



Introduction

Strategic priorities provide focus and forward-looking direction for organizations. This report explains how TDIN went about reviewing/ re-setting our strategic priorities (our process) and shares the themes, priorities and suggestions for next steps that we heard from our members in this process. The content of this report will inform our workplan for the next 2 years. TDIN encourages feedback and participation from our members as we implement the priorities through concrete and responsive action.

First, however, is a recognition of the many hours and ideas and the huge commitment to guiding and implementing this process of the members of the Strategic Priorities Working Group: deep thanks to Monica Sarty, Sharon Anderson and Joanne Green. A demonstration once again of the incredible talent and passion we have within our TDIN membership. Thank you also to everyone who contributed to the survey, focus groups and interviews.

This report is not the end of the process. *It is important for us to hear back from TDIN members about what else we can learn and how we can put into practice what you have shared with us.*

Follow the star  for suggestions from members and arrows  indicating current thinking and further work for TDIN.

(A) Indicates comment from ally interviews.

Strategic Priority Review-ReSet Process

Our first Strategic Priorities Working Group (September 2017) meeting affirmed that our goals were to:

- ❖ review existing strategic priorities
- ❖ establish new priorities if required to respond to needs, capacities and changing environments
- ❖ establish strategic priorities that would guide us for two more years
- ❖ NOT do a full strategic planning process
- ❖ Produce good answers for the question “Why?” – solid rationale for TDIN advocacy positions, for the content of trainings, resources and development around best practices in drop ins and associated programs and for our TDIN workplans so that our limited resources are used most effectively and creatively.

To do this we agreed that we would:

- ❖ Be ambitious/aspirational AND realistic at the level of new priorities. Build on work already done.
- ❖ Engage both TDIN members as well as external allies
- ❖ Provide necessary supports to involve drop in participants – honorariums, TTC tokens, safer space for discussion

How we involved TDIN members

- All TDIN members were invited to do a survey* – one for staff/co-ordinators; one for leadership positions. Sixty-one surveys were completed: individual leadership responses were received from 35% of our membership and individual staff responses, from 44%.
- A drop in participant member and a TDIN placement student led 3 focus groups with drop in participants. 12 people participated, representing 6 of our member drop ins.

Who filled out the surveys

- One organization was over represented in responses.
- Responses span most but not all of the geographic and demographic diversity that exists within the membership.

↔ Future work: Analyze to see if responses differ according to drop in location (e.g. downtown core versus inner suburbs)

- Characteristics of respondents:

Leadership and staff respondents had a wide range of experience.

