

**Recommendations from
Members of the City-Wide
Tenant-Staff Engagement
Advisory Committee**

FOR

**Refreshing the Current
Tenant Engagement System
at Toronto Community
Housing**

TCH Tenant Engagement System Refresh Proposal Report

City-Wide Tenant-Staff Engagement Advisory Committee
c/o Toronto Community Housing
931 Yonge Street, 7th Floor
Toronto, Ontario
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June 23, 2017

Angela Cooke
Vice President, Resident and Community Services
Toronto Community Housing
931 Yonge Street
Toronto, Ontario
M4W 2H2

Dear Ms. Cooke,

On behalf of the City-Wide Tenant-Staff Engagement Advisory Committee, we are presenting you with our recommendations for the improvement of the Tenant Engagement System currently in place at Toronto Community Housing (TCH).

We wish to thank you for the opportunity and support necessary to provide meaningful recommendations. It is our hope that you will submit these recommendations to the TCH Executive Leadership Team and Resident Services Committee.

We look forward to working together in partnership with TCH staff on the implementation of these recommendations.

Sincerely,

Susan Gapka
Tenant Co-Chair

Robbie Rambarrat
Tenant Co-Chair

Harriet Shepherd
Alternate Co-Chair

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Acknowledgements

Our committee would like to thank:

- Delegates and volunteers who participated in and organized the nine community meetings and the “Take 5” Survey
- Members of the City-Wide Tenant - Staff Engagement Advisory Committee
- Tenants who completed the “Take 5” Survey

Members of City-Wide Tenant-Staff Engagement Advisory Committee

Tenant Members

| | | |
|---------------------|------------------------|--|
| Zahra Davarnia | Charles Galbraith | Robbie Rambarrat (Co-Chair) |
| Margaret Devlin | Susan Gapka (Co-Chair) | Sandra Ramsay |
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| Patricia Duck | Jacob (WeiJie) Ma | Harriet Shepherd (Alternate Co-Chair) |
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Staff Members

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Support Staff

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2015, Toronto Community Housing (TCH), in keeping with its corporate strategy and Shareholder Direction, started a process to review its current Tenant Engagement System Model. The process assessed how the organization facilitates effective support for tenant groups and identified models required for TCH communities. It was decided the Tenant Engagement System review will support TCH to develop a “road map” for achieving a shared vision for tenant groups and will articulate how tenant groups work towards achieving the vision.

From the outset, it was understood tenants would play a key role in the review as they are the key constituency impacted by the current Tenant Engagement System. There have been a series of efforts by TCH and tenants to improve the Tenant Engagement System, starting in 2015 with an Open Space Forum. This was followed up by establishing a tenant group who developed, implemented and analyzed results of a survey (“Take 5” Survey) which directly informed a set of recommendations around changes to the Tenant Engagement System. From May 2016 to April 2017 a joint working group composed of tenants and staff (The City-Wide Tenant-Staff Engagement Advisory Committee) worked diligently to understand the successes, gaps and opportunities, and to develop a shared vision and operational principles to guide any changes to the current Tenant Engagement System.

The committee identified a set of core values/principles:

Respect: Mutual respect between all involved

Equity: Ensuring equitable treatment for all involved

Informative: Ensuring all involved have the capacity to make informed decisions

Inclusive: A system that is inclusive and representative of all TCH tenants

Collaborative: Working together as partners

The City-Wide Tenant-Staff Engagement Advisory Committee developed recommendations on how TCH can approach any changes to the Tenant Engagement System. The recommendations have been grouped under six key objectives:

1. Establish a Governance System
2. Create an Accountability Framework
3. Knowledge & Information: Buildings Profile
4. Communications
5. Increase Tenant Participation
6. Capacity Building for Tenants and Staff

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Benefit to TCH and TCH Tenants

The recommendations will help to:

- enhance the effectiveness of the Tenant Engagement System;
- engage more TCH tenants to participate in TCH initiatives and/or initiatives in their local community;
- involve more tenants in the decision-making process.

