

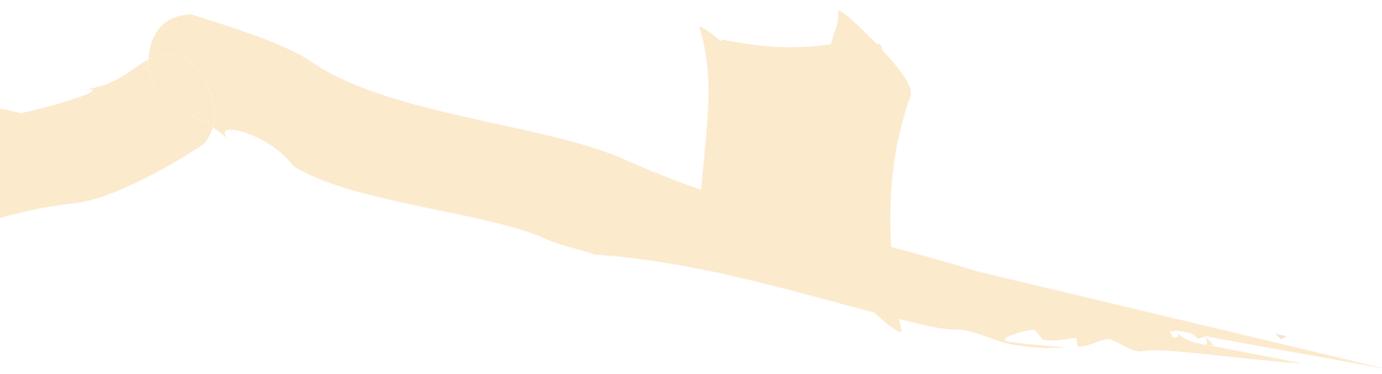


HOUSING FOR THE AGED ACTION GROUP INC.

A GUIDE TO STARTING AND RUNNING A RESIDENTS' COMMITTEE

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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide has been developed by Housing for the Aged Action Group (HAAG) to provide practical information on starting and running a residents' committee.

The law gives residents who have signed a valid site agreement the right to form and take part in residents' committees. The full rights of such residents (who are referred to as **site tenants** in the law) are covered in Part 4A of the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997*.

If you need help in starting a residents' committee, please contact HAAG:

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WHAT IS A COMMITTEE?

A committee may have some or all of the following characteristics:

- » A group of people taking on the responsibility of managing a group
- » An unincorporated group functioning according to the membership model (representative democracy)
- » "Service or support its members... and as far as possible follow the view of members"
(www.ourcommunity.com.au)
- » "Established to enable discussion between residents and the park owner"
(www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au)
- » Improving lifestyle of residents
- » Helping to avoid problems occurring in the park
- » A group of residents, elected by fellow residents, to represent their interests and carry out certain functions
(www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au)
- » Provide a channel for communication between residents and park operators
- » Presents resident complaints, concerns and proposals to the park operator
(www.fairtrading.qld.gov.au)

*Generally, residents' committees are **unincorporated**, which means that their aims do not involve making a financial profit. An **incorporated** association has certain legal advantages but, in return, there are more legal responsibilities. For more information, visit www.ourcommunity.com.au.*

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A RESIDENTS' COMMITTEE?

Under the law, you have the right to form and take part in a residents' committee. The park operator must provide suitable facilities for committee meetings to take place. While there are no set rules, a residents' committee can provide:

- » information to members and other residents about matters relevant to the park
- » advice and support to residents who have a particular issue
- » dispute resolution services if a resident has a complaint with a park operator
- » other services it thinks are appropriate, such as communication protocols to engage with park owners and operators.

Residents' committees "can be a powerful means to achieving change" (www.sentinelha.org.au).

HOW DOES A COMMITTEE WORK?

A committee:

- » is usually made up of three to 12 people
- » meets regularly
- » makes decisions about the direction of the group
- » liaises between park residents and the park operator
- » shows leadership and collective responsibility
- » deals with resident issues.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD COMMITTEE?

