



Final grant report: Tenancy law in NSW: a practical guide

Project title	Tenancy law in NSW: a practical guide
Grant recipient	Tenants' Union of NSW
Project manager	Julie Foreman
Position	Executive Officer
Law and Justice Foundation awarded amount	\$22,500.00
Grant period	August 2011 – February 2013
Date of this report	February 2013

Description of the project

Describe the project in just enough detail so that anyone can understand it. What was the aim of the project, who was the intended audience and what strategies did you implement to achieve the aim?

To ensure that members of the community who need to understand tenancy law have an easily accessible and practical guide to the elements of tenancy law in NSW and actions to be taken when tenancy problems arise.

Write and publish a completely revised (new) plain-English guide to tenancy law in NSW. The last edition of the Tenants' Rights Manual was published in 2006 and became out of date with the commencement of a new Residential Tenancies Act 2010 in January 2011.

The TU commissioned its Senior Policy Officer, Dr Chris Martin, to write the manuscript, drawing on the expertise of TU legal and policy staff, tenant advocates from Tenant Advice and Advocacy Services in NSW, and Legal Aid NSW lawyers.

The TU contracted a publisher to copy-edit, design, print, market and distribute the publication. An on-line searchable version was made available on Legal Answers website (State Library NSW).

The project – what happened?

How did the project come about?

The new Residential Tenancies Act 2010 commenced on 31 January 2011 and constitutes the first major rewrite of tenancy legislation in 20 years. As a result, the 3rd edition of the Tenants' Rights Manual is out of date and there was no current, authoritative, community-oriented guide to NSW tenancy law.

The TU has itself identified the need for this project but had also been approached by a number of organisations interested in a new guide to tenancy law, including tenancy services, community legal centres, other community services, the Legal Information Access Centre and Legal Aid NSW.

Briefly set out the project stages and what happened in each stage.

Project Stage	Activity
Preliminary research	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review of third edition 2. Initial liaison with funders, CLC, Legal Aid, TAAP services, State Library, publishers, previous author and experienced publication project managers. 3. Research electronic publication options 4. Draft project plan and budget
Submit funding submission	included liaison with funding body
Convene User Group (UG) and Legal Reference Group (LRG)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In consultation with UG and LRG determine process and scope of involvement 2. Collate comments on third edition; identify specific target audience etc 3. Draft outline of 4th edition sent for comments 4. Ongoing meetings, consultation and liaison
Drafting of content	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Publication outline finalised 2. Drafting begun by chapter 3. Ongoing consultation with UG and LRG 4. Several drafts produced 5. Final proof reading of entire document by experienced volunteer
Liaison with publisher	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Initial meeting 2. Finalise contract 3. Final manuscript sent to publisher 4. Editor and author liaison 5. Ongoing liaison during drafting, editing and marketing 6. Separate liaison with indexer
Liaison with Legal Information Access Centre (LIAC)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Meetings to discuss partnership 2. Partnership formalised 3. Liaison during development phase 4. TRM hosted free on-line, in searchable form on Legal Answers website.

Sales, Marketing, Distribution	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Plan developed 2. Stakeholders notified 3. Launch conducted 4. Promotion undertaken
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If grant materials were produced:

How were they distributed?

- Hard copy sales were managed and distributed by the publisher, largely through direct mail and on-line marketing
- Copies sold at the launch
- Via 'Legal books on-line', Find Legal Answers, State Library. There is a direct link from the TU websites to 'Legal books on-line'
- Direct mail by TU to TAAP services

As prizes on the TU Facebook page

What was the extent of the distribution?

As at 17 January 2013, a total of 649 books were distributed - 480 copies sold, 169 provided free to tenant or community advocates. In comparison 761 were distributed within the same period for the previous edition. This drop in distribution numbers can be explained by the growing preference for, and availability of, an on-line version.

Sales were made to CLCs, bookshops, individuals, tenant organisations, lawyers and libraries. A small number of purchases were made from interstate. Of those sold over 400 were distributed to local libraries for placement in the 'Law Toolkit'.

Promotion (or distribution) of the on-line version was made direct to over 200 community organisations and to many more via sector publications including newsletters produced by: HSNET, Legal Aid, CLCs NSW, NSW Federation of Housing Association, Homelessness NSW, Shelter NSW, Tenants' Union, National Tenancy Support Network and Southern African Housing Foundation!

If applicable, at the time of this report, what has been the extent of online use of your publication?

From Monday 17 December 2012 to 8 February 2013 there were 584 page views of the TRM online via 'Legal Answers' website, of which 203 were directly into pages of the publication, probably directed from Google. The bounce rate was 0% with an average time on a page of approximately 2 minutes. This is a positive statistic that indicates readers are not just 'bouncing' off or exiting immediately.

As it is still early days, and because the publication went live just prior to the quieter Christmas period, it is expected that visits will continue to increase.

Now that the project has concluded, how did the implementation and/or the outcome differ from what was originally intended? Did anything surprise you? Were there any unintended outcomes?

There were no significant changes to the implementation or the outcome. Minor changes included the extension of the project timeline. It took approximately 3 months longer than anticipated. On advice of the publisher and after user testing, the name of the publication was retained rather than changed and illustrations were not included.

There were unintended positive outcomes:

- The community profile of the TU was enhanced through the launch and promotion of the TRM.
- Minister for Fair Trading purchased copies of another State Library community law publication - *Neighbours and the Law* for every Member of Parliament at the launch.

Ongoing partnership developed with Legal Information Access Centre including free venue for TRM launch and opportunity to brief public librarians from around the state on using the TRM and TAAS.

Evaluation

What questions did you ask to evaluate whether you had achieved your aim?

Do you feel more informed about tenancy law in NSW?

Do you rely on the TRM?

Rate the ease of use of the TRM on a scale of 1 to 10.

Have you suggested the Guide to other people? To whom?

Are sales on track to sell all hardcopies at the end of three years?

How many, and what type of, organisations have purchased the guide?

How many individuals have purchased the guide? What is their postcode?

Are there any groups or organisations missing from an expected list of purchasers?

What data did you gather to answer your questions?

The user group, legal reference group and an external user provided verbal and written feedback during the process of writing. This included broad comments on structure and style as well as comments on readability of specific sections. The feedback enhanced the quality of the publication. More details are provided in Part B question 2(b).

The list of attendees at the launch demonstrated that the TRM had interested a wide audience which included social housing providers, Parliamentary representatives from three political parties, tenants, pro bono lawyers, barristers, CTTT staff, community advocates, CLC staff, TU members, academics, student accommodation providers, mainstream media (Domain/SMH) and peak NGOs.

Written comments from readers:

- “The TRM is a fantastic resource. It's the bible for tenants advocates and is always present at our client interviews as the main back up resource for information. Content and coverage of topics is fantastic” (regional TAAP worker)

- “The Tenants’ Rights Manual is a great tool, I love it “ (TAAP worker)
- “It is the best Tenants’ Rights Manual ever” (from leading Housing Law academic)
- “We have used it at the CTTT and sent pages to our clients when we couldn’t appear at the CTTT. I also have given it to our new worker as a quick reference and learning guide. It’s a valuable tool with quick and easy referencing. We also like the plain English. A copy was sent to an informal tenant leader in Bourke and she has been using it for herself and other community members from Orange to Bourke..so it has gone forth and multiplied!” (Aboriginal TAAP advocate)
- “I found the manual easy to read and full of useful practical information and templates” (Legal Aid NSW employee)
- “In relation to the TRM, the only suggestion I have is to include a chapter summary after each chapter with the relevant sections of the act otherwise I find it really useful.” (TAAP worker)
- “The notes on changes are good but I think some more ‘examples’ for the different topics would be great. For instance in the topic ‘Rent arrears’ there is an example about Chad, whereas in the ‘break fees’ section there’s no example. The ‘This is new’ sections are awesome.” (TAAP worker)
- “I find the legislation, fact sheets and Anforth more useful.” (TAAP worker)
- LIAC staff provided very positive feedback on how they use the publication to provide information to library users.

A reader survey developed in liaison with the Law and Justice Foundation was inserted in each book. As yet no responses have been received. A copy of the survey is attached.

The TRM has been used successfully as a training tool with tenant advocates and community workers in sessions conducted by the Learning and Development Coordinator and the Principal Solicitor of the TU. Questions are posed and participants were able to successfully use the publication to locate answers to questions and make short presentations on selected topics.

Sales and on-line data usage

For sales and on-line data refer to question 2 (c).

Did you achieve your aim? What did you find out?

Data is limited and it remains early days, however the feedback from a range of informants suggests that the TRM is useful to a variety of organisations and individuals. It has informed readers and is easy to use.

Conclusion and recommendations

What is your conclusion?

That the project was completed in a timely manner and largely achieved its aims.

What are your recommendations for improvements both for the intended audience of your project, and for the strategy you used to achieve your aim? What would you do differently next time?

Continue to promote the existence of the publication to ensure continued use.