

National Community Housing Standards Manual

Third edition • May 2010



This third edition of the *National Community Housing Standards Manual* has been developed by JPX Consulting Pty Ltd through a national project jointly funded by each state and territory government and the Australian Government.

May 2010

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Housing NSW

Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA)

Designed by the Queensland Department of Communities (Housing and Homelessness Services)

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Acknowledgments

This manual has been adapted from the second edition of the National Community Housing Standards published in May 2003. The National Community Housing Standards were initially based on standards developed by the NSW Government in 1997.

The third edition has been produced after extensive consultation with stakeholders from all jurisdictions during 2008 and 2009. This work has been guided by a Steering Committee made up of:

- Carol Croce, Community Housing Federation of Australia
- Adam Farrar, Executive Director, NSW Federation of Housing Associations
- Jennifer Clark, Executive Director, Social Housing Programs, Department of Communities, QLD
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- Yvonne Quinn, Department of Communities, QLD
- Amanda Standish, Senior Analyst, NSW Registrar of Community Housing office
- Paul Pendergast, Department of Housing, WA

Commenting on the standards

It is important that the standards are regularly reviewed and revised to reflect developments in best practice in the sector.

A feedback form has been included at the end of the manual. We encourage organisations using the manual to make use of the form as a way to pass on any ideas for improvement. Please make your comments as specific as possible by stating on the form the standard and/or signpost they relate to.

The next edition of the manual will draw on comments received in this way along with feedback gained by using the standards to evaluate community housing organisations over the next period.



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For further information about the standards or accreditation process in each jurisdiction contact:

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Social Housing and Homelessness Services
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New South Wales

NSW Community Housing Division
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Northern Territory

Policy and Legislation
Department of Housing, Local Government
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Phone: (08) 8999 8534

Queensland

Accreditation and Registration Unit
Department of Communities
Phone: (07) 3225 1718
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South Australia

Community Partnerships and Growth
Phone: 1300 700 561
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Housing Registrar
Phone: (03) 9096 9830
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Western Australia

Regulation and Compliance
Phone: (08) 9440 2520

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Suite 3, 44–48 Colbee Court,
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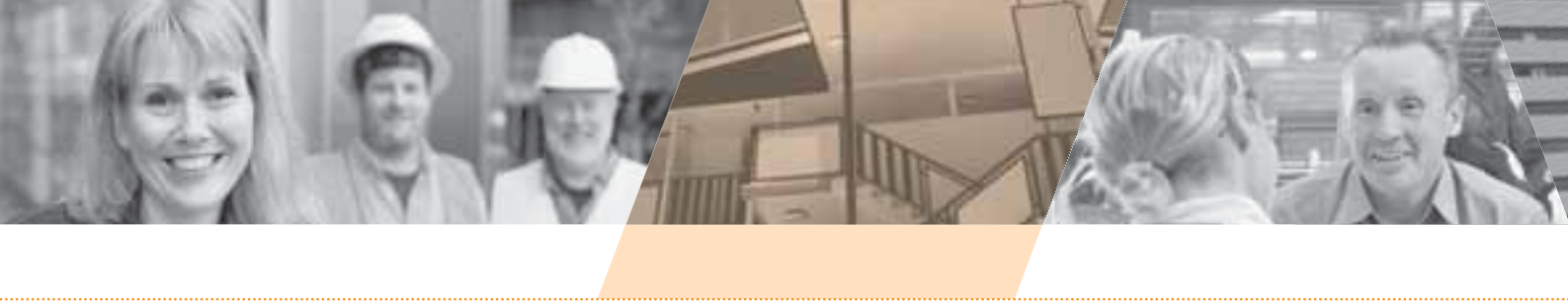


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Part 1: Introduction and overview of the manual

This third edition of the National Community Housing Standards Manual sets out standards of good practice in service delivery in the community housing sector throughout Australia. The standards attempt to cover all the elements that constitute a high quality housing service for community housing tenants and contribute to a well-managed organisation.

Background

The standards were initially developed in 1998 as part of a project of the National Community Housing Forum (funded by the Australian Government) that sought to develop:

- common national standards for community housing
- a system to assess organisations on the basis of the standards
- a structure to accredit community housing providers on the basis of the standards.

Developing the third edition of the standards

This third edition of the National Community Housing Standards Manual has been adapted from the second edition, published in 2003 by the National Community Housing Forum.

New South Wales Standards

The first edition was based on a set of standards developed in a project initiated by the New South Wales Government during 1997. The original development involved:

- extensive consultation with the sector
- a drafting party made up of New South Wales community housing provider peaks and government representatives
- wide circulation of the draft document within the sector
- revision of the draft standards based on feedback received.

National Standards

This was followed by a national project which involved:

- circulation of the second-draft New South Wales Standards to service providers, tenant organisations and government departments across Australia
- workshops in each state and territory to gain feedback
- developing a draft set of National Standards
- piloting the draft National Standards and a review process in 11 services in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland
- revising the standards based on the pilots and other feedback.

Using the standards in an accreditation system

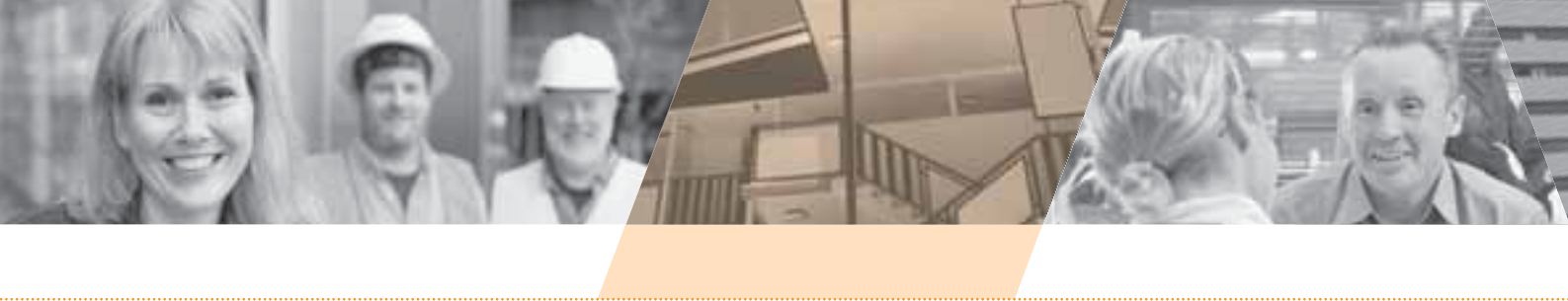
In 1999, the New South Wales and Queensland Governments funded the establishment of Standards and Accreditation Units to conduct accreditation evaluations using the national standards as the performance benchmark for good practice.

Review of the standards and accreditation system

First review

In 2002, after the standards and the accreditation system had been in operation for three years, the National Community Housing Forum, in collaboration with state and territory governments, commissioned a review of the standards and the accreditation system. The review aimed to ensure that the standards and accreditation process:

- could be used by a range of community housing organisations
- would support ongoing sector development and reflect developments in the community housing sector and quality systems
- would complement other performance management initiatives



- see greater ownership of the system across all states and territories and with all stakeholders.

The second edition of the National Community Housing Standards Manual was published in May 2003.

Second review

In December 2008, JPX Consulting Pty Ltd was commissioned to complete a review of the National Community Housing Standards and develop a third edition of the National Community Housing Standards Manual. The review aimed to ensure that the standards:

- remain relevant and adaptable to organisations delivering community housing
- reflect changes that have occurred in the provision of social housing, including new business such as property development
- reflect current best practice in the sector and quality improvement principles.

The review process

In April 2008, a nationwide consultation was undertaken to seek stakeholder feedback on the standards. The consultation asked five key questions:

1. Which standards (if any) need to be changed and how? What is the rationale for these changes?
2. Which signposts of good practice (if any) need to be changed and how? What is the rationale for these changes?
3. Which (if any) information under 'further explanation and examples' needs to be changed and how? What is the rationale for these changes?
4. Please highlight any other improvements to the standards, signposts and explanatory information that would help to reflect and clarify existing or emerging good practice.

5. Please highlight any other improvements to information in Section 4 of the National Community Housing Standards Manual which is aimed at assisting organisations to use the standards in an accreditation process.

The extensive feedback from this exercise formed the basis of further, more detailed consultation with stakeholders at the beginning of 2009. A workshop was held with representatives from housing providers and peak bodies from across Australia to focus on standards where significant change had been proposed. Briefing papers were prepared outlining best practice and including suggestions for changes, which the workshop considered in detail. Following this consultation, a draft of the standards was prepared and consultation processes were held over an eight-week period to seek the views of stakeholders in all states and territories.

The revised standards have drawn upon the experiences of those in the community housing sector, their working knowledge of the standards and their views of where improvements could be made. This also involved researching best practice in other sectors, both nationally and internationally, and input from the Steering Committee which identified further areas where change may be necessary.

Outcomes of the review

Overall, there was considerable positive support for the standards as a national document providing a clear framework for the sector. Since the last version of the Standards was published, however, the affordable housing sector has experienced significant growth and some organisations have commenced development programmes of their own. Many of the amendments to the standards reflect this change in the sector and recognise the need for a greater degree of management controls. This has meant strengthening key areas such as financial planning, asset management and business planning.



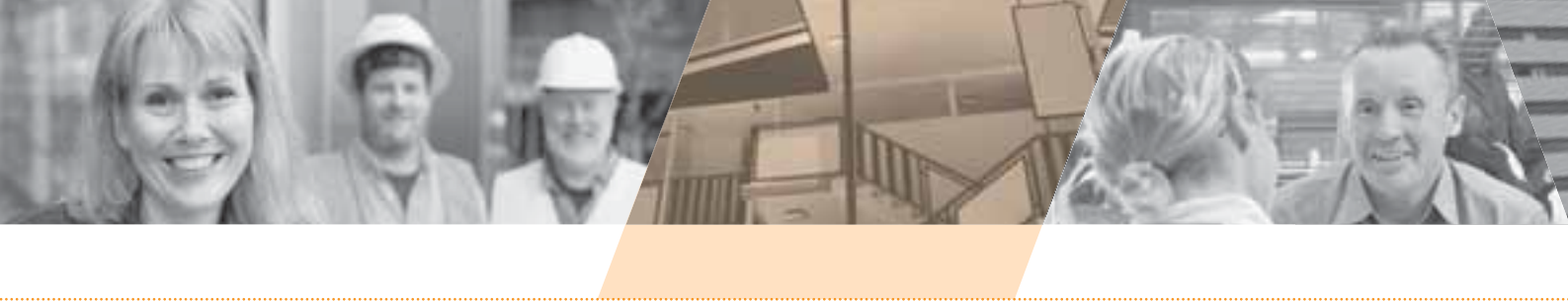
The review also considered the issue of accreditation and looked in detail at a number of accreditation systems in other sectors. Some changes have occurred in New South Wales and Queensland, where formal accreditation systems were established. From 1 July 2008, the New South Wales Government ceased to administer the community housing accreditation system and Global-Mark Pty Ltd was selected to become the recognised provider of community housing accreditation services for the state. Queensland is also considering where the accreditation role best sits. These quite significant changes will be closely monitored by the sector to assess whether

there is any impact on accreditation levels and the numbers of providers undertaking the formal review.

Jurisdictional application and use of the standards in 2009

While the standards are designed to be used by all jurisdictions, their application and usage differs across Australia. The table below outlines the current usage in each jurisdiction, together with information about the accreditation system (if any) in place.

	Application and usage	Accreditation system
ACT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding agreements stipulate that providers should achieve accreditation against the National Community Housing Standards (NCHS) and should demonstrate use of the NCHS as a quality improvement tool. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accreditation of services will be provided by an external assessor.
New South Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An industry development tool that forms part of a system of accreditation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accreditation system operated by a non-government provider. Community housing providers apply for accreditation on a fee for service basis. New South Wales has a separate regulatory system. There is no direct relationship between regulation and accreditation in New South Wales.
Northern Territory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Northern Territory government leases public housing dwellings to the community sector by way of a head leasing arrangement to non-government organisations. The non-government organisation sector in the Northern Territory currently does not have its own dwelling assets and is not regulated as in some other jurisdictions. 	



Most jurisdictions do not have a formal accreditation framework in place, although how accreditation could work in the future — and its relationship to regulation — is currently being considered by some jurisdictions.

It is important in this manual to make a clear distinction between accreditation and regulation. Most jurisdictions operate a regulatory framework which is distinct from the National Community Housing Standards and is a series of measures

and benchmarks that providers must achieve to be eligible for government funding. Some jurisdictions keep their accreditation and regulatory systems completely separate with no overlap whatsoever, while others do make some reference to the National Community Housing Standards in their regulatory assessments. Whatever the situation, the two are nevertheless quite different systems with different purposes and this distinction is important.

	Application and usage	Accreditation system
Queensland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amendments to the <i>Housing Regulation 2003</i>, introduced from 1 February 2007, included the requirement for certain types of providers to obtain accreditation. Many community housing organisations voluntarily use National Community Housing Standards (NCHS) as a service improvement and self assessment tool. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A government funded unit was established in 1999. Accreditation evaluations are conducted by departmental staff and a peer evaluator using NCHS as a benchmark. The Queensland Community Housing Standards and Accreditation Council oversees the accreditation system and is responsible for making decisions on the accreditation of organisations.
South Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Voluntary use by community housing organisations as a guide to best practice, with some organisations submitting for accreditation via Victoria. 	
Tasmania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standard funding agreements require providers to manage projects in accordance with the National Community Housing Standards (NCHS). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No accreditation system or framework in place to formally monitor usage.
Victoria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Separate regulatory system with own published performance standards, some of which reference aspects of the National Community Housing Standards (NCHS). Voluntary use by associations as guide to best practice, with some associations self-assessing for internal quality assurance purposes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No formal accreditation service in place.
Western Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The West Australian regulatory system is application-based and has three tiers. Assessment for the highest tier of registration, known as the Growth Provider, is based on the National Regulatory Code for Growth Providers. Assessment for the second tier (Preferred Provider) and third tier (Registered Provider) is based on the National Community Housing Standards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Regulation and Compliance Unit administers the West Australian regulatory system. Formal assessments are submitted to a Registrar for determination of registration status.



The format of the standards

The standards are divided into seven sections, each devoted to a key area of service provision. Each section contains:

Standards: These are broad statements of what is expected of an organisation. There are between three and six standards for each section of the manual.

Signposts of good practice: Under each standard, there are a number of signposts that are intended to give organisations some guidance about how to achieve the standard, without being exhaustive or prescriptive. They are not meant to be a checklist for accreditation. Organisations might do some of these things, but might also be doing a range of different things that equally demonstrate that they meet the standard.

The list of signposts for each standard is grouped under three different sub-headings:

1. Documentation that can support good practice
2. Processes that can support good practice
3. Measuring outcomes to support good practice

This is to remind people using the manual of the range of elements that contribute to achieving the standard. Evaluation should be based on how things are actually done and what is achieved, not just on what is written in policies or procedures manuals.

Further explanation and examples: These sit opposite the signposts. They are designed to assist organisations in understanding what good practice might involve. Where there is legislation covering a signpost, this is usually mentioned in the further explanation column.

The standards aim to cover the wide range of organisations providing community housing. Most of the standards apply to all organisations irrespective of size, location or type. Where the standard may not apply to certain types of

organisation, this has been specifically noted under the standard. Some standards also include additional components for larger organisations and/or those involved in property development. Part 4 of the manual includes a table which sets out which standards apply to tenant-run cooperatives and a table which sets out which standards may apply to other housing providers.

Using the manual to improve service delivery

The standards were developed within a framework of **quality improvement** (more often referred to as continuous quality improvement).

Quality improvement is an approach to organisational development that relies on people within the organisation being committed to constantly looking for better ways to do things. The overall aim is improved outcomes for clients and communities served.

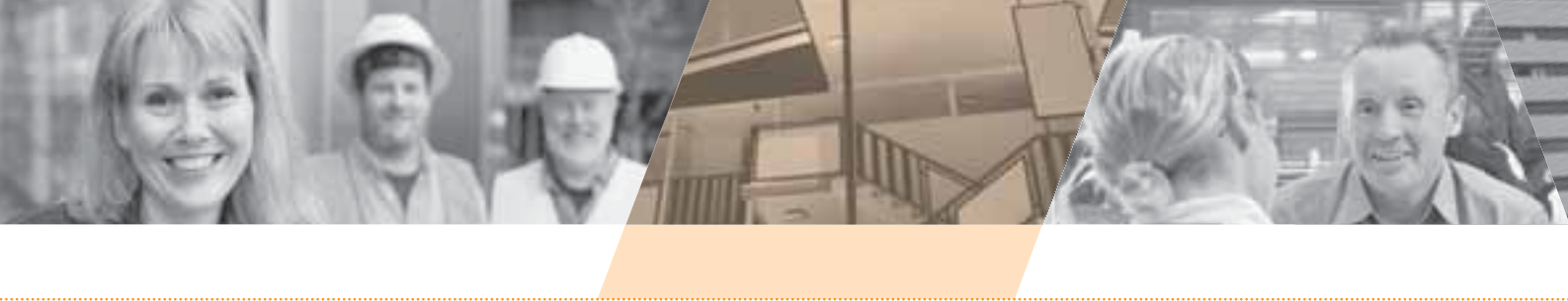
The standards can be used by community housing organisations as a tool for quality improvement. This might include assisting in:

- writing policies or procedures
- training members of the organisation in good practice
- evaluating parts, or all, of the organisation's work.

It is not expected that every organisation will be able to meet every standard immediately.

Most organisations will find that their work in at least some areas is already meeting the standards. Certain aspects of every organisation's work, however, will need improvement.

In some cases, only minor changes may be needed which can be introduced with relative ease. In others, more substantial work such as developing plans or writing new policies might be required. The standards are designed to help organisations make these changes over time.



The 'further explanation' column attempts to indicate that different organisations might do things differently because of their size or type. However, except where standards are actually not applicable, all organisations should attempt to meet all standards. For instance, one signpost says regular reports should be provided to the board/management committee on allocation of tenancies, rent arrears, and other key performance data. A valid response to these criteria from a small tenant cooperative could be that a report is given verbally, but a large housing association would normally be expected to submit a formal written report.

Using the standards to assess the work of organisations

The standards have been designed to both articulate good practice in community housing and be used as criteria for forming judgements about performance for evaluation purposes (either internal or external).

The accreditation system was designed to have two main purposes:

- To encourage continuous quality improvement in community housing.
- To provide a mechanism for external certification of performance levels at a given point in time.

The standards and accreditation processes therefore have a strong emphasis on quality improvement but also the capacity to assess for accountability purposes. The accreditation process is described in detail in Part 4 of this manual.

In most jurisdictions, participation in accreditation is a voluntary process. For community housing providers where there is no formalised accreditation framework in place, use of the manual will mostly be an internal process. However, even where there is no formal accreditation process, some jurisdictions make reference to the National Community Housing

Standards (NCHS) in their regulatory requirements and ask providers to demonstrate application of some of the standards to achieve registration.

How the standards relate to other documents

Regulatory standards or codes exist in many jurisdictions and specify the benchmarks providers are required to meet to be eligible for certain streams of funding. Providers are assessed and monitored against these benchmarks on a regular basis. In some jurisdictions there is an overlap between the regulatory standards and the National Community Housing Standards (NCHS), while in others the two are kept completely separate. Further details about each jurisdiction's approach and whether there is an overlap is included on page 6 of this manual.

National competency standards assess the extent to which an individual has the skills necessary to perform the work of community housing provision. Competency standards are used to develop curricula for training programs and to provide training certification of individuals. In contrast, accreditation standards aim to ensure the quality of services provided to tenants by organisations. The two sets of standards have similar content but very different purposes.

In some states, **codes of practice** have been developed for community housing as a means of specifying appropriate behaviours in the management of community housing. Organisations that have met the code will most likely be better able to meet the standards.

The manual also takes account of the **Seven International Principles of Cooperation** which can be used to guide the formation and management of cooperatives.



The seven international principles, as they apply to housing cooperatives are:

Voluntary and open membership: Cooperatives are voluntary organisations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibility of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination.

Democratic member control: Cooperatives are democratic organisations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership. In primary cooperatives, members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote), and the cooperatives at other levels are also organised in a democratic manner.

Members' economic participation: Members contribute equitably to and democratically control the capital of their cooperative. At least part of the capital is usually the common property of the cooperative. Members usually receive little compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes:

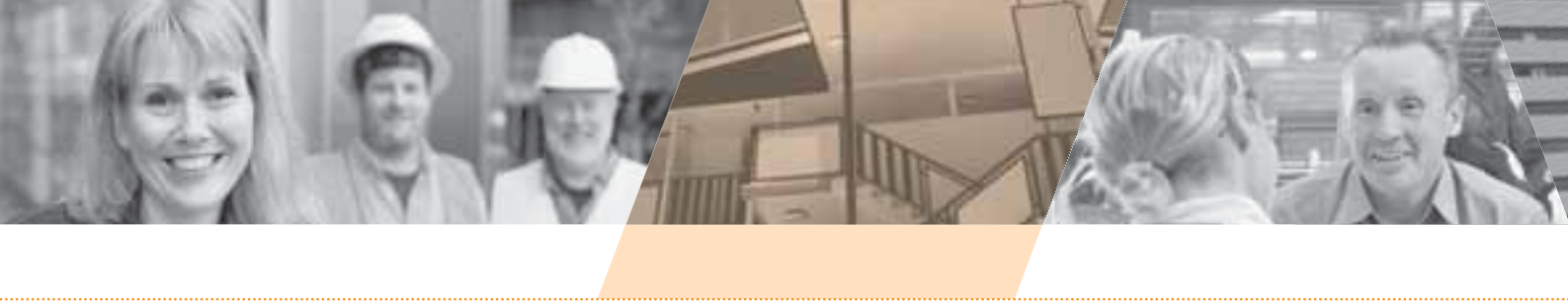
- Developing their cooperative, possibly by setting up reserves, part of which would be indivisible.
- Benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the cooperative.
- Supporting other activities approved by the membership.

Autonomy and independence: Cooperatives are autonomous, self-help organisations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organisations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their cooperative autonomy.

Education, training and information: Cooperatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers and employees, so they can contribute effectively to the development of their cooperatives. They inform the general public — particularly young people and opinion leaders — about the nature and benefits of cooperation.

Cooperation amongst cooperatives: Cooperatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the cooperative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures.

Concern for the community: Cooperatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members.



The aims of community housing

Affordability:

To ensure that housing costs do not create hardship for tenants.

Choice:

To provide people in need of housing with a diverse choice of housing options.

Responsiveness:

To respond to the needs of individual tenants and their changing circumstances by ensuring that housing is appropriate to tenants' needs and is managed flexibly.

Security:

To ensure that tenants are secure in their housing, are housed in accordance with jurisdictional policy and meet the tenancy agreement.

Sustainability:

To contribute to successful tenancies and the development of sustainable communities, by being supportive of tenants' wider social needs and building their independence.

Fairness:

To ensure equitable access to community housing regardless of people's cultural identity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age and household composition; and to treat tenants fairly in all matters relating to their tenancy.

Respect:

To ensure that all tenants' rights are respected and to treat tenants with respect in all dealings.

Participation:

To actively seek the participation of tenants in decisions about their tenancy and the management of organisations.

Partnerships:

To work in partnership with governments and communities in developing housing and related services which meet tenant and community needs.

Quality:

To provide the best possible accommodation and housing services to tenants.

Accountability:

To be accountable to tenants, the community and government for the effectiveness of the service provided and for the use of public funds; and by doing so, to enhance the credibility of community housing options.



Part 2: Good practice standards for community housing

Section 1: Tenancy management

Standard 1.1 Allocation of housing

Tenants are selected openly and fairly, based on an assessment process which considers individual and local housing needs and meets the stated aims of the organisation

Standard 1.2 Establishing and maintaining tenancies

The organisation is tenant focused and works with tenants to establish and maintain successful tenancies.

Standard 1.3 Changing needs of tenants

The changing housing needs of tenants are responded to fairly and flexibly within the capacity of the organisation.

Standard 1.4 Ending tenancies

Tenancies are ended in a way that is legal and minimises the impact on the organisation and tenants.

Standard 1.5 Outsourcing tenancy management

Appropriate organisations are transparently selected and monitored in the provision of such services.

Section 2: Asset management

Standard 2.1 Asset management strategy

The organisation plans for the management of its housing assets to ensure they deliver optimal return in terms of financial investment, service delivery and meeting housing need.

Standard 2.2 Responsive maintenance and repairs

The organisation's systems enable the effective delivery of repairs and maintenance so that housing is well-maintained and the assets managed by the organisation are protected.

Standard 2.3 Planned maintenance

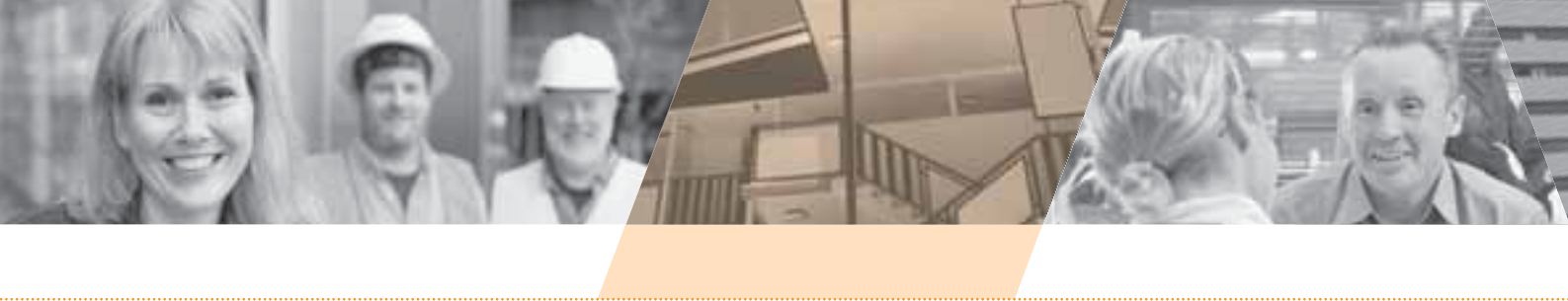
The organisation plans for the maintenance and upgrade of its housing assets to ensure accommodation quality and overall value is sustained.

Standard 2.4 Stock acquisition and development

The organisation acquires and develops new and existing housing stock in accordance with strategic growth objectives and to meet identified need.

Standard 2.5 Partnerships and new business

The organisation's growth strategy is based on sound financial planning.



Section 3: Tenant rights and participation

Standard 3.1

Tenant rights

Tenant rights are upheld throughout the organisation's work and those who access the organisation are assisted to exercise their rights and responsibilities.

Standard 3.2

Tenant participation

Tenants are encouraged to provide feedback and become involved in making decisions on issues which affect them or their tenancy.

Standard 3.3

Participation in tenant-run cooperatives

Cooperative members are selected, trained and supported to maintain a sustainable organisation.

Standard 3.4

Access to services of the organisation

Applicants, tenants and service users are, as far as possible, given opportunities to access a range of services appropriate to their needs.

Standard 3.5

Confidentiality and privacy

Applicants' and tenants' confidentiality and privacy is respected and maintained.

Standard 3.6

Complaints and appeals

Complaints and appeals of decisions are addressed promptly and fairly.

Section 4: Working with the community

Standard 4.1

Tenants' access to support

Tenants have access to relevant support to help manage and maintain their tenancy.

Standard 4.2

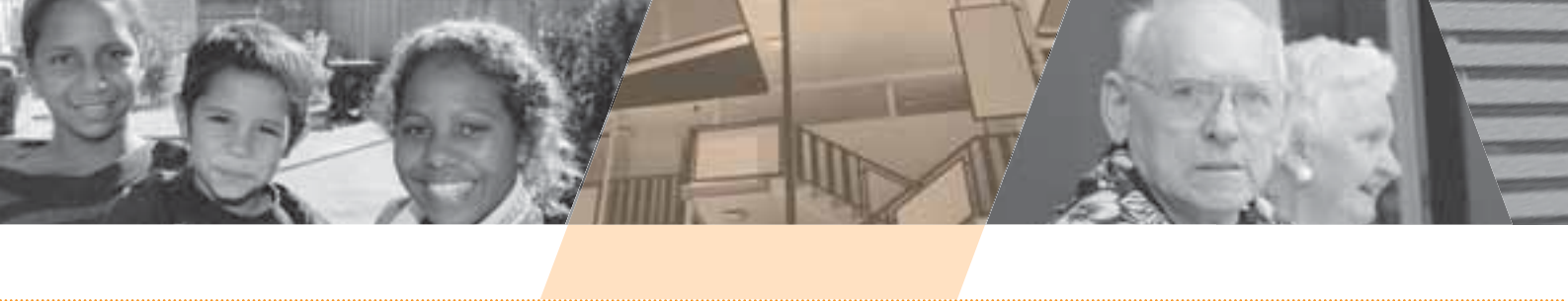
Building community capacity

Work undertaken by the organisation contributes to sustainable improvements in the wellbeing of tenants and communities.

Standard 4.3

Providing housing information, advice and referral

Community members accessing the service are given up-to-date information and referral that assists them to find safe housing options.



Section 5: Governance and organisational management

Standard 5.1 Establishing and maintaining governing bodies

Members of the organisation's governing body have the skills and experience needed to fulfil their obligations and to establish and oversee the strategic direction of the organisation.

Standard 5.2 Good governance

The organisation has a clearly defined purpose and goals and is accountable for all aspects of its work.

Standard 5.3 Effective management

The organisation is managed to ensure accountability and deliver outcomes consistent with its aims and objectives.

Standard 5.4 Business planning

The organisation has plans in place which outline objectives and specify how resources will be used to achieve them.

Standard 5.5 Organisational review

Regular evaluation and review ensures that the organisation is working efficiently and effectively towards achieving its goals.

Section 6: Management systems

Standard 6.1 Financial management and systems

The organisation's financial systems support effective financial control, management, accountability and ongoing viability.

Standard 6.2 Administrative systems

The organisation's administrative systems support effective management and accountability.

Standard 6.3 Management information systems

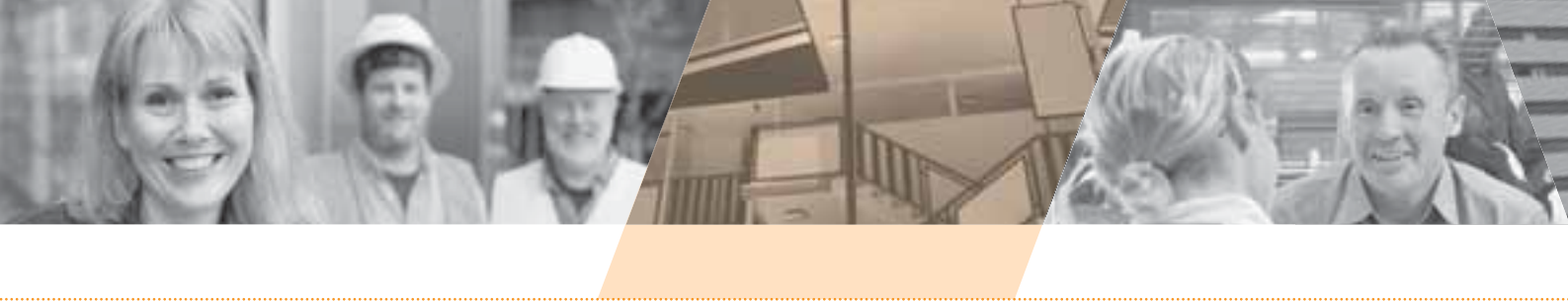
Information about the organisation's activities, applicants, tenants and staff (where applicable) is used to support management of the organisation.

Standard 6.4 Office environment

The organisation's office premises and equipment provide a safe, secure and appropriate work environment for staff and tenants.

Standard 6.5 Environmental sustainability

The organisation works to reduce the environmental impact of its operations, housing and assets.



Section 7: Human resources management

Standard 7.1

Recruiting, selecting and appointing staff

Staff are appointed to the organisation with the skills and experience needed for their work and for their ability to contribute to the overall goals of the organisation.

Standard 7.2

Staff management and development

Staff are managed within a framework that assists them achieve their objectives, develop their skills and contribute to the overall goals of the organisation.