After reviewing this report, the City-Wide Tenant-Staff Engagement Advisory Committee recommends that TCH's Executive Leadership Team and the Resident Services Committee of the Board:

- accept this report for consideration
- act on the recommendations outlined in this report in partnership with TCH tenants

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BACKGROUND

In 2003, the City of Toronto (in its capacity as the sole shareholder for TCH) mandated TCH to develop a Tenant Engagement System to incorporate tenants in the decision making processes of the organization. This process led to the development of Tenant Representatives and the Tenant Council system.

In 2013, with the transition of the Community Health Unit (CHU) into what is today Resident and Community Services (RCS) Division, RCS staff began plans to review the Tenant Engagement System, including an understanding of how Tenant Representatives perform their roles and responsibilities.

Following the 2015 Tenant Representatives election, TCH's Executive Leadership Team approved a project to assess how the Tenant Engagement System model facilitates effective support for tenant groups and to identify models required for our respective communities. The Tenant Engagement System review also considered how to implement initiatives that better support tenant groups and how to work with partner organizations such as the City of Toronto and other stakeholders.

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PROCESS

The process to refresh TCH’s Tenant Engagement System included the establishment of a tenant-staff work group (Tenant Engagement System Refresh Work Group) to provide direction for the design of the process. The process undertaken includes:

| # | Activity | Results | When |
|---|--|--|----------------------------|
| 1 | Open Space Forum (tenant consultation) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tenant consultation to identify common issues with the current Tenant Engagement System model and to co-develop a plan for moving forward | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over 50 tenant participants Tenant Working Group established (Tenant Participation System Refresh – Interim Tenant Workgroup) | September 2015 |
| 2 | Take 5 Survey <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed, implemented, and analyzed a survey to understand tenant knowledge and experience with existing Tenant Engagement System | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 457 tenants completed the “Take 5” Survey | September to December 2015 |
| 3 | Tenant Town Hall Meetings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shared Take 5 survey results; collected feedback; nominated and elected tenants to form the <i>City-Wide Tenant-Staff Engagement Advisory Committee</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nine town hall meetings (three meetings per directorate) At each town hall meeting tenants were nominated and elected to form the <i>City-Wide Tenant-Staff Engagement Advisory Committee</i> | January to March 2016 |

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| # | Activity | Results | When |
|---|---|---|-----------------------------------|
| 4 | <p>City-Wide Tenant-Staff Engagement Advisory Committee Group Formation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed of rules of order; established a meeting schedule; developed Terms of Reference | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A 33-member Committee consisting of 12 tenant representatives, 14 tenant leaders and 7 staff Nine committee meetings | <p>May to August 2016</p> |
| 5 | <p>City-Wide Tenant-Staff Engagement Advisory Committee</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brainstorm what is and isn't working with current tenant engagement model; identify areas of focus for group: learning, identifying, discussion, and proposal; develop slide presentations on the roles and responsibilities for current Tenant Representatives and an overview of the current Tenant Engagement System; developed core values/principles guiding the committee's work; present "Take 5" survey results, and do a visioning exercise | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed vision for the potential governance model Identified core values/principles for potential governance model Identified key objectives for governance model | <p>September to December 2016</p> |
| 6 | <p>City-Wide Tenant-Staff Engagement Advisory Committee</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysis of "Take 5" survey to inform a set of recommendations; grouping of recommendations under six key objectives of the potential governance model | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of draft report (pending final committee approval) | <p>January to April 2017</p> |

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The City-Wide Tenant-Staff Engagement Advisory Committee developed a shared vision, core values/principles and key objectives to guide any changes to the current Tenant Engagement System.

SHARED VISION

Our vision is to foster tenant engagement and to build vibrant communities through diverse, inclusive and collaborative methods to give all tenants of TCH a voice and input into community-related decision-making.

