

Community Housing Tenant Network

Strategic Plan

Draft 3

21st February 2008

(Planning workshops held on 19th February and 1st April 2008)

2008-2011

Document Approval

The original of this Strategic Plan has been endorsed and approved by the Representative Committee on:

 Signed _____
 Name _____
 Position _____

Document Changes and reviews

Table 1

Version	Author	Date	Description of main changes
Draft 1	Rep Committee / Adam West	21 st February 2008	
Draft 2	Rep Committee / Adam West	2 nd April 2008	Several additional goals and approval of goals by Rep Committee
Draft 3	Rep Committee / Adam West	23 rd April 2008	One amendment to goals

About this Strategic Plan

This Strategic Plan reflects the input of many members of the tenant network and our supporters.

Thank you to everyone who has taken the time to contribute either at the initial planning workshop or through the review process. The following people contributed to the development of the plan, either through attending the workshops or by providing comments:

Maria Barrios, Agnesa Kelly, Nelly Talamas, Suzanne Libby, Allan Rankmore, Carla Kis Major, Max Cunliffe, Dale Robertson, Susan Lucock, Richard Graham, Irene Charnas, Leslie Fuller, Cecilia Nunez, Malcolm Pollard, Greta Angel, John Evans, Robert Bembrick, David White, Charmaine Jones, Kate De Marco, Adam West

Where is the Community Housing Tenant Network going? (Vision)

Our vision is to work in unity towards greater involvement for community housing tenants in NSW.

What is the Community Housing Tenant Network? (Statement of purpose)

The Community Housing Tenant Network (the Network) is a group of tenants who are working together to:

- Represent the interests of all Community Housing tenants in NSW
- Share information, ideas and good practice
- Support and promote learning, educational, volunteering and employment opportunities for tenants
- Assist and support tenant leaders and representatives
- Ensure that the Network is led by tenants and run in the best interests of all Community Housing tenants in NSW
- Connect to the wider tenants' movement

Values

We are a democratic organisation working to support tenant involvement, genuine participation and control. We rely on the commitment of volunteers.

Organisation History

The network was started in 2005 to increase the opportunities for community housing tenants to learn about tenant participation and to get involved themselves. It was initially funded through a Community Development and Resourcing Grant from the Office of Community Housing. The project was initiated by four Housing Associations (Garrigal, Western Suburbs, St. George and Hume), who quickly extended an invitation to join the network to tenants of other metro area associations.

The principle behind the network was that there were creative, inspirational examples of tenant involvement amongst many of the housing associations in NSW, particularly in some of the Metropolitan associations. Yet there were few opportunities for housing association tenants to meet up and learn from each other. Many Housing Association tenants were isolated and were not fully accessing the opportunities for participation already available.

Aims

Tenants developed these aims:

- To get tenants' organisations to come together as a collaborative group and form a network for community housing tenants' groups
- To work towards the involvement of all community housing tenants
- To become a tenant led network
- To break down the isolation felt by individual tenants' organisations
- To share information about successful projects and learn from other tenants' experience
- To promote effective tenant participation in the community housing sector
- To link up with the wider tenants movement
- To encourage and support tenant leaders
- To promote educational and training opportunities to support tenant participation in the sector
- To represent the interests of all Community Housing tenants
- To comment and have input on Office of Community Housing and wider government policy matters

Tenants from different Metro associations worked hard as a core group of able and committed tenants have been attending and guiding the Federation's work as a steering group. The Tenant Network has now elected its first Representative Committee which will begin to take on additional responsibilities as they start to represent tenants' views from across the region.

Items in **bold** have been identified as priorities within the Strategic Plan. These items scored six or above in the prioritising exercise conducted at the 1st April 2008 workshop. A separate Action Plan has been developed to describe what will be done with these priorities.

Goal 1: Represent all community housing tenants in NSW

Strategy:

By 2011 tenants from each of the community housing associations in NSW will have joined the network and accessed our resources.

