renter voice

Implementation Toolkit for CHOs

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# OVERVIEW

This toolkit is designed to assist community housing organisations bring their [Renter Voice policy](#_Appendix_1_–) to life. It serves as a companion to the Renter Voice model policy.

The kit is scalable and comprises a range of tools to be adapted and used, depending on the size and capacity of your organisation, and where you are along the Renter Voice journey.

In implementing or expanding Renter Voice, Community Housing Organisations (CHOs) will be strengthening a model of service delivery that puts the renter at the centre. For some organisations this requires a transformational shift in organisational culture; for some organisations it means reflecting on their current approach and thinking about how to improve it; while other organisations may be leading the way already. A ‘best practice’ Renter Voice policy will impact decisions at every level of the organisation, from the Board to the CEO, managers, team leaders and front-line workers.

This Implementation kit will provide CHOs, including those with established Renter Voice structures in place, with the opportunity and the tools for self-assessment; and to continually improve the understanding of renter priorities and needs and use this understanding to deliver more and better services.

If you have any questions or comments on any of the information in this guide, please contact CHIA Vic by emailing [alex.dordevic@chiavic.com.au](mailto:alex.dordevic@chiavic.com.au) or [lisa.may@chiavic.com.au](mailto:lisa.may@chiavic.com.au).

## Who should use this kit?

This kit contains tools and guidance materials for adaptation and application across all levels of the organisation and includes materials for renters. It is for:

* Boards
* Management
* Staff at operational level, team leader level, across front line, policy, program and governance level
* Renters

### Support services

While some organisations also operate homelessness and support services, the scope and focus of this Implementation kit is about renters having a say about their housing. When renters raise concerns or provide feedback about support services, CHO will refer these to the appropriate agency, or the relevant part of the organisation.

# WHAT IS RENTER VOICE?

Renter Voice is the term given to the conversations (verbal and written) between renters, their household members and the CHO about their housing and what might make things run more smoothly and efficiently. It includes providing referrals to support services for renters, but not participating in, or advocating on behalf of renters for, support services.

**It is not:** Conversations about the rental agreement or potential breaches of the agreement, except where these provide opportunities for continuous improvement and reflection on policy and procedure by the CHO.

Renter Voice in Community Housing means that:

* Renters feel confident and safe in providing their views, feedback and lived experiences on all aspects of their housing, at any time, including – but not only – when these are asked for by the CHO
* Renters are advised up front why their views are sought, and are valued, but also why they might not always be acted on
* Their views are heard and reflected on by the CHO in considering how to deliver and improve housing
* Their views are acted on as much as possible, and consistent with the legal and financial obligations of the CHO, in planning, designing, and delivering housing services
* CHO is accountable to, and reports back to, renters on how their views and feedback have been considered, acted on and have been used to influence changes to housing services; and where their views have not been acted on, the reasons are provided to them in a timely way.

|  |
| --- |
| From a community housing renter consulted as part of Community Housing Tenant Consultation project: |
| *“My provider communicates well and makes changes and service availability known promptly” [[1]](#footnote-2)* |

# PLANNING FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RENTER VOICE

## Reviewing future vision and current state

An analysis and review of the CHO’s current approach to Renter Voice (if any) is an important start to understanding the steps required to reach the desired future Renter Voice model. This process will enable a CHO to determine where and how much change is required and will include the following:

* Review current policies, procedures, practices and skills – undertake a critical analysis of current practice. How well does it support the proposed model of renter voice?
* Ensure renters have sufficient trust that the CHO is committed to meaningful renter engagement.
* Identify what needs to change to enable CHO to be ready to implement its model. Policies and practice that the CHO can consider under this step include: communication; commitment inviting renter views; managing expectations; embedding the culture; and continuous improvement. This Toolkit provides guidelines and tools for CHOs to use in these areas.
* Establish a timeline and workplan for introducing the necessary changes. This may take months, or even longer, depending on the extent of change needed to systems, skills and policies.
* Include in this workplan promotional mechanisms so you can start to create interest in the program – separate from the above guides for communicating with renters, developing a marketing campaign to generate interest, and increase renter trust that CHO wants to include them in decisions, will be an active learning opportunity.
* Celebrate the organisation’s commitment to renter voice with a launch.

The CHO Board and senior management should work through a strategic workshop process to determine the features of Renter Voice that are seen as a goal to aim for in the future. See Section 4.2 below for a comparison of various tools CHOs might consider.

A screenshot of a computer

Description automatically generated with low confidenceThe key questions in the ***infographic*** below will help guide CHOs in developing their future vision and how to determine the most suitable tools to use in their model.

## Renter voice models in action

There are a range of models that CHOs currently use to seek and receive feedback from their renters. At one end of the spectrum is a minimalist approach, for example, holding regular renter satisfaction surveys; progressing through models where renters participate in advisory committees, are members of CHO boards, through to the cooperative models where renters are very involved in the running of the CHO.

Different renter voice models can offer various levels of involvement. Depending on the model, renters might:

* Provide feedback and complaints, receive communication about decisions made by CHO
* Provide input and participate in discussions about options, receive communication about decisions made by CHO
* Undertake deliberations about an issue, participate in discussions and decision-making about operational issues
* Participate in discussions and decision-making about operational and strategic issues, including sharing responsibility for decisions and feeding back to the renter community
* Participate in discussions and decision-making as a self-directed group
* Participate as a voting or non-voting member of the board or formal board committee
* Operate as the owners and managers in a cooperative model, where all decisions are taken by members who are renters
* Advocate on behalf of renters on specific local matters, through to policy reforms or systemic change impacting all renters.

Renter Voice can be instituted at various organisational and geographic or network levels:

* Individual unit or tenancy
* Apartment building
* Group of buildings in a community housing development
* Across a suburb or groups of suburbs
* Country town
* Region
* Statewide (within an organisation or organisational networks).

These options are not mutually exclusive, and a CHO might choose to implement different models at different geographic levels; or the same model at more than one geographic level. For example, a committee of renters might be constituted to provide views about maintenance for an individual set of units in one housing block, across a suburb where community housing is scattered, or across the state.

This Implementation Kit describes and explores a range of ways that renters can have a say, including in the governance and operations of a CHO. Housing cooperatives are a particular model of community housing organisation where renters, as cooperative members, are integral to its management. The CHIA Vic website provides more detail about housing cooperatives:

<https://chiavic.com.au/community-housing/community-housing-models/>

The following tables show the range of Renter Voice mechanisms across the sector and can be used to identify and assess where your organisation is along the Renter Voice journey. Where an organisation is on the spectrum depends on a number of factors, including size, budget, culture, strategic plan and Board understanding of the importance of using the experiences of renters in decision making.

