

Affordable Housing Energy Efficiency Tenant Engagement

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

23 June 2014

Jennifer McCarron

ALL ONE SKY FOUNDATION

Introduction

The purpose of this research is to help the Calgary Housing Corporation and other providers of affordable housing meaningfully engage their tenants on behavioural change for energy conservation. Tenant behaviour can increase the likelihood of realizing the full projected savings from energy efficiency measures installed as part of a capital renewal project at a building, as well as result in cost and energy savings at buildings where there has been no or minimal upgrades. Low-income tenants face multiple barriers (e.g., food insecurity, language, physical ability, mental health, etc.) and therefore need significant on-site support if energy savings are to be achieved through behavioural change. This research will provide the theoretical background on how to start a meaningful engagement with tenants on energy conservation, as well as provide communication and supplementary resources to support engagement initiatives and activities. While our primary goal with tenant engagement is to realize increased energy savings and greenhouse gas reductions, tenants also benefit from new knowledge, improved relationships, increased confidence and empowerment, and strengthened communities.

Part 1 of the tenant engagement document provides the theoretical background for the development of a tenant engagement program for tenants in the affordable housing sector. This report includes a summary of relevant behaviour change theory, as well as two specific case studies where the theory has been applied in Canada for energy efficiency and conservation programs in the affordable housing sector. Part 2 provides a toolkit of possible engagement activities to guide the design of a tenant engagement program in the affordable housing sector.

Part 1 – Background Research and Case Studies

Historically, the go-to approach to changing behaviour in communities has been to simply provide information. Posters and brochures are created in hopes that increased knowledge will be enough to change behaviours. These tactics follow the attitude-behaviour approach. The belief being that increased knowledge leads to a change in attitude thus resulting in a new behaviour. Unfortunately, numerous studies have shown that education by itself does little to create new behaviours. Despite being armed with knowledge, there can be an abundance of reasons why people do not instantly change their behaviours; one opposing force is simply the strength of engrained habits.

Community-Based Social Marketing (CBSM) is an approach that has been widely used by sustainability practitioners to effectively decrease undesirable behaviours and increase desirable behaviours to achieve positive social and environmental outcomes. Under CBSM, the attitude-behaviour approach is turned on its head. The focus is first to simply create a new behaviour and then allow the shift in attitudes to naturally result.

The CBSM approach involves five steps:

1. Carefully selecting the behaviour to be promoted
2. Identifying the barriers and benefits associated with that behaviour
3. Designing a strategy that utilizes behaviour-change tools to address the barriers and benefits that have been identified
4. Piloting a strategy with a small segment of a community, and

5. Evaluating the impact of the program once it has been implemented broadly.¹

Two Canadian case studies were summarized as best practice examples of energy efficiency tenant engagement programs: the *Livegreen* Tenant Engagement on Sustainability implemented by BC Housing, and the *Community Champions* program implemented by the Toronto Housing Corporation.

There has been demonstrated success in other jurisdictions in Canada in implementing tenant engagement programs to save energy. Studies indicate that by engaging staff and residents in conservation, providers can achieve savings of up to 10% in utility costs. Combined with technical measures and/or energy analysis reporting, the savings can be even higher. The programs have reduced energy use and costs for both tenants and building owners, and have also had positive co-benefits such as greater building comfort, and tenant well-being and satisfaction.

Part 2 – Tenant Engagement Toolkit

This toolkit provides a framework for the design and implementation of a community-based social marketing tenant engagement program in the affordable housing sector. Rather than a prescriptive “one size fits all” approach, this toolkit provides a framework and a description of program elements to guide the design and implementation of tenant engagement programs for energy use in the affordable housing sector in Calgary.

While tenant engagement programs are generally challenging, there are unique challenges associated with programs targeted at the vulnerable populations who typically reside in social and low-cost housing. The recommendations in this guide were created in recognition of the unique barriers over-represented in the affordable housing sector, including: low literacy and/or language barriers, mental health, physical and intellectual capacity, and a lack of awareness of/concern for the costs of energy use.

The recommendations of the toolkit are organized into the five steps of the CBCM approach described in part 1.

Before you Begin

Before beginning to design a tenant engagement program, there are several foundational elements that should be considered. First, it is important to establish a clear commitment to energy conservation from senior management to demonstrate commitment to the project. It is also important to ensure that there is sufficient staff capacity to roll out the project. Finally, an appropriate site to pilot the program should be selected. Site selection criteria should be established, such as: availability of common space, tenant capacity, potential for energy savings in the building, and alignment with existing initiatives.

Step 1 – Selecting Behaviours

Before selecting specific behaviours to target, it's important to define the objectives of the program. Program objectives can be defined by senior management and program coordinators, or tenants can be engaged in setting the objectives of the program themselves. Engaging tenants in the early planning stages of the tenant engagement program may result in higher levels of buy-in and participation in the program. The objectives will also determine how the program should be evaluated.

¹ For a complete guide to designing a CBCSM strategy, see McKenzie-Mohr, *Forstering Sustainable Behaviour: An Introduction to Community-Based Social Marketing*, Gabriola Island: 1999.

Target behaviours will be selected based on achieving the defined objectives of the program. For example, BC Housing identified the following objectives for their **Livegreen** program:

1. Reduce utility costs, energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions
2. Increase community capacity
3. Increase tenant well-being and satisfaction.

Step 2 – Identifying Barriers and Benefits

Once the target behaviours for the program have been selected, the next step in designing a program is discovering why these behaviours are not already taking place. Engaging the tenant population in preliminary conversations is very helpful in answering this question. Tenants can be consulted through focus groups or surveys.

Step 3 – Designing the Strategy

The design of the tenant engagement program will depend on the results of steps 1 and 2. Possible tactics that may be employed in the tenant engagement strategy include:

- Recruiting tenant champions
- Events, including celebration events, tenant meetings, and workshops
- Energy challenges
- Incentives
- Tenant Activities, including games, story-telling, community mapping, movie night or children's events
- Marketing and communications

Step 4 – Pilot

Once the planning in steps 1 – 3 has been completed, and a designed tenant engagement program has been developed, the program should be piloted with a small sub-set of buildings. This step allows for evaluation of the program (and changes to be made if necessary) before the program is rolled out across all buildings and tenant groups. Ideally, a program would be piloted for six months to one year.

Step 5 – Evaluation

At the conclusion of the energy engagement program, a final evaluation should be completed to determine how close the program came to meeting the desired objectives. This should include an inventory of energy use throughout the program (baseline, before and after challenges, and final energy use numbers).

This toolkit is intended to provide a framework to design and implement a tenant engagement program for public and private providers of affordable housing in Calgary. The suggested activities can be customized for both public and private providers of affordable housing in Calgary. The triple-bottom line benefits of tenant engagement programs in the affordable housing sector to reduce energy use are clear. The potential for energy cost and greenhouse gas savings in this sector is high, and tenant behaviour can increase the likelihood of realizing the full projected savings from energy efficiency measures installed as part of a capital renewal project at a building, and tenants benefit from new knowledge, improved relationships, better health, increased confidence and empowerment, and strengthened communities. The next step is to design and implement a specific program for Calgary based on the recommendations of this report.