

Principles And Methods for a Tenant Engagement System

Recommendations from the
Seniors Tenant Advisory Committee

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Executive Summary

On December 16, 2021 Toronto City Council directed the Deputy City Manager, Community and Social Services through The Tenants First initiative, to “engage with the Seniors Tenant Advisory Committee to provide advice and recommendations to the Board of Directors of the Toronto Seniors Housing Corporation on the principles and methods for a tenant engagement system.”

This report is the Seniors Tenant Advisory Committee’s (STAC’s) response to that motion. The response draws upon STAC’s discussions at its April 5th, 26th and May 16th meetings, along with relevant discussions from STAC’s February 18th and March 23rd meetings. An independent facilitator supported STAC by posing questions for discussion, compiling and grouping the quotes from the near *verbatim* notes taken at the meetings, and drafting potential principles to reflect common themes. A sub-committee of eight STAC members then worked with the facilitator to finalize the report, which was then circulated to all STAC members for comment.

STAC recommends the following Principles and Methods for a Tenant Engagement System:

A say in the decisions that affect us

Principle 1: We need a tenant voice at every level of the organization: building, region and corporation level

Principle 2: When it comes to programs or committees, “tenant-led” means tenants set the agenda

Principle 3: Access to information is key

Method 1: Build from the ground up to address Corporation-wide issues. Develop paths for bringing shared concerns up and down the ladder

Method 2: Cultivate a sustained engagement and participatory culture

Method 3: Develop a system of oversight

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Method 4: Prepare to adapt structures as needs arise

At the Building Level:

Method 5: Clarify the role of Tenant Rep

Method 6: Enable each building to identify tenant representation in the way that makes sense to them

Method 7: Provide each building with a predictable, easy-to-access fund to support tenant-led activities

Method 8: Create a channel for tenant voices in the work of partner agencies

At the Regional Level

Method 9: Regenerate Regional Councils

At the Corporation-wide Level

Method 10: Identify a clear, ongoing mandate for STAC

Method 11: Consider other ways to engage tenants in city-wide issues

Tenant/Staff relations that build on each other's strengths

Principle 4: Recognize and strength the collaborative relationship between staff and tenants

Principle 5: Cultivate an ethos of deep respect for tenants

Method 12: Identify the specific roles of staff who support tenant engagement

Method 13: Acknowledge and repair mistrust

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Method 14: Return Tenant Reps' calls. Keep tenants informed on changes or building issues

Method 15: Ensure continuity when staff policies changes

Method 16: Create a clear path for requesting building improvements

A lively, inclusive community

Principle 6: All tenants have an equal right to participate at multiple levels

Principle 7: Acknowledge and support the MANY ways tenants create a lively community

Method 17: Hold space for spontaneous tenant use

Method 18: Actively promote inclusion

Method 19: Use multiple ways to bridge language and cultural divides

Method 20: Use multiple ways to seek out tenants' ideas

Effective communication

Method 21: Use the corporation's launch to start fresh

Method 22: Create a glossary of frequently used terms

Method 23: Use multiple ways to communicate

Method 24: Prioritize in-person communication

Method 25: Create clear friendly written communications

Method 26: Create an agreed-to approach in each building to the use of bulletin boards

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Method 27: Make it fun

Supporting Tenant Leaders

Principle 8: Seek and draw out the qualities of a good tenant leader

Method 28: Create a path for emerging leaders

Method 29: Offer ongoing support to tenant leaders

The Context

The Assignment

“We have a great opportunity to make change. We need to take it!”

On December 16, 2021 Toronto City Council directed the Deputy City Manager, Community and Social Services through the Tenants First initiative, to “engage with the Seniors Tenant Advisory Committee to provide advice and recommendations to the Board of Directors of the Toronto Seniors Housing Corporation on the principles and methods for a tenant engagement system.”

This report is the Seniors Tenant Advisory Committee’s (STAC’s) response to that motion.

The Process

At their April 5th, 26th and May 16th meetings, STAC members drew on their own experience to answer such questions as “What IS tenant engagement, and how is it best structured at the building, regional and city-wide level?” “What have been the essential ingredients to the success of tenant councils, committees, and tenant-led activities?” “What are the qualities of an effective tenant leader, and how can leaders be best supported?”

This report is a compilation of their answers. During the sessions, Tenants First staff recorded the answers as close to word-for-word as possible. The aim was to ensure the report reflected tenants’ own words, rather than have others interpret or re-frame them, and to make principles come alive by giving real-life examples.

An independent facilitator supported STAC by posing questions for discussion and compiling all recorded quotes related to tenant engagement from the April and May meetings, relevant quotes from STAC’s February 18th and March 23rd meetings, and emails and phone conversations with STAC members. She then grouped the quotes to discern where there was common ground and drafted potential principles to reflect common themes.

A sub-committee of eight STAC members then worked with the facilitator on three occasions to discuss the report’s format and the principles and methods

The Assignment

described in it. The draft report was then circulated to all STAC members and their emailed comments were incorporated into the final draft.

A wide array of perspectives

The quotes presented in this report illustrate the wide range of views held by STAC members. Some quotes might be endorsed by most STAC members. Others may represent the views of only one individual.

However, the recommended principles and methods (listed in bold type) are all widely supported by STAC sub-committee members.

STAC recognizes that this report is only one part of a much larger discussion that must draw in an increasingly wider circle of tenants. But it's a start.

A word about terminology

In this report, “Principles” refer to the over-arching philosophy that should inform Toronto Seniors Housing Corporation’s approach to tenant engagement. “Methods” are the strategies for turning the principles into action.

The Assignment

The STAC sub-committee who oversaw the development of this report:

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What Do We Mean By Tenant Engagement?

Engagement. Community. Participation. Quality of life.

The term “tenant engagement” is the language used in the City Council motion. It is the term Toronto Community Housing has used for many years, and is the term used throughout this report.

