

Worksheet: Frequently-Asked Questions – An information sheet for neighbors

Instructions: This worksheet contains typical questions about tent cities collected from neighbors, businesses, and the general public. Fill in the answers to as many questions as possible for your tent city. (Sample answers from Dignity Village are provided for comparison.)

Uses: For distribution to neighborhood associations, local businesses, supporters, politicians, and anyone interested in more in-depth information about your tent city.

Section I. Population

Question #1:	How many people live at _____ at a time? How many have moved on to permanent housing? How long do people usually stay?
Our tent city	
Dignity Village	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum of 60 people live at Dignity Village at one time (limit imposed by the city) • 700+ people transitioning through the Village since its inception • 25% stay a few days or weeks • 55% stay several months • 20% stay on a more permanent basis and become part of the Core Operations Team

Question #2:	What are the demographics or population mix at _____?
Our tent city	
Dignity Village	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Demographics: very diverse population</i> • <i>30% female, 70% male</i> • <i>No one under 18 years (restriction by city), oldest current resident is 65 years</i> • <i>10% are AfrAmer; 75% Cauc; 8% NatAmer; 2% Asian/PacIslander; 5% Hisp</i> • <i>Religions include Rastafarian, Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Druid</i> • <i>Job skills and degrees of residents include: construction, accounting, mechanic, nurse, others</i>

Question #3:	Does anyone at _____ have jobs outside of the camp/village?
Our tent city	
Dignity Village	<i>Yes, we have at least 5 working at Saturday Market regularly, and at least 10 others working part-time at various places. 10-12 villagers are also now working at Digsville Farm. We have had over 140 former residents get full time jobs and move away from the village into conventional housing.</i>

Question #4:	Aren't homeless people all drug addicts or drunks?
Our tent city	
Dignity Village	<i>Nearly one-third of adult homeless persons are not involved in the substance abuse culture; they do not want to be forced to live with those people who are abusers. For those who are recovering addicts, Dignity Village offers a safe supportive environment without temptations and with community peer support. Support services such as AA or NA are offered at the Village, with their centralized location allowing greater access to those who need the services.</i>

Section II. Community Structure and Operations

Question #4:	Where does the money come from to support _____?
Our tent city	
Dignity Village	<i>From private donations, fundraising events, and grants from private foundations. Our long-term goal is to develop microbusinesses and expanded organic gardens at our permanent site so that we are self-sustaining.</i>

Question #5:	Who are the decision makers and responsible parties at _____?
Our tent city	
Dignity Village	<i>The Council members are the elected Board of Dignity Village. Dignity Village is run as a democracy, and the Council members are the responsible parties for financial and organizational decisions. The Council meets once a week on Wednesdays; general membership meetings are held monthly on the first Thursday of the month. The Village Officers (Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer) are elected by the Council for one-year appointments.</i>

Question #6:	How does _____ dispose of trash and deal with sanitation issues?
Our tent city	
Dignity Village	<i>There is a Sanitation Crew composed of Villagers which is responsible for keeping the Village and the surrounding area clean of trash and waste. The Village owns and maintains four Port-a-lets (one is handicapped accessible) and two dumpsters, at a total cost of \$1530 per month, paid by the Village through their own funds.</i>

Question #7:	How does _____ get access to heating and water resources?
Our tent city	
Dignity Village	<i>Water is provided by the city at the Sunderland site, through 4 cold-water faucets. At their permanent site, Dignity Village expects to pay for their water use themselves. Currently, heating is accomplished through propane and wood/charcoal burning cookstoves. Several small propane heaters and a large patio heater have been donated to heat the commons areas (communal kitchen and meeting area commons). Dignity pays for its own propane, although donations of propane, sleeping bags, and blankets are always welcome.</i>

Question #8:	How does _____ get food and clothing?
Our tent city	
Dignity Village	<i>Most residents of Dignity Village receive food stamps, and many work part-time jobs which pays for their food and personal expenses. We often share food among ourselves, cooking communally in our commons area. Dignity Village also receives a variety of donations of food, clothing, bedding, tents, and other items. Local soup kitchens and faith organizations bring hot meals to the Village, particularly around holidays and during the cold winter months.</i>

Section III. Outreach and Neighbors

Question #9:	What about drug and alcohol use at _____?
Our tent city	
Dignity Village	<i>In our admittance agreement we have five basic rules: 1) no violence to self or others, 2) No alcohol or illegal substances on the premises, 3) No theft, 4) Everyone must contribute to the well-being of the village, 5) No constant disruptive behavior. Breaking any of these rules is grounds to be removed from the village.</i>

Question #10:	What about theft and poverty crimes in our neighborhood by people at _____? How do we keep you off our property and out of our garbage cans?
Our tent city	
Dignity Village	<i>Our Security Team would join the neighborhood watch and patrol the neighborhood. The Outreach Team would also join the neighborhood associations. We respect other people's property as well as our own, and strive always to be good neighbors.</i>