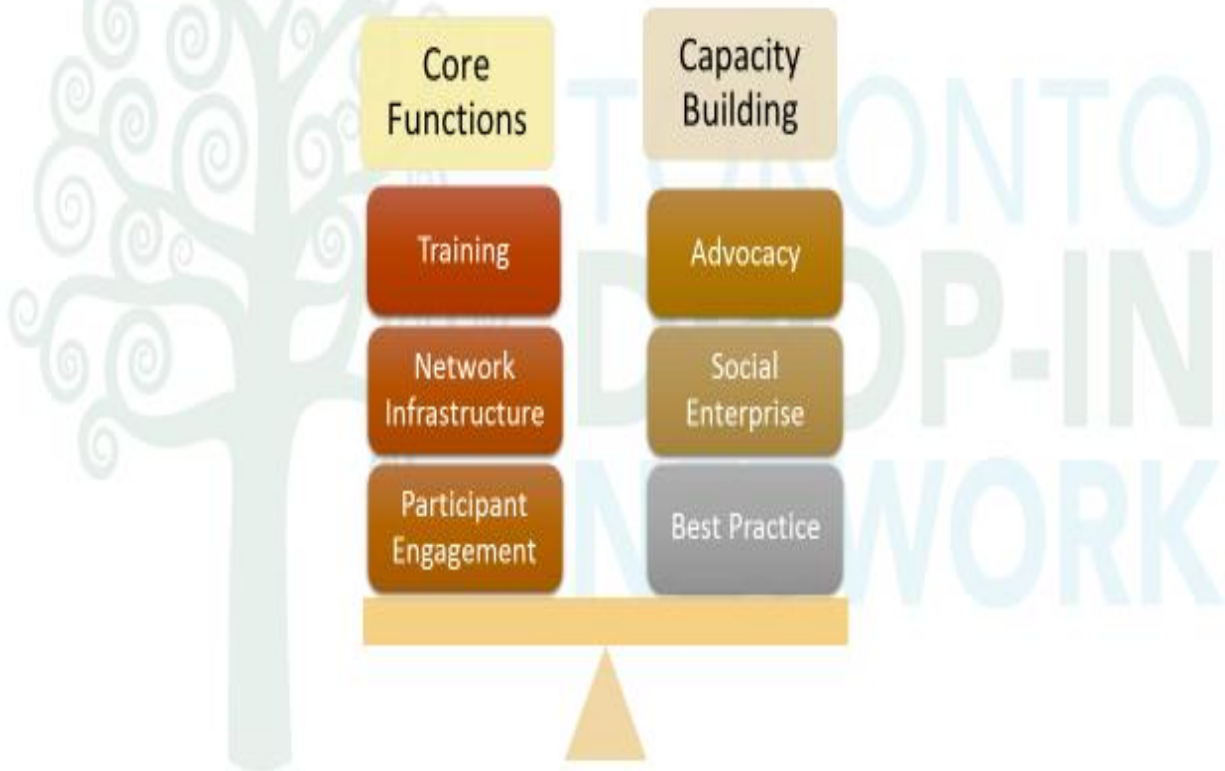
Minimum years in drop in sector	0
Median	7
Max years in drop in sector	29
Average # of years	9

Input from allies

Our MSW student conducted interviews with 2 representatives of community-based organizations.

This is what guided TDIN for the last 4 years

Two Streams of Strategic Priorities



Best Practices include: Harm Reduction, Neighbourhood Coordination and Food Security

This is how TDIN members ranked the importance of these priorities for TDIN’s work in the next two years (2019 – 2020).

TDIN STRATEGIC PRIORITY REVIEW 2018	
RANK	ALL SURVEY RESPONDENTS (n=61) Combined Ranking Points
1ST	TRAINING
2ND	ADVOCACY
3RD	PARTICIPANT ENGAGEMENT
4TH	HARM REDUCTION
5TH	NEIGHBOURHOOD COORDINATION
6TH	FOOD SECURITY
7TH	NETWORK INFRASTRUCTURE
8TH	SOCIAL ENTERPRISE



Big Picture Themes

Survey responses provided a lot of information about how much and what members valued about TDIN.

The over-arching message is that TDIN has a role in supporting the drop in sector both at the macro and at the micro level.

- ↔ What TDIN does helps address systemic issues, especially through our advocacy and information sharing and the opportunities TDIN creates to bring the sector together.
- ↔ What TDIN does also supports the one-on-one/individual work that happens every day in drop ins, and that the one-on-one problem-solving work needs that support – through sharing informational resources on-line and through the digest, through TDIN training and through the GMM and other forums for sharing information and networking.
- ↔ TDIN supports and should continue to develop a community of practice.

When asked to describe the ‘*most important thing you think TDIN has done in the last four years*’, members noted that the work TDIN has done around affordable public transit is an important way to ensure people can meet their basic needs and have a voice. The sector itself has also benefitted.

"It has given clients and service providers' creative ways to support and connect with other agencies. This makes a very clear difference in the lives of hundreds of people daily."

(TDIN has) "Built networks, boosted staff competency and morale, helped develop best practices."

Comments on the importance of TDIN training were also prevalent throughout the survey responses. When asked *'What needs to happen next to build on this 'important' work'*, one respondent stated:

"Continue to listen to the voices of those who use drop ins, and to make the training responsive to changing needs."

"By offering trainings specific to drop in settings, by listening to the voice of drop ins and concerns that keep arising and addressing them in stride and by keeping all of us informed."

Strategic priorities ranking

We asked survey respondents to rank from 1 to 8 the strategic priorities according to importance.

