



Working with the Community

Policy Category	1. Tenancy	Policy Number	1.36
Author	Jennifer Townsend - Consultant	Board Approval Date	28 May 2020
Position Responsible	Housing Services Manager	Scheduled Review Date	May 2022

Purpose:

Homes Out West (HOW) will engage in activities that contribute to sustainable tenancies that improve and enhance tenants' lives and the communities in which they live.

HOW will ensure that tenants, applicants and other service users will be provided with appropriate information and referral to provide the opportunity to enhance and improve their lives.

This policy relates to all staff and volunteers undertaking the operations of HOW and is inclusive of applicants, tenants and other users of the service.

Policy:

HOW's aim is to deliver sustainable and successful tenancies that enable people to thrive, enjoy a better quality of life, and live in stable, strong and thriving communities. HOW understands the complexity of needs tenants may experience which can present barriers to being able to sustain their tenancy.

HOW recognises that as a community housing provider, we need to work in collaboration with support providers and the broader communities that we service in order to effectively and appropriately assist our tenants and achieve our desired outcomes.

Working with the community includes (but is not limited to):

- providing housing information and referrals
- developing and maintaining partnerships with support providers
- building community capacity
- community engagement.

The combined influence of HOW's commitment, resources and skills will be deployed to further build on community strengths, address problems and present opportunities for our clients to improve their lives.

Definitions:

Community engagement – refers to the broad range of activities and strategies

registered community housing providers use in order to better connect their tenants to, and involve them in, their local communities. Community engagement provides local communities and other key stakeholders, such as service providers, philanthropic trusts, local and state government, funding bodies, as well as neighbours, with the opportunity to engage with the registered community housing provider and their tenants through a variety of means.

Essentially, community engagement can be distilled down to all those activities and processes that are undertaken with the aim of bringing people together for a number of different purposes.

It is important to make a distinction between Community Engagement and Tenant Engagement. Community engagement involves community housing providers engaging with the broader community to achieve social and economic outcomes for tenants. Tenant engagement on the other hand, involves ensuring that tenants have a voice and are able to influence decisions made by community housing providers. It is acknowledged that there is a cross over for some activities.

Social inclusion – those activities that assist people to fully participate in social and economic life. These activities may include access to education, training and employment services. They may also include better connecting tenants into the local community.

Place renewal – is more commonly referred to as *place making* or *neighbourhood renewal*. This relates to strengthening connections between people and the places they share. Place renewal activities may range from working with tenants and neighbours to improve local amenities, through to consulting with neighbours and prospective tenants on new developments and facilities.

Relevant Service Standards:	<p>National Community Housing Standards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard 4.1 – Tenants’ access to support • Standard 4.2 – Building community capacity • Standard 4.3 – Providing housing information, advice and referral <p>Legislation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residential Tenancies Act 2010 (NSW) • Residential Tenancies Regulation 2010 (NSW) • Housing Act 2001 • Community Housing Providers (Adoption of National Law) Act 2012 (NSW) <p>National Regulatory System for Community Housing (NRSCH) Performance Outcome and Performance Requirement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance Outcome 1: Tenant and Housing Services • Performance Outcome 3: Community engagement
Related HOW Policies:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable Tenancies for Tenants with Complex Needs Policy • Tenant Rights and Participation Policy • Supporting Tenants Policies
Related HOW Forms & Internal Documents	<p>Tenancy Response Plan Template Support Agreement Vulnerability Assessment Tool (VAT) Support Referral Register Resource Directory</p>

Procedure and Guidelines:

Homes Out West (HOW) works in partnership with relevant organisations to promote community housing and to contribute to socially inclusive communities.

Providing housing information and referral

HOW engages with relevant organisations using appropriate communication tools to promote community housing and benefits of partnerships.

Community members and tenants who present requiring information and advocacy regarding their tenancies will be referred to the appropriate Tenants Advice Service i.e. Verto Tenants' Advice and Advocacy Service and for Aboriginal tenants, Murra Mia Tenant Advocacy Service.

Clients accessing information will be advised to seek expert advice when faced with specific problems. Information provided by HOW will not be a substitute for qualified or legal advice.

Appropriate referrals should be made by workers in the event of the matter being beyond that of housing.

Partnerships with support providers

Where appropriate, the referral to and engagement of support providers to assist an applicant / tenant to establish or maintain their tenancy, will be encouraged.

HOW will continue to develop a wide range of support providers to utilise to provide support to tenants. Where the services of a support provider are regularly used, the establishment of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) will be encouraged to define and formalise the partnership. HOWs CEO (or delegate) will be involved in negotiating each MOU.

Where priority allocations or applicants / tenants assessed as being complex are identified, the establishment of a Support Agreement is encouraged to maximise the chances of the tenancy being successfully established and maintained. (Current benchmarks for the organisation include a target that 10% of all new tenancies are supported and 5% of all tenancies are supported).

