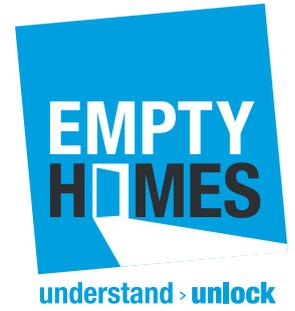


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EMPTY HOMES

STARTER KIT | MARCH 2022



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The Wise Group is a family of community organisations sharing a common purpose: to create fresh possibilities and services for the wellbeing of people, organisations and communities.

Our work spans health and wellbeing services, education and training, workforce development and research, information services and software development, employment and navigation services and business support services. Together we are one of the largest providers of mental health and wellbeing services in Aotearoa New Zealand.

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Nau mai, haere mai - welcome

Who is this kit for?

This Starter Kit is intended for organisations and/or local authorities that are interested in learning about and implementing a place-based programme to return empty homes into the housing supply.

The focus of an empty homes programme is on finding and filling empty homes. **If you are considering an empty homes programme for your area, it should not be viewed as a solution for addressing homelessness.** There are many other organisations and initiatives that are working in that space.

What's in this kit

This guide is divided into five sections:

- Discovery - researching empty homes in your area and helping you determine whether there will be merits to implementing a local empty homes programme
- Setup - getting ready to implement an empty homes programme
- Planning - thinking through and preparing for external engagements with stakeholders
- Making it happen - finding and filling empty homes
- Building relationships - ...

A range of digital assets and files is also available as a supplement to this guide. These can be obtained from the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development.

How to use this kit

The information provided is based on the learning and experience of the Empty Homes project and trial in Hamilton city during 2021-2022.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to finding and filling empty homes. There are likely to be housing, economic, and environmental factors that will differ from when the original project and trial ran.

The information in this kit should be used as a guide only. It should be adapted to reflect your area's unique environment and needs.

Updates

The information in this kit was published in March 2022 and was correct at the time of publication.

There are recommendations from the Empty Homes final report that may have been implemented since publication. Readers should check with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development for the latest information and/or changes since this was published.

“When we find and fill empty homes the benefits are many and far-reaching. Building safe and vibrant communities while improving wellbeing for many is work worth doing!”

Julie Nelson
Joint Chief Executive, Wise Group

Benefits of filling empty homes



Financial

- Cheaper and faster than building
- Less roading and environmental impacts when people live closer to their place of work
- Increased business for local economy, e.g. dairies, hairdressers, cafes, pharmacies



Tenants

- Frees up the homes tenants vacate when they rent an empty home, for other tenants to move into
- Improved mental wellbeing
- Improved social wellbeing



Empty Homes programmes

- Learnings guide more success
- Success stories build credibility and positively influence other empty home owners



Neighbourhoods and local communities

- More vibrant
- Safer



Employers

- Easier to attract staff when local housing is available
- Easier to retain staff when they have housing close to place of work



Landlords

- Increased income
- Contributing to society and being part of the solution to the housing crisis

Discovery

Understanding your region's housing situation is essential prior to launching an empty homes programme





Read the Empty Homes report

The Empty Homes project and trial ran from March 2021 through to March 2022. The project needed to:

1. identify barriers and opportunities for housing market renewal, specifically through the reintroduction of empty homes into the housing supply
2. identify the characteristics of empty homes, including location and condition
3. identify owners of empty homes in Hamilton city that would be willing to participate in a trial to reintroduce their home to the housing supply
4. identify potential tenants to occupy empty homes, for consideration by empty home owners.

The final report submitted to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development in March 2022 shares the process, insights, learnings and successes of that project. This kit should be read in conjunction with that report. There may be additional insights that may be relevant to your local area.



Review Census data

The Census contains information on the number of empty dwellings on Census night. There are many limitations to this data, but it does give some insights that - when combined with local knowledge - can help you understand long term patterns and trends.

A spreadsheet of Census data from 2013 and 2018 has been included in the supplementary resources associated with this starter kit.

This contains empty dwelling data that you can use to better understand empty homes in your area. Information has been supplied at both the territorial local authority (TLA) level, and SA2 level (similar to suburb). Additional data can be obtained from Stats NZ, if more current information is required.