### Table 1 - Renter Voice models at a glance

Table 1 presents ‘at a glance’ the various models, or tools, with the renter voice functions or elements that might be applicable to each. This might assist CHOs in assessing which approach or combination of approaches they have in place or may choose to adopt or develop for their organisation.

|  |  | ELEMENT | | | | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | Feedback/ complaints /surveys | Info. Sharing, org led | Consultation / testing | Involvement  (operations) | Advisory | Governance | Advocacy | Community  development | Renter led? Y/N Can be C | Scope /geog. |
| **MODEL** | Regular Info & listening Sessions | ü | ü |  |  |  |  | ü |  | **C** | Bldg. / estate  Town/ suburb |
| Focus groups | ü |  | ü |  |  |  |  |  | **N** | Bldg. / estate  Town/ suburb |
| Specific purpose panels / groups | ü |  | ü | ü | ü |  | ü | ü | **C** | Bldg. / estate  Town/ suburb |
| Advisory committee / council - specific | ü |  | ü | ü | ü |  | ü | ü | **C** | Bldg. / estate  Town/ suburb |
| Advisory committee / council - standing | ü |  | ü | ü | ü |  | ü | ü | **C** | CHO |
| Board rep. |  |  |  |  | ü | ü |  |  | **N** | CHO |
| Co-op | ü | ü | ü | ü | ü | ü | ü | ü | **Y** | CHO |
| Renter association | ü | ü | ü |  | ü |  | ü | ü | **Y** | CHO  Bldg. / estate  Town/ suburb |

### Table 2 - Foundational renter voice requirements CHOs

All CHOs are required by the Housing Registrar to survey their renters at the minimum every two years to assess renters’ overall satisfaction with delivery of their housing services, and satisfaction with how their views have been taken into account in decision making. CHOs are also required to have in place a complaints handling process. Any informal and ad hoc feedback should be captured as an opportunity for service improvement.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Foundation** | **Who** | **Type of Involvement** | **Strengths** | **Challenges** |
| Required of all CHOs for registration | Individual renters and household members | Informal communication, including ad hoc feedback and requests; formal complaints;  survey responses | Quick, direct communication | Ad hoc, may miss issues or be skewed towards those matters that the most vocal renters wish to promote. Dependent on relationship between renter and tenancy worker |

### Table 3 Renter voice model tools

Building on these foundational elements, **Table 3** suggests a range of tools that a CHO might adopt to listen to and capture renters’ views, and provides some strengths and challenges associated with each. These models are not mutually exclusive and can be implemented using the most suitable of the above geographic and decision-making models.

| **Tools** | **Who** | **Type of involvement** | **Strengths** | **Challenges** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Regular information and listening sessions** | Groups of renters or all renters if CHO is small or locality based | ‘Town Hall’ type forums or social gatherings where CHO leaders share information and receive feedback and ideas from renters | If CHO leadership and decisionmakers in attendance, effective in building trust and sharing information | Need to be well facilitated. Potential for challenging behaviours needing to be managed. Need mitigation strategies |
| **Focus groups** | Selected groups of renters | Structured discussions to consult on, and test, proposals as well as seek feedback | Cross-section of renters represented to capture cohorts’ views on specific topics | Requires skilled facilitator to keep group on track. Renters may be suspicious of agenda |

| **Tools** | **Who** | **Type of involvement** | **Strengths** | **Challenges** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Advisory group - informal** | Group of renters, informal  Could be either renter-led or initiated by CHO | Might be single-issue or have a role in providing ongoing feedback and advice on an ongoing issue, like maintenance or neighbour noise complaints.  Meetings are informal, irregular and responsive to specific issues | Easy to organise  Can be disbanded when issue is resolved  Allows for variety of membership depending on issue  Small time commitment, low requirement for commitment by renters | Can be difficult to know who is involved as membership can change  Can be ineffective as there is little formal structure in place |
| **Advisory committee / council - Specific purpose** | Group of renters, formal committee  May be renter-led or CHO initiated | As above, but renters commit to regular meetings and formal meeting procedures Committee is convened, supported by tenancy workers as needed  Ad hoc, based around specific issues such as gardens, shade areas, various maintenance issues | Provides structure to ensure issues are progressed efficiently  Clear who is involved  Allows for membership to change with different issues  Strengthens the relationship between renters and tenancy workers who support the committee  Provides good access to renter views for tenancy workers | Renters may not value structure, it may be a disincentive  Additional work for tenancy workers supporting the committee |

| **Tools** | **Who** | **Type of involvement** | **Strengths** | **Challenges** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Specific purpose panels / groups** | Group of renters, formal committee – Time limited | As above, but committee is convened with a specific time frame attuned to the resolution of the specific issue. For example, procurement of cleaning or gardening services; fittings and furnishings in upgraded homes; upgrade of heaters or cookers throughout the social housing community | As above, with additional control – committee will end after issue is resolved, so membership can be renewed for new issues | As above |
| **Advisory committee / renter (or member) council** | Group of renters, formal committee – ongoing | As above, but a permanent reference committee used to provide input and support for whatever issues are being considered. This committee moves from one issue to another, over time, or considers a range of matters concurrently  This committee can also operate as an advisory committee to senior management and the board | As above, but agenda of committee is broader and may include strategic issues as well as operational  Ongoing, not time limited, so some renters develop a strong understanding of housing management over time (more informed input to board) | There may be few renters who are prepared to participate in this level of involvement  Individuals may step up because they have a strong or extreme point of view, thereby skewing their input |
| **Board member** | Renter board representative | One or more renter representatives on the board, or subcommittees of the board. Has full voting rights on all issues and is there to provide their own views, not as a representative of any particular cohort of renters | Board membership allows discussion at the board to be informed by lived experience, providing the most direct influence of renter voice | As above |

| **Tools** | **Who** | **Type of involvement** | **Strengths** | **Challenges** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Board member ex-officio / advisory** | Renter board representative - advisory | As above, but without voting rights | As above | As above |
| **Renter association / committee** | Renter-led committee, self-managed | Renters initiate and run the committee, which determines its agenda, the issues it will address and is a permanent committee. Can provide advice or recommendations to senior management and the board, or be constituted as a formal Renter Voice to the board.  Advocacy on behalf of renter body on policies, rights, responsibilities | Renters set their own agenda and address the issues and strategic matters that are important to them.  They provide advice to the board and senior management from a position of independence and strength  Skills development for renters | Requires renters to input significant time, resources and skills. There may be a limited pool of renters interested and able to participate  It may be difficult to find sufficient numbers of interested parties to ensure that the ‘burden’ does not always ‘fall on the same few’ |
| **Co-operative (Common Equity or Rental Housing Co-op)** | Cooperative members / renters | Renters are the owners and managers of the housing stock and work together to run efficient, effective housing that meets the needs of their members | Renters control their own housing and can directly provide what best meets the needs of their members | As above, the major share of responsibility and work can fall to the same few people, leading to burnout and possibly sub-optimal decision-making |

## Critical Success Factors

Identifying, embedding and reviewing critical success factors are essential in planning and monitoring a CHO’s renter voice model[[2]](#footnote-3). Critical success factors include:

