

THE MINNESOTA RENTER'S GUIDE TO TENANT ORGANIZING

HOME Line and Housing Justice Center



CONTRIBUTORS

HOME Line provides free and low-cost legal, organizing, education, and advocacy services so that tenants throughout Minnesota can solve their own rental housing problems. We work to improve public and private policies relating to rental housing by involving and centering affected tenants in the process.

Housing Justice Center (HJC) is a nonprofit public interest advocacy and legal organization that works to strengthen tenant protections, preserve and expand affordable housing, and improve our housing system so all Minnesotans can be stably housed with dignity while remaining rooted in community.

AmeriCorps VISTA is an anti-poverty program designed to provide needed resources to nonprofit organizations and public agencies to increase their capacity to lift communities out of poverty. AmeriCorps VISTA provides opportunities for Americans 18 years or older from a diverse range of backgrounds to dedicate a year of full-time service with an organization (“sponsor”) to create or expand programs designed to empower individuals and communities in overcoming poverty.

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Please read through this entire guide before starting to organize in your community.

INTRODUCTION

This guide is for Minnesota renters looking to organize with their neighbors around a shared housing or neighborhood issue. Many organizers collaborated on this guide. The information comes from their experiences as well as pre-existing organizing guides from advocacy groups nationwide. It has been expanded and adapted to fit Minnesota state law.

This guide was written by organizers, for organizers!

Land Acknowledgement

Our work takes place on ancestral, traditional, and contemporary unceded territory of the Dakota and Anishinaabe peoples. Our work is rooted in solidarity, liberation, and community. We pledge to fight systems that have oppressed people indigenous to this land for centuries.

Labor Acknowledgement

Organizers and leaders from historically marginalized communities have largely developed the teachings in this guide. We recognize and wish to uplift the reality of these communities, including: Black, Indigenous, and People of Color; women; Queer folks; disabled folks; immigrants; and individuals from low-income backgrounds. You can find more information in the resources section of this guide.

The guide aims to provide tools and resources to help undo dehumanizing systems that block our inherent right to accessible, affordable, dignified, and safe homes.

We thank those who came before us — known and unknown, recognized and unrecognized — for their wisdom, sacrifices, and belief in change. May this work continue to move us toward a future where we are all secure in our homes, health, wealth, and communities.

Note: this guide is in its Beta (pre-release) version. If you would like to leave feedback on this guide, please fill out the [feedback form](#).

WHEN & WHY ORGANIZE?

Sometimes, tenant rights can be enforced through simple communication with a landlord or individually through legal [action](#). But knowing the law is not always enough to protect your rights to decent, affordable housing.

Due to the imbalance of power that landlords have over tenants, sometimes it takes the action of an organized group of tenants to make your voices heard. While a landlord may find it easy to ignore individual tenant demands, a group of tenants speaking with one voice can exert collective [power](#) and pressure. That is harder to ignore.

If there is a problem that a single tenant thinks is serious, others will likely share that same concern.

Some common [issues](#) that tenants organize around include:

- Shared repair issues among neighbors
- Emergency repairs: loss of essential services such as heat, running water, hot water, electricity, or sanitary facilities
- Utility shut offs due to landlord nonpayment or retaliatory behavior
- Third party utility billing issues
- Poor management and record-keeping
- Abuse and [retaliation](#)
- Privacy violations
- Threat of loss of affordable housing
- Notices to vacate/evictions
- Rent increases and high non-optimal fees
- Predatory towing
- Safety and security concerns
- Building sales without notice

There are a number of reasons that you might find yourself in need of collective power, but there are three main categories we will separate them into.

- Many times, community organizing is a reaction to an immediate and pressing issue. For example, a pipe burst on the third floor and flooded a number of units on all the floors below it. You and your neighbors may quickly organize to minimize damage and push for a quick response time from your landlord. This can be very effective in the short term, though it is not usually sustainable once the problem is solved. But it can be the beginning of a longer-term effort to improve living conditions in your home.
- Other times, you may begin organizing not because there's an emergency, but because your intuition is telling you something is wrong that needs to be addressed. This may

look like confusing, unexplained charges on your rent ledger, long delays in repairs, or an upcoming change in management or ownership. Because the issue is not as urgent, you can spend time talking with your neighbors and strategizing for long-term solutions.

- Lastly, you may start organizing within your building because you want a stronger sense of community. You don't have any specific issues but know that you might in the future, and you want to be proactive about it. This could look like organizing an exercise group or community garden, a space where you and your neighbors can get to know one another. An informal space like this lets relationships and trust develop naturally so that when problems arise, you have already started developing a base of people to work with.

RIGHT TO ORGANIZE LAW IN 2025

 **Note:** Effective January 1st, 2025 a statewide policy protecting tenants' right to organize will go into effect. The policy language which can be read under [MN statute 504B.212](#) will protect tenants and [tenant organizers](#) attempting to work together collectively to solve issues in their housing. **In the coming months, we will update this guide to reflect these incredible changes.**

WHAT IS A TENANT ASSOCIATION?

[Tenant associations](#) are building, neighborhood, or geography-based organizations made up of tenants who organize together to build [power](#).

Generally, tenant associations:

- Use collective political, economic, legal, and social pressures to **overcome recurring problems**.
- Organize because they agree there is a **commonly shared issue** that their collective [actions](#) can address.
- Help **build strong relationships between neighbors** and stronger communities, creating meaningful support systems for individuals and families.
- Often host social events, celebrations, and resource fairs, bringing neighbors together regularly to get to know one another and **experience joy outside of the struggle**.

 **Note:** The term [tenant association](#) is used interchangeably with the terms *tenant union*, *resident association*, *renters association*, and *renters union*. You can use whatever terms feel best for your group. *Tenant association* is used in this guide because it reflects the terms used in some legal contexts and existing laws.

Before we get into how to organize your tenant association, we'll give you some definitions of common organizing terms that you can reference throughout your reading.

COMMON ORGANIZING TERMS

Accessibility

The practice of making information, activities, and/or environments sensible, meaningful, and usable for as many people as possible.¹

Action

Use of various tactics by the base to put pressure on the target.

Base-building

The process of organizing people by building relationships based on shared interests and understanding of the issues in the community. The result of successful base-building is a network of strong community leaders who deeply understand the direct experiences of their community and are trusted to act on their behalf.

Burnout

Physical, emotional, or mental exhaustion, accompanied by decreased motivation and negative attitudes toward oneself or others. Burnout can be caused by several factors, but is usually the result of excessive and prolonged stress.

Campaign

A campaign is your plan to win lasting change on an issue that you care about. In a tenant association, campaigns can be started to improve conditions, stop an unjust rent increase, stop evictions in your building, or buy your building.²

Community Agreements

Code of ethics created by groups like a tenant association that allows all members to be included, honored, heard, and respected.³

Community Organizing

The process of building power at the community level by building relationships around a common interest. Coordinated people and resources are a vehicle to promote the changes desired by community members.

¹ SeeWriteHear

² AAPI Neighborhoods Tenant Building Tenant Power Guide

³ IDHA

Decision-making

Process of deliberation and negotiation between your base and a particular target that leads to a “final” decision.

Discrimination

In everyday use, to "discriminate" means to distinguish, single out, or make a distinction. When faced with more than one option, we discriminate in arriving at almost every decision we make. But in the context of civil rights law, unlawful discrimination refers to unfair or unequal treatment of an individual (or group) based on certain characteristics⁴. In Minnesota, state and federal laws prohibit discrimination in housing based on race, color, creed, religion, disability, national origin, sex, marital status, public assistance, familial status, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Please see [Appendix A](#) for more information on legal discrimination.

Escalation

A plan over time to increase the pressure of your tactics on the target(s) to build momentum and demonstrate your power

Evaluation

Capturing lessons, tensions and gut reactions to the outcome of a campaign. Evaluation shouldn't only happen at the “end” of a campaign, but constantly throughout the campaign, focusing on what went well, what to improve and next steps.

Issue

A solution to a shared problem that has a clear target and demand.

One-to-Ones

A base-building tool to build power and strengthen relationships in the community. This is an intentional conversation between an organizer/tenant leader and a community member where the organizer/tenant leader seeks to build relationships, uncover self-interest, develop clarity, and gather information.

Organizer/Tenant Leader

An organizer is someone who works to help coordinate group efforts to campaign for change in any number of ways. In this guide, organizers specifically refer to people who work within housing. A Tenant Leader is someone who takes on more responsibility within their community to help plan meetings or actions, connect with outside resources to support the campaign, or conduct negotiations. A Tenant Leader may or may not work with an organizer, while an organizer is always looking to center their support towards leaders within the community.

Power

Ability to cause or prevent an action, make things happen.

⁴ <https://www.findlaw.com/civilrights/civil-rights-overview/what-is-discrimination.html>

Power analysis

Strategy designed to understand and build power around a particular issue in order to achieve victory.

Retaliation

An unfavorable action a landlord takes like rejecting a rental applicant or evicting a tenant because they complain about discrimination or exercise any of their other rights under law. “Retaliation” is a fancy word for revenge.⁵

Self-interest

A person's needs, concerns, interests, and values that motivate them to take action in their community. Self-interest allows us to think of ourselves in relationship with others. This is different from self-lessness (only thinks of others) and self-ishness (only thinks of self).

Strategy

A strategy is a thought out action plan that will help you reach victory. No matter the issue, every campaign has a strategy.⁶

Tactics

Actions to pressure the target to grant your campaign demands. (This is done through phone calls, letters, rallies, press conferences, etc.)

Target

People with the power to give you what you want.

Tenant association/union

Building-based organizations made up of, and led by, tenants to fight for collective interests and rights.⁷ Used interchangeably with Residents Association, Renters Union, etc.

Tenant organizing

Process of building power with tenants of a building or complex by addressing immediate and systemic problems and creating ongoing solutions.⁸

⁵ Fair Housing Coach

⁶ AAPI Neighborhoods Tenant Building Tenant Power Guide

⁷ KC Tenants Union Organizing Toolkit

⁸ NLIHC

Now that we understand the purpose of this guide, let's learn how to start your own tenant association!

HOW TO FORM A TENANT ASSOCIATION

Step 1: Know Your Rights

Learning about your rights and responsibilities as a renter is essential to address your housing [issue](#) and to build collective [power](#). This will help you determine if your landlord is doing something illegal and if you are following your responsibilities.

Most importantly, you might find out that the issue you are facing is difficult to address through legal [action](#). You might learn that the issues you feel SHOULD be against the law ARE NOT. This means [organizing](#) around the issue *might be the only way to address it*.

If an issue you and your neighbors are dealing with IS against the law, having an organized group of people to address it is important because you can build stronger legal cases and work toward results that represent everyone's interests. Working with a legal team will run more smoothly when you and your neighbors are strongly organized. You could see bigger wins outside of the court system, too.

The more we know, the stronger we are!

See [Appendix A](#) for a list of basic tenant rights landlords often violate. If your learning style is more visual, [check out the renter rights videos on HOME Line's website](#).

 **Tip:** You could watch one of these videos during a [tenant association](#) meeting to give everyone a baseline understanding of their rights!

It's important to know that your right to organize is not protected under Minnesota law *until 2025*. Importantly though, [retaliation](#) from a landlord in the form of eviction after asserting your protected tenant rights is illegal. However, if you live in HUD-funded housing, federal law guarantees your right to organize with no interference from property owners or management (see [Appendix H](#)).

That said, any renter who chooses to organize **must assess their own personal risk** and be prepared for various forms of retaliation from their landlord. Some of these can be hard to prove in court. One way to support yourself and your neighbors if this happens is to document as much as possible.

Some examples of retaliation include:

- Not responding to repair requests
- Sending a notice to vacate (not renewing a lease at the end of a lease term without cause)
- Threatening or filing for eviction
- Becoming unresponsive to communication attempts
- Calling Immigration and Customs Enforcement to displace undocumented folks
- Refusing to complete needed paperwork or inspections for renter program participation (rental assistance, voucher programs, etc.)
- Predatory towing
- Causing conflict between tenants (“divide and conquer”)

For a full listing of Minnesota tenant-landlord law, see the Attorney General's [website](#). You can also call HOME Line at 612-728-5767 for specific questions.

Step 2: Talk to Your Neighbors

Finding out what [issues](#) your neighbors are experiencing is a simple way to create a network of connection and support within your apartment complex. If your neighbors are facing similar issues to you, you'll be able to share information about how to deal with the problem.

Most importantly, you'll be able to make a plan about how everyone affected can work together to address the issue. If you think it's a serious issue, your neighbors probably will, too.

This may be easier to tackle if you live in a smaller building with only a few units compared to complexes that have hundreds of units. If you live in a building with many people, it can be intimidating and overwhelming to start a conversation with people that may feel like strangers. But people are more likely to come to a meeting if they've spoken to the person who organized it.

This is a key first step to building your base. Without a base of people and resources coordinated to address an issue, you may be advocating or mobilizing, but you're not organizing.

The easiest way to connect and find support is by talking to your neighbors. You might go door-to-door and chat. You might distribute flyers encouraging neighbors to write down their concerns. Or you might connect with people at a community meeting. While you may decide to flyer, [many organizers](#) find that talking to people directly is the most effective way to recruit people.

Whichever way you do it, make sure you've completed **Step 1** so that you and your neighbors understand your rights and how to use the law to protect yourselves. [Organizing](#) and taking risks as a collective can help protect against [retaliation](#).

 **Tip:** Start small. Talk to the people on your floor, at the bus stop, or that you run into while walking your dog. This could be the first step to finding other interested people willing to door-knock with you.

If you decide to go door-to-door in your building or neighborhood, make sure to bring a sheet of paper to track who you talked to and get contact information. It is a good idea to print out flyers to put under your neighbors' doors if they don't answer. See an example flyer in [Appendix C](#).

If you live in a multilingual building and you don't speak the languages represented in the building, try to connect with others who do speak the languages and door-knock with them to make sure you are hearing all your neighbors' concerns. Make sure all your materials are translated into the languages represented.

Door-knocking isn't the only way to drum up support for your campaign. You can connect with people in your building parking lot or inside the lobby. Or you can reach out to people by tabling at community events or dropping off informational flyers at local businesses.

Door-Knocking

There are many ways to build a base and develop relationships in your community. With that being said, there is sometimes no substitute for door-knocking. While a lot of strategies depend upon people coming to you, door-knocking is unique in that it takes you to where people are. For a sample door-knocking script, please reference [Appendix M](#).

Prepare

Having a safety plan for your door-knock is important. Ground yourself in your goal, plan your outreach [strategy](#), and take some time to consider potential outcomes. One possible scenario is someone getting upset because they're having a bad day. Another scenario is someone who is excited to speak with you. These could be neighbors, management, or community members.

Out In The Field

If possible, don't door-knock alone. Try to go with someone who also lives in your building or has the same landlord. Make sure another person who isn't door-knocking knows where you're going and the area you're moving through.

While Door-Knocking

Be aware of your surroundings. Look out for signs like "Keep Out" or "Beware of Dogs," or things like locked gates. If you encounter anyone who is acting hostile, be sure to note the unit, address, and what happened. Avoid returning to that unit in the future.

Remember, you have permission to end a conversation whenever you want. But there are times when there is space to play with contending ideas. You're not door-knocking to get into arguments, but some of the topics you're trying to address with neighbors may be unfamiliar to them. With practice, disagreement can stir up conversations that let all sides learn something.

It is also important to note that sometimes it is absolutely necessary to exit a situation, such as when door-knockers are being harassed because of their race, gender, or other aspects of their identity. If you are [organizing](#) a door-knock and any volunteers explain that they had to leave a conversation or end early because of an encounter with someone being hostile toward them, believe them.