Standard 7.3

Employment systems

The organisation has fair and effective systems to support its employment role.

Standard 7.4

Occupational health and safety

Staff and volunteers work in a safe and healthy environment.

Standard 7.5

Management of volunteers

Volunteers are supported to do their jobs well and safely.



Part 3: Using the standards for quality improvement

Section 1: Tenancy management

Standard 1.1

Allocation of housing

Standard 1.2

Establishing and maintaining tenancies

Standard 1.3

Changing needs of tenants

Standard 1.4

Ending tenancies

Standard 1.5

Outsourcing tenancy management



Overview and definition of issues in this section

A key goal of community housing is to assist tenants to establish and maintain affordable, secure tenancies. The ways in which community housing organisations try to enable both affordable and secure tenure will differ, depending on the nature of their funding program guidelines and the type of housing stock available.

Security of tenure

Community tenancy or rent schemes which head lease properties from private landlords will not be able to guarantee security of tenure for a particular dwelling beyond the length of the lease given by the landlord. However, they might commit themselves to providing security of assistance to the tenant, by helping them secure a further tenancy. The funding guidelines of homelessness services which provide crisis and short-term housing may prevent them from providing security of tenure, but may commit them to assisting the tenant to gain stable longer term housing.

Providing security of tenure will be easier for organisations that control their own stock. In such cases, tenancies would only be ended by the organisation if the tenant breaks a specific condition of the tenancy agreement. That is, the organisation would only cancel the tenancy for just cause, and only after it had tried all reasonable avenues to solve the problem and maintain the tenancy.

Housing affordability

Similarly, the choices that community housing organisations have in trying to provide housing that is affordable by their clients may be affected by their funding conditions and by the type and location of their housing stock. Common ways that organisations try to ensure affordable tenancies include:

- providing quality housing at around 20 to 25 per cent of tenants' income
- communicating clearly to tenants how income is assessed in accordance with funding guidelines
- assessing income in a fair, confidential and consistent manner
- engaging in advocacy to increase access to subsidised housing for those on low incomes.

Fair and non-discriminatory practice

Recording details of those who have had unsuccessful tenancies (for example, late rent payments, property damage) is common in the rental accommodation industry. People are often refused housing based on such information.

Social housing providers take a different approach. The ethos of social housing recognises that people experiencing social disadvantage sometimes experience difficulties that impact on their tenancies. Good practice in community housing means dealing with individuals on a one-to-one basis and assisting people to find workable solutions to their housing problems.



Standard 1.1

Allocation of housing

Tenants are selected openly and fairly, based on an assessment process which considers individual and local housing needs and meets the stated aims of the organisation.

The following features and examples are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive but rather to provide services with some guidance in how to achieve this standard.

Organisations should consider any relevant legislation in their jurisdiction that may apply to the service. The features and examples do not take into account the specific requirements of relevant legislation in each jurisdiction, and organisations are advised that the provisions of any legislation will prevail.

Standard 1.1

Allocation of housing

Tenants are selected openly and fairly, based on an assessment process which considers individual and local housing needs and meets the stated aims of the organisation.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Documentation that can support good practice

1.1.1

The organisation has a documented system for allocating housing that ensures transparency and consistency, and covers:

- eligibility based on relative need
- a standard application form
- how housing stock is allocated, including any priority categories
- mechanisms for managing conflict of interest
- nomination agreements with any third party (for example, a government department, specialist provider, housing agency).

Eligibility criteria

Eligibility criteria need to be linked to the needs identified in the organisational plan. Criteria must comply with relevant legislation, funding guidelines and the organisation's aims.

Eligibility criteria must not discriminate unlawfully against people on the grounds of gender, race, age, marital status, disability or sexual preference. However, some organisations may wish to provide services to a particular group (such as single women), which inevitably means they do not provide services to other groups (such as men or women with partners). They may need to seek an exemption to anti-discrimination legislation to practice this 'positive discrimination'.

The eligibility criteria for cooperatives will include the applicant's willingness and capacity to participate in management of the cooperative.

The organisation needs to ensure that any information used to assess potential tenants has a fair and non-discriminatory effect on their access to housing. This would include giving potential tenants access to information that the organisation has about them and the opportunity to respond to it.

Standard application forms

Application forms need to collect enough information to inform decision-making processes around eligibility and priority for allocation. They also need to fulfil data reporting requirements.

In cooperatives, it may be useful to collect some extra information on an applicant's willingness to participate, and other skills and experience they have to contribute.

Decision-making and conflicts of interest

The allocation system should cover :

- the grounds on which decisions are made
- which members of staff/management make the decisions
- how decisions are communicated to applicants
- how conflicts of interest will be handled.

Where possible, governing body members should not be involved, or influence, allocation decisions. This does not mean that the relatives of the housing organisation's members must be automatically denied housing. It does mean that these members should not participate in that decision, and that the application should be determined on its merits. Once an allocation decision has been made, it is good practice to have this counter-signed by a more senior member of staff or management if possible.

Ranking of eligibility

Many organisations will develop and prioritise a list of eligible applicants.

To establish the ranking procedure, organisations will need to compare the relative importance of different circumstances. Allocation criteria will be determined by factors such as local housing needs, property type, tenant mix, an individual's current circumstances, financial considerations and household size in relation to accommodation size.

In some situations, nomination agreements with a third party may exist which impact on the organisation's own allocation policy. Nomination arrangements should be clearly negotiated, formalised and regularly reviewed. The same level of fairness, consistency and transparency should apply to allocation policies across the whole portfolio.

Where a common access strategy exists between community and government managed housing, providers will have allocation strategies to respond to identified local need.

For cooperatives, priority might be given to criteria such as the applicant's compatibility with existing members, their understanding and support of the cooperative model, their skills, and their willingness to participate.

Standard 1.1

Allocation of housing

Tenants are selected openly and fairly, based on an assessment process which considers individual and local housing needs and meets the stated aims of the organisation.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Grounds for refusal/withdrawal of an offer

The allocation system needs to balance the rights of a tenant to refuse offers on reasonable grounds, with the needs of the organisation to manage the property efficiently and to assist other applicants.

Defining the 'reasonable grounds' a tenant may have for refusing an offer, as well as the reasons why an organisation might withdraw an offer, will help make the system more understandable and transparent.

Time frames for responses and communication should be set within the system.

Processes that can support good practice

1.1.2

The organisation makes its allocation policy and housing application form publicly available for potential tenants to access and apply for housing.

Promotion

This could include promotion of the organisation's services and eligibility criteria to target groups identified through the planning process.

Promotion could take a variety of forms. It could be holding an open day or publishing information sheets or packages (in a form to suit the target group) and distributing them to other community organisations and the state housing department's local client service teams.

For small organisations with low turnover, less frequent promotion may be appropriate

Assistance to complete applications

Many applicants may need assistance to complete the application form, and all applicants should be offered a copy of their completed form.

1.1.3

The assessment process allows applicants an opportunity to be interviewed in a personal interview — either at the time of application or prior to an offer being made, to have the process explained, present their case for housing need and have their questions answered.

Personal interview

Wherever possible, supplement the application form with a personal interview — either at the time of application or when an allocation is being considered. For cooperatives, the applicant may meet a selection committee.

Interviews should be held at times that suit the applicants. It may need to be done by telephone, but face-to-face is preferable. Interpreters may be needed.

A two-way process

Applicants should be given information about:

- the assessment process
 - when they will get a decision
 - how long they can realistically expect to wait for housing.
- They should also have the chance to ask questions.

1.1.4

Applicants are properly notified of an offer and given adequate opportunity to make an informed choice about whether to accept it.

Notification

A letter of offer may not always reach its destination. Organisations may choose to follow-up with a telephone call or some other form of contact to ensure the applicant has been properly notified.

Informed choice

In order to make an informed decision, the applicant should be given an opportunity to:

- ask any questions
- visit the property
- refuse the offer
- request modifications and repairs.

1.1.5

The eligibility status of applicants is regularly updated and applicants are routinely informed before being removed from the waiting list.

Obtaining and recording updated information

Where organisations maintain their own waiting lists, it is good practice to advise applicants about the frequency and manner of reviews. It is useful to encourage applicants (especially those who may be transient) to actively keep themselves on the eligibility list by providing a 'next of kin' contact and/or regularly confirming their interest. These contacts need to be routinely recorded as an indication of ongoing interest.

Status reviews

It is desirable to review eligibility status annually and essential to review it at the time of allocation. A form letter can be sent advising applicants that they will be removed from the waiting list if they do not make contact to update their information. Applicants who miss deadlines may still be eligible for reinstatement to the waiting list should they re-apply for housing (this is not applicable to SAAP clients living in CAP properties).

In jurisdictions where waiting lists are held centrally by government departments, the community housing provider may not have any responsibility for reviewing the waiting list or ensuring information on it is up to date.

Standard 1.1

Allocation of housing

Tenants are selected openly and fairly, based on an assessment process which considers individual and local housing needs and meets the stated aims of the organisation.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Measuring outcomes to support good practice

1.1.6

The organisation regularly monitors allocations to ensure that they are made as quickly and efficiently as possible, and that the documented systems have been followed.

Reports on allocations

Regular reports on allocations could include:

- frequency and length of vacancy periods
- numbers of allocations by household type
- satisfaction of tenants with the process
- assessment of how well the properties have been matched to tenant needs.

Monitoring

Depending on the governance structure of the organisation, monitoring of allocations may be done either by management level staff or by the board/management committee.

In larger housing associations, the board is more likely to restrict its role to setting targets and approving policies and then receive reports against targets and review the policies if necessary.

In smaller organisations and cooperatives, there is likely to be a much more direct supervision of allocation by the governing body.

Efficient allocation

Eligibility lists that are regularly updated and sorted by key characteristics can help reduce vacancy times. Allocation procedures should be started as soon as notice is given. Offers should be made when keys are handed in. The organisation should match households to the housing available (for example, extended family).



Standard 1.2 Establishing and maintaining tenancies

The organisation is tenant-focused and works with tenants to establish and maintain successful tenancies.

The following features and examples are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive but rather to provide services with some guidance in how to achieve this standard.

Organisations should consider any relevant legislation in their jurisdiction that may apply to the service. The features and examples do not take into account the specific requirements of relevant legislation in each jurisdiction, and organisations are advised that the provisions of any legislation will prevail.

Standard 1.2

Establishing and maintaining tenancies

The organisation is tenant-focused and works with tenants to establish and maintain successful tenancies.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Documentation that can support good practice

1.2.1

The organisation has documented systems for tenancy management that are consistent with relevant legislation and cover:

- how the range of household types will be managed
- how bonds (where collected) are handled
- rent management
- how disputes between tenants and neighbours will be addressed
- how reports of racial and other forms of harassment will be responded to
- how complaints will be dealt with (see Standard 3.6 for detail).

Tenancy agreements

Tenants should be advised of their rights to be a party to the tenancy agreement (which could involve multiple signatories to the same tenancy agreement). This advice should be given at the time the agreement is first signed, and may need to be given again during the course of the tenancy if the household composition changes.

Share households

In share households, each tenant might have a separate tenancy agreement. Where the organisation manages share accommodation, the system needs to provide clarity about how:

- new household members are selected
- the household will operate
- disputes between tenants will be resolved
- insoluble disputes will be handled.

Bonds

Where bonds are collected, the system should not disadvantage tenants who are unable to pay the full bond at the beginning of the tenancy. In some states, rental bond boards ensure tenants and landlords have independent assessments for determining return of bonds. Where no such bodies exist, the organisation needs to have clear guidelines to make these assessments.

Rent management

The organisation's rent management approach needs to both ensure the financial viability of the organisation and be sensitive to the needs and circumstances of social housing tenants. The documented system might include:

- affordable rent benchmarks
- the rent setting policy applied to different types of affordable or sub market rents, where more than one exists (for example, public housing low income rentals, key workers, sub market community rentals)
- methods of calculating the rent payable
- methods of rent payment
- procedures for handling rental arrears
- when and on what basis rental and income reviews are conducted (including any program guidelines the organisation must comply with)
- reference to applicable jurisdictional legislation that impacts on rent setting.

Affordable rent should be determined in comparison with similar organisations and housing types.

Some organisations may charge fees in addition to rent when they provide other services (for example, food might be provided in a youth refuge). In such instances, it is important to clearly note the rent component of the total payment, and to have the rent covered by a clear tenancy agreement.

Disputes

The system for dealing with disputes between tenants and neighbours might include:

- determining whether the organisation has a responsibility for the matter
- how to investigate
- when not to investigate but to refer to police (such as allegations of criminal activity)
- steps and time frames in mediation (internal and external)
- confidentiality
- how complainants are informed of outcomes
- documentation requirements
- when to refer to outside mediation
- any relevant legislation that applies
- the range of options open to the organisation to resolve disputes, including relocation of tenants.

It may be useful to seek out local mediation services to obtain written information and training in dispute resolution.

It is important for the organisation to ensure the investigation does not compromise the case for the victim or the rights of the accused.

Processes for responding to reports of harassment

The organisation should consider how it will collect evidence of harassment, what legal remedies are available and what action can be taken to protect and support victims. Support may include providing information on their rights or how to access help and/or relocating the tenant. Organisations may be liable under anti-discrimination legislation if action is not taken to protect tenants.

Standard 1.2

Establishing and maintaining tenancies

The organisation is tenant-focused and works with tenants to establish and maintain successful tenancies.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Processes that can support good practice

1.2.2

The organisation provides clear, useful information to ensure tenants/members understand their rights and responsibilities as tenants and how the organisation can assist them. This includes expectations under both tenancy legislation and the organisation's own policies and procedures.

Information on rights and responsibilities

Information is best understood when repeated more than once and at different times. Accessible written information uses simple English and is translated if required. Audiotapes might also be useful. The organisation may need to use interpreters (including telephone interpreters). Some tenants might require an advocate.

Tenants are likely to need information about:

- the organisation's services and procedures for housing management
- their specific tenancy and any conditions created by funding or program guidelines
- how to contact and participate in the organisation (for example, feedback, consultation, decision-making)
- organisational by-laws and membership
- other services in the area
- how to access advice and advocacy services.

Tenancy agreements

It is important that tenant responsibilities are clearly outlined in tenancy agreements and other materials. These could include information on:

- bonds (if they are collected)
- rent payment and rent arrears
- the organisation's approach to tenant improvements and repairs
- procedures for reporting repairs that are needed
- maintenance the tenant is responsible for
- disputes and conflict with neighbours
- for leasehold premises, the various roles and responsibilities of the landlord, real estate agent and organisation.

1.2.3

When establishing a tenancy, tenants are taken through the complete tenancy agreement and the major clauses are specifically explained to them.

Ensuring that tenants understand tenancy agreements

The formal tenancy agreement is written in legal language. A challenge for organisations is to make this agreement understandable. Particular attention should be given to pointing out and explaining:

- the length and type of tenancy agreement
- the circumstances around eviction
- their responsibilities and rights
- policy on security of tenure
- any additional clauses.

Any additional clauses need to be consistent with relevant state tenancy legislation and the principles of social housing and must be initialled by tenants.

When tenants are under 18 years old, the organisation must ensure that it has gained their informed consent in signing the agreement as set out in the legislation. They may also wish to involve guardians or advocates in the process where appropriate.

1.2.4

The organisation ensures that condition reports are completed prior to occupancy.

Condition reports

Inspection reports need to comply with relevant tenancy legislation.

It is useful to provide information for tenants on how to inspect the premises for a condition report — a simple checklist could be used or a verbal explanation given. In some organisations, videos or photographs are used to record the condition of premises. Other organisations do a joint inspection with the tenant.

The tenant should be given a completed and signed copy of the report.

Any repairs needed should be documented and timeframes agreed for completion of the works.

Standard 1.2

Establishing and maintaining tenancies

The organisation is tenant-focused and works with tenants to establish and maintain successful tenancies.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

1.2.5

The organisation uses a rental payment system designed to maximise the ability of tenants to keep up-to-date with their payments and maintain successful tenancies.

Payment options

It is good practice for tenants to be offered a choice of ways to pay their rent. Some jurisdictions are obliged to offer rent payment options in accordance with their Residential Tenancy legislation. These options might include direct debit from the tenant's account or Centrelink payment, electronic transfer via online banking, payment at the office via cash or cheque, payment into the organisation's bank account or, if there is no other option, cash payment at the office.

As direct debit can incur a fee, organisations should consider bearing this cost themselves. Tenants need to be informed of this cost if they are required to pay it.

Information on rent accounts

Giving tenants information about their rent accounts on a regular basis helps them to keep up-to-date with their rent. Some methods might be:

- a quarterly statement
- dated receipts for cash or cheque payments (consistent with legislative requirements)
- statement of accounts when the organisation claims arrears
- a rent deposit book.

Management of rent arrears

Where the tenant does incur arrears — or owes other non-rent sums such as utilities, maintenance charges, property damages — prompt identification of the problem can prevent the debt from becoming unmanageable for the tenant. Some organisations have found it useful to hold group discussions with tenants to help to develop strategies for reducing rent arrears. Strategies could include:

- maximising tenants' incomes by providing information about their eligibility for benefits
- linking them to employment training programs
- referrals to organisations who can assist with budgeting (for example, credit line/financial counsellors).

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Management of rent arrears must comply with relevant legislation. The organisation's system could include:

- clear and prompt time frames for notification and contact
- personal contact where possible
- correspondence in respectful and simple language
- negotiation mechanisms for realistic repayment
- documentation of the agreement for repayment and monitoring
- direct debit from bank account or Centrelink payment (where the tenant consents)
- clear documentation of the process
- encouraging tenants to give early notice of future financial difficulties.

In cooperatives where there are no employed staff, responsibility for dealing with rent arrears needs to be clearly delegated. This will prevent other members of the cooperative from becoming involved unnecessarily.

1.2.6

The organisation regularly reviews rents and clearly explains to tenants when and how this will be done.

Rent reviews

Tenants should be provided with a simple explanation of how their rent is calculated against their income. Having a clear understanding will make it less likely that tenants will appeal unnecessarily.

Reviews might be conducted annually, or less frequently where it is clear that tenants' incomes have not changed.

A review process could involve:

- informing tenants of what information they must provide and how to initiate a review
- giving tenants adequate notice of a change in rebate and/or rent (consistent with state legislation or funding guidelines)
- guidelines for dealing with income fluctuations
- accurate calculation of rent in accordance with policy/guidelines of the funder.

According to social housing principles, increased rent payments should not be backdated.

Standard 1.2

Establishing and maintaining tenancies

The organisation is tenant-focused and works with tenants to establish and maintain successful tenancies.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Measuring outcomes to support good practice

1.2.7

The organisation monitors its service delivery to tenants to ensure quality.

Tenant feedback

Regular feedback from tenants/cooperative members could seek their views on:

- the usefulness and accessibility of information provided to them
- their satisfaction with the rent management system.

Records of management of rent arrears and disputes

Other information to be monitored could be:

- records of management of rent arrears
- records of disputes
- records of notices issued regarding tenancy breaches (both given and received by an organisation)
- copies of notices issued to end tenancies, both from the organisation and tenants
- applications made by the organisation to tenancy tribunals and records of outcomes.

It is important to analyse changes/trends over time that might point to a need to change service delivery practices.

It is useful to keep a record of any disputes and how they have been resolved in a central file or database so that they can be more easily monitored.

These records could include:

- the nature of the dispute
- who was involved
- what action was taken
- time taken to resolve disputes
- the outcome achieved.



Standard 1.3

Changing needs of tenants

The changing housing needs of tenants are responded to fairly and flexibly within the capacity of the organisation.

The following features and examples are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive but rather to provide services with some guidance in how to achieve this standard.

Organisations should consider any relevant legislation in their jurisdiction that may apply to the service. The features and examples do not take into account the specific requirements of relevant legislation in each jurisdiction, and organisations are advised that the provisions of any legislation will prevail.

Standard 1.3

Changing needs of tenants

The changing housing needs of tenants are responded to fairly and flexibly within the capacity of the organisation.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Documentation that can support good practice

1.3.1

The organisation has a documented system for how it will respond to changes in tenants' needs that is consistent with legislation, its own eligibility criteria and allocation system, and covers:

- existing tenants who want to transfer homes within the organisation
- mutual exchange
- the status of other household members when a principal tenant vacates or dies
- tenants whose circumstances change through illness or injury and are no longer able to maintain their tenancy.

Documentation

Documentation could include:

- grounds for transfer eligibility such as overcrowding, health issues, domestic violence, support needs (such as a requirement to be closer to family)
- specification of how transfer applications are prioritised
- specification of further evidence that may be required to support transfer applications such as doctors' certificates
- procedures to assist mutual exchange opportunities
- a succession of tenancy policy.

Transfer priorities

The organisation needs to consider the relative priority of rehousing existing tenants against factors such as availability of stock, length of the waiting list, turnover time and public housing waiting lists. Priority for decisions should take account of changes in tenants' support needs, including those that are identified and raised by external support agencies working with the tenant.

Mutual exchange

Mutual exchange may occur within the organisation or between social housing providers. The organisation might have a means of collecting information and making it available to those seeking exchanges such as details on a website, a notice board or exchange register.

Information about individual tenants or their circumstances should never be shared without their consent.

Status of household members when a principal tenant leaves or dies

The organisation might have a succession policy which details how they will deal with:

- other family members when a tenant dies or vacates the property indefinitely
- a carer (who may or may not be a partner) remaining in a household after the tenant moves to a supported housing environment
- squatters who have moved into a household.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Tenancy status of existing household members should be determined by:

- how they fit with the defined target group of the organisation
- any legislation that might apply
- the obligation of the organisation to house existing household members
- the obligation of the organisation to house others on their waiting list and the relative priorities of both parties.

For cooperatives the issue of succession of tenancies and ongoing membership will need to be considered and well-documented.

Tenants whose circumstances change through illness or injury

The organisation will endeavour to provide support to tenants to assist them to maintain their tenancy. This may include carrying out adaptations to assist mobility and/or facilitating access to support services that provide in-home care.

Where maintaining the tenancy is not an option, the organisation will work with other support services and agencies to try and find alternative accommodation.

Processes that can support good practice

1.3.2

The organisation has a process for defining and identifying under-occupancy or over-crowding situations, and strategies for dealing with these issues proactively.

(See also Section 2: Asset management)

Utilisation of housing stock

This relates to recognising under-occupancy or over-crowding situations and developing strategies to manage them. These could include exchanges, transfers, rehousing, payment of relocation costs or financial incentives to encourage moves. All such instances would require the tenants' consent and would be voluntary.

Standard 1.3

Changing needs of tenants

The changing housing needs of tenants are responded to fairly and flexibly within the capacity of the organisation.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

1.3.3

The organisation works with tenants who are experiencing domestic violence, or whose relationships have broken down, to find appropriate housing solutions.

Domestic violence or relationship breakdown

Relationship break-up and domestic violence are common. Organisations need sensitive, speedy and confidential processes to deal with these circumstances.

The housing needs of victims of domestic violence should be given priority. In many cases, organisations may rehouse the tenant with another provider.

In order to allow the victim of domestic violence to stay in the property if they choose, even if they are not a tenant, it is also reasonable to assist in rehousing the perpetrator or renegotiating leases.

It will often be necessary to involve other agencies to provide the victim with other forms of assistance and support.

1.3.4

The organisation has strategies to support tenants who require home modifications due to ageing or disability.

Home modifications

The organisation may arrange adaptations to the property itself or may assist the tenant to access other home modification services and funding (for example, through government departments, disability services).

Measuring outcomes to support good practice

1.3.5

The organisation documents and reviews its performance in dealing with the changing needs of tenants.

Reviewing performance

Review could include:

- analysis of the number of requests made and the responses
- outcomes in domestic violence cases
- satisfaction of tenants who have requested changes
- whether reallocations have been done in line with eligibility criteria and allocations system.

For many small organisations, rehousing will not be possible due to resource constraints. However, they should ensure that they have at least reviewed their capacity to rehouse people.



Standard 1.4

Ending tenancies

Tenancies are ended in a way that is legal and minimises the impact on the organisation and tenants.

Note: Tenancies can end voluntarily or by forced termination.

The following features and examples are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive but rather to provide services with some guidance in how to achieve this standard.

Organisations should consider any relevant legislation in their jurisdiction that may apply to the service. The features and examples do not take into account the specific requirements of relevant legislation in each jurisdiction, and organisations are advised that the provisions of any legislation will prevail.

Standard 1.4

Ending tenancies

Tenancies are ended in a way that is legal and minimises the impact on the organisation and tenants.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Documentation that can support good practice

1.4.1

The organisation has written documentation to deal with voluntary and forced termination of tenancies that is consistent with legislation. It ensures that a tenancy is secure unless the tenants have broken specific conditions of the tenancy agreement.

Secure tenancy

Security of tenure means that community housing organisations should not evict without a just cause and organisations should take reasonable steps to ensure tenants are not evicted into homelessness. The length of a tenancy agreement may be limited by funding program guidelines, legislation or specific nomination agreements assigning tenancies for a fixed term but the tenancy is legally secure until the end of the term of the agreement.

When the organisation leases properties on the private rental market, it may be more difficult to ensure security of tenure. In these situations, the organisation should assist the tenant to find alternative housing when the private tenancy ends.

Forced terminations

Organisations need to ensure that due legal process is followed in 'breach of agreement' situations leading to termination and relevant legislation is adhered to. Termination proceedings need to be both efficient and respectful of tenants' rights.

Organisations should actively prevent intimidation and harassment of tenants, including those who are in breach of their tenancy agreement, and provide information to tenants on their rights and how to access advocacy services.

Information about unsuccessful tenancies should be kept confidential within the organisation and only used for legal proceeding to deal with the matter.

As there are a number of procedures involved in termination, it is important to keep good documentation and systems for monitoring the steps involved. Tenants whose tenancy is terminated should have the right to access an organisation's complaints policy, if there are issues arising out of the termination that they wish to raise after their departure from the property.

A decision to apply for termination of a tenancy is routine and does not usually result in termination, but can in fact result in a performance order such as, to pay rent.

All organisations should have clear lines of responsibility and delegations regarding who is empowered to make decisions regarding terminations. In most organisations, the board/management committee would be notified of all terminations. In all situations, communications between parties should be documented and appropriate written records kept to ensure procedures have been adhered to and evidence is available should a matter proceed to appeal.

Processes that can support good practice

1.4.2

When the organisation considers that termination proceedings may be necessary, it continues to treat the tenants fairly and with respect and tries to rectify the breach.

Prevention of forced terminations

Preventative action might include:

- holding a personal interview with the tenant outlining the situation
- providing information (for example, on housing alternatives)
- encouraging the tenant to attend any Tribunal or legal hearings
- facilitating access to support agencies or advocates.

Where a tenant no longer meets eligibility requirements, the organisation works with the tenant to try to make suitable transition arrangements.

1.4.3

When a tenant gives notice of ending a tenancy, the organisation:

- attempts to organise a joint inspection of the premises
- calculates rental payment and assesses bond conditions.

Voluntary terminations

The organisation needs to make clear to tenants that it may make a claim against the bond (where there is one) to cover the costs of any damages beyond normal wear and tear. Offering the opportunity to conduct a joint inspection of the premises (using the conditions report produced at the beginning of the tenancy as a baseline) gives the tenant added protection.

A joint inspection provides the opportunity for the parties to make an agreement about any outstanding issues or actions that need to be taken for the bond refund.

1.4.4

The organisation has a written procedure that is consistent with relevant legislation, to recover possession of an abandoned property and deal with any of the tenant's goods.

Abandonment of tenancy

The organisation takes steps in line with legislation to:

- contact the tenant and inform them how long their goods will be stored
- take an inventory of the goods
- store the goods for a reasonable period
- dispose of the goods
- recover any debts (if permitted under state legislation)
- keep records and document all action taken.

Standard 1.4

Ending tenancies

Tenancies are ended in a way that is legal and minimises the impact on the organisation and tenants.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Measuring outcomes to support good practice

1.4.5

The organisation seeks feedback from tenants when they end their tenancies.

Exit interviews

An interview with the tenant at the end of a tenancy can provide useful information and feedback for the organisation on matters such as:

- the type and location of housing the tenant is moving to
- their views about the services provided
- the quality of the property and any faults which need to be rectified
- the cooperative model (where applicable)
- the reason for ending the tenancy.



Standard 1.5

Outsourcing tenancy management

Appropriate organisations are transparently selected and monitored in the provision of such services.

Note: This standard only applies to those organisations that outsource their tenancy management.

The following features and examples are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive but rather to provide services with some guidance in how to achieve this standard.

Organisations should consider any relevant legislation in their jurisdiction that may apply to the service. The features and examples do not take into account the specific requirements of relevant legislation in each jurisdiction, and organisations are advised that the provisions of any legislation will prevail.

Standard 1.5

Outsourcing tenancy management

Appropriate organisations are transparently selected and monitored in the provision of such services.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Documentation that can support good practice

1.5.1

The organisation has a documented system for outsourcing tenancy management which ensures that the best interests of tenants and the organisation will be served and that appropriate consideration has been given to the legal and funding ramifications of outsourcing such services.

Selection processes

When outsourcing a service, an agency should be selected using a process that ensures fairness and transparency. There should be a written procedure that outlines the steps to be followed when outsourcing such services. A documented selection criteria should be developed prior to outsourcing and tenderers provided with details of the organisation's requirements. Some criteria for selection might include:

- sensitive to cultural issues relevant to the housing organisation's target group(s)
- demonstrated capacity to work with people in the target group(s)
- understands the difference between providing social housing and housing for profit
- understands the nature of disadvantage and its impact in the housing market
- offers value for money
- willing to negotiate a management agreement and work cooperatively
- good understanding of the relevant tenancy legislation and legal avenues for redress (for example, Tribunals)
- willing to adhere to best practice standards
- no conflicts of interest.

Processes that can support good practice

1.5.2

A formal tender process is undertaken and an agreement signed with the successful party which clearly details the roles and responsibilities of both parties, monitoring arrangements, and how any disputes will be handled.

Management agency agreements

The organisation should ensure that the signed agreement with the managing agent includes:

- decision-making authority of the agency and what matters need to be referred back to the housing organisation/cooperative for a decision
- reporting requirements
- frequency and manner of property inspections
- meeting requirements with tenants and the organisation
- compliance with the organisation's policy framework and these standards
- monitoring and reporting arrangements
- how complaints will be managed and reported upon.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

The two key responsibilities that a social housing organisation may wish to maintain control over are:

- selection and allocation of tenants
- final approval of any terminations.

Where a standard management agency agreement is used, special conditions in line with social housing principles will need to be added.

1.5.3

Staff and management meet with the selected agent to explain the organisation's policies, cultural issues, how they are expected to work with tenants, and the standards with which they are expected to comply.

Clear communication of expectations

It will be particularly important to have a clear and shared understanding about how to handle:

- rent arrears
- tenant inflicted damage
- breaches of the tenancy agreement that could lead to an eviction.

1.5.4

There is regular two-way communication between the organisation and the managing agent.

Regular two-way communication

It is crucial that the organisation receives regular reports that include financial information, details of any maintenance and interactions with tenants.

In particular the agent will need to promptly inform the organisation when a tenant comes into rent arrears or there is any other breach of the tenancy agreement that could result in eviction.

Where there is a complaint, the organisation should seek to resolve this promptly with the managing agent.

Measuring outcomes to support good practice

1.5.5

The performance of the managing agent is regularly monitored and reviewed by the organisation to ensure that the conditions of the agreement are being met and that the agent is delivering value for money.

Monitoring the performance of the agent

The views of tenants should be sought in the monitoring process.

The organisation should meet with agent to discuss the outcomes of the review process, whether the performance is satisfactory or unsatisfactory.

The review may raise issues that need to be addressed or may even point to a need for a change of managing agent.



Section 2: Asset management

Standard 2.1

Asset Management Strategy

Standard 2.2

Responsive maintenance and repairs

Standard 2.3

Planned maintenance

Standard 2.4

Stock acquisition and development

Standard 2.5

Partnerships and new business



Overview and definition of issues in this section

Managing and maintaining the organisation's assets

This third edition of the standards includes a new Standard 2.1 Asset Management Strategy. This addresses the more strategic aspects of managing and maintaining assets and the importance of doing this in a structured manner. As there is often confusion around the use of the term, the standard seeks to clarify what is meant by an asset management strategy and provide a consistency to how it is used in a business sense. The standard also details the importance of asset management and what an asset management strategy might include.