CORE VALUES/PRINCIPLES

Respect: Mutual respect between all involved

Equity: Ensuring equitable treatment for all involved

Informative: Ensuring all involved have the capacity to make informed decisions

Inclusive: A system that is inclusive and representative of all TCH tenants

Collaborative: Working together as partners

KEY OBJECTIVES

1. Establish a Governance System
2. Create an Accountability Framework
3. Knowledge & Information – Buildings Profile
4. Communications
5. Increase Tenant Participation
6. Capacity Building for Tenant Staff

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1 ESTABLISH A GOVERNANCE SYSTEM

The committee felt that it was important that TCH collaborate with tenants to refresh the Tenant Engagement System. This will make a difference in tenants' communities by building on the strengths and needs of each community. To ensure success, the refreshed Tenant Engagement System must be clearly communicated to tenants and should be comprehensive in nature. Furthermore, the Shareholder Direction mandates that TCH maintain a democratic system that will "provide for tenant input for decisions at the corporate and local levels (Shareholder Direction, p. 16).

Principles for Creating a Refreshed Governance System

- 1.1**
Initiate a broad, transparent and meaningful process to develop a refreshed Tenant Engagement System reflective of tenants' input. Ensure tenant recommendations are reflected throughout the system.
- 1.2**
Refresh the democratic tenant engagement system to facilitate local community-based decision-making.
- 1.3**
Work with tenants to develop models that are adaptable to the community's needs.
- 1.4**
Refresh the Tenant Engagement System to develop capacity for both tenants and staff.
- 1.5**
Develop a framework that honors and recognizes the ways in which tenants may participate in a refreshed system.

Define:

- The roles and responsibilities of Tenant Representatives, Tenant Leaders and Tenant Volunteers
- Tenant-led, Staff-led and Tenant/Staff-led initiatives

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Educate tenants and staff about each definition and how to they relate to our communities.

1.6

Create an accountability framework for the refreshed Tenant Engagement System. **See Objective 2** for more details.

1.7

Establish a youth engagement system that includes a “Youth Council” with dedicated resources—i.e., funding, staff support, and partnerships.

Community Representation and Elections

1.8

Create and empower a “tenant-staff election working group” which will have the responsibility of planning, implementing and evaluating the election process.

In addition, the tenant-staff election working group will ensure an election process which:

- Is fair, accessible, transparent and inclusive
- Increases participation
- Provides sufficient time for effective planning and implementation by staff
- Consults tenants on community geographical boundaries of representation
- Includes all tenants (regardless of whether they are RGI, affordable housing or market rent tenants, or live in townhouses, single family homes or contract-managed buildings)
- Educates tenants about how tenant elections operate
- Educates potential Tenant Representatives about their Roles and Responsibilities
- Effectively communicates the election results in a transparent manner

1.9

Develop a protocol for the timely filling of vacant Tenant Representative positions. Create a specific timeline for by-elections.

1.10

Consult tenants on how tenants are selected for the TCH board, and on the composition of the board and the structure of committees.

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Accountability

1.11

Create a city-wide tenant-staff governance oversight committee which acts as a resource and accountability structure for tenants and staff. Solve building and community issues related to the Tenant Engagement System. Select members to this oversight body through a democratic process.

1.12

Develop a plan to review and evaluate the effectiveness and success of the Tenant Engagement System every three years.

1.13

Create a mechanism that engages Tenant Councils in the creation of TCH policies.

Tenant Council Funding

1.14

Reform the Tenant Council funding system to ensure:

- It addresses the issues and priorities of local communities
- Funds are available for use at the beginning of the calendar year
- Unused funds can be allocated to the next year
- Transparent and equitable division of funds according to tenant-defined community geographical boundaries

1.15

Where possible, use the approved vendors list, or use neighbourhood merchants (not on the approved vendor list) for time, convenience and cost efficiency. Pay vendors in a timely manner. Design a system which holds individuals accountable while giving flexibility to tenants in purchasing decisions.

1.16

Educate tenants and staff about the current vendor purchasing system, explaining processes and timelines.