1. **Trust and transparency** 
   * Engage early – ask renters how they want to engage
   * Clear negotiables – setting expectations with renters
   * Address renter distrust – be open and transparent about issues
   * Slow down - foster participation & build skills first
   * Renter collaboration – identify renter champions, foster relationships
2. **There are many different voices**
   * Stakeholder analysis – know and understand cohorts of renters and the barriers to engagement they might encounter
   * Accessible and easy to read materials and methods of communication
3. **Commitment from the top**
   * Organisational buy-in – during planning, delivery, and evaluation
   * Real decisions on the table / real impact
   * Decision-makers including Board directors to attend engagement events
4. **There are many ways to engage and strengthen Renter Voice**
   * Fun and social activities
   * Regular in-person and online Zoom sessions
   * ‘Pop Up’ hubs on site – regional, suburban, apartment
   * Regular newsletter – member / renter content and ‘priority issues’
5. **Pilot a Renter Voice model** 
   * Consider testing new approaches at a particular site, or within a region or suburb. You may find that different cohorts of renters respond positively to different Renter Voice tools. Trialling tools that you think will be effective and evaluating them at selected locations can provide important learnings before general roll out of the program
   * Obtaining renter support and buy-in to any trials is a necessary precursor
6. **Robust policies, systems, and processes**
   * Ensure staff are empowered and supported in receiving and managing renter feedback
   * Ensure there are tools in place for managing individual renter enquiries, and issues (e.g., policies and procedures)
   * All feedback is valuable – don’t lose it. Capture and record feedback – formal and informal
7. **Ongoing communication** 
   * All feedback is an opportunity for improvement
   * Answer the phone, return calls and emails, make time to listen in person
   * Close the loop and maintain trust – report back to renters in a timely way on the status of their issues, and how their feedback has been used

# IMPLEMENTING THE RENTER VOICE – THE TOOLKIT

## Communication

Good communication is the essential building block for successful Renter Voice. Without clear, two-way, timely and regular communication between renters and their housing providers, there can never be the respectful relationship that creates trust and generates ideas and innovations to improve service delivery. Sharing information and treating renters with respect are key.

### Model Communication Template

At all stages of the renter’s community housing journey, the CHO will share clear and complete information, including during the application process. CHOs recognise that renters need information to be provided:

* When they can absorb it – not just on the day they move in
* On how their rent is set, when reviews will happen and how to appeal
* On the procedures for transferring from one to another house
* On how (and why) to exit community housing
* On how to make complaints, log maintenance/repair requests etc.

CHOs will ensure renters are treated with respect by:

* Returning renters’ calls when they leave messages for the CHO
* Having their written concerns acknowledged in a timely manner
* Providing them with estimated times when repairs etc. will be undertaken
* consulting them about when trades people will visit to undertake quotes or carry out works
* Visiting them to establish and maintain a positive business relationship based on mutual regard
* Adjusting communication styles to meet the needs of all renters.

|  |
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| From a woman with a lived experience of homelessness: |
| *“The reality of it is if everyone's dealing with their own trauma, mental health issues, addiction issues and stuff like that and then they come together. You know it breeds like a power struggle and there's like a hierarchy type thing, you know dog-eat-dog. And it's hard because we're all dealing with our own individual trauma and individual stuff. So when we come together and we feel attacked or retriggered or something like that we get retraumatised. When you're in that state, you don't have the power to think about others and to be considerate about others because you're so up in your own head and you're so confused about what it is you're dealing with, you know.”[[3]](#footnote-4)* |

## Commitment

A client or customer service charter (or statement or commitment) is key to accountable and transparent service delivery. It sets out the standards of service that renters can expect to receive from an organisation, as well as the renter’s rights and responsibilities. The charter should invite scrutiny by being transparent about how service delivery is measured. The charter should also refer to the CHO Renter Voice policy, invite renter feedback and provide information about how to make a complaint, and how the complaint will be handled (as outlined in the CHO’s complaints policy).

Many CHOs have customer or client service charters or statements publicly available. Examples include:

* Aboriginal Housing Victoria’s Customer Service Charter <https://ahvic.org.au/cms_uploads/docs/ahv-customer-service.pdf>
* Community Housing (Victoria) Ltd’s Customer Promise <https://chl.org.au/wp-content/uploads/CHVL-Customer-Promise-Brochure.pdf>
* Common Equity Housing Ltd.’s Member Value Statement <https://www.cehl.com.au/HaveYourSay/Attachment?Action=Download&Attachment_id=15777>

## Inviting and welcoming renters’ views

Renter Voice in action means that renters feel confident and safe in providing their views, feedback and lived experiences on all aspects of their housing, at any time, including – but not only – when these are asked for by the CHO.

|  |
| --- |
| From Mark, a community housing renter in his mid-50s |
| *‘’Tenants are a resource – there are a lots of skills, a wealth of experience.’’* |
|  |
| From Margaret, a long-term community housing renter: |
| *“You know I loved being part of the tenancy advisory group right from the beginning. I’ve done it for years and years now lots of different roles mind you. I think there are just some people who really want to be part of things help run events and bring their ideas in. There’s also lots of people who just don’t care and I say that’s fair enough but I also think they could get something out of it if they tried. Maybe they don’t like the activities that we run but they could come up with their own ideas as well and we’d give it a try.”[[4]](#footnote-5)* |

### Checklist – Inviting Renter Views

CHOs should provide:

* An upfront statement that views are welcome, that there will be no reprisals taken against renters who speak up (refer to the Model Commitment in Appendix 3)
* Open information-sharing, e.g., about policy changes, new building developments, etc.
* Invitations to provide input – e.g. into policy reviews, physical upgrades, outdoor spaces and common areas
* Surveys – let renters know that there will be regular surveys (at least every 2 years) and encourage response. Consider accessibility, language, and events to promote survey. Consider engaging an independent, trusted third party to conduct the survey
* Suggestion boxes in building foyers, and at the CHO offices
* Pulse check events – such as ‘town hall’ forums, barbecues, etc.
* Opportunities for:
  + Renter-led engagement models (optional) [see Appendix 4]
  + Advisory committees (optional)
  + Governance – e.g. Board participation etc. (optional)
* Complaints procedures that are clear, easy to use and clearly state that there will be no adverse outcomes from using them. Refer to Complaints policy.

## Managing expectations

Renters need to be advised up front why their views are sought, and are valued, but also why they might not always be acted on.

There are many factors involved in managing an organisation, and the views and wishes of renters will not always be able to be incorporated into decision-making. For example, there are some legislative and regulatory requirements that must be met:

* Financial viability
* Relevant laws of the land (Commonwealth, State and local)
* Regulations passed by Government and the Housing Regulator
* Strategic and business plans set by the Board
* Operating policies and procedures approved by the Board to run the CHO.

Specific ideas and views may not always align with these requirements and will therefore not always be adopted. It may be, too, that renters have different and conflicting opinions on particular matters. Renters may be unclear about the roles and responsibilities of tenancy organisations, and may think that their individual support needs – such as health, education, employment or financial advice – should be actioned by the CHO. It is important to be clear with renters that Renter Voice is about housing related issues only. CHO staff can provide referrals for renters, but cannot action items outside the provision of safe, affordable and appropriate housing.