We will do this by (actions):

- 1. Inviting tenants from all NSW community housing associations to join the Network and encouraging them to elect a representative**
2. Working through the processes described in Goal 3: Communications to ensure that all tenants have an opportunity to join and contribute to the network
3. Ensuring that tenants are informed and aware of the Network
4. Choosing two or three partner associations in the regions and consulting them on the best ways of involving them. Use an Expression of Interest process to identify future partners and describe the commitment needed from these organisations.
5. In future years, target organisations who have not signed up and encourage them to join.
6. Review the Terms of Reference and representative structure to take account of the needs of additional, regionally based reps.
- 7. Encourage Housing Associations to recognise the role played by Tenant Network representatives and to consult them**
8. Campaign for the inclusion of tenants at future conferences through the provision of scholarships for tenants whose landlords cannot pay for them to attend.

Goal 2: Become a strong and credible voice for Community Housing tenants that is consulted by OCH and other stakeholders about tenant issues.

Strategy: Make sure that the Network is recognised as a tenant led representative voice for community housing tenants that is respected and listened to.

We will do this by (actions):

1. Working together effectively and in unity
2. Become the mechanism for the 'state wide tenant network' identified in OCH's Planning for the Future strategic document.
3. Develop an executive to liaise with state and Federal housing ministers, OCH and Housing NSW staff to ensure communication, consultation and understanding
4. **Campaign to ensure that the Network is consulted when policy changes are proposed that will affect tenants**
5. **Become the mechanism for Community Housing tenants to link into Housing NSW's Social Housing Tenants' Council (SHTC). Tenants will be involved in a two way dialogue with the SHTC and the SHTC Community Housing members to ensure Community Housing tenants' views are fully represented at the SHTC. The Network will also assist communication and information sharing from the SHTC.**
6. Make sure that the Network is genuinely tenant led and independent.
7. Secure funding or help in kind support to assist us in meeting our goals. Secure a longer term commitment from NSW Federation of Housing Associations and OCH to continue providing support from core funding.
8. Secure 'in kind' support from NSW FHA to provide admin support for the Network.
9. In the long term, work towards becoming self-sufficient
10. Encourage all associations to adopt a consistent approach to paying tenant network members' expenses, including when Tenant Network members attend external events.
11. Develop links with the Real Estate Institute and promote the community housing sector to them

Goal 3: Effective communications.

Strategy: Communicate effectively with community housing tenants, tenant councils, community development workers, associations, OCH and other partners across the state. Adopt a variety of creative methods to overcome challenges of distance and other barriers.

We will do this by (actions):

1. **Continuing to run quarterly workshops. Workshops will be promoted for the year ahead and have agreed themes and expert speakers where necessary**
2. Offer a limited number of travel and accommodation expense packages to tenants from regional associations, subject to securing funding
3. Choose two or three regional partner associations each year and consult them and their tenants on the most effective way to involve and communicate with them. Use an Expression of Interest process to identify future partners and describe the commitment needed from these organisations
4. Investigate options for a live webcast of the quarterly workshops and other Network events
5. **Continue producing at least four newsletters per year that are written by tenants, for tenants. Work to secure the widest possible distribution for the newsletters**
6. Write letters from the Network to promote the group and tenants' rights, for example to the Federal and state housing ministers, OCH, Housing NSW, housing providers and their boards.
7. Develop the website as a good practice clearing house for tenant participation resources. This will include a bulletin board to promote discussion and information exchange, downloadable best practice case studies from across the sector and information about the Network's work. Link the website to other sources of information such as the Community Builders website, Tenant Participation Advisory Service (UK) and individual associations and tenant councils.
8. Ensure the website is updated regularly by tenant reps
9. Video case studies of the most inspiring examples of tenant participation around the sector, subject to securing funding. Investigate options of distributing this as a DVD to associations, tenants and other partners
10. Develop a Facebook or Myspace site for the Network and use this to share video and photo resources
11. **Use the most effective videoconferencing and teleconferencing techniques**

to allow access to tenants who are unable to travel to events.