Key questions

In your TLA:

- How many empty dwellings were there?
- How many empty dwellings were there per square kilometre (density)?
- Are there any suburbs with particularly high numbers or density of empty homes?
- Are there any local factors that can explain why some areas have higher numbers and/or density of empty homes?



Review utilities data, if available

A recommendation of the Empty Homes project was to use utilities consumption data (such as power or water) to better identify potentially empty homes. The purpose of this data is to understand the prevalence of homes that meet the empty home definition; it is not intended to specifically identify individual homes that may be empty.

A key benefit of utilities data is that it is more current than Census data and it can be tracked over time. This information, if available, can be used to identify whether there are sufficient numbers of empty homes in an area to merit launching an empty homes programme, and highlight local areas to focus on.

Key questions:

- How is the number of empty homes changing over time? Are there more or fewer empty homes?
- Are there any suburbs or areas with particularly high numbers of potentially empty homes?
- Are there any local factors that can explain why some areas have higher numbers of empty homes?
- Are there any seasonal factors that can explain fluctuations in the number of empty homes? eg student accommodation areas.



Identify local housing initiatives

During the Discovery stage of the Empty Homes project and trial conducted in Hamilton, a range of local housing initiatives and programmes were identified that aligned with the project's aims. Identifying these complementary programmes, and understanding how they could work in partnership with the Empty Homes programme can create mutually beneficial opportunities. Creating partnerships is essential for the success of an Empty Homes programme.

Key questions

- Are there any local funds or grants available to support healthy homes (such as insulation or heat pumps)?
- What other housing groups or complementary housing initiatives are there in your region?



Research housing in your area

New Zealand has been experiencing a housing crisis for many years, which was exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Rising rents, increasing house values, constrained supply chains, changing regulations, and a general shortage of affordable housing, were key drivers for the need for the Empty Homes project and trial. Returning empty homes to the housing supply was identified as an innovative way to alleviate some housing pressure and improve utilisation of existing housing stock.

Housing moves in cycles. As the pandemic subsides and the borders re-open, the housing situation across New Zealand will change. There are also economic factors that will impact housing in your area.

Before embarking on an empty homes programme, it will be important to deeply understand the housing situation in your area.

- Speak with property stakeholders and experts in your area to better understand the current housing situation.
- Speak with key employers in your region to identify how housing is impacting recruitment and retention of staff.

Key questions

- What is the current rental demand in your area?
- How quickly are rentals filled?
- Is it getting easier or more challenging to find suitable rentals?
- What are the typical rents in your area? How is this changing?
- How are the current economic conditions impacting on housing demands?
- What is the current regulatory environment for rentals and how is that impacting housing in your area?
- Would it be beneficial to have more rentals?
- Are key employers in the area struggling to find and retain staff due to housing issues?
- Reflecting on the data gathered to date, and your understanding of housing demands and needs, would there be merit to an empty homes programme in your area?

Setup

If you've decided to implement an empty homes programme in your area, here's what you'll need to get ready





People and talent

Key skills

An organisation delivering an empty homes programme would need to have competence in the following areas:

- community engagement
- relationship building
- promotions and communications across multi-media
- database management
- data analysis
- monitoring and reporting
- funding (attracting, managing and accountability reporting).

Key resources

At least two full time equivalent staff are recommended to establish and run an empty homes programme in a given location.

This may vary depending on the size of the geographical area and the number of empty homes in that area. More staff may be required as the programme grows.

Key attributes and strengths

People responsible for delivering an empty homes programme within an organisation would ideally have the following attributes and strengths:

- tenacity
- analytical
- relationship-builder
- communicator
- achiever.



Knowledge

What you need to know

It is recommended that, as soon as possible, you familiarise yourself with a number of key regulations, guidelines and requirements in the housing and rental space.

At a minimum, you should understand:

- the obligations and rights of landlords under the Residential Tenancies Act
- the Healthy Homes standards and requirements
- basic financial understanding of being a landlord, such as rent setting, tax deductibility, rental yields, what expenses can be deducted.

You will find this information and much more at www.tenancy.govt.nz. You may also want to explore whether there are any local tenant education programmes in your local area.

Your ability to understand these will empower you when you're engaging with empty home owners and other stakeholders. The more informed you are, the better you will be able to listen and identify unmet needs and opportunities in order to meet their needs and expectations.