Where another part of the organisation offers support services, the tenancy worker will refer any support needs to that division. In this way, there is a clear separation of responsibilities between the various sections of the CHO.

The Renter Voice policy makes it clear that views will be considered, but will not necessarily be able to be implemented as a whole or even in part and that the CHO is committed to advising renters of the outcomes of their input, whatever that may be.

### Managing expectations – Statement to renters

The following is an example of a statement to renters:

[CHO] is responsible for ensuring your housing is safe, affordable and appropriate. It is responsible for providing referrals to support services for you where you have additional needs, but the housing services workers are not responsible for undertaking those support roles. If your CHO does offer support services, your tenancy worker will provide referrals for you to the responsible support worker. Wherever possible, [CHO] will adopt either in total or in part the ideas and suggestions you provide about your housing needs. However, there are circumstances where that may or will not be possible. For example:

* Where it would not be financially viable (for example, where an idea might send the CHO broke)
* Where there is a law or regulation that prohibits something (like discriminating against a group of people)

Where it is inconsistent with CHOs goals and/or values Renters might also have different ideas about how problems can be solved, or have contradictory views about the same issue. Not everyone can have their ideas used where there are conflicting solutions offered.

## Embedding the culture

The implementation of Renter Voice culture requires:

* Organisation-wide commitment and should be embedded into everyone’s duties and responsibilities (and job descriptions), including at Board level
* Where the organisation is of sufficient size, a dedicated senior officer should be responsible for implementing and managing the process, either full time or as part of other duties, depending on the available resources
* In smaller organisations there is still a need to incorporate the championing, implementation and management of the renter voice culture into a single senior officer’s responsibilities.

### Checklist – Embedding the Culture

**CHO Board will ensure that:**

* Board members fully understand the renter-at-the-centre culture and are supportive of involving renters in decision-making
* Provide awareness training for Board members as required to keep this culture current
* Boards adopt appropriate mechanisms for listening to renters’ voices, such as a renter representative on their Board (or more than one), developing a renter advisory committee, specific issue advisory panels, or facilitating a renter-led advisory group
* Prospective Board members are aware of the renter voice culture and are able to demonstrate commitment to the policy
* The Board receives regular reports on the progress and outcomes of renter voice

**Senior management will ensure:**

* Renter Voice is a fundamental part of ‘the way we do business’ and Renter Voice opportunities are always considered in decision making
* A senior officer has specific responsibility to champion and manage the implementation and operation of Renter Voice activities, either full time or as part of their duties, depending on the size of the organisation
* Other levels of management, to team leader, have responsibility for ensuring renter voice is incorporated into their position descriptions, performance review process, discussions and deliberations
* Other levels of management ensure front line staff have the training, skills and tools to implement renter voice and that it is part of their position descriptions and performance review processes.

**All front-line staff will:**

* Develop an open and positive relationship with renters
* Actively seek advice or opinions and feedback
* Use their skills and tools to listen with a view to incorporating feedback into decisions
* Live the values inherent in a culture of openness and transparency
* Consider a wide range of opportunities for renter voices to be heard and used in the decision process, from community activities like barbeques to focus groups where renters are asked more formally for their views and insights
* Manage more difficult conversations where renters may not have adhered to protocols and rules under the renter agreement.

It is at this level that much of the interpersonal skill will be demonstrated. Managing what will be a complex and multi-faceted relationship with renters requires significant skill and commitment.

## Reflecting on and considering renters’ views and feedback

Renter views are heard and reflected on by the CHO in considering how to deliver and improve housing.  This might mean a re-think of tenancy and property staff KPIs, acknowledging that frontline staff have large workloads, with competing priorities. Taking the time to listen and respond to renters needs to be valued equally alongside other tenancy and property management activities. The following checklist sets out ways to ensure this happens.

### Checklist - Reflecting and considering renters’ views and feedback

* Ensure that staff have the capacity, time and space to capture all feedback, including informal feedback.
  + This will involve **active listening** (see Communication section) and unhurried conversations: re-stating the feedback to clarify that staff have understood the issue correctly and asking renters what they see as possible solutions to problems
  + **Record the feedback** – keep an issues log (a template in hard copy, or e.g. on an iPad or computer), capturing the name and address of the renter, the date and time of the conversation, the nature of the request or feedback, and any suggested solutions identified in the conversation with the renter (NB if a formal complaint or appeal, refer to these policies and processes).
* Build consideration of renters’ feedback into formal processes
  + Include renter feedback as a **standing agenda item** at Board / committee / management / team / staff meetings
  + **Invite renters to attend meetings** and participate in discussions. This might be through formal representation on Boards or advisory groups (see 9.1 Inviting and welcoming renters’ views)
  + **When a new development or upgrade, or policy is proposed**, include consideration of renter input in the decision-making process
* Build into proposal templates for management and Board approval
  + Many proposals taken to management or Board use **templates** requiring consideration of financial, social, and environmental impacts of proposals
  + A question such as: ‘**How have current renters been consulted on this proposal?** Summary of views could be included in the template
* Build into job descriptions of senior and dedicated renter engagement staff (for larger organisations)
  + Incorporate commitment to reflecting and valuing renters’ feedback in decision-making in the Purpose and Key Selection Criteria sections of job descriptions

## Acting on what renters said

Renters’ views should be acted on as much as possible, and consistent with the legal and financial obligations of the CHO, in planning, designing, and delivering housing services.

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| Renter Mark, interviewed for this project, describes why he is frustrated with the lack of communication or action from his rental provider, in this case about an issue seen as a safety concern at his housing complex: |
| *“We’ve asked quite a lot for a gate but [we are] not in the loop – no reporting back to tenants.”* |

### Checklist – Acting on renters’ feedback

* Follow up on complaints [refer to Complaints procedure]
* Ensure maintenance and repairs are done properly and on time [refer to Residential Tenancies Act requirements] and keep renters informed about progress, and why delays might occur
* Respond in a timely manner to requests, for example, those regarding safety concerns, use of common areas, cleaning, pets, or social events. This means:
  + - An upfront commitment to acknowledge requests within a specified timeframe (e.g. 24 hours)
    - Keeping renters informed about progress
    - Checking to see whether the request has been met satisfactorily
* These could be done face to face, by phone, email or SMS
* Invite renters to be involved in acting on feedback – through advisory committees, and focus groups

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| Renter Karen, mid 40s, female, community housing renter interviewed for this project, expressing interest in being engaged in consultation and decision-making in a more formal way: |
| *‘’If there was an advisory committee I would want to go on it. I would put my hand up. It would benefit me and the other tenants. … having a say in the design, utilisation of the space…’’* |

## Reporting back

Reporting back to renters on how and why their feedback has been used, or how their complaint or maintenance request has been handled and resolved, is essential to building and keeping trust, and to ensure that the flow of feedback continues. Reporting back does not need to be formal, or complicated. The Reporting back tool provides examples.