Evaluate

Evaluating our work gives us a chance to improve our strategies. After a door-knock, gather with everyone who joined and get a feel of how it went for everyone. Every experience will teach you something new!

You can ask questions like:

- What was the most common issue you heard?
- Did you face any challenges?
- Did you have any positive interactions?
- Did you meet anyone else who is interested in working with us?

Door-knocking Resources

To be prepared and stay safe, consider bringing the following materials:

- A form of identification like a nametag or a safety vest
- A contact sheet to write down people's names and contact details, and problems that people are facing
- A copy of laws, when applicable (check [Appendix A](#) for supportive laws in Minnesota)
- Flyers to stick under doors when people don't answer

One simple option for making a flyer is a word processor like Microsoft Word, Pages, or Google Docs. You can use templates provided or simply design things as you like. It can be challenging to move things around or create and adjust shapes or images in word processors. But with practice and patience, these can be great tools!

Canva is another great program that is available for free online. Canva is an online tool for making materials such as flyers, posters, or even presentations and has many templates you can use. It is user-friendly, though you do need to create an account.

 **Tip:** You can always create large posters or signs by hand to advertise meetings or spread key information in limited places, like on bulletin boards or in common areas. This is an especially great way to get younger folks involved in the association.

The most important thing is to create an engaging flyer or poster with the necessary information for whatever you are trying to advertise. Use whatever tool feels best for you! If you live in a multilingual community, make sure to translate your materials with Google Translate, with the help of bilingual leaders on your team or, with the assistance of a partnering organization.

Step 3: Host a Meeting

If you're putting together a large meeting, it'll be a lot of work. You'll want other neighbors to help coordinate. Meet first with a small group of neighbors who are enthusiastic about coming together and are willing to do some preparation with you.

Together, you'll need to decide a few things:

- Where should the meeting be held?
 - Is there a common space in your building you can use? Sometimes an apartment or house can be large enough. Otherwise, see if you can reserve a room at a public building like a library, church, or school. Choose a place that's convenient for everyone.
 - Is the meeting space and facilitation format [accessible](#) for your neighbors? See [Appendix E](#) for more information on accessibility considerations.
- When should the meeting be held?
 - Make sure to pick a time that is most convenient for the majority of your neighbors. If many people work 9-5, then evenings or weekends are generally good times to meet.
- What will be discussed in the meeting?
 - Create a meeting plan—it should be brief! This could look like an agenda, a to-do list, or goals for your meeting. See an example in [Appendix D](#).
- Who will do what?
 - In your small leadership group, assign different roles for the meeting, including someone to sign people in, a note-taker, and at least one person to facilitate.
- How will you get turnout to the meeting?
 - A good first step is to make a flyer for the meeting. See example flyer in [Appendix C](#). Post the flyer in common spaces in your building and, if possible, go door-to-door to personally invite your neighbors.

- If you have contact information for your neighbors, remind them on the day of the meeting and do a quick door-knock an hour before to get better turnout.



Considerations for Leading a Meeting:

- Large meetings can be challenging, especially when people have strong emotions about an [issue](#).
- An ideal meeting will stay on track while also making everyone feel like they had a chance to be heard.
- See [Appendix E](#) for some “Do’s and Don’ts” that can help make the meeting a success.
- Plan to take time in your first large group meeting to discuss how you will make decisions together. This can be done by group majority, consensus decision, etc. See [Appendix K](#) for more information on how to use different [decision-making](#) models.
- Make sure to bring a sign-in sheet to gather contact information from neighbors who attend.
- Don’t forget to set a date for your next meeting.

Step 4: Vote

Sometimes you won’t be able to define clear next steps at your first meeting—that’s okay! One important thing you can accomplish is voting to form a [tenant association](#).

A simple majority vote can be a good way to establish yourselves as an association if there’s broad representation of tenants at your meeting. You could do an anonymous ballot by having people vote ‘yes’ or ‘no’ and putting all pieces of paper into a big pile, then sorting the responses. You could also start a petition and aim to get 51% of residents to sign.

Outside of HUD-subsidized properties and manufactured home communities, currently there is not a legal definition of a [tenant association](#). This will change in 2025. ***The key thing to remember is: The more residents who are represented and involved in the association, the more powerful your group will be.***

Step 5: Create the Structure

If you have decided to move forward with a tenant association, you will need to create the decision-making structure and [community agreements](#) of your association.

A common reason why tenant associations fall apart is because of [burnout](#) among leaders. This can be avoided if responsibilities are shared effectively. Many tenant associations elect officers or assign more informal roles. The University of Minnesota’s Center for Urban & Regional Affairs explains the importance of having a leadership structure:

"Leadership is everything. Being clear about how you develop community leadership throughout the [campaign](#) is arguably just as important (if not more important) than the outcome of the campaign itself. Victories will need to be defended, and new issues are sure to arise. Having strong leadership in your community will position you well for future campaigns."

Leadership roles within the association may include:

- **President/Lead Organizer:** Highest-ranking officer who delegates responsibilities, runs meetings, writes agendas, and acts as a facilitator. The President gives each member the opportunity to discuss and vote so that all voices are considered.
- **Vice-President/Outreach Coordinator:** Holds many of the same responsibilities as President, manages specific projects, and gets the word out to the public about activities of the tenant association.
- **Secretary/Note-Taker/Communications Lead:** This officer takes notes and keeps records of decisions made and accomplishments achieved. They respond to all questions about the association.
- **Treasurer:** Not all tenant associations collect dues or receive funding, but those that do may have a Treasurer who keeps records of all checks, receipts, and reimbursements. This officer is responsible for the association's money, receives dues, and disburses the funds for agreed-upon activities.

You may also consider a **co-lead** or **co-director** model where each leader takes responsibility for different aspects of the organizing work. Please see the [Building Shared Structures](#) Guide as a resource. If designated leaders are absent from a meeting, there should be a plan in place to cover their responsibilities.

The association should always be recruiting members to take on more leadership roles—this will help spread out the [decision-making](#) power and ensure all members feel equally invested in the group. Additionally, electing people to take on specific roles allows for better organization and for the values of the tenant association to be upheld.

Tenant association activities will also be easier to sustain if the group holds regular meetings, has a standing meeting plan, and sends out consistent updates.

Congratulations!
You just formed a tenant association.

You've accomplished the foundation of what you'll need to work together as a group to build your [power](#), address concerns in your housing, and build the community you want to live in.

The next steps are important to help make your tenant association strong and sustainable. These steps will take time and can happen at the same time as you work together to address immediate concerns you and your neighbors have. If you are struggling to work together as an association or to be productive toward your goals, it might be time to focus on the following steps more immediately.

Once you've created an association, you'll work together to continue building your power!

HOW TO BUILD YOUR POWER

Step 1: Grow Your Base

Base-building means creating a network of strong relationships rooted in shared interests. The larger your membership is, the more powerful and sustainable your tenant association will be.

Some ways to go about this:

- door-knock to inform neighbors and community members about the association
- host a meeting for new and interested members
- organize social events like a barbecue or back-to-school event

Step 2: Deepen Relationships

Numbers alone won't get you there—you also need strong relationships between members. **Organizing requires trust and commitment.**

This means you and your neighbors should know each other on a personal level and feel invested in each other's well-being. This can be as simple as remembering to ask members about things unrelated to organizing, like how their family is doing, or checking in on people outside of meetings.

Sometimes relationship-building requires more intentional and structured communication. In organizing lingo, we call these conversations "One-to-Ones."

A One-to-One is an intentional conversation with someone you want to build a relationship with and potentially work with to get something done. You can start by working together to find an hour to meet in person (or on video chat) to learn about each other.

A good way to start is asking someone about their background and how that informs their values and motivations. You'll also want to get a sense of the issues they're concerned about now and how they might make a change. An important part of a good One-to-One is encouraging the other person to believe that, together, you have the [power](#) to make that change. If it seems like your goals are aligned, don't forget to follow up!

Step 3: Expand Your Network

As you are building relationships with your neighbors, keep in mind that your building is a community inside larger communities and support systems where you can build power with unlikely allies.

As you're getting to know each other, figure out who and what people are connected to. Are there strong neighborhood associations, faith institutions, non-profits, or community organizations that you or your neighbors are actively involved in? Are folks connected to local politics? Are they leaders at schools? Etc.

Reach out and make connections with people in these areas, too. Let them know what's happening in your building and how you'd like them to *support you*. Engage them in One-to-Ones, find out who their bases or audiences are, and learn how you can build even larger support for your [issue](#) beyond your immediate neighbors.

***Communities often show up for one another
when they know there is a need.***

Many institutions that have been in neighborhoods for a long time are able to influence *decision-makers* in the cause you're fighting for. Of course, not everyone may be supportive. But you'll be surprised at how many folks are willing to step up to support their neighbors when they're asked.

Some people and places to consider reaching out to when you're building your base:

- Local renter's rights organization, like Housing Justice Center or HOMELine
- Renters of the same landlord in another property
- Faith institutions/leaders
- Schools
- Neighborhood Associations
- Local, state, and national elected leaders
- Small businesses
- Community-based non-profits
- Other tenant associations
- Cultural organizations or advocacy groups
- Community [organizers](#)

- Social workers
- Local food shelves

Finally, it may be relevant for some tenant associations to partner with local or national organizations, such as the National Alliance of HUD Tenants, Right to the City, or the National Low-Income Housing Coalition.

It's important to identify potential allies to your cause as well as those who might oppose your demands. Some local homeowners might have prejudiced ideas about renters, or there might be unsympathetic local officials, for example. Discovering the players that will support you, and those that will not, will help you determine what [tactics](#) to use in making your demands as you move toward conducting a [campaign](#).

HOW TO BUILD A WINNING CAMPAIGN

 **Important note:** [Tenant organizing](#) campaigns are a cycle, not a straight line. Even though the steps below are numbered, you might need to jump back and forth. [Base-building](#), as we said in the last section, is an ongoing process that you will keep revisiting throughout your campaign. And [evaluation](#) should happen every step of the way.

Check out “The Life Cycle of an Organizing Campaign” for more information about conducting your campaign in [Appendix B](#).

Step 1: Choose an Issue

[Tenant associations](#) are equipped to tackle shared problems with clear [targets](#) (decision-makers) and demands/solutions.

You'll probably find that your neighbors have many concerns and problems with the property, landlord, and community. While there may be a number of problems, not all can be resolved at once.

The [tenant association](#) must decide which are top priority. We recommend working on one or two [issues](#) at a time.

Some examples of issues and solutions:

- If residents are facing high yearly rent increases, a solution could be rent freezes for a year.
- If residents are not getting repairs, the solution could be timely and quality repairs from management.

The best issues to organize around:

- are shared by most residents
- are clearly defined
- have winnable solutions/demands
- are time-sensitive

Repairs to common space, for instance, is an issue shared by all with a demand that could be winnable. Interpersonal neighbor conflicts, like complaints about occupancy limits or pet breeds, on the other hand, are neither.

Coming together over a common goal can be challenging, especially in a meeting space. One activity that can get everyone's thoughts sorted and help the group find a direction is "Sift and Sort."

Sift and Sort

Materials needed

- Pens
- Post-It Notes

Instructions:

1. Ask everyone in the meeting to write down the top three problems they are hearing from their neighbors. Individual problems may include things like packages being stolen, broken washing machines and dryers, or a pest infestation.
2. Have a volunteer collect the issues and put them up on the wall or a large piece of paper.
3. Next, the facilitator works with everyone to organize the problems into broad categories (like Repairs, Communication, Safety, etc.).
 - a. To include neighbors who are unable to attend meetings, you could door-knock and ask them to fill out a survey on their top issues.
4. Once all the problems have been sorted into broad categories, the group can easily identify which category has the most issues listed under it and then rank them by priority level.
 - a. It is easy to get caught up in all of the problems that you and your neighbors are experiencing. This process can capture the details of a problem while giving your tenant association a specific direction to start moving in.
5. Now, take the top two problems and brainstorm possible solutions.
6. Once you have done this, give tenants three dot stickers to vote on the top three solutions they think the tenant association should focus on. See where the most votes are and make sure the top issues fit the criteria: shared by most residents, clearly defined, winnable, and time-sensitive. This can determine your issue.

Once the tenant association determines your issue, try writing it like this:

We want _____ to _____ by _____.
(target; usually your landlord) (demand; ex. make repairs) (timeframe)

This step will help anchor your work and remind you why you are all gathering together, one or two issues at a time.

Step 2: Do Your Research

After choosing your [issue](#) and creating a list of demands, it's time to learn more about your issue and key decision-maker(s). This is also called a [power analysis](#).

Research & Identify your target

This starts with identifying your [target](#). Your target is the person or group with the power to solve this issue.

Often, your target is the owner of a building. But it could also be building management (if different) or outside parties, such as elected officials. You'll want to direct the majority of your energy toward your primary target, but sometimes it can be useful to put pressure on multiple parties. It can also be helpful to think about secondary target(s). These are the people who can influence your primary target.

It's a good idea to research your landlord or management company. You can read consumer reviews online, look at the company's website, or even search property records to find out who owns your building. You can research the type of property your building is in [Appendix H](#).

You'll most likely see that the landlord's name in these records is something like "Landlord LLC." An LLC is a Limited Liability Corporation—a legal entity that landlords use to own property. Many landlords own each property under a separate LLC, so it can take a bit of digging to find the individual people behind these entities.

It's always worth the effort to find people you can contact directly, rather than going through company contact channels. For a detailed guide on how to do this, see the Research Your Landlord Toolkit in [Appendix F](#).

Research & Identify Allies and Opponents

Identify who may support or oppose your demand. More support means more collective power. Researching and identifying opponents will help you plan your strategy.

Research Your Issue & Strategy

You'll also want to research the [issue](#) you care about and get informed about your rights.

For instance, if the issue you care about is towing, make sure to research parking ordinances in your city. Read through your leases and handbooks about rules. Consult with a renter's rights organization about state or local laws that might be relevant. Gather and organize all existing documentation that you and your neighbors have.

These steps are important so that you are fully informed before you begin to develop potential strategies to address the issue or hold your target accountable.

Step 3: Choose Your Tactics

After completing your research and power analysis, you are almost ready to act! Taking [action](#) means using various [tactics](#) (phone calls, letters, rallies, press conferences, etc.) to put pressure on the [target](#) to meet your demand.

There is one crucial rule of thumb in choosing tactics: [escalation](#). It's generally a good idea to make demands in a way that first invites collaboration with your target and only becomes more oppositional if that doesn't work.

You'll want to start out with low-pressure tactics, like sending your landlord a letter (see [Appendix G](#) for a template) and/or inviting them to a meeting with your [tenant association](#) to discuss the [issue](#). These steps start a conversation with your landlord/property management. You may get a solution right away!

But if there's no resolution or you feel your concerns aren't taken seriously, you will want to choose new tactics and/or map an escalation strategy.

You may also use several tactics at once to apply pressure. Each of these tactics could hold various levels of risk and effectiveness in any given situation depending on your [power analysis](#), relationships, and other factors. You will want to make your decision based on your community's situation.

Some considerations in choosing tactics/creating an escalation plan:

- Does this tactic make a clear demand of a specific target?
 - If yes, will this action achieve the goal?
 - If yes, does it appeal to your target's [self-interest](#)?
- How public is this action? Is it only between your base and your target, or are other people involved?
- How comfortable are you with the risks involved in this tactic?
 - Are you taking calculated instead of reckless and senseless risks?
- How will your action build [power](#), leaders, and your base?

- Did you establish leadership roles (including for emerging leaders)?
 - How many people are able or willing to take this action together?
 - Are you choosing an unexpected tactic? One that your base has the skills for, but may catch your target off guard? Good! Keep your target on their toes.
- Does your action address systems of power?
 - Are you targeting power imbalances instead of personalities?
- Are you prepared to escalate and win?
 - How can you make participation simple, enjoyable, or rewarding?