The next standard in this section covers responsive maintenance and repairs. Responsive maintenance is carried out in response to a need as it arises. This could occur because a tenant notifies the organisation of the need for a repair, or as a result of an inspection of the property (for instance, after a tenant has vacated).

Various pieces of state legislation may define types of repairs and response times. There may be further categories with different time frames:

- 'Urgent repairs' may be defined in state legislation and need a response within 24 hours. They generally include burst water services, blocked or broken sewerage systems, serious roof leaks, gas leaks, dangerous electrical faults, flooding, storm or fire damage, failure of electricity, gas or water supply, failure or breakdown of any essential service or appliance provided by the landlord, serious damage or fault to a lift or staircase.
- 'Normal repairs' need a response within set periods, usually less than 21 days.

Responsive repairs for head leasing schemes can take longer to organise due to the need to involve a third party. However, the organisation should undertake to ensure that these repairs are completed within appropriate time frames which do not unfairly inconvenience the tenant.

The third standard covers 'Planned maintenance' and includes two elements — long-term maintenance and cyclical upgrade:

- 'Long-term maintenance' is predictable, regular maintenance that is planned for, such as regular external painting, gutter-proofing, or pest control spraying.
- 'Cyclical upgrade' is done over a longer term and is required as buildings wear out. 'Upgrades' mean replacing more costly components of the building, such as a kitchen or a roof.

Both of these standards deal with maintaining rather than developing an asset. The latter is covered by the fourth and fifth standards in this section.

Acquiring and developing assets

The standard on stock acquisition and development covers all types of stock: leased, donated, purpose built and bought. It also allows for a variety of roles for the organisation in stock acquisition and development. In some cases, an organisation might have primary responsibility for all aspects of this work, while in others this may be done wholly or partly by other organisations.

As the community housing sector grows, many organisations are looking to develop partnerships to facilitate new business. This work requires a whole new set of skills and processes to ensure the viability of such ventures and protect existing assets. The final standard in this section is designed to assist organisations moving into this area of activity.

Rulings

Rulings are any legal decisions that could set a precedent regarding the organisation's responsibilities. There have been, for instance, 'duty of care' rulings which have made the community housing provider (as the landlord responsible for ensuring that any repairs carried out on a property are safe) liable for such work. One example of the implications of such a ruling is that, even if a licensed electrician has completed electrical work, the housing association could still be held responsible if the tenant is electrocuted.



Standard 2.1

Asset management strategy

The organisation plans for the management of its housing assets to ensure they deliver optimal return in terms of financial investment, service delivery and meeting housing need.

The following features and examples are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive but rather to provide services with some guidance in how to achieve this standard.

Organisations should consider any relevant legislation in their jurisdiction that may apply to the service. The features and examples do not take into account the specific requirements of relevant legislation in each jurisdiction, and organisations are advised that the provisions of any legislation will prevail.

Standard 2.1

Asset management strategy

The organisation plans for the management of its housing assets to ensure they deliver optimal return in terms of financial investment, service delivery and meeting housing need.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Documentation that can support good practice

2.1.1

The organisation has a documented and up-to-date Asset Management Strategy that ensures the housing stock it manages is of appropriate size, condition and specification and is financially sustainable.

Purpose of an Asset Management Strategy

The aim of an Asset Management Strategy is to help an organisation manage its property assets in a way which meets housing need but also maximises financial return. It is not just about having a long-term maintenance plan in place (although this is part of an Asset Management Strategy) but about managing and using assets in an efficient and cost effective manner. This might mean:

- changing their tenure if a more appropriate use is identified
- selling homes if they become too expensive to maintain
- making long-term plans for upgrades to ensure homes are maintained at appropriate standards
- aligning the capital development program to an organisation's strategic objectives.

These principles can apply equally to properties owned directly or leased from a third party. All housing providers have a core aim of providing tenants with good quality accommodation that meets modern living standards. Where a property is leased, organisations can seek to develop plans in partnership with owners that address the principles of an Asset Management Strategy.

An Asset Management Strategy is about bringing together the processes that ensure the housing stock is and continues to be:

- in good condition
- in the right location
- of the right type and design to meet local housing need (hostels, single dwellings, family homes)
- sustainable and financially viable.

The Asset Management Strategy is a critical document that needs to be reviewed and updated regularly, particularly where the organisation is developing, increasing and diversifying its stock. It is also important that it links to other key planning documents such as the organisation's strategic plan, business plan and long-term financial plan.

Components of an Asset Management Strategy

The complexity and content of an organisation's Asset Management Strategy will vary according to the size of the organisation. This means the number of analyses supporting the strategy may also vary. For organisations of all sizes and types, however, it is likely that a basic strategy will include:

- an overall assessment of stock condition
- an analysis of property type (size, location, numbers)
- an analysis of local housing need
- a long-term plan of future maintenance that will be required to keep homes at an acceptable standard (planned maintenance)
- an assessment of maintenance and funds required immediately to bring homes up to acceptable standards (backlog maintenance).

Additional components for organisations acquiring or developing significant levels of stock

Larger, growing organisations may also include the following analyses:

- Development, construction and acquisitions plan which outlines the program for increasing stock numbers and includes details of the number of units, their type and location, the costs and the funding sources.
- Disposals plan which outlines the properties targeted for sale in the short and medium-term and includes details of expected values, selling costs and timing of sales.
- Surveys of functional suitability which outlines those properties not suitable for their purpose and the plans and proposals to address these issues. For example, a hostel may be under-occupied due to lack of local need but may be re-developed into a number of units for young couples due to local demand. Alternatively, there may be a number of family units which do not have sufficient facilities or fail to meet space standards which need re-modelling.
- Portfolio investment plan which outlines specific properties purchased for investment purposes and includes information on projected returns and performance. Economic circumstances may govern alternative actions (such as sale for certain properties) as these plans are reviewed and monitored.

Standard 2.1

Asset management strategy

The organisation plans for the management of its housing assets to ensure they deliver optimal return in terms of financial investment, service delivery and meeting housing need.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

2.1.2

The objectives of the Asset Management Strategy are clearly defined and reflect the complexity of the organisation's activities.

An Asset Management Strategy can include a number of objectives, depending on the complexity of the organisation and what it is trying to achieve from the plan.

Organisations that are developing a range of different tenured homes (such as hostels, low-income rentals, essential/key worker accommodation, commercial properties, sub market rentals) or are carrying out activities aimed at maximising financial returns (asset values, sales proceeds, rent, grants) will adopt objectives that reflect these aims. Others who are non-developing will have an Asset Management Strategy concentrated only on their existing assets.

Some generic Asset Management Strategy objectives that could apply to most organisations are to:

- eradicate the backlog of repairs
- meet legislative and regulatory housing condition requirements (for example, size, quality)
- meet additional accommodation standards established by other stakeholders or determined by local need (for example, location, layout, space standards, facilities).

Additional objectives for organisations acquiring or developing significant levels of stock

Larger, growing organisations may also include objectives such as:

- develop a flexible portfolio to meet changing service needs and standards set by stakeholders. This may involve refurbishment or remodelling accommodation to meet local needs (for example, converting hostels into single person dwellings or vice versa)
- rationalise the asset base to eradicate properties considered uneconomic to maintain
- maximise income and capital growth for those elements of the portfolio acquired for investment purposes
- fund and develop new properties from the disposal of selected older properties to create more modern and cost effective homes.

Processes that can support good practice

2.1.3

The Asset Management Strategy and its component elements are reviewed and updated at least annually.

Given the strategic importance of an organisation's Asset Management Strategy, it is critical that it is reviewed annually by senior management and the governing body. Prior to this review, the management team would be responsible for updating all supporting analyses and documenting any material consequences of changes. This might include, but not be limited to, issues such as:

- significant increases in the scale of backlog maintenance identified and the cost of carrying out the works
- the introduction of new funding regimes by government agencies
- improvements or deterioration in the condition of homes
- key changes in the development program such as extended delays
- changes in key economic factors such as construction costs, inflation, market values of properties.

2.1.4

The databases and analyses supporting the Asset Management Strategy are maintained accurately and kept up-to-date. Any cost implications are evaluated and integrated into the financial planning process.

The data, surveys and other analyses that support the Asset Management Strategy will vary in relation to the complexity and scale of the activities being undertaken.

Smaller organisations may have a basic condition survey and inspection program (see signpost 2.2.5) conducted on an annual or cyclical basis. For example, resources available may only allow for property inspections every three years. Equally, the condition of properties may be of a high standard and only require less frequent review.

Information gathered from the inspection process is used to update property records and surveys. This information can then be used to revise maintenance plans, the frequency of maintenance activity or the priority of works. For example, a property that is scheduled for roof maintenance in three years may require attention within a shorter timescale due to deterioration caused by unusual or unforeseen factors.

The financial implications of the findings of these reviews can then be costed and evaluated against the budget and long-term financial projections. Once this is done, an organisation can assess whether the scale of works is affordable or whether it needs to be delayed, phased over a longer period or some other option found. For smaller organisations, sharing tasks with other organisations could be considered as a way of reducing costs or achieving economies of scale.

Organisations undertaking growth may have a number of additional surveys and analyses to update. For example, an increased acquisitions plan or additional liabilities arising from an updated condition survey may require a re-assessment of the investments portfolio and disposal plans to fund the cost implications.

Standard 2.1

Asset management strategy

The organisation plans for the management of its housing assets to ensure they deliver optimal return in terms of financial investment, service delivery and meeting housing need.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Measuring outcomes to support good practice

2.1.5

The organisation monitors progress against the objectives of the Asset Management Strategy.

The Asset Management Strategy is likely to have a number of targets set at both operational and strategic level. Operational targets might include measures such as:

- completion of condition surveys including backlog of outstanding surveys
- sales of 'x' properties for 'y' value within the reporting period
- acquisition of 'x' properties of 'y' type within the reporting period.

At a more strategic level the organisation may set targets that are reported to and monitored by the governing body on an annual basis and related to the Asset Management Strategy objectives, such as:

- reducing the value of backlog maintenance
- specifying the number or percentage of properties to meet minimum standards
- increasing housing stock
- achieving investment portfolio capital growth.

In addition to reviewing progress against the Asset Management Strategy, the governing body could also examine issues such as:

- the Asset Management Strategy objectives and continued relevance
- whether the Asset Management Strategy remains consistent with the organisation's overall strategy and business plan
- new funding opportunities
- the financial impact of changes to the Asset Management Strategy on the long-term financial plan and viability of the organisation
- consideration of recommendations and/or options presented by management such as increasing sales of properties and increasing planned maintenance funding.



Standard 2.2

Responsive maintenance and repairs

The organisation's systems enable the effective delivery of repairs and maintenance so that housing is well maintained and the assets managed by the organisation are protected

The following features and examples are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive but rather to provide services with some guidance in how to achieve this standard.

Organisations should consider any relevant legislation in their jurisdiction that may apply to the service. The features and examples do not take into account the specific requirements of relevant legislation in each jurisdiction, and organisations are advised that the provisions of any legislation will prevail.

Standard 2.2

Responsive maintenance and repairs

The organisation's systems enable the effective delivery of repairs and maintenance so that housing is well maintained and the assets managed by the organisation are protected.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Documentation that can support good practice

2.2.1

The organisation has a documented system for responsive maintenance and repairs that:

- ensures transparency of decisions
- provides good service in a timely manner
- is equitable between tenants and across properties.

General guidelines for maintenance and repairs

A maintenance and repairs system might include:

- time frames for different categories of repairs, consistent with the relevant local government requirements or state legislation and rulings
- guidance on the fair and equitable expenditure of maintenance funds to meet community living standards
- criteria for how budgets for repairs/maintenance will be prioritised
- procedures for all repairs, including those where a property is head-leased from the public or private sector
- tenant responsibilities and rights, including how tenant damage and/or maintenance responsibilities will be assessed and costs recovered
- guidelines for the maintenance of properties after they have been vacated
- assessment of repairs and the approvals process for initiating repairs
- documentation and monitoring of repairs.

Guidelines can assist in demonstrating that funds for repairs and maintenance are distributed fairly across properties.

Where organisations do not have direct control of repairs (for example, where they are carried out by the landlord or government asset manager) repairs policies and procedures will need to reflect how the organisation will monitor these arrangements. These need to take into account duty-of-care rulings.

Vacated properties

Guidelines for the maintenance of properties after they have been vacated might include:

- condition reports
- withholding/releasing bonds (consistent with state legislation)
- non-standard and standard work to be done
- prioritising health and safety issues
- bringing forward planned maintenance or major upgrades
- insurance implications
- plans for mitigating potential damage and vandalism.

Standard work might include cleaning, carpet cleaning or changing locks. Non-standard work might include things such as gradual introduction of increased security screens.

Documentation of maintenance and repairs

Record systems will need to document the whole process — from the initial needs assessment and approval through to completion.

Record systems might include:

- request forms
- adherence to occupational health and safety requirements and forms
- order forms including cost of works
- maintenance log
- feedback
- evaluation and signing off system
- contractual agreements and any variations to the job.

The records need to reflect the role the organisation has in initiating and monitoring repairs for each property (organisations may have different levels of responsibility for maintenance of different properties they manage).

Processes that can support good practice

2.2.2

The organisation has budgeted an appropriate amount for responsive maintenance and repairs.

The organisation needs to take into account funding guidelines and arrangements as well as the types, ages and current condition of its properties.

2.2.3

The organisation provides tenants with easy-to-use information on repairs and maintenance including:

- how to request repairs
- time frames for different categories of repairs
- ways to comment on the repairs.

A variety of mechanisms for tenant access and feedback

Organisations might think about a variety of ways to enable tenants to request and comment on repairs. Some useful approaches might include:

- written information provided as part of establishing the tenancy
- fridge magnets with emergency contacts details
- a calendar that outlines a variety of tenancy information including repairs and maintenance
- phone calls/visits to tenants following repairs
- feedback cards on repairs and contractors
- surveys and/or meetings with tenants about satisfaction with overall approach to repairs and maintenance.

It is important to ensure tenants understand the process for having repair requests approved and acted upon so they have realistic expectations.

Standard 2.2

Responsive maintenance and repairs

The organisation's systems enable the effective delivery of repairs and maintenance so that housing is well maintained and the assets managed by the organisation are protected.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

2.2.4

The organisation works with tenants to reduce the need for maintenance call-outs.

Preventative strategies

Organisations can work with tenants to reduce maintenance costs. Useful approaches might include:

- informing tenants of ways to fix minor problems such as how to relight a stove's pilot light
- purchasing gardening tools/lawnmowers to assist tenants to maintain outside areas
- giving tenants a simple checklist of things to do when vacating a property to increase their chance of getting their bond back
- providing containers for sharps disposals.

2.2.5

The organisation has a program for regularly inspecting properties.

Property inspections

Inspection systems might include:

- annual inspections for each property
- inspection after vacancies (internal and external areas)
- inspections before and after complex repairs
- procedures for how inspection results will be documented and reported (including to landlords)
- stock condition surveys by a qualified professional every few years to assess structural issues.

Inspections need to comply with the conditions set by the state legislation.

Frequency of inspections and how they are handled should ensure that the tenants' right to privacy and quiet enjoyment is not violated.

A new inspection report should be completed after each inspection.

Inspections should include items such as smoke alarms and termites to meet the conditions of building insurances.

Condition inspections should be used to indicate when cyclical maintenance or responsive repairs are needed.

The organisation will need to consider which inspections will need higher level professional skills.

Check-lists could be developed for different types of inspections.

Smaller organisations could consider sharing expertise or using the same surveyor to minimise the costs of inspections.

2.2.6

The organisation selects and works with contractors to ensure that the interests of the organisation are protected and, in particular, that the contractors:

- **respect the tenants and their home and property**
- **deliver good quality work in a timely fashion**
- **are competitively priced and represent value for money.**

Selection of contractors

Organisations may use a single contractor or contract a range of individual tradespersons to manage their maintenance and repairs. For high value jobs, competitive tenders may be considered a viable option. In all situations, the organisation will need guidelines to assist their selection processes.

These guidelines might include:

- requirements for skills (including ability to communicate well with tenants), experience and trade qualifications for types of work
- insurance coverage requirements of contractors
- references for reliability, timeliness, quality and meeting price targets
- information from any internal reviews of the contractor's work (including tenant feedback)
- development of a list of approved contractors by trade type
- how to deal with a potential conflict of interest
- indicative costings for standard jobs with an upper limit and competitive tendering for jobs over the limit.

Some organisations have asked external tradespeople who are not tendering for the job to be part of a panel that selects the contractor(s).

Written agreements with contractors

The performance of contractors can be improved by having clear written agreements with them about the organisation's expectations (such as courtesy to tenants, reliability, and quality) and what the contractor can expect from the organisation (such as payment timeframes and prompt feedback).

Some organisations have found it useful to have contractors sign a 'code of conduct' prior to being engaged.

Agreements with a private landlord or department

Where a private landlord or government department is in charge of organising repairs and maintenance, they should be proactive in meeting their contractual obligations. However, organisations might also need to develop agreements with them about the management of repairs. Such agreements might cover response times, quality of work, monitoring arrangements for repairs completed, and how tenant complaints will be addressed.

Organisations should be aware of any legislation that requires contracts to be in place, and whether this is a responsibility of the contractor or the organisation.

Standard 2.2

Responsive maintenance and repairs

The organisation's systems enable the effective delivery of repairs and maintenance so that housing is well maintained and the assets managed by the organisation are protected.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Approval for variation on jobs

Tenants and contractors should be given clear information on the need for approval of any variations on jobs. This could be provided as part of contractors' agreements and in the repairs and maintenance information provided to tenants. Where variations are agreed to, this needs to be documented in the maintenance records.

Reviewing contractors' work

It is good practice to regularly review contractors' work and provide them with feedback. Useful approaches to reviewing work might include:

- feedback from tenants following each job and/or following introduction of new contractors
- reviewing reliability/timeliness of contractors' quality of work for price.

Processes should also include consideration of when it is important to remove a contractor following unsatisfactory performance or when a contractor might be provided with clear feedback to improve performance. Penalties for failure to complete/unsatisfactory work should be built into larger contracts.

In some rural areas, it may be difficult to find alternative contractors. Organisations in these situations may need to place extra emphasis on building a relationship with its contractors and providing feedback.

Measuring outcomes to support good practice

2.2.7

The organisation measures its performance in the area of repairs and maintenance, using indicators such as tenant satisfaction, timeliness, quality and price.

Setting performance targets

Useful approaches to measuring performance might include setting targets. These targets will vary between organisations and tenants may be involved in deciding an appropriate level. An example of targets could include:

- 80% of tenants satisfaction with the process and outcome
- 80% of repairs are completed on time and within estimates and quotes
- less than 2% of repairs are subject to rework.

Setting targets then allows the organisation to find ways of measuring its progress through its repairs procedures and through its system for gaining feedback from tenants.

It can be useful to monitor the percentage of variations to orders.



Standard 2.3 Planned maintenance

The organisation plans for the maintenance and upgrade of its housing assets to ensure accommodation quality and overall value is sustained.

The following features and examples are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive but rather to provide services with some guidance in how to achieve this standard.

Organisations should consider any relevant legislation in their jurisdiction that may apply to the service. The features and examples do not take into account the specific requirements of relevant legislation in each jurisdiction, and organisations are advised that the provisions of any legislation will prevail.

Standard 2.3

Planned maintenance

The organisation plans for the maintenance and upgrade of its housing assets to ensure accommodation quality and overall value is sustained.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Documentation that can support good practice

2.3.1

The organisation has a documented system for planned maintenance and upgrading of properties that includes a plan for each property it controls which is linked to financial planning and budgets.

Planned maintenance and upgrades

Planned maintenance has two different but related aspects:

- 'Long-term maintenance' which covers the life cycle of the building and makes plans to replace key components over this period (such as kitchens and bathrooms).
- 'Cyclical maintenance' which is most usefully planned in five to ten year cycles and covers everyday aspects of the property (such as internal and external painting).

Maintenance plans

Maintenance plans should link to the organisation's annual plan and budget projections, with some aspect of planned maintenance being undertaken each year. An asset plan would normally include:

- costings
- time frames
- who is responsible for implementation.

Larger organisations with a substantial financial turnover and asset base are likely to have plans for 15 to 20 years.

A reserve based on a percentage of the replacement value of a property should be set up to adequately cover cyclical maintenance and upgrades. Many jurisdictions have set a mandatory reserve figure. In some jurisdictions, permission must be sought from the funder for upgrades.

The organisation should set some agreed standards for the quality of the materials purchased or work undertaken (such as size and type of hot water services, types of floor coverings) or adhere to externally prescribed standards in jurisdictions where they exist. Consideration in this process should always be given to environmental issues, such as water and power efficiency.

The organisation should consider under what circumstances there is a need for inspection by an independent building consultant.

Tenants are an important source of information about their property condition and efforts will be made to capture useful information from tenants, wherever possible.

Where the organisation has a long-term head-lease arrangement, the organisation will need to negotiate with the landlord to ensure that the appropriate cyclical maintenance is done and tenants are not disadvantaged.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

When a substantial amount of work is required to upgrade a property, disposal may be a more cost-effective option. This will depend on the organisation's funding agreement. Where organisations do not hold title, they may need to negotiate with the funding body about disposal. Retaining the property might require remodelling or extending it to better meet tenants' needs and maintain its overall value.

Processes that can support good practice

2.3.2

Planned maintenance and upgrade is coordinated to balance the needs of current and future tenants with achieving value for money.

Balancing the needs of the tenant and the organisation

Planned maintenance is best coordinated with vacancies to minimise disruption to tenants. Where possible, maintenance work can be planned to be tendered as one package (for example, painting a number of properties in one year). Priority should be given to items that enhance the safety and security of tenants. This could be things such as replacing battery operated smoke detectors with hard-wired ones or installing deadlocks to all external doors.

Some organisations have policies that allow tenants to do minor maintenance work themselves and be credited for their labour. This should only be allowed if the work does not require a licensed tradesperson, or if the tenant is licensed to perform such work.

2.3.3

The organisation ensures that its own interests are protected when major upgrades are contracted.

Protecting the organisation's interests

Processes to protect the interests of the organisation might include:

- tendering the work
- keeping clear records about the extent of work required and the agreed costs
- sighting qualifications and insurances of contractors
- clearly identifying specifications for work quality
- having a defects clause in the contract
- having completed work inspected by a qualified building consultant to assess its standard.

Standard 2.3

Planned maintenance

The organisation plans for the maintenance and upgrade of its housing assets to ensure accommodation quality and overall value is sustained.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Measuring outcomes to support good practice

2.3.4

The organisation monitors the progress made against its maintenance plans.

Monitoring progress

The monitoring system could include looking at:

- quality of work done
- appropriateness of materials used
- time frames for decisions on work performed
- budgeted costs compared to actual costs
- adequacy of reserved funds to cover projected costs
- costs compared to benefits.

Recording needs to ensure that information can be easily collated and trends can be identified.

This information can then be linked to developing budgets and making future decisions about contractors and materials.



Standard 2.4

Stock acquisition and development

The organisation acquires and develops new and existing housing stock in accordance with strategic growth objectives and to meet identified need.

Note: This standard is not applicable to organisations that have not acquired or developed stock in the past three years, or have no plans to expand in the next five years.

The following features and examples are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive but rather to provide services with some guidance in how to achieve this standard.

Organisations should consider any relevant legislation in their jurisdiction that may apply to the service. The features and examples do not take into account the specific requirements of relevant legislation in each jurisdiction, and organisations are advised that the provisions of any legislation will prevail.

Standard 2.4

Stock acquisition and development

The organisation acquires and develops new and existing housing stock in accordance with strategic growth objectives and to meet identified need.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Documentation that can support good practice

2.4.1

Where funding arrangements allow such activity, the organisation has a documented strategy for stock acquisition, disposal and development that is consistent with its organisational mission and corporate plan.

Integrated strategy

The strategy is likely to have a number of elements. The level of complexity will vary depending on the size and context of the organisation. It should be linked to the asset management strategy and could include:

- ways to use existing stock more effectively
- assessing the need to change stock through modification, dual occupancy or sale
- assessment of future needs and strategies to meet them.

The strategy should specify how sites will be chosen, whether by the organisation or by a project contractor. If the organisation does the work, it is best to involve a range of real estate agents in order to minimise any potential conflicts of interest.

Design principles to guide acquisition or development

It is useful to develop broad property (land and building) design principles to guide housing stock acquisition or development (development of stock could mean initiating extensions or major remodelling of existing stock).

Design principles might include:

- siting of stock with consideration of the health and wellbeing of tenants
- siting of stock in relation to the organisation's offices and identified geographical areas for expansion
- siting of stock in relation to schools, health facilities and other infrastructure
- site/area characteristics (including open space, existing housing standards, proximity to public transport and facilities, car parking)
- planning of communal spaces (if appropriate)
- construction methods and ability to be adapted, upgraded or converted
- energy efficiency
- environmentally sustainable development
- special/cultural needs (for example, disability)
- long-term maintenance needs
- affordable rent, health and safety for tenants
- designing for the needs of children
- designing for crime prevention
- accommodating pets.

When organisations are given or offered properties, a similar set of criteria can be considered before the property is accepted or used.

In remote areas, construction materials need special consideration to ensure the health and safety of tenants.

Head-leasing properties

Where the organisation head-leases properties, it needs to ensure that these acquisitions meet the needs of the tenants and do not pose any risks to the organisation. Criteria for assessing whether the property meets the needs of the organisation might include:

- compatibility with local need and those on the waiting list
- compatibility with the organisation's management capabilities
- levels of safety and security similar to those in the organisation's own capital properties (for example, security screen doors, smoke alarms, secure fencing if there are children)
- likelihood of being given the property on a long lease (at least 12 months)
- processes to ensure appropriate maintenance and repairs (inspections, emergency and cyclical maintenance) are carried out
- public liability coverage to cover duty of care responsibilities
- bond requirements
- no landlord's conditions to require discriminatory practices
- capacity for the tenancy to be transferred to the tenant as part of transitional housing arrangements.

Disposal

Where stock increases in market value but does not have a high strategic value, the organisation may wish to consider selling it to maximise its housing stock. Where the organisation has the power to sell stock, the system needs to ensure transparency, consistency with the organisation's goals and ensure any potential impact on tenants is considered as part of the decision making process. Guidelines that might be documented could include:

- when a property might be considered for sale
- who should be involved in selling the property
- how the sale price will be determined
- who has final decision-making power (consistent with the organisation's constitutional requirements)
- how tenants' rights and needs will be considered
- potential for sale to tenants.

Standard 2.4

Stock acquisition and development

The organisation acquires and develops new and existing housing stock in accordance with strategic growth objectives and to meet identified need.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Processes that can support good practice

2.4.2

The organisation prepares specific individual project briefs which describe the stock to be acquired.

Project briefs for acquisitions

A detailed project brief is needed when the organisation has the power to design and construct new stock. It might include:

- household requirements (size, type and design)
- location (access to facilities, geographic spread, special service needs)
- unit cost (derived at by comparing costs/benchmarks with other housing providers)
- management and day-to-day maintenance costs (for example, municipal rates, water rates, insurance)
- long-term cost to the organisation (including planned maintenance and relative re-sale value and replacement costs)
- affordable rent for tenants.

Other types of acquisitions, such as stock transfers may only require a very brief outline of requirements (for example, type of property, number of bedrooms).

To be prepared for short lead time in funding, the organisation could produce some standard project briefs for spot purchase, transfer or construction based on prior consultations.

2.4.3

Before deciding on the best method to acquire new stock, the organisation researches the feasibility of the various options.

Feasibility study

A feasibility study will need to consider: availability of stock or land, implications of long-term maintenance, council requirements (current and future), architect/technical report, community opinion, cost issues and target group needs.

As social housing can sometimes be contentious, community attitudes should first be assessed through discussion with key community organisations and leaders.

Ideally, the organisation should aim to acquire properties that need minimal maintenance for the first five years.

Before acquiring any new stock the organisation should inspect the property and also get an independent valuation and a professional technical report.

2.4.4

Where possible, the organisation involves tenants/members in the design process of developing new housing stock.

Tenant input

When new stock is developed tenants/members might be involved in:

- setting briefs
- appointing advisers
- determining and reviewing designs/property selection briefs.

Organisations will establish parameters for how, when and on what issues tenants/members will be consulted throughout the process of acquisition and/or development. Different tenants might be involved over the course of the project. Initially, current tenants or tenants from other similar housing developments could be consulted. Post-occupancy surveys may also be a useful source of information.

Support or peak agencies for target groups could be consulted on the initial design.

For head-leased stock, prospective tenants could be involved in selection of the property where possible. Consideration could be given to leasing the property the prospective tenant is already renting.

2.4.5

When employing an architect, project manager and/or builder, the selection and appointment process ensures transparency, quality service, value and minimal risk to the organisation.

Selection of contractors

Even if a project firm employs its own staff, it is important that the organisation retains some ability to select the most appropriate people. A good selection and appointment process might include:

- checking previous work, including through visiting sites
- looking for community sector/special needs experience
- requiring the ability to work with tenants and the organisation
- identification of any conflict of interest
- referee checks
- tendering/cost comparisons
- letter of agreement/contract
- stated variations and allowances for contingencies.

Standard 2.4

Stock acquisition and development

The organisation acquires and develops new and existing housing stock in accordance with strategic growth objectives and to meet identified need.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

2.4.6

Whenever it signs agreements for another party to develop a property, the organisation ensures that the agreement delineates rights and responsibilities of all parties, agreed monitoring and conflict resolution arrangements and is considered a partnership arrangement.

Clear contracts that are actively managed

Before signing an agreement, organisations should ensure they understand the legal implications of the contract. Organisations need to take active roles in managing the development process. They will need to review reports in the given time frames, work hard to involve tenants at key points in the process, and build a good working relationship with the project managers. In instances where this is controlled by the state government's own agency, building good working relationships is just as important. It can help to maximise the capacity to be involved in decision-making and to influence future policy development.

2.4.7

When taking possession of a property (leased or acquired), all relevant documentation is received.

Gathering the documentation

It is critical that all relevant documentation related to a property is obtained when taking possession and maintained on an ongoing basis. Documentation might include leases or other contractual agreements, property history, upgrade reports, survey results, building certificate, building warranties and pest reports. Sometimes this might be difficult for organisations to achieve but every attempt should be made to gain documentation and keep it updated.

For capital properties, ensure that insurance coverage is in place for any property loss or damage.

2.4.8

The organisation monitors any defects and ensures they are rectified.

Defect identification and rectification

This can apply to either a newly constructed property as well as to leased or capital properties that have had major works or upgrades. Organisations should be aware of when the defects liability period ends, in order to give a list to the builder or project manager of the defects to be rectified.

A list of defects should be prepared in conjunction with the tenant.

Measuring outcomes to support good practice

2.4.9

The organisation monitors and reviews its acquisition and development processes to ensure they are efficient and effective.

Monitoring

Information to be collected and considered could include:

- over or under-expenditure of budget
- progress against asset management strategy
- time taken to complete projects against planned timeframes
- satisfaction with performance of contractors and project managers
- post-occupancy surveys of tenants for feedback.

Where the organisation head-leases and/or acquires properties, all agreements should be systematically reviewed before they are renewed.

Review of properties should include consideration of:

- responsiveness of lessor in completing repairs
- need for major refurbishment
- value for money
- feedback from tenants about the property and its suitability to their needs.



Standard 2.5 Partnerships and new business

The organisation's growth strategy is based on sound financial planning.

Note: This standard is not applicable to organisations which are not attempting to acquire stock through new income streams and have no plans to do so.

The following features and examples are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive but rather to provide services with some guidance in how to achieve this standard.

Organisations should consider any relevant legislation in their jurisdiction that may apply to the service. The features and examples do not take into account the specific requirements of relevant legislation in each jurisdiction, and organisations are advised that the provisions of any legislation will prevail.

Documentation that can support good practice

2.5.1

The organisation has written documents to guide its development of property partnerships which includes a statement of ethics.