However, there are other terms that reflect different facets of the tenant experience. Here are some of the comments from STAC members.

“The word ‘tenant engagement’ has been used by TCHC for years. It has been viewed as recreational activities, going to meetings, having events come into the building and seminars. What was created by TCHC in the Refresh was not engagement but a governance model.”

“We need to differentiate between communication and engagement. Putting up posters is not engagement.”

“Some people cannot determine or define engagement, but everyone knows about community. We should redefine tenant engagement and call it community engagement. It will make sense to tenants and will allow them to participate which is what we want them to do, and will speak more to tenants because they belong to the community.”

“How about tenant participation? That’s what it’s all about.”

“I think we should think of it as a tenant network.”

“Community building and engagement work to bring the talents, resources and skills of people in community together, increasing their collective capacity.”

“[I’m] troubled by the words ‘tenant engagement.’ I reached out to individuals in housing of different types and they had a category called ‘community development.’ That is what we are aiming for. More of a development process rather than an engagement process.”

“Quality of life needs to be put into the engagement system. The phrase ‘quality of life’ has to be included.”

“Both [tenant engagement and community development] are interconnected – one won’t thrive without the other. We need to have the goal of the wellness and wellbeing of the community as part of community development. However in order to have that community development you need to have some structure for the community to have dialogue, have discussions, make decisions and work towards accomplishing objectives. Both are equally important.”

“The tenant engagement will depend on the specific goals of the landlord who adopts it. However, the function of tenant engagement is to drive open landlord-tenant communications and to enable landlords to better address specific tenant wants and needs.”

The Catalyst For Involvement

During its discussions, STAC members reminded us their engagement was a voluntary activity. They participate because they want to, and the success of any tenant engagement strategy depends on recognizing the many reasons tenants decide to step up and get involved.

Here's what drew in some of STAC's members:

“[When I moved in] I said, ‘OK. I’m a senior. I’m turning 60. I’m moving in and I need to find out what community housing is about.’ I wanted to be informed about what is happening in the building and how community housing worked.”

“When I saw the injustice and all the pain, the fear, the confusion, I asked myself, ‘Do I want to be treated like this when I’m that age? No!’ I’ve been an activist all my life. This is a good cause.”

“This is community housing and I wanted to be part of a community. That’s why I got involved.”

“I saw that tenants are not aware of a lot of programs and benefits, so I slowly started setting up free income tax clinics, teaching basic computer skills for seniors, helping them with pensions and setting up wheelchair online bookings. I’m still doing those things.”

“It comes from a sense of wanting justice. . . I have some skills that can benefit my community. I’m young. . . When I’m 20 years older, I want the services to be available. It’s a rare opportunity to be at the base of something that, hopefully, I will be able to rely on later.”

“I’ve watched people get into wheelchairs, have strokes, have heart attacks, so when I heard there would be an infrastructure of support, I was very curious. I wanted to learn about it. It’s become a challenge for me, but it’s also become an opportunity for growth . . . for me, the actual involvement is a better draw than the original impulse.”

“I have a background in advocacy and social justice, personally and professionally, so this was a natural move for me. When I moved in, all I saw was utter chaos and no-one knew what was going on in any area. And because I have these skills, it’s my responsibility to try to make sense of some of this and get involved.”

Fostering a successful tenant engagement system

A Say in the Decisions that Affect Us

“The focus should always be a human focus as opposed to an institutional focus.”

Principle 1:

We need a tenant voice at every level of the organization: building, region and corporation level

“There has been a lot of re-organization with tenant engagement at the managerial level, but it hasn’t reached tenants.”

“The most important component is collaboration between City elements, seniors housing, agencies and tenants . . . I have put together ideas about how STAC can work with tenant-led councils, and how things can work down into the buildings, where there can be a communication conduit back and forth, sharing information.”

“You have to know how the structure works before you can try to make changes.”

“I have in mind a structure that includes the Senior Tenants Community as another arm along with TCHC and the Agencies around the central hub of TSHC. A self-directed community focus would start at the individual buildings and move to a regional level of the 83 buildings, arranged in quadrants, with 8 councils (2 in each quadrant) chosen by senior tenants.”

Principle 2:

When it comes to programs or committees, “tenant-led” means tenants set the agenda

“I believe that to create empowerment, ownership, participation and independence, the building of community should be done by a community’s members. Active seniors engaged in their own governance will not be apathetic seniors. Our tenants will be a resource to themselves, not to external entities.”

“Tenants should set mandate, guiding principles and the agenda of tenant councils or groups. Staff’s role is to inform, support and help put decisions into action.”

“Tenant Reps/group leaders should chair meetings.”

A Say in the Decisions that Affect Us

“Tenants need to identify a common purpose for the group (e.g., putting up a fence, improving communications with staff). Tenant groups have to be designed around tenants’ needs.”

“Tenants need to be involved in a whole whack of things, like procurement for appliances to advise TCHC if it is a good thing or not for tenants.”

“Tenant Councils are very important for seniors. Those of us who don’t have digital literacy prefer face-to-face communication. Tenant Councils were important for that. But there’s confusion around what the Tenant Councils were, what they were supposed to do, and whether staff was interfering or influencing them.”

Principle 3: Access to information is key

“In order to be involved, tenants need to be able to be engaged and contribute. We need relevant information so that activities, decisions and issues can be shared in a timely way. Transparency and trust are needed.”

“Information needs to be accessible to everyone. In my building that means translation into at least four languages.”

Method 1: Build from the ground up to address Corporation-wide issues. Develop paths for bringing shared concerns up and down the ladder

“Structures at the top tend to flatten tenants’ views. The best way is to get representation in the building, and then up to [Regional] Councils – where common areas can go up further. You need the potential [for information] to flow down and up to make sure good ideas don’t get lost.”

“We need a structure or ladder to be the chain of communication. . . . Each rung of the ladder is needed. The detail needs to be put in place at each rung of the ladder.”