A good committee has:

- » the right mix of skills and experience.
These include the ability to:
 - negotiate
 - communicate
 - engage with the community
 - advocate
 - network
 - lead
- » members who understand their roles and responsibilities
- » commitment to the committee's aims and objectives
- » a shared sense of purpose
- » an understanding of boundaries
- » the ability to take a step back every now and then to review direction and purpose
- » "a clear sense of purpose and a list of jobs to be done" (www.cvsfife.org).

A residents' committee can only be effective if it consists of good members. A good committee member:

- » is committed to preparing for and attending meetings
- » has a good understanding of their role and the role of the committee
- » takes initiative
- » sticks to the majority decision
- » supports fellow members
- » advocates for residents, in their interests.

For more information, refer to the exercise sheet: **Individual Committee Members – Making Meetings Better.*

EFFECTIVE TIME MANAGEMENT

There are many things you can do to help ensure that committee meetings run smoothly and effectively. For example:

- » make a plan but remain flexible to suit circumstances
- » get a diary
- » keep lists
- » stick to priority lists
- » delegate
- » learn to say no if there is too much to do
- » divide tasks into easy-to-do steps
- » be organised
- » set clear goals
- » take a break and recharge every now and then.

Note: The above list is relevant to committee members holding key positions, such as the chairperson or secretary, but can also provide general committee members with strategies to be able to undertake tasks assigned to them.

HOW TO START A RESIDENTS' COMMITTEE

A good way to begin discussions about starting a residents' committee is to hold a **general residents' meeting**.

This will enable all residents to discuss the concerns and benefits related to having a residents' committee at the park/village.

The meeting is an opportunity to gauge whether any residents are interested in being a committee member, and can be a good space to hold informal nominations.

It is also an opportunity to bring up any issues relating to park/village living that the committee, if started, would be dealing with.

It is important for a committee to have the support of all residents in order to be most effective.

It is also important for all residents to realise they are involved, even if they are not officially a committee member, as the committee represents them and exists to serve them.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Electing committee members

Residents can have one vote per dwelling, relating to permanent residents, although it can be one vote per resident instead. It is up to the residents' committee, with consultation of all residents, to decide how members are selected.

A permanent resident, for the purposes of these residents' committees and according to Part 4A of the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997*, is an owner/renter whose primary residence is the caravan park/residential village.

Any permanent resident can stand for election, and although a committee usually has three to 12 members, there is no real restriction on the number of members.

You can have an informal vote, with a show of hands at a general meeting, to elect committee members or you can use formal nomination forms in a ballot vote.

Committee members will usually hold their position for one year from the date of election, and may be re-appointed unless their position is contested.

It is often a good idea to make sure new committee members are introduced each year, and the main committee roles are newly appointed, to ensure the focus, clarity and energy of the group is reviewed and refreshed so it does not become stagnant. This also aims to ensure all resident views will be represented.

For more information, refer to the example: **Nomination Form.*

Inducting committee members

Take note of the following points when inducting new committee members:

- » The better your induction process, the more effective your committee will be.
- » Provide core information and advice to new members to understand the role of the committee and their role as member (this includes providing minutes, committee rules/code of conduct.
- » Ensure new members feel welcome and part of the team (for example, create a special welcome for new members and perhaps run a group activity for an inclusive, cohesive start).

For more information, refer to the checklist: **Induction of Committee Members.*

COMMITTEE ROLES

The main committee roles are:

- » chairperson
- » secretary
- » treasurer (although for an unincorporated committee with no money, this is not important).

Sometimes there is also a vice-chair if the chairperson is absent.

It may be a good idea to put together role profiles so people can understand what role they are nominating and electing for.

For more information, refer to the examples: **Role Descriptions and worksheet: **Drawing up a position description.***

The main roles of the **chairperson** are to:

- » manage the group direction
- » plan and run meetings
- » act as a spokesperson
- » ensure that the committee functions properly
- » ensure full participation during meetings
- » ensure relevant matters are addressed and discussed
- » ensure effective decisions are made and carried out
- » direct discussion of the committee, ensuring objectives are met
- » ensure communication channels between residents and park operators are open and clear.