Key questions

- Have you read the requirements for landlords on the Tenancy.govt.nz website?
- Are you familiar with the Healthy Homes standards and what these mean for potential landlords?
- Do you understand the tax implications for landlords, specifically interest deductibility and the Brightline test?
- Do you understand national and local council planning and policies around housing density and any new intensification rules?



Information management

Good information management will help you run an effective empty homes programme. Using documents and spreadsheets is one option but it can be hard to manage over time, particularly as the amount of information grows.

There are a range of systems that can help you more effectively manage your information and collaborate as a team.

Your information needs will include tracking:

- stakeholder details
- project tasks and milestones
- project assets and files
- event calendar and key dates
- media article register
- media enquiries register
- website enquiries register
- empty home and owner register
- survey responses and feedback, if using a survey
- consultation responses and progress.

You may have other information needs that aren't yet clear. It will be important your systems are able to quickly and easily adapt to any emerging requirements. Flexibility is key.

The 2022 Empty Homes report made a recommendation related to a central website and system for empty homes. If you are commencing your project prior to this system being in place, we recommend the following systems for your information management. Even if a central system is in place, you may find benefits using some of these tools. All were used during the Empty Homes project and trial.



Project management and customer relationship management

Tracking project tasks, and keeping records of your meetings, stakeholder engagements, empty home owner details, and other information assets will be very important.

If your organisation does not have access to a customer relationship management (CRM) platform or project management platforms, we highly recommend Airtable.

Airtable.com was used during the Empty Homes project and trial with great success. It is a user-friendly, flexible, customisable database platform, offering many advanced features.

The Empty Homes project used Airtable for managing the majority of their information needs. A key benefit of using Airtable was the ability to quickly and easily adapt to changing information needs. This is essential for a project of this nature.



Recording interviews and meetings

Keeping notes during meetings and interviews can be challenging, particularly when there is a lot to be discussed. Recording meetings (with consent of participants) can allow you to focus on what's being said during the meeting rather than being distracted writing notes. Otter.ai provides excellent quality audio and transcription, in your web browser on the desktop, or using the dedicated app on iPhone and Android devices. Free and paid versions are available.



Conducting surveys

Surveys may be used in your approach to find empty homes. The Empty Homes project and trial found SurveyMonkey the most user-friendly and feature rich solution. A free version is available with some limitations. For more complex surveys, a paid version may be required. The analysis and reporting features are particularly useful.



Presentations

Presenting to stakeholders is an important part of any project. Canva is an online platform that simplifies the design and presentation experience for non-designers.

- No software required - everything's done in your web browser.
- Designers can easily collaborate.
- Keep all your presentations in one place.

Website

The Empty Homes project and trial recommended the establishment of a centralised website and system to support place-based empty homes programmes. If this is not established when you are launching your empty homes programme, it will be important to set up your own website (or pages within your organisation's website) to promote your programme.

How your website looks and works for you will depend on how you want to run your programme. At a minimum, we recommend including information about:

- your organisation and team
- the purpose of your programme
- the benefits of your programme
- who it's for
- how to get in touch (general enquiries)
- how empty home owners can register their interest in the programme.

When you are designing your site/pages, you might like to also consider an area for sharing success stories. Success stories will help grow your programme and raise awareness.

Key questions

- How will empty home owners get in touch with you to enrol in your programme?
- What information will you collect from empty home owners when they connect with you via your website?

Planning

There are a several plans that should be developed before you commence your empty homes programme





Engagement strategy and plan

The purpose of your engagement plan is to guide and inform the process of engagement with stakeholders involved in your empty homes programme, that:

1. facilitates awareness of empty homes and your programme
 2. builds collaborative relationships and partnerships that will support your empty homes programme
 3. builds relationships with empty home owners to find and fill empty homes.
- local mayor and councillors/council
 - local branch of NZ Property Investors Federation
 - other property stakeholders (eg property developers, real estate agents, etc)
 - regional council
 - any organisations working in the housing sector with subsidies
 - any organisation offering or developing housing related subsidies.
 - Recommended
 - Utilities companies, if data is required.

What's in an engagement plan?