“We want an elevator, not a ladder!”

A Say in the Decisions that Affect Us

“For a successful Tenant Engagement System [the key] is interconnection. We need to work on a map. It needs to be a structure of layers (no hierarchy). Some of the structures created by Toronto Community Housing Corporation work. The piece that is missing is the interconnection (tenant representatives in each building, Regional Councils, the Seniors Tenant Advisory Committee).”

“I’m one of two members of the committee that can take issues to the City and Corporation. The community gets to know from me and other STAC members what’s going on that will impact their lives.”

Method 2:

Cultivate a sustained engagement and participatory culture

“A culture of participation involves programs and activities that involve housing and agencies to support ongoing tenant engagement. Quality engagement and democratic participation with different [support] organizations so that it becomes standard practice — so that there is a sense of ownership. In process the aim is to learn what we are not seeing: new skills and more inclusive democratic methods so that decisions can be made, and problems can be solved, with good information that will allow for good solutions.”

“A culture of participation requires consistency. A yearly calendar with gatherings scheduled once a month gives people something to look forward to.”

“We have to become a respected partner. Our communities turn over quickly. How do we get continuity to build this strength? How do we build in the idea where it is worthwhile for the community to come together and have a voice? . . . A formal system helps build that continuity.”

Method 3:

Develop a system of oversight

“We have seen where staff have failed, tenant leaders have failed, and no one has caught it. A system of oversight, where there is an accountability framework for staff and tenant leaders, is needed to catch things before they go off the rails.”

“There seems to be no across the board, mutually accountable tribunal-type body to resolve issues when they arise, between tenants and staff.”

“The accountability has to be there, especially if money is involved.”

A Say in the Decisions that Affect Us

Method 4:

Prepare to adapt structures as needs arise

“We’re looking too far into the future. We need to stay flexible, and review and analyze what’s working on a regular basis.”

“A good group has a common goal. It may be a long-term one. . . Until we get something started, we won’t know. Be welcoming but branch out as we go ahead.”

“The word “system” is a red herring because, while there have been great responses to that word, the *ad hoc* nature of how individuals work as social beings is such that we have to be careful about implementing those words. We need to look at what makes it work with tenants at a social level.”

Engagement at the Building Level

Method 5

Clarify the role of the Tenant Rep

“Lots of existing or new Tenant Reps don’t know what they’re supposed to be doing. We need to come up with guidelines for them.”

“Is Tenant Rep an admin management role, or is it the tenant building volunteer? Could STAC member be responsible for a certain number of buildings? And what is the role of the volunteer Tenant Rep?”

“The tenants need to have an interconnection map with all the staff involved. We need some clarity around roles and responsibilities. Right now, the Tenant Representatives don’t understand their role. There needs to be easy-to-understand Tenant Representative Guidelines, laying out all (staff and tenant) roles. To design those roles should be a team effort. Each layer should be involved.”

A Say in the Decisions that Affect Us

Method 6

Enable each building to identify tenant representation in the way that makes sense to them

STAC members noted there was no “one-size-fits-all” approach to engagement at the building level. TSHC should offer each building or community the choice of representation through elected Tenant Reps, tenant committees or councils, tenant leaders or other approaches.

“There has been confusion around the election and selection processes of the tenant engagement system resulting in some buildings not having representation or those who had originally expressed interest no longer participating.”

“We no longer have Tenant Reps; we had an election to start a senior committee . . . The committee is a good way to make positive changes; we are having our first meeting with the tenant community next week.”

“Tenant Reps work in some buildings, but there should be accommodation for different methods of engagement.”

Method 7

Provide each building with a predictable, easy-to-access fund to support tenant-led activities

The lack of money for tenant-led activities was among the most frequently raised obstacle to successful engagement at the building level. Many STAC members recommended an annual allocation for each building for tenant-led activities.

A successful fund would:

- provide a predictable annual allocation for each building or community, so that tenant leaders or committees could collectively plan events or activities throughout the year
- be administered at the building level with systems in place to give both tenants and TSHC confidence funds were properly administered.

A Say in the Decisions that Affect Us

- “ We need financial support to run programs that tenants enjoy -- not what staff think that we enjoy.”
- “ You can get funding for a BBQ but it's one shot – not sustained. What tenants needs is sustainment.”
- “ The biggest barrier that we have is that we are promised funding and never know to the last minute if it will be approved. . . This puts a huge strain on the Tenant Rep, as the tenants have come to expect programs provided without realizing that the Tenant Rep is paying for most of the programs.”
- “ The ageism that abounds has many tenants feeling like they can't do things. It's even more difficult for tenants who have no money. That's why funding is important. Tenants can say, 'we can make this happen.' You can't operate on a decentralized model if you need to go to a central body for approval.”
- “ [Managing] funds should be accountable and transparent. Right now there are two reps making unilateral decisions about use of funding; they want to use the funding to buy a locked cabinet. There is no consensus from tenants on how to use funds and tenant engagement.”
- “ I asked for money for something, but staff said we didn't have a budget yet.”
- “ You can apply for [up to \$1,000 from the Tenant Action Funds] in a 10-page application with essay. It used to be 2 pages.”
- “ Each building should get \$5000 for the year. Some buildings have in place committees or structures for a good conversation about those funds. The key is oversight and openness. A suggestion would come from the community, the building committee would investigate options, mull over ideas, and determine if it's feasible. If the community agrees, then it is signed off by the CSC or SSC.”
- “ Having tenants pay in advance and then be reimbursed for receipts for things like our garden is not a good model. I'm still waiting for part of the refund for what I spent on the garden four years ago. We know how to shop and save money, so give the money to us up front.”
- “ We need to make sure that the tenant funds aren't used for things the corporation would have done anyway. And we need to think through questions about funds for assets. Who pays for tuning a piano in the common room? Who is responsible for maintaining exercise equipment donated by tenants but used by everyone?”

