



Gender-Based
**SAFETY
AUDIT**



Hamilton Gender-Based Safety Audit Info Sheet

The YWCA is leading a city-wide Gender-Based Safety Audit (GBSA) that invites Hamiltonians to exercise their power to make the city a safer place for everyone, particularly women and gender-diverse people!

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The Short of it

WHAT?	WHO?	WHEN?
A Gender-Based Safety Audit (GBSA for short) is a process that invites community members to identify safe and unsafe physical spaces in the city and recommend how the unsafe spaces can be improved.	Humans who live, work, play, and visit Hamilton. Since this is a gender-based safety audit we are particularly focused on gathering the wisdom and experience of women, children, and gender-diverse people.	January - November 2024
HOW?	WHERE?	WHY?
There are two main ways to contribute your opinions and ideas to the GBSA. 1. Organize an audit event with members of your community. 2. Participate in an audit event run by a community organization or member.	All over Hamilton!	By addressing the unique safety risks faced by women and gender-diverse people, we engage the safety, dignity, comfort, and accessibility needs of many Hamiltonians.



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The Long of it

Gender-based safety audits that focus on the safety needs and concerns of women and children have been around for decades. Metropolitan Toronto Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children (METRAC), a well-known leader in conducting safety audits started conducting audits over forty years ago! Audits invite community members to name the factors that lead to feelings of being unsafe and invite suggestions for how to make places safer (rephrased, [source](#)).

Gender-based safety audits have been defined as a process that brings individuals together to move through a physical environment, evaluate how safe it feels to them, identify ways to make the space safer, and organize to bring about these changes. The gender-based safety audit allows participants to identify safe and unsafe spaces and recommend how the unsafe spaces can be improved. In doing so, the gender-based safety audit prioritizes the experience and knowledge of women and gender-diverse individuals living in a neighbourhood and/or using a community space as experts in their own safety, comfort, dignity, and accessibility needs.

Safety audits are a tool that individuals, organizations, businesses, and/or municipalities can use to evaluate different features of their environments, with the goal of improving everyone's safety. A safety audit is typically a checklist or "inventory" of features that may affect the safety of those using the space. It allows for the assessment of risk and the proposal of solutions/strategies to increase safety.

The proposed Gender-Based Safety Audit would support the goals of the City of Hamilton's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan, through using a proactive, collaborative, community-based approach to address women and gender-diverse individuals' safety.

[Read more...](#)



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The Process

We commit to do our best to adjust our projected timelines to honour the pace and needs of the communities involved in the audit.

Phase 1: Preparation	Phase 2: Invitation	Phase 3: Data Collection
<p>In this phase, we clarified the purpose of the audit, scope, and tools needed to support the project over the long term (i.e. project planning documents; worksheets; introductory communications etc.)</p> <p>Projected Timeline: Dec. 2023 - Apr. 2024</p>	<p>We invite formal and informal community partners (leaders, groups, and organizations) who identify or work primarily with women and gender-diverse people to host audit events.</p> <p>Projected Timeline: Mar. 2024 - May 2024</p>	<p>We work with communities to collect meaningful audit data and collaborate with City divisions to encourage public participation.</p> <p>Projected Timeline: June 2024 - Aug. 2024</p>
Phase 4: Data Analysis	Phase 5: Knowledge Sharing	Phase 6: Now What?
<p>We make sense of the data (i.e. develop themes, reveal questions, and identify gaps) in ways that are rooted in the contexts, histories, and experiences of the communities who generated and gathered the data in the first place.</p> <p>Projected Timeline: Sept. 2024 - Oct. 2024</p>	<p>We share the identified information, experiences, additional questions and gaps with various audiences (i.e. City of Hamilton, YWCA, general public, communities etc.) in ways that are relevant, accessible, meaningful, and action-oriented.</p> <p>Projected Timeline: Nov. 2024</p>	<p>We identify the “next steps” for the work alongside the communities involved and the City of Hamilton in ways that are meaningful to the communities involved and biased toward action. We submit the audit report to the City.</p> <p>Projected Timeline: Oct. 2024 - Nov. 2024</p>



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Overall Approach and Commitments

Dedicated to Accountable and Responsible Action. As an audit team, we believe it is good practice to be transparent about the principles and practices that inform and guide our work. We commit to center our work on the values of equity, reciprocity, justice, and action. We commit to imperfectly exercising an anti-oppressive, anti-racist, trauma-informed, community-first approach to conducting and completing the audit.