Below are some examples of tactics your campaign can use. They are categorized based on public visibility and the time and energy needed to achieve the intended impact.

Low-Pressure Tactics

- Write a letter asking your landlord to meet with your tenant association. (See [Appendix G](#))
- Talk to more people about the problem to raise awareness: residents in your neighborhood, local church leaders, businesses, government officials, etc.
- Involve tenants from other buildings: Research your landlord to see if they own other buildings. Do those tenants have similar problems? You could find a way to speak to them and get them involved.
- Document and publicize the problem yourself by starting a blog.

Mid-Pressure Tactics

- Send copies of the letters to (or cc on an email) your city council, state legislators, congresspeople, or any other elected official who represents you. Get a meeting with those elected officials. Tell them your story and ask for their support.
- Call your city to see how to file a complaint with the inspector or health department. Have all tenants file individual complaints and necessary follow-ups.
- Have a majority of tenants file a complaint with the state Attorney General Office. Mass complaints will get you more attention than a single form.
- Write a letter to the editor of your local paper.
- Send letters to secondary targets, such as company investors for corporate owners or other interests the landlord has.
- Engage with agencies responsible for governing housing, like the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency (MHFA) and/or HUD.
- Testify at city council, commission, neighborhood board, or other meetings to share what's happening at your building.

High-Pressure Tactics

- Organize a press conference to cover the issue or showcase another action you are taking.
- Call the news: TV, radio, newspaper, blogs, etc. (see an example for reaching out to press in [Appendix L](#)).
- Organize an event or rally at your apartment building, community center, or library that showcases your efforts to address your housing issue.
- Collectively withhold rent through actions such as a Tenant Remedies Action (TRA), an Emergency Tenant Remedies Action (ETRA), or Rent Escrow. The type of action you choose will depend on your specific situation, but these three options will allow you to legally withhold your rent without putting your community under threat of eviction.

Bonus Tip: Think creatively - these are not your only options! Some examples of creative tactics tenants have used:

- Send Christmas “Wishlist of Repairs” to Landlords during the holidays disguised as a Christmas Card.
- Research if your landlord belongs to any non-profit boards, community organizations, religious groups, or other associations where you could deliver a letter or message in person.
- #BreakUpWithYourLandlord Action on Valentine’s Day.
- Disrupt local parades or community events with a group demonstration

It is important to keep in mind that every action will have some level of risk. We must, as a collective, consider those risks and the collective response to the landlord's reaction to your [escalation](#).

Risk is based on many different things, including race, class status, ability, and gender. You may have neighbors with a higher personal risk of displacement, targeting, or another negative consequence who need to take a step back from a particular tactic. This is an opportunity for other neighbors to step into leadership around that tactic.

IMPORTANTLY, remember that a demand letter or anything you put in writing or say verbally in public can be used against a tenant association as an opportunity for the landlord to claim defamation. Defamation is a spoken or written false statement to another person that harms the good reputation of another person or entity.

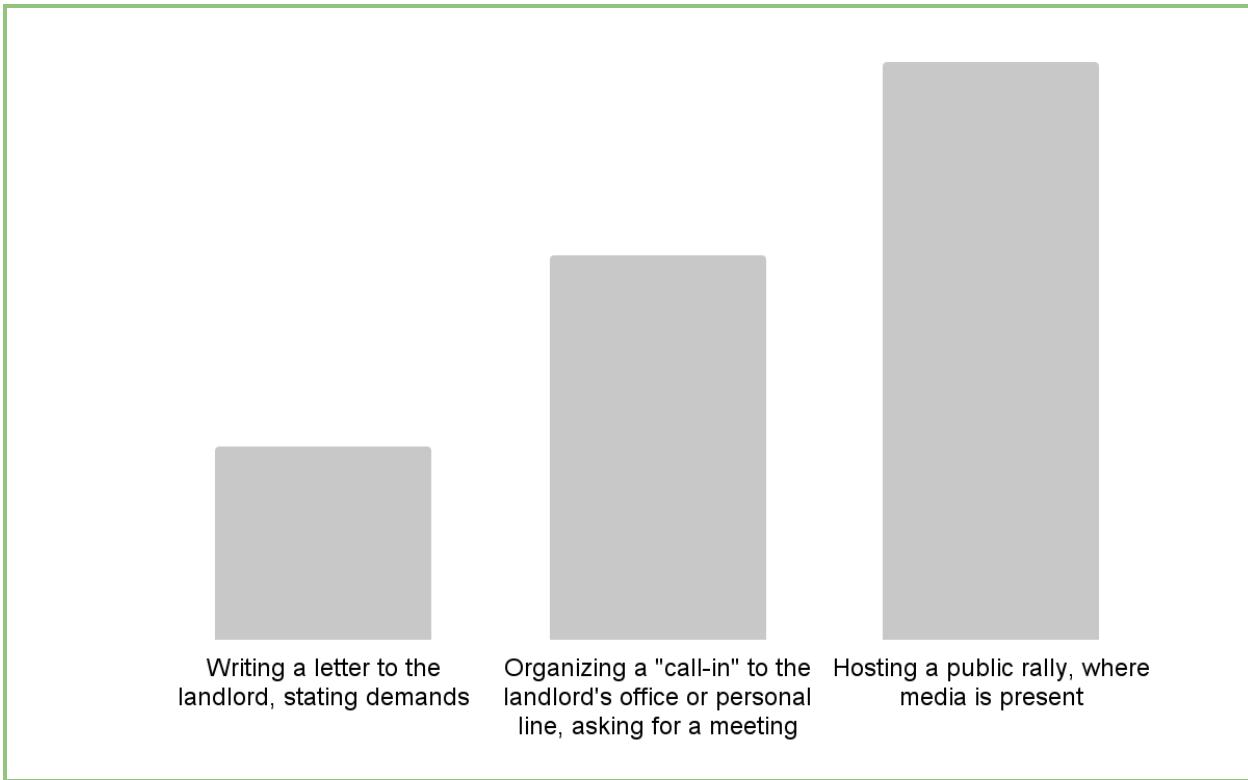
Unfortunately, threatening (and sometimes bringing) a defamation lawsuit has become a common tactic used by landlords to pressure tenants to stop fighting for their rights, even if what you are saying is true. You can protect yourself against risk of defamation claims by:

- Sticking to provable and verifiable claims of fact. Make sure you can back up what you say or put in writing with documented proof.

- Staying clear of personal attacks and issues related to personality conflicts.
- Avoiding claims about intent. For instance, do not claim that a property management representative is doing something because they hate disabled people.
- Requesting a review of your letter by other tenant organizers or attorneys you may be connected with.
- Remembering that truth is the ultimate defense against defamation – but you need actual proof that what you are saying is true before you say it.

Tactics Activity: Think back to the power analysis you did. As a group, brainstorm several possible tactics you can use to pressure your target. Organize each tactic on the “tactic staircase” to map out your escalation plan. Work through one tactic at a time.

An example escalation plan might look like this:



Step 4: Decision-Making

Decision-making is the process of deliberation and negotiation between your base and your target that leads to a “final” decision. This will likely happen at a negotiation meeting with your target. For tips on how to make the negotiation successful, see [Appendix I](#).

If you don’t get what you want from that meeting, step up the escalation ladder! Ideally, your target will meet your demands before you reach the last steps on your escalation plan.

If you don't win this [campaign](#), don't lose hope! Along the way, you have built relationships, knowledge, and the infrastructure for ongoing [tenant organizing](#). Remember, organizing is a cycle!

Step 5: Evaluation and Celebration

Everything worth doing is worth evaluating. [Evaluation](#) means capturing lessons, tensions, and gut reactions to the outcome of a campaign. It's one of the most important steps in any campaign.

Evaluation shouldn't only happen at the "end" but constantly throughout the campaign, focusing on what went well, what to improve, and next steps. Make sure all members of your base feel comfortable sharing their honest feedback. See an example of an evaluation form in [Appendix D](#).

Organizing may not always resolve problems quickly. It is often a long-term commitment that takes a lot of time and energy to move toward the change you want to see with your neighbors. The stakes are high, and it can be frustrating or heartbreak when things don't go according to plan. So how do you stay hopeful in the face of long-term struggle?

Celebrating every win, no matter how small, will help you sustain hope. This can look like community potlucks, block parties, award ceremonies, or anything that allows you and your neighbors to put the hard work aside for a moment and enjoy each others' company. Celebrating will also help you track progress toward your long-term goal.

These moments of joy and connection will strengthen your community, reminding you what you're building together and why it matters.

Even if you don't win your campaign, the sense of belonging you create through the organizing process can be just as important. By getting to know your neighbors and meeting people you can rely on, you build deeper community roots. This will prepare you to take on the next organizing challenge that comes your way—together.

Organizing in action: The story of Pike Lake Apartments

The story of Pike Lake Apartments tenants shows that victories may not look like we expect, but the power built through organizing causes ripple effects beyond what we can predict.

On New Year's Day, 2020, more than 60 tenants in New Brighton received notices to vacate or eviction notices. QT properties, a large rental company, had bought their building. The

apartments needed significant repair, but the rents were below market rate. QT intended to renovate the buildings and raise the rents. To do this, QT wanted everyone out.

But QT picked the wrong tenants to try to force out. Several tenants had lived on the property for over 10 years. Many units were home to families with children who went to the elementary school across the street. Everyone worked, worshiped, and built a life in New Brighton. No one was going to stand being kicked out of their homes in the middle of a brutal winter.

Immediately after receiving notices to vacate, neighbors got in touch with each other. One tenant went door-to-door discussing the letters and gathering contact information. With the support of tenant organizers from HOME Line, tenants held a meeting in the school cafeteria across the street. Everyone agreed: We don't want to leave.

Tenants wrote a letter to QT demanding an in-person meeting. Tenants spoke at a city council meeting and asked the mayor to intervene. After some tenants got their story published in the Star Tribune, QT agreed to meet. Just before the meeting, tenants got in touch with lawyers from Housing Justice Center. With their support, the tenant association entered several rounds of negotiation with QT and the city.

Meanwhile, QT embarked on aggressive demolition and renovation activity at the property that did not comply with lead and asbestos laws and that made it even more difficult for them to stay in their homes.

In the end, many tenants did not reach their initial goal of staying in their apartments. Most tenants were able to buy more time (six months) until they had to move. They also decided to continue the fight after leaving the building and filed a class action lawsuit⁹ in April 2020.

In January 2021, the parties reached a class settlement agreement, where they agreed to a settlement of \$250,000 and non-monetary settlement conditions including appropriate construction protocols at all QT properties.

Other victories related to this case were meaningful to Pike Lake tenants. The former mayor of New Brighton stepped down. The new mayor ran on a housing policy that directly addressed QT's actions, promising to prevent such injustice from ever happening again. The city also passed an ordinance giving tenants notice when their building is put up on the market.

Many tenants who moved to the same building in a neighboring city began exploring benefits and paths toward cooperative ownership models. Some extended their housing justice leadership to spaces and work beyond their own buildings.

Tenants in Pike Lake recognized that what they were experiencing was unjust and decided that they shared a common interest in fighting back against the injustice. Every step of the way, neighbors built connections and community that lasted long beyond the immediate struggle they

⁹ <https://www.hjcmn.org/construction-harassment-in-new-brighton/>

were facing together and ensured that what happened to them would be less likely to happen to others in the future.

HOW TO STAY ORGANIZED

An important part of organizing with your neighbors is how communications and documents are organized! This means how you keep track of your work, where you store documents, and what tools you use to communicate with the group.

You'll want to think through what types of organization and communication systems you'll use along the way. Organization is critical to working successfully with other tenants and making sure everyone is on the same page. It also makes it much easier to bring new members up to speed and to introduce community partners to the work you're doing.

Organization allows for accountability and transparency, creates a paper trail, and makes it easier to put together documents and evidence that could be needed for legal fights.

Additionally, it is useful when you need to make quick decisions.

Meeting Notes

Meeting notes are important because they help you remember what was said and what decisions were made in tenant meetings.

However, for privacy and to limit opportunities for [retaliation](#), it's important to be careful about what you put in writing. It is generally best to keep notes vague and not share them widely. It can be helpful to have tenants take their own notes during meetings rather than trying to share detailed notes, as those can get back to management. Having one-on-one discussions to update neighbors who may have missed meetings is another way to keep each other informed and to further build strong relationships.

Communications Systems

Additionally, it's important to develop **clear communications systems**. There are different options that all have pros and cons, and may be better- or worse-suited to different communities:

- **Encrypted chat, such as Signal or Whatsapp:** These are apps that would connect to your phone number and are secure ways to share information. You can create a group chat for your association within the app and use that to share information.
- **Website:** You could create an association website, where you post updates that people can check.
- **Email:** You can create a [tenant association](#) email. This is simple to do with services such as Gmail. Make sure you do not enter a tenant's name when you set the email up; you

could put “building name” as the first name, and then “tenant association” as the last name. You can then create an email list or group in your contacts with the members of your association. This can be helpful in protecting the identity of individual leaders to avoid retaliation.

- **Social Media:** You can create a social media account (Facebook, Instagram, etc.) to share updates with tenants and the community. You can create a private group or a public group—just be aware of your audience.

With any of these methods, it is still important to keep information that is shared in writing need-to-know. Don’t include important private information or strategy in emails sent to large groups or talk negatively about management or other tenants. Keep emails and social media posts focused on facts and information about meetings and working together.

Data Collection

It is also very important to have a plan around **data collection**, whether this is done online or on paper.

If you create an association Gmail account, that will come with a Google Drive account. **Google Drive** can be used to share information with tenants and partners. You could create folders in Google Drive to organize the information and files that you make and receive throughout your organizing work. For instance, you could create folders for meeting notes and agendas, contact lists, and documents such as leases, repair requests, or letters from management. This way, if you need evidence of what management has done and tenant efforts to get better conditions, you can quickly find all of your documents.

When storing documents digitally, scanning is best for moving paper documents into Google Drive. If you don’t have a printer, this can easily be done using your phone. There are many free or low-cost phone apps that can scan documents, including the Apple Notes app or CamScanner.

This can all also be done **analog!** If you prefer doing the documentation with physical papers, it’s still important to keep all your papers organized! One awesome tool is accordion folders. Instead of making digital folders for things like leases or notices, you can label the folders in the accordion folder in the same way and are still able to quickly find them. For taking notes, make sure that you’re keeping them organized. For instance, you could keep a designated notebook for tenant association work, making sure to add a date to the pages as you go.



Note: If you are new to using technology, no worries at all! If you prefer to stay analog, stay analog! But if you are interested in learning more about technology, an amazing resource is your **public library**. Most libraries have computers that are free to use, and many also have staff who are trained to teach folks how to use computers and different computer tools. They often have times for one-on-one assistance and classes on computer basics or specific

programs. These services are typically free! If you are interested, reach out to your local library or check their events calendar!

***That's all there is to it—now you're ready to get out there and ORGANIZE!
Just remember, organizing is an ever-evolving process, and there's no one right way to do it.***

Some more inspiration: Victories at Westrom properties

In 2008, HOME Line organizers began working with low-income tenants in rural Minnesota who had been defrauded by their property owners, the Westroms. The Westroms owned a group of seven properties that were subsidized under section § 515, the Rural Development (RD) program.

Like other federal programs, the RD is supposed to ensure that rents stay affordable for low-income households. Most tenants living in RD buildings pay below-market rent, and many will pay no more than 30% of their income because of an additional subsidy known as Rental Assistance (RA) also available through RD.