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2 CREATE AN ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK

The refreshed Tenant Engagement System must be accountable to the needs of communities, tenants and TCH's Shareholder Direction. It is critical that staff are empowered to consistently deliver quality service to tenants through an accountability framework. Similarly, it is critical that tenants are held accountable for money invested and decisions made. A strong Tenant Engagement System must be accompanied by a strong accountability framework. As noted by the TCH strategic plan Homeward 2016, TCH is "accountable to residents and the citizens of Toronto for the housing we deliver with the dollars invested" (Homeward, p. 19).

- 2.1**
Revise guidelines and processes for tenants and staff to hold both parties accountable to their roles and responsibilities.
- 2.2**
Create a process for when accountability guidelines (See 2.1) are not followed.
- 2.3**
Create a tenant-staff governance oversight committee which acts as a resource and accountability structure for tenants and staff. Elect tenant members in a democratic process. Resolve community issues and issues related to the Tenant Engagement System in this setting.
- 2.4**
Improve the current communication system to ensure it is open and accountable.
- 2.5**
Create an attendance monitoring structure that encourages the regular attendance of Tenant Representatives at Tenant Council.
- 2.6**
Develop a strategic vision and policies for increasing safety in our communities with tenants, key stakeholders and partners. Develop a framework that keeps all parties accountable to improvements in safety.

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2.7

Create an accountability mechanism ensuring tenants have priority access to their common spaces and that clear rules and protocols are used for booking spaces. Invest in a common room booking calendar system to avoid double-booking and other issues related to Use of Space.

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3

KNOWLEDGE & INFORMATION: BUILDINGS PROFILE

Communities and tenant leadership can be strengthened through a systemic examination of tenant demographics and community needs and assets. This complements work TCH has undertaken to develop knowledge about the demographics of our tenants and communities. (TCH Strategic Plan, Homeward 2016, p. 16)

The committee agreed that this can only occur through detailed and accurate creation of profiles for each building.

3.1

Create a building/townhouse community profile for each community in the TCH portfolio.

Include in this profile:

- Stand-alone single family homes
- Community Priorities for Change
- History of Engagement and Participation
- Community Demographics (i.e., languages)
- Existing initiatives and partnerships
- List of engaged community leaders
- Agencies and contacts
- Government services and contacts and other assets

Develop a system in which community profiles can be updated and accessed by tenant and staff.

3.2

Acknowledge and trust tenants' understanding of their local communities. Build tenants' capacity to grow their knowledge and understanding of their communities. Develop a strategy to support how tenants can share their knowledge with other tenants and staff.

Create learning opportunities for staff to further develop their understanding of local community conditions and knowledge. Provide tools that can be used to share this information in strategic ways with stakeholders.

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3.3

Provide knowledge and information in the two most commonly used languages of the community, in addition to English.

3.4

Whenever necessary, provide interpreters for community meetings to better share knowledge and information.

3.5

Connect new and existing tenants to community activities, resources and assets through the creation of welcome packages and welcoming activities. Give communities local control over these packages and activities with support for their development from staff. Distribute the welcome packages when apartments are leased.

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4 COMMUNICATIONS

A successful communication strategy forms the backbone of the TCH Tenant Engagement System. The committee emphasized the importance of clear, concise and timely communication in a refreshed Tenant Engagement System.

In addition to traditional methods of communication, including but not limited to door knocking and meetings, TCH should implement emerging digital methods of outreach.

4.1
Ensure all communications are provided two weeks in advance of an event or initiative.

4.2
Distribute all communication materials to all tenants in an equitable fashion. (Regardless of whether they are RGI, affordable housing or market rent tenants, or live in townhouses, stand-alone single family homes or contract-managed buildings).

4.3
Review all communication protocols with the aim of increasing tenant participation. Improve communication and engagement by:

- Removing language barriers
- Using accessible, plain language materials and graphics/icons that communicate key messages
- Translating materials into the two most commonly used languages of the community, besides English [per 3.3 above]
- Creating video presentations that inform tenants about opportunities for participation
- Exploring greater use of social media and technology
- Use best practices for distribution of information to tenants—for example, lobby intercepts, door knocking and enlisting Tenant Representatives or community animators to share information in the building or community

4.4
Develop a communication strategy that ensures tenants and staff are informed about the roles and responsibilities of Tenant Representatives and about the election process and the Tenant Engagement System.