General guidelines

This could include:

- aims of partnerships
- parameters for assessing partnerships
- how partnerships will be maintained
- the required documentation.

Ethics statement

A statement of ethics might include things such as:

- declaration of any conflicts of interest
- adherence to social housing principles
- transparency
- accountability.

Processes that can support good practice

2.5.2

The organisation assesses the viability of potential partnership arrangements.

Assessing viability of possible partnerships

The assessment process might include identifying:

- contributions each partner could make
- likely interests of potential partners
- areas of common interest
- possible challenges or points of difference
- any potential risks from the potential partner
- whether the scale and timelines of the project are realistic to the resources of the organisation.

For example, churches are likely to be interested in partnerships that assist them to provide high quality supported housing, while private developers will have financial returns as their primary consideration.

Local government could be useful in helping to identify developers that are likely to have greater common interests with social housing.

Standard 2.5

Partnerships and new business

The organisation's growth strategy is based on sound financial planning.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Risk assessment of potential partners

Some indicators to consider in risk assessment of potential project partners could be:

- financial records
- reputation for quality
- analysis of corporate records
- history of compliance with building codes and regulations
- defaults (financial and other)
- discussion with previous partners
- company search
- annual report.

2.5.3

The organisation explores and utilises the full range of planning incentives set by state and local government to maximise its potential in developing financial partnerships.

Identifying and using planning incentives

Planning incentives could include things such as reductions in public space, car parking, use allowances (rezoning) and design issues (for example, height restrictions). One state's planning Act for example, places a levy on development as a contribution to social housing. Avoiding having to pay this levy can be a strong incentive for private developers to work in partnership with a social housing provider.

2.5.4

When entering into partnerships with other organisations to develop stock, formal contractual agreements are signed which include sound risk management strategies.

2.5.5

Development strategies seek to build community capacity.

Contributing to community capacity building

In developing new stock, consideration should be given to maximising the opportunities to improve social housing tenants' links to the community and social connectedness.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

2.5.6

The organisation promotes and markets its potential as a partner for property development.

This could involve sending out marketing materials to target potential partners (such as private developers, investment companies, local councils), holding events to showcase an organisation's work or direct approaches to key partners the organisation would like to work with.

2.5.7

The organisation ensures that it has access to appropriate and high level expertise in business planning, project management and property development.

Access to appropriate expertise

This could mean employing staff or utilising consultants. Organisations engaging in this type of development will need to ensure that the governing body also has an appropriate knowledge and skill level in these areas.

Measuring outcomes to support good practice

2.5.8

The organisation monitors and reviews its efforts to develop new income streams.

Cost/benefit analysis

This is likely to involve a cost/benefit analysis of the time and other resources taken in developing partnerships compared with the relative benefits to the organisation and its constituents.

Careful consideration should also be given to what has worked and what hasn't in developing future directions.



Section 3: Tenant rights and participation

Standard 3.1

Tenant rights

Standard 3.2

Tenant participation

Standard 3.3

Participation in tenant-run cooperatives

Standard 3.4

Access to services

Standard 3.5

Confidentiality and privacy

Standard 3.6

Complaints and appeals



Overview and definition of issues in this section

Dual roles of some tenants

In this section, a distinction is made between tenants in their role as tenants, and as managers of community housing organisations, in particular, tenant-run cooperatives. The term 'member' refers to an individual in her or his management role, while 'tenant' refers to an individual, possibly even the same person, in the housing tenant role. It is important to acknowledge that these roles are distinct and can on occasion conflict. This section focuses on the tenant role, not the management role.

Tenant participation

'Standard 3.2 Tenant participation' covers the importance of tenants being involved in the organisation's decision-making processes about issues which affect them. As well as seeking feedback from tenants on matters which may interest them, this standard encourages organisations to find other, varied ways for tenants' views to be heard. Tenant representation on governing bodies already occurs in many organisations but this is not the only way representation can occur. In recent years, many organisations have chosen not to include tenants on their governing bodies and, therefore, need to consider other ways of consulting and engaging with their tenants.

A standard on participation in tenant-run cooperatives is also included to highlight the particular issues involved in participation of tenants beyond their specific roles in governance of the cooperative (the selection and work of board/management committees is covered in Section 5: Governance and organisational management).

Complaints and appeals

'Standard 3.6 Complaints and appeals' covers the right of applicants and tenants or any other individual or group in the community to complain about anything they think is unfair or not of a good standard — either with the organisation or the service received. An appeal specifically refers to a decision that the tenant or applicant believes to be unfair and wants to have reconsidered.



Standard 3.1 Tenant rights

Tenant rights are upheld throughout the organisation's work and those who access the organisation are assisted to exercise their rights and responsibilities.

The following features and examples are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive but rather to provide services with some guidance in how to achieve this standard.

Organisations should consider any relevant legislation in their jurisdiction that may apply to the service. The features and examples do not take into account the specific requirements of relevant legislation in each jurisdiction, and organisations are advised that the provisions of any legislation will prevail.

Standard 3.1

Tenant rights

Tenant rights are upheld throughout the organisation's work and those who access the organisation are assisted to exercise their rights and responsibilities.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Documentation that can support good practice

3.1.1

Written documents of the organisation demonstrate a clear commitment to:

- the rights of tenants to respectful, fair and non-discriminatory treatment
- safe and secure housing
- privacy.

Clear commitment to tenant rights throughout the organisation

Many of these rights are covered by legislation, and will be included in lease agreements. Others are linked to the purpose of community housing and may not be a separate statement, but embedded in a number of organisational documents, such as the Constitution, mission statement and specific policies and procedures.

For example, documents might cover the rights of tenants to:

- security of tenure within the terms of the tenancy agreement, funding guidelines and their rules
- maintenance of confidentiality of personal information provided
- complain and appeal against decisions
- use an advocate to act on their behalf
- have access to their own information held on file by the organisation.

Processes that can support good practice

3.1.2

Tenants and applicants are consistently informed of their rights and responsibilities and information is presented in an appropriate and accessible way.

Accessible information on rights and responsibilities

It is useful to inform tenants and applicants of their rights and responsibilities through a simple document, which is publicly available and easily accessible. This might mean including the details in an information kit or handbook given to applicants/tenants, in separate information leaflets, making it available online or in other ways that make it easy for tenants and applicants to obtain. A list of relevant legislation and policies of the organisation could also be included in some documents.

Some of the rights (to be treated with respect, fair and non-discriminatory treatment) might also be included in a leaflet about the organisation.

Particular attention needs to be given to tenants with low levels of literacy. Written information needs to be presented in ways that make reading easy — in plain English, visual where possible and, if tenants do not speak English, in community languages.

3.1.3

A range of strategies are used to assist tenants exercise their rights and responsibilities.

Making it easy for people to exercise their rights and responsibilities

The organisation should make it clear to applicants and tenants that these rights exist, they are encouraged to exercise them and can complain if they are not respected. A variety of means can be used to send this message including:

- discussing rights and responsibilities when the tenancy agreement is signed
- having a sign in the office (if applicable)
- reminding tenants of how they can complain or appeal against decisions and providing them with further information (such as a leaflet or publication) explaining the process
- reinforcing this verbally when they complain.

Interpreters may also be needed, and other community organisations could be approached to assist in informing tenants of their rights (for example, Migrant Resource Centres).

The organisation should provide information about advocacy organisations to tenants, and make sure these advocacy organisations are fully informed of the rights and responsibilities of community housing tenants.

The organisation can actively promote awareness of rights and responsibilities and how to exercise them (for example, at meetings, issue based forums or Annual General Meetings).

Measuring outcomes to support good practice

3.1.4

The organisation monitors its work around tenant rights.

Reviewing performance

This could include:

- regularly reviewing policies, mission statements and plans to ensure that they reflect tenants' rights
- seeking feedback from tenants about its performance around tenants' rights
- measuring performance of any action plans intended to increase tenant and staff awareness of tenants' rights.

Tenant feedback could be sought through an annual survey, as part of exit interviews when tenants vacate properties, or through focus groups or meetings of tenants. Informal social events can be utilised to reach a broader range of tenants than those who might attend a meeting.



Standard 3.2 Tenant participation

Tenants are encouraged to provide feedback and become involved in decision-making on issues which affect them or their tenancy.

The following features and examples are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive but rather to provide services with some guidance in how to achieve this standard.

Organisations should consider any relevant legislation in their jurisdiction that may apply to the service. The features and examples do not take into account the specific requirements of relevant legislation in each jurisdiction, and organisations are advised that the provisions of any legislation will prevail.

Documentation that can support good practice

3.2.1

Written documents of the organisation reflect a strong commitment to enabling tenant participation.

Commitment to tenant participation permeates the organisation

Commitment to tenant participation might be found in a range of documents such as the Constitution, mission statement, the organisation's business plans, and information provided to tenants. Some organisations may also have a written tenant participation strategy, reflecting in one document the ways in which tenants can become involved in the organisation and community.

Tenant participation might include:

- feedback on existing services and activities
- consulting on proposals for change that will impact on tenants
- opportunities for involvement in the decision-making of the organisation
- opportunities for broader community engagement.

In cooperatives, this may include involvement in the day-to-day running of the organisation.

Concrete strategies

Documentation should indicate more than mere statements of principle and intent. They should set out some processes/strategies for achieving participation. For example, the organisation's plan and budget might include the provision of training for tenants so that they are able to participate more fully.

The level of participation that is realistic for short-term accommodation will be different from that for long-term housing.

For organisations where housing provision is only one part of a larger operation, policies should explicitly state which areas participation relates to.

Standard 3.2

Tenant participation

Tenants are encouraged to provide feedback and become involved in decision-making on issues which affect them or their tenancy.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Processes that can support good practice

3.2.2

The organisation regularly seeks feedback from tenants.

Regular and active seeking of feedback

Feedback from tenants provides the organisation with an ongoing measure of how well it is meeting the housing needs of tenants, how contractors are doing their work and tenants views on policy issues that the organisation may be considering. To ensure feedback and input is as widely accessed as possible, different methods of feedback can be used, including verbal (telephone or face to face), written, via electronic media, in groups rather than individually or anonymously via suggestion boxes.

Feedback is most useful when it is regular and built into everyday activities, such as just after a repair is completed. Monitoring complaints and appeals are other important forms of feedback. Where a significant issue arises that may be of interest to tenants, organisations may carry out one-off feedback activities to encourage tenants' views on the issue/s in question. This might include events, telephone surveys, local meetings.

Specific strategies may be needed to ensure the organisation hears from its full range of tenants, including those from non-English speaking backgrounds, young people and those with support needs. All these groups may find formal feedback mechanisms threatening or difficult to manage. This is important to consider when designing feedback activities to ensure all groups are able to participate and be heard. Involving tenants in the design of the feedback mechanism can help encourage ownership and, as a result, a higher involvement rate.

An invitation to provide feedback anonymously can help and some organisations provide incentives (such as entry into a raffle draw) to encourage tenants to participate in the feedback exercise.

It is useful for organisations to obtain feedback from tenants who are leaving through interviews or simple written feedback forms.

3.2.3

Where proposals will affect tenants, the organisation consults with them.

Consulting with tenants

Proposals for major change are more likely to need formal meetings and other types of consultation. For example, an organisation may be considering changing its rents and collection system. As this decision would affect tenants directly, a meeting may be called to discuss the issue. In these situations, it is important to recognise some tenants do not like to attend meetings (for reasons of distance, other commitments, lack of confidence in groups). The organisation may choose to hold locally based meetings where practical, to encourage attendance, or supplement the meetings with other opportunities for contributions.

Organisations with very short-term tenants will have less opportunity to consult than those with longer term tenants, however, it should still be possible to undertake more time limited consultation on major issues.

Consultation is likely to be token and frustrating if tenants are not given sufficient time and information to contribute.

Different tenants will appreciate different types of opportunities to participate and where possible, multiple ways to participate should be provided.

Although some written methods of consultation and feedback (such as surveys) may be useful, person-to-person discussions (by phone or face-to-face) are likely to be most useful.

Consultation means that the organisation takes into account the views of its tenants when making a decision. Whatever decision the organisation takes, it is important to inform tenants of the results of the consultation process and what views were acted upon.

Organisations need to be clear about how the views of tenants will be included within the decision-making process and exactly what issue/s tenants are being asked to comment on. Setting boundaries at the beginning and communicating them to everyone is critical to a productive consultation exercise.

Standard 3.2

Tenant participation

Tenants are encouraged to provide feedback and become involved in decision-making on issues which affect them or their tenancy.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

3.2.4

The organisation provides opportunities for tenants to participate in its decision-making processes.

Participation in decision-making

Participation in decision-making is a more active process than consultation or feedback. While cooperatives will generally be used to having tenants on their governing body, many other organisations may not wish to pursue this structure. There can be potential conflicts of interest that arise with this structure and some organisations may consider mandatory tenant representatives to be incompatible with the independent, governance role that governing body members need to take.

This is a choice for individual organisations to make, based on their size, number of tenants and the availability of potential, skilled tenant members. Where tenants are board/management committee or sub-committee members, they will still be required to demonstrate their skills to undertake such a role and agree to carry out their responsibilities in the same way other governing body members do — acting in the interests of the organisation, not according to a personal agenda.

Where organisations do not have formal tenant positions on their governing body, participation in decision making can be done in a variety of other ways. These might include:

- Representative forums — made up solely of tenants and providing input to the governing body on policy and service delivery issues. This is not a formally constituted sub-committee and does not have decision making powers, but can provide tenants' views to the governing body. It can also review potential policy changes and make recommendations when asked to consider specific issues.
- Issue-based groups — these can be established as required to consider specific issues. Membership would depend on the issue being considered and examples could include a locality based group, tenancy based (for example, short-term tenants, hostel tenants) or constituency based (for example, women, young people, a specific ethnicity).
- Tenants' associations — groups that exist in a specific locality and represent the views of tenants in that area.
- Working groups — individuals working with staff or governing body members to develop policy in a specific area. These would be useful on matters where tenants have direct experience such as complaints, maintenance provision, rent payments.

In some cases, participation might be facilitated through a support agency rather than the housing organisation directly.

In tenant-run cooperatives, all tenant members need to have a voice in decisions, not only office holders or committee members.

3.2.5

Barriers that might limit participation in the organisation have been identified and addressed.

Breaking down barriers to participation

Things to consider include:

- holding meetings in the most accessible locations and at times when tenants can attend
- holding meetings in venues with disabled access
- assisting with child care or transport arrangements
- arranging for interpreters
- considering age appropriate mechanisms — processes for young people may be different for older people
- providing refreshments
- making sure the meeting is well advertised and addresses issues likely to attract tenants
- finding ways to regularly inform tenants about issues so that they can meaningfully participate
- providing training for tenant representatives.

A budget allocation is useful to help tenants participate (for example, to pay for child care or transport). Tenants should be clearly advised of any assistance available before they outlay funds.

Measuring outcomes to support good practice

3.2.6

The organisation monitors the level of tenant participation in the organisation.

Monitoring progress

This would involve monitoring things such as:

- the levels of feedback from consultations (people attending meetings, returning surveys)
- quality and timeliness of information given to tenants
- the range of tenants actively participating
- feedback from tenants about how easy it is to have input into decision-making processes
- examples of recent decisions that have been influenced/made by tenants (changes might include policies, procedures, range of activities and acquisitions).

Note: There are naturally different levels of tenant participation expected for short-term and longer term tenancies and for cooperatives.



Standard 3.3 Participation in tenant-run cooperatives

Cooperative members are selected, trained and supported to maintain a sustainable organisation.

Note: This standard applies to tenant-run cooperatives only.

The following features and examples are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive but rather to provide services with some guidance in how to achieve this standard.

Organisations should consider any relevant legislation in their jurisdiction that may apply to the service. The features and examples do not take into account the specific requirements of relevant legislation in each jurisdiction, and organisations are advised that the provisions of any legislation will prevail.

Documentation that can support good practice

3.3.1

The organisation's documents outline expectations for participation by cooperative members.

Clarity of expectations

Documents might include the constitution, by-laws, policies, minutes of meetings and information provided to members/applicants. It is important that the cooperative is clear on the expectations it has for member participation and the importance of avoiding conflicts of interest. It needs to balance the organisation's needs and the individual's capacities.

Processes that can support good practice

3.3.2

The cooperative has processes for selecting and inducting members that ensure an understanding of what it means to be a cooperative member.

Communicating the cooperative model to applicants and new members

Applicants will need information about the cooperative model and the specific requirements of the cooperative they are applying for.

New members will need a formal induction to the cooperative. This could be done through a kit, attendance at governing body meetings, or a buddy system.

Explanations could cover:

- the goals and work of the cooperative
- their role as tenants and their role as managers of the cooperative
- their legal responsibilities
- meeting arrangements and meeting processes/procedures
- financial position, including income and liabilities
- relevant government policies and documents
- the cooperative's policies and plans.

3.3.3

The cooperative has strategies in place to identify gaps in skills and to build and maintain sustainable management.

Skills development

An organisation functions best when its members have a range of skills including:

- financial management
- property management
- organisational management.

The cooperative could conduct a skills audit of members or use the national competency standards to assess training needs. Peak bodies can be contacted to find out about training providers.

Standard 3.3

Participation in tenant-run cooperatives

Cooperative members are selected, trained and supported to maintain a sustainable organisation.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

In addition to more formal training, a cooperative might also:

- rotate jobs and tasks
- formalise a buddy or deputy system so that inexperienced people do a job assisted by more experienced members
- purchase services from other organisations where skills cannot be met within the cooperative
- consider succession planning and training of committee members and/or assistants to ensure knowledge is retained.

3.3.4

The organisation has strategies for building positive relationships and managing conflict between members.

Strategies for positive relationships

Some ways that a cooperative might work to ensure that healthy relationships are maintained are:

- welcoming and introducing new members
- social events (which will need to be funded by non-rental income)
- getting people to work together on committees or projects
- training members in effective communication techniques
- early intervention techniques such as conflict resolution.

Conflict resolution is necessary for continued functioning of tenant-run cooperatives. Guidelines might include:

- strategies for 'cooling off'
- ways to involve other members
- guidelines for when and if external professionals (mediators, police or others) will be called upon.

Measuring outcomes to support good practice

3.3.5

The cooperative regularly reviews member participation in key roles and areas of responsibility.

Reviewing effectiveness of enabling participation

This could be done by:

- keeping records of tasks undertaken
- asking individuals to assess their own contributions and identify areas where they may need development
- assessing and acting on gaps in the skills the organisation needs
- establishing and assessing targets for individual members' participation
- conducting exit interviews.



Standard 3.4

Access to services of the organisation

Applicants, tenants and service users are, as far as possible, given opportunities to access a range of services appropriate to their needs.

The following features and examples are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive but rather to provide services with some guidance in how to achieve this standard.

Organisations should consider any relevant legislation in their jurisdiction that may apply to the service. The features and examples do not take into account the specific requirements of relevant legislation in each jurisdiction, and organisations are advised that the provisions of any legislation will prevail.

Standard 3.4

Access to services of the organisation

Applicants, tenants and service users are, as far as possible, given opportunities to access a range of services appropriate to their needs.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Documentation that can support good practice

3.4.1

The organisation's written and online sources of information are up to date, accessible and reflect a commitment to ensuring equitable access to its activities and services.

Information sources

Many organisations produce leaflets or maintain websites containing information about their services and how to access them. Where this is done, it is important that both the written and online information is maintained and up-to-date. Leaflets, written documents and websites also need to be user-friendly which may mean considering issues such as translations and large print versions.

Commitment to equitable access

Information provided will need to be consistent with relevant legislation around equality of access in areas such as:

- disability
- racial or sexual discrimination
- equal opportunities
- privacy.

Processes that can support good practice

3.4.2

The organisation's offices/venues and activities are accessible to its potential and current service users.

Accessible locations

Offices/venues need not be in a central location but might be linked to road and public transport routes or to shopping and/or community centres. Wheelchair access to venues where activities or services are provided will also need to be addressed. Where this is not possible, the organisation might offer an outreach service in a more accessible location to meet these needs (for example, a half day in another space and/or home visits).

In cooperatives, the venues involving the work of the cooperative (meetings, filing cabinets, computers) should be chosen with access considerations in mind.

3.4.3

The organisation's operating hours meet the needs of the range of tenants, applicants and service users.

Suitable operating hours

Feedback from tenants should identify whether operating hours are a barrier to people accessing services. If barriers are identified, the organisation may need to consider the scope of changes it may be able to make, particularly larger organisations that have greater capacity. The organisation may need to think about offering night and/or weekend hours of service, individual appointments or home visits.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Better access could be provided through an 1800 or 1300 telephone link. Another strategy could be an answering machine with a recorded message giving details of opening hours and what to do in case of an emergency.

3.4.4

The organisation has strategies to ensure it provides services that are culturally appropriate to its potential and current service users.

Culturally appropriate services

In order to provide services and activities that are culturally appropriate, the organisation will need to have identified barriers to access. Building good relationships with a range of people or organisations representing different groups in the community can also help.

Strategies could include:

- co-locating with another agency providing culturally specific services (for example, Migrant Resource Centres, Aboriginal Land Councils, gay and lesbian advocacy services)
- considering literacy levels when designing written information
- actively trying to recruit staff and volunteers from a variety of diverse backgrounds useful to the target population
- using interpreter services (including signing)
- access to TTY phone service (for people who are deaf or hearing impaired)
- sensitivity training for staff and board/management committees to increase their understanding of target populations and their cultures
- accessing resources from other agencies
- using appropriate venues for meetings
- networking and consulting with other relevant organisations.

Measuring outcomes to support good practice

3.4.5

The organisation monitors its accessibility to the full range of service users.

Monitoring accessibility

Monitoring could include:

- periodic surveys of tenants and other service users about the full range of access issues
- comparing client characteristics with those of the community being served and setting targets for inclusion
- gaining feedback from other agencies that service the target group.



Standard 3.5 Confidentiality and privacy

Applicants' and tenants' confidentiality and privacy is respected and maintained.

The following features and examples are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive but rather to provide services with some guidance in how to achieve this standard.

Organisations should consider any relevant legislation in their jurisdiction that may apply to the service. The features and examples do not take into account the specific requirements of relevant legislation in each jurisdiction, and organisations are advised that the provisions of any legislation will prevail.

Documentation that can support good practice

3.5.1

The organisation has written documents that outline how confidentiality and privacy will be upheld, consistent with relevant privacy legislation.

Clear guidelines for privacy protections

All jurisdictions have federal and state privacy legislation in force which sets standards for dealing with personal information. The legislation provides that information is considered confidential if it was obtained from an applicant, tenant or third party, could identify an individual or is personal in nature. The specific obligations that apply in each jurisdiction are outlined at www.privacy.gov.au.

Documentation to help protect confidentiality could include:

- applicant/tenant interviews being conducted in spaces which provide privacy (when appropriate)
- specifications of what information can be released internally and externally, and to whom it can be released
- details of when the informed consent of the tenant is required for release of information, and how this consent will be gained and recorded
- storage of tenant files
- access to computer files
- how applicants/tenants may access their records (including deleting all references to third parties)
- information about privacy that must, by law, be provided to applicants and tenants.

Depending on the nature of the organisation, Freedom of Information legislation may also need to be considered. Further information about Freedom of Information laws can be found at www.pmc.gov.au/foi/.

The principles of 'need-to-know' and 'informed consent'

Generally, information should be kept confidential within an organisation on a 'need-to-know' basis — that is, only those who need the information should have access to it. For example, a board/management committee will need to know how many tenants are in arrears, but only the person/people who work with the tenant need to know their names.

Sharing information with other agencies should be limited on the same basis. Tenants should generally provide consent for this information to be released. For example, other community agencies may ask for a mailing list to enable them to send their information directly to tenants. This would be a breach of confidentiality unless tenants had given their consent.

Standard 3.5

Confidentiality and privacy

Applicants' and tenants' confidentiality and privacy is respected and maintained.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Processes that can support good practice

3.5.2

A private place is used for collecting information of a personal nature.

Privacy for interviews

Many people will not talk about confidential matters in a public place, therefore, a suitable private place should be used for collecting information of a personal nature (this also applies to taking personal information by telephone). Where premises are not suitable, organisations could consider using other agencies' premises or making home visits.

3.5.3

Where individual tenants are being discussed, steps are taken to ensure their anonymity.

Protecting confidential information internally

Following the 'need-to-know' principle, discussions about confidential information related to tenants should not use their names. Many organisations apply a 'need-to-know' basis for operational staff and advise tenants of this. However, code systems for sharing information about individual tenants (such as Tenant '1' or Tenant 'x') are needed for reporting to governing bodies.

Where there are valid reasons for sharing names, such as approving an allocation within a cooperative, the applicant's consent should be sought.

In tenant-run cooperatives, it might be useful to have a small finance committee where open discussion can occur. Confidentiality about rents or incomes is then kept while holding discussions in the larger committee.

Where tenants have concerns about privacy being used to protect vested interests, this should be handled through having processes in place to monitor and review delegations and ensure that any conflicts of interest are managed properly (see Section 5).

3.5.4

Where tenants cannot give consent to information being shared, the organisation considers how privacy and confidentiality can best be protected.

Situations where 'informed consent' is not possible

There may be a number of instances where tenants are not in a position to give consent. Instances could include tenants with incapacitating illnesses or tenants in abusive situations. This is a complex area of law and organisations should ensure they refer to local legislation or take formal advice if these issues arise.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

3.5.5

The organisation ensures that all tenant files are stored and destroyed in a confidential manner.

File management

For example, files should be stored in a lockable cabinet and archived for seven years before shredding.

Where files are computerised, it is important to have password access for approved users and to ensure that computers are turned off when unattended.

Measuring outcomes to support good practice

3.5.6

The organisation regularly reviews whether all those involved in the organisation understand and act in accordance with their responsibilities to protect confidentiality.

An organisational culture of privacy protection

This would include staff, governing body members, contractors, volunteers and tenant members.

The organisation has a responsibility to make sure that those with access to personal tenant information are aware of the confidentiality policy and procedures. This can be done through:

- making the written guidelines available during induction
- training
- discussion
- evaluation.



Standard 3.6

Complaints and appeals

Complaints and appeals of decisions are addressed promptly and fairly.

The following features and examples are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive but rather to provide services with some guidance in how to achieve this standard.

Organisations should consider any relevant legislation in their jurisdiction that may apply to the service. The features and examples do not take into account the specific requirements of relevant legislation in each jurisdiction, and organisations are advised that the provisions of any legislation will prevail.

Documentation that can support good practice

3.6.1

The organisation has a documented system for managing complaints and appeals that make it easy for people to lodge a complaint or appeal and ensures that they:

- are dealt with promptly and fairly
- have access to an independent body if the matter cannot be resolved to the person's satisfaction.

Definitions of complaints and appeals

Complaints and appeals cover very distinct issues although similar principles apply when dealing with either.

Complaints relate to dissatisfaction with an area of service delivery, over which the organisation has direct control. It will generally relate to the manner in which the service was actually provided — by a staff member, contractor or other third party working on behalf of the organisation. The complaints process allows a tenant or third party to formally express their dissatisfaction, have their point of view heard and obtain some form of recourse or resolution.

Appeals relate to a tenant or service user's dissatisfaction of a decision made by the organisation. For example, a tenant may have been refused a transfer and believe the decision is flawed in some way. The appeal process gives them the opportunity to dispute the decision and possibly have it changed.

Disputes relate to wider neighbourhood issues such as difficulties with neighbours or accusations of antisocial behaviour. Often, these are areas that the organisation does not have direct control over, which is why it is covered in a separate standard (see Standard 1.2 Establishing and maintaining tenancies).

Benefits of effective complaints procedures

An effective complaints procedure will benefit tenants and the organisation. It can reduce complaints in the long-term and provide the organisation with important feedback on how to do its work better.

Organisations that do not encourage complaints or appeals will often receive very few — establishing an effective complaints and appeals system may lead to an increase at first.

While it is likely that the majority of complaints and appeals will be made by tenants, applicants, or cooperative members, the process needs to be easy for any member of the community to access. This could be an advocate, or another community organisation. There should, however, be a separate system for dealing with staff complaints as the processes outlined in this section only relate to those from outside the organisation.

Standard 3.6

Complaints and appeals

Complaints and appeals of decisions are addressed promptly and fairly.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Good practice procedures for complaints and appeals

A good complaints and appeals system might include explanations about:

- how they are welcomed and will be used to improve the organisation's services
- tenants and applicants not being penalised for making a complaint or appealing a decision and continuing to receive respectful service
- how to make a complaint or appeal a decision
- processes that take into account culture and language issues and ensure it is easy for tenants and applicants from different cultures to access complaints and appeals systems
- the criteria on which appeals can be made, so that expectations are managed
- attempting to resolve complaints and appeals promptly and simply
- steps, timeframes and person(s) responsible for resolving all types of complaints and appeals.
- how complainants/appellants will be kept informed of progress
- how the complaint/appeal will be documented
- how the tenant/applicant will be informed of the progress of the complaint/appeal and the outcome
- independent bodies to which the complaint/appeal may be taken if it is not resolved to the tenant's satisfaction.

It is a good idea to seek tenant input into developing the system to ensure that it is simple, accessible and practical.

Appeal bodies

If complaints or appeals are not resolved within the organisation, an independent mediator might be used.

In some jurisdictions, breaches of the tenancy agreement can be taken to Residential Tenancy Tribunals, while breaches of the funding guidelines could be taken to the relevant funding body. Some jurisdictions have Housing Appeal Committees which can hear complaints if a tenant is dissatisfied with the decision of the provider. Providers are obliged to provide information to tenants on how to access these bodies.

Other bodies that can hear some types of complaints include the Human Rights Commission, incorporation bodies and the police. The organisation should sign up to an external appeals system if one is available.

Where there is a complaint that relates to the organisation's own corporate governance (for example, financial fraud, lack of transparency in its election processes) it would not be appropriate for the governing body to investigate itself. Such complaints/appeals might be referred to the funder or the relevant registration body.

Processes that can support good practice

3.6.2

Written information about how to lodge a complaint or appeal is easily accessible.

Information on how to lodge a complaint/appeal

Mechanisms should be clear and simple, and written information explaining the process made readily available. This might mean:

- having a brochure available in the waiting room
- including the procedures in the organisation's information package for tenants/applicants
- displaying information on noticeboards
- placing reminders in newsletters
- providing online access to information and forms.

Tenants can assist in letting you know if the information is accessible. Involve tenants in writing/designing the leaflet or pilot it with tenants before publication.

Translation of the leaflet may be necessary for non-English speaking people.

3.6.3

Tenants are informed of how to access advocacy organisations or individual advocates to help them complain or make an appeal.

Information on advocacy services

Providing tenants with information on tenant rights advice services can help overcome difficulties in making a complaint. In some jurisdictions, providers have an obligation to inform tenants of appeal options available to them where they are unhappy with the decision of the provider. In these cases, providers must make information available to tenants to assist them access such bodies.

Some organisations may also wish to access third party advice services to help them deal with complaints and appeals. Peak bodies and regulators may be useful sources of guidance, depending on the nature of the issue.

Standard 3.6

Complaints and appeals

Complaints and appeals of decisions are addressed promptly and fairly.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

3.6.4

Any member of the organisation likely to receive complaints or handle appeals is trained in how to deal with them.

Training in handling complaints/appeals

It is important that everyone likely to receive a complaint or an appeal knows the procedures for resolving and recording complaints, including who will follow up /deal with the complaint.

Active listening and good communication will help resolve many complaints and appeals.

Tenants may complain to the organisation about a range of issues that fall outside their jurisdiction. These could include issues such as Centrelink fraud, child abuse or drug dealing. The organisation must be clear of the situations when it is not appropriate to investigate, and where the complainant should be referred to the relevant body (for example, Centrelink, child protection agency, Ombudsman, police).

Measuring outcomes to support good practice

3.6.5

The effectiveness of the complaints and appeals system is regularly monitored.

Monitoring complaints and appeals

Monitoring might include:

- the number of complaints and appeals
- the issues complained or appealed about
- the time taken to resolve complaints
- the outcomes of complaints and appeals
- input from tenants/applicants who have used the system.

Using a simple form to document what happens with all complaints/appeals will make this an easier task as will holding a central complaints register. Note: It is important that records maintain the confidentiality of individual tenants.