The Westroms tried to take advantage of a rule in the program that would have allowed them to exit it without losing ownership of the properties and with no protections for tenants. They stopped making mortgage payments, filing required reports with RD, and allowing RD to come on the property. Then, when RD declared them in default, the Westroms paid off their mortgage balances to get out of the program.

HOME Line, in partnership with the Housing Justice Center (formally known as The Housing Preservation Project), began door-knocking and talking with residents in Westrom properties. Organizers discovered that most if not all of these buildings had substantial rent increases of as much as \$100 per month. In some cases, these increases happened more than once over a period of several years. All of these rent increases were illegal and excessive; under the § 515 program, a landlord cannot impose a project-wide rent increase without RD's consent.

The owners attempted to minimize the harm of their rent increases by urging some tenants to apply for Section 8 vouchers through their local Housing Redevelopment Authority. A number of tenants did receive vouchers, in which case the owners' rent increases may not have affected them directly.

However, those tenants were possibly owed rent from before they obtained Section 8. Additionally, by steering these scarce Section 8 vouchers to tenants who would not have needed them if the owners had followed the law, others in the community were deprived of

badly needed voucher assistance. The Westroms' actions affected not just the residents of their buildings, but also the entire community.

The organizing effort on this project spanned years. It culminated in a lawsuit brought on by attorneys at the Housing Preservation Project. In 2011, the parties reached a settlement in which five properties were sold to the Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership. All units in those buildings had their affordability preserved and remained within the USDA program.

Tenants involved in the suit were awarded \$117,000 for the overpayments they had made in rent over the years, and many were able to continue living in their homes.

RESOURCES

Organizing and Tenant Rights Guides

This is a collection of organizing guides and resources created by tenant groups and non-profits around the country. They all have great information and are worth a read! Most have tables of contents, so if you are looking for more information on one topic, you can navigate directly to it. One thing to note: for guides created by out-of-state groups, specific laws mentioned may differ from the laws in MN. Still use and consider the organizing advice provided, but if there are questions about the laws and your rights, please refer to [Appendix A](#) of this guide, refer to the [Attorney General Tenants Rights and Responsibilities booklet](#), or call HOME Line for answers to specific questions!

- [HOME Line Organizing Materials](#)
 - [HOME Line Tenant Organizing Webinar Archive](#)
 - HOME Line provides free and low-cost legal, organizing, education, and advocacy services so that tenants throughout Minnesota can solve their own rental housing problems. Their website includes brief advice for forming a tenant association, along with an extensive archive of webinars featuring [organizers](#) discussing organizing strategies and tools.
- [Neighborhoods Now! Training Curriculum, University of Minnesota Center for Urban and Regional Affairs](#)
 - Neighborhoods Now! is an innovative community educational series to strengthen the work of individuals and organizations working in neighborhoods so they can organize to win [issues](#) for people and places, build [power](#) to change systems for racial equity and economic justice, build organizations whose leadership is reflective of the community, and build diverse and effective cross cultural collaborations. It is free to take, and their website includes some of the materials from the curriculum.
- [Tactics Zine, Autonomous Tenants Union of Chicago](#)
 - Based in Chicago, Autonomous Tenants Union is an all-volunteer organization committed to organizing for housing justice from below and to the left. Their

Tactics Zine offers tools they hope folks will use to fight back against their landlords, and explain when different tactics are most useful and how they can be organized.

- [How to Organize a Tenants Union, Democratic Socialists of America New York City](#)
 - This guide was written by the Housing Working Group of the New York City Chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America. It is a useful guide that works through how to build connections to fight against corporate landlords. It is written from the perspective of building socialist political power, but the organizing advice will be useful even if you don't identify as a socialist!
- [COVID Organizing Toolkit, Kansas City Tenants United](#)
 - [Short COVID Organizing Toolkit, Kansas City Tenants United](#)
 - KC Tenants is a citywide [tenant union](#) in Kansas City. They made an organizing toolkit specifically geared towards organizing [tenant associations](#) during the COVID-19 pandemic. While life has been slowly returning to normal and some portions of their advice may be less relevant, most of it is! The aftereffects of COVID are still being felt, and tools such as Zoom are still parts of our lives. And of course, organizing is always still organizing.
- [The Organizer's Cookbook, Angela Ponn and Laura Bennett](#)
 - This book is about a very specific type of tenant organizing, project based Section 8 work. However, its principles can be used in any type of tenant or community organizing.
- [Building Tenant Power: Your Guide to Protecting Tenant Rights in Your City, #OurNeighborhoods](#)
 - [Construyendo poder en los Inquilinos: Su Guía para Proteger los Derechos de Inquilinos en su Ciudad](#)
 - Additional #OurNeighborhoods Organizing Resources ([English](#), [Spanish](#))
 - #OurNeighborhoods is a network of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) grassroots organizations committed to addressing the issue of gentrification through neighborhood organizing. They build power with low-income AAPI residents and youth who have been directly impacted by displacement. Their guide works through how to build an association and a sustainable organizing campaign.
- [Tenants Association Handbook, Los Angeles Tenants Union](#)
 - This handbook was created by rank-and-file members of the L.A. Tenants Union to help other tenants in the process of creating and defending the community. The idea of tenants supporting and standing with other tenants is a fundamental principle of the L.A. Tenants Union. We have created this handbook both to encourage tenants everywhere to organize themselves and for them to then help others organize. In the words of the freedom struggle: each one, teach one.
- [Organizing Toolkit, Inquilinxs Unidxs por Justicia \(English, Spanish\)](#)
 - Inquilinxs Unidxs is a base-building nonprofit working to transform the Minneapolis housing system.
- [An Advocate's Guide to Tenants' Rights in the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Program](#)

- A guide to understanding the ins and outs of Low Income Housing Tax Credits and how funding decisions, eligibility requirements, management and ownership, and rents impact tenants
- [Language Justice: A Toolkit for Organizers](#)
 - The purpose of this toolkit is for organizers to gain a basic understanding of the concept of language justice and then use the suggested practices to build more language justice into their organizing work. It includes advice on planning different types of meetings and resources and activities for your group and planning teams to make sure you are inclusive in a multilingual space.

Additional Resources

These are additional resources on and from folks who inspire us, about organizing, housing, and related topics. For those interested in learning more about organizing work and the history of organizing!

Housing

- *Streets of Hope: The Fall and Rise of an Urban Neighborhood* (Peter Medoff and Holly Sklar, 1999)
- *Evicted* (Matthew Desmond, 2016)
- *The Color of Law* (Richard Rothstein, 2017)
- *In Defense of Housing* (David Madden and Peter Marcus, 2016)
- *Poverty, By America* (Matthew Desmond, 2023)
- *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* (Barbara Ehrenreich, 2011)
- *Carving Out the Commons: Tenant Organizing and Housing Cooperatives in Washington, D.C.* (Amanda Huron, 2018)
- *The Tenant Class* (Ricardo Tranjan, 2023)
- *Unbroken: My Fight for Survival, Hope, and Justice for Indigenous Women and Girls* (Angela Sterritt, 2023)

History

- *Black Power Afterlives: The Enduring Significance of the Black Panther Party* (ed. Diane C. Fujino and Matef Harmachis, 2020)
- *Living for Change* (Grace Lee Boggs, 1998)
- *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, 2016)
- *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement* (Angela Y. Davis, 2015)
- *American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs* (Documentary, 2014, Dir. by Grace Lee [a different person with the same name])
- *The Assassination of Fred Hampton: How the FBI and the Chicago Police Murdered a Black Panther* (Book, 2009, Jeffrey Haas)

- *Tonguebreaker* (Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2019)
- *Mediocre: The Dangerous Legacy of White Male America* (Ijeoma Oluo, 2020)
- *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Indigenous Life* (James Dashuk, 2014)

Strategizing

- *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* (Adrienne Marie Brown, 2017)
- *The Next American Revolution: Sustainable Activism for the Twenty-First Century* (2011, Grace Lee Boggs, with Scott Kurashige)
- *Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals* (Saul Alinsky, 1971)
- *Let This Radicalize You: Organizing and the Revolution of Reciprocal Care* (Kelly Hayes and Mariame Kaba, 2023)
- *This is an Uprising: How Nonviolent Revolt is Shaping the Twenty-First Century* (Mark Engler, Paul Engler, 2016)

Visioning

- *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* (Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018)
- *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good* (Adrienne Marie Brown, 2019)
- *The Future is Disabled: Prophecies, Love Notes, and Mourning Songs* (Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2022)
- *Rest Is Resistance* (Tricia Hersey, 2023)
- *All About Love: New Visions* (Bell Hooks, 2018)

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: Know Your Rights: Minnesota Tenant/Landlord Law

Applications

- **Are screening fees legal?** Yes, but the landlord must tell tenants what the criteria is beforehand¹⁰ and the tenant can request a record of the screening for free from the screening company.¹¹
- **Is discrimination legal?** No, Minnesota state law prohibits discrimination for the following protected classes:
 - Race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, gender identity, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, sexual orientation, disability, or familial status.¹²
 - **What about Section 8?** State law does not require landlords to accept housing vouchers.¹³ However, the Minneapolis nondiscrimination ordinance has closed this loophole for tenants in that city alone.¹⁴

Leases

- **Does a lease have to be written?** No, a lease can be a verbal agreement, but it is good practice to request a lease with all rental agreements in writing. However, if a

landlord has not given a tenant written notice of their physical address or one for a property manager, that is a defense to an eviction or lawsuit for rent.¹⁵

- **When can I terminate a lease?** Generally you must wait until the end of the lease term and give proper notice (the longer time of (A) one rental period¹⁶ or (B) the notice required by your lease), in writing, unless your landlord permits you to break the lease early.
- **What if I'm month-to-month?** If you are a month-to-month tenant, you can terminate your tenancy at any time and the same notice rules apply. Notice must be given in writing, and the notice period from the last lease you signed still applies, even if it's longer than one month.¹⁷ If your notice period is the statutory minimum (e.g. one month or 30-days notice), then you must give your notice before the first day you want your tenancy to end.¹⁸ For example, if you have a 30-day notice requirement and want to end your lease at the end of June, you must give your notice by May 31.
- **If I terminate my lease, when does it actually end?** If you give notice, it does not run to the calendar day. It

¹⁰ Minn. Stat. § 504B.173 (2024).

¹¹ 15 U.S.C. §§ 1681g, 1681h.

¹² Minn. Stat. § 363A.09 (2024).

¹³ *Edwards v. Hopkins Plaza Ltd. P'ship*, 783 N.W.2d 171 (Minn. Ct. App. 2010).

¹⁴ *Fletcher Props., Inc. v. City of Minneapolis*, No. 27-CV-17-9410 (Minn. Dist. Ct. Dec. 6, 2022).

¹⁵ Minn. Stat. § 504B.181 (2024).

¹⁶ Minn. Stat. § 504B.135 (2024).

¹⁷ *Slafter v. Siddall*, 106 N.W. 308, 308–09 (Minn. 1906).

¹⁸ *Oesterreicher v. Robertson*, 245 N.W. 825, 826 (Minn. 1932).

runs to the end of the rental period in question. For example, if your lease requires 30 days notice, and you give notice on March 15, your lease does not end on April 14. It runs until the last day of April.¹⁹ Unless your lease specifically says otherwise, you have the right to occupy your rental dwelling until 11:59 PM on the last day of your tenancy.²⁰

Breaking a Lease

- **How can I break my lease?** It is difficult for a tenant to break a lease without their landlord's permission. The easiest way to break your lease may be to negotiate with your landlord.
- **If your landlord refuses to let you out of your lease,** there are a few limited situations in which a tenant may break their lease without their landlord's permission:
 - Entry into military service or military orders requiring them to move.²¹
 - The tenant has suffered harassment, domestic abuse, criminal sexual conduct, or sexual extortion.²²
 - The rental dwelling is completely uninhabitable.²³ This is a very high standard, think "should be condemned."
 - If a building is destroyed or condemned.²⁴
 - If a medical professional has advised that all tenants should

¹⁹ *Hunter v. Frost*, 49 N.W. 327, 329 (Minn. 1891).

²⁰ *Hyman Realty Co. v. Kahn*, 271 N.W. 248, 248 (Minn. 1937).

²¹ 50 U.S.C. § 3955 (a)(1).

²² Minn. Stat. § 504B.206 (2024).

²³ *Fritz v. Warthen*, 213 N.W.2d 339 (Minn. 1979).

²⁴ Minn. Stat. § 504B.131 (2024).

be admitted to certain medical facilities for ongoing care.

Unless you or your rental dwelling meets one of those conditions, your best chance is to go through a Rent Escrow lawsuit and request that a court break your lease because your landlord has failed to repair and maintain your rental dwelling or is in such serious violation of the lease or the law that you do not think you can live there anymore.

Find out more:

- MN Attorney General: <https://www.ag.state.mn.us/consumer/handbooks/lit/default.asp>
- LawHelp MN: <https://www.lawhelpmn.org/self-help-library/housing>
- Call HOME Line: (612) 728-5767
- Call your local Legal Aid

Rent

- **Can my landlord raise my rent during my lease?** No, unless it is specifically allowed by your lease.
- **Can I be fined for late rent?** Yes, but the fine must be stated in your lease and cannot exceed 8% of the overdue amount. The maximum late fee for a given month may only be charged once.²⁵
- **Can I be evicted for late rent?** Yes, a landlord has the legal right to evict proceedings if a tenant owes them rent. However, the landlord must give 14-days written notice before filing an eviction for nonpayment, and must provide a specific accounting of what's owed.²⁶ And tenants have the right to pay what they owe, plus the landlord's costs to file and serve the case plus

²⁵ Minn. Stat. § 504B.177 (2024).

²⁶ Minn. Stat. § 504B.321, subd. 1a (2024).

\$5, and have the case dismissed. Tenants can call 211 to request help paying overdue rent, but a pending financial assistance application does not stop an eviction. However, a letter of guarantee from a rental assistance agency, for the full amount including the extra fees, does count as payment in order to stop an eviction.²⁷

Repairs

- **Your landlord is required to keep the unit in reasonable repair, “fit for the use intended, and comply with all local health and safety laws.”²⁸**
- **Additionally, the landlord must ensure that the unit can reach and maintain 68°F (20°C), from Oct. 1 through April 30.**²⁹
- **What if my landlord won’t make repairs?** You can...
 - File a complaint with a city inspector
 - File a Rent Escrow lawsuit³⁰
 - Sue your landlord in conciliation court for rent abatement.
- **What about emergency situations?**
 - There is a different procedure for emergency repairs. The law³¹ defines these emergency repairs as:
 - a government order condemning the dwelling or deeming it uninhabitable, threatening to deem it so, or revoking a rental license.

²⁷ Minn. Stat. § 504B.291, subd. 1(a) (2024).

²⁸ Minn. Stat. § 504B.161, subd. 1(a)(1)–(2), (4) (2024).

²⁹ Minn. Stat. § 504B.161, subd. 1(a)(5) (2024).

³⁰ Minn. Stat. § 504B.385 (2024).

³¹ Minn. Stat. § 504B.381, subd. 1 (2024).

- a serious pest infestation;
 - the loss of running water;
 - the loss of hot water;
 - the loss of heat;
 - the loss of electricity;
 - the loss of sanitary facilities (think a working bathroom or shower);
 - a nonfunctioning refrigerator;
 - if included in the lease, a nonfunctioning air conditioner;
 - if included in the lease, no functioning elevator;
 - any conditions, services, or facilities that pose a serious and negative impact on health or safety; or
 - the loss of other essential services or facilities.
- To enforce their rights to emergency repairs, tenants can file a lawsuit referred to as an “Emergency Tenant Remedies Action” or “ETRA.”³² The court provides [a specialized form](#) to file this case.
 - In order to file this lawsuit a tenant must first attempt to give 24 hours notice, written or verbal, that they “intend to seek emergency relief” if the issue is not fixed. That quoted language is required by the law.³³

Security Deposits

- **How much can a landlord demand for a deposit?**

³² Minn. Stat. § 504B.381 (2024).