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4.5

Create a robust and transparent information sharing system between communities, Tenant Councils and other committees or governing structures. Share best practices, minutes and decisions, and success stories. Provide opportunities for learning exchanges.

4.6

Develop a communication protocol for Tenant Representatives to bring community and building issues to Tenant Council for resolution. Develop a reporting structure which communicates results back to community members while achieving accountability.

4.7

Provide Tenant Representatives with easy-to-use and accessible tools for them to communicate with tenants in their communities. Consider providing TCH email addresses, voicemail-only phone extensions, lobby/community “suggestion boxes” and bulletin boards.

4.8

Develop local Tenant Council newsletters with support of tenants and staff. To enhance communication to tenants, the newsletters should focus on Tenant Council–specific news, profiles and announcements. Use each newsletter to recognize achievements of communities and local volunteers. Provide the newsletter in paper and digital format and in different languages.

4.9

Ensure that tenants receive clear communication about policy changes and provide an explanation for such changes.

4.10

Ensure that each community holds at least two “Building Meetings” per year for the purpose of sharing information and addressing community priorities.

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5 INCREASE TENANT PARTICIPATION

We know communities are vibrant “where tenants are engaged, have opportunities to thrive and play leadership roles to build their communities (Homeward 2016, p. 13).” By increasing tenant participation, we can increase the vibrancy of our communities.

5.1

Recognize that safety and safe spaces are critical in increasing tenant participation.

As such, develop a strategic vision and policies for increasing safety in TCH communities with tenants, key stakeholders and partners. Develop a framework that keeps all parties accountable to improvements in safety.

5.2

Eliminate barriers to participation by providing childcare, translation, food and transportation. Use approved vendors and ensure accountability structures are in place.

5.3

Remove overly strenuous Use of Space insurance requirements that prevent tenant led programming.

5.4

Provide new community space by converting empty units/townhouses and by developing partnerships with local agencies or nearby buildings to provide space.

5.5

Support and/or provide resources for tenant led programming, where requested. Communicate that all programming is subject to the rules and regulations governing TCH spaces.

5.6

Explore the possibility of providing honorariums as part of the Tenant Engagement System. Ensure that tenants and staff are consulted about the benefits and drawbacks of providing honorariums.

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5.7

Communicate any limitations in implementing any project or initiative at the forefront. Speak honestly about these constraints while allowing for the development of innovative solutions that can address these constraints.

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6 CAPACITY BUILDING FOR TENANTS AND STAFF

The committee understands the importance of staff providing excellent service. This can be accomplished by building staff skills and by ensuring staff have the right tools to do their work. Furthermore, the committee recognizes the importance of developing tenant capacity to increase participation in the Tenant Engagement System. Working together to build our mutual capacity, we can build upon the existing strengths of our communities.

- 6.1**
Identify partnerships to provide learning opportunities.
- 6.2**
Create mechanisms to understand the learning needs of both tenants and staff in order to better support TCH's Tenant Engagement System.
- 6.3**
Provide opportunities for tenants and staff to learn about local needs, priorities and opportunities.
- 6.4**
Reduce isolation between site staff (Asset Management) and engagement staff (Resident and Community Services) by encouraging effective communication between staff. Encourage site staff to participate in engagement activities and programming, where possible.
- 6.5**
Provide funding for effective training of tenants and Tenant Representatives. Ensure they can share their learnings, where appropriate.
- 6.6**
Provide training that will improve tenant and staff capacity to network and secure resources in creative ways. Encourage tenants and tenant representatives to share this knowledge in their communities.
- 6.7**
Create a peer-to-peer mentorship model in which veteran Tenant Representatives mentor new Tenant Representatives.