Including a report on complaints in the annual report can provide tenants with an idea of how responsive the organisation is to its tenants. It is also important for the governing body and senior management to receive a regular complaints report, detailing the results of the monitoring information gathered.

Complaints are a valuable feedback mechanism and receiving a small number of complaints can be an indicator of lack of feedback from tenants. Where an organisation receives no or few complaints, steps should be taken to review how accessible the complaints system is.

Section 4: Working with the community

Standard 4.1

Tenants' access to support

Standard 4.2

Building community capacity

Standard 4.3

Providing housing information, advice and referral



Overview and definition of issues in this section

This section covers much of the work that distinguishes the community housing sector within social housing. Providers come from, and are based within, communities. It is understood that there is a direct link between providing quality services to tenants and applicants and working well with other organisations and services within the community.

'Standard 4.1 Tenants' access to support' covers what organisations do to support individual tenants in managing and maintaining their tenancies. These are tenants who may require additional assistance beyond simply providing them with housing. 'Standard 4.2 Building community capacity' covers the broader role that organisations play in the community as partners in working to improve the wellbeing of communities.

Building community capacity

Community capacity relates to the ability of individuals, organisations and communities to manage their own affairs and to work together to make and sustain positive changes in their lives and communities.

Building capacity can be done at many levels. For community housing providers, it can involve:

- working with tenants, helping them to develop skills and expertise that they can use to assist other tenants and to contribute to their communities
- providing services that meet the needs of tenants and communities, and are responsive to their ideas
- building partnerships with other people and organisations to tackle issues that are affecting people's lives
- participation in forums and campaigns within the community that seek to build support for social housing and increase the availability of housing for people on low incomes.

Capacity building is about solving problems, and then building on what has been learned to take further steps in improving the wellbeing of tenants and their communities.



Standard 4.1

Tenants' access to support

Tenants have access to relevant support to help manage and maintain their tenancy.

The following features and examples are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive but rather to provide services with some guidance in how to achieve this standard.

Organisations should consider any relevant legislation in their jurisdiction that may apply to the service. The features and examples do not take into account the specific requirements of relevant legislation in each jurisdiction, and organisations are advised that the provisions of any legislation will prevail.

Standard 4.1

Tenants' access to support

Tenants have access to relevant support to help manage and maintain their tenancy.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Documentation that can support good practice

4.1.1

The organisation has documented systems to ensure tenants have access to relevant support.

Information on support agencies

Tenants may simply need information about, or referral to, other relevant agencies to gain support. In cases where tenants have a high level of support needs for their tenancy to be successful, a formal agreement with a support agency may be needed. Tenants can also be referred to tenant advocates for assistance in dealing with the organisation.

To meet tenants'/members' needs for information and/or referral, organisations will need to have at least a simple resource file/list of relevant agencies. Larger organisations may need a computerised database that includes individual contacts and a description of the services provided.

Local government and other community organisations are good sources of information for developing comprehensive directories of services.

Co-operatives might want to record details of caseworkers, professional specialists, or next of kin for members (with their consent) so they can be contacted to provide assistance in specific episodes.

Formal support agreements

Before entering into an agreement, it is important for both organisations to discuss their approach to clients and services. Where a formal agreement is developed it will need to be consistent with state and federal privacy legislation and include:

- contact protocols, including after hours responses
- how any dispute will be resolved
- time period for the support
- roles and responsibilities of each agency
- confidentiality
- cost and payment periods (if any)
- services to be provided
- review processes
- how breakdowns in the agreed procedures will be dealt with.

For many small cooperatives, individual members (rather than the cooperative) would negotiate their own support arrangements with providers.

Processes that can support good practice

4.1.2

The organisation has established good working relationships with key government departments and community agencies.

Developing positive relationships

Good working relationships could entail regular contact, joint projects and discussion of issues relating to tenancies. Good working relationships with other agencies can help tenants access the full range of support available to them. They can also ensure that other agencies are clear about the organisation's own services.

In some states, formal mechanisms outline requirements for partnership arrangements with government agencies and organisations will be required to adhere to these.

For tenant-run cooperatives, there may only be a small number of agencies likely to be of most use for the particular membership of the cooperative.

Relevant agencies might include:

- local offices of government departments, particularly housing
- support agencies
- tenant advocates
- other community agencies including recreation, employment and welfare agencies
- cultural organisations or organisations representing the interests of different groups of tenants (for example, a youth agency, a Tongan group, a church)
- real estate agents.

4.1.3

Where a tenant would benefit from support from another agency in order to remain housed and agrees to referral, the organisation assists them to gain this support.

Assisting tenants to gain support

It is important that the organisation gains the client's informed consent prior to making a referral.

For example, organisations might contact other agencies to refer:

- tenants with mental health problems who may need active support from a mental health team
- an elderly or sick tenant who may need house modifications and support services to remain housed.

Standard 4.1

Tenants' access to support

Tenants have access to relevant support to help manage and maintain their tenancy.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

4.1.4

The organisation customises services to maximise the success of tenancies for people with high support needs.

Adapting services for people with high support needs

This could mean:

- greater flexibility in rent payment options
- additional steps in dealing with potential breaches of the tenancy agreement
- use of advocates whenever there are problems.

Measuring outcomes to support good practice

4.1.5

The organisation monitors its links to other agencies.

Monitoring links to other agencies

Monitoring might include:

- ensuring that contact details and information is up-to-date
- seeking feedback on how well communication and/or referral processes are working.

4.1.6

The organisation regularly reviews the arrangements it has set up with support agencies.

Reviewing agreements with support agencies

Good working relationships require ongoing maintenance. It is important to have both formal and informal opportunities to discuss how things are working and to find better ways to support mutual clients.

Tenants also need to be asked if they are satisfied with the arrangements.

This is unlikely to apply to tenant-run cooperatives.



Standard 4.2

Building community capacity

Work undertaken by the organisation contributes to sustainable improvements in the wellbeing of tenants and communities.

The following features and examples are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive but rather to provide services with some guidance in how to achieve this standard.

Organisations should consider any relevant legislation in their jurisdiction that may apply to the service. The features and examples do not take into account the specific requirements of relevant legislation in each jurisdiction, and organisations are advised that the provisions of any legislation will prevail.

Standard 4.2

Building community capacity

Work undertaken by the organisation contributes to sustainable improvements in the wellbeing of tenants and communities.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Documentation that can support good practice

4.2.1

The organisation's written documentation reflects a commitment to building sustainable improvements in the wellbeing of tenants and communities.

Sustainable improvements

Sustainable improvements in the lives of tenants and communities can relate to things such as:

- improved social relationships among and between groups of people
- improved physical environments
- improved life outcomes for individual tenants
- enhanced workforce participation.

This work can also have a flow-on effect on the long-term viability of organisations through more sustainable tenancies.

Documentation

These commitments might be expressed within a range of documents such as the aims of the organisation, mission statement, strategic plan, job descriptions or embedded in policy statements.

Processes that can support good practice

4.2.2

Strategies used to build sustainable improvements in the lives of tenants and communities are developed in response to identified needs and relate to the organisation's target communities.

Target communities

Target communities can be geographic, communities of interest, or defined by culture, age, gender and circumstance.

Identifying needs

Needs can be identified by tenant requests, staff observations, through the organisation's monitoring and planning processes, or through collaborative work with other community agencies.

Strategies to build sustainable improvements in wellbeing

Strategies could include:

- establishing a social group to break down isolation
- linking tenants to training and employment agencies
- supporting work being done by the local council to develop plans for specific groups such as elderly or young people
- specific projects such as establishing a community garden or youth football team
- advocating on behalf of client groups to improve their access to services (for example, changing bus routes to improve access to public transport).

Cooperative housing

The cooperative housing model is based on the same principles involved in building community capacity. It embodies the ripple effect that often results from projects that build people's self-esteem and skills so that they can help themselves and also assist other people in the community.

Strategies used by cooperatives could focus on their own membership, or might involve links with other organisations in the social housing sector or the local community. Some examples might be:

- organising collective purchase of food and groceries
- car pooling to get children to school
- arranging informal child-minding by tenants for tenants
- organising cleaning bees for the membership
- participating in Clean-Up Australia or other local council greening events.

4.2.3

The organisation actively seeks out people and organisations to collaborate with in order to maximise resources and gain broader ownership of initiatives.

Collaborative working relationships

Collaborative working relationships are usually built over time as trust develops. There needs to be mutual benefits, or at least a common vision identified, for people to commit to working together.

Potential project partners are likely to include tenants and tenant groups, and other agencies that have a common interest in building community capacity. These might include agencies in health, education, or the arts, which have access to other resources that housing providers may not be aware of.

Ownership

The organisation does not have to 'own' every initiative. It may play a large or small part in joint initiatives depending on the fit of the initiative with its own work. The organisation needs to realistically consider:

- whether being involved fits with the organisation's own mission, directions, and philosophy
- whether the activity will help address an identified local need
- what resources it will require and how this might impact on other services/activities
- management capacity of the group proposing the initiative
- how the partnership will be negotiated
- potential for success.

Standard 4.2

Building community capacity

Work undertaken by the organisation contributes to sustainable improvements in the wellbeing of tenants and communities.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Interagency forums

There may be a range of forums that it would be useful for the organisation to attend to both gain and share information with other organisations.

For cooperatives, this might be meetings with other cooperatives or in a local interagency forum.

For larger housing associations, the number of relevant forums may be greater and it will be necessary to prioritise to ensure the most useful ones are attended.

Organisations also have a shared responsibility to contribute to the development of policies and debates in the sector. This might be through representation in peak bodies and forums, commenting on submissions and attending workshops.

4.2.4

Initiatives are promoted so that successes can be built upon and the organisation and its community can gain appropriate recognition.

Promoting successes

Social housing often attracts only negative publicity which focuses on tenants' disadvantage. Recognition of positive community outcomes can be very valuable for individual tenants and their communities.

Sharing what has and hasn't worked can help social housing providers, tenant groups and other community agencies to learn from one another to achieve even greater successes.

Media releases, writing strategies as part of annual reports or presenting in forums or conferences can be simple methods for sharing information more widely.

4.2.5

The organisation keeps itself and its tenants informed of developments in the social housing sector.

Keeping informed about social housing

For example, organisations might subscribe to housing newsletters or journals, attend seminars and conferences, and/or utilise the internet and electronic networking.

Relevant information might be provided to tenants through tenant meetings or flyers, particularly where it is clear how tenants could become involved in these issues.

Measuring outcomes to support good practice

4.2.6

The organisation monitors and reviews the scope and level of its contribution and commitment to building community capacity.

Measuring benefits to tenants and the community

Review needs to measure more than just how much activity there has been. It should consider what benefits were gained for the organisation, tenants and the wider community. It needs to ask whether or not the benefits match the amount of time and energy spent in doing the work.

Realistic measurements will need to be set in the planning stage, depending on what the objectives of the work are. For example, some realistic measures of benefits could be:

- impact on vacancy rates (for tenant social groups)
- impact on maintenance call-outs for common areas (for a community garden)
- impact on crime reports, reduction in reports to local councils or community members report they feel safer (implementing a local safety plan or introducing activities for people to help them improve their living skills)
- increased levels of participation in community events (cooperative members linked to wider community activities)
- positive promotion in the local media (work to remove stigma attached to social housing).



Standard 4.3 Providing housing information, advice and referral

Community members accessing the service are given up-to-date information and referral that assists them to find safe housing options.

Note: This standard only applies to organisations that are funded to provide a housing information and referral service (**not** tenancy advice and advocacy services).

The following features and examples are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive but rather to provide services with some guidance in how to achieve this standard.

Organisations should consider any relevant legislation in their jurisdiction that may apply to the service. The features and examples do not take into account the specific requirements of relevant legislation in each jurisdiction, and organisations are advised that the provisions of any legislation will prevail.

Documentation that can support good practice

4.3.1

The organisation has documented systems that provide adequate guidance for the conduct of housing information, advice and referral services.

Documented systems

Documentation could include things such as:

- standard response times
- how to ensure access to accurate and up to date information
- confidentiality
- how they will work with other agencies, both government and non-government
- having written protocols with other agencies (where appropriate).

Processes that can support good practice

4.3.2

Staff have a thorough knowledge of housing and support options within the area served, and how these options can best be accessed.

Staff knowledge of housing and support options

To provide effective services, staff will need to have a knowledge of housing options that goes beyond having a contact list. This would include:

- relationships with key individuals in other organisations (such as government departments for housing, other housing providers, welfare agencies, real estate agents, support organisations)
- a knowledge of their selection/allocation practices
- what information users of the service will need to provide to gain housing
- a detailed understanding of housing application and allocation procedures.

4.3.3

The service has operating systems that ensure users have timely access to assistance.

Systems to ensure timely access to assistance

Operating systems that impact on the timeliness of access could include:

- effective phone systems that queue callers and provide information while waiting, or help after hours
- hours of operation that are linked to peak usage periods and fulfil funding requirements
- staff hours spread to ensure maximum coverage for peak periods
- service users can access the service in a variety of ways including by phone, by appointment and by drop-in
- the service sets and monitors maximum waiting times for access on a regular basis
- use of brokerage funds to provide access to outlying areas.

Standard 4.3

Providing housing information, advice and referral

Community members accessing the service are given up-to-date information and referral that assists them to find safe housing options.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

4.3.4

The organisation has systems in place to support the effective assessment of the housing and support needs of service users.

Effective assessment

Systems to support effective assessment of housing and support needs might include:

- checklists and flow charts for assessment that assist staff to gain an understanding of the service user's situation
- record systems that allow information to be recorded on each user so that future contact can be assessed
- supervision and staff training to assist staff to effectively assess users' needs.

It may be particularly useful to develop and use a common assessment system across similar organisations so that common information is gained that meets the needs of support organisations. Common assessment tools also decrease the need for the service user to repeat their story to each agency.

4.3.5

The assessment process actively involves individual service users in identifying their short term and longer term needs.

Involving service users in the assessment process

Actively involving users in identifying their needs is likely to lead to more sustainable housing solutions. Because of the urgency of the situation, initial assessment might focus on meeting immediate needs. However, good assessment processes will use sensitive interview techniques that help to identify issues that might assist longer-term solutions.

4.3.6

The organisation has effective systems to support referral of service users based on their presenting situation and the assessment of their needs.

Referral systems

Depending on the urgency of the user's situation and the assessment of their needs, referral might be more or less active. Effective systems would assist staff to determine when a service user would need to be offered greater assistance in gaining housing or support, and when it is appropriate for the service user to undertake this work themselves.

Active referral assistance would include checking the other agency will accept the referral, assisting the user to present their case, and assisting with transportation.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

4.3.7

The organisation provides clear information to service users on their housing options and what steps they will need to take to access them.

Information on housing options

Some standard information might be prepared that also allows more individual information to be included. Standard information might include, for example, how to apply for public housing, and how to gain rent assistance from Centrelink.

Copies of the information should be given to the service users in written form.

4.3.8

The organisation has effective systems to guide use of financial assistance to service users.

Systems to guide use of financial assistance

Effective systems would include:

- guidelines for staff on allocation of funds
- not allocating funds to service users directly
- good records to track funds allocated
- guidelines in relation to repeat usage.

Systems should aim to maximise flexibility within a risk management framework. They should assist service users to access funds promptly and not create inflexible barriers for those re-accessing brokerage funds.

Measuring outcomes to support good practice

4.3.9

The organisation monitors allocations of financial assistance to service users.

Monitoring of financial assistance

Financial assistance provided should be linked to the overall budget and monitored on an ongoing basis. Risk management guidelines would alert staff when monthly budget allocations are overspent. This could trigger the introduction of prioritising allocations to ensure access for those most in need.

4.3.10

The organisation monitors the timeliness and usefulness of its referrals.

Monitoring and review

Data for monitoring needs to be kept on indicators such as:

- presenting issues
- the time taken to identify housing or referral options
- outcomes achieved
- unmet need.

Methods for gaining feedback from both clients and other agencies also need to be developed.



Section 5: Governance and organisational management

Standard 5.1

Establishing and maintaining governing bodies

Standard 5.2

Good governance

Standard 5.3

Effective management

Standard 5.4

Business planning

Standard 5.5

Organisational review



Overview and definitional issues in this section

The standards in this section cover the structural and procedural factors that assist an organisation's governing body to be accountable. Accountability has often been narrowly defined as financial accountability, or accountability to funding bodies.

By contrast, this section is written from a view that community organisations need to be accountable to a variety of stakeholders — tenants, staff, board/management committees, relevant community groups, the broader community, funding bodies and relevant incorporation authorities.

Organisations also need to be accountable for the work of the organisation — for financial and housing management, in their role as employers and as community organisations.

Governing bodies

Governing bodies refers to elected or appointed boards or management committees. Members of a governing body represent the ownership of the organisation and establish and oversee an organisation's direction and progression. Another way to think about governing bodies is as trustees for the membership, clients and communities they serve. Whilst governing bodies have ultimate responsibility for an organisation's activities, the day-to-day operations of the organisation are delegated to management and staff.

Governance and management

The governing role is different from the managing role. Governance is normally about the 'big picture' responsibility. It involves setting broad directions for policies and plans, and monitoring these to make sure they are implemented by management and staff as intended.

Management refers to the 'hands-on' role of putting the broad directions into practice on a day-to-day basis within the organisation and reporting on progress to the governing body.

A governing body usually delegates management responsibility to the staff employed by the organisation. In large community housing organisations, where there are senior management positions, this is normally a very clearly defined division of responsibility and is often referred to as 'delegated authority'. In tenant-run cooperatives, and some small

organisations with minimal staffing, members of the governing body sometimes assist in the day-to-day management of the organisation. It is important in these situations for the organisation to be clear about which decisions need to be made by the governing body and which can be made by whoever is handling the matter.

'Standard 5.2 Good governance' refers to work done by the governing body. This work is naturally informed by the work done by the management, which is covered under 'Standard 5.4 Effective management'.

A number of the other standards in this section reflect a shared responsibility — planning, organisational development and review are all functions that will need to involve both the governing body and management of the organisation at some level. Once again, the levels of involvement will vary depending on the structure of the organisation.

Business planning

This standard outlines the importance of an organisation establishing long and short-term plans for its operations and explains how this planning process might be undertaken. The type of plans an organisation will have in place and the detail and extent of their planning processes will depend on their size and type and whether they are a developing and growing organisation.

Many larger organisations will have a strategic plan outlining the organisation's goals and direction for the next few years, as well as a current annual plan that guides specific operational activities and priorities.

Smaller organisations may have an annual operational plan but be yet to embark upon their first strategic plan. This standard covers the processes an organisation can go through to plan their work, assign resources and monitor and report on progress.

Organisational review

This standard covers the processes involved in assessing the work of the organisation as a whole. Earlier sections include specific signposts about recording, monitoring and reviewing the work that the organisation does in all of its core function areas on an ongoing basis. The ongoing monitoring feeds into this 'big picture' assessment to ensure that the intended processes are consistently applied and that they are delivering the desired results.



Standard 5.1 Establishing and maintaining governing bodies

Members of the organisation's governing body have the skills and experience needed to fulfil their obligations and to establish and oversee the strategic direction of the organisation.

The following features and examples are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive but rather to provide services with some guidance in how to achieve this standard.

Organisations should consider any relevant legislation in their jurisdiction that may apply to the service. The features and examples do not take into account the specific requirements of relevant legislation in each jurisdiction, and organisations are advised that the provisions of any legislation will prevail.

Standard 5.1

Establishing and maintaining governing bodies

Members of the organisation's governing body have the skills and experience needed to fulfil their obligations and to establish and oversee the strategic direction of the organisation.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Documentation that can support good practice

5.1.1

The organisation has a documented system for nomination, selection or election of governing body members which is open and transparent.

Processes for selection/election of governing body members

The system must suit the requirements of the relevant legal entity that applies to the organisation (for example, cooperative).

Tenant-run cooperatives may have a range of governance models including tenant members taking all positions of responsibility, or a management committee may undertake the work.

Calls for nominations should be widely advertised. Meetings to select/elect members need to be well-publicised and allow sufficient notice.

Processes that can support good practice

5.1.2

The organisation has processes to ensure that the governing body has members which provide the appropriate range of skills/expertise it needs and share a commitment to the goals of the organisation.

Appropriate range of skills/expertise

The governing body functions best when its members have a range of skills that result in a well-balanced level of expertise. The range of skills required will vary according to the work of the organisation but will generally include:

- project design and development
- financial
- legal
- property/asset management
- organisational management and human resources
- community sector management
- tenant advocacy and support services.

Finding people with the skills/expertise needed

Active recruitment may be required to ensure an appropriate level of expertise in some areas, such as financial, legal, asset management, and project design/development.

Many larger organisations advertise positions in the mainstream press. Where recruitment proves difficult, organisations could consider the use of co-optees or specialists who make themselves available for advice when required, but do not hold a formal role on the governing body.

The governing body will need to ensure they are informed of tenant views when they make decisions that affect them. This can be achieved by the establishment of a tenant advisory group or other mechanisms that provide feedback on tenant views.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Tenant run cooperatives may need to consider whether their rules enable them to attract the skills/expertise needed for good governance. Some cooperatives have found that they need to recruit people who are not members/tenants to gain a wider level of expertise than exists within the membership. As a minimum, the cooperative will need to have strategies for ensuring that members of the governing body can gain the level of skills and expertise needed (see Standard 5.1.4).

5.1.3

New members of the governing body receive an induction to the organisation and their role.

Induction of governing body members

It is important that potential new members are made aware of their role and responsibilities before they commence. These issues can be covered in an induction, along with details about the organisation's activities and key pieces of documentation. An induction could include:

- organisational goals, history, work and structure charts (where staff are employed)
- information about the work of the organisation such as annual reports
- role and responsibilities including levels of delegated authority between the governing body and management
- legal liabilities
- all policies that relate to their governance role (including ethics, conflict of interest, privacy and confidentiality)
- meeting arrangements and decision making processes
- strategic plan and other business and operational plans
- financial assessments, long-term financial plans and budgets
- key business documents such as risk management plans, asset management strategies
- other relevant organisational policies
- legislation relevant to their role and any broader accountabilities.

It is important that governing body members in organisations that employ staff understand the separation between governance and management. They need to be equally clear about how they can add value to the work done by the staff of the organisation.

Cooperative committees need to be clear about how they will gain input from the rest of the membership and communicate decisions to them.

Standard 5.1

Establishing and maintaining governing bodies

Members of the organisation's governing body have the skills and experience needed to fulfil their obligations and to establish and oversee the strategic direction of the organisation.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

5.1.4

The governing body identifies training needs and helps its members to access ongoing education or development opportunities relevant to their role.

Training and development of members

For example, the organisation could conduct a skills audit of governing body members and arrange an annual training update.

It is also useful to consider ways to ensure that skills are passed on to other members. For example, some strategies could be:

- a specified number of members stand down at each election rather than the whole governing body
- mentor/buddy systems used between old and new members
- rotation of positions so different people gain experience
- setting maximum terms for executive positions
- developing a plan for how key executive members will be replaced when they leave (succession planning).

5.1.5

The governing body assists its members to build appropriate working relationships with each other and staff (where they exist).

Strategies to build appropriate working relationships

Some types of activities to develop relationships could be:

- processes to welcome new members including meetings with key staff from different sections
- providing occasional social events
- giving people opportunities to work together on sub-committees and working parties.

Measuring outcomes to support good practice

5.1.6

The governing body regularly reviews its own capacity and performance.

Reviewing the operation of the governing body by appraising performance on a regular basis. This review could include:

- whether the governing body has the appropriate skills/expertise to fulfil its role
- individual members' assessment of their own understanding of their role and contribution to the organisation
- assessment of how well the group has worked together and followed agreed processes
- feedback from members, tenants, managers and other staff (where appropriate) about the effectiveness of the leadership and governance provided.

The review can be done formally or informally and conducted internally or by an independent external party. Methods could include:

- an annual self appraisal to be reviewed and discussed between individual members and the Chair
- a survey of individual members or review with key senior staff
- formal exit interviews with outgoing members.



Standard 5.2

Good governance

The organisation has a clearly defined purpose and goals and is accountable for all aspects of its work.

The following features and examples are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive but rather to provide services with some guidance in how to achieve this standard.

Organisations should consider any relevant legislation in their jurisdiction that may apply to the service. The features and examples do not take into account the specific requirements of relevant legislation in each jurisdiction, and organisations are advised that the provisions of any legislation will prevail.

Standard 5.2

Good governance

The organisation has a clearly defined purpose and goals and is accountable for all aspects of its work.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Documentation that can support good practice

5.2.1

The organisation has a documented system for governance that covers:

- the organisation's purpose and overall goals
- roles and responsibilities of the governing body and a code of conduct for members
- how it conducts business and makes decisions
- how it manages conflicts of interest.

As well as responsibility for establishing and monitoring the organisation's strategic direction, the remit of governing body members is broad and can range from general good governance to consideration of more technical issues. Governance is likely to vary between large and small organisations, with governing body members in smaller organisations — or organisations with no employed staff — playing a more 'hands-on' role than in large organisations. In both cases information specifying the remit of governing body members is important to avoid conflicts of interest and confusion in decision making.

Purpose and goals

The governing body is responsible for strategic issues such as defining the purpose of the organisation and setting its directions.

A statement of purpose defines why the organisation exists, its target population and the broad directions it is working towards.

Goals are statements about the long-term outcomes the organisation is working to achieve.

Governance is separate from management

The governing body has legal responsibility for everything the organisation does. This does not mean they should do everything, rather that they have an effective framework of control and exercise the principles of ethics, transparency and accountability.

In organisations employing staff, responsibility for day-to-day management of the organisation is delegated to staff.

In cooperatives this responsibility is usually shared among tenant members, so will be delegated to specific executive members or committees.

In either case, the difference between governance and management needs to be understood. Decisions that have to be made at a governing body level should be distinguished from decisions that managers are delegated responsibility for. This separation may differ according to the scale of the organisation, with the decision making roles in smaller organisations being less distinct than those in larger organisations with defined structures.

Roles and responsibilities

Documentation should provide a clear delineation between the roles and responsibilities of governing body members and the person(s) delegated responsibility for management of the organisation. This scheme of delegation will identify appropriate roles and responsibilities for the governing body which might include:

- setting strategic directions
- monitoring organisational performance
- overall policy setting
- financial accountability and risk management
- setting controls for procurement activity
- setting parameters for business development and diversification
- legal accountability (for example, for funding agreements, employment and other legal responsibilities)
- awareness of and compliance with relevant legislation and contractual arrangements
- appointment of a CEO and input into executive level appointments.

The key governing instruments include:

- an organisation's constitution, rules and standing orders
- schedule of delegation
- terms of reference of any sub committees and the delegated powers of these groups
- standing financial instructions which outline key financial reporting requirements and the financial responsibilities of governing body members
- any legislative requirements that exist
- operational policies and procedures requiring governing body approval.

Rules and standing orders

These will provide a framework for how the governing body operates, including:

- how often it meets
- how meetings are conducted
- how decisions are made and recorded
- how participation is encouraged
- how conflicts are resolved
- what access members will have to information
- how and when performance is reviewed
- records of meetings
- how confidentiality is maintained
- payment of expenses.

Standard 5.2

Good governance

The organisation has a clearly defined purpose and goals and is accountable for all aspects of its work.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Code of conduct

Governing body members also have an obligation to act in the best interests of the organisation, make a commitment to attend and prepare for meetings to enable them to properly fulfil their role and to conduct themselves in an appropriate manner while undertaking their duties.

A code of conduct outlines the values by which a governing body conducts its business and the manner in which individual members are expected to act. This might include values such as transparency and honesty and meeting rules that allow for collective decision making and an opportunity for all members to be heard. Larger organisations may have more detailed policies that outline how the board can mitigate against fraud and corruption and provide protection to whistleblowers.

Conflict of interest

Documentation needs to specifically address how the organisation will manage any real or perceived conflicts of interest. This includes conflicts of interest for members of the governing body, staff and volunteers.

Conflicts of interest can arise in carrying out any of the work of the organisation including:

- acquiring and developing housing stock
- allocating housing
- providing tenant advice/advocacy services
- employing staff
- appointing contractors.

Small organisations are particularly vulnerable to perceptions of conflict of interest as there are fewer people involved to scrutinise decisions. Clear guidelines for how conflicts of interest are managed can guard against this.

Procedures to guard against conflict of interest

Some procedures to guard against real or perceived conflict of interest could be:

- disclosing in a public register all financial and personal interests and relationships connected in any way to a person's position or the work of the organisation
- having procedures in place to ensure no special treatment or favours are granted to members or their relatives or friends as a result of their positions
- ensuring members do not receive payments or personal gifts as a result of their position
- not participating in decisions where there may be a conflict of interest.

Processes that can support good practice

5.2.2

The governing body meets regularly to ensure effective management of the organisation. Decisions are properly recorded.

Regular meetings of the governing body

Most governing bodies meet monthly or six-weekly in order to ensure that good governance is maintained. In some organisations, a smaller executive group or specific subcommittees will meet more often. In such instances, the full governing body may only need to meet on a bi-monthly basis.

The Constitution will set out the minimum number of meetings that are required of the governing body. Some organisations will need to meet more often than the required minimum to be effective.

The organisation might produce a governance calendar for activities such as a budget review, annual plan or management review to ensure that the core responsibilities are dealt with at regular times throughout the year.

Focusing meetings on strategic issues

Meetings are the main time the governing body has to conduct its business, so it is important to use this time effectively. The key is having a well-developed agenda that focuses on strategic issues rather than day-to-day operational matters.

Highest priority should be given to items of business that require decisions, rather than information sharing which can be done in other ways (for example, circulating documents, tabling a list of correspondence).

5.2.3

The governing body receives useful, timely and accessible information to help inform its decisions.

Getting enough of the right information

Governing bodies are often given either too much irrelevant and inaccessible information or too little information. Having information that is well-organised, to the point, and easy to read can greatly assist decision-making.

Background briefing papers can be used to outline issues requiring a decision. This should summarise research done, the range of possible options, and recommend a preferred option (if there is one).

Giving people information in advance and allowing enough preparation time will enable evidence based decisions to be made promptly and efficiently.

Standard 5.2

Good governance

The organisation has a clearly defined purpose and goals and is accountable for all aspects of its work.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

5.2.4

The governing body regularly receives and considers a financial overview report and the management accounts. The reports are presented in an accessible way.

Financial monitoring

The governing body is responsible for monitoring the financial position of the organisation and ensuring it remains viable. It is important that people who have to work with and be informed on finances receive clear and accurate reports that are simply presented. It is best for the reports to provide an overview and summary of key points, to help the reader interpret the technical data. Including a copy of the management accounts with the overview paper allows members to look in more detail at the figures if they want to. An important aspect of this review would include assessing actual expenditure against budget, highlighting key variances and agreeing any actions required to address the variances.

Some governing bodies may review the management accounts at each meeting although the cycle of reviews is a matter for governing bodies to consider. The frequency may depend on how often they meet and other factors such as the current financial position of the organisation, major projects underway and the financial skills and experience of the management team.

Every member of the governing body needs to be able to understand the financial report. This may require additional training. At least one member of the governing body should have particular expertise in financial management.

5.2.5

The governing body regularly reviews the performance of people delegated key responsibilities for the running of the organisation's business.

Performance review

Governing bodies can only confidently delegate responsibility for management if they have systems in place to monitor performance of those who are given this responsibility.

For organisations which employ a CEO, Manager or Executive Officer, the governing body would normally have processes to ensure that the directions set in strategic planning are being pursued and that performance targets are being achieved by that lead officer.

Organisations without paid staff also need to monitor their delegations to make sure things are being done as planned. This is part of the governing body's assurance that it is accountable to its members, funders and other stakeholders.

Measuring outcomes to support good practice

5.2.6

The governing body reviews the effectiveness of its own processes and structure in providing good governance to the organisation.

Reviewing the operation of the governing body

Monitoring the effectiveness of governing body processes and structures is critical to maintaining good governance. This can be done in addition to reviewing individual member performance. The code of conduct and standing orders will provide useful frameworks for carrying out these reviews. Issues that could be considered annually include:

- how effectively meetings are conducted
- attendance of individual members at meetings and level of shared contributions by all members
- the timeliness of its response to important issues
- the effectiveness of the governance structure (including subcommittees) in maintaining financial control and executing their governance responsibilities
- members' awareness of their responsibilities and liabilities in governing the organisation
- who it is accountable to and the effectiveness of processes to ensure accountability
- the effectiveness of delegations.

