

TENANTS' UNION OF NSW
STRATEGIC PLAN 2016 – 2019

Introduction

2016 marks the 40th anniversary of the Tenants' Union of NSW (TU). We enter the years ahead after an intensive period of reflection and critical analysis of our work to date and identifying what must be done to continue to make a positive difference to the lives of residential tenants in NSW.

Tenants in NSW face difficult times. Funding to Tenancy Advice and Advocacy Services has not increased since 2002. Services are turning away 1 in 3 requests for advice. The Residential Tenancy Act is under review as I write, and there is much that needs change. New legislation covering residential parks and boarding houses have been introduced in the last two years and their effectiveness is yet to be tested. Social housing tenants have come under increased scrutiny.

The TU faces its own challenges. There are important questions being asked externally and internally about TU's identity 40 years on from its inception by a small group of tenant activists. The systemic battles ahead must be informed by our mandated constituency – residential tenants in NSW – and must engage them in action if the battles are to be won. Reliance on a single major funder is not sustainable long term.

This Strategic Plan, developed through consultation with the Board, staff, and volunteers of TU and significant stakeholders, is our commitment to meeting these challenges.

I take this opportunity to thank Mauro di Nicola who has steadied our hand as we navigated these uncharted waters.

Paula Rix
Chairperson

The Tenants' Union of NSW is:

- A non-profit membership based cooperative under the Cooperatives Act 1992 (NSW)
- A community legal centre specialising in NSW residential tenancies law and accredited by the National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC)
- The main resourcing body for Tenants' Advice and Advocacy Services (TAASs)
- A Registered Training Organisation (RTO)

We work to promote the interests of:

- Aboriginal tenants
- Boarders, lodgers and other marginal tenants
- Private tenants
- Social housing tenants
- Public housing tenants
- Residential parks resident

Our Vision

A society in which people in NSW can access secure, livable and affordable rental housing.

Mission

The TU aims to make a positive difference to the lives of residential tenants in NSW, and particularly tenants who are economically and socially disadvantaged.

Objectives

The TU will work towards this mission by striving to meet the following objectives:

1. To maintain and enhance the level and quality of information, advice and representation on tenancy law matters to tenants, both directly and through our support of Tenants Advice and Advocacy Services (TAASs) by providing:
 - High quality legal advice and assistance to TAASs
 - High quality legal advice and assistance directly to tenants (including strategic litigation and Tenants' Advice Line)
 - High quality training provided to TAASs and other tenancy workers.
 - Accurate and accessible materials produced on tenancy law and related matters
2. To have a positive impact on public opinion, policies and practices affecting tenants by:
 - High quality research on the needs of tenants
 - Advocating for the reform of laws and policies affecting tenants
 - Supporting tenants taking action on issues affecting them
 - Media and public comment on tenants' issues
3. To build a strong and dynamic organisation capable of providing high quality services and advocating effectively in the interests of tenants at a systemic level by:
 - Effective governance and management
 - Planning, evaluation and continuous quality improvement
 - Developing and supporting staff and volunteers

Strategic approach

Overall, the strategies we will use to achieve these objectives are:

Apply research

- We will gather information on the needs of tenants in NSW and the wider economic, social and political environment, and apply it to ensuring our work advances the interests of tenants.

Work in partnership

- We will work to ensure meaningful involvement of tenants in the work of the organisation.
- We will work collaboratively with other non-government organisations and in particular with the Tenancy Advice and Advocacy Services (TAAS) Network.
- We will maintain and develop strong relationships with funders and relevant government bodies.

Develop people

- We will ensure the ongoing development of the skills and capacities of the TU staff and members of the board.

Develop our organisation

- We will use our resources efficiently and effectively to maximise and evaluate the impact of our activities.
- We will ensure internal policies and procedures promote a safe, productive and effective organisation.
- We will ensure regular and ongoing review of our strategy and activity.

Priority Areas 2016 - 2018

1. Effectively communicate and strategically deploy our organisational identities
2. Build a constituency for change in tenant law and practice within the context of social justice
3. Create a strong, viable and sustainable organisation

Priority Area 1: Effectively communicate and strategically deploy our organisational identities

The TU is different things to different stakeholders – advocate, information source, legal practice, training organisation, think tank, advice giver and resource body. We need to effectively communicate these and strategically deploy them to achieve our Vision and Mission in a context of uncertainty and rapid change.