Typically, an engagement plan will include:

- the types of stakeholders you will be engaging with
- the projected risks and recommended actions to deal with those, should they arise
- the engagement approach method to be used (eg one-to-one, email, cold calling, website, online, large group presentations, etc)
- how to conduct an approach before, during, and following engagement.

Who should you engage with?

With respect to the types of stakeholders you will engage with, we recommend the following:

- Essential
 - HUD or whichever agency is responsible at a central Govt level
- Highly recommended
 - local iwi
 - local funders and philanthropics
 - local MPs

Key questions

- Have you researched the stakeholder groups and organisations that you wish to engage?
- Have you identified and selected the relevant person to engage with?
- Have you researched the individual's background and history before engaging with them?
- Have you identified the reason for engagement, ie what help do you need from them?
- Have you identified the approach method you will use?
- What is your goal?
- What resources, if any, do you require for a successful engagement (eg to establish credibility, leave-behind information about the project, etc)?
- How will you create excitement and share your vision for the empty homes programme?
- Have you planned for follow-ups?

(101)

Media strategy and plan

Why?

An empty homes programme will be of interest to the media and general public for a number of reasons.

- Housing – affordability, quality and supply - is currently a major social and political issue in New Zealand and has been for many years.
- There are thousands of empty homes across New Zealand and many of us know of an empty home in our neighbourhood.
- The rental market is important. One in three Kiwis rent a home and the proportion of private home ownership is dropping.
- Tenants complain of poor quality or unsuitable rental accommodation; for example, Stats NZ reports that 49% of tenants say their rented home is always or sometimes damp.
- Almost half of tenants say their rented home is unaffordable.
- Tenants often queue in hundreds to secure a property in a highly competitive rental market or are forced to live far away from work, schools, and family.
- On the other side of the coin, private landlords feel vilified by recent legislative and tax changes. They must comply with legislation that forces them to make capital improvements to their properties. The Brightline test has doubled and tax deductibility on interest payments is being progressively removed.

It will be important you are prepared to act quickly to respond to any media enquiries. If the opportunity arises, take a proactive approach with the media.

Key questions

- Have you identified 3-4 communications objectives when dealing with the media?
- Have you identified who the audiences are likely to be?
- Have you identified your key messages?
- Have you identified what you want each of your stakeholder groups to think?
- Have you prepared a holding media statement or a full press release?
- Have you coached frontline staff from your organisation (eg receptionists) on how to handle media enquiries (ie provided a holding message and coached them on timeout techniques) so they reach the right people?
- Have you established a media contacts database with a focus on local media?
- Have you brainstormed the types of questions you might get asked by the media?
- Have you prepared a range of possible answers to anticipated questions from the media?



Communications and promotions strategy and plan

Why?

It will be important to tell the world (okay, tell your area) about the empty homes programme. You will need to employ a range of tactics across multi-media and channels to get the word out.

Your strategy and plan will be limited in part by the available budget.

An empty homes programme will attract interest and support from a wide range of local stakeholders who can assist with your communications and promotions efforts. It is recommended that, through your stakeholder engagement actions (in your engagement plan), you identify and work collaboratively with all interested parties.

Key questions

- What is your available budget?
- Where will you get your biggest bang for buck?
- What are your key communication and promotion goals?
- What are your key messages?
- Who are the priority audiences you want to reach?
- What channels will you use to reach them?
- What collaborations can you source to support your communications and promotions activities?
- What external skills do you need and who will supply those (eg design, production)?
- How will you monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of your communications and promotions activities?

Making it
happen





Find empty homes

The Empty Homes project and trial considered two key methods for finding empty homes:

- self-referral by the empty home owner
- actively identifying empty homes using local knowledge or using a “report an empty home” mechanism.

Self-referral

The preferred way to identify empty homes is to have empty home owners directly make contact with you. This shows they have an interest in the programme and a willingness to return their empty home to the housing supply.

First, you need to raise awareness of your empty homes programme. Start your activities as per your communications and engagement plans. Remember, owners of homes in your area may not live in your area; they may be in other towns or cities in New Zealand, or even abroad. It will be important to promote your programme using channels that will reach empty home owners.