³³ Minn. Stat. § 504B.381, subd. 4 (2024).

- Statewide, there is no limit on maximum deposit size.
 - In Minneapolis, most deposits are limited to one month's rent.³⁴
- **Do I have the right to an inspection or walkthrough?**
 - Tenants have the right to inspections at both the beginning and end of the tenancy.³⁵
 - The landlord must notify the tenant of their right to a move-in inspection within 14 days of the start of the tenancy.³⁶
 - The landlord must notify the tenant of their right to a move-out inspection within a reasonable time of (A) a notice to vacate from either the landlord or tenant, or (B) the end of a lease. The move out inspection must be held within five days of the end of the tenancy.³⁷
- **When does my landlord have to return my deposit?**
 - The later of 21 days after (A) your tenancy ends, or (B) the date you provide your forwarding address.³⁸
 - The deposit only needs to be mailed by the 21st day.³⁹
 - If your landlord withholds any money, they must provide a written statement explaining the withholding.⁴⁰
- **What can my landlord keep my deposit for?**
 - Unpaid rent, fees, utilities, etc.⁴¹
 - Damage to the property that was (A) caused by the willful, malicious, or irresponsible conduct of (B) the tenant or their guest,⁴² and (C) rises above "ordinary wear and tear."⁴³
- **What can I do if I disagree?**
 - Send your landlord [a letter](#) demanding they return your deposit. Sue in conciliation court.
- **What can I sue for?**
 - Any portion of your deposit that was wrongfully withheld.
 - If your landlord did not return the deposit within 21 days, and did not provide a written statement, a penalty equal to the amount withheld.⁴⁴
 - \$500 in "bad faith" damages.⁴⁵

Evictions

- **What can I be legally evicted for?**
 - Non-payment of rent⁴⁶
 - Certain illegal activities⁴⁷
 - Breach of lease agreements⁴⁸
 - Staying past a va

³⁴ Minneapolis, Minn., Code of Ordinances tit. 12, ch. 244, § 244.2040 (2024).

³⁵ Minn. Stat. § 504B.182 (2024).

³⁶ Minn. Stat. § 504B.182, subd. 1 (2024).

³⁷ Minn. Stat. § 504B.182, subd. 2 (2024).

³⁸ Minn. Stat. § 504B.178, subd. 3(a) (2024).

³⁹ Minn. Stat. § 504B.178, subd. 3(b) (2024).

⁴⁰ Minn. Stat. § 504B.178, subd. 3(a) (2024).

⁴¹ Minn. Stat. § 504B.178, subd. 3(b)(1) (2024).

⁴² Minn. Stat. § 504B.161, subd. 1(a)(2) (2024).

⁴³ Minn. Stat. § 504B.178, subd. 3(b)(2) (2024).

⁴⁴ Minn. Stat. § 504B.178, subd. 4 (2024).

⁴⁵ Minn. Stat. § 504B.178, subd. 7 (2024).

⁴⁶ Minn. Stat. § 504B.291 (2024).

⁴⁷ Minn. Stat. § 504B.171 (2024).

⁴⁸ Minn. Stat. § 504B.285 (2024).

- lid notice to leave (termination or non-renewal)⁴⁹
- **What can a landlord NOT do during an eviction process?**
 - Seize your property⁵⁰
 - Lock you out⁵¹
 - Shut off your utilities⁵²
 - Retaliate against you for asserting your rights⁵³
- **Does my landlord have to tell me before they file a case?**
 - Statewide, landlords must send a written notice at least 14 days before filing an eviction for nonpayment of rent.⁵⁴
 - Statewide, there is no requirement to provide advance notice before filing an eviction for holdover or breach.
 - Federally subsidized or regulated properties must provide 30-days advance notice if the eviction is for nonpayment of rent.⁵⁵ This includes:
 - Section 8 Projects,
 - Section 8 Vouchers,
 - Section 42 / LIHTC,
 - Dep't of Agriculture Rural Subsidies.
 - Minneapolis requires 14 days notice prior to an eviction for nonpayment of rent.⁵⁶
- St. Louis Park requires 7 days notice prior to an eviction for nonpayment of rent.⁵⁷
 - Brooklyn Center requires 30 days notice prior to an eviction for nonpayment of rent or breach of lease.⁵⁸
- **Do I have the right to a lawyer in an eviction case?**
 - Generally, most tenants do not have a right to a lawyer in eviction cases.
 - However, tenants who live in public housing have a right to a lawyer if they are being evicted for material breach of lease.⁵⁹
 - If you live in Minneapolis, you can consult an attorney for free before your hearing and they may be able to represent you.⁶⁰
 - Some other courts will have self-help centers where you can consult an attorney before your case.
 - If you make 125% or less of the [Federal Poverty Guidelines](#), you likely qualify for representation by the [legal aid organization](#) covering your county. You should call them as soon as you find out about the case.
- **If I lose my case, how long do I have to move?**
 - The court must give you a "reasonable period," up to one

⁴⁹ Minn. Stat. § 504B.285 (2024).

⁵⁰ Minn. Stat. § 504B.101 (2024).

⁵¹ Minn. Stat. § 504B.225 (2024).

⁵² Minn. Stat. § 504B.225 (2024).

⁵³ Minn. Stat. § 504B.285, subd. 2 (2024).

⁵⁴ Minn. Stat. § 504B.321, subd. 1a (2024).

⁵⁵ 15 U.S.C. § 9058(c)(1).

⁵⁶ Minneapolis, Minn., Code of Ordinances tit. 12, ch. 244, § 244.2060 (2024).

⁵⁷ St. Louis Park, Minn., City Code ch. 8, art. II, div. 3, subd. VIII, § 8-335 (2024).

⁵⁸ Brooklyn Center, Minn., Code of Ordinances ch. 12, § 12-912D(4) (2024).

⁵⁹ Minn. Stat. § 504B.268 (2024).

⁶⁰ Minneapolis, Minn., Code of Ordinances tit. 7, ch. 143, § 143.30 (2024).

- week, before the eviction order can be enforced.”⁶¹
 - However, that stay of enforcement law does not currently apply to evictions for nonpayment of rent. A mistake was made when drafting the law, and advocates intend for it to be corrected by 2025.
 - If a stay is not granted, a tenant cannot be evicted until the sheriff posts and enforces the eviction order. A tenant has 24 hours from the time the sheriff posts the order to leave.⁶²
 - Sheriffs do not always post the orders right away. The time it takes a sheriff is unpredictable. Sometimes it happens the next day, sometimes it may take a week or more.
 - **What happens if I have to leave my property behind?**
 - If the landlord has the sheriff move your property off of the premises of the rental dwelling, they must keep it for 60 days, and can demand you pay them for the costs of moving and storing the property before you can take it back.⁶³
 - If your landlord stores your property on the premises of the rental dwelling, they must keep it for 28 days.⁶⁴ They can charge you a reasonable amount for the expense necessary to store the
- property, but may not demand payment before giving you your property.
- **How do I get my property back?**
 - Your landlord must give you access to your property upon a written request within (A) 24 hours if the property is stored on the premises, or (B) 48 hours if it's stored elsewhere.⁶⁵
 - If the property is stored on the premises, they cannot demand that you pay anything before receiving the property.
 - There is no specific law stating how long they must give you to remove your property, but if they do not give you a reasonable amount of time they have likely broken the law.
 - **What do I do if my landlord has thrown my property out early, or refuses to let me take it back?**
 - You should always make a written request for the property, even if you know your landlord has already thrown it out.⁶⁶
 - If your landlord does not or cannot give you access to your property within 24/48 hours (see above), you can sue them for 3x the value of your property (\$1,000 minimum), as well as reasonable attorney's fees.⁶⁷

Lockouts / Utility Shutoffs

- **Can my landlord change the locks on my apartment, kick me out, or prevent me from entering my**

⁶¹ Minn. Stat. § 504B.345, subd. 1(d) (2024).

⁶² Minn. Stat. § 504B.365, subd. 1(a) (2024).

⁶³ Minn. Stat. § 504B.365, subd. 3(a)–(c) (2024).

⁶⁴ Minn. Stat. § 504B.271, subd. 1(b) (2024); Minn. Stat. § 504B.365, subd. 3(d) (2024).

⁶⁵ Minn. Stat. § 504B.271, subd. 2 (2024).

⁶⁶ See *Said v. Old Home Mgmt., LLC*, No. A21-1676 (Minn. Ct. App. Dec. 19, 2022).

⁶⁷ Minn. Stat. § 504B.271, subd. 2 (2024).

apartment? No. It is illegal for a landlord to exclude you from a rental dwelling without going through the legal eviction process. It does not matter how much money you owe or what rights the landlord claims to have. Only an eviction ordered by the court is legal and valid. Anything else is an illegal lockout.⁶⁸

- **Can my landlord shut off my utilities?** No. Intentionally interrupting a tenant's utilities is treated the same as a lockout.⁶⁹
- **What do I do if my landlord has locked me out or cut my utilities?** Tenants can file a lawsuit referred to as a "Lockout Petition."⁷⁰ The court provides [a specialized form](#) to file this case. The tenant will need to provide some proof that they have the right to live at the rental dwelling, which may include:
 - a copy of their lease,
 - proof of recurring rent payments to the landlord,
 - multiple consecutive months of utility bills for the property in the tenant's name,
 - communications with the landlord showing that the tenant was a resident of the property,
 - a previous lawsuit their landlord filed against the tenant over the tenancy such as an eviction case,
 - or any other documented evidence which might show they have the right to live at the property in question.

- **What will a court do if I file a lockout case?** The court will make an initial finding of whether it believes you have been unlawfully excluded. If it does, the court will issue an emergency order directing the sheriff to obtain access to your apartment for you. The court will also set a hearing date. If the court needs more information to make its decision, it may not grant you access to your rental dwelling right away, and you will have to make your case at the hearing.⁷¹

- **What compensation can I get for being locked out?** If a court finds that your landlord acted in bad faith when they locked you out, it can award you three times your economic damages, with a minimum award of \$500, as well as attorney's fees you incur to sue your landlord.⁷² Economic damages may include reasonable amounts spent on:

- replacement housing such as a hotel room,
- storage of your property,
- replacement food and medicine,
- temporary clothing or other household supplies purchased,
- damage to a tenant's property as a result of the lockout,
- extra travel costs incurred such as rideshares,
- or any other extra monetary costs you incur as a result of the landlord locking you out

Privacy

- **Can my landlord enter my unit?** Yes, your landlord has the right to enter

⁶⁸ Minn. Stat. § 504B.225 (2024).

⁶⁹ Minn. Stat. § 504B.225 (2024).

⁷⁰ Minn. Stat. § 504B.375 (2024).

⁷¹ Minn. Stat. § 504B.375 (2024).

⁷² Minn. Stat. § 504B.231 (2024)

your rental unit if they have a “reasonable business purpose,” they give you at least 24 hours notice in advance, and the entry may only be between 8:00 AM and 8:00 PM.⁷³

- **Who can enter my unit?** The landlord, their employees or other parties acting on behalf of the landlord, or any “other person acting under the landlord's direction and control.”⁷⁴ This includes property managers, maintenance staff, outside maintenance vendors, real estate agents, or potential tenants or buyers authorized to enter by the landlord.
- **What is a “reasonable business purpose”?** There is not a single, complete definition of the phrase, but the privacy law provides a list of acceptable examples:
 - showing a unit to prospective tenants once notice to vacate has been given by the landlord or tenant;
 - showing the unit to a prospective buyer for the property;
 - performing maintenance;
 - inspections by government officials;
 - a tenant is causing a disturbance in the unit;
 - a reasonable belief that a tenant is violating the terms of their lease in the unit;
 - pre-arranged housekeeping work in senior housing;
 - a reasonable belief that the unit is being occupied by someone with no right to be in the unit; or

- a tenant has vacated the unit entirely.⁷⁵

- **Are there any exceptions?** Yes, there is an exception for emergency situations. A landlord may enter without any notice if:
 - immediate entry is necessary to prevent injury to people or damage to the property because of maintenance issues, building security, or issues of law enforcement;
 - immediate entry is necessary to determine the safety of a tenant in the unit; or
 - immediate entry is necessary to comply with local laws concerning illegal activity in the unit.⁷⁶

If a landlord enters in one of these emergency situations and the tenant is not home, they must leave a note “in a conspicuous place” in the unit disclosing the fact that they entered without notice.⁷⁷

- **Can my landlord force me to leave the unit when they enter for a reasonable business purpose?** No, you always have the right to be in your unit unless a government entity has deemed the unit uninhabitable or a court has ordered you to leave.
- **Can I insist on being present when my landlord enters?** No, your landlord has the right to enter so long as they have a reasonable business purpose and give you 24 hours notice. As long as they meet those requirements, they have the right to enter when you are not home.

⁷³ Minn. Stat. § 504B.211, subd. 2 (2024).

⁷⁴ Minn. Stat. § 504B.211, subd. 1 (2024).

⁷⁵ Minn. Stat. § 504B.211, subd. 3 (2024).

⁷⁶ Minn. Stat. § 504B.211, subd. 4 (2024).

⁷⁷ Minn. Stat. § 504B.211, subd. 5 (2024).

- **Can my landlord insist that I be present to let someone in?** No, you cannot be forced to provide these services to your landlord. While the landlord has the right to enter, or allow others to enter at their direction, you are not obligated to facilitate that.
- **What do I do if my landlord wants to enter when they're not allowed to?**
If your landlord tries to enter (A) without a reasonable business purpose, (B) without giving 24 hours notice, or (C) outside the hours of 8:00 AM to 8:00 PM, you are within your rights to deny them entry.
- **What if my landlord enters anyway?**
If your landlord enters in violation of the law, you should not physically confront them. If you are worried for your safety, you should make all efforts to leave the unit. If you remain in the unit, you are within your rights to record the people entering your unit. Minnesota law allows the video and audio recording of anyone without their permission so long as one person present consents to the recording.⁷⁸ Because you are lawfully present, you can consent to the recording and have the right to record your surroundings.
- **What are the penalties for unlawfully entering my unit?** You can sue your landlord for \$500 per occasion that they enter your unit in violation of the law, a reduction in your rent based on how much the unlawful entry interferes with your use and enjoyment of the property, and your reasonable attorney's fees incurred in suing the landlord. You can also ask the court to break your lease. You may sue your landlord via a Rent Escrow Case, ETRA, or in conciliation court.

⁷⁸ Minn. Stat. § 626A.02, subd. 2(c) (2024).

APPENDIX B: Lifecycle of An Organizing Campaign

A core value in [community organizing](#) is intentionality: the idea that every step is purposeful and connected to larger goals of building [power](#) to change systems. The Lifecycle of an Organizing Campaign is a tool for [organizers](#) and leaders to see the steps in pulling together a successful campaign. At first glance, it may seem like a lot of work (it often is!). The purpose of this tool is for people to see that each step in their organizing is connected to future steps.

Using The Lifecycle:

1. **It is a cycle, not a straight line:** You can never have too many people in your base. No single [issue](#) will end injustice or change a system completely. [Power Analysis](#) should adapt to changing organizing and political realities. No decision is final. [Evaluation](#) never ends.
2. **Momentum is critical, avoid shortcuts:** To keep people involved, don't let the campaign become stagnant, but skipping phases or moving too quickly can be harmful. For example, a group can do a really thorough analysis of an issue, but if that issue isn't a priority to the base, then the issue won't attract the support necessary to win. Alternatively, one can build a large base, but if there is no action, power and change will be limited.
3. **Leadership is everything:** Being clear about how you develop community leadership throughout the campaign is arguably just as important (if not more important) than the outcome of the campaign itself. Victories will need to be defended, and new issues are sure to arise. Having strong leadership in your community will position you well for future campaigns.