### Reporting back tool

* Phone renters back with status updates / outcomes of complaints and repair requests
* Formally and informally report back (phone calls, face to face, and in writing) to renters who have made suggestions and provided feedback on how to improve delivery of their housing services, to acknowledge, and to let them know how their feedback has been used (or if not, why not)
* Organisations with small property portfolios and tenancies to manage have the advantage of knowing their renters and household members, and can report back face to face
* 'You said, we did’ information on website, posters on noticeboards, newsletters - see [Appendix 5](#_You_Said,_We) for examples of ‘You Said, We Did’)
* Survey response information – whether it’s the annual or biannual satisfaction survey data, or one-off surveys and polls on specific topics, results should be reported back to renters using clear, easy-to-understand language and graphs / pictograms
  + See <https://www.cehl.com.au/TakingActionRSS22> for an example of how Common Equity Housing Ltd reports back on action taken in response to renter feedback
* CHO performance information – similarly, the CHO’s performance data, as assessed by the Housing Registrar, should be made available in clear, easy-to-understand language and graphs / pictograms
* Review the way Housing Registrar presents performance information – is this accessible and easy to understand for renters?
* Ensure renters are invited to the CHO’s Annual General Meeting
* Updates on new building developments, upgrades, and policies / policy changes – respond individually to renters who have had input to these, and to all renters more generally via letters and newsletters, as well as in News section on the CHO’s website
* Social events – use these as opportunities to report back; ‘Town Hall’ style information sessions, if well-facilitated, can be very effective. Consideration needs to be given to the best time of day, and the venues, for such events, depending on renter profiles. Refreshments, if offered, need to be culturally appropriate; there may need to be child-minding offered
* Ensure that consideration is given to renters’ communication needs:
  + Clear, simple language. Consider using pictograms and icons
  + Translation and interpreting services may be required
  + Adaptation of information for people with hearing and visual impairments.

# SUPPORTING RENTERS TO ENGAGE

Renters and residents may be distrustful, antagonistic, or apathetic when it comes to consulting with community housing staff. There may be significant barriers to overcome with some renters to establish an open and trusting relationship. Creating a positive relationship may be the initial task for housing provider staff.

Staff should consult and take account of the differing levels of interest and need for skills training for renters to provide their feedback constructively. Advice to this project suggests that there will be a significant learning curve for some renters to find their way to participate effectively in group settings.

As with all groups, consultation mechanisms are likely to have stages. In the initial formation stage, some individual renters may wish to air grievances and have difficulty moving on to other topics. Gradually the group will coalesce and move to a more effective feedback and advisory mechanism. This process needs to be understood, acknowledged and managed.

|  |
| --- |
| Stefan, community housing renter who found inter-tenant issues impacted his interest in engagement: |
| “Not everyone wants to sit on a committee or go to meetings or whatever. Sometimes you just want to connect with other people in the building. The problem is once some idiot starts arguing and carrying on at these things, it makes you just not want to go again. That’s what happened to me. I just didn’t want to be part of all the bullshit.”[[5]](#footnote-6) |

At the other end of the spectrum, renters may be willing to establish renter-led voice groups. These would need terms of reference and guidelines from the CHO to ensure the outputs are able to be incorporated into the organisation’s work plan. Renter-led groups may be particularly effective in drawing out issues that renters feel uncomfortable or fearful about raising directly with CHO staff.

## Supporting implementation

Given renter voice is a significant change to the culture and workload for some organisations, especially small ones, it will be important to consider ways for the sector to support them.

### Checklist – Supporting Implementation

Supports for implementation might include:

* Sharing resources between organisations with similar client groups or geographic areas – back of house resources that could be shared include best practice reporting mechanisms, training sessions and perhaps group workshops to consider renter voice policies and procedures
* Larger organisations seconding staff to small agencies for a short period to help set up the renter voice culture. The cost of such secondment would be an important consideration
* Mentoring by larger, more well-resourced agencies of smaller agencies – providing documentation, training and advice as required. This could include regular catch ups during the implementation phase
* Both the above should provide some assistance with workload for smaller organisations during the establishment phase. Being able to learn from, and lean into, the experience of those organisations that have already moved significantly down this path will be invaluable
* Establishing a specific community of practice group across the sector, facilitated by CHIA Vic, will be an important way to share experience and skills and develop best practices and protocols for use across Victoria
* Embedding support workers as part of the consultation process where renters with multiple and complex needs request their assistance
* Engaging with existing renter-led engagement groups to create peer support models and opportunities for renter-to-renter mentoring.

# TRAINING

Training needs fall into two groups:

1. Staff (including Board and management)
2. Renters and household members

### Staff (including board and management)

Consultation for this project identified a wide range of views about what training and skills might be needed to implement and operate a renter voice culture. Individual organisations can select from the following as suits their needs.

**Board**

* Familiarisation with the concept of Renter voice
* Adoption of and commitment to policy/principles
* Introduction to trauma informed practice
* Understanding of the complex issues faced by renters and residents and the constraints within which they live

**Senior staff**

* Familiarisation with the concept, implementation strategies
* Trauma Informed practice
* Review of policies, procedures, protocols, forms
* Continuous improvement process (thematic analysis of all complaints and reviewing front line staff suggestions for change)

**Front line staff**

* Overview of the context
  + How social housing works, the legal and regulatory framework. Policies, practices across social housing
  + Trauma informed practice, participating in the recovery journey for renters and household members
  + Managing their own mental health and stress levels
  + Managing vicarious trauma, responding to the wide variety of issues renters may disclose
  + Bias/unconscious bias (remaining open, not tuning out to issues that have been mentioned many times)
  + Charter of Human Rights
* Familiarisation with renter voice principles and practices: what does this mean in your organisation? The use of complaints and informal feedback in this process
* Interpersonal skills needed:
  + Communication skills (including active listening and reflecting, using words, voice and body language etc). Building trusted relationships
  + Meeting management, including encouraging open participation in a safe environment and managing renter contributions
  + Pre-briefing techniques. Identification of issues likely to be of interest to renters
  + Advice/support to renters to help them participate in consultation
  + Sensitivity to managing complex relationships with renters
  + Delivering bad news and managing the power imbalance in the relationship
  + Dealing with difficult personalities in forums
* Continuous improvement process
  + Understanding the continuous improvement process and their role in providing data and feedback from renters
  + Identification of issues to be upscaled to management (includes suggestions for change)
* Recognition of presenting issues of renters (identification of support needs)
  + Basic identification and response to mental health and other issues of renters (renters with complex needs).
  + First Aid training
  + Accredited Mental Health First Aid training

### Renters and household members

* About Social Housing
  + How the Social Housing System works (applications, the Victorian Housing Register, myth busting about queue-jumping, allocations, rent-setting, maintenance processes and how to report a repair / maintenance need)
  + Charter of Human Rights, inclusivity, anti-discrimination
* Communication skills
  + Communicating effectively with peers and agency staff
  + Public speaking
  + Listening skills
  + Basic literacy and numeracy – some residents may not be functionally literate in English or in their own language. This and fundamental numeracy will be useful skills for participation in this process and for general life
  + Basic computer literacy – as above
  + Basic financial literacy – in addition to numeracy, renters and residents involved in more formal consultation and advisory roles will need to be able to understand some basic financial information, such as costings for projects like maintenance. These skills will also be useful in other areas of life
* Meeting skills
  + Participating in meetings and workshops to provide ideas and discuss options and reach agreement on solutions
  + Use of mechanisms to manage dissent and off-topic comments (e.g. Parking Lot)
  + Team work – working with others
  + Basic leadership skills – accessing and supporting natural leaders among the renter/resident community will be an important component in the success of the program.
  + Governance practices – for those involved in Boards or Board committees. These practices might include an introduction to strategic and business planning.

# CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT & MEASURING IMPACT

Measurement, whether it is part of the continuous improvement process or program evaluation, starts when the program is being formed. Data collection should be set up to capture the first information in implementation, so there is a valid, robust formative data set against which to measure progress.

## Continuous improvement

Continuous improvement includes improving the product/service, the processes used to design, implement and manage what is delivered and the way the team carries out those processes. It also – crucially – involves obtaining input and feedback from renters and open, regular communication is a key part of implementation.

Continuous improvement is not instantly transformative and requires a culture shift within a CHO. It takes time to implement, and it can take time for the benefits to flow. That is one of the reasons ongoing communication is so important.

Steps to implement continuous improvement[[6]](#footnote-7):

* **Commit throughout the organisation**. That is a big part of what makes this work. It’s not just the people at the top or the bottom of an organisation that makes continuous improvement possible. Everyone needs to be moving toward the same goal.
* **Make continuous improvement part of the new routine.**  Continuous improvement is something that needs to be revisited regularly. The routine is key to sustaining it. Holding regular review meetings to monitor how changes are going is as important as identifying ideas to initiate change.
* **Tie it back to everyone’s job.** Some CHO staff will almost certainly look at this as just one more new initiative. To take it seriously, it needs to be part of everyone’s performance plans.
* **Measure the results**. (If it’s done right, these should be positive, and are usually cumulative). Continuous improvement is metrics-driven. This means that terms like good, bad, and better become very objective. Continuous improvement works, but it takes time. It’s like saving money: at first, the benefits (e.g. interest) earnt is barely noticeable. But over time, the interest income starts to add up.
* **Communicate**. Unlike some initiatives, there may not be quick wins. It will probably take time because continuous improvement is not instantly transformative. Keep everyone aware of what is going on (including renters) while waiting for the results to speak for themselves.
* **Be deliberate and patient.** Creating a culture of continuous improvement is an exercise in demonstrating continuous improvement. CHOs require commitment and sustained energy; it will take time to produce results.
* **Repeat.** These are baby steps, and this is the real heart of continuous improvement. Go over these steps again and again. This is continuous and will never really be finished.

Creating a culture of continuous improvement will not only help make the services the CHO deliver better. It helps make the teams and the organisation better, and like compounding interest, the benefits keep coming.

### Checklist for implementing continuous improvement

CHOs know that the most effective and efficient use of resources follows from a full and current understanding of:

* Presenting issues/complaints e.g. maintenance, incorrect rental formulas applied
* The reasons (underlying causes) for these presenting issues/complaints
* The routine practice of analysing the issues and their causes to find ways to improve processes and eliminate errors or issues. This may be referred to as continuous improvement.

Most CHOs already have robust routine systems with which they collect and report on complaints, and all are required to report to the Housing Registrar on complaints handling every two years. Some organisations are already using this information to feed into their business processes to review what opportunities they present for system and policy improvement.

To bring a continuous improvement overlay to existing reporting, organisations could:

* Commit to continuous improvement as part of the culture of the CHO
* Include participating in all stages of the improvement process in everybody’s performance review process
* Institute a regular renters’ services team meeting to review complaints, renter feedback, observed renters’ issues and any issues observed by staff
* Identify common themes
* Identify underlying causes of complaints and renter- and staff-identified issues
* Address the underlying causes as is practicable, including providing metrics to measure the effectiveness of the changes implemented (e.g. reduction in cost of maintenance, reduction in complaints about noise)
* Hold regular review meetings to monitor how changes are going (as important as identifying ideas to initiate change).

Addressing the issues might include:

* Immediate remedial action, such as repairs
* Using various problem-solving techniques, such as brainstorming, to develop revised procedures, policies and practices
* Developing performance indicators to monitor improvement (describing the desired outcome and how to measure it)
* Instituting team-level changes to policies, procedures, practices or reporting requirements, as appropriate
* Making recommendations to management for changes to policy, procedures or practices, as appropriate
* Meeting regularly to monitor progress and the results of changes made.
* Feeding back to renters and residents the progress and outcomes of the analysis. Where the preferred renters’ solution has not been adopted, reasons for the outcomes should be clearly explained.

Without a regular and valued feedback loop between renters and staff it is easy to miss the link between issues (which staff may not otherwise hear about, or take account of) and underlying process analysis needed to improve service delivery. Once again, open, effective communication is key.

## Measuring performance

Organisations need to keep and interrogate data on their performance so they have the best possible understanding of the impact of decisions, policies and procedures. This information is crucial input to strategic and business planning and understanding how funds are used and how to institute the most effective process and program improvements.

Impact measurement is an essential tool for Boards and management. In this context, measuring impact means being able to attribute to the renter voice program positive (or negative) changes to the quality and liveability of housing for renters and residents – how the program has impacted renters’ experience of their community housing.

Along with measuring impact, organisations need to measure outcomes, outputs (activities undertaken) and inputs (costs and time attributable to the program).

Before trying to measure the success of Renter Voice, it is important to be clear about what success would look like and to base your measurement on that model. Outcome measurement in this context means listing the specific ways in which the CHO identifies that Renter Voice is successful. Outcomes reflect the results from the point of view of renters and the organisation.

The outcomes of implementing Renter Voice include the benefits listed below in Table 4.

### Table 4 Checklist of indicators for measuring outcomes attributable to Renter Voice

| Outcome | Measures – change year-on-year |
| --- | --- |
| * Increased overall satisfaction with housing | * Results of renter satisfaction surveys * Renter satisfaction with the way complaints handled and resolved * % of renters reporting that their views are taken into account |
| * Improvements in housing services due to more effective contribution by renters | * % of renters reporting that their views are considered * Number of complaints, appeals and disputes * Efficient expenditure, e.g. reduced damage, repeat repair jobs * Qualitative: renters speak with pride about their homes |
| * Reduced property damage through earlier notification of issues | * Average time taken to notify property damage * Average time taken to respond to notifications * Average time taken to complete property repairs and maintenance (measured against agency standards) |
| * Reduced rental arrears | * Average rental arrears – Dollars and days |
| * Fewer neighbourhood disputes and nuisance reports to staff (and reduced staff time dealing with these) | * Number of neighbourhood disputes notified * Number of disputes resolved (where possible) * Average length of time to resolve disputes * Average staff time dealing with disputes |
| * Improved maintenance of common areas | * Average spend on maintenance of common areas * Qualitative: visual attractiveness / tidiness of common areas |
| * Greater sense of pride and ownership of rented properties | * Qualitative: renters speak with pride about their homes * Average cost of repairs to homes |
| * Reduced renter turnover (reduced cost associated with vacancies/renter selection and down-time between tenancies) | * Average number of turnovers per property * Overall cost of renter turnover |
| * Increased sustainable tenancies – greater stability in renters’ and their families’ lives has significant long term intangible benefits | * Qualitative: improved school attendance; improved physical and mental health (attributable to stable, suitable housing); improved employment opportunities (attributable to suitable housing) |
| * Increased job satisfaction for housing provider staff, from front line to Board. | * Average staff turnover * Results of staff satisfaction surveys * Average length of staff vacancies * Average sick leave taken * Average number of applications for vacancies at all levels (including Board positions) |

