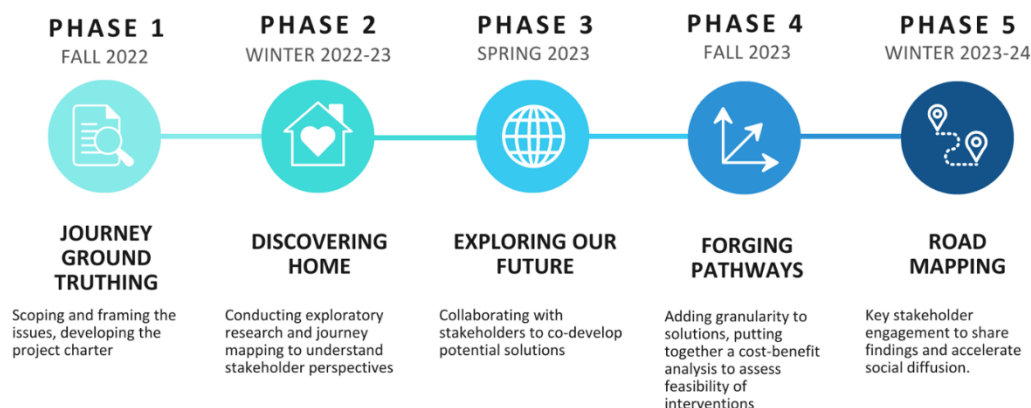


Figure 1: Project timeline

Outcomes and impact

The project's outcomes include a detailed understanding of the barriers to and opportunities for alternative senior housing on the North Shore, a suite of scalable housing options, along with strategic recommendations for policy, regulatory, and programmatic changes. The project included a [cost benefit study](#), [shared what participants thought and possible solutions](#) to address privacy, safety, legal and financial concerns, [recommendations for various levels of government](#) and [considerations for program administrators](#), including scoping questions, project stage checklists, draft program budgets and job descriptions.

Additionally, the scalable housing solution prototypes serve as a model for other communities facing similar challenges. For example, this model could be used to house first responders in communities with limited housing where firefighters or paramedics have long commutes from the municipalities they reside in.

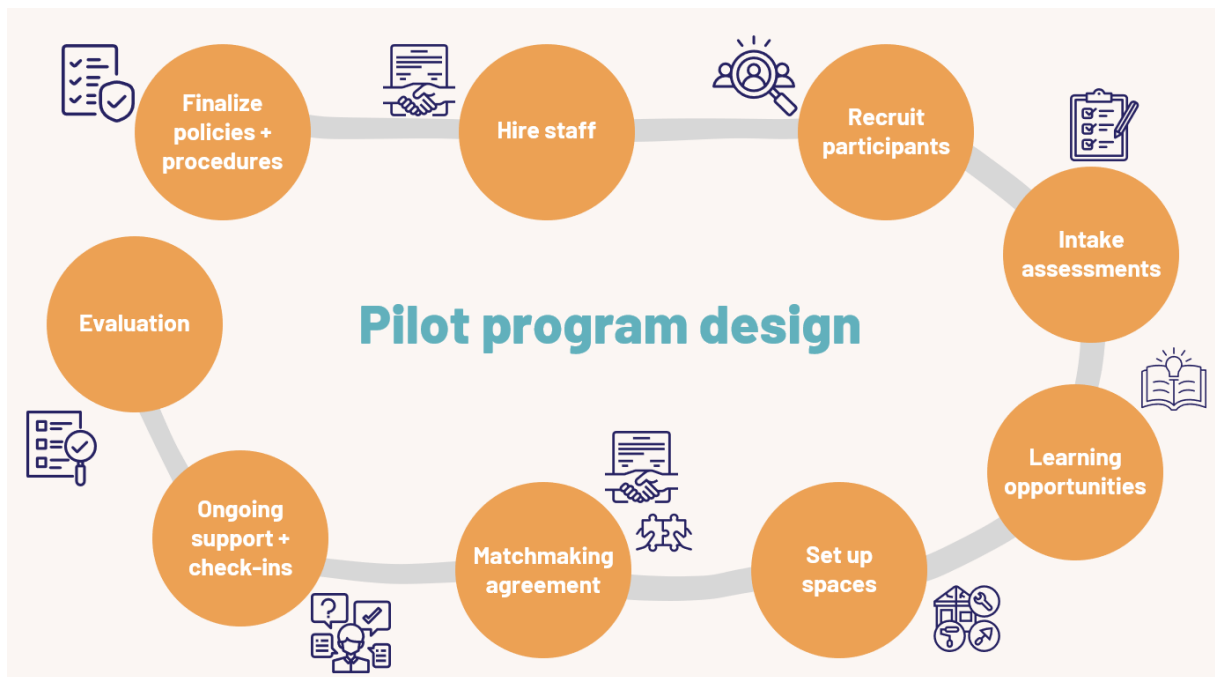


Figure 2: Draft pilot program design outline

Challenges and lessons learned

Navigating the complexities of legal, financial, and social barriers presented significant challenges. These included aspects from the complexity of regulatory landscapes (i.e., interactions with tenancy laws and municipal bylaws and building codes) to the diverse needs and concerns of senior homeowners. The project's iterative approach, with a strong emphasis on stakeholder feedback and adaptability, proved crucial in overcoming these obstacles. Lessons learned highlight the importance of flexibility, the value of diverse stakeholder engagement, and the need for targeted communication strategies to change perceptions and encourage adoption of new housing models.

Governance commentary and future directions

The governance structure of the project, characterized by its collaborative and inclusive approach, played a pivotal role in its ability to navigate challenges and leverage opportunities. Looking forward, the project's findings and prototypes have the potential to influence housing policy and practice not only on the North Shore but also across B.C. and Canada, contributing to a more sustainable, affordable, and inclusive housing landscape for seniors.

For more details about the lab, please refer to our Roadmap to Implementation report and [living library archive website](#).