- Consistently, **training, advocacy and participant engagement** were ranked as the number 1st, 2nd and 3rd (respectively) most important priorities.
- **Harm reduction; food security and neighbourhood coordination** were (generally speaking) in the 4th, 5th and 6th ranked spots;
- **Network Infrastructure** was usually in the 7th position and **Social Enterprise** always ranked 8th/last.


The survey asked a number of questions specific to each strategic priority.

Common comments and themes



TRAINING: Many staff respondents (59%) had participated in TDIN training. All of them stated that the training was valuable. Specifically, the material was relevant and they were able to apply the material in their work at drop ins. Having a “good connection

with others” at the training session was also noted as an example of how the training was valuable to their work in drop ins.


 **Suggestions** for how training could support capacity-building demonstrate the importance of responding to the pressures on and current status of drop ins (i.e. difficulties in sending staff to training and the importance of volunteers in some drop ins) Suggestions included: providing training for volunteers, more on-site training and developing new training content and/or ensuring drop ins can access training delivered by other trainers. Harm reduction, staff well-being and concurrent disorders and trauma-informed care were recommended future topics.

Comments also highlighted the importance of TDIN training that supports an increased understanding and capacity within drop ins of the value of participant engagement, including why participant engagement is a key component of drop in best practices and exploring different roles for participants in the advocacy and programming initiatives drop ins do.



ADVOCACY: The issues that all respondents said that TDIN should focus on for advocacy were wide-ranging and likely reflected the communities drop ins work in and participants they work with and for. The issues of housing/homelessness, range of housing available, TTC/public transit and ensuring adequate resources for drop ins were the issues most frequently identified. Clearly, limited resources (money, available time) are the most significant barriers to involvement in advocacy.

Allied organizations that were interviewed also emphasized the need to push for more housing and different types and models of housing, including for people using substances, for those who do not, and for transitional and permanent housing.

 When asked what TDIN can do to support member involvement in advocacy efforts – there was a lot of response. Most fell into one of TWO categories:

1. Information - “More information and resources about where to begin / how to get involved” including “specific things an individual might do” or “information relevant to drop in needs [as they are] all different”.

2. Interaction - more trainings; meetings; information sessions around advocacy efforts; more direct interaction with drop ins and the participants that are there: “more site visits to talk to staff and participants”.

Responses highlighted the value of opportunities for members to connect and work collectively with others outside of their drop-in context. Members need to be more familiar with TDIN Committees and advocacy groups and about advocacy tools TDIN has developed. Especially

given high turnover rates and the use of relief staff and volunteers, this communication will need to be on-going.

↔ The Advocacy Bulletin may be useful in this regard if regularized and easy to access.

Staff responses emphasized supports to drop in participants to engage in advocacy including mentorships and advocacy/civic engagement education, incentives, clear potential roles and activities and in-person contact with drop ins. Drop in organizations also need to support drop in staff involvement in advocacy.

Use of current advocacy resources including the TDIN Advocacy toolkit has been low, although those respondents who did know about it and used it found it useful.

↔ TDIN will evaluate the effectiveness of these tools – content, need for - given other resources available and how tools can be integrated into the work of drop in organizations.



PARTICIPANT ENGAGEMENT (PE): Thirty seven [37%] of respondents – or 17 - knew that their organization had used the participant engagement fund from TDIN. Of those that had not accessed this fund: some didn't know about it; 5 stated it was not relevant.

The open comments section was used to report some of the barriers to use of the PE fund: resources of time; organizational transitions or priorities; understanding of how it is supposed to be used; and one person stated that “*Participants often do not want to travel downtown for events*”. Frontline staff are not as familiar with the PE fund as are leadership.

That is the top three strategic priorities. This report will now turn to the strategic priorities that were consistently ranked in 4th, 5th, and 6th.



HARM REDUCTION: Again, there was a lot of feedback about what this priority means, especially in the open responses.

Leadership responses focused on education and information about harm reduction programs and broad harm reduction strategies including Restorative Justice approaches.