### Table 5 Checklist of measures of output attributable to Renter Voice

| Output | Measures – change year-on-year |
| --- | --- |
| * Matters on which renters have influenced CHO practices | * Number and type of policies, practices, procedures influenced by the Renter Voice program |
| * Types of decision in which renters are involved | * Policy * Program as a whole * Specific items in a program * Individual matters |
| * Types of renter voice structures and mechanisms | * Board membership * Advisory body for specific policy or program or specific issues of interest * Participating in resolving issues of interest * Self-managed renter group * Individual renters raising issues |
| * Budget expenditure on Renter Voice program | * Actual and committed expenditure on Renter Voice compared with budget provision |
| * Representation of renter group membership | * Geographic coverage, age, gender, ethnicity, disability |
| * Number of individuals participating as a proportion of housing stock | * Proportion increases |
| * Number, variety and frequency of different methods of communication and engagement | * Communication between staff and Renters improves |
| * Number of staff receiving training, topics of training | * % Staff receiving training and refreshers |
| * Number of renters receiving training, topics of training | * % Renters receiving training and refreshers |
| * Number of renters responding to requests for input through formal surveys and other formal consultations | * Increase in responses to formal communications, including surveys |
| * Systems for continuous improvement results reflect renter input (formal and informal) | * Influence of Renter Voice is clear |

Achieving the outcomes linked to renter voice described above will require either direct or in-kind expenditure (inputs) on the part of the CHO.

### Checklist for inputs attributable to Renter Voice

* Training in Renter Voice related activities for all levels in the organisation, and for renters
* Adding responsibilities to the workloads of staff – this may result in the need for additional staff time
* Review and enhancement of systems for capturing and using formal and informal feedback
* Additional formal communications such as newsletters and leaflets or barbeques to receive ideas and provide feedback on results
* The costs of improvements to services generated through the Renter Voice process
* Budget to support Renter Voice
* Office facilities available to renter groups, for instance, photocopying, mail, and IT, support to attend meetings, for instance, transport, child care, and out of pocket expenses
* Independent advice and third party services, such as polling or survey companies, or dedicated in house support
* Support from other (larger) CHOs, especially during implementation.

# APPENDICIES

## Appendix 1 – Renter Voice Model Policy

*[****Note: This is a template policy for community housing organisations. It should be tailored to the specific needs of the organisation and linked to other appropriate policies]***

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Date Created:** |  |
| **Review Date:** |  |
| **Reviewed By:** |  |

Purpose

The aim of this policy is to ensure that renters can have a say in how their housing is run, and that their views are heard and reflected on by [CHO] in considering how to deliver and improve housing services. This policy expresses [CHO]’s commitment to ensuring that any feedback made by renters will not adversely affect their rental agreement.

Scope

This policy applies to:

* renters and prospective renters, their case workers and advocates;
* household members of all ages living in [CHO] properties; and
* people whom [CHO] has assisted to make an application for social housing through the Victorian Housing Register (VHR).

This policy does not apply to:

* Neighbours outside the rental property (or properties in a multi-unit development)
* Friends of renters, household members or applicants (unless they are providing support)
* Family of renters or applicants (unless they are household members, support providers or advocates).

Overview

[CHO] welcomes and values the views of renters and is committed to using to this information as far as possible to improve service delivery.

[CHO] acknowledges that some renters may face barriers to speak up and offer views, make a complaint about their housing, or service provided by their housing officer or even request a repair or a maintenance job, for fear of losing or otherwise adversely impacting their tenancy. [CHO] is committed to ensuring that renters may speak openly without fear or reprisal from their rental provider. Having a say or making a complaint will not affect a renter’s right to their housing or the provision of other related services. Addressing any misconceptions that [CHO] has the power to take away renters housing if they speak up, and building confidence, trust, respect and transparency are key to empowering renters to have a voice.

For the purposes of this policy, Renters’ Voice can include but is not limited to, formal and informal feedback, advice, suggestions, survey responses, participation in committees and panels, and Board membership. It also includes complaints made by renters, their advocates and support providers, including through the organisation’s complaints handling process. Please see [CHO] Complaints policy for more information.

[CHO] also acknowledges that not all renters wish to engage on a range of issues and may choose not to respond to requests for input from their rental provider. [CHO] respects renters’ preferences regarding how, and when they wish to engage.

What is Renter Voice?

Renter Voice is the term given to the feedback between renters and household members and [CHO] about how things are going and what might make things run more smoothly and efficiently.

Having a say, or requesting repairs, or making a complaint are all useful sources of feedback for improving renter voice and will not impact on your right to have a home.

Renter Voice in Community Housing means that:

* All feedback is treated as an opportunity for improvement not a nuisance or a problem to be managed.
* Renters feel confident and safe in providing their views, feedback and lived experiences on all aspects of their housing services, at any time, including – but not only – when these are asked for by [CHO].
* Renters are advised up front why their views are sought, and are valued, but also why they might not always be acted on.
* Their views are heard and reflected on by [CHO] in considering how to deliver and improve housing services.
* Their views are acted on as much as possible, and consistent with the legal and financial obligations of [CHO], in planning, designing, and delivering housing services.
* [CHO] is accountable to, and reports back to, renters on how their views and feedback have been considered, acted on and have been used to influence changes to housing services; and where their views have not been acted on, the reasons are provided in a timely way.

Guiding Principles

The Renter Voice policy is based on the following principles:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Principle** | **What this looks like in action for renters** |
| Renters’ voices are always respected. | All renters feel safe in saying what they think. They are assured up front that speaking up, requesting repairs, giving feedback, and making complaints will not impact their tenancy. They are thanked for providing input. |
| Listening to, reflecting, and acting on what renters say is essential to the delivery of housing services that meet people’s needs. | Renters know how to provide their views, feedback, and experiences, and to make complaints, and know that they will be listened to with an open and attentive attitude. They will be taken seriously. |
| Renters’ lived experiences are respected and valued in planning, delivering, and improving housing services. | Renters are housing experts! Their views and lived experiences are valued and acknowledged. Where renters participate in, and provide their expertise on, advisory panels and committees, they are remunerated or otherwise appropriately rewarded. |
| Renters’ voice is part of everyone’s role: Board members, management, and frontline staff. | Renters’ views are actively sought, valued, and used in decision-making by everyone at [CHO].  [CHO] acknowledges and thanks renters for their expertise. |
| Renters from all backgrounds, cultures, language groups, ages (including children), and abilities are supported to have a say, and they are listened to with respect. | It is easy for all renters to have a say. Barriers to participation are removed. Renters feel culturally safe. There are interpreters, translation services, and accessible ways to communicate. Wherever possible, staff go to renters to seek their input, rather than using phone or office visits or requiring things to be “in writing” |
| What renters say is acted on, and they are told about how they have influenced change, leading to improved services. | Renters are kept informed about issues they have raised, and how complaints are being handled (*refer to Complaints policy*). They are given information and regular updates about how their input is being used. |
| Renter voice input is reflected in decisions made by the organisation | Renters are told up front how their contributions will be considered and used by [CHO]. They are also informed about why it is not always possible to act on what they have said. |

Who can have a say?