This information has been developed and provided by Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) at the University of Minnesota. [Print-out available here!](#)



APPENDIX C: Meeting Flyer Example

*Did you receive an eviction notice or notice to vacate?
Are you concerned about new management?*

Join your neighbors for an emergency community meeting



Let's join together and **take action!**
Tell Generic Properties, we will not be displaced!

WHEN: Thursday, January 23rd, 6:30 - 8:00 pm

WHERE: Local School Cafeteria

WHAT: Tenants will be joined by advocates from (nonprofit) to talk about organizing a tenants association and options for taking action.

QUESTIONS? Contact Miranda, Generic Properties tenant (651)
XXX-XXXX

APPENDIX D: Meeting Agenda & Community Agreement Examples

ABC Building Tenant Association Meeting
(Month Day, Year)

Purpose: To get to know each other, talk about our housing challenges, and make a plan to support each other moving forward

Agenda

1. Welcome - 10 mins
 - a. Consider a grounding practice, prayer, etc..
 - b. Why are we here?
2. Introductions - 10 mins
 - a. What is your name? How long have you lived here?
3. Meeting [Community Agreements](#) - 5 mins
 - a. See examples below for ideas
4. [Issue](#) discussion - 25 mins
 - a. What are the issues that everyone is facing in our building?
5. Next steps - 10 mins
 - a. Set next meeting
 - b. Talk about what next steps need to happen between meetings and at the next meeting
6. [Evaluation](#)
 - a. One word from everyone about how they are feeling to end the meeting

Community Agreements (Examples to consider)

1. Be Curious, Open, and Respectful - call in, not out/throw sunshine, not shade
2. No one knows everything - together, we know a lot
3. We can't be articulate all the time - give the benefit of the doubt and ask questions
4. We take care of ourselves - stretch, eat, drink, use the restroom, rest, etc.
5. Confidentiality - don't speak for others without explicit permission; don't share something communicated in a private or safe space
6. One mic - one voice at a time
7. Take Space/Make Space - if you are usually quiet, challenge yourself to take more space, and if you usually talk a lot, be mindful to leave room for quieter voices
8. Avoid Jargon, Acronyms, and Industry language - use inclusive language that is accessible for people
9. Be aware of time - "enough, let's move on" (ELMO) means if what you wanted to say has already been said, don't say it
10. Speak from your own experience - use "I" statements rather than generalizations

APPENDIX E: Meeting Facilitation Basics

It is often said that facilitation is an art, not a science. Your confidence and skill increase with the amount of practice you get. The list below is not everything that should and shouldn't be done in a meeting. It's a general guideline to give you an idea of what meeting practices will support building your [tenant association](#) and what may harm it.

DO	DON'T
DO assign facilitation roles ahead of time	DON'T allow people to talk over one another
DO set an agenda or to-do list and share with the group	DON'T let a meeting last more than 90 minutes
DO make a safety plan in case management arrives unannounced	DON'T overload the agenda - keep it to 3 topics max
DO set community agreements as a group	DON'T forget to assign action and follow-up items to participants
DO stay welcoming to your neighbors!	DON'T dismiss people's contributions to the conversation
DO bring printed materials to share in all languages participants use	DON'T rush the decision-making process—if you need more time, take the time
DO prioritize important topics	DON'T ignore emotional tensions and disagreements
DO have interpreters to be inclusive of all languages represented in your building	DON'T forget to make time for questions and feedback

DO CONSIDER ACCESSIBILITY

When thinking about accessibility, it is important to make some upfront considerations, especially around physical access and the meeting process. However, disability accommodations and needs are highly personal and will vary based on the individual. Make sure you are asking your neighbors what their needs are at a first meeting and continuously throughout your organizing effort, and communicate clearly what types of accessibility will be available at your meetings. For instance, you could say on a flier: "We ask that everyone wear a mask when not eating and drinking, if they are medically able, to prevent the spread of illness among our neighbors. We will be meeting at a location that is stair-free and has different types of seating options, and will have printed materials available." Types of accessibility to consider when planning include:

- **Physical Accessibility:** The space has a level entrance and no stairs, or an available elevator, for wheelchair users and those with mobility limitations. There is accessible parking. There are different types of seating options for people with chronic pain, sensory issues, and to accommodate body diversity. There is a bathroom nearby that can be accessed by users of mobility devices and families.
- **Sensory Accessibility:** The event is safe for people with allergies and noise and light sensitivities. There are accommodations for people who are blind, deaf, or hard of hearing. Speakers should use microphones at all times, if available. Try to reduce noise levels, bright or flashing lights, and intense smells wherever possible. Welcome people to move around the room or take as many breaks as they need.
- **Cognitive Accessibility:** Give clear information about the event. Provide all material in different formats and plain language. Consider having a powerpoint presentation or other visual aid and handouts for people to take information home. Plan an agenda with meeting timing that allows for questions and additional explanations or context-setting, as needed.
- **Psychological Accessibility:** Remove barriers to participation for neighbors with mental health conditions. Allow flexibility for attendance and deadlines. Reduce extreme environmental distractions (see sensory accessibility). Do not crowd seating and make sure exits are clearly visible. Build in breaks for long meetings. Provide different ways people can participate, such as door knocking, writing communications, making signs, or leading meetings. Be direct, clear, and specific with requests for assistance, expectations, and feedback. Communicate intentionally and check for understanding. Provide advanced notice of meetings, topics to be discussed, and changes in schedule. Create clear expectations for working together, including roles, working agreements, and processes for troubleshooting and resolving group conflicts.

Importantly, designing accessible meetings usually benefits everyone and removes many barriers to participation in the organizing effort, universally. When you cannot provide for specific accessibility, the important thing is to communicate what you can and cannot do, so people know what to expect and can plan accordingly. Designate a person to answer participant questions and gather requests for accessibility. Finally, it is possible that some people's accessibility needs may conflict. If this happens, try to work with your neighbors to find suitable alternatives that meet multiple needs. If you have to deny an accessibility request, be transparent and give as much notice as possible. Remember, be open to making mistakes and learning directly from disabled neighbors.

HOW TO AVOID COMMON ORGANIZING MISTAKES

- **Share responsibilities/assign facilitation roles ahead of time:** Tenant associations can fall apart because of [burnout](#) among leaders. Sharing the responsibilities of building and maintaining the association, rather than expecting one or two neighbors to do the majority of the work, can prevent burnout. It also ensures that many voices are included and that the association will

continue to function even if some neighbors move or have changes in capacity. And, with roles assigned ahead of time, people know what is expected of them during your meetings.

To have successful outcomes, everyone will need to participate and contribute regularly to the association. A tenant association is made of many people, and it takes everyone's commitment to make it sustainable.

- **Attend meetings.** Life happens, and sometimes you can't attend every meeting. But if meeting attendance dwindles, the [power](#) of the association begins to weaken because collective [decision-making](#) is almost impossible, and involved tenants lose momentum. If you want change, you have to show up and make it happen! (Meeting times should be set, and possibly rotated, so the majority of tenants can attend even with varying schedules.)
- **Focus on building-wide, winnable [issues](#).** In general, don't try to solve everyone's individual issues with management, conditions, interpersonal conflict, etc. Work together to find resources to share. This doesn't mean you can't support each other as individual neighbors when someone needs help. But making individual issues the work of the entire association might reduce engagement because most tenants' interests are no longer being represented.

 **Note:** Some individual issues have the potential to become building-wide issues, like rent increases, notices to vacate, or lack of response to maintenance requests. Use your best judgment when deciding which issues you will tackle together. If working together to support one neighbor through an issue is something you all agree to, that's a strong way to show up for each other.

- **Respect every member.** Understand that you will be working across differences in racial/ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientation, gender identity, political affiliation, ability, religion, age, income, etc. Do not engage in biased comments or political debates. Understand that you need each other to win on your issue.

While you may become friends with many of your neighbors, temper expectations around getting along with everyone and focus on your shared goals. It is important to establish expectations for respect and communication early on, such as through [community agreements](#) that explain how you will solve conflict if harmful behavior occurs.

- **Be language-inclusive.** If your building is multilingual, have interpreters or bilingual leaders so all residents can participate in the language they feel most powerful in. If you do not have the resources for interpretation, you might partner with a neighborhood organization or renters rights organization to support your efforts. Make sure to create enough time in your agenda for interpretation. Encourage members to speak slowly so the interpreter has time to interpret what is being said.
- **Be kind to your neighbors.** Don't gossip about neighbors or form cliques. Hurt feelings, interpersonal conflict, and infighting are the easiest ways to weaken your [power](#). In a meeting,

allow everyone the chance to speak.

- **Build strong communication skills and processes.** This can look like **setting community agreements** so that everyone involved knows what is expected of them. It can also look like **passing out printed materials** so that participants can keep track of what the association is working on.
- **Be careful about how you talk about your landlord and other residents.** When speaking with each other, the media, and outside allies, focus on facts about what's happening in your property—what are the conditions, responsiveness of management, impact on you and your neighbors? How are you working together to address it? What are your solutions? Avoid bad-mouthing each other or the landlord out of frustration. Focus on strategy.

Besides leading to hurt feelings or disruptions in your organizing, some comments can lead to threats of defamation lawsuits against tenants or organizers. When you share your experience, nobody can argue with that. And you keep your association strong and united.

- **Have realistic expectations** about conditions issues. Having the carpet cleaned yearly or HVAC vents and outside windows cleaned regularly are not generally considered regular maintenance for a rental property. Try to focus on health and safety issues, violations of state law, mismanagement, high costs, displacement threats, and similar concerns.
- **Make time for questions and comments.** Organizing a tenant association is a collective process. Creating space for people to get clarification, contribute their ideas, or raise concerns about strategic decisions will strengthen your neighbors' trust in the association.
- **Set a hard stop for meetings.** By putting the meeting on a clock, it will be easier to keep the association focused and on task. Allowing meetings to run for longer than an hour or hour and a half puts the group at risk of losing people's attention.

A few simple techniques can help to build variety into your meetings, to help more people engage.

Go-rounds: Each person takes a turn to speak without interruption or comment from anyone else. This can happen in order round the circle, or each person simply takes their turn when they're ready. Go-rounds are useful when it is important to hear from everyone, e.g. everyone giving their views on a controversial proposal. Writing up the question people are answering can help keep a go-round focused.

Small groups or pairs: Many people are more comfortable voicing their opinions in a smaller group. This can be a good way to give everyone a chance to work out what they think about an issue before joining in a whole group discussion on the topic. Or several small groups could work in parallel on different issues. If the small groups are feeding back into the main group,

make sure you give them time to agree on key points they want to share, so everyone feels well-represented by the feedback.

Energisers: Most of us can stay focused for longer if we get a chance to move around and have a laugh. Some people will love short games and ice-breakers; other people will hate them! You could try offering a quick group game for everyone who wants to join in. Other options include a short break, chance to go outside, swapping seats, a few moments to stretch, or 'purposeful' activities with movement built into them.

Ideastorms: A technique to help to get lots of ideas out before you start evaluating and deciding what to do. Many people feel more creative when they know their suggestion won't be immediately criticized. Plus, thinking up lots of possibilities helps the group to not get stuck on the first idea. Announce the question, encourage 'thinking outside the box' and impractical suggestions, and write down every idea anyone shouts out. Ask people to hold back on commentary if they can. Emphasize that unworkable ideas may have the seeds of a new idea that would work.

APPENDIX F: Research Your Landlord Toolkit

National Housing Preservation Database

<https://preservationdatabase.org/>

A great tool for researching subsidized housing. You must register, but it's free and easy.

HousingLink Funding Streams

<https://www.housinglink.org/Streams/#lnkShowResults>

Another tool for looking up Minnesota subsidized housing. This allows you to search by funding category or subsidy expiration date. HousingLink also shares other helpful research and resources.

Secretary of State Business Filings

<https://mblsportal.sos.state.mn.us/Business/Search>

Once you know your landlord's company/LLC name, you can get more details here. This can be helpful for researching large corporate landlords that operate under multiple names.

Property Search by County

Provides basic property information. If your county offers an interactive map, this can be helpful when researching properties within a specific geographic area. For other counties, do a web search (try a phrase like “[county name] property tax records”) to find the right site.

- **Hennepin County Information**
<http://www16.co.hennepin.mn.us/pins/addrsrch.jsp>
- **Ramsey County Information**
<https://beacon.schneidercorp.com/application.aspx?app=RamseyCountyMN&PageType=Search>

Property Search by City

 **Note:** Some cities, like Minneapolis, offer lots of property data on their website (see below). Other cities don't. Try a quick web search (like “[city name] property information”) and see what comes up. You can always contact your city if you can't find what you're looking for.

- **City of Minneapolis Property Information**
<http://apps.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/AddressPortalApp/>
Provides information on owner, taxpayer, valuation, licenses, inspections, rental information, 311 service requests, etc.
- **City of Minneapolis Active Rental Licenses**
<https://opendata.minneapolismn.gov/datasets/active-rental-licenses>
Helpful to find names and contact info for property owners and applicants. You can compile neighborhood-wide data in one spreadsheet.
- **City of Minneapolis Rental Housing Violations**

https://tableau.minneapolismn.gov/views/OpenDataRegulatoryServices-Violations/Introduction?iframeSizedToWindow=true&%3Aembed=y&%3AshowAppBanner=false&%3Adisplay_count=no&%3AshowVizHome=no

Shows Minneapolis city violations for rental properties.

- **Twin Cities Landlords**

<https://tc-landlords.azurewebsites.net/>

This helps you find a landlord's entire portfolio. Combines Minneapolis rental license/violations data.

- **HOME Line webinar: "How to Research Your Landlord"**

<https://homelinemn.org/7726/4-8-21-tenant-organizing-webinar-how-to-research-your-landlord/>

Provides more great info about landlord research.

Freedom of Information (FOIA) and Data Practices Act (DPA) Requests

Sometimes renters or [organizers](#) need to access information from public records to strengthen their organizing campaign. The processes for federal requests (called FOIA) and state requests (called DPA) are different.

How to Complete a FOIA Request

Since 1967, the Freedom of Information Act has provided the public the right to request access to records from a FEDERAL agency. It is often described as the law that keeps citizens in the know about their government. Federal agencies have to disclose any information requested under FOIA unless it falls under one of nine exemptions that protect things like personal privacy, national security, and law enforcement.

Step 1 – Research And Identify the Correct Agency

Before making a request, see if the information is already publicly available. You can find a lot of information on individual agency websites.

It is important to identify the correct agency for your needs. There are over 100 agencies, and each is responsible for its own FOIA requests. You can find a breakdown of agencies by topic on USA.gov to help you identify the correct agency.

For a list of government agencies, search here: <https://www.foia.gov/search.html>

To search by topic: <https://www.usa.gov/contact-by-topic>

Step 2 – File Your Requests in Writing

Requests can be sent through mail or email to appropriate staff. You want to be specific enough to give the staff direction while remaining broad enough to get what you need.

Submit requests separately to avoid fees. Do not lump multiple requests together.

Be prepared for some back-and-forth with the agency. They may reach out to ask for more specifics, to assess fees, or to determine if the request can be simplified.