A Say in the Decisions that Affect Us

Method 8

Create a channel for tenant voices in the work of partner agencies

STAC members agreed there needed to be a communication channel with partner agencies and a path to address any concerns. There was debate, however, on the best way to proceed. Some sought tenant representation at monthly roundtable meetings with TSHC and agency staff. Others felt any concerns related to agencies could be channeled through the SSC.

- “ There is a monthly ISM meeting with the SSC, Super, CSCs, agencies and anyone involved in operations. But there are no tenants at that meeting. It’s a model that does not include tenants. . . Having tenants there will bring valid information to the table, and is one means of accountability and a bridge to improved collaboration. If tenant leaders are included as part of the building roundtable, the medical part of the discussion could be held *in camera*. ”
- “ If tenants have a concern about an agency they should be able to talk to the SSC who could bring up the matter at the roundtable. ”
- “ Individual buildings have their own staffing objectives and ways of dealing with each other – some formally, some informally. For example, the SSC may speak to site staff and health support [staff] for vulnerable tenants, or tenant issues if applicable. Where privacy is involved, discussions should not include any other tenants. ”
- “ Until we have substantiated facts on the structures, levels and attendees of staff building/regional meetings (as they are now or will evolve into under TSHC), we need to focus on what we can do at the building level, and that is to include SSCs, CSCs and Supers at tenant building meetings. I believe with STAC’s ongoing efforts to work with the Board, we will create roles collaboratively, where Tenant Reps can be more involved with staff in decision-making at the building level, sharing information and providing accountability. In the interim, tenant voices regarding the work of partner agencies are represented at the STAC level. ”

A Say in the Decisions that Affect Us

Engagement at the Regional Level

Method 9

Regenerate Regional Councils

STAC members recommend creating or reviving Regional Councils representing clusters of buildings of no more than 10 - 11 buildings each. At these Councils, Tenant Reps or leaders would meet to share their experiences and obtain advice, suggestions, and encouragement.

The Councils would also be an opportunity to identify shared concerns that required city-wide action. STAC members suggested a variety of methods to bring issues to the Board level.

“We had the only tenant-run [Regional] Council. Tenants chaired and ran the meetings. It was very successful for the 15 buildings involved. To this day we interact and try to help each other out.”

“I like the idea of Regional Councils for tenants. I would like to hear what other buildings in my area are experiencing. Maybe if we have the same issues we can share solutions and best practices.”

“Sometimes we need smaller, neighbourhood-based clusters. The realities in the southern part of our quadrant are very different from the northern part.”

“Some buildings are stronger than others. There could be a committee of experts. Those with experience could come to every building and explain what is going on.”

“Communication between buildings is essential. I am so frustrated STAC has not been able to communicate with 83 buildings.”

“Divide the quadrants in two, with 10 or 11 buildings in each district. Quadrants were too big for regional tables. . . With 39 people at a table nothing was getting done.”

“STAC needs an engagement sub-committee . . . We had some small tenant-run STAC meetings with 6 – 8 of us. We can be a conduit. STAC members from each quadrant can reach out to leaders of each building so that Councils can be formed. To bring those Councils back – suggested 2 STAC membes in each quadrant. They would be responsible for getting the Councils going.”

A Say in the Decisions that Affect Us

“ CSCs, SSCs and Regional Managers should be at Council meetings, to update, support and take away action items, which they can report back on at the following Council meetings.”

Engagement at the Corporation-wide Level

Method 10

Identify a clear, ongoing mandate for STAC

STAC has developed Terms of Reference for this year's operations. However, during our discussions together, individual STAC members brought forward new ways of thinking about STAC and its role in the future of the Toronto Seniors Housing Corporation.

“ The most important components needed for a successful Tenant Engagement System is collaboration (between City of Toronto, Seniors Housing, Agency, Tenants). There needs to be motivation and inspiration to create connection.”

“ I would like to see STAC as a body that reviews policies that TSHC may make. [I would also like to see] STAC be able to create their own policies that they can suggest to the corporation.”

“ I like the idea where STAC becomes a kind of Senate. STAC would review ideas and give advice. We could have sub-committees, with one or two STAC reps in each. STAC could act as observers.”

“ If STAC continues, it should be an advisory group, making recommendations to the Board. [Regional] Councils can bring forward ideas to STAC.”

“ STAC's core mandate should be to draw on connections with the Regional Council and Tenant Reps to identify issues or concerns that require a corporation-wide response; draw on this information to recommend corporation-wide policy changes to the TSHC Board and Quality and Tenant Engagement Committee; and offer advice and support to Tenant Councils.”

“ I would like to see the corporation tell STAC about things that are in the planning stages to give STAC the ability to inform those decisions.”

A Say in the Decisions that Affect Us

“Currently STAC members follow City guidance and agendas but could be more independent in formulating agendas and topics.”

“The authority should be the community and any leadership should follow the community.”

“In the Terms of Reference, STAC should have an oversight role and some authority as a conduit to Regional Councils.”

“We want STAC to grow, to build in diversity. You can’t do that with 24 people. It’s not the right moment to expand STAC, when other needs must be dealt with first. But something to keep in mind.”

Method 11

Consider other ways to engage tenants in city-wide issues

Some STAC members sought ways for tenants to participate in city-wide seniors’ issues that went beyond input into TSHC operations.

“It would be good to have a panel or advocate group for tenants around mental health, potentially including tenants, spiritual leaders and health and legal advocates, to make sure the ethics, morals, rights and complexities of mental health are being identified and addressed appropriately. This would allow tenants to be more engaged and have a greater voice.”

“I believe it is very necessary to have a separate board responsible for/to the senior’s community. Two city councillors, a financial officer, chairman, a member from Toronto city community expert in ageing, another member from our larger community expert in the building of communities, seven senior tenants. They would establish governance; obtain and administer funding from the City, the Province and Federal Governments, also from available cultural, fitness and health, as well as grants designated for seniors.”