Rooted in community knowledge, wisdom and expertise. We operate from the belief that women, youth, and gender-diverse communities are experts in their own safety, comfort, dignity and accessibility needs. Their knowledge, expertise, and wisdom are powerful contributors to the City's overall health and prosperity.

Guided by an intersectional framework. In data collection and analysis, we prioritize the experiences and knowledge of women and gender-diverse people who face additional systemic and structural threats to safety due to race, class, sexual orientation, etc. By addressing the unique safety risks faced by these community members, we engage the safety, dignity, comfort, and accessibility needs of many Hamiltonians.

Committed to honouring agency. This means that communities own and retain the information and ideas they share and are invited to make decisions around how/if it is shared throughout the project. It also means that all information gathered and shared from community members will be grouped together to make the information less identifiable.

Connect with Us

The audit team is co-led by Sarah Glen, Vice-President of Knowledge and Culture Mobilization, and Bernadette Arthur, External Consultant of Co: Culture Collective, and supported by a small team of McMaster student volunteers.

If you have questions, suggestions, or comments about the audit contact us at gbsahamilton@gmail.com. We are looking forward to connecting with you!



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Frequently Asked Questions

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- + [I have a creative idea for a safety audit event and need some support or resources to pull it off. Can you help?](#)
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Frequently Asked Questions

What happens at a safety audit event?

Community members will gather on a specified date and time to:

- 1. Conduct an **onsite tour** of a physical space, or*
- 2. Participate in a **community conversation** about the ways they experience safety in public spaces in Hamilton.*

During the event, community members will capture their observations, perspectives, and ideas using and a checklist of matters to consider and data collection forms provided by the audit organizers.

How do I organize a safety audit event?

Contact us at gbsahamilton@gmail.com and we will send you an audit event planning form that you can complete alone or with other community members. We recommend that you plan an audit event with at least one other person. Two heads can be better than one.

Once we've received your form, we will contact you to provide you with feedback, support, and a safety audit event kit so that you have the tools to collect the data on your event day.

I have a creative idea for a safety audit event and need some support or resources to pull it off. Can you help?

Absolutely, all safety audit event organizers will be connected to a community support team member who can provide moral support, access to financial resources and/or skilled facilitators, etc.



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I don't want to organize a safety audit event, but want to participate in one. How do I find out about safety audit events in my area?

Onsite tour audit participants will receive materials to assist and then have a discussion about-. Part of any audit is discussing the physical and social aspects that make a physical space safe like lighting, surveillance, sightlines, and general attitudes and behaviours of the community members, businesses, and organizations that share the space (rephrased, [source](#)).

What will happen with the data that's collected?

GBSAs can be used to help community members, business leaders, and City officials answer important questions related to the extent that gender impacts the way people can navigate physical spaces safely.

So why are we focusing on women and gender-diverse people and not all people's safety?

Women and gender-diverse individuals face different and often increased safety risks in various community spaces than cis-gendered men. In 2023, Hamilton joined several cities across Ontario to declare gender-based violence to be an epidemic. The statistics gathered by the Women Abuse Working Group are sobering: there were 7,660 crisis or helpline calls recorded last year related to gender-based violence, and 2,061 women in Hamilton received violence against women counseling.

After conversing with other women-serving organizations, YWCA Hamilton, a local leader in programs and services for women and gender-diverse individuals, discovered:

- *A lack of data around what types of violence women and gender-diverse individuals were experiencing*
- *Many incidents of violence against women and gender-diverse individuals at street level making targeted solutions difficult*
- *An increase in violence against women and gender-diverse individuals during the pandemic (in line with historical evidence showing a pattern of increased gender-based violence during epidemics)*



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- *Several organizations facing similar challenges around creating safe(r) spaces for women and gender-diverse individuals*

The GBSA is designed to close the gap of documented understanding about the physical and social safety needs of women, gender-diverse people, and children in Hamilton's public spaces.