Question #11:	How does _____ guarantee security to the surrounding neighbors and businesses?
Our tent city	
Dignity Village	<p><i>The Village has a Security Crew which maintains and ensures security and respect within the Village. No alcohol, drugs or disrespectful or aggressive behavior are allowed in the Village. We also do neighborhood security checks 24x7, in 2-4 hour rotating shifts, walking a “beat” in a 2-block perimeter around the Village grounds to ensure safety and security of the Village and neighbors. Security coaches wear an identifying badge and an orange safety vest. Any problems are dealt with according to a standard protocol within the Village Security operations and with local police precincts.</i></p>

Question #12:	What happens with homeless people whom _____ does not welcome into their camp? Will the neighborhood be worse off because of them?
Our tent city	
Dignity Village	<p><i>We would go to the Neighborhood Watch and let them know who they are what they look like and work with them to get them out of the neighborhood.</i></p> <p><i>Dignity Village is not a total solution to homelessness, it is an economical and practical solution to address the needs of some number of homeless persons who share the vision of the community. Those people who do not share the vision of Dignity Village and who are not welcome there will have the same options as all homeless persons have in the absence of Dignity Village: attempt to find a place at one of the shelters or sleep on the streets and in doorways. THIS IS A NATIONWIDE PROBLEM THAT MUST BE ADDRESSED BY EVERYONE, not just the responsibility of Dignity Village. The Village will address the needs of a percentage of homeless people, helping them get off the streets and back into society. The presence of Dignity Village will not result in an increase in homeless persons in a neighborhood; if anything, the numbers will decrease.</i></p>

Question #13:	What is the history of crime in neighborhoods where _____ has been? What is _____'s relationship and history with the police?
Our tent city	
Dignity Village	<i>We have protocols in place with all police precincts, signed by all commanders of each precinct. Copies of our protocols are available from the Village or from police precinct offices. Crime statistics show decreased crime (indicated by fewer police calls) in the Sunderland Yard area since Dignity Village moved in.</i>

Question #14:	How does _____ deal with the legality of the zoning issues related to camping in the city limits?
Our tent city	
Dignity Village	<i>In our initial discussions with the city, one option we discussed was to bend regulations temporarily until we found a permanent site. There were requirement that each unit have electricity and plumbing, so we discussed the possibility of setting up something similar to a trailer park under similar ordinances, or even yurts or straw-bale structures on a permanent site that conformed to housing codes. We have a team of lawyers and land use planners who worked on an amendment to city zoning laws that brought Portland zoning laws into compliance with an Oregon state law allowing municipalities to rezone a limited amount of land for transitional/temporary encampments. We were designated a transitional campground in 2004 for zoning purposes, and we are in the process of upgrading our structures to conform to fire safety codes and other housing regulations.</i>

Question #15:	Why is there a need for _____? Why can't they all go to shelters?
Our tent city	
Dignity Village	<i>There are a total of 3-6,000 homeless in Portland on the streets on any given night, but only 600 shelter beds. The cost of keeping one person in a shelter is about \$50 per night; this is supported by taxpayers through government subsidies and grants. Dignity Village costs the taxpayer nothing, as we rent the city property where we are located. Rules in the shelters prevent families and couples from staying together, no pets, cannot leave personal property in shelters, cannot stay in shelters during the day. Adult shelters are not clean, they are not safe for personal belongings, not accommodating for people who are ill or who work late or work night shifts and need to sleep late. Shelters are not conducive to healthy attitudes about oneself; they tend to reinforce the institutionalized charity model rather than the self-empowered, self-sufficiency model.</i>

Question #16:	Can't they all get subsidized housing somewhere? Doesn't the government provide welfare payments and low-income housing?
Our tent city	
Dignity Village	<i>The unfortunate fact is that there simply isn't enough low-income housing. The gentrification of neighborhoods and cities often reduces the amount of low-income housing available, and the government is slow to create other options for affordable housing. Homeless people use much less free assistance than do many of our businesses and more wealthy individuals who receive large publicly funded tax breaks, tax shelters, grants, and favorable rulings by governmental bodies. The homeless who work (half of the population at DV) do pay taxes and often are not able to qualify for some of the publicly funded support that the wealthier people receive. The homeless just receive different forms of support. The goal at Dignity Village is for homeless people to help themselves, to be self-sufficient and self-empowered, at no cost to the city or taxpayers.</i>

Question #17:	Why don't those homeless people get a job?
Our tent city	
Dignity Village	<p><i>A lot of people living on the streets already work, but housing is extremely expensive, particularly in today's economic climate. Some people have issues that prevent them from being able to work in any regular employment capacity, such as mental and physical disabilities, substance abuse issues, and lack of social skills or job training. Most of the jobs available for people with limited skills are at minimum wage or below, often part-time at less desirable hours, and typically with no benefits such as health care or sick leave. Many are actively looking for jobs, a difficult task in a recession. Others are often trying to juggle the logistics of transportation and scheduling for two or three part-time jobs while trying to earn enough money to find permanent housing. Half of the population at Dignity Village work at least part-time.</i></p>