Any renter, prospective renter, household member of a [CHO] home (or their supporters and advocates) is encouraged to share their views, feedback, and lived experiences on all aspects of their housing services, at any time, including when these are asked for by [CHO]. Household members include people of all ages, children, and people of all abilities, cultural backgrounds and genders.

How to have a say

There are many ways renters can have a say about their housing, including:

* Responding to surveys.
* Attending social events organised by the housing organisation to share information.
* Raising issues with housing staff or just by being actively listened to
* Making complaints when things are not working (*refer to Complaints policy*).
* Making suggestions about how things can be improved.
* Giving feedback on how things are going, or when changes are planned.
* Participating in community or estate meetings and advisory committees on matters such as repairs and maintenance, or the design of accommodation or how common areas are used.
* Participating in the governance of the organisation through Board membership.

Renters can have a say by:

* Telephone: [Insert telephone number]
* Online: [Insert web address. If CHO has an online complaint form, include

instructions on how to access it from the home page]

* Email: [Insert email address]
* Post: [Insert contact name and postal address]
* In person: [Insert address]

How [CHO] will use Renter Voice

This policy recognises that renters and household members know the most about living in [CHO] properties. They have valuable ideas and experiences to contribute to improving the way our housing services are provided.

[CHO] needs renters’ experience and ideas and will use the information provided by renters to:

* Improve all aspects of their housing provision.
* Fix problems while they are small, before they become much bigger problems.
* Keep costs as low as possible by hearing about maintenance and other issues quickly, so they can be responded to as soon as possible.
* Be aware of any interpersonal issues between renters/household members and appreciate how this can impact on their views.
* Act on ideas about how to make things run more smoothly, such as improving communication with renters.
* Consult with renters to understand their preferences where [CHO] are planning to make changes to the property (e.g. ideas regarding fittings, use of common space or what to plant in communal gardens etc.)
* Help renters enjoy living in their homes, so they can get on with their lives in secure and stable housing.

Accessibility – if renters need help in having a say

[CHO] is committed to ensuring that the opportunity to have a say about housing is accessible to everyone. If a renter has specific communication needs or barriers, they can communicate this to [CHO] so assistance can be provided by:

* using an assistance service, such an interpreter or TTY (for free);
* assistance with reading or writing; and
* communicating with another person acting on the renter’s behalf.

Confidentiality

All individual feedback, views, and input are confidential, and no identifying information will be shared without permission.

[CHO] uses this information to respond to issues raised by renters, and to improve the services. All personal and sensitive information provided by renters will be kept secure and managed in accordance with the Privacy and Data Protection Act 2015.

[CHO] may share information to promote the wellbeing or safety of a child or group of children, or to prevent family violence, with other approved information sharing entities as legislated by the Victorian Government.

For more information relating to privacy and confidentiality, please refer to [CHO]’s privacy policy.

Related policies

[Insert description of related policies: most relevantly those relating to privacy and confidentiality, complaints policy, neighbourly behaviour policy and other relevant policies outside the scope of this policy.]

Legislation and standards

This policy meets the regulatory requirements of the Performance Standards established under sections 93 and 94 of the *Housing Act* 1983. (Performance Standard 1, Tenant and Housing Services – supporting tenant and resident engagement).

Transparency and accessibility

This policy will be available on the [CHO] website [*www.cho.org.au/policy*](http://www.cho.org.au/policy)

Definitions

In this policy:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Prospective Renter** | A person who [CHO] assists to apply for social housing |
| **Renter** | The person renting the home, whose name(s) is on the rental agreement. Includes recently exited renter. |
| **Household Member** | Other people residing in the rented home, including children. |
| **Residential rental provider** | The community housing organisation managing the rented property. |

## Appendix 2 - Customer Service Charter and Model Renter Voice Commitment

## Appendix 2 - Useful links

### Guiding Renter Voice Principles in action matrix

The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) has developed a [Client Voice Framework](https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/publications/client-voice-framework-community-services) with a set of principles that are supported by CHIA Vic, but are broad and do not apply specifically to the social housing sector:

1. Client voice is essential for quality and safety.
2. Clients have expertise.
3. Client voice is part of everyone’s role.
4. There are many voices.
5. Voice leads to action.

### You Said, We Did

An example of a [feedback communication tool](https://myemail.constantcontact.com/You-Said--We-Did.html?soid=1123163422887&aid=Yhnuvvtitlw) for renters from Leeds and Yorkshire Housing Association highlighting the ways renter feedback was acted on and improvements to their service.

## Appendix 3 – Links to Model Templates, Tools & Checklist in this Guide

Click on the links below to find these resources in the guide.

* [Model Communication template](#_Model_Communication_Template)
* [Inviting and welcoming renters’ feedback – checklist](#_Checklist_–_Inviting)
* [Managing expectations – model statement to renters](#_Managing_expectations_–)
* [Embedding renter voice in the culture – checklist](#_Checklist_–_Embedding)
* [Reflecting on and considering renters’ views – checklist](#_Checklist_-_Reflecting)
* [Acting on what renters have said – checklist](#_Checklist_–_Acting)
* [Reporting back to renters – tool](#_Reporting_back_tool)
* [Supporting implementation – tool](#_Checklist_–_Supporting)
* [Training – lists of competencies and programs](#_TRAINING)
* [Implement continuous improvement – checklist](#_Checklist_for_implementing)
* Measuring impact:
  + [Table 4 Outcomes](#_Table_4_Checklist)
  + [Table 5 Outputs](#_Table_5_Checklist)
  + [Checklist for Inputs](#_Checklist_for_inputs)

1. Eighty Nine Degrees East: Community Housing Tenants Consultation Project Report, September 2021 p 18 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Includes materials from presentations by Taegan Hannah, CEHL, and Mark O’Brien, Residential Tenancies Commission, at the CHIA Vic Conference 2023, session C11 - *Embedding renter voice into the business of CHOs* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Case study from *Community Housing Tenant Consultation Report* by 89 Degrees East,P33 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Case study ‘Active engagement considered a bonus’ from *Community Housing Tenant Consultation* *Project* *report* by 89 Degrees East P36 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Ibid p36 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. https://www.liquidplanner.com/blog/7-steps-build-continuous-improvement-culture/ [↑](#footnote-ref-7)