

Good practice for resident engagement in the development and ongoing review of a retirement living accreditation scheme

(as at 31 Jan 2019)

RRVV's recommendations for good practice regarding stakeholder engagement and processes for the development and review of village accreditation schemes are as follows.

1. Start with a blank sheet of paper

Retirement villages are unique. They are unlike aged care facilities, hospitals, manufacturers, retailers and so on. They deserve a unique solution.

2. Independence of process

Generally, an industry body sponsors the accreditation scheme. This arrangement raises questions of potential conflicts of interest. To avoid this issue, the various stakeholders should appoint an independent person to lead the development of the scheme.

Independence requires that the project leader does not have any direct relationship with the industry or the accreditation scheme sponsor and can demonstrate having no conflict of interest in the conduct of the role. The project leader should be also capable of conducting the work with fairness, equity and impartiality, independent of the interests of the industry body. The industry body should make adequate resources available to the project leader such as support people or a secretariat.

The project leader needs to have the capability, including relevant expertise, to conduct the review. In general, we consider that non-specialist consulting firms are rarely an acceptable choice for projects that require a specialised understanding of unique requirements of the retirement living sector and the operation of accreditation schemes.

3. Project plan

The project leader should develop, working with stakeholders, a project plan with realistic milestones and dates. It should ensure the scheme drafters have time to 'really listen' to stakeholders.

Timeframes for submissions should also acknowledge the need for resident groups to consult with their colleagues and members. Six weeks is generally an appropriate minimum period to respond to a call for submissions

4. Evaluation of the impact of existing schemes

As part of the plan, there should be an independent assessment of the impact and effectiveness of the existing accreditation schemes.

In addition to engaging with stakeholders, this could involve:

- independent research or analysis of relevant complaints or files;
- conducting audits or mystery shopping exercises;
- examining emerging issues;

- close consideration of relevant processes adopted by the administrators of the schemes (for example, file reviews or audits of processes).

5. Compliance audits

After a reasonable time, (say, one year) of operating under the scheme, operators and villages would be eligible to apply for an accreditation audit.

To maintain ongoing accreditation, operators and villages must undergo compliance audits. The frequency of these audits should reflect the compliance track record of the entity.

The auditors should be both expert and independent and their reports subject to independent review.

6. Periodic reviews

Similarly, the stakeholders should appoint an independent person to conduct periodic reviews of the operation and achievements of the scheme in conjunction with stakeholders.

Following an independent review, the reviewer must provide a formal report with findings and recommendations. RRVV recommends making the report public, both online and by circulation to stakeholders. It should summarise stakeholder positions on key issues and indicate, with reasons, whether or not the reviewer supports that position.

The sponsoring body should respond publicly to the review in a reasonably short timeframe. The response should set out how it will respond to the recommendations. It should give reasons if the body does not accept or plan to implement a recommendation (either in part or in full). The body should conduct additional resident consultation as necessary, for example, if there are changes to scheme standards.

The body should also publish a timetable for recommendation implementation and publish regular progress updates.

7. Approach to stakeholder engagement and consultation

The stakeholder engagement process should be meaningful, genuine and efficient. The process should be capable of identifying and examining the issues of concern to all stakeholders. Generally, this would require an open process at the outset to identify all relevant issues before narrowing down approaches to address those issues.

Engagement processes should involve:

- targeted roundtable engagement with particular stakeholders that have specific experience or knowledge on particular topics, stage by stage throughout the process, including the drafting of terms of reference and developing the project plan
- a broad call for submissions about relevant concerns, usually supported by an initial open issues paper or discussion paper
- resident forums
- the publication of an interim report, with a further call for submissions on its findings and recommendations
- opportunities for all stakeholders to review and comment on scheme drafts



Residents' representatives should be directly involved in the development of the terms of reference and the project plan and should contribute to the drafting of scheme documentation. Resident representatives retain independence, however, and the sponsoring body should not take their participation as indicating endorsement unless specifically given.

Engagement processes should be transparent, and the project leader or independent reviewer should release all submissions to the public with only rare exceptions. A clear engagement plan (a part of the project or review plan) is vital. A dedicated website would be helpful, posting not only submissions and any reports, but also regular updates from the project leader or reviewer about the unfolding of the process.

(Note: RRVV has drawn heavily on the Consumers' Federation of Australia paper "Good practice principles for consumer advocate involvement and expectations of development and reviews of industry codes and external dispute resolution (EDR) schemes" (April 2018) in preparing these guidelines.)