 **Note:** All FOIA requests must be responded to within 20 business days, barring unforeseen circumstances

Data Practices Act (DPA)

Under [Minnesota law](#), STATE and LOCAL GOVERNMENT records are accessible to the public unless a statute or rule provides otherwise. (Minn. Stat. 13.03. subd. 1)

That includes all information in any form (written, computerized, on recording tape, microfilm, etc.) collected, created, received, maintained, or disseminated by the government. (Minn. Stat. 13.02. subd. 7)

Entities Covered By The Act:

- State Agencies
- The University of Minnesota and Minnesota State Colleges and Universities
- Political Subdivisions: a county, a statutory or home rule charter city, a town, a school district, or other political subdivision of state
- Statewide systems (record-keeping systems used in common by multiple state agencies and/or political subdivisions)
- Corporations and nonprofit social service agencies under contract with a government entity

Real world examples:

- Request building or unit inspection reports from your city.
- Request inspection reports from HUD (FOIA) or the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency (DPA) if they are the contract administrator for your property (common for public, subsidized and affordable housing properties). For HUD and public housing properties, these will be called Management and Occupancy Reviews (MOR's) and REAC reports. You can also request all related correspondence between the management company and HUD or MHFA, to check on compliance and enforcement of required improvements.
- Request information on how rents are determined. In Low-Income Housing Tax Credit properties, it is common for different rents to be charged because different funding sources are covering different units. In order to find out which funding source or subsidy is covering which unit, so you can determine which rent metric your unit is based on, you can request the Project Map, Self-Scoring Worksheet, and the 8609 document for the property from MHFA using a DPA request.
- Request rental licensing information from your city.
- Request correspondence between a property owner or developer and city staff or council.

How to Complete A DPA request

Step 1 - Do Research Before You Request

Before making a request, see if the information is already publicly available. Use things like property tax records, court filings, business licenses, searches, etc. Much of this is available online.

Step 2 – Identify the Correct Agency and “Responsible Authority” (RA)

- Contact the government office that holds the information and ask for the name of the “responsible authority.” You often must ask the RA for the information.
- Information on the RA can be found at
<https://www.mnhousing.gov/data-requests---practices.html>

Step 3 – File Your Request In Writing

Each office has its own procedures you must follow. For example:

- It may require you to make a written request
- It may require you to ask someone other than the RA for the information
- It may require prepayment for copies
- It may require a data subject to provide identification for private information⁷⁹



Note: DPA Requests must be responded to within 10 business days.

Important: You are requesting existing information. Agencies do not have to respond if you ask questions or ask them to create data or conduct research.

Examples:

Correct – “I would like to inspect all data about why the county board decided to end the park program.”

Incorrect – “Why did the county board decide to end the park program?”

⁷⁹ You are allowed to request private information about yourself, but you may have to provide identification. The general public may not be able to see private data about someone—that usually gets redacted in a request.

APPENDIX G: Demand Letter Example

This draft letter is meant to be used as a template for rental housing residents in Minnesota. A demand letter can serve many different purposes in your organizing efforts. For example, it can serve as a request for a meeting or as a cover letter for a 14-day letter campaign.

A letter like the one outlined below is a means to communicate clearly with property owners and managers, state and local representatives, or anyone else who has the power to help residents achieve solutions.

When outlining demands, consider this formula:

1. State the broad issue
 - a. And specifics that relate to the broad issue
 2. Explain the effect on residents/outline what state law or city code the issue violates
 3. Identify solutions
-

Date

[Insert Property Management],

RE: Problems at [insert property name]

To Whom it Will Concern,

We, the residents of [insert property, city], Minnesota, are writing to you as a formal notification of ongoing problems at the property. Our concerns are as follows:

- 1. Repairs**
 - a. Mice infestation
 - b. Broken washers and dryers
 - c. Torn carpeting throughout building

Under Minn Statute 5041B.161, repairs must be made within a timely manner. This means within 14 days for non-emergency repairs. Multiple residents have submitted repair requests for issues in both their own units and in public space. However, no repairs have been done.

To address these issues, residents request:

- a. That an exterminator comes twice a month to set traps and fill holes until the infestation is resolved.
- b. That management reimburses all residents for money lost on broken laundry machines and that the machines be replaced with functioning ones.
- c. That carpeting be replaced, resolving a trip hazard for residents with mobility difficulties.

2. Communication with management

- a. Lack of response to requests for repairs, copies of leases, rent ledgers
- b. No onsite presence of management
- c. No translator available for non-English speaking residents

These barriers have made it difficult for us to effectively communicate when residents are having issues.

To solve these problems, we would like to see:

- a. That all residents who have requested a copy of their lease and rent ledgers receive them. That all requests for repairs are responded to with an update on when they will be completed.
- b. That an onsite manager be reinstated to handle resident questions and requests more promptly.
- c. That management makes an effort to hire multilingual staff or bring in a translation service to make communication between management and non-English speaking residents easier.

3. Security

- a. Entrances aren't secure
- b. Non-residents are regularly gaining access to common spaces
- c. Packages are being stolen

These issues are making it difficult for us to enjoy the full use of the property. Calling the police to file a report is ineffective and is not an option that all residents feel comfortable with. The entrances to our building are meant to only be accessible to those with key fobs. All requests to have the doors repaired have been ignored.

The remedies residents would like to see:

- a. Doors repaired so that they only open to assigned key fobs
- b. Cameras installed in the mail room so that package thefts are monitored

We would like to invite you to a community meeting, giving both residents and management/elected officials an opportunity to discuss the solutions we have outlined. The expectation is that this meeting will be held at the convenience of the majority of the building's residents so that all who have been affected have the chance to ask questions and participate.

We ask that you respond within [x] days to this letter. A lack of response will indicate that we need to escalate our concerns.

Sincerely,
The [insert property name] Residents

APPENDIX H: Different Types of Properties Toolkit

This organizing guide is designed for renters. While the general principles are the same for any property-based organizing, and while much of the advice in this guide still applies, people have different rights and protections based on property type.

Market-Rate Rental Properties

Market-Rate Rental Properties already exist or are part of a proposed development where rent is based on existing area market values and demand. Rent is not tied to a government subsidy or affordability restriction. Market-rate rental units can vary widely in price based on location, conditions, and amenities. State and federal housing and tenant/landlord laws, civil/human rights laws, and consumer protection laws govern market-rate rentals.

Federal HUD-Assisted Rental Properties

Federal HUD-Assisted Rental Properties have additional protections. In HUD-assisted rental properties, the government pays rent on behalf of tenants based on an individual's or family's income. Generally, you pay around 30% of your income (or a small minimum rent if you have no income) to the landlord, and the government pays the rest.

Local, state, and federal housing and tenant/landlord laws, civil/human rights laws, and consumer protection laws govern HUD-assisted rental properties. Importantly, some local or state laws may exempt federal HUD-assisted or other subsidized rental properties from certain protections, meaning that they may protect people in market-rate housing, but not subsidized housing, so it's important to look carefully at each law to understand your rights. But if you're a resident of a federal HUD-assisted multifamily property, you have definite protections around organizing. Rights of federal HUD-assisted property residents include:

Rights Involving Your Apartment

- The right to live in decent, safe, and sanitary housing that is free from deteriorating paint and environmental hazards, including lead-based paint hazards;
- The right to receive a lead disclosure form disclosing the landlord's knowledge of any lead-based paint or related hazards, available records and reports, and a lead hazard information pamphlet before you are obligated under your lease;
- The right to have repairs performed in a timely manner, upon request;
- The right to reasonable notice, in writing, of any non-emergency inspection or other entry into your apartment;
- The right to protection from eviction except for specific causes stated in your lease;
- The right to request rent recalculation if your income decreases; and
- The right to access your tenant file.

Rights Involving Resident Organizations

- The right to organize as residents without obstruction, harassment, or [retaliation](#) from property owners or management;

- The right to provide leaflets and post materials in common areas informing other residents of their rights and opportunities to involve themselves in their property;
- The right to be recognized by property owners/management company as having a voice in residential community affairs;
- The right to use appropriate common space or meeting facilities to organize (this may be subject to a HUD-approved fee); and
- The right to meet without representatives or employees of the owner/management company present.

To exercise these rights, residents must form a “legitimate” [resident association](#), as HUD defines it.

To meet HUD’s definition of “legitimate,” your resident organization must:

1. Be established by the residents of the property;
2. Meet regularly;
3. Operate democratically;
4. Represent all residents at the property; and
5. Be completely independent from the property owner, management, and their representatives.

Rights Involving Nondiscrimination

- The right, under the Fair Housing Act of 1968 and other civil rights laws, to equal and fair treatment and use of your building’s services and facilities, without regard to race, color, religion, sex, disability, familial status (having children under 18) or national origin (ethnicity or language). Residents with disabilities also have the right to reasonable accommodations. In some cases, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975 may also apply; and
- The right, under HUD’s Equal Access Rule, to equal access to HUD programs without regard to a person’s actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, or marital status.

These rights apply to tenants of:

- Project-based Section 8 properties (unless the property is administered by the Public Housing Authority);
- Properties with HUD-insured or HUD-held mortgages assisted under Section 236, Section 221(d)(3) BMIR, the Rent Supplement program, or the Section 8 LMSA program;
- Former HUD-owned properties that had been assisted under the programs listed above and were sold with a Use Agreement to maintain the property as low- or moderate-income housing;
- State or local housing finance agency properties that receive assistance under the Section 236 program or the rent supplement program;
- Properties that receive enhanced vouchers;
- Section 202 properties for the elderly; or
- Section 811 properties for persons with disabilities.

USDA Section 515 Program and Section 521 Rural Rental Assistance

Section 515 Rural Rental Housing properties have additional protections. Rural Rental Housing properties are those which are financed by direct loans from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in order to provide housing for very low to moderate-income families, seniors, and disabled people in

rural areas. The Rural Development (RD) division of the USDA oversees the administration of the Section 515 program. Section 515 financed properties have restrictions on the amount of rent they may charge tenants.

Section 515 properties are classified with one of five designations: family, elderly, mixed, congregate, or group housing. All tenants must meet the income eligibility of very low (50 percent AMI), low (80 percent AMI), and moderate-income (\$5,500 more than 80 percent AMI). Each project type serves a different population.

- Family properties: income eligible households
- Elderly properties: income eligible tenants must have a disability or be 62 years or older
- Mixed properties: family and elderly units in the same property
- Congregate properties: income eligible tenants who are elderly and require meals or other services be provided; this designation is not intended to operate like a nursing home, although there are similarities, so costs of health services are not covered through this program
- Group housing: income eligible tenants who are elderly or have a disability; different from other elderly designations, units have shared living space and a tenant may require a resident assistant

Section 521 is the Rural Rental Assistance Program. Tenants in Section 515 developments classified as very low-income or low-income are eligible for this rental assistance subsidy. This subsidy is a “pass through” benefit similar to a housing voucher program: tenants must pay 30 percent of their income and RD pays the remaining rent amount directly to the owner. Section 521 is seen as an incentive to keep owners in the Section 515 program. However, funding of this rental assistance is subject to Congressional approval and it varies annually. The program has never been fully funded to cover all who are eligible.

Tenants are eligible for this RD rental assistance subsidy *after* the owner prepays the loan or the property is foreclosed. The RD voucher amount is determined at the time of prepayment or foreclosure when market rates are set for the units. The voucher amount never changes, meaning tenants must pay any differences due to rent increases, regardless of income changes. Tenants living in Section 515 properties in which the mortgages are still owed are not eligible for these vouchers.

The part of the Section 515 Program that allows prepayment of the mortgage also allows owners to exit the program early, potentially resulting in increased rents for tenants and threatening tenants’ housing stability.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ [USDA Section 515 Program Overview: CURA UMN](#)

Local, state, and federal housing and tenant/landlord laws, civil/human rights laws, and consumer protection laws govern RD-assisted rental properties. Importantly, some local or state laws may exempt federal RD-assisted or other subsidized rental properties from certain protections, meaning that they may protect people in market-rate housing, but not subsidized housing, so it's important to look carefully at each law to understand your rights. But if you're a resident of a federal RD-assisted multifamily property, you have definite protections around organizing. Rights of federal RD-assisted property residents include:

Rights Involving Your Apartment

- The right to live in decent, safe, sanitary housing free from environmental, health, and safety hazards;
- The right to have repairs performed in a timely manner, and upon request;
- The right to receive reasonable written notice of any non-emergency inspection or other entry into your home;
- The right to protection from eviction, except for specific causes stated in your lease;
- The right to receive a 30-day notice prior to eviction for nonpayment of rent;
- The right to request recalculation of your rent if your income decreases by \$50 or more per month;
- The right to access your tenant file;
- The right to access resources to help you avoid eviction, ensure the legal process during an eviction proceeding is fair, and avoid future housing instability;
- The right to protections under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). VAWA provides housing protections for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, harassment, and stalking who are applying for or living in federally assisted housing. The law applies to a survivor regardless of sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, or age; and
- The right to file a complaint alleging discrimination without fear of retaliation or reprisal.

Rights Involving Resident Organizations

- The right to organize without difficulty, harassment, or retaliation from property owners or management;
- The right to provide leaflets and post materials in common areas informing other residents of their rights and opportunities to be involved in matters concerning their rental homes;
- The right to use appropriate common space or meeting facilities to organize. (There might be instances in which a reasonable, USDA-approved fee applies for common space use);
- The right to meet without representatives or employees of the property owner or management company present;
- The right to be recognized by property owners and the management company as having a voice in residential community affairs.

Rights Involving Nondiscrimination

- The right to equal and fair treatment;
- The right to use services and facilities without regard to your race, color, religion, gender, gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, disability, familial status, national origin (ethnicity or language), and age.

Rights Involving Leases

Leases must:

- Be clearly and fairly written, with well-defined rental terms, rights and responsibilities;
- Not include provisions limiting how disagreements will be settled, unauthorized terms, hidden or illegal fees, false representations, or other unfair or deceptive practices;
- Include transparent information regarding the security deposit policy, with appropriately sized deposits placed in a federally insured bank account for the duration of the lease;
- Provide reasonable advance notice of actions related to the unit, including notice of entry for inspection, and notice of any significant changes to the unit;
- Be written in simple, plain-language, accessible to the renter, and the leasing process must ensure tenants understand the terms of the lease; and
- Describe the rights and protections provided to victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, harassment, and stalking.

Rights Regarding Adverse Actions and Appeals

- The owner must notify applicants and tenants in writing about any proposed actions that would have negative consequences, such as denial of occupancy or changes in the occupancy rules or lease;
- The written notice must give specific reasons for the proposed action and must also advise applicants and tenants of their appeal rights. Housing complexes in areas with concentrations of non-English-speaking residents must provide notices both in English and in the majority non-English language;
- Applicants and tenants can file a grievance in writing with the property owner in response to the owner's actions – or failure to act – that result in a denial, significant reduction, or termination of benefits; and
- Grievances can also be filed when an applicant or tenant disputes the owner's notice of proposed adverse action. Refer to USDA Rural Development Multifamily Housing Grievance Process FAQs (available at this link: <https://tinyurl.com/a2tezj7c>) for more information.⁸¹

Section 42 / Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) Rental Properties

Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) properties are the government's primary policy model for creating, rehabilitating, and preserving rental housing serving lower-income residents.

Unlike many forms of federal HUD-subsidized housing, LIHTC rents are generally not based on a resident's income, although you must be income-qualified to live in a LIHTC property. Instead, rents are most often based on a combination of the Area Median Income and Fair Market Rents. These numbers are based on the incomes and market conditions of all people and properties in the region. This is why rents at many LIHTC properties are out of reach for many low-income people.

Many LIHTC properties are funded through different forms of financing, so rents may not be the same across units, even if unit sizing is the same. It will depend on how that particular unit is classified when it was financed.