The Empty Homes project and trial worked with Hamilton City Council to promote their project in rates notices - both posted and emailed. This was an excellent way of reaching the right audience. We highly recommend collaborating with your local council to promote your programme directly to rate payers - either in rates notices or other targeted communications.

Actively identified / reported empty homes

Your team and organisation may be aware of homes that are currently empty (or at least appear to be empty) in your area. This may include knowledge of properties that will be redeveloped. There are also likely to be people within the community that will have knowledge of potentially empty homes.

The Empty Homes project and trial considered a “report an empty home” mechanism, but opted against implementing this during the short trial, for a few key reasons.

- Reports of empty homes can be unreliable. Appearances can be deceiving.
- There can be good reasons why homes sit empty, which aren't immediately obvious to an external observer. Sometimes the reason a home is empty will clearly eliminate the home from being eligible for an empty homes programme.
- It will be time consuming to follow up on empty home reports to identify the home owner, and start a cold approach.
- Home owners may react negatively at the idea of someone reporting their home as empty. They may also raise privacy concerns. This could be damaging for the reputation of your programme.
- The health and safety of people who actively seek out and report empty homes could be at risk.

Making a cold approach can start the relationship on difficult terms. For this reason, it's highly recommended to focus your efforts on increasing the number of self referrals from empty home owners. It is a far more positive and collaborative approach that is likely to achieve better outcomes.

If you decide to proceed with a “report an empty home” approach, or direct approaches to home owners of suspected empty homes, we recommend proceeding with caution. Carefully craft your scripts, messaging, and campaign. Consider the possible reactions you may receive.



Identify the right opportunities

Not all of the empty homes you discover (either self referred or reported) will be right for your programme. Based on all the learnings from the Empty Homes project and trial, three essential elements have been identified as necessary when selecting homes and owners to work with.

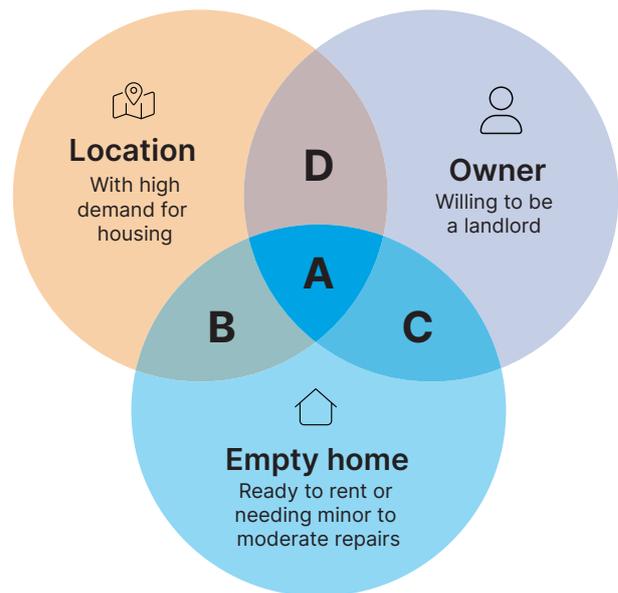
Initial assessment

Your initial conversation(s) with the empty home owner should seek to identify whether the empty home is a suitable opportunity.

Ideally, the empty home should:

- be in the right condition
- be in the right location
- have an owner willing to be a landlord.

When all three elements are present together, there is a higher probability of reintroducing an empty home into the housing supply.



Key

A - the ideal scenario of an empty home in the right condition, the right location and with an owner willing to be a landlord.

B - an empty home in the right condition and location, but an owner who may be reluctant or unwilling to make their home available to rent. With the right supports and solutions, there may still be an opportunity to address any owner concerns to reintroduce the empty home into the housing supply.

C - an empty home in the right condition and a willing owner, but not in a location where there is demand and need for housing. Housing demands can change; an empty home in this scenario could be a future opportunity if housing demand changes.

D - an owner with a home in the right location that either isn't empty, or is empty but not in a suitable condition / requires considerable renovation or repair.



Right condition

The Empty Homes project and trial encountered empty homes in a variety of states. The vast majority were described by their owners as “ready for occupation” or “needs minor renovation or repair”. These are the ideal empty homes to work with, as any improvements required will likely be limited and achievable with small investment from the owner or through subsidies.