Towards a Structure for Tenant Representation

Background

On May 5th and 9th, a STAC Sub-Committee discussed a structure for engaging tenants in decisions that affect them. This summary presents where the Sub-Committee was in overall agreement, *with topics still under discussion in italics*.

Principles that underpin the structure:

- We need a tenant voice at every level of the Toronto Seniors Housing Corporation: building, region and corporation-wide
- All tenants have an equal right to participate at multiple levels
- Build from the ground up to address corporation-wide issues. Clarify the relationships between each part of the system

In Each Building:

- Tenants' choice! Engagement could include a Tenant Committee (elected or volunteer), other groups of tenant leaders, an elected Tenant Rep *or an endorsed or unelected Tenant Leader*. The approach may evolve over time.
- Tenant Committees would be chaired by a tenant, who would set the agenda *in consultation with staff*. Staff would participate in meetings at the invitation of the Committee to provide information, hear and respond to recommendations, make suggestions and provide administrative support as requested. Staff's work in supporting tenants should be recognized in the job descriptions of the CSC, SSC and Superintendent.
- *There was broad discussion on the best way for tenants to understand and have input into any programs offered by partner agencies.*

One option was to invite one or two Tenant Representative(s) to attend their building's monthly Roundtable Meeting, joining the SSC, Superintendent, agencies and others to discuss building-wide issues. It is understood that tenants would not be present during discussion related to individual tenants' situation.

Towards a Structure for Tenant Representation

Alternatively, if tenants have concerns about agencies or health partners, they could ask the SSC to bring forward their concerns to the Roundtable or through other means. Tenant Committees could also invite the SSC to attend their meetings to discuss any concerns with partner agencies.

At the Regional Level

- STAC envisions creating Regional Councils in natural geographic clusters.
- Regional Council will include up to two representatives from each building.
- Each Regional Council would meet *monthly/quarterly* to share information, ideas, encouragement, suggestions and advice, and identify shared issues or concerns to bring forward to STAC.
- Regional Councils would be chaired by a tenant. Staff would participate in meetings at the invitation of the Chair to provide information, hear and respond to recommendations, make suggestions, and provide administrative support as requested by the Council. The Chair's role would include bringing any recommendations for corporation-wide changes to STAC. *The best channel for bringing concerns to STAC had not yet been decided.*

At the Corporation-wide Level

- STAC would continue as an Advisory Committee to the TSHC Board and Quality and Tenant Engagement Committee
- STAC would also advise the TSHC Board of Directors and the Quality and Tenant Engagement Committee by bringing forward any concerns identified by Regional Councils that require a corporation-wide response, along with any recommended solutions.

Towards a Structure for Tenant Representation

- *Some STAC members also envisioned STAC as a resource offering support to Regional Councils or tenant committees requesting help, as a communication conduit and oversight body for the engagement process.*
- *Some STAC members envisioned a seniors tenant community Board. This “town council for 14,000 tenants” would focus on creating community and fostering tenant-led initiatives. The Board would seek the endorsement of the City, and would include four members from each quadrant chosen in a similar manner to STAC. Tenant volunteers would be invited to assist the Community Board by supporting research and policy reviews, informing advocacy with medical providers, agencies, provincial and federal governments, etc. The Community Board would welcome support from staff.*

What is needed to start or re-start a tenant council or other tenant group where none exists?

- Need to trust in principles and methods
- Motivation and support to deal with issues
- Positive approach that is encouraging
- Outreach, where experienced tenant leaders join with staff to hold building meetings to answer tenants’ questions and provide information and support
- Tenant support – tenants need to understand where things go wrong
- Encouragement

Tenant/Staff Relations that Build on Each Other's Strengths

“It’s not just about empowering tenants. We are also here to empower the staff.”

Principle 4

Recognize and strengthen the collaborative relationship between staff and tenants

- “It’s not us and them. We need a partnership.”
- “Staff should be a partner. [I’m] seeing a growth in awareness that staff will be much more integrated into our communities.”
- “Staff need to be empowered to be flexible and meet tenants where they are. Where there is on-going conflict between staff and tenants [any engagement] will be unsuccessful.”
- “Staff presence at tenant meetings can be helpful. In the past, tenants would make requests at meetings and staff would be there to respond.”
- “We must bring in a degree of understanding to the critique of TCHC and TSHC. There is such a terrific demand on staff time and energy. With the amount of workload put on TCHC staff we have to give them patience and understanding.”
- “The Us and Them paradigm does justice to no one.”
- “One thing that’s helped our building is our SSC. We express what we need to her. She is encouraging and allows us to have meetings and invite all tenants so that we can hear their needs and wants, like getting a patio set for the building. She also helps with funding and communicates important changes in the building.”
- “[I] suggest we hold meetings where we listen to tenants and take their concerns up with managers. Managers can also attend meetings. The managers then need to come back to tenants and brief them on the status of the concerns they initially raised.”
- “We have a great Super who works hard to keep maintenance up. I would like him to have input in tenants’ meetings – have him included.”

Tenant/Staff Relations that Build on Each Other's Strengths

Principle 5

Cultivate an ethos of deep respect for tenants

- “Staff treatment is the biggest issue affecting tenant morale. It's a worse [problem] than maintenance. It's the disrespect that's shown to tenants by staff.”
- “We had one Tenant Rep who lasted six months. The Super was authoritarian – would sit in on meetings and didn't leave tenants any privacy.”
- “I happen to be in a building where the staff is really great – every one of them. No complaints. When I ask a question or need help, I get it. But in the past, I have had staff or superintendents who are not so friendly. So having management talk to staff and tell them to respect the tenants – that would be good.”
- “When [tenant leaders] bring something forward, give a quick acknowledgement – a thank you for the email – as a sign of respect.”