⁸¹ [USDA Rural Development Tenant Rights and Responsibilities](https://tinyurl.com/a2tezj7c)

Although rents can be adjusted up or down based on the Area Median Income and Fair Market Rent numbers that HUD releases annually, the choice to raise rent is completely up to the property owner. The LIHTC program does require that rents are lowered to no more than the maximum allowable rent if annual numbers go down. Numbers typically go up every year, though.

Federal rules prohibit LIHTC properties from denying housing to people who use Section 8 vouchers to pay a portion of their rent. Even so, Section 8 voucher payment amounts are capped based on what's known as a Voucher Payment Standard. That means LIHTC property rents may be too high for some tenants with vouchers.

Important to note: Because it is common to use multiple funding streams to build and maintain housing identified as "affordable," some properties are BOTH federal HUD-assisted and LIHTC properties. In this case, the residents have the organizing rights of HUD-assisted residents.

Rents may vary from unit to unit based on whether it is tied to Project-Based Section 8 funding or LIHTC funding. It is common for properties to have some units where rents are based on an individual's income and others where rents are based on Area Median Income or Fair Market Rent caps, or even market rate. It all depends on the property's financing.

In order to find out which units have which subsidies (which ties to how much rent a particular person may be charged), you can make a Data Practices Act request to MHFA. Ask for the following items:

1. Project map
2. Self-scoring worksheet
3. The 8609

Please refer to [Appendix F](#) for instructions on filing a Data Practices Act request. You can also find out which subsidies apply to your property generally by using the National Housing Preservation Database or HousingLink funding streams tools.

For additional information and graphics, please refer to the [What are Low Income Housing Tax Credits Guide](#) from CURA.

Manufactured Home Communities

Manufactured home communities (MHCs), also called mobile home parks, have many additional protections, especially for manufactured home owners. The rights that all renters have, such as to repairs or a written lease, still apply. The difference is the additional protections.

One important protection for all folks in MHCs is the right to organize a resident association. There are also some specific legal protections for manufactured home owners.

These include:

- Once you sign a lease when you move in, the park owner CANNOT make you sign a new lease. The rules outlined in the original lease are the rules that apply to you. If the park owner wants to change rules later on, the park owner must give 60 days' notice, and all changes must be reasonable. Any rule changes that "substantially modify" previous policies only apply to new residents.
- Park owners may increase rents, but they must give 60 days' written notice of any rent increases.. They cannot increase the rent more than twice in 12 months. There is currently no cap on how much they can increase the rent.
- Manufactured home owners can only be evicted for the following reasons and using the following timeframes:
 - A resident is late paying rent or utility charges owed to the park.
 - Park .
 - Park must give 10 days' notice and opportunity for the resident to pay the amount due in those 10 days.
 - A resident fails to comply with a law or government rule.
 - Park must write to the resident and explain what is being done wrong. The resident must then begin obeying the law or rule within a reasonable amount of time.
 - A resident breaks the terms of the lease or the park's rules.
 - Park must give 30 days' notice and opportunity to comply with the lease or rules.
 - A resident repeatedly breaks important terms of the lease, park rules, laws, or governmental rules.
 - Park must give written notice of violation and a written warning that any future violations could result in eviction. If another violation occurs within 6 months of the notice, the park can ask the resident to move immediately.
 - A resident does something in the manufactured home park that endangers other residents or park personnel, seriously damages park property, or substantially annoys other residents.
 - Park can give the resident a written notice and ask the resident to move within 30 days. If the resident again endangers people, seriously damages park property, or substantially annoys other residents, the park can ask them to leave immediately.
 - All or part of the manufactured home park is going to close.
 - Park must give 9 months' advance notice. If part of the park will remain open, a resident has the right to move within the park where possible.
 - The park owner is making improvements to the park that will substantially benefit the health and safety of the residents, and it is necessary to remove a resident's home to complete the work.
 - Park must give affected residents 90 days' notice. Residents have the right to move within the park, if possible.
 - A resident gives false information in the lease application.
 - Park can only evict residents for this reason if the park acts within 1 year of the date the resident started paying rent.

Manufactured home communities have the right to organize through a [resident association](#). A Resident Association is a legally recognized voice for MHC residents.

According to Minnesota Statute 327C.01 subd. 9a., "Resident Association" means an organization that has the written permission of at least 51% of the manufactured homes' owners to represent them. It also must be organized to resolve matters relating to living conditions in the park. Resident Associations can address many park-wide issues by requesting necessary repairs, maintenance, and improvements in health and safety conditions.

For more information, please refer to the Attorney General's Handbook ([English](#), [Spanish](#)) and [All Parks Alliance for Change Organizing Manual](#) (link coming soon). However, please note that these resources have not been kept up to date. **If you have any questions on specifics, please contact [HOME Line](#) or [Housing Justice Center](#).**

APPENDIX I: Conducting Negotiations

Before you negotiate with anyone, you will want to think things through very carefully.

- Consider the outcome that you desire.
 - What are your aims?
 - You need to provide decision-makers with information that specifically outlines what you want.
 - Is there anything you will settle for? What won't you accept if it is offered?
- Consider what foundations are necessary to the desired end result.
 - How do you make your argument? What will convince decision-makers that it is in their interest to work with you?
 - Compile documents and information like receipts, how often you've reached out, and reported [issues](#).
 - Consider bringing in media and community advocates as a part of this process.
- Consider how you will manage the unexpected.
 - What will you do if you're presented with an alternative you haven't discussed as a group? Can you still present a united front even if you disagree?
 - Stay focused on your desired outcome. You know why you and your neighbors are at the negotiating table.

Be okay allowing the silence to do some heavy lifting. Once you've said what you are prepared to say, don't be afraid to let the static rest in the air. You do not need to fill the space or dilute your message for the comfort of the recipient.

How do I prepare myself to negotiate with the owner of my development?

To be as effective as possible at the negotiating table, plan out the following:

Issues

- Decide priorities, such as rent, repairs, contract, etc.
- Be clear on what you are asking for and put it in writing.
- Keep it simple and stick to priorities.
- Have documentation easily available – notices, copies of letters, taxes, other properties, petitions, etc.

Negotiating Team

- Select a lead negotiator, one who can keep control over the meeting.
- Select other negotiators who will help the lead but not speak directly to the other side.

Preparation

- Meet in a private, neutral place with a serious atmosphere.
- Position the lead negotiator in the center of your group with other team members to their left and right.
- If you can, set the room up to give more control to your side. For example, have the [target](#)'s negotiators sit in chairs with their backs to the audience but facing your negotiating team.
- Decide what/when/how your team would end negotiations. If negotiations are not happening in good faith or you are not making gains with landlords, is there a point that your neighbors decide to walk out?

The role of observers (members and supporters of the tenants association)

- Observers should not speak, interrupt, or contradict your negotiating team. If the negotiators make a mistake or forget something, the observers should write them a note or whisper to them.
- Observers should not enter late, leave, or create other distractions.
- If the other side speaks to the observers for your side, ask your team's observers to direct questions and comments to your negotiating team.

Negotiations

Basic Principles

- Never go into negotiations without knowing what you want to get out of them.
- Never go into negotiations without knowing what you can or can't do to get your demands – never threaten action you can't deliver on!
- Deal only with the opposition that has the power to make decisions, not their representatives.
- Set and stick to the agenda. Don't argue about the agenda during the bargaining.
- Negotiate, don't discuss. Don't let your opposition get off the subject or just talk.
- Never let the opposition know how you're feeling about how things are going, unless you planned earlier to give them that impression.
- If you are considering a compromise and there isn't unanimous agreement, call a caucus and go outside to discuss for a few minutes. Never agree to do something that doesn't have your group's full support.
- Record the negotiating session. You can use the opposition's remarks later, even if they haven't put it into writing.
- Nail down the gains you have made. Restate what you've agreed to, and get everything in writing. The agreement can be handwritten on the spot and initialed by both sides.

Sample negotiating format

- Lead negotiator introduces negotiating team
- Lead negotiator begins by briefly explaining the background and reasons for the negotiations
- Discuss one point at a time
- Caucus or cut negotiations short if necessary
- Summarize and formalize your agreements
- Agree to next steps
- Meet as a group after negotiations to review progress and process

Some likely responses

The other side may try to:

- Ignore you
- Divide you
- Pacify you
- Delay answer
- Intimidate you
- Discredit your group/your leaders
- Threaten eviction
- Lie to you
- Patronize you
- Walk out
- Offer deals to some of your people
- Agree to everything, but commit to nothing
- Act friendly and try to take control of the session
- Ask that you be “reasonable”

APPENDIX J: Self-Interest 101

What is self-interest? People take action based on what truly motivates them. Motivations can come from what makes you eager to wake up in the morning and what keeps you up at night. A person's needs, concerns, interests, and values that could/would motivate them to take action in the public sphere are called self-interest.

Self-interest allows us to think of ourselves in relationship with others. This is different from self-lessness (only thinking of others) and self-ishness (only thinking of yourself).

When your core values are being dismissed or dismantled in the public arena, it can drive you to build relationships and power with others whose self-interest intertwines with yours. This is why we have self-interest conversations, or one-to-ones.

Examples of questions that uncover self-interest:

- What has been your experience as a renter? How have your landlords treated you? Have you ever struggled to find or afford housing?
- What are your core values around housing? Where did they come from?
- When you think about our community, what keeps you up at night?
- What are your hopes for our community?
- What is important to you?
- Who is important to you?
- What would you publicly defend?
- What motivates you to keep going?
- When was a moment you felt powerful?

Self-Interest Conversation (One-to-One) Notes

- Name of person you talked to
- What did you learn about this person: identities, occupation, core experiences, etc.
- What values did you hear from this person?
- What are their primary concerns about their housing situation?
- Where do those concerns come from? What interests/experiences have shaped their perspective, concerns, and values?
- What else struck you in this conversation?

APPENDIX K: Decision-Making Models

There are many ways to structure [decision-making](#). Not being intentional in how we make decisions as a group can lead to conflict and quickly sour the relationships and collective [power](#) we are trying to build.

We pulled much of this from the workbook [“Turning Towards Each Other”](#) by Jovida Ross & Weyam Ghadbian.

Generally speaking, we can make decisions either individually or collectively. By setting up processes that your group can anticipate and depend on, you will alleviate a lot of stress.

Below is a list of models that are either individual- or collective-oriented:

Democratic Vote – Everyone casts a vote, and the majority wins. These are decisions with clearly defined choices that impact many, for which consensus is impractical or unnecessary. Example: The decision to form a [tenant association](#).

Consensus – A decision isn’t made until everyone in the group agrees. These are decisions that really require full buy-in for successful implementation. Example: What’s our group’s purpose or core values?

Self-Stewarded – One person decides. These are operational decisions that don’t impact others hugely. Examples: The timing of a particular task. Decisions concerning physical safety (be sure to define what that means for your group). Compliance with laws that the group has to operate within.

Consent – One person has an idea and no one disagrees, so the group tries out the proposal. These decisions can be made quickly and only impact others in a limited way. Example: I propose moving the date of an important meeting. Any objections?

Consultative – The group contributes heavily to the input process, but one person makes the final decision. These are decisions that will impact others significantly, but it’s useful to have a single point of contact accountable. Example: Setting goals related to a specific function that one person leads (like the communications leader making a flyer and asking for group input.)

Your community also has the option to mix and match models depending on what decision needs to be made, how many people it will impact, and how quickly it needs to be decided on. Below are some questions that can help you determine when and how you might want to apply these models.

- What decisions would I like full authority to make on my own?
- What decisions does our group need to make together?
- What decisions does our group make together that could be simplified with a consent model?

- What kinds of decisions do I have responsibility for that I want others to weigh in on (and share their expertise or experience with me about)? What decisions do I want a group-mate to have responsibility for, with input from others?
- What kinds of decisions does our group make that would be useful to put to a vote?
- When would it be useful to blend decision-making models in our group?

APPENDIX L: Press Release Sample

1/1/23

Media Contact:

[NAME]
[email address]
[phone number]

For Immediate Release

January 7th Demonstration Against Persistent Housing Deficiencies

On January 7th, 2023, the residents of Sherwood Pines apartments will be demonstrating in response to continued avoidance of legal responsibilities by their landlords and property management entities.

The protest will begin at 12 a.m. near the apartment complex (222 Sherwood Ave). Residents will remain on site for three hours and use the opportunity to bring community attention to the challenges they are experiencing in their homes.

“We don’t have to be rich, famous, or well-educated to make change. The fact that we’re doing this all together is important,” said Mary Jean, a Sherwood Pines resident.

This action is happening after residents made several attempts to bring property owners’ and management’s attention to issues in the 115-unit property.

Complaints include:

- Long waits for repairs and failure to make repairs. Issues range from sinks that consistently back up to residents living without heat for days.
- Inaccurate and miscalculated rent ledgers.
- No communication from management or presence of staff on site.

Last summer, residents hosted a meeting with management and owners to discuss concerns, only to have property representatives walk out on tenants. Residents have pursued enforcement of their rights within federal (HUD), state, and local housing protections. Despite tenants’ efforts, including a meeting with local representatives, management has remained unresponsive.

“We’re doing this because our experiences need to be centered, the people that live here, not the landlord,” said Sherwood Pines resident Gloria Beech. “Just because they’re managing the building doesn’t mean they’re the priority or the only voice. We are people in here.”

During the demonstration, tenants will deliver a list of demands that includes reinstating onsite management and paying overdue utility bills. Tenants will be available to speak to the press.

This release is an invitation to the January 7th demonstration. If you have any questions about the event or interest in speaking with affected tenants, please contact [insert name] at [insert contact information]..

APPENDIX M: Door-knocking Sample Script

Purpose: Door-knocking is a common tactic to inform, meet, and promote. Secondarily, it can be used as a means to recruit for a specific action or event. By going to a person's front door, we are creating a space to make an intentional connection with them around our goal. Meeting someone in this space opens up the chance for them to ask questions and get answers about topics they may be interested in, but haven't sought out information on.

Today our goal is to _____

The Script: If you're new to door-knocking, or feeling nervous about door-knocking for a new goal, it's a good idea to practice the interaction with a trusted co-collaborator beforehand. This will give you the chance to identify what your intention is for the conversation, give you confidence to keep someone's attention, and make it easier to remember what you're there to talk about.



Note: It can be very hard to walk up to someone's door and start a conversation with them, but take a deep breath and remember that we're just talking to people.

A basic script consists of:

- introduction
- information on goal
- an ask
- material drop-off and exit

Interested Party Script

Door-Knocker: Hello my name is _____, I live in the _____ (building, neighborhood, area) and I'm out here to let you know about an upcoming meeting I'm putting together with some other renters that focuses on _____ (tenant rights training, collecting tenant concerns, a community event or gathering) Do you have a few minutes to chat with me?

Resident: Hello, yes, I do. Who are you with? What is this event?

Door-Knocker: I am a volunteer working with other renters to build out a renter centered space. The last few years have been really hard and I know that there's been a lot of instability in housing for people. We want to create a space that can be a resource for education on our rights, advocating for improving protections in our city for renters and generally building community connections to better support each other.

Resident: Oh that does sound like something I would be interested in! What day is it? Can I bring other people?

Door-Knocker: Here is a flyer with all the information on it, my phone number is there too. You are welcome to invite anyone, but we do ask that this remain a space just for renters.

Resident: Why just renters?

Door-Knocker: We are hoping that by ensuring that just renters are present, will make everyone more comfortable with sharing their experiences.

Resident: Okay, I see, well that makes sense. Well I will check my calendar and see if I am available

Door-Knocker: Great! Would you mind giving me some of your contact information? We won't share it with anyone, we just take it so that we can send you a reminder of the event

Resident: Sure, my number is 444-444-4444

Door-Knocker: Thank you, I hope to see you soon!

Brief Interaction Script

Door-Knocker: Hello my name is ____, I live in the area and I