The tenant will be fully informed of the Support Agreement and responsibilities of each provider in the agreement.

Building community capacity

HOW recognises our responsibilities in meeting the housing needs of the communities we serve and in having a role in the broader development of social housing at Local, State and Federal levels.

Opportunities to be utilised will include:

- making contributions to local area housing related forums as convened by stakeholders
- being actively engaged in co-operation with other local housing providers and other stakeholders in specific programs

- making contributions to CHIA NSW's seminars and conferences and working with CHIA NSW on project working parties, delegations and special project steering committees
- using opportunities to remain up to date with current social housing developments, such as ensuring HOW receives regular correspondence from groups with broader housing interests (Shelter NSW, National Community Housing forum etc) and attendance at housing information forums and conferences
- using HOW skills and resources to sponsor special housing projects, pilots, community development initiatives and / or policy development projects
- provision of direct advice and assistance to other community housing providers.

HOW will actively promote and develop social housing and will proactively work with the community on issues relevant to tenants. This includes maximising positive economic and social outcomes for tenants and the community through social inclusion.

HOW will show our commitment to the ongoing involvement in and building of our communities and will be recognised through:

- the stated aims of the organisation, including our Constitution, Rules and strategic planning processes and documents
- developing relevant policies and procedures, across all areas of HOW's tenancy management responsibilities, that embed the principles of community engagement and involvement
- position descriptions for relevant staff including objectives relating to community involvement and the establishment of links with key community stakeholders and ensuring that staff performance review processes recognise achievements in this area
- training and development plans for staff including knowledge and skills development in areas such as client referrals, building community networks, local community development activities etc.
- regularly consulting with the community on our direction, goals, policies and reviewing our performance
- participating in and developing strategies that promote the positive outcomes being achieved by social housing providers and local community service agencies.

HOW, as a key member of the local non-profit sector, will participate in and contribute to the continued development of communities throughout the region. HOW's CEO will ensure adequate resources are available in order to provide contributions, wherever possible, including in relation to:

- participation in local community service planning projects
- attendance at local community agency network meetings in order to provide social housing information, develop an understanding of current trends or issues being experienced in our communities and to begin to foster collaborations with other agencies on mutually beneficial initiatives
- provision of advice and assistance to other groups, where requested, e.g. housing policy, organisational management, tenancy and housing issues
- where appropriate, support the development of housing and housing related projects by other community agencies
- participate in the planning processes of other organisations.

How recognises that we do not have to control or own every initiative or involvement, but may often play a smaller supportive role, as to how each activity may fit with our expertise or our other areas of relative priority.

A strong local community and regional focus will be maintained and fostered by HOW to enable tenants ease of access to appropriate and necessary support services and activities to enhance their lives. This process will endeavour to facilitate an integrated service delivery approach.

HOW's Housing Services Manager (or delegate) will facilitate regular tenant / community forums in each region where HOW manages properties. The purpose of these forums is to provide tenants and the broader community an opportunity to raise any concerns with HOW; make suggestions to HOW; be provided with relevant information (such as information from local service providers); and provide an opportunity to bring tenants and the broader community together, to support social inclusion. HOW will collate feedback from each forum in order to address concerns and make appropriate changes to procedures / service delivery as considered appropriate / necessary.

HOW will inform tenants by way of newsletters and other forums or options that are available, as to major issues or relevant information in their community and in the broader community housing sector.

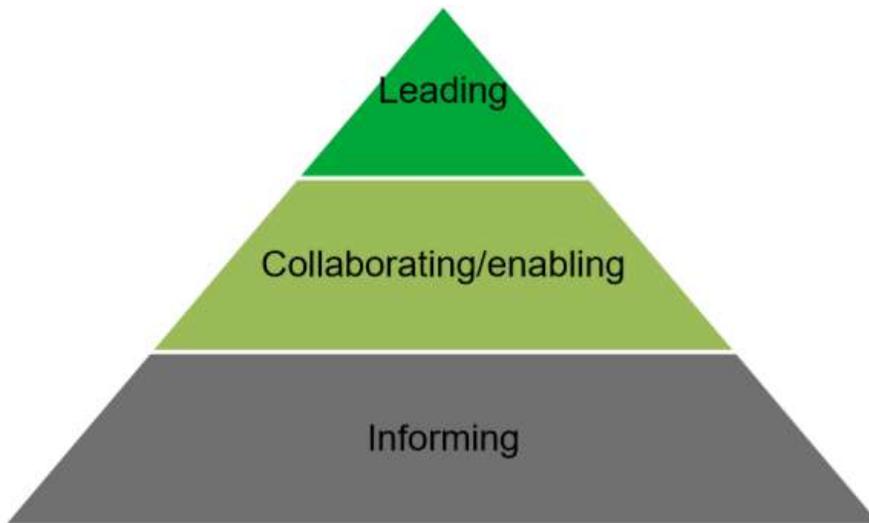
Community engagement

The table below lists some of the many benefits associated with community engagement.