Staff responses emphasized the role of TDIN in anti-stigma campaigns, advocacy to ensure harm reduction workers are placed in drop ins, especially those drop ins that do not have funding for these positions, facilitating provision of harm reduction supplies and trainings, including

Naloxone. TDIN needs to continue to respond to the overdose crisis through training and advocacy. (A)

Drop in participants who participated in the focus groups affirmed the role of TDIN in this area:

TDIN is very responsive to current events. Great job creating awareness.

It's going well because I keep hearing about it a lot everywhere I go, the information gets around.

↔ Given that other organizations such as Toronto Public Health have on-going training and supports for providing harm reduction supplies in drop ins, TDIN will need to explore further how we can most effectively respond to the feedback.



NEIGHBOURHOOD COORDINATION: Although 85% of responses reported that TDIN was supporting neighbourhood coordination somewhat to very well, the open-ended responses to four further questions demonstrated that there isn't a clear or cohesive idea of what the neighbourhood coordination role of TDIN is or would continue to be moving forward.

★ Respondents suggested TDIN should build or strengthen connections with BIA's, SSHA, shelters, 24/7 respite programs, CAMH, TCHC and Working for Change. Drop in participants emphasized the importance of programming in drop ins and good referrals out to the community. Both gain from neighbourhood connections and partnerships with other organizations.

★ Strategic recommendations included convening neighbourhood tables for drop ins to build collaborations and to uncover unique challenges related to the neighbourhoods where drop ins are providing services and supporting broader networks with other providers of services to people who are homeless and BIA's. Respondents also suggested media work and other strategies to promote an understanding of the role and value of drop ins in communities.

↔ This strategic priority will require further workshopping with members in order to develop a clear workplan to implement it.



FOOD SECURITY: Food security was highly valued as a goal for TDIN by both staff and leadership. It was one of the strategic priorities that was hard to place definitively – sometimes 3rd; sometimes 6th etc.



Drop in participants in the focus groups had strong suggestions about providing information about where people can get food, including making it more obvious on the website where to find food and having a big bulletin announcement of areas of food for those who have no internet. Quality of food provided at drop ins is not always good. (A).

↔ Of course food security is very important within the drop in sector. TDIN and our membership will need to discuss further how TDIN – as a network – can best support this goal in future.

Now this report will turn to the two strategic priorities consistently ranked 7th and 8th.



NETWORK INFRASTRUCTURE: Network infrastructure ranked low although it is an integral part of the work TDIN does. It allows the network to function – through the website, e-digest, committees and through other mechanisms that connect drop ins to each other, to events and to resources.

Questions about the use of and the value members get from our current network infrastructure components indicated that, generally speaking, respondents did use these platforms and valued them (77% of respondents used the TDIN website; 60% read the digest; 46% attended a discussion forum; 58% attended a GMM; and 38% participated in a TDIN committee).

Drop in participant focus group comments highlighted the need for more TDIN posters/brochures/visuals (to address limited access to computers in some cases) and ads in Now and Metro to increase visibility.

Questions exploring the connections amongst TDIN members indicated that the leadership respondents felt greater levels of connectedness to other drop ins than staff respondents.



Exploring different content and scheduling of the General Members Meetings were offered as ways to strengthen the support TDIN can offer members.

Respondents were also asked about other ways they thought that TDIN could support partnerships or communications between drop ins. Some ways noted were: more issue or resource-based meetings; a conference for drop ins; mentorships; different online platforms; small tables for drop ins with shared challenges and/or resources; different tables for management and staff.

↔ TDIN will continue to pilot different forums for collective learning, strategizing and action including neighbourhood and/or issue-based forums. We will continue to prioritize drop in visits to inform content for our network communication and supports.



SOCIAL ENTERPRISE: Respondents did not have a lot of information about the Social Enterprise resources produced by TDIN or about the TDIN member organizations’ work in this area (62% did not know about social enterprise work being done at TDIN member organizations and 75% were not interested in or aware of any planning at their organization to develop a social enterprise.)

Where there was some interest in building social enterprise, respondents did note that it required significant resources of time, materials and staff input that the organization did not currently have.