12. Develop a poster to publicise the Network and distribute to all associations

13. Encourage associations to include a fact sheet or the poster on the Network at sign up and contact details of the local tenant rep. if the representative is willing to see this happen
14. Promote the Network to the wider community via local papers, council publications, and resource services
15. Communicate and consult on the Strategic Plan to get wide involvement and agreement on the plan.
16. Work towards a tenants' conference organised by tenants in NSW every three years
17. Encourage associations to look at collaborative arrangements so that all associations could share some Community Development worker time amongst themselves

Goal 4: Develop skills

Strategy: Continue to develop a skilled, confident and independent Representative Committee. Support community housing tenants to access training, volunteering and education opportunities.

We will do this by (actions):

1. Provide at least two formal training sessions a year 'in house'
2. Continuing to work with Regional Tenants Resource Services, Housing NSW tenant participation unit, NSW Federation of Housing Associations and ARCH, to identify, publicise and attend training opportunities for tenants
3. Learn 'on the job' as we work
4. Accessing good practice examples via the website and meeting other tenants
5. Providing opportunities for study visits to other tenant groups and other places of interest

Goal 5: Develop strong ties with wider tenant movement

Strategy: Develop effective partnerships with tenant and community groups

We will do this by (actions):

1. Working through the Social Housing Tenant Council and with Housing NSW's Tenant Participation Unit
2. Work closely with Regional Tenants Resource Services, Tenant Support Network, tenant activists, community development workers and other partners
3. Circulate the newsletter and all other relevant information to the Regional Tenants' Resource Services and other key contacts in OCH and Housing NSW and other partners.
4. Work through the processes described in Goal 3: communications to promote and collect information on tenant participation

Goal 6: Identify tenant needs and provide information to those who can help address those needs

Strategy: Network Representatives are encouraged to identify the needs of tenants in their associations and present them to the Network, staff and boards of associations.

We will do this by (actions):

1. Developing strong consultation and representation skills for all reps
2. Questionnaires, including linking into the annual tenant surveys done by associations
3. Inviting tenants to express their views at local workshops and through attending the Network quarterly workshops
4. **Where a genuine and significant problem has been identified, make representations to the associations in question, via their tenant rep., staff, their CEO or if necessary, their board. Assisting associations to develop an action plan to resolve the issue if possible.**

Resource requirements

This section of the strategic plan describes the resources that will be required to help us meet our strategic goals. Formal requests for assistance will be made to the Office of Community Housing and the NSW Federation of Housing Associations.

1. A commitment from the Office of Community Housing and NSW Federation of Housing Associations to continue current level of support for the Network for the period of this Strategic Plan. This includes 15 days of worker time and some provision to run workshops and post out newsletters to members
2. Support 'in kind' from the Federation to help with admin tasks such as mail outs, newsletter production, and minute secretary support.
3. An additional three days of Federation worker time to consult with regional partners and their tenants
4. Travel and accommodation expenses to enable six tenants per year from regional areas to attend Tenant Network events in Sydney. The Network would seek a contribution towards these costs from large regional associations but would seek funding to provide 100% subsidies for small (less than 100 properties) regional associations.
5. Resourcing to support effective video conferencing to enable tenants from regional areas to access Network events remotely. This item includes the purchase of web cams, microphones and head sets to provide good quality access. It also includes 2 days of IT support to make sure the video conferencing works effectively.
6. Video case studies project. This is a three year project to make a video record of some of the most inspirational examples of tenant participation in NSW and to make the information available via a DVD and the Network web space. Media studies units at UTS, UWS, and Macquarie Universities will be contacted to see if they are able to help. If this is not possible the Network will seek funding to commission the video case studies project.
7. Funding for study visits. The Network will seek funding to allow two study visits per year for its members to visit an area where inspirational good practice in tenant participation is happening. The study visits will be written up and used as case studies to promote future good practice in tenant participation across the sector.

8. Contribution towards postage costs for associations to send out the Network newsletter to all their tenants.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Reporting

The Representative Committee will prioritise actions for the year and quarter ahead to make sure the network has clear targets to help meet this strategic plan.

Progress against the Strategic Plan will be assessed at each quarterly Representative Committee meeting. Members will receive an update from the Federation support worker and from the Chair about progress made.

The plan and priorities will be reviewed and updated as necessary.

Review

Progress against the strategic and annual plans will be formally reviewed and amended if necessary at least once a year.