Tenant benefits	Community benefits	HOW benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased engagement and satisfaction. • Improved community connectedness. • Increased feeling of safety and confidence. • Increased access to education, training and employment opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased understanding of community housing. • Greater community diversity and tolerance. • Increased feeling of safety. • Increased local amenity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved relationships with service partners, philanthropic trusts, local government and other key stakeholders. • Fewer complaints. • Enhanced capacity to innovate. • Agency is accepted / adopted by broader community.

HOW's CEO and Housing Services Manager will develop, monitor and review the organisation's Community Engagement Strategy following consultations with HOW staff and relevant stakeholders.

HOW will include in our Community Engagement Strategy activities that relate to the typology of community engagement.



Informing – Activities undertaken that revolve around communication, such as tenant newsletters, or appearing regularly in local newspapers or advertising events on websites or through Facebook. They are also actions that can be used to inform or educate the wider community.

Examples may include:

Promotion of community housing

- Newsletters
- Social media
- Local media
- Websites
- Tenant / community forums
- Christmas parties

Place renewal

- Community meetings

Social inclusion

- Connecting tenants with local activities

Collaborating / enabling – Activities that HOW will undertake alone or in partnership with others that actively work to overcome the social exclusion of tenants and build strong linkages with the local community.

Examples may include:

Promotion of community housing

- Protocols with local service providers
- Fundraising activities with local service clubs

Place renewal

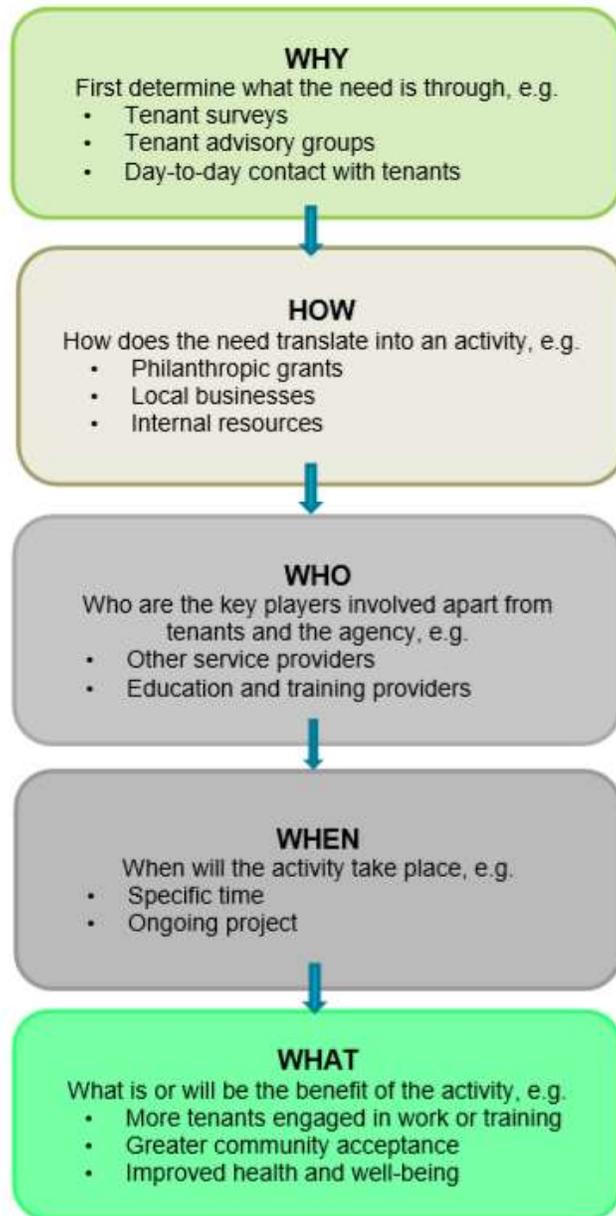
- Community partnerships formed around specific neighbourhood issues
- Community projects facilitated through partnerships e.g. community gardens, community barbeque areas, community artwork in a public space

Social inclusion

- Working with philanthropic organisations to facilitate access to adult learning and other courses

Leading – Activities that HOW will undertake that are designed to influence service provision or government policy or are activities that are breaking new ground, such as research or the development of new programs. HOW will support the broader community housing sector in such activities.

HOW will also include in our Community Engagement Strategy the following elements:



Variations

HOW reserves the right to vary, replace or terminate this Policy from time to time.