The main roles of the **secretary** are to:

- » administer the group and maintain effective records
- » deal with most of the paperwork (communication and correspondence)
- » ensure effective organisation and minutes
- » facilitate and supports meetings
- » act as an information and reference point for other committee members.

HOW TO HAVE EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

Meetings are for:

- » decision making – decisions are recorded and carried out
- » reporting – an agenda is followed
- » review – policies are applied
- » problem solving – with time limits applied
- » discussion – ensuring full participation.

The aim is to run purposeful and participatory meetings; this requires a well-planned agenda with a clear purpose. Productive meetings also require the contribution of all members.

All members need to:

- » be prepared
- » forward apologies if they cannot attend a meeting
- » use the agenda
- » listen to others and speak up to share their views
- » ask questions
- » consider all options before making a decision.

Once a decision is made, members need to abide by it to create a cohesive committee environment.

Planning a meeting

Before you have a meeting, make sure you:

- » plan ahead (the chairperson, along with the secretary, is generally in charge of planning)
- » set dates in advance and send out reminder notices
- » clarify the purpose and focus of the meeting
- » ensure minutes and reports are easy to understand and concise.
- » ensure minutes and agenda are circulated to all committee members and, if possible, residents.

For more information, refer to the checklist: **What Committee Members Need Before A Meeting and format examples: **Agenda and Minutes**.*

What the chairperson does at meetings

Before the meeting:

- » plan the agenda – the order and timing of it
- » identify which items are for information, discussion and decision
- » ensure all necessary background is provided
- » make sure practical arrangements have been made (i.e. room, seating, tea/coffee etc.)
- » arrive in good time before the meeting is to start.

During the meeting:

- » communicate:
 - start meeting with welcome/ introductions
 - receive apologies
 - ensure additions/amendments to minutes are recorded
 - state the objectives of the meeting
- » maintain control:
 - set out time limits
 - allow flexibility and expression whilst keeping to the agenda
 - ensure **quorum** is present if it has been defined in the rules and/or constitution, although for an unincorporated committee it is not necessary
 - ensure effective time use
 - ensure proper minutes are taken
 - summarise and weigh up contributions
 - ensure decisions are recorded along with who will implement them.
 - guide the meeting and keep an eye on the time.

*A **quorum** “refers to the minimum number of committee members who have to be present for the committee to legally transact business (www.ourconsumerplace.com.au).*

At the end of the meeting:

- » summarise decisions, actions and important information
- » agree on a date for the next meeting
- » agree about any special items on the next agenda
- » ensure minutes are written up and sent out in good time to the committee.

What the secretary does at meetings

Before the meeting:

- » consult the chairperson on the order of business for the meeting
- » ensure notice of meeting, along with agenda and minutes from previous meeting, has been circulated to all committee members
- » make sure reports/information requested at last meeting is available.

During the meeting:

- » arrive in good time with all relevant correspondence/paperwork
- » record who is present and apologies
- » read previous minutes and approve
- » report on actions/matters from previous minutes and read important correspondence to the committee
- » take minutes of meeting, ensuring all decisions and proposals are documented, including who will be implementing them
- » work with the chairperson to assist in the running of the meeting.

After the meeting:

- » draft minutes and run them by the chairperson for approval.
- » send out a reminder notice of decisions/ actions relevant to committee members
- » send all relevant correspondence to committee members or, if agreed to by the committee, to all residents.

MAKING DECISIONS

In a good committee:

- » members are responsible for joint decision making
- » all relevant information has been read or heard before making a decision
- » the aim of the decision must be clear and consistent with committee objectives and all members agree
- » choices are weighed up and discussed
- » residents are consulted and informed of decisions and possibly allowed to vote on the outcome
- » a plan is put in place outlining what resources are needed and what steps must be taken to achieve the goal
- » decision making is more effective when the committee establishes what is to be done, how, when and by whom.

There are two ways to make a decision:

- » **Consensus** – all committee members/residents agree on a decision
- » **Vote** – a decision is put to a vote with a majority rule.

Either way, a decision must be clearly documented and, as much as possible, include all residents in the decision-making process.

The committee must remember that any decisions made must be a representation of **all** residents in the park/village.