Method 12

Identify the specific roles of staff who support tenant engagement

- “We need to identify which staff (who) and how do we get them involved and respect tenants. . . . There needs to be more specific definition – who would / should be available or expected to be available.”
- “The SSC has been trained wrong. They need to be front-facing – which means face-to-face. Not sitting in an office.”
- “The SSC is the only place to go with your complaint, unless you go to the 5500 number. . . . I don't even bother going through it. A seniors' housing manager stated that if five other tenants hadn't complained about the same thing, they won't return your call.”
- “If there is conflict between SSC or CSC and the Tenant Rep, will there be a place for tenants to go?”

Tenant/Staff Relations that Build on Each Other's Strengths

Method 13

Acknowledge and repair mistrust

- “There is some mistrust of staff in my building. It seems adversarial: us against the landlord.”
- “[We've been] promised many things by staff and never hear about it again. It seems like what they say is to pacify tenants at the moment with no substance.”
- “I got involved because of distrust. Promises didn't materialize – unless you went to CEO and then everyone acted!”
- “Trust has been stretched thin over the years. The attitude with many [tenants] is that if you are engaging with staff then you are 'a rat' gone over to 'them.' There's low trust due to a lack of due diligence, and having rules but not honoring them . . . That was an issue present before Refresh and the ISM. That part of it has never changed.”

Method 14

Return Tenant Reps' calls. Keep tenants informed on changes or building issues

- “Staff must communicate with us. We won't be successful as Tenant Reps if housing staff don't phone us back within a certain time . . . Communication is the key to everything.”
- “In our building they were doing accessibility upgrades. Tenants asked me about this every day. I sent an email to staff for information [and said] I would appreciate answers to my questions. I'm embarrassed I don't know answers when tenants ask . . . If you want me to be the front person, then you have to help. I need the info so I can keep tenants informed.”
- “I had a problem in our building about a fight in the garden. It could have been taken care of if I had received a call back. . . Women are frightened, and staff still haven't called back. We needed immediate action to stop rumours.”
- “I'm concerned with how long it takes to get approval for a tenant-led event. . . We need a faster route to be able to go ahead with invitations. It takes time to do things. You can't cook a dinner in half an hour. There needs to be some consideration that time does matter.”

Tenant/Staff Relations that Build on Each Other's Strengths

“ There needs to more honest communication with staff about what they intend to do, instead of wishful thinking. They have good intentions. But it's just like your house. You might want to paint but if you can't afford it you have to wait six months. So be honest about that.”

Method 15

Ensure continuity when staff or policies change

“ Staff were involved in tenant meetings. It worked well. Staff heard tenant complaints and their needs. Then suddenly the staff weren't there.”

“ We were encouraged to submit applications for [Tenant Action Fund] events and then 4 or 5 months later found out that no action funds have been available for seniors' programs since January.”

“ In 2019, councils were disbanded with no reason given. Staff contacts were pulled from all the buildings. No explanation given. [We were told] 'We're working on a new system.' There has been a lot of re-organization within tenant engagement in managerial level but it hasn't reached the tenants.”

“ We have been changing SSCs frequently. Every time there is someone new, you have to start from scratch.”

Tenant/Staff Relations that Build on Each Other's Strengths

Method 16

Create a clear path for requesting building improvements

“There are good things that have happened in our building. When we requested changes to floors and wallpaper, everything was changed, our garbage doors were done with pushbutton . . . We made a petition that all tenants signed, and we submitted it to the management. I want to know if you would always have to do a petition to create pressure, or whether the Tenant Rep can just submit a request to management and get the results.”

“Maybe we could see more actions, rather than just principles. One issue I raised was when we had someone come to do our garden, was whether we could have benches placed at a different spot, but I don't know who can address that.”

STAC said staff:

- need to lead and be available and make tools available so that tenant leaders can draw tenants out from isolation — things like BBQs and other events to draw tenants in
- need to be empowered to partner with tenants without always getting approvals
- need to be patient, remain calm and try to help
- need to be transparent and communicate progress on issues raised by tenants back to those tenants

A Lively, Inclusive Community

“We have the opportunity to awaken the spirit of community.”

Principle 6

All tenants have an equal right to participate at multiple levels

“All tenants have an equal right to participate at multiple levels. That means that tenants are given plentiful, clear opportunities to be involved as much or as little as they would like, but that they know clearly that they are welcome to be involved.”

“There are different groups and communities from different backgrounds and cultures in buildings which should be honoured and respected. Need to figure out how those individuals and communities can expand their base to include other individuals in their community.”

Principle 7

Acknowledge and support the MANY ways tenants create a lively community

“There needs to be opportunity and resources for tenants to run community programming and gather informally. Social participation is a part of tenant engagement.”

“We used to have all kinds of activities, (e.g. Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter dinners) not necessarily run by reps or councils – just due to the positive dynamics of the building.”

“We used to have an outdoor rummage sale every weekend. It brought lots of people out.”

“We had a monthly speaker – a TCHC manager, pest control, engagement manager, Service Canada – and a pharmacist doing blood pressure checks. It was a chance to get people together and create some sense of community.”

“Having a Christmas party or tea and cookies – it reminds you of family. It’s a structure that people knew. It can bring folks back to that feeling of being included – a part of something.”

Inspiring examples of tenant-led community-builders

- A winter party every December to denote no particular religion but just happiness for the season. Over 100 tenants coming together singing, dancing, clapping hands — their enthusiasm that this party was for them.
- A barbecue pre-Covid for more than 200 people. Managers did all the cooking. Agency staff served tenants. The Tenant Rep coordinated and ensured that everyone enjoyed themselves through music interaction and good food.
- During Covid, balcony concerts where agencies, churches and synagogues came out with musical instruments and sang songs that tenants knew in their own language from eastern Europe and South America. The performers stood in the courtyard or on the street while tenants stayed on their balconies singing, dancing, waving or playing some of their own accordions, violins etc.
- A tenant-run fruit and vegetable market every Tuesday. Good quality fruits and vegetables straight from the food terminal and local farms for sale at cost lower than No Frills. In one month over 350 tenants used this service. Leftover produce is delivered to needy families referred by community and religious leaders and word of mouth.
- Card games in the afternoon. Bi-weekly agency light lunches with lecturers or music.
- Evenings where 10-15 women go to the lounge area and have tea and home baked cookies or cake.
- A gardening club. Tenant Rep goes to community outside of building for plants shrubs, bushes, soil etc. Our gardens are beautiful and envied by the neighbourhood.
- Walks in the early evening to interact and chat; 30-40 senior tenants gather in nice weather along our driveway at the back of the building or sit in the courtyard on benches.