How will the GBSA acknowledge and account for nuance in the experiences, perceptions, and safety needs of women and gender-diverse individuals from different identity backgrounds?

Women and gender-diverse individuals who are Indigenous, racialized, disabled, elderly, identify as LGBTQ+, and/or coping with homelessness are disproportionately at risk of experiencing violence in public spaces. It is therefore important to apply a gender-based lens to creating safer spaces. We like the way a team of gender and place practitioners at Monash University explain it:

Women from different racial backgrounds and of different ages, sexuality, disabilities and socio-economic class have very different experiences. Indeed, one woman's experience of a place as "bad" might be contradicted by another's account of the same location.

This means we must also consider how women's differing and intersecting identities shape their individual and collective experiences – and thus perceptions of safety in public space.

Understanding these complex experiences for women in greater depth means gathering more gender-specific data. Right now, we have far too little data about women's experiences and knowledge. Or, rather, the information is in a format that is too general and too easily dismissed. (rephrased, [source](#))



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What are the data collection, analysis, and sharing commitments and practices of the GBSA team?

*The auditing team is committed to working with communities in ways that centre their **data sovereignty**. This means that:*

- *We believe women, youth, and gender-diverse communities are experts in their own lives;*
- *We honour participants' decisions to contribute their ideas and wisdom to the audit;*
- *Communities who participate in the gender-based safety audit own and retain their data.*
- *Participants are invited to exercise their power of choice about when they share data, how they share data, and who has access to that data; and*
- *All information gathered and shared from participants will be grouped to make the information less identifiable.*

On a practical level, this means that:

- *Participants can receive a copy of the data they have shared.*
- *Participants and community members at large will be invited to participate in the audit data meaning-making process.*
- *Participants and community members will be invited to review and comment on the draft report.*
- *Community members will have access to the final report.*

What can we expect after the audit report is submitted?

The YWCA has been commissioned by the City of Hamilton to complete this GBSA because there is a desire and intention to create a greater sense of physical and emotional safety and decrease incidents of crime/violence against women, girls, and gender-diverse people.

We can't predict what will occur after the audit report is submitted, however, what we do know is:

- *the GBSA is meant to support the Community Safety and Well-Being (CSWB) Plan developed by the City and community partners and adopted by City Council on June 23, 2021. [Review the plan here.](#)*



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- *Under the Province's Safer Ontario Act, 2018 municipalities are required to develop a Community Safety & Well-being Plan using the provincial government's Community Safety and Well-Being Framework.*
- *Built into the auditing process are measures to promote and foster community connection and civic engagement. We value and commit to facilitating participants' connections to other community partners (formal and informal organizations and groups) committed to reducing gender-based violence in public spaces.*
- *In Fall 2024, we will host a community gathering that invites gender-based safety-committed individuals, organizations, groups, and elected officials to practically explore how we fuel and support our ideas and actions. Stay tuned!*



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The Long Of It (cont'd)

Key objectives of the project includes:

- Offering another opportunity for users of community space as “experts of experience” with equal standing to professional experts such as urban planners and police officers
- Establishing partnerships and shared responsibilities for enacting environmental changes between organizations, services, and municipal government
- Collecting data around violence against women and gender-diverse individuals that may be used to help prevent/address it more effectively
- Identifying areas of greatest risk to women and gender-diverse individuals’ safety and providing long and short-term recommendations/solutions
- Involving diverse and vulnerable populations of women and gender-diverse people, including those with lived experience of violence, poverty, and homelessness.
- Developing safety evaluation frameworks and community planning/development tools grounded in gender-based analysis
- Implementing recommendations to enhance community safety

For more information:

<https://www.ywcahamilton.org/ywca-hamilton-to-lead-the-citys-gender-based-safety-audit/>

https://www.thespec.com/news/hamilton-region/ywca-hamilton-to-lead-gender-based-safety-audit-of-public-spaces/article_1a0fe2e7-4c1b-56b1-a141-76210156c7de.html