“Ready for occupation” doesn’t necessarily mean the empty home is ready to be used as a rental; some upgrades may be required to bring them up to the Healthy Homes standards.

If a home needs significant repairs and maintenance and/or renovation, you may need to consider whether it is the right fit for an empty homes programme.

Right location

Check with the owner to ensure the empty home is within your area. Also identify the suburb.

Within your area, there may be suburbs with higher demand for housing. Understanding those needs can help you prioritise which empty homes to focus on for maximum results.

Owner willing to be a landlord

Check to ensure that the owner is interested and willing to become a landlord. They may have some reservations, but assure them those will be worked through as part of the programme.

Explain the support and solutions your programme offers them in the early stages of consultation. Tenancy concerns were a common barrier identified in the Empty Homes project and trial. It is important to have, and communicate, support and solutions that are readily available to overcome these barriers.

Consult with the empty home owner

Once the right opportunities have been identified, work begins to deeply understand the empty home owner’s situation.

Our experience during the Empty Homes project and trial showed that:

- every situation is unique
- successful outcomes are about the empty home owner, and less about the actual home.

Your engagement with empty home owners will determine the outcome.

Key questions

- Why is the home empty?
- How long has the home been empty?
- How many bedrooms are there?
- What is the condition of the home?
- Does the home meet the Healthy Homes standards?
- What improvements might be required to bring the home up to standard?
- Has the owner been a landlord before?
- How would the owner like to manage their property?
- What type of tenant would the owner like?
- What rent are they expecting?
- What are the owner’s biggest worries and concerns about tenanting the property?
- What does success look like for the owner?



Identify barriers for the home owner

There is a range of common barriers that emerged during the Empty Homes project. Some barriers can be overcome through an empty homes programme, but others can be more difficult to navigate.

Every situation will be unique. Explore barriers with the empty home owner and determine the degree to which they can be overcome.

Voluntary / internal barriers

Tenant concerns	
G	The type of tenant the owner is willing to accept
G	Concerns about tenants and their impact on the property, neighbours and the local community
G	Difficulty finding the right tenants
G	Ongoing property and tenant management
Finance	
G	Owner unwilling to fund improvements to meet required standards
G	No financial need or duress to justify the risk of renting
O	The costs may not be worth it, ie low or negative rental yield
Attitudes	
O	Unwilling to rent home
O	Resistance to the regulations
O	Resistance to tax changes
O	Resistance due to negative past experiences
Purpose of the home	
R	Home is for use by the owner only, or is a primary residence
R	Home not obtained for full-time use (ie holiday home, bach)
R	Future intentions for the property (ie redevelopment)

Involuntary / external barriers

Finance	
O	Cost of improvements
O	Cost of finance related to funding improvements may be prohibitive
O	Unable to fund improvements
Condition of home	
O	Home damaged – decontamination, repairs and maintenance, fire, etc
O	Doesn't meet the requirements of the Residential Tenancies Act, including Healthy Homes standards
Demand	
O	Building supply chain constraints and cost of supplies
O	Availability of tradespeople to undertake improvements
R	Housing demand where the home is located
Personal	
O	No bandwidth/capacity/time to consider filling home without affecting wellbeing
R	Personal or family factors outside of the owner's control
R	Estates and probate
R	Divorce and separation property disputes
Environmental	
R	Unable to access home due to factors outside of owner control – force majeure, lockdowns, etc
R	Damaged from earthquake, flood, storm, etc
Third party delays	
R	Waiting on consents or approvals
R	Insurance claims process

Green - resolvable barriers

Orange - more challenging to overcome, but may be resolvable through an empty homes programme

Red - very difficult or unlikely to be resolvable through an empty homes programme



Fill empty homes

After identifying the nature and condition of the empty home, and the barriers the property owner faces in regards filling the home, identify the supports and solutions needed in order to return the empty home to the housing supply.

The Empty Homes project and trial identified that every situation will be unique. There is no single support or solution that will meet everyone's needs. This process is very much about doing whatever it takes to support the property owner to rent their empty home.

Leverage your partnerships and relationships

Your knowledge of the housing sector, local housing initiatives, and regulations, combined with the partnerships you have established, will empower you to come up with creative solutions to any barriers presented. There are no right or wrong answers - test and trial solutions, and refine these over time as your experience grows.