A Lively, Inclusive Community

Method 17

Hold space for spontaneous tenant use

- “Tenants agree with agencies having space but NOT to locking us out of the common spaces – not allowing spontaneity.”
- “We need space for small and quiet activities, even something as simple as sharing a puzzle.”
- “Want spontaneity to be an option – not have to fill out forms. We need clear parameters on things like the use of space, a clear calendar, etc. We want clarity on security policies as well.”
- “There is way too much ‘weight’ on the legal and risk management end. We are made to feel like liabilities.”
- “Need to streamline this process so that folks don’t have to wait months and navigate all these restrictions; need to make the process effective.”
- “I’ve been to over 200 meetings. The biggest obstacle I encountered was rooms being locked even though I had permission to go to the buildings.”
- “As seniors our schedules are different. Rooms have to be open and available. Some seniors sleep in the afternoon. Late at night they may want to get together, play chess . . .”
- “We can’t lose focus on the pride and independence that seniors feel when they are able to run tenant-led programs. The hoops and the barriers that tenants need to jump through is tremendous. We want programs geared to us.”
- “Tenants should not have to apply and wait for three weeks to run a small tenant program in their space.”
- “I wanted a St. Pat’s Day event. I went to the maintenance guy. Instead of paperwork, he just let the maintenance people know and he marked it on the calendar. This is the sort of system that works for tenants.”

A Lively, Inclusive Community

Method 18

Actively promote inclusion

- “ We need to ensure translation supports are available so that tenant leaders can communicate with all the tenants in their community about meetings, events, etc.”
- “ Power struggles and bullying are happening. Training on how to support tenants with these kinds of actions would be good.”
- “ There is already discrimination through exclusion, particularly through agencies limiting service delivery.”
- “ In all buildings you will have people who don't believe in inclusion and may even be racist – how will we manage this? One idea is an ongoing seminar series in each building on topics like inclusion and CABR [Confronting Anti-Black Racism] and bullying, presented in more informative rather than directive way to create discussion – almost like book club.”

Method 19

Use multiple ways to bridge language and cultural divides

- “ I led a meditation class the other day. I spoke English and my co-facilitator also spoke Russian; she interpreted for me.”
- “ QR codes can enable tenants to obtain more information via their smart phone and can translate the information into their own language.”
- “ One frustrating thing is that it seems very hard to get anything translated and up onto the bulletin boards. Even the SSC is having trouble with translation.”
- “ Charts and diagrams can communicate a lot in overcoming language barriers.”
- “ Our last meeting was so successful because I partnered with a person well known to Russian community in my building. This person helped communicate with Russians and got them to come the meeting, and I reached out to English speakers too.”
- “ It was a difficult process to try to get different cultures to come to same understanding, especially regarding democracy and how to select people. I'm from the US, I have a political gene. I'm 'we can have flyers, soap boxes, etc.' Russians said, 'NO, that's not how we do it.' They just write down who they think will do the best job. It worked.”

A Lively, Inclusive Community

Method 20

Use multiple ways to seek out tenants' ideas

“When we had community dinners, we’d ask tenants what they want and then we’d take requests back to staff.”

“That is similar to our suggestion box, which is locked with a key. But I like the idea of the flip chart more – asking those questions, putting them in the lobby. It allows folks to build ideas on what other people in the building are saying.”

“One little thing we’ve found to be helpful is an easel with a newsprint flipchart. Tenants are able to walk by and write down ideas about what they want. One of the things we found out through our flip chart is that tenants were less interested in parties and more interested in education sessions about health, City services, SSCs ...)”

A Lively, Inclusive Community

The keys to successful tenant-led groups

- Input to share
- Positive sense of purpose and *shared* purpose
- Active listening
- Camaraderie
- Listening and responding
- Building trust through follow through
- Respect
- Results need to be collaborative
- Team work
- Support
- Understanding that there is role for everyone

What helps invigorate groups?

- A shared group vision
- Problems need to be addressed immediately so people don't get discouraged
- If an outside group undermines the group this needs to be addressed
- Share problems to get support from others who may have experienced those issues
- Clarity and definition of purpose

What are the keys to successful tenant-led activities?

- Budget
- Communication with all tenants (address language barriers)
- Listen to others and respond

Effective Communication

Communication is the key to everything.

Method 21

Use the new corporation's launch to start fresh

- “The TSHC launch is an opportunity for engagement and outreach. We should have BBQs, outdoor events . . . Get out and meet tenants in their buildings and get them excited.”
- “We are moving into something new. There's an undercurrent of antipathy and lack of trust. For whatever reason, information doesn't travel correctly.”
- “Tenants need comprehensive details for any proposed plans that affect them, including timelines, contact info for the liaison, a mailing well in advance of changes, and postings on the Tenants' Bulletin Board used only for and by tenants.”
- “Tenants must be kept informed of all changes coming down the chute. People are still asking about June 1st. We have tenant committees informing people. But we need information in multiple languages.”

Method 22

Create a glossary of frequently used terms

- “Definitions for words being used by staff versus seniors are often not the same. We need to come to consensus.”
- “What's the right language? Tenant Council? Tenant Committee?”
- “This is my first time being involved and there are some terms I don't know. What does CSC mean, for example? We need to understand acronyms.”