EFFECTIVE COMMITTEE RELATIONS

Take note of the following points for developing good relationships within the committee:

- » Delegation is the key to ensure equal responsibility, participation and contribution.
- » Clear organisation of a committee is also important.
- » Every member on the committee must be utilised, and must be willing to be actively involved, so that no one person takes on too much responsibility.
- » The committee may choose to involve all residents to complete any tasks set.

For more information, refer to the checklist: **Improving Committee Relations.*

ESTABLISHING COMMITTEE RULES

An effective committee will usually establish a set of rules for members to abide by. The rules may also be referred to as a code of conduct or constitution; they set out the committee's aims and objectives and how it will conduct its business.

This will usually include:

- » the name of the committee
- » its aims
- » membership criteria
- » committee position descriptions
- » how the committee will provide information to members
- » equal opportunity policy
- » conduct of meetings
- » amendments to the rules
- » voting rights and procedures
- » dissolving the committee.

Members may be interested in drafting committee rules for easier functioning of the committee.

As a fairly informal group you are not required to have rules but it may help to outline boundaries, roles and conduct.

For more information, refer to the sample: **Residents' Committee Rules.*

CHECKLIST FOR GOOD PRACTICE AT MEETINGS

- » Be punctual.
- » Be constructive with your comments.
- » Respect the ground rules for the meeting.
- » Make sure that you have carried out the tasks given to you at previous meetings.
- » Respect other participants' rights to have a different opinion from your own.
- » Listen to others without interrupting.
- » Be aware of others' feelings.
- » Make your points clearly and concisely.
- » Make sure your points are understood and encourage questions from other participants.
- » Support the chair and other participants at the meeting.
- » Be interested in the discussion.
- » Speak "through the chair", address your statements to the chair, and know that by doing so you address the whole committee.
- » Welcome new members and help them settle in.
- » Be co-operative and accept decisions made by the majority.
- » Always be aware of the meeting's objectives.
- » Practice confidentiality. Be aware that some issues may be difficult and sensitive for some residents and committee members.

(www.residentsassociations.co.uk)

USEFUL CONTACTS

Housing for the Aged Action Group

- A:** 2nd Floor Ross House,
247-251 Flinders Lane,
Melbourne Victoria 3000
- T:** (03) 9654 7389
- T:** 1800 637 389 (country callers)
- F:** (03) 9654 3407
- E:** haag@oldertenants.org.au
- W:** www.oldertenants.org.au

Our Community

Our Community can provide advice and tools relevant to residents' committees. Their services include publications, training and general information.

- A:** 51 Stanley Street,
West Melbourne Victoria 3003
- T:** (03) 9320 6800
- F:** (03) 9326 6859
- E:** service@ourcommunity.com.au
- W:** www.ourcommunity.com.au
- P:** PO Box 354,
North Melbourne Victoria 3051

www.diycommitteeguide.org

This website provides practical information about how to go about running a committee. It also includes a sample 'code of conduct' that can be used as a basis for committee meetings.

Tenants Union of Victoria (TUV)

The TUV can provide a range of services for residents, including information, support and advocacy.

- A:** 55 Johnston Street,
Fitzroy Victoria 3065
- T:** (03) 9416 2577
- F:** (03) 9416 0513
- E:** admin@tuv.org.au
- W:** www.tuv.org.au
- P:** PO Box 234, Fitzroy Victoria 3065

Consumer Affairs Victoria

Consumer Affairs Victoria regulates the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997*, the main law that sets out the rights and duties of park residents and operators. Consumer Affairs Victoria provides information, advice and a free conciliation service between residents and operators in cases of dispute.

- A:** 113 Exhibition Street,
Melbourne Victoria 3000
- T:** 1300 55 81 81
- E:** consumer@justice.vic.gov.au
- W:** www.consumer.vic.gov.au
- P:** GPO Box 123, Melbourne Victoria 3000

If you are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment, you can call Consumer Affairs Victoria through the National Relay Service. TTY users, phone 133 677 then ask for 1300 55 81 81.

Speak & Listen users (speech-to-speech relay), phone 1300 555 727 then ask for 1300 55 81 81.

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