There are also external sources of information available about governing body's responsibilities and these may help when reviewing their effectiveness. The Australian Securities and Investment Commission (www.asic.com.au) details the responsibilities of Directors while many state governments provide information about public sector corporate governance on their websites.



Standard 5.3 Effective management

The organisation is managed to ensure accountability and deliver outcomes consistent with its aims and objectives.

The following features and examples are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive but rather to provide services with some guidance in how to achieve this standard.

Organisations should consider any relevant legislation in their jurisdiction that may apply to the service. The features and examples do not take into account the specific requirements of relevant legislation in each jurisdiction, and organisations are advised that the provisions of any legislation will prevail.

Documentation that can support good practice

5.3.1

The management structure of the organisation is clearly defined and documented including:

- levels of decision-making
- reporting arrangements
- levels of delegated authority between governing body members and management.

Management responsibility

It is important that the organisation's governing body clearly assigns responsibility for its tenancy and property management, finances and employment to specific staff or sub-committees with the skills appropriate to fulfil the roles.

Documentation

Depending on the structure of the organisation, responsibility could be documented in a range of different places including:

- position descriptions of CEO, Executive Officers and other key senior staff
- organisational chart
- constitution, rules or standing orders
- governance policies outlining roles and responsibilities of the governing body
- specific policies of the organisation
- schedule of delegation.

Specific delegations may also be included in minutes of governing body meetings.

Processes that can support good practice

5.3.2

Performance indicators are developed, and regular reports on the organisation's performance against the indicators are submitted to the governing body.

Reports on organisational performance

Performance indicators can be developed across the range of an organisation's activities and reports produced which show progress for the current period and historically. This will allow governing bodies to assess patterns and performance trends. Indicators could include:

- vacancy levels
- rent arrears management performance
- lettings and allocations performance
- number of terminations, transfers and exchanges
- repairs and maintenance performance
- number of complaints/appeals and their outcome
- tenant participation levels
- tenant satisfaction with services provided
- development and acquisition performance
- staff turnover
- overheads and management costs per unit
- financial performance indicators such as budget performance, levels of bad debts, income collected, surplus.

Standard 5.3

Effective management

The organisation is managed to ensure accountability and deliver outcomes consistent with its aims and objectives.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

In housing associations with paid staff, responsibility for producing such reports would normally sit with the CEO or Executive Officer or the Chief Financial Officer where one exists.

In organisations where there are no paid staff, this would be the responsibility of whoever has been delegated responsibility by the board/management committee to oversee the day to day work of the organisation.

5.3.3

The organisation reports to its funding bodies and relevant statutory bodies on its activities and financial status as required.

Accountability to funding and statutory bodies

The funding agreement will establish the requirements and time frames required for reports to the funding body. Other obligations such as annual company returns are specified under the relevant legislation that applies to the organisational structure (for example, cooperative, company).

5.3.4

The organisation has strategies for keeping members, tenants and other stakeholders informed about its activities.

Keeping people informed of the organisation's work

Strategies could include:

- newsletters or e-bulletins
- articles in the local press
- wide distribution of the annual report
- Annual General Meeting
- open days, forums, and other public events.

Annual report

The content of annual reports can vary depending on the organisation's own needs and preferences. Legal requirements also vary — these depend on the legal structure of the organisation and may require, as a minimum, presentation of annual audited accounts. The annual report may also cover other areas such as:

- achievements against targets
- innovation and new areas of work
- outcomes of planned activities
- key information on the organisation and its services
- tenant profile
- staff profile
- property portfolio summary
- board/management committee information
- statistics on a variety of issues (for example, complaints and appeals)
- partnerships and work with external stakeholders
- future plans.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Measuring outcomes to support good practice

5.3.5

The organisation reviews its management structures regularly to ensure they are efficient and enable accountability.

Management review

This could be done as part of the annual planning process. It would need to be linked to any performance review processes for the CEO or Executive Officer (where they exist) and the review of the governing body's effectiveness. Periodically, it may be useful to gain input in this process from someone who is external to the organisation. This is particularly true for organisations undergoing rapid growth or major change.



Standard 5.4 Business planning

The organisation has plans in place which outline objectives and specify how resources will be used to achieve them.

The following features and examples are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive but rather to provide services with some guidance in how to achieve this standard.

Organisations should consider any relevant legislation in their jurisdiction that may apply to the service. The features and examples do not take into account the specific requirements of relevant legislation in each jurisdiction, and organisations are advised that the provisions of any legislation will prevail.

Documentation that can support good practice

5.4.1

The organisation has written plans in place which set out its long-term priorities and outline how objectives will be met operationally in the shorter term.

Planning processes

Most organisations undertake an annual planning process and have long and short-term plans in place, although the terms used to describe such plans may differ between organisations. Plans assist organisations to set long term goals, assign resources to their day to day activities to achieve these goals and decide how they wish to develop their organisation and services. Plans also provide a way of measuring progress and assessing achievements.

Planning need not be complicated and the size and detail of plans will vary according to the size, complexity and long term goals of an organisation and the resources available to it.

The language used in developing a plan may vary between organisations, but essentially a strategic plan will outline high-level objectives and could include:

- a statement about long-term goals and where an organisation would like to be in the future (for example, in three to five years)
- a statement about an organisation's overall goal and why it exists (vision and mission statement)
- more specific statements about what is to be achieved (aims and objectives)
- how the aims will be met and by when (strategies and time frames)
- key performance measures
- the resources required to successfully deliver the plan.

An operational plan adds detail to the strategic plan by specifying how, when and by whom the objectives will be met. It will break down the high level objectives into operational activities and specify which area of the organisation will be responsible for its achievement. It will also reference other key organisational strategies (such as a long-term financial plan or asset management strategy) and ensure the assignment of overall resources is achievable and consistent.

Some organisations will take this planning even further by using the operational plan as the basis for individual staff or team planning and set individual objectives and targets linked to the operational plan.

Standard 5.4

Business planning

The organisation has plans in place which outline objectives and specify how resources will be used to achieve them.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

To assist monitoring progress against the plan, performance indicators are an extremely useful tool for doing this. Indicators can be developed from the aims listed in the strategic and operational plans. They can be used as the critical measure to assess performance and report progress against plans to the governing body.

Most organisations will develop their plans in conjunction with their governing body and may have a separate planning day to undertake this work. For smaller organisations, such as tenant-run cooperatives, planning might be carried out at the Annual General Meetings.

Processes that can support good practice

5.4.2

The organisation gathers and uses a range of data to help inform its business planning process and establish work priorities.

How to address unmet housing need is an ongoing issue for providers, so prioritising where an organisation can best use its limited resources is important. Determining priorities will be influenced by factors such as the organisation's mission, future objectives, areas of expertise, geographical areas of operation and local need.

Assessing community needs

Target populations could be based on a geographical area or could relate to a specific population group (for example, single young women with children).

Assessing data about community needs can help an organisation determine where its services might be needed in the future. This can then be taken into account when work priorities are being set and resources assigned.

Assessment could include the use of:

- demographic data
- local government planning data
- Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute
- regional housing plans and surveys of people in housing need
- what needs other housing providers are meeting
- whether there are any areas of housing need that the organisation is particularly qualified to address
- research in areas relevant to its work
- literature on best practice in housing and related fields
- data from national and state peak bodies and regulating bodies
- information produced by state and/or local governments.

Housing management data

Information from an organisation's existing tenant population can help determine if new services are needed or if existing services need expanding or improving. Data could include:

- profile of tenants/applicants
- feedback from tenants/applicants
- vacancy rates and reasons for the vacancies
- condition and number of properties.

5.4.3

The organisation assesses its structure and other organisational issues on an ongoing basis in relation to its strategy, mission and aims.

Organisational structure

An organisation might review its structure on a regular basis to make sure it is appropriate to meet aims and deliver the organisation's strategy.

If an organisation sets itself goals for growth and change, it will need an appropriate structure to help deliver this growth. Assessing the appropriate structure is an important aspect of business planning. As well as monitoring progress against a business plan, an organisation can monitor its structure and assess where resources are being placed and whether this needs to be varied.

Changes to structures may be permanent if they represent an ongoing, key business area (such as creating a property development section) or they may be temporary and only exist for a fixed term until an issue is dealt with (such as implementing systems for a new funding regime).

Other organisational issues

In order to achieve strategic objectives, there may be other internal issues that need considering. These could include:

- office premises — are they in the appropriate location to deliver the services required and will they accommodate the agreed structure and any projected growth?
- governing body structure — does the existing body have the range of skills needed to guide the changes and are other subcommittees or specialists needed?
- management structure — will appropriately skilled staff be in place to deliver the proposed objectives, are new staff needed or is succession planning needed if skilled specialists are likely to leave?
- funding — is the current level of funding appropriate, will new sources of funds be required and are additional funding options available that are not yet being explored?

Standard 5.4

Business planning

The organisation has plans in place which outline objectives and specify how resources will be used to achieve them.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

5.4.4

The organisation identifies and actions the training and development goals of staff and governing body members as part of its planning process.

Identifying training needs

When assessing internal issues, the organisation will be able to determine where skills gaps might exist that would limit their ability to achieve the organisation's objectives. Where such skills gaps are identified, the organisation can address this by developing appropriate training programs for staff or governing body members.

5.4.5

The organisation has strategies for finding the resources it needs in order to achieve its goals.

Strategies to gain the needed resources

For example, an organisation might decide to apply for a range of funding programs, develop partnerships and explore a variety of finance options. Or it might consider ways to maximise existing resources, such as sharing administration with another agency.

5.4.6

The planning process allows for discussion about new ways of doing things and/or the development of new services.

Considering new approaches

This could include exploring other relevant organisations' approaches to service delivery in preparation for the planning process. It could also involve researching best practice from abroad or other jurisdictions within Australia.

5.4.7

The process of developing organisational priorities involves input from staff, tenants, governing body members, and other agencies.

Community participation

There will be varying levels of participation in the planning process. A planning day or forum at which tenants/members, staff and governing body members set priorities is an example of how comprehensive participation could be achieved.

Organisations could survey other agencies/tenants or other stakeholders or invite them to attend part of a planning day.

Measuring outcomes to support good practice

5.4.8

The organisation develops performance indicators to measure progress against their plans and can cite improvements achieved over the reporting and planning period.

Developing performance measures

Once an organisation has developed their plans, they can specify the indicators they will use to measure progress and improvements.

The number of indicators to be reported upon will depend on the organisation's business plans and priorities for the period in question. The list of indicators will usually be agreed with the governing body and a frequency of reporting also agreed — whether it is to be quarterly or less frequently. As well as reporting progress to the governing body, organisations can ensure staff and other stakeholders are also kept informed of progress.

Organisations may also wish to seek quantitative data to assess progress and improvements in areas such as:

- feedback from tenants
- feedback from other agencies
- exploring approaches used by other agencies
- critical reflection among the staff and governing body members.



Standard 5.5

Organisational review

Regular evaluation and review ensures that the organisation is working efficiently and effectively towards achieving its goals.

The following features and examples are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive but rather to provide services with some guidance in how to achieve this standard.

Organisations should consider any relevant legislation in their jurisdiction that may apply to the service. The features and examples do not take into account the specific requirements of relevant legislation in each jurisdiction, and organisations are advised that the provisions of any legislation will prevail.

Documentation that can support good practice

5.5.1

The organisation's documented systems and plans reflect a commitment to organisational review and service improvement.

Documented commitment to organisational review and service improvement

Examples might be:

- all new programs will be evaluated
- monitoring and review processes attached to all key function areas
- the annual plan reflects specific strategies for service improvement
- development of a new business/strategic plan every three years
- annual reviews of business and operational plans
- development of performance indicators and reporting of progress to governing body, staff and other stakeholders
- reviewing achievements against relevant state registration systems
- a policy to undertake external evaluation for accreditation every three years.

Processes that can support good practice

5.5.2

The organisation reviews its progress against its stated plans.

Reviewing progress

Review should be inclusive of the full range of stakeholders. Naturally varying levels of input would be sought from different stakeholders. For example, feedback from tenants would be related to overall performance, or specific activities undertaken during the year.

Governing body review should focus on:

- whether targets were met
- outcomes of specific projects
- whether adequate resources were assigned to each target
- where goals have not been achieved, the reasons for this.

It is advisable for the organisation to have a system for monitoring progress towards achieving the plan on at least a six-monthly basis.

A review could occur at the governing body meeting or the Annual General Meeting by asking "have we achieved this?" and "are our goals and targets still appropriate?"

Once the review has taken place, action plans can be developed to address any areas still requiring attention or where goals have not been achieved.

Standard 5.5

Organisational review

Regular evaluation and review ensures that the organisation is working efficiently and effectively towards achieving its goals.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

5.5.3

Information gained in monitoring and reviewing service delivery is regularly used to improve practices.

Using review processes to improve service delivery

This would include consideration of reports on performance about:

- allocations
- rent management system
- asset management
- repairs and maintenance
- acquisition and development
- tenant participation
- access to support
- complaints and appeal processes
- feedback from other agencies.

While this information is being reported to the governing body on a regular basis and as part of the annual planning process, it also needs to be considered in the day-to-day management of the organisation.

5.5.4

The organisation has a process for reviewing all policies and procedures at least every three years.

Reviewing policies and procedures

All policies should have a sign-off and review date. How often review is done depends on the rate of change in circumstances or practice in that policy area.

Review could be done as a rolling process, with a timetable established for the review of each policy. Another strategy is to have smaller subcommittees review individual policies and feedback issues that may require changes to the policy.

Measuring outcomes to support good practice

5.5.5

Review of progress against the plan demonstrates that targets and timeframes have been achieved or there are genuine reasons why they have not.

Achievement of planned targets

Where targets and/or timeframes have not been achieved it is important to ask why. Was the target realistic to start with? Did unexpected things happen which affected the outcomes?

Section 6: Management systems

Standard 6.1

Financial management and systems

Standard 6.2

Administrative systems

Standard 6.3

Management information systems

Standard 6.4

Office environment

Standard 6.5

Environmental sustainability



Overview and definition of issues in this section

This section deals with the financial, administrative and information systems which need to be in place to support effective service provision, management and accountability. It also covers provision of a safe and appropriate working environment for staff and tenants.

A new 'Standard 6.5 Environmental sustainability' has been included in this third edition. Its inclusion recognises sustainability as a growing concern for individuals and businesses and aims to provide organisations with practical examples of how they can help address this agenda.

Glossary of financial terms

Given the technical nature of this section, a glossary of key terms has been included to provide further details for readers who may not have a financial background.

- **Audit** — Internal audit is the process of an independent review of an organisation's financial systems and controls. External audit is the process of examination of the Statutory Accounts to establish if they are a true and fair representation of the organisation's financial status for a defined period. They may also examine financial systems and make recommendations for change.
- **Balance sheet** — A statement of the organisation's assets (cash, land, buildings, equipment) and liabilities (monies owed to suppliers, borrowings).
- **Budget variance analysis** — Comparison of actual expenditure or income against the budget established for the period.
- **Capital program** — A plan of proposed acquisition, construction and refurbishment of housing assets.
- **Cash flow analyses and forecasts** — A statement of the cash that is expected to be received (for example, rents, loan drawdowns) into the organisation and the cash expended (for example, salaries, interest payments, repayments of loans, equipment purchases, land purchases) during a defined period.
- **Income and expenditure** — Financial statements which show a breakdown of income received and money spent in a defined period. This includes accruals, which are transactions already undertaken, but for which cash may not have yet been received or paid out. For example, a utilities bill for the period that has been received but not yet paid would be included in the accruals statement. The income less the expenditure is shown as either a surplus or deficit.
- **Loan portfolio** — Records of the loans undertaken by the organisation including details of the terms of the loans. It includes an analysis of the processes in place to help manage interest rate movement (for example, fixed rates, variable rate loans).
- **Liquidity** — The ability of the organisation to pay what is due to suppliers, banks and other organisations from cash held or from assets which can be quickly converted into cash.
- **Securitisation plan** — Lending institutions require some form of security to guarantee the cash before it is paid over. In most cases, this takes the form of housing assets. A securitisation plan outlines the activities required to ensure security is put in place in time for the loan to be drawn down from the lender.
- **Statutory accounts** — Financial statements produced annually to satisfy legislative reporting requirements. Their format and content is governed by the Australian Accounting Standards.
- **Treasury Management** — The process of managing funds held within the organisation to ensure their value is protected through appropriate investment strategies as well as the management of cash flows and borrowing. The latter includes management of the loan portfolio to minimise the risk of interest rate fluctuations.



Standard 6.1 Financial management and systems

The organisation's financial systems support effective financial control, management, accountability and ongoing viability.

The following features and examples are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive but rather to provide services with some guidance in how to achieve this standard.

Organisations should consider any relevant legislation in their jurisdiction that may apply to the service. The features and examples do not take into account the specific requirements of relevant legislation in each jurisdiction, and organisations are advised that the provisions of any legislation will prevail.

Standard 6.1

Financial management and systems

The organisation's financial systems support effective financial control, management, accountability and ongoing viability.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Documentation that can support good practice

6.1.1

The organisation has clearly documented systems to guide its financial management and maintain viability and probity.

The level and extent of financial systems in place will vary according to the size of an organisation and the scope of its activities. This section suggests some basic financial systems that are applicable to all organisations. It also provides information on systems that are more appropriate for larger organisations or those undertaking a development program and managing the risks and activities associated with that.

Financial management systems

It is critical that organisations, irrespective of size and complexity, maintain documentation of basic financial processes including:

- Key financial policies (such as fraud prevention, appointment of auditors and treasury management) aimed at governing body and senior management level. This would also include reporting processes and the respective responsibilities of the governing body and the CEO.
- The role, function and scope of authority of financial and audit mechanisms such as a governing body subcommittee.
- Financial delegations of authority outlining levels of financial authority at governing body, CEO and management level.
- Preparation and auditing processes including final governing body sign-off of annual audited financial statements and the accounting policies governing preparation of the statements.
- Financial policies and procedures outlining the core transaction system (debtors, creditors, payments, cash, payroll, banking), processes and procedures.
- The budgeting function outlining the process and timing of preparation and authorisation at governing body level. The processes for the authorisation of budget changes should also be highlighted.
- Financial monitoring and reporting processes including budget variance analysis and reporting at management and governing body level with regard to financial performance.
- The format, timing and frequency of core financial statements comprising income and expenditure statements, cash flow forecasts and balance sheets. Analyses should also be included where appropriate such as arrears, bad debts and rent loss from vacancies.

Financial systems for organisations undertaking development activities

Organisations with significant capital programs will require additional documentation to ensure the enhanced risks and additional processes that arise from this complexity are properly managed.

These could include:

- **Enhanced treasury management policies.** Smaller organisations may be limited to documenting processes for the investment of cash surpluses including minimum balances and methods of investing deposits.

Developing and larger organisations may have to manage a substantial loan portfolio and therefore the policy will extend beyond cash management. Policies and procedures will cover borrowing strategies, loan debt portfolio management, limitations of instruments used and scope, and use of alternative risk management products.
- **Capital program appraisal and monitoring.** Documentation may be required detailing the process for:
 - appraising projects
 - the methods of evaluation
 - agreed targets and hurdle rates
 - capital expenditure monitoring at project and program level
 - management and governing body review processes for review and monitoring of the performance of the program
 - decision-making at management and governing body-level for approval of projects and new business. This may include a dedicated subcommittee for detailed and specialist consideration.
- **Long-term financial planning and monitoring.** More frequent and significant consideration of new business and diversification places increased pressure on financial viability. Documentation may be required outlining the process for:
 - preparation and review of long-term financial projections
 - agreed targets and baselines for financial viability
 - consideration and review of sensitivity analyses
 - integration of developments and new business proposals
 - governing body review and approval.

Standard 6.1

Financial management and systems

The organisation's financial systems support effective financial control, management, accountability and ongoing viability.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Processes that can support good practice

6.1.2

The organisation uses cash flow projections to help guide its work.

Cash flow projections

The preparation and review of cash flow projections are important to ensure that cash liquidity is maintained and financial liabilities are met.

For smaller organisations normal cash needs will usually be met from ongoing operations. The preparation and review of short-term quarterly analyses covering the forthcoming year should be sufficient to ensure working capital needs are funded. Cash flow analyses may be reviewed by management and included in the management accounts presented to the governing body.

Organisations undertaking development activities may require significant funds in addition to those required to pay their day-to-day operational expenses. A development and acquisition program will generate large and often uneven funding requirements. The scale of funds may also require a significant lead time to allow necessary arrangements to be put in place (for example, commercial loan deals). To manage this, an organisation may need to have processes in place such as:

- The preparation and review of medium and long-term cash flows.
- Project specific cash flows to allow a detailed evaluation of the financial impact of specific projects.
- Medium and long-term loan portfolio planning to enable future funding needs to be identified in adequate time. This will also allow the market rates to be compared, loan deals negotiated and arrangements put in place in a timely manner.
- A securitisation plan to enable assets to be secured against loans in a timely manner. This will allow loan funds to be accessed when needed.
- Review of the existing loan portfolio. This can identify any scope for rationalising loans or re-negotiating loans to achieve better terms or better spread of risk.

6.1.3

The organisation's audited financial statement meets appropriate accounting standards.

Audited financial statements

The Australian Accounting Standards provide guidance for how audited statements should be prepared and presented. Financial year (at a minimum) accrual accounting is good practice.

The complexity of the accounts and policies will be governed by the legal status and structure of the organisation and advice should be sought from appointed auditors.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

6.1.4

The organisation encourages rent payment systems that minimise cash handling.

Systems involving the collection and holding of cash provide greater scope for theft and fraud. There is also an increased risk to the safety of staff involved in handling cash. For these reasons, cash handling and cash rent payment systems are generally discouraged.

Where such systems are required, it is important to have controls in place to minimise the risk to staff and the potential for mismanagement of funds. Controls could include:

- ensuring two staff are involved in receiving and recording the cash payment
- splitting key financial duties between separate roles. For example, cash handling and cash recording
- holding regular, independent reviews and reconciliation of cash deposits against accounting and bank records.

Where practical, and convenient for tenants, the introduction of non-cash systems (such as payment by transfer, direct debit or Centrelink deductions) could be considered. In the long-term these systems are more cost effective as well as being easier to control.

6.1.5

The organisation has appropriate financial controls to ensure that funds are not mismanaged or misappropriated.

Processes to prevent financial mismanagement

It is important that organisations have appropriate systems of control in place to prevent funds being mismanaged or misappropriated. Controls that could be considered appropriate include:

- documentation of key financial procedures (as outlined in Standard 6.1.1)
- separation of key financial duties such as cash collection and cash recording
- regular reconciliation of records (for example, bank statements, control accounts)
- requirement for dual authorities (for example, cheque signing, electronic funds transfers)
- management supervision and checks (for example, test checks of transactions)
- use of official documentation (for example, receipt books)
- regular preparation of management reports (for example, monthly accounts) and rigorous review by senior staff
- independent systems review (for example, internal audit)
- formal documented tendering procedures
- a whistle blowing policy.

Standard 6.1

Financial management and systems

The organisation's financial systems support effective financial control, management, accountability and ongoing viability.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

The number and degree of controls an organisation will have in place will depend on its size and type. An organisation undertaking development activities, with an average complement of finance and administrative staff, could aim to have a full suite of controls in place.

This is unlikely to be possible for a small organisation in which case selective and compensating controls could be the objective. For example, the ideal separation of duties may not be achievable in all systems due to the limited number of staff employed. This may be compensated by a more hands-on and involved governing body.

For the governing body of a larger, growing organisation this would usually be considered too detailed an approach as they would generally focus on more strategic issues such as the viability of the capital program.

6.1.6

The organisation has sound financial management practices that support its ongoing financial viability.

Organisations, irrespective of size and complexity, will generally undertake a number of processes to support their ongoing financial viability. These could include:

- setting and monitoring surplus budgets
- adopting and monitoring performance indicators for items that impact on income and expenditure (rent arrears, vacancies)
- assessing viability in light of major commitments such as planned maintenance programs
- monitoring long-term viability through production and review of financial projections
- assessing and monitoring ongoing cash requirement through cash flow forecasting
- ensuring appropriate insurances are in place to cover material risks
- recognising and ensuring material liabilities are accounted for and provisions made are realistic
- having appropriate financial accounting policies which recognise the liabilities facing the organisation in a realistic manner.

The scale and complexity of these analyses should be proportionate to the size of the organisation and scope of its activity.

Organisations with a significant capital development program could be expected to devote more resources into assessing ongoing viability. This is because the risk to viability through development, acquisition and diversification is much more significant. Additional practices for those organisations engaged in development activities could include:

- the production of more detailed and rigorous long-term financial plans to include income and expenditure, cash flow and balance sheet

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

- more frequent and detailed updating and review of long-term financial plans with increased emphasis and attention by the governing body
- more frequent and detailed sensitivity testing of projections by modelling different scenarios of key assumptions
- a comprehensive Asset Management Strategy (see Section 2)
- analysis and review of the loan portfolio
- monitoring and review of the financial performance of the capital program including sensitivity analyses on changes to core assumptions (for example, interest rates, construction costs).

6.1.7

The organisation has considered the appropriateness of its legal structure to ensuring its financial viability and capacity to achieve its goals.

Legal structures to support financial viability

The optimum organisational and legal structure will vary according to size, geographical location and scope of activities. While it is good practice for all organisations to review and consider the appropriateness of their structure from time-to-time, organisations undertaking development activity may wish to conduct a more formal review process periodically and seek the advice of specialists. This is because the growth and diversification process may raise new issues and increase risks.

Due to the diversity of activity and the nature of change in law and regulation, it is not possible to define an ideal and enduring model of best practice. However organisations may consider reviewing their structures in light of the following considerations:

- A legal structure that minimises the risks to viability and ensures there are appropriate legal barriers to protect the core business from higher risk diverse activities. This can be done by legally ring fencing or quarantining high risk activities so they do not impact on the core business if they fail.
- A structure to enable an optimal tax position. For example, more complex organisations may engage in commercial activity which can have tax implications. An appropriate corporate structure may help minimise this liability.
- A structure that balances risks and tax benefits with operational effectiveness and management efficiency. Complex group structures can be onerous to manage and govern, with multiple governing bodies and a complex and devolved management structure.
- Specific activities which involve joint ventures with commercial/profit-making organisations need to be carefully reviewed in terms of risk. Where appropriate, tailored structures which limit legal and financial liability could be considered.

Standard 6.1

Financial management and systems

The organisation's financial systems support effective financial control, management, accountability and ongoing viability.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Measuring outcomes to support good practice

6.1.8

The organisation conducts internal and external reviews of its financial systems on a planned basis.

Review of financial systems

It is important for all organisations, irrespective of size and complexity, to undertake independent reviews of financial and operational systems and controls. This is an important element of internal control systems and a key factor in minimising the risk of fraud, theft or inefficient use of funds.

'Independent' does not necessarily mean using an external consultant or auditor. Smaller organisations could consider using the skills of governing body members with a financial background to help with the reviews or pooling resources with other small organisations to employ a firm or a temporary staff member to conduct the work. Where this occurs, it is important to determine that there are no conflicts of interest of the parties involved in the reviews.

Generally a review of key controls does not need to be a time consuming or onerous exercise for a specialist and it can bring benefits to an organisation, however small. Results may reveal key areas of risk or equally provide assurance to the management committee.

Organisations undertaking property development activities

Developing organisations face far more significant controls risks which could impact upon viability. Some key areas of additional risk include:

- failure to control the capital program and the significant costs involved
- failure to manage capital cash flows adequately resulting in destabilising core activity
- failure of joint ventures creating significant losses and liabilities
- failure to manage the planned maintenance program
- failure to manage the debt portfolio and interest rates.

With the significance of control risks inherent in the environment of a developing organisation, the introduction of an ongoing internal audit function (either in-house or outsourced) may be advisable.



Standard 6.2

Administrative systems

The organisation's administrative systems support effective management and accountability.

The following features and examples are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive but rather to provide services with some guidance in how to achieve this standard.

Organisations should consider any relevant legislation in their jurisdiction that may apply to the service. The features and examples do not take into account the specific requirements of relevant legislation in each jurisdiction, and organisations are advised that the provisions of any legislation will prevail.

Standard 6.2

Administrative systems

The organisation's administrative systems support effective management and accountability.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Documentation that can support good practice

6.2.1

Tenancy files contain appropriate and adequate information to assist good tenancy management.

Tenancy files

Tenancy files should include only information related to housing management. Where organisations do both welfare casework and housing provision, there needs to be a separation of processes and files. Tenancy files should allow easy cross-referencing to property files.

Tenancy files need to include:

- application details
- tenancy agreement
- all correspondence
- all incidents related to the tenancy (including marking of files if there are security concerns)
- a record of the formal referrals made
- rental information (including current financial status and income reviews)
- emergency and ordinary contact information
- support agreements (where they exist)
- bond information.

6.2.2

There is an asset register or file for each property that contains adequate information to ensure quality management of assets.

Property files

Property files should allow easy cross-referencing to tenancy files. Individual property files would normally contain:

- acquisition information (surveys, certificates, lease agreements, upgrade reports)
- property description (for example, materials, location, size)
- property condition (for example, inspection and condition reports)
- repairs and maintenance undertaken and planned
- special conditions applying to the property
- emergency contacts (related to the property, not the tenant)
- insurances and warranties.

6.2.3

There is a documented system for the use of motor vehicles which ensures appropriate access, usage and maintenance.

System for the use of motor vehicles

Documentation needs to cover vehicles owned or leased by the organisation as well as personal vehicles owned by staff and used for work purposes. This is likely to include:

- bookings
- mileage
- servicing
- insurance
- storage
- systems for calculating mileage for reimbursement of staff volunteers.

Guidance on reimbursement of staff will be covered in Australian Tax Office regulations or individual staff contracts. Where a vehicle is part of salary packaging, there needs to be clarity about private usage and insurance coverage.

Organisations should investigate the cost effectiveness of various means of transport for different activities and consider reducing car usage where possible.

6.2.4

The organisation has documented appropriate, up-to-date insurances which cover all assets and potential liabilities.

Insurance coverage required

Organisations should have insurances that cover:

- equipment (for example, electronic) and premises
- housing stock for which the organisation is responsible
- public liability (housing stock, commercial and product public liability)
- workers' compensation
- professional indemnity and directors' fidelity insurance
- volunteers (where appropriate)
- any other insurance relevant to specific activities.

Housing stock insurance

Insurances need to be monitored to prevent under-insurance or inappropriate coverage. Housing stock insurances should cover:

- new-for-old reinstatement
- landscaping
- alterations or additions
- accidental damage
- storm and tempest
- additional cover as appropriate to the location or stock type.

Standard 6.2

Administrative systems

The organisation's administrative systems support effective management and accountability.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Processes that can support good practice

6.2.5

There is an efficient procedure for managing electronic and posted mail to ensure that it is received by the appropriate person in a timely manner.

Effective communication systems

This is particularly significant where there are outlying offices, or part-time staff, where there may be delays in accessing mail. In cooperatives it will be particularly important to develop effective communication systems between those taking responsibility for different aspects of the organisation's work.

6.2.6

The organisation has efficient filing systems that ensure timeliness, appropriate access and secure storage.

Filing systems

An organisation's filing systems should include files for legal issues, accounting, funding agreements and so on. Filing may not only relate to paper files but also electronic data and their storage/filing. It is useful to identify:

- who is responsible for filing
- methods for timely filing of documents
- access to sufficient storage space
- regular culling of files
- how easy access for authorised people can be assured to all the organisation's documents.

6.2.7

The organisation has a system for secure storage of property keys.

Secure storage of keys

Keys need to be easily accessible to staff but also secured to prevent unauthorised people from gaining access to tenants' homes. Keys should not be labelled with the address of the property. Some other system of identification such as numbering cross-referenced to property files can be used. Keys should be signed in and out of a central register by staff.

6.2.8

Equipment is registered to ensure it is appropriately maintained and replaced.