We will:

- Build TU's public profile to accurately and succinctly communicate TU's identities and activities e.g. be inclusive of training, park residents, and older tenants.
- Develop standard presentations of TU's profile appropriate for a range of promotional media e.g. training workshops, Annual Report, brochure, posters, and ensure consistent messaging across TU.
- Develop and keep current a promotional pack of TU material and information that covers cross-organisation activity and distribute via TU activities.
- Leverage requests for specific information into broader offers of information/resources/assistance.
- Redevelop our website to assist different stakeholders access the right information to meet their needs.
- Investigate the development of a TU phone application to broaden constituent access to TU information, resources, campaigns etc.
- Expand TU's social media portfolio
- Develop a Communication Plan for every project in TU.
- Encourage regular cross-organisation review of activity and policies and procedures for alignment with TU foundation documents and strategic plan.

Priority Area 2: Build a constituency for change in tenant laws and practices within the context of social justice

TU is a social justice organisation and an agent for change as is made clear in its Vision and Mission. Our work will be successful when we engage with and are informed by our constituency - residential tenants in NSW, and particularly tenants who are economically and socially disadvantaged. Our work will also be assisted by the strategic partnerships and alliances we make.

We will:

- Build options for engagement including membership, to reflect TU's tenant constituencies.
- Develop and promote public policy and analysis that represents the interests of tenants based on our legal practice, liaison, and consultation with stakeholders.
- Maintain relevance through regular review of the constituencies TU engages with and should engage with, to achieve its Mission including evaluation of the effectiveness of engagement strategies.
- Undertake an annual Diversity Audit.
- Prioritise finalising, promoting and implementing the Reconciliation Action Plan.
- Identify and address language/terminology barriers to engagement e.g. defining 'vulnerable', 'disadvantaged', and 'tenants' interests'.
- Develop a clear description of a 'secure, affordable, liveable rental system'
- Develop a media strategy inclusive of placing tenancy within a broader social justice framework including de-stigmatising renting.
- Continue to include issues of systemic change in relevant training modules currently presented and in future modules.
- Review the way in which strategic casework is reported to the public to ensure recognition of expertise and highlight systemic injustice.
- Develop stories to evidence our work.
- Strengthen communication and consultation processes and structures with the TAAP network in order to continue and increase the informing role of front line services, to demonstrate leadership, encourage participation in policy development.
- Engage proactively with informal and activist tenancy and housing groups.
- Establish a campaigns fund attracting funding from supporters and members to either conduct TU campaigns or contribute to campaigns TU supports.
- Facilitate cross-agency development of relationships with partners and allies.

Priority Area 3: Create a strong, viable and sustainable organisation

The TU needs to ensure its long-term sustainability in uncertain times and rapidly changing circumstances in such a way as to maintain and strengthen its independence, autonomy and capacity for action for change.

We will:

- Conduct an annual whole of organisation big picture reflection day
- Continue to strengthen TU/TAAS relationship and broaden options for TAAS involvement in TU work e.g. building the TU trainer base, utilising interest and expertise in policy and casework.
- Implement strategies to increase the general public's recognition of TU e.g. use 40th anniversary to broaden and strengthen TU supporter base; develop a cross-organisation contacts database.
- Develop a whole-of-organisation Volunteer Strategy.
- Use pro bono options more regularly across the whole-of-organisation.
- Identify options for monetising TU expertise and products e.g. training modules, location API, IT, print and web design skills.
- Investigate donation options
- Review suppliers
 - to align with TU ethics and sustainability principles; and
 - identify cheaper options for bulk orders.
- Develop an IT Strategy that achieves cost efficiencies and sustainability.
- Increase use of electronic communications (e.g. AGM notices, voting) and online print-on-demand resources (e.g. Annual Report) where appropriate and not in conflict with TUs Rules of Incorporation.
- Extend on-line training options.
- Continue to exercise risk management in legal and policy work.
- Deepen cross-organisation sharing of expertise.
- Monitor workload across the organisation and develop practices to address critical areas such as legal and administration.