↔ We would like to explore this area more to determine if it stay as a priority for TDIN. TDIN can also share information and expertise from the increasing number of social enterprise resources being developed by other organizations in Toronto.

Our Environment: Challenges and Opportunities

Enduring and newly emerging issues and trends impact drop ins, individually and as a sector. This section includes contributions from ally interviews (A).

Leadership respondents reported a range of issues that make it difficult for drop ins to do their work well. Lack of funding and, clearly connected, staff turnover/burn out, stress felt by staff and inadequate staffing were challenges most often cited. It is clear that many drop ins are patching together different sources of funding, and are not receiving enough committed funding given the time sensitive nature of some of the work in drop ins and the level of crisis and, in some cases, violence that is occurring within drop ins spaces.

The increase in numbers of aging drop in participants and the unique and different services needed to adequately respond was raised both in survey responses and in drop in participants’ focus groups.

Drop in participants in the focus groups spoke about fighting, arguing and also violence in drop in spaces. They emphasized the importance of safety, built in part through developing healthy ways of challenging each other, fixing relationships and fixing conflicts among participants.

Need for drop ins keeps rising (more people accessing programs) and programs themselves are still in the same spaces with the same number of staff. Also lack of services that are willing to work with those who are street-involved/have complex needs.


Level of desperation is worse and it's getting worse. Undiagnosed brain injury and delays on top of trauma. (A)

[A] certain number of participants are losing access to all programs because their needs are not understood and programs don't have the capacity/understanding to learn how to work with them.

Not enough funding. Funding is project based not core funding [There is the] expectation of funders to provide outcome based reporting without the capacity of organizations to do this. (A)

There is real concern, in part related to funding, about gentrification and the stigma and discrimination against people who are street involved. Interviews with allied organizations reported lots of stigma and victim blaming of poverty. They also noted there is a little less stigma with addiction because people from middle class are getting addicted more visibility.

[We are] wanting to do more engagement aspects, but not having an increase of funding for our program [makes it difficult].

 Suggestions for addressing challenges for drop ins (organizations and people who come to them) include for TDIN to explore the gap between drop ins, mobile crisis and Mdot, to focus on large advocacy initiatives that build a strong public recognition of the role and value of drop ins and about the complex issues our communities face. Part of this story is the reasons people need to go to drop ins, especially lack of food security and social isolation. (A)

We need to continue to be a strong voice with the city. The following comments provide a strong orientation for future TDIN strategies and work plan:

Always mindful that the drop in is not just a crisis intervention point but that it is also a place to begin recovery, build capacity for coping and developing new skills. There can be a worry that services are geared more toward band-aid than community development.

As drop in participant said in a focus group: [We want] to feel comfortable, wanted. People need to feel valued more than wanted. Appreciated.

As we move to grappling with the many issues and complexities of drop in work, TDIN will draw upon what respondents told us gives them energy and hope:

People committed to bring about change.

The people who access our services and contribute to our wonderful space.

We provide a safe and meaningful place for people to go.

I think there is a growing sense that people need to work together, rather than against each other. The city's support of affordable housing endeavors and the support of the federal government, although it hasn't perhaps resulted in much yet, is hopeful. (Echoed by ally)

I get energy and hope when I see and hear of our guests/clients getting connected and overcoming small and big barriers in their lives. We celebrate every level of success and to hear their stories.

Incredible volunteer / community support.

Energy and commitment of front line staff, of TDIN staff.

Clients are resilient – inspiring capacity to survive and thrive. (A)

How you can be involved in implementing these learnings:

Ask: What can TDIN do something about?

↔ How does TDIN continue to be proactive in supporting the capacity of drop ins to work in the best ways possible with communities coming to drop in spaces. Are there new trainings

required? Can we offer learning opportunities in different ways? How do we support collective problem-solving and collaborative practices that align with the core values and goals of drop ins.

TDIN staff will continue to work with our members, the Steering Committee and other Committees to build on what we have heard and learned through this process and to ensure that our strategic priorities drive what we do as a network.

As a member of TDIN, your involvement - big or small – will help us succeed.