Registering equipment

This should include:

- warranties
- service schedule
- record of maintenance expenditure
- that the equipment has been stamped or engraved as protection against theft.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

6.2.9

The computer system is well set up and maintained including:

- security measures
- virus protection
- internal and preferably off-site back-up of files.

Computer systems

Computerised tenancy management databases need to be adequately maintained, and systematically backed-up, both on-site and off-site. It is very important to have good technical support which is easy to access.

It is a good idea to store backed-up data off site in case of fire or theft.

6.2.10

The telephone system operates efficiently.

Efficient telephone system

Procedures for an efficient telephone system might ensure, among other things, that:

- there are enough telephone lines for incoming and outgoing calls, as well as fax and internet usage
- people can contact the organisation without undue delay
- provision has been made for after hours service (for example, answering machine/service)
- clear and accurate messages are taken and passed on to people
- messages are promptly returned
- staff members have access to telephone facilities when they are away from the normal business telephones (for example, mobile phone, call cards, reimbursement of calls).

Some of the above points may not apply to cooperatives.

Measuring outcomes to support good practice

6.2.11

The organisation regularly reviews its administrative systems and resources to ensure they are effective.

Review of administrative systems

For example, a review could involve:

- analysis of calls unanswered (done by your telecommunication provider)
- adequacy of computer and administrative systems to meet projected demands
- having a member from another organisation to look at the systems used
- having a peak body to evaluate the systems
- discussing administrative systems in a regional forum.



Standard 6.3

Management information systems

Information about the organisation's activities, applicants, tenants and staff (where applicable) is used to support management of the organisation.

The following features and examples are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive but rather to provide services with some guidance in how to achieve this standard.

Organisations should consider any relevant legislation in their jurisdiction that may apply to the service. The features and examples do not take into account the specific requirements of relevant legislation in each jurisdiction, and organisations are advised that the provisions of any legislation will prevail.

Documentation that can support good practice

6.3.1

The organisation has adequate and appropriate records of its service usage, tenant and applicant characteristics, and housing stock to support planning and good housing management.

Performance monitoring information

Information collected and recorded might include:

- number of enquiries for housing and referrals
- applicant characteristics (age, gender, household size and type, ethnicity, income, current housing situation)
- number of applications, waiting list numbers and number of tenants housed
- tenant characteristics (age, gender, household size and type, ethnicity, income)
- monthly rent collected and rent owed
- vacancy periods and costs
- housing stock (quality, history, occupancy)
- client complaints and appeals (type, outcome)
- repairs (type and number, response times).

The information collected about housing stock will vary between organisations and may be influenced by local conditions. For example, property history in colder jurisdictions may include damp and/or mould data which would not be collected in other locations.

The organisation will also need to consider how it collects information about other aspects of its work (contacts with the media, tenant participation levels, committee work, membership, community liaison, advocacy, referrals).

Even small organisations need to collect data to inform their work.

Standard 6.3

Management information systems

Information about the organisation's activities, applicants, tenants and staff (where applicable) is used to support management of the organisation.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Processes that can support good practice

6.3.2

There are efficient methods for collating and analysing the information collected so it can be used in reporting and monitoring.

Data collection and reporting

Data needs to be collected regularly and in the most efficient (and simple) way. Analysis and summaries of the data will be needed in most cases to inform management decisions.

Computerised databases

Before setting up a database for tenancy, property and financial management it is a good idea to look at the systems other similar-sized organisations are using. You can then weigh up the benefits of developing your own against using or adapting somebody else's.

Large organisations may require different levels of access within the data system (for example, administrative assistants and housing managers). This will require different access codes for different people.

Measuring outcomes to support good practice

6.3.3

The organisation reviews the usefulness of the information it collects and uses for planning, service development and evaluation.

Using data for planning and service development

The value of good data is in being able to easily use it to compare trends over time or between different groups or properties. Such a review may point to the need to collect different data or produce a different type of report.



Standard 6.4

Office environment

The organisation's office premises and equipment provide a safe, secure and appropriate work environment for staff and tenants.

The following features and examples are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive but rather to provide services with some guidance in how to achieve this standard.

Organisations should consider any relevant legislation in their jurisdiction that may apply to the service. The features and examples do not take into account the specific requirements of relevant legislation in each jurisdiction, and organisations are advised that the provisions of any legislation will prevail.

Standard 6.4

Office environment

The organisation's office premises and equipment provide a safe, secure and appropriate work environment for staff and tenants.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Processes that can support good practice

6.4.1

Space in which to undertake management has been established for organisations without staff.

Adequate space to undertake management

This signpost only applies to organisations without staff who may or may not have a separate space for these activities. It may carry them out by using the homes of members or the premises of other organisations. Either way, it needs to ensure:

- access to private spaces for interviews
- space for computer and other equipment
- space for filing systems.

6.4.2

Action has been taken to ensure fire safety of the office premises.

Fire safety of office premises

Appropriate fire safety measures include:

- ensuring that the landlord has had a fire safety inspection of premises and equipment done recently by an appropriate authority
- clearly marked fire exits and evacuation procedures
- appropriate fire safety equipment is available (for example, smoke alarms, fire blanket, fire extinguishers)
- staff trained and informed on fire safety, including fire drills.

For cooperatives that have offices (for example, a space identified to carry out the business of the cooperative) in a tenant's premises, fire safety would at a minimum include smoke alarms, and appropriate fire safety equipment (for example, extinguisher, fire blanket).

Facilities that can support good practice

6.4.3

The organisation has adequate and appropriate office equipment and furniture that is well maintained.

Office equipment

Depending on the size of the organisation this could include computers, faxes, telephones and photocopiers. Office furniture and equipment need to be ergonomically sound and suitable for office work. Somebody needs to be responsible for ensuring equipment is regularly serviced and that maintenance is carried out in a timely fashion.

6.4.4

The organisation ensures physical access for staff with disabilities.

Access for staff with a disability

To make premises accessible might require ramps, lifts, automatic doors, wheelchair accessible toilets and an internal layout that allows wheelchair access (accessibility to tenants is covered under Standard 3.3).

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

6.4.5

The organisation ensures that its office premises are safe for tenants and staff and are adequately secured.

Safety and security of premises

Safety issues might include correctly secured floor coverings and electrical cords, and positioning of photocopiers (safety for staff is covered in Standard 7.4).

6.4.6

There is adequate well-maintained office space.

Adequate office space

This signpost applies to the office premises of housing associations, not to tenant-run housing cooperatives or to organisations without staff. Adequate office space includes:

- staff work areas
- space for office equipment (for example, filing cabinets, computers)
- access to private interview spaces for tenants
- access to meeting room/s
- kitchen facilities
- staff amenities areas
- reception and waiting areas.

6.4.7

The areas where tenants meet or wait provide adequate comfort.

Waiting areas

This signpost applies to the office premises of housing associations. It is not applicable to tenant-run housing cooperatives or to organisations without staff.

Adequate comfort might include refreshments, comfortable chairs, magazines, pictures and toys for children.

6.4.8

There is adequate lighting, ventilation and air temperature control in the premises.

Lighting, ventilation and temperature control

This would not apply to organisations without a permanent office.

Measuring outcomes to support good practice

6.4.9

The organisation has reviewed the accessibility, safety, adequacy and comfort of its office environment and developed strategies to address any shortcomings.

Reviewing safety and adequacy of the work environment

The review should include:

- the perspectives of staff
- the perspectives of tenants
- inspection by an appropriate fire authority.



Standard 6.5 Environmental sustainability

The organisation works to reduce the environmental impact of its operations, housing and assets.

The following features and examples are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive but rather to provide services with some guidance in how to achieve this standard.

Organisations should consider any relevant legislation in their jurisdiction that may apply to the service. The features and examples do not take into account the specific requirements of relevant legislation in each jurisdiction, and organisations are advised that the provisions of any legislation will prevail.

Documentation that can support good practice

6.5.1

The organisation has written policies that outline its commitment to improving its environmental sustainability.

The policies and procedures outline the steps an organisation can take to try to improve environmental sustainability across its operations, in the design and management of its homes and of its assets. The extent to which an organisation will pursue these aims will depend on the resources it has available to implement changes and the commitment it wishes to make to this agenda. Some organisations may also have legal or contractual obligations that require them to address environmental sustainability.

An organisation might have one written policy addressing all sustainability aims in one document or it may have a variety of policies that make reference to environmental sustainability throughout them.

For example, a design or procurement procedure could make reference to ways in which environmental sustainability can be achieved in that area of operations. In addition, if this is an agenda that an organisation wishes to actively pursue, they may also include a statement of intent or specific goals in their strategic or operational plans.

Whilst complying with all relevant federal or state legislation, examples of where an organisation could make changes to their activities include:

Office environment practices

Objectives could include:

- reducing energy use (while still ensuring a comfortable, safe and productive working environment)
- reducing paper usage and encouraging responsible actions such as double sided printing, use of scrap paper, minimal printing of documents and emails
- reducing water consumption
- reducing the amount of waste generated at office premises and using biodegradable substances where possible
- sustainable waste disposal
- increasing the use of recyclable materials (taking into account cost and value for money)
- utilising flexible working arrangements (for example, hot desking) to minimise the amount of space occupied
- minimising the use of less sustainable travel options (for example, air travel and car use)
- minimising the use of hazardous substances (for example, solvents, pesticides, batteries).

Standard 6.5

Environmental sustainability

The organisation works to reduce the environmental impact of its operations, housing and assets.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Design, development and management of homes

Objectives could include:

- minimising future energy use by smart design
- assessing value for money on a life-cycle basis
- using building materials that minimise the environmental impact
- procuring materials from responsible sources
- managing waste disposal from the site
- designing external areas that minimise water usage and meet 'water-wise' principles
- using contractors that adhere to sustainable and energy efficient principles in their work.

Processes that can support good practice

6.5.2

The organisation has measures in place to encourage staff awareness and reduction of their energy and resource usage.

Engagement with staff is an important means of helping an organisation achieve energy efficiency targets within its workplace. The organisation can make staff aware of the practical difference they can make in their day to day activities by:

- using signage to remind staff and visitors to minimise water usage (for example, in kitchens, bathrooms, near external taps)
- using signage to remind staff and visitors to minimise electricity use (for example, a reminder to turn the computer off at the end of the day and not leave it on standby)
- setting photocopiers and printers to default to double-sided printing and using recycled paper
- setting individual or organisational incentives for achieving targets
- discussing at staff forums how staff can contribute to the sustainability drive and take ownership of initiatives.

6.5.3

The organisation informs staff and stakeholders of its targets and promotes its achievements.

Involving and engaging staff and stakeholders in sustainability initiatives adopted by the organisation is an important means of promoting the environmental sustainability agenda.

Ways in which staff and stakeholders can be engaged include:

- holding staff awareness campaigns to educate staff about changes they can make in the workplace to improve environmental sustainability
- giving staff practical examples of how they can contribute to improved energy efficiency practices (for example, switching off computers and other office equipment)
- communicating policies and objectives to staff and stakeholders so they are aware of the organisation's long-term goals.

6.5.4

The organisation provides tenants with information to assist them reduce their energy and resource usage.

Tenant awareness and education

Specific objectives could include:

- producing information for tenants on how to reduce energy use and implement environmentally friendly practices in their homes
- making tenants aware of the direct cost to them of energy usage (such as water and electricity) and, therefore, the benefits of reducing it
- providing further sources of information for tenants interested in making their homes more sustainable (for example, being water-wise)
- providing opportunities for further participation within the organisation on sustainability issues
- including a sustainability hints section in tenant publications.

6.5.5

The organisation requires all parties to contracts and procurement agreements to meet environmental sustainability targets.

To extend the sustainability agenda and awareness beyond an organisation's own activities, goals and targets could be passed onto third parties who have dealings with the housing provider.

The extent to which this is done will depend on the level of commitment the organisation wishes to make to the issue. Targets could range from simply a statement of intent by a third party, right through to setting specific objectives such as sourcing materials from sustainable suppliers, reducing energy use in construction or using energy efficient materials.

In order not to alienate third parties, it is important that organisations seeking to embark on this engage with their contractors and others at an early stage. It may be more appropriate to phase changes over a period of two or three years. Organisations should also be aware that implementing such targets may have a financial impact on the contractor which could be passed to the organisation and this needs to be factored into financial appraisals.

Measuring outcomes to support good practice

6.5.6

The organisation monitors progress against sustainability objectives and reports this to the governing body and other stakeholders.

Once targets have been set, the organisation can put in place methods to measure progress and report the results to the governing body on at least an annual basis. Results could also be published externally to stakeholders and tenants.

As well as reporting hard results, the monitoring could also involve seeking feedback from tenants, service users, staff and contractors to assess their views on the new targets and any positive or negative impact this has had on their work or relationship with the organisation. This qualitative feedback could be very useful in the early stages of implementing a sustainability program.



Section 7: Human resource management

Standard 7.1

Recruiting, selecting and appointing staff

Standard 7.2

Staff management and development

Standard 7.3

Employment systems

Standard 7.4

Occupational health and safety

Standard 7.5

Management of volunteers



Overview and definition of issues in this section

This section deals with the management of people within an organisation — how they are recruited, appointed, managed, trained and developed. It also covers the processes used by the organisation to maximise the safety of staff, volunteers and tenants.

Performance review

Performance review refers to a system for examining, measuring and discussing the performance of individual staff within the context of organisational goals over an agreed period of time. These are often known as 'appraisals'.

Risk assessment

Risk assessment is a structured process to identify potential hazards to the safety of staff, tenants or other visitors, and to put in place strategies to address all identified hazards.

Volunteers

Volunteers who are governing body members of organisations or tenants in tenant run cooperatives are not covered by Standard 7.5. For development of governing body members, refer to Section 5. For development of tenant members, refer to Standard 3.3.



Standard 7.1

Recruiting, selecting and appointing staff

Staff are appointed to the organisation with the skills and experience needed for their work and for their ability to contribute to the overall goals of the organisation.

Note: This standard is not applicable to organisations that do not employ staff.

The following features and examples are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive but rather to provide services with some guidance in how to achieve this standard.

Organisations should consider any relevant legislation in their jurisdiction that may apply to the service. The features and examples do not take into account the specific requirements of relevant legislation in each jurisdiction, and organisations are advised that the provisions of any legislation will prevail.

Standard 7.1

Recruiting, selecting and appointing staff

Staff are appointed to the organisation with the skills and experience needed for their work and for their ability to contribute to the overall goals of the organisation.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Documentation that can support good practice

7.1.1

The organisation has a documented system for recruiting, selecting and appointing staff.

Recruitment, selection and appointment processes

Documents should include reference to equal employment principles that ensure people are not discriminated against on the basis of gender, age, race, marital status or sexual preference, religion or disability as outlined in the relevant anti-discrimination legislation.

Documentation covering processes for recruitment, selection and appointment will need to cover:

- job descriptions and selection criteria
- how selection decisions are documented
- appointment documentation (information for new employees, reporting requirements, conditions of employment, how performance will be reviewed)
- how unsuccessful applicants will be informed.

Documents might also cover the employment of tenants. Where organisations do employ tenants the system will need to deal with any real or perceived conflict of interest issues that might arise in relation to maintenance and housing.

Processes that can support good practice

7.1.2

The organisation has clear processes for assessing and reviewing the need for positions prior to recruitment.

Reviewing staff roles and skills

When staff leave or funds are available for a new appointment, it is useful to review the current roles and skills of staff against the likely directions the organisation is going in. The review may lead to changes in job description, employment status, selection criteria, pay and reporting structure and may also determine recruitment strategies. Staff resources need to be targeted in areas of service delivery and areas identified as priorities in business plans.

7.1.3

The organisation selects staff through a transparent and fair process.

Fair staff selection processes

Organisations will need to think through how to make selection of staff transparent and fair. Different processes might be used for appointing casual and permanent staff, but both need to be open to scrutiny.

Issues that could be considered include:

- how the position is advertised and what information is provided to applicants
- when selection panels are required and whether the panel needs to have an independent member
- the selection process itself (what applications need to include, how interviews are conducted and assessed against selection criteria, how references are to be checked, whether criminal checks are required)
- how the appointment decision is to be made (delegations, recommendations of selection panel)
- how feedback to successful and unsuccessful applicants will be provided
- how applicant confidentiality will be maintained and the decision communicated.

Measuring outcomes to support good practice

7.1.4

The organisation is viewed by tenants, other agencies and staff as having fair and transparent recruitment and selection practices.

Monitoring employment practices

Useful approaches to assessing the organisation's reputation in relation to recruitment and selection practices might include:

- discussion of the practices at governing body and/or staff meetings during reviews of personnel procedures
- including questions on reputation in surveys of other agencies and/or tenants
- monitoring and following up complaints in relation to employment practices
- carrying out exit interviews when staff leave.

7.1.5

The organisation has staff employed that can competently do their work and contribute to the overall strength and direction of the organisation.

Assessing the competence of staff

Assessment of staff at interview stage and ongoing performance review are useful means for assessing the competence of staff. Performance review could also include assessment of the staff member's capacity to contribute to the organisation as a whole (refer to Standard 7.2).



Standard 7.2 Staff management and development

Staff are managed within a framework that assists them achieve their objectives, develop their skills and contribute to the overall goals of the organisation.

Note: This standard is not applicable to organisations that do not employ staff.

The following features and examples are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive but rather to provide services with some guidance in how to achieve this standard.

Organisations should consider any relevant legislation in their jurisdiction that may apply to the service. The features and examples do not take into account the specific requirements of relevant legislation in each jurisdiction, and organisations are advised that the provisions of any legislation will prevail.

Documentation that can support good practice

7.2.1

The organisation has a documented system for the management, appraisal and development of staff.

Employment policies

The extent and detail of any employment policies will depend on the size of the organisation, the number of staff they employ and the culture they wish to develop. Documentation might be a single, simple document or could include a range of interrelated documents covering many different aspects of employment at the organisation.

Areas that might be addressed in such policies include:

- establishing individual standards of performance, competencies and behaviours appropriate to the organisation's objectives
- appraising and monitoring performance — how this will be done and how frequently
- establishing how conflicts between staff and their supervisor/ manager will be addressed
- identifying and implementing training and development plans
- addressing poor performance — from informal discussions through to termination of employment
- linking pay or financial incentives to performance
- providing leadership development and succession planning.

Performance management

Organisations of all sizes will need to have some system in place stating how they will deal with poor performance. This will explain the process for dealing with staff not meeting their objectives or displaying unacceptable behaviours in the workplace.

Staff performance is best assessed on a joint basis between the member of staff themselves and their direct line manager/supervisor. Depending on the size and nature of the organisation, a detailed management system may be developed encompassing a formal, written appraisal process. Alternatively, staff management may be approached more informally with ongoing one-to-one discussions as the main basis of supervision.

Whatever the nature of the system, it is important to document key aspects of the employment relationship (such as targets and notes from one-to-one discussions) so employees are clear about what is expected of them and how they are performing. This will ensure both parties are clear about ongoing performance and that adequate records have been kept should conflicts ever arise.

Standard 7.2

Staff management and development

Staff are managed within a framework that assists them achieve their objectives, develop their skills and contribute to the overall goals of the organisation.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

How each instance is dealt with depends on the severity of the matter, but generally, instances are dealt with informally and then progressed through different stages such as verbal and written warnings and then dismissal. There may also be instances warranting immediate dismissal. Given the complexities of employment legislation, where budgets permit, external assistance may be useful to help develop such policies. Alternatively, membership organisations for employers (such as Chambers of Commerce) or government departments for employment can provide assistance to employers on employment-related matters.

Processes that can support good practice

7.2.2

New staff receive an appropriate induction to the organisation, their individual role and the overall community housing sector.

Staff induction

Induction will vary according to the type of position and the scope of the organisation, but should generally cover both a corporate overview together with information about the individual's specific role. This could include:

- information on the organisation's history, size and structure, areas of operation and scope of work, current and long-term goals and decision making structures
- information on the employee's specific role, its position within the organisational structure, relevant job related policies, management arrangements and team goals
- opportunities to meet people within the immediate team, the wider organisation and from other key external agencies
- an introduction to the organisation's human resource framework — relevant employment policies, the organisation's culture, how performance is assessed and how staff management will take place, how training will be dealt with, support available to staff and how conflict is dealt with
- the wider community housing context and how the staff member's role fits into this, key external agencies, the regulatory framework and role of the organisation in their jurisdiction.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

7.2.3

All staff have their training and development needs assessed regularly and, where appropriate, are provided with professional development opportunities.

An important part of an organisation's employment system is assessing staff training and development needs in relation to the organisation's strategic objectives. This might be done annually as part of an appraisal process or more frequently via one to ones. Organisations will have different training priorities depending on the range of staff they employ and the scope of the organisation. Decisions will be influenced by the budget available, the type of training needed and the organisation's requirements for specific skills.

For organisations employing staff without formal qualifications, priority may be given to ensuring staff receive accredited training in their specific role (or are assessed for prior learning that will be formally recognised).

For organisations with staff who already have these qualifications, priority may be on gaining access to further development of particular skills, such as management training.

Others may want staff to further broaden their knowledge of the organisation or wider housing sector.

Both informal and formal training opportunities may need to be explored, with staff understanding that training is not a reward for good performance but a genuine development tool that will take place when it is felt necessary to enhance the staff member's performance in a key area or develop skills required to help meet strategic objectives. Training may not necessarily involve attendance at a conference or external course but could involve mentoring, coaching, acting in a different role, a secondment, subscription to sector periodicals or attendance at housing forums.

Whatever the type of training, it is important to evaluate it and report back to management as to its usefulness and whether skills learned can be shared with others.

7.2.4

All staff have access to regular supervision of their work and management support.

Staff management/supervision

Managers need to be clear about their role and responsibilities to assist staff in maintaining and/or improving performance. Good management enables staff members to be clear about their work and gives recognition for good performance.

Standard 7.2

Staff management and development

Staff are managed within a framework that assists them achieve their objectives, develop their skills and contribute to the overall goals of the organisation.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

The main goals of staff management or supervision meetings (or one-to-one discussions) are to:

- assist staff to maintain clarity about their work, provide guidance on what is expected and to assist in improving performance
- ensure accountability to agreed work plans and address any areas of concern
- provide support to staff in areas of difficulty
- identify staff development needs
- communicate corporate information about organisational issues or changes which may impact on individuals.

One-to-one discussions should be held regularly and arranged in advance with specific, uninterrupted time set aside.

Where poor performance is identified, managers can first work with the staff member to identify ways of addressing the issue. The plan for improvement should be documented and revisited at future one-to-ones to ensure progress is being made. Where improvements do not occur, the manager may choose to commence a process of performance management. This is a formal system which recognises the instance of poor performance and the need to have it formally managed to try and achieve improvement. It should be conducted in line with the organisation's written policies and if necessary, with the assistance of a Human Resource Manager or external human resource support, depending on the organisation's resources.

7.2.5

The organisation has a system for annual performance review of all staff.

Performance review

Effective performance review systems (often known as performance appraisal systems) assist the individual and organisation review their work and set goals for the coming year. Appraisals might result in a change in the job description/role, plans for training or professional development as well as the staff member and reviewer acknowledging areas of good performance. Performance reviews also provide the staff member and the reviewer with an opportunity to set concrete plans to address poor performance or skills gaps where these exist.

The review system needs to be clear to all of those involved and should provide the opportunity for reflection and honest feedback.

A record of the outcomes of each review should be signed by both parties and kept in the staff member's personnel file.

7.2.6

There are processes in place to promote a positive work environment where staff feel their contributions to the organisation are welcomed and valued.

Strategies to promote a positive organisational culture

A positive environment will assist the capacity of staff members to work well and further the goals of the organisation. Processes that can assist building a positive work environment include:

- regular top-down communication and feedback to staff on organisational issues and matters which affect them
- regular appreciation of staff member's individual and collective efforts (for example, acknowledgement/thank you from management and/or governing bodies for work done by the team in a particularly difficult period)
- transparent, fair and prompt processes for addressing conflict between staff
- regular opportunities for staff to meet to discuss work issues in a relaxed and open manner (formal opportunities such as staff meetings and more informal events)
- a management culture that encourages effective communication
- consulting staff about decisions that affect them (for example, restructuring the organisation or changes to employment policies).

Measuring outcomes to support good practice

7.2.7

Staff view the organisation as a positive work environment.

Monitoring staff satisfaction with work environment

Monitoring overall patterns of sick and stress leave can be useful at indicating the strength of the organisation's work environment.

Organisations can do periodic 'culture audits' of staff to see if they regard it as a positive environment to work within. Audits can also help to identify problem areas and what might improve the work environment.

Where only one or two staff members are employed this might be identified through annual performance reviews.

Exit interviews can also assist in identifying the health of the organisational culture.

Standard 7.2

Staff management and development

Staff are managed within a framework that assists them achieve their objectives, develop their skills and contribute to the overall goals of the organisation.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

7.2.8

Access to appropriate supervision, performance review and some relevant training/development each year is monitored and reviewed.

Monitoring supervision, performance review and training

Monitoring of appraisal and performance review systems can take place by ensuring all managers are required to complete annual appraisal forms by a deadline and recording that this is done. Qualitative data about the usefulness and accessibility of review systems can also be gathered by asking staff their views or by a 'culture audit'.

The quality and usefulness of training can also be measured and reported on by asking all staff to complete a training evaluation after participating in any training or development activity. This will help evaluate the types of training being conducted, the quality of the providers, where training resources are being spent, the areas of training and whether these match organisational priorities and will help determine whether training resources are being well-spent.



Standard 7.3

Employment systems

The organisation has fair and effective systems to support its employment role.

Note: This standard is not applicable to organisations that do not employ staff.

The following features and examples are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive but rather to provide services with some guidance in how to achieve this standard.

Organisations should consider any relevant legislation in their jurisdiction that may apply to the service. The features and examples do not take into account the specific requirements of relevant legislation in each jurisdiction, and organisations are advised that the provisions of any legislation will prevail.

Standard 7.3

Employment systems

The organisation has fair and effective systems to support its employment role.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Documentation that can support good practice

7.3.1

The organisation has a documented system covering the employment conditions of staff.

Employment conditions

This might be a single document setting out the basis for employment of an individual staff member or might be a number of interrelated documents outlining a range of employment conditions. Organisations will vary in how these employment conditions are established but will need to ensure they are consistent with relevant state and federal industrial legislation. This might be through the negotiation of individual contracts or through an enterprise agreement.

Policies should outline how staff will be consulted over major changes to work conditions and structures and the process for negotiating changes in pay and conditions.

Documentation of pay and conditions

Documentation of pay and conditions needs to include:

- hours worked and payment (including core hours, time in lieu, flexi time arrangements and overtime)
- leave arrangements (including sick leave, annual leave, long service leave, family leave, study leave, maternity and paternity leave, study leave and leave without pay)
- notice periods, termination procedures and redundancy arrangements
- review procedure for employment conditions and how staff will be consulted
- how family and other care responsibilities will be accommodated.

Dispute and grievance mechanisms

The system also needs to cover dispute and grievance mechanisms including:

- steps to be taken in raising, assessing and resolving grievances
- informing staff members of any complaints/grievances that have been made against them and providing them with an opportunity to present their side of the story (except where this might affect the outcome of criminal investigations)
- use of mediation
- access to independent support or advocacy
- confidentiality
- time frames for responding to agreed action plans
- how processes will be documented to ensure there are no grounds for claims of unfair dismissal.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

7.3.2

Personnel records are kept up-to-date for each staff member employed.

Personnel records

Personnel records should include basic information for any person employed (casual, temporary or permanent) such as:

- application and supporting documents such as copies of qualifications/references
- signed and dated copies of the letter of appointment or contract
- details of employment conditions
- record of training attended
- reports of performance reviews
- records of any grievance procedures.

Records containing personal information and/or details about performance reviews/grievances should be kept confidential in a secure place.

Processes that can support good practice

7.3.3

The organisation has effective systems for managing employment issues.

Effective systems for management of employment issues

Effective systems might include:

- a person or committee delegated with management responsibility for employment matters
- agreed methods of communicating employment related matters to all staff
- confidentiality and secure storage procedures
- procedures for staff to request access to their own files
- a transparent method of recording and monitoring hours worked, leave taken and payments made (including superannuation payments).

Measuring outcomes to support good practice

7.3.4

Staff are satisfied that the employment practices of the organisation reflect the terms of their employment and are in line with industrial legislation.

Monitoring staff satisfaction with employment practices

Employment practices that staff might consider in making this judgement include:

- being paid correctly, on time, with written payslips
- being able to take leave entitlements at convenient times
- working the correct number of hours or being compensated for additional hours worked (such as time-in-lieu, paid overtime)
- duties undertaken accord with their job description and rate of pay.



Standard 7.4

Occupational health and safety

Staff and volunteers work in a safe and healthy environment.

The following features and examples are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive but rather to provide services with some guidance in how to achieve this standard.

Organisations should consider any relevant legislation in their jurisdiction that may apply to the service. The features and examples do not take into account the specific requirements of relevant legislation in each jurisdiction, and organisations are advised that the provisions of any legislation will prevail.

Documentation that can support good practice

7.4.1

The organisation has a documented system covering occupational health and safety which includes an up-to-date risk management plan.

Occupational health and safety system

The organisation's system for occupational health and safety should be consistent with current state legislation and will generally cover:

- differing responsibilities of management and staff for health and safety matters
- identifying potential workplace and job hazards via a regular risk management assessment
- reporting and responding to accidents
- responding to and reporting critical incidents
- training of staff/volunteers in health and safety.

Risk assessment

Risk assessments should be undertaken regularly and a plan to address any hazards should then be put in place and monitored. Larger organisations with multiple sites and staff will need to do risk assessments more frequently than smaller organisations.

Most state Work Cover authorities provide simple risk audits/planning tools to assist organisations to undertake a risk assessment of potential hazards. Common hazards that might be included in the community housing context include:

- work with aggressive tenants
- visiting tenants' homes and travelling between locations
- building sites and inspections of buildings
- handling cash when receiving rent
- stressful situations when dealing with critical incidents (for example, discovering the death of a tenant)
- being exposed to communicable diseases while at work.

Standard 7.4

Occupational health and safety

Staff and volunteers work in a safe and healthy environment.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Processes that can support good practice

7.4.2

Work practices and the design of the work environment supports health and safety of staff, volunteers, and tenants.

Work practices to ensure safety

A range of equipment and measures might be needed to ensure health and safety of staff and tenants. Equipment/procedures needed might include:

- provision of sharps containers, tongs, gloves to prevent needle stick injuries
- fire equipment and exit plans
- closing the office and having a recorded message so that in organisations with single staff work breaks can be taken
- use of alarms or security firms to minimise risk to staff when handling cash
- staff are supported following critical incidents such as a tenant's death.

7.4.3

Staff are trained in addressing work hazards where these are identified.

Staff training in addressing work hazards

Training may be required for a range of hazards identified. Common training often needed is in handling aggression, personal safety when making home visits and working in the community and infection control.

Training in handling aggression might include how to calm threatening situations and prevention measures (for example, being close to exit doors, not visiting tenants alone when physical threats have been identified as an issue).

Measuring outcomes to support good practice

7.4.4

The organisation regularly reviews its success in providing a safe and healthy work environment for staff and volunteers.

Reviewing safety/health outcomes

Ways of assessing the safety/health outcomes could include:

- monitoring the number of workers on compensation and amount of sick leave taken by staff
- examining any claims for workers compensation and setting strategies for preventing future claims
- monitoring the currency of risk audits and their outcomes
- monitoring the number of workplace accidents or injuries reported
- engaging an independent third party to undertake a health and safety assessment at the organisation's premises.



Standard 7.5

Management of volunteers

Volunteers are supported to do their jobs well and safely.

Note: This standard does not apply to organisations that do not have volunteers. Governing body members of organisations acting in their governance role (refer to Section 5) are not covered by this standard. If a person who happens to be a member of the governing body also undertakes a housing management or administrative role in the organisation, they are then covered by this standard. Tenants in tenant run cooperatives are not covered by this standard (refer to Standard 3.3).

The following features and examples are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive but rather to provide services with some guidance in how to achieve this standard.

Organisations should consider any relevant legislation in their jurisdiction that may apply to the service. The features and examples do not take into account the specific requirements of relevant legislation in each jurisdiction, and organisations are advised that the provisions of any legislation will prevail.

Standard 7.5

Management of volunteers

Volunteers are supported to do their jobs well and safely.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Documentation that can support good practice

7.5.1

The organisation has a documented system to guide and record the use of volunteers.

System to guide the use of volunteers

Documentation should cover:

- a rationale for the use of volunteers and the type of work they will do
- how they will be recruited and screened (for example, whether police checks are required)
- code of ethics/guide for how the volunteers will work (including how tenant confidentiality will be maintained)
- orientation and ongoing training
- how supervision will occur
- what expenses will be reimbursed.

Record of the use of volunteers

Records of each volunteer and the amount and type of work they have undertaken should include basic information such as:

- contact details
- police checks (if done)
- signed code of ethics
- training undertaken
- dates of volunteer work and scope of work undertaken.

These records can be useful for volunteers seeking to use their experience to obtain paid employment.

Processes that can support good practice

7.5.2

The organisation has effective approaches to recruit, support, train and supervise volunteers.

Recruitment

A range of approaches to recruitment/selection might be used depending on the work involved. In some cases, volunteers may need skills for specific tasks and students may be a useful source of volunteers. For other volunteer work, the most important requirement may be the capacity to work respectfully with specific categories of tenants. Where volunteers will be working alone for periods in positions related to finance or vulnerable tenants it is important to have police checks and/or other screening approaches in place.

Signposts of good practice

Further explanation and examples

Support and training

Orientation to the work should include some background to the overall organisation and its goals and methods of working. Volunteers will need to be clear on what they can and cannot do and who is responsible for supervising their work.

Ongoing opportunities for further training and development of skills will need to be considered for long-term volunteers.

A code of ethics may be a useful tool for volunteers when beginning work.

7.5.3

Volunteers are provided with opportunities to give and receive feedback on their work.

Valuing the work of volunteers

This should include matching the needs of the volunteer with the needs of the organisation. It is important for organisations to find ways in which to acknowledge and value the work of volunteers. Some possible ways to do this could be:

- providing a written reference
- opportunities for public recognition (for example, citizenship awards, articles in the local paper)
- providing occasional social events
- making a reference in the annual report.

Measuring outcomes to support good practice

7.5.4

The work of volunteers adds value to the organisation.

Assessing benefits of using volunteers

Measures for assessing value adding include:

- perception of benefits of volunteers reported by staff, governing body and tenants
- the organisation continues to attract and retain volunteers.



Part 4: Using the standards in the accreditation process

The standards have been designed so they can be used in an accreditation system. Accreditation provides organisations with an external process for certifying that they are meeting standards. The following process was refined during the 2002 review of the National Community Housing Standards and Accreditation system with only minor changes made during the 2009 review.

Overview of accreditation

The approach to accreditation is best thought of as a three-year cycle. The stages that make up the cycle are:

- self-evaluation
- post-self-evaluation consultation and development of a quality improvement plan
- implementation of the quality improvement plan
- accreditation evaluation.

It is anticipated that most organisations embarking on accreditation for the first time will take from one to two years to work through the cycle. The system allows scope for organisations to progress in different ways and over a shorter or longer period. For this reason, some stages of the

cycle are described as optional. If, for example, an organisation undertakes self-evaluation (stage 1) and considers it has performed strongly against the standards, it has the option of by-passing stages 2 and 3 (post-self-evaluation consultation, and development and implementation of a quality improvement plan), and proceeding directly to stage 4 (accreditation evaluation).

This means that organisations seeking accreditation can choose between two pathways, depending on how well they perceive they are performing and whether they require assistance from the accreditation unit. In summary, the pathways are:

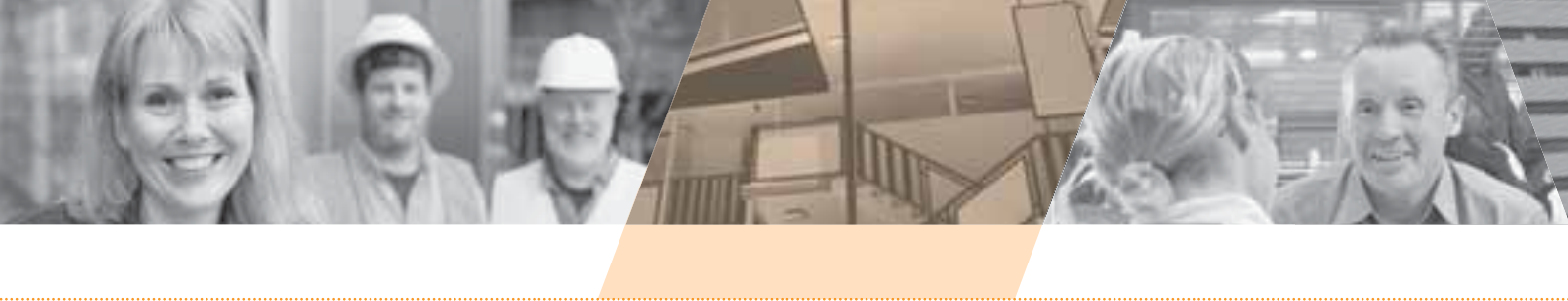
- undertaking all stages
- undertaking a self-evaluation and choosing to move directly to external evaluation for accreditation.

It is expected that most organisations will choose the former pathway, as most benefit will be gained through using the full accreditation process.

The various stages are represented in the following diagram which also indicates probable timing.

Stages in the accreditation process





Self-evaluation

Self-evaluation is the first phase in the accreditation cycle, and must be undertaken by all organisations seeking accreditation.

Organisations review their service against every applicable standard (see the tables at the end of this part of the manual) and signpost, looking for evidence that they have achieved the requirements and seeking views from tenants and other service providers. The self-evaluation provides information upon which a quality improvement plan is to be developed.

It is anticipated that organisations will complete the self-evaluation within four to six months. This should be long enough to avoid major disruption to staff's normal workloads, yet short enough to maintain enthusiasm and momentum. The process may take longer in organisations that rely fully on members to do the work.

Self-evaluation comprises five main activities:

- **A self-study report** is completed in groups (for staff members, or cooperative members and members of the management committee) in which participants review their practice against the standards and signposts. The results of these group meetings are collated into a report that presents in dot point form, evidence of how the organisation meets the standard, using the signposts as prompts.
- **Feedback from tenants** — Through focus groups, questionnaires and/or interviews, organisations find out from tenants what they see as strengths and weaknesses of the service. Tenants' views are summarised and specific changes that may be required are identified.
- **Feedback from other organisations and interests** — The organisation will use questionnaires and/or interviews and focus groups to elicit comments on the service from other organisations, such as key referral

organisations, other service providers or regional department staff where appropriate. (For small tenant cooperatives with little turnover, this work may be unnecessary.)

- **Tenant file and property record audit** — A comprehensive audit will need to be undertaken as part of self-evaluation. Organisations will undertake an audit and the external evaluation team will access random records. This will require tenants' consent, which means that in the long-term consent to such auditing will need to be sought from people when they first become tenants of the organisation.
- **The pre-evaluation questionnaire** is completed to provide the evaluation team with the background information they will need to begin the accreditation evaluation. It covers organisational history, location, structure, staffing, services, client profile and other significant features.

Post self-evaluation consultation and development of a quality improvement plan

Organisations not wishing to move immediately from self-evaluation to external evaluation (the majority of organisations) have an evaluator assist them in identifying key areas for improvement. This is an optional step called the post self-evaluation consultation. It involves an evaluator reading materials developed by the organisation during self-evaluation and providing feedback to the organisation.

The feedback will provide:

- an external view of the gaps and weaknesses which the organisation would need to address before proceeding to an external evaluation
- advice on how practices might be improved
- advice on planning strategies for change.

The evaluator should be either a very experienced peer evaluator or one of the evaluators employed by the accreditation body. The organisation will



then need to identify the priority order in which issues will be addressed, the steps required to implement the change, the time frame for implementation and the person(s) responsible for implementation. This information should be recorded as the organisation's quality improvement plan to guide them in their next stage of preparing for accreditation.

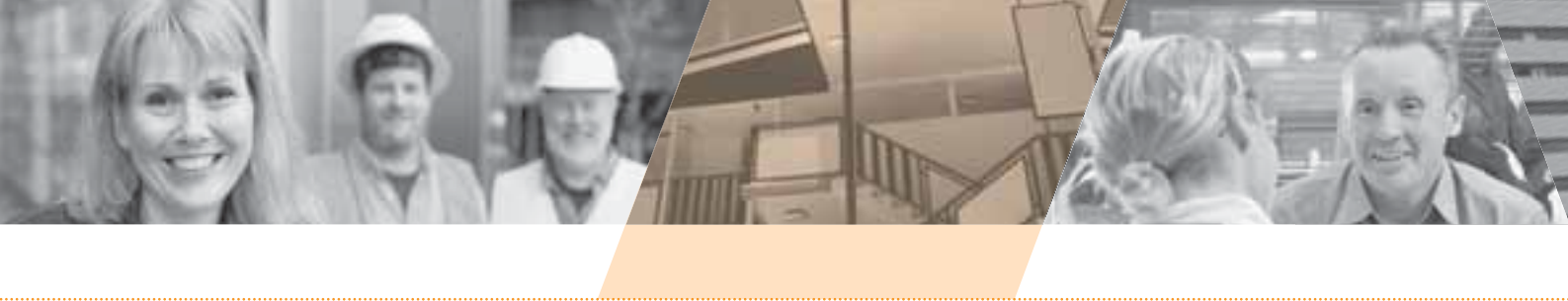
This post self-evaluation consultation will directly assist the organisation to maintain their commitment and motivation to improve services and ultimately seek accreditation.

It is expected that organisations will implement the quality improvement plan between one to two years after it is developed, depending on the number of areas needing to be addressed and the resources of the organisation.

Accreditation evaluation

The accreditation evaluation is an external evaluation conducted by a team of evaluators over two days or longer, depending on the size and complexity of the service.

- **Meetings with staff and governing body members** — A series of interviews are held between the evaluation team and members of the board/committee and staff of the organisation. In organisations with no staff, interviews will be held only with board/committee members.
- **Discussions with tenants and other organisations** — The evaluation team will have some form of direct contact with tenants and other service providers. The approaches used will vary and may include:
 - an informal meeting with a group of tenants
 - phone or face-to-face interviews with a sample of tenants
 - telephone interviews with representatives of other organisation
 - a meeting with regional funding bodies where appropriate.
- **Review of tenant files and property records** — The evaluation team will examine a sample of tenant files, to verify the results of the organisation's file audit. They will also examine property records. Where the organisation has a computerised record system, the team will look at the adequacy of the data management system.
- **Site inspection** — A number of standards relate to the organisation's office facilities and equipment. A site inspection will allow the evaluation team to assess the service against these standards (the quality of accommodation is checked through interviews with tenants and by examining property records and condition reports).
- **Document inspection** — Most of the standards require an organisation to have documentation to guide their practice. This could involve a wide range of documents including policies, procedures and guidelines. The organisation will collect all such documents together for ready reference of the evaluation team.
- **Analysis of results and scoring** — At the end of the evaluation, in a meeting that lasts between half a day and a full day, the evaluation team will discuss the organisation's performance against the standards and agree on recommendations. To assist in their discussion, the team will score the organisation's compliance with each standard using the scale on the following page.
- **Feedback session** — Before leaving the organisation, the evaluation team provides the organisation with a brief overview of their performance. This is intended to be a sort of 'debriefing' and give some immediate feedback while the organisation waits for the more comprehensive draft evaluation report. The evaluators provide a summary of strengths and areas for development identified, without providing extensive detail.



Surpassed	Performance meets expectations in all of the three categories of evidence (documentation, processes, measuring outcomes), and at least one category has exceeded expectations.
Met	Performance meets expectations in all of the three categories of evidence (documentation, processes, measuring outcomes).
Partially met	Where there are no categories of evidence (documentation, processes, measuring outcomes) not met, and any of the three categories is partially met. 'Partially met' does not equal 'met' when scoring for accreditation.
Not met	Where there is a 'not met' rating in any of the three categories of evidence (documentation, processes, measuring outcomes).
Not applicable	The standard cannot be met by the organisation because external legislation, organisation definition or funding policy guidelines prevents them from doing so (see the tables at the end of this part of the manual).

- Evaluation report** — Following the evaluation team meeting, the team coordinator will write a draft report of the findings, including achievements identified in relation to the standards, areas for improvement and recommendations. The whole team will discuss the draft evaluation report, in most cases in a telephone hook-up. An agreed draft will then be given to the organisation for consideration. Discussions will be held between the coordinator of the evaluation team and representatives of the organisation to agree on any changes. The evaluation report is then submitted to the accrediting body to assess and determine accreditation status.

Composition of the external evaluation teams

Evaluation teams for accreditation are made up of:

- At least one peer evaluator who has sector-specific knowledge and experience, and is broadly experienced in the management of an organisation of similar type to the one being evaluated (for example a cooperative if a cooperative is being evaluated). The organisation has the option of accepting or rejecting a nominated peer evaluator — this ensures a proper fit between the evaluator and the organisation.
- A coordinating evaluator who has significant experience in accreditation.



Accreditation decisions

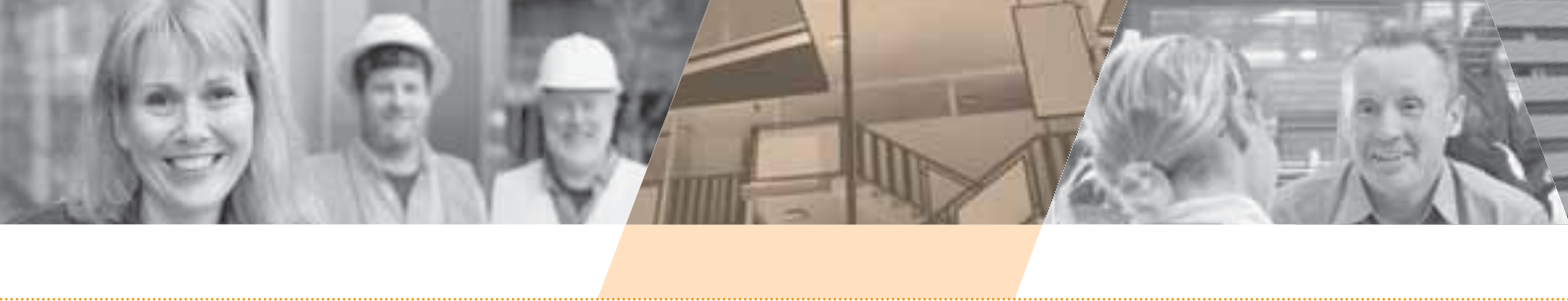
Accreditation decisions are made by the relevant state accrediting body taking into consideration the advice of the evaluation team. They fall into three categories:

1. Full three-year accreditation.
2. One-year accreditation.
3. Not accredited.

Accreditation status	Requirement
1. Full three-year accreditation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • where an organisation has met or surpassed at least 80%¹ of all applicable Standards, and • no section has the majority of applicable standards not met².
2. One-year accreditation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • where an organisation has met or surpassed at least 65% of all applicable standards, and • no more than one section has the majority of applicable standards not met, and • another 15% of applicable standards can be met in one year, and • no sections will have the majority of standards not met within one year.
3. Not accredited	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • where an organisation has not met or surpassed at least 65% of all applicable standards, or • more than one section has the majority of applicable standards not met.

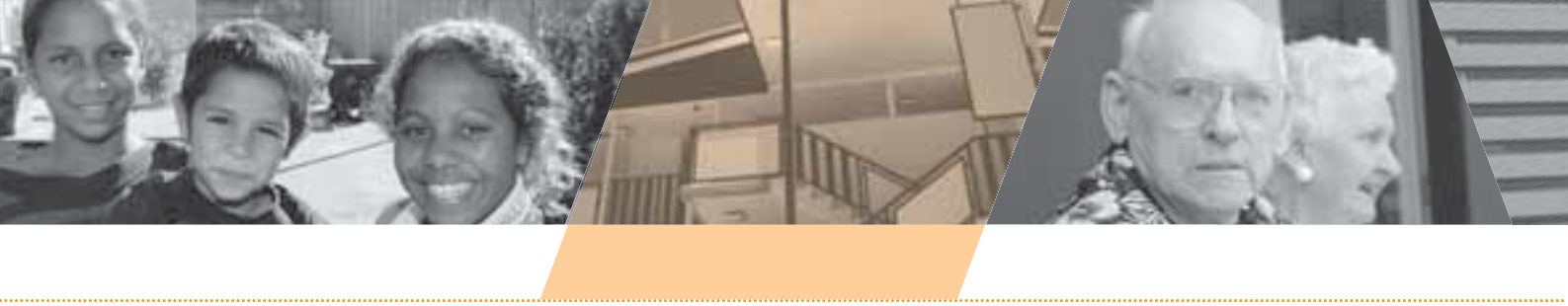
¹ The percentage figures in this table were agreed following national consultation and are current as at 2010. It is important to note that these percentage figures may be reviewed in the future.

² Due to the uneven number of standards (ranging from three to six) across the seven sections, the relevant accreditation bodies will have some discretion in relation to this requirement.



Standards applicable to housing cooperatives

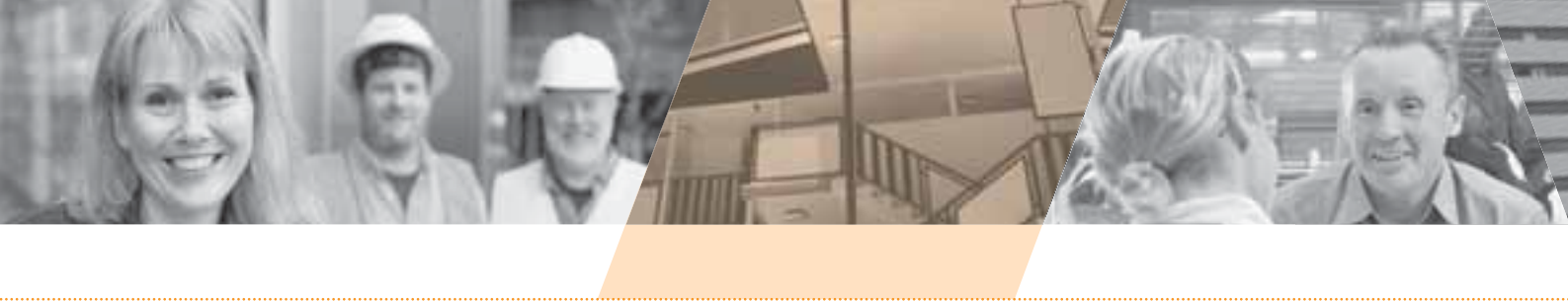
Standards that apply to all	Standards that might apply
Section 1. Tenancy management	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1 Allocation of housing 1.2 Establishing and maintaining tenancies 1.3 Changing needs of tenants 1.4 Ending tenancies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.5 Outsourcing tenancy management
Section 2. Asset Management	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2.1 Asset Management Strategy 2.2 Responsive maintenance and repairs 2.3 Planned maintenance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2.4 Stock acquisition and development 2.5 Partnerships and new business
Section 3. Tenant Rights and Participation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3.1 Tenants' rights 3.2 Tenant participation 3.3 Participation in tenant-run cooperatives 3.4 Access to services of the organisation 3.5 Confidentiality and privacy 3.6 Complaints and appeals 	
Section 4. Working with the Community	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4.1 Tenants' access to support 4.2 Building community capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4.3 Providing housing information, advice and referral
Section 5. Governance and Organisational Management	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5.1 Establishing and maintaining governing bodies 5.2 Good governance 5.3 Effective management 5.4 Business planning 5.5 Organisational review 	
Section 6. Management Systems	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6.1 Financial management and systems 6.2 Administrative systems 6.3 Management information systems 6.4 Office environment (except signposts 6.4.4 and 6.4.5) 6.5 Environmental sustainability 	
Section 7. Human Resource Management	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7.4 Occupational health and safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If staff employed: 7.1 Recruiting, selecting and appointing staff 7.2 Staff management and development 7.3 Employment systems If organisation uses volunteers: 7.5 Volunteers



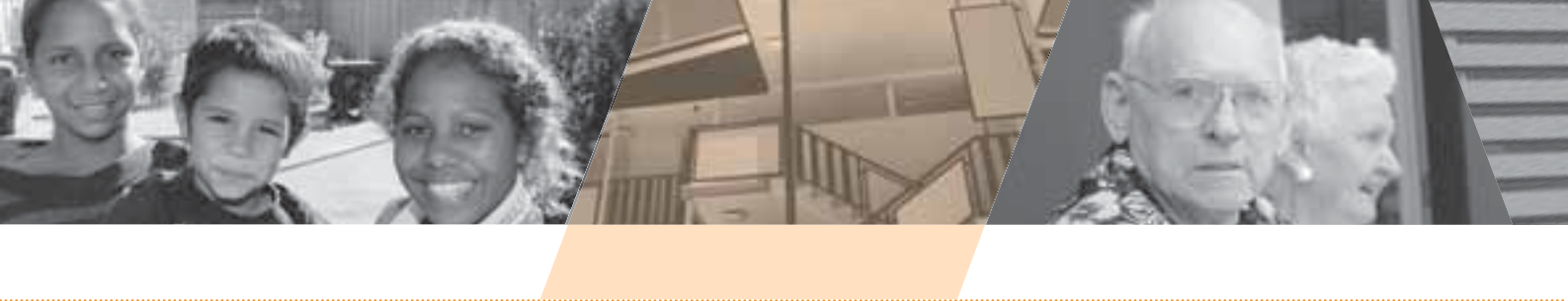
Standards applicable to other housing providers

Not all Standards will apply to all organisations and the table on the next page aims to provide a snapshot of which Standards are generic and those which are limited to certain types of organisations providing certain services.

Some of the Standards also have differing expectations for large and small organisations or organisations that are engaging in development activities. These are highlighted in a separate column so organisations can check the detail of those Standards and assess to what extent they might apply to them.



Standards that generally apply to all	Standards with differing application according to organisation size or range of development activity	Standards that might apply
Section 1. Tenancy management		
Allocation of housing Establishing and maintaining tenancies Changing needs of tenants 1.4 Ending tenancies		1.5 Outsourcing tenancy management
Section 2. Asset management		
2.2 Responsive maintenance and repairs 2.3 Planned maintenance	2.1 Asset Management Strategy 2.4 Stock acquisition and development 2.5 Partnerships and new business	
Section 3. Tenants' rights and participation		
3.1 Tenants' rights 3.2 Tenant participation 3.4 Access to services of the organisation 3.5 Confidentiality and privacy 3.6 Complaints and appeals		
Section 4. Working with the community		
4.1 Tenants' access to support 4.2 Building community capacity		Organisations funded to provide a housing information and referral service: 4.3 Providing housing information, advice and referral
Section 5. Governance and organisational management		
5.3 Effective management 5.5 Organisational review	5.1 Establishing and maintaining governing bodies 5.2 Good governance 5.4 Business planning	
Section 6. Management systems		
6.2 Administrative systems 6.3 Management information systems 6.4 Office environment 6.5 Environmental sustainability	6.1 Financial management and systems	
7. Human resource management		
7.1 Recruiting, selecting and appointing staff 7.3 Employment systems 7.4 Occupational health and safety	7.2 Staff management and development	If organisation uses volunteers: 7.5 Volunteers



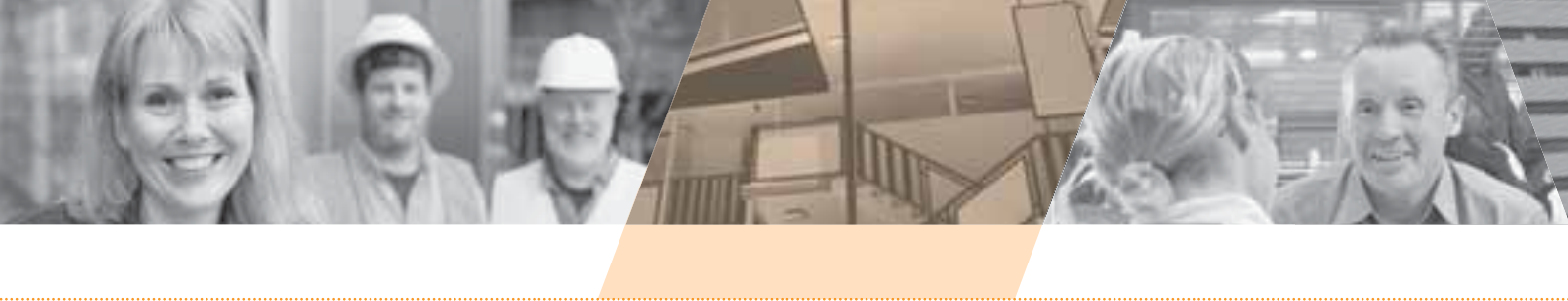
Glossary of terms

Many of the terms used throughout this manual have different meanings in different jurisdictions. Others are technical terms that may not have general understanding across organisations of different sizes. This is especially true for some of the concepts discussed in Section 2:

Asset management and Section 6: Financial management and systems.

The purpose of this glossary is to provide a common definition that applies throughout the manual. Many of these definitions are also found at the beginning of the individual sections.

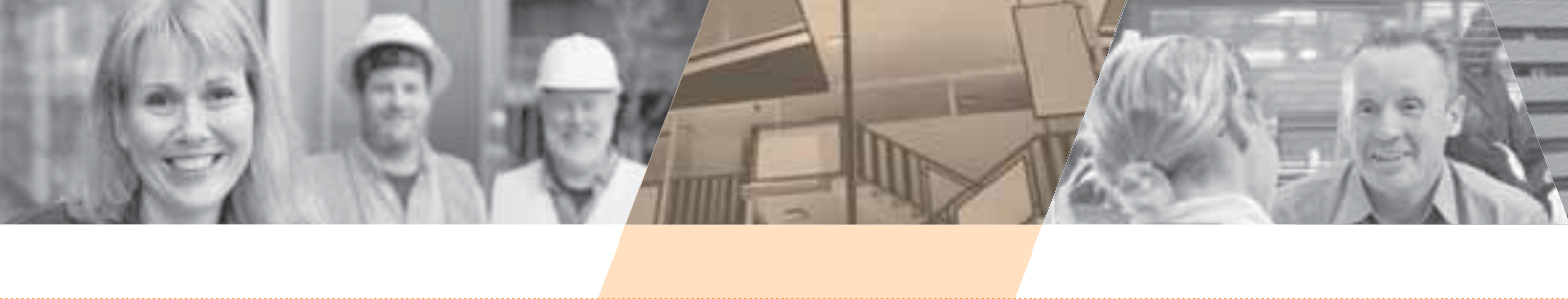
Term	Definition
Accreditation	An independent assessment of an organisation against the National Community Housing Standards to determine a level of compliance.
Acquisition and development	The activities of procuring new housing stock — either through purchasing, leasing or taking on new management arrangements or physically building new homes.
Appeal	A formal representation to an organisation to express dissatisfaction with a decision taken and to request it be reconsidered.
Appeal body	A third party to which an issue may be referred if a resolution can not be found within an organisation.
Asset management	Proactively managing an organisation's overall asset portfolio (housing assets owned and leased) to meet housing need and maximise financial return.
Balance sheet (or Statement of Financial Position)	A statement of an organisation's assets (cash, land, buildings, equipment) and liabilities (monies owed to suppliers, borrowings).
Budget variance analysis	Comparison of actual expenditure or income against the budget established for the period and investigation of material differences.
Business plan	A document that summarises the operational and financial objectives of an organisation, usually over the next one to three years, and contains the detailed plans and budgets showing how the objectives are to be realised.
Capacity building	Undertaking work with tenants and service users aimed at developing their transferable skills base and assist them achieve positive changes in their lives and communities.
Capital program	A plan of proposed acquisition, construction and refurbishment of housing assets.
Cash flow analyses and forecasts	A statement of the cash that is expected to be received into an organisation and the cash expended during a defined period.
Complaint	A formal representation to an organisation to express dissatisfaction with some aspect of service provision over which the organisation has direct control.



Cyclical maintenance/upgrade	Work to a property carried out over a longer term, generally required as buildings deteriorate (such as replacing a kitchen or a roof).
Delegated authority	The transfer of operational responsibility for an organisation's activities from the governing body to management.
Dispute	A wider neighbourhood or community issue between more than one party over which an organisation may not have direct control.
Environmental sustainability	Restructuring work and living practices to minimise the use of resources and energy and the impact on the environment.
External audit	The process of examining statutory accounts to establish if they are a true and fair representation of an organisation's financial status over a defined period. It may also involve examining financial systems and making recommendations for change.
Governance	The process of establishing and overseeing an organisation's direction at a strategic, rather than operational, level.
Governing body	The generic term for the body responsible for governance within an organisation. Often referred to as a management committee within a cooperative or a Board within other housing providers.
Head-lease	A legal arrangement between a property owner (may be a government department or a private landlord) and a housing manager (the community housing provider) to manage a property on their behalf. They are often long-term in nature and involve delegation of responsibility for the property's operation (including maintenance) in return for a rental income and ability to house a tenant in need.
Human resource management	The management and development of an organisation's personnel (staff and volunteers).
Income and expenditure	Financial statements which show a breakdown of income received and money spent in a defined period.
Internal audit	The process of undertaking an independent review of an organisation's financial systems and controls.
Jurisdiction	An individual state or territory within Australia.
Liquidity	The ability of an organisation to pay what is due to third parties from cash held or from assets which can be quickly converted into cash.
Loan portfolio	Records of the loans undertaken by an organisation, including details of the terms of the loans and an analysis of the interest management processes in place to help manage interest rate movements.
Long-term maintenance	Predictable, regular maintenance that is planned (for example, external painting, gutter-proofing or pest control spraying) rather than reactive.
Nomination agreement	An agreement negotiated between a housing owner/manager and a third party, allowing that party to house a tenant of their choice within a property.
Normal/routine repairs	Repairs deemed non-urgent and requiring action within a set time period.



Performance appraisal	The process of reviewing an individual's work performance over a defined period against established goals.
Performance indicators	A set of standards or measurements against which the organisation can measure its performance over time.
Planned maintenance	Repairs carried out as part of a pre-planned schedule of works. It is an overall term that includes long term and cyclical maintenance.
Risk assessment	A process to identify potential workplace hazards and put in place strategies to address them.
Responsive maintenance	Repairs carried out on a property as the need arises, in a reactive manner.
Schedule of delegation	A document that defines and delineates responsibility between governing body level and management level and outlines the activities both are responsible for.
Securitisation plan	Lending institutions require some form of security to guarantee cash before it is paid over. In most cases, this security takes the form of housing assets. A securitisation plan outlines the activities required to ensure security is put in place in time for the loan to be drawn down from the lender.
Security of tenure	Guaranteeing a tenant an ongoing lease and not evicting them unless there is just cause (usually a breach of the tenancy agreement).
Standing financial instructions	A set of high level financial rules that govern the organisation's financial systems and procedures.
Standing orders	Documents that outline the rules and guidelines by which a governing body will conduct its activities.
Statutory accounts	Financial statements produced annually to satisfy legislative reporting requirements as required by the Australian Accounting Standards.
Strategic plan	A plan outlining an organisation's overall direction and aims for the next three to five-year period or longer for larger organisations.
Stock transfer	The transfer of a property from a government department to a community housing manager. Some jurisdictions transfer the title while others only execute a long-term head lease without the title.
Treasury management	The process of managing an organisation's funds to ensure their value is protected via appropriate investment strategies and good management of cash flows and borrowing. The latter includes management of the loan portfolio to minimise the risk of interest rate fluctuations.
Urgent repairs	Relate to repairs required within 24 hours. Examples include gas leaks, dangerous electrical faults and failure of essential services.
Whistleblower	A person who reveals wrongdoing within an organisation to the public or to the authorities.



Feedback form

This form is designed to assist you in providing feedback on the manual. Feel free to add any additional comments or pages.

1. Overall, are the standards easy to read and follow? Please circle. Yes No

2. Are there any words or concepts used in the manual that you think need defining?

3. Are there any aspects of the work of community housing that the manual does not cover?

4. Would you like to have changes included to any standard, signposts or further explanation?

Standard, signpost, further explanation number	Comment
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5. Can you suggest any new standards, signposts or further explanations you would like added?

Standard, signpost, further explanation number	Comment
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