Effective Communication

Method 23

Use multiple ways to communicate

- “I think everything depends on communication. It's not just verbal; it's letters, flyers, posters, word of mouth, etc. If we don't do all of these together, we are not communicating effectively. We need them all. So how do we communicate so that, at the end of the day, everyone can understand?”
- “Some people don't read flyers. Some prefer word of mouth.”
- “Pamphlets available in the building [describing] programs and services in the community would allow tenants to find services on their own if desired.”
- “Quite often, even if you build in two-way feedback loops, communication remains a one-way broadcast. You need to build frequency of your message to ensure the broadcast gets through.”
- “TVs in buildings [could] display relevant information in different languages.”

Method 24

Prioritize in-person communication

- “The key to building trust is communication, communication, communication. It has to be face-to-face. In the beginning it could be just communication with Tenant Reps, and then face-to-face with tenant committees or groups.”
- “It's about the body language. You have more of a sense of being heard.”
- “Engagement and ‘participatory culture’ needs to happen in-person. Communication in-person is more fulsome.”
- “We need staff from TSHC and tenant leaders to be getting together. Food is one way to do that, entertainment is another.”

Effective Communication

Method 25

Create clear, friendly written communications

- “The reports we get now are so vague and full of corporate language.”
- “Print items provide challenges for tenants with low vision – need larger font with high contrast.”
- “Language used is often confusing and harsh, especially in standard communications and notices, such as those for annual rent reviews.”

Method 26

Create an agreed-to approach in each building to the use of bulletin boards

- “There needs to be guidance and clear messaging from the City/Corporation around access and use of bulletin boards. Some posters haven’t arrived. Some aren’t taken down. It may not be their priority, but the boards are a really important way to communicate.”
- “Post notices at the intercom where it’s easy for everyone to see it.”
- “Our lobby is inundated with bulletin boards (3 open, 3 locked) with the same stuff on all of them.”
- “One thing tenants did in our building was take over one of the locked bulletin boards so that we can put things up that cannot be taken down.”
- “Bulletin boards are a challenge for communicating as they are crowded, poorly maintained or organized, and if they are not locked, posters sometimes go missing.”

Effective Communication

Method 27

Make it fun

“In Denmark, instead of taking out a book you take out a person – someone you can sit down with and exchange ideas and talk about your history.”

“How about a musical group that could travel around to announce the new corporation.”

“How about a travelling carnival with skits, but also info on how to use the 5500 phone line?”

“The intramural Olympics!”

Supporting Tenant Leaders

Principle 8

Seek and draw out the qualities of a good tenant leader

- “A good leader is someone who will take charge, be responsible, be friendly and empathic but firm that they will not break policy or the law to assist any tenant.”
- “Tenant leaders are in a serving role and do not make decision unilaterally.”
- “Tenant leaders need to have passion. If they don't it won't work to engage tenants.”
- “A good tenant leader is someone who actually cares about the building and works well with site staff to get things done. A person who will delegate duties in a friendly manner without demands on others.”
- “My job will be to start the whole process, to invite residents to join us, and put forward the concept. . . . I see my role as a catalyst, not a leader.”
- “A group I'm involved with had strong leadership. But you can't let ego get in the way. Inclusivity means you need to be open to input from everyone. You have channels of communication open.”

Method 28

Create a path for emerging leaders

- “I'm troubled by how long it takes for a new member to get enough of a broader vision to bring to the committee in a useful way. I like the idea of workshops to help them. It's taken me a long time to understand the history and what has happened before.”
- “Long-time Tenant Reps can work with incoming Tenant Reps to orient them to the role.”
- “I just moved in 3 years ago. The Tenant Rep had been doing it for 14 years. We worked together to help me get started. If you don't know what's going on, how will you answer questions?”
- “We've talked about an orientation package for new tenants. There should also be an orientation package for tenant leaders, so that they know all the information, including info about funding. Terms of Reference needs to be expanded and re-written.”

Supporting Tenant Leaders

Method 29

Offer ongoing support to tenant leaders

- “For some, being a Tenant Rep can be overwhelming. It’s a lot of work for just one person. That’s why need more support, or structures, to help assist.”
- “Staff should not assume that every community leader or Tenant Rep is well enough or can physically do what they are demanding. Some of us are unable to do the things that youth have no problem with.”
- “In our building we have a tenant association that organizes social events, dinner dances . . . Are there agencies that can help organize these? Housing needs to have somebody on staff who has experience at running things and organizing events. There’s no experience in our building, but these events are important.”
- “Tenant leaders don’t have the support needed to pull people together.”
- “There is a lot of pressure on the tenant representative for all the programming and engagement. It is a tremendous process and tenants haven’t been engaged in two years. I feel that this process must not rush. Getting good tenant-led programs doesn’t have to be done in the next month if the building doesn’t move that fast.”

An inspiring example of tenant-led engagement

“ I have done presentations in over 200 TCHC buildings as the Chair of Seniors Voice, a volunteer group that went to various buildings and brought information to tenants. We took pamphlets that tenants could take with them on various services, such as Wheel Trans, fire safety, fraud scams against seniors, and how to get services. We also presented the ten-year strategy plan. Materials were translated into the languages of the buildings that we attended: Chinese, Russian, Spanish, Somalian, Hindi, Farsi, etc.

We talked to tenants as peers, with no staff presence when we spoke about concerns. We also took pictures of needed facility repairs, and I wrote a report that went to various departments to get things done, such as repairs and general maintenance, pest control, security etc. [TCHC’s Facilities Management team] were marvelous. Senior staff were on the spot, getting major repairs completed in buildings that we identified.

I faced many barriers with some managers, while other managers were co-operative and worked collaboratively, taking the report and making things better for communities. The funding provided was limited to tokens and everything else was paid for by me, i.e., refreshments, administrative needs etc., It was very effective, even though the barriers were troublesome, such as lock outs from the building, lack of funding, and promises by staff that never materialized.”