Ready pipeline of tenants

The concerns conveyed by property throughout the Empty Homes project and trial focused predominantly on tenant suitability and behaviour. It is recommended to establish a pipeline of pre-vetted tenants that could be presented without delay.

Examples of supports and solutions

Some examples of the types of supports and solutions you might consider include:

- assistance with a Healthy Homes assessment
- supporting the property owner to scope any required improvements to bring the home up to the required standards
- connecting the home owner with your empty home programme partners to conduct property improvements
- identifying and recommending funding, grants or subsidies that could help fund any property improvements
- coaching the property owner on the obligations and rights of landlords
- helping the property owner determine an appropriate rent
- sourcing suitable tenants for the home owner to select from
- connecting the home owner with a suitable property manager, or giving guidance on how to manage the property themselves.



Close the loop

Follow up with empty home owners

Once an empty home has been filled, it's important to check in with the empty home owner. Have things gone to plan? Is there anything outstanding? What else needs to be done? If additional support is required, work with the empty home owner to resolve any issues.

It's a good idea to set a reminder in your calendar to follow up in a few months. Check in to ensure the tenancy is working well.

Seek feedback from stakeholders

Given the diversity of empty homes and owners you will encounter, and the dynamic nature of housing, it's important to seek feedback from your stakeholders.

Embrace a continuous improvement mindset - every engagement will have key learnings that can inform better, faster, easier, more efficient ways of working.

Capture and share success stories

Success breeds success. Satisfied landlords who have been through your programme may have other properties to fill. They are also often connected to other property investors or property developers.

Every empty home returned to the housing supply is a success story that, if shared, can help build your profile and encourage others to enrol.

Tips



Plan your time well

It may sound simple in practice but finding and filling empty homes is time intensive and commitment-heavy work. There may be many conversations with empty home owners before you reach a point where they are willing to engage.

Be sure to be realistic about the long lead time necessary to complete a reintroduction of an empty home. You may need to be flexible with your hours, too, to meet empty home owners on their terms.



Keep an open mind, listen closely

Your engagement and discussions with an empty home owner will determine the outcome. Listen deeply and authentically to identify unmet and unspoken needs. Don't judge empty home owners - every situation will be different. Try to understand from their perspective and walk in their shoes. Many empty home owners have worked hard to acquire their property - their concerns regarding filling their property are valid and need to be addressed.



Do what you say you're going to do

Your ability to deliver and the reputation of your programme will rely heavily on your integrity. If you commit to something, follow through. Be careful not to over-promise.



Be solutions focused

You may be presented with difficult barriers and challenges when engaging with empty home owners and other stakeholders. There may be times when you don't have all the answers, and that's okay. What's important is to commit to finding the answers and working collaboratively on solutions.



Stay positive

There may be times when you're unable to find the right solutions, or empty home owners decide not to proceed. It's important to remain positive! Learn from the experience, seek feedback from stakeholders, and adapt your process for next time.

Build relationships





Connect with partners to help fill empty homes

You will encounter a wide variety of challenges as you work with empty home owners. Your ability to solve many of those challenges will depend on the strength of your connections and relationships with partners in your area.

Think creatively about the types of challenges you anticipate when it comes to filling empty homes. Here are some examples of the types of relationships you might need.

- Tradespeople - to conduct property improvements.
- Suppliers - to source low cost equipment and supplies that are likely to be needed for common property improvements to meet the standards. For example, heat pumps, extraction fans, insulation.
- Property managers - as an option for property owners that don't want to manage the property themselves.
- Local funders and philanthropics - to identify any funding, subsidies or grants (including current or any future opportunities) that might be available to home owners or complement your empty homes programme.

You may have multiple partners engaged on the project that fulfil the same purpose. This can be advantageous, as it gives empty home owners options and choice.



Connect with local employers to source a stream of potential tenants

Finding and selecting tenants was identified as a key challenge during the Empty Homes project and trial. It's not just about paying the rent on time. Landlords want to know that tenants will care for the property, respect the neighbours and community, and maintain good relationships.

It's likely that sourcing tenants will be a solution that empty home owners will need. It will be important for your programme to have connections with local employers and essential services so that you can develop a ready source of pre-vetted tenants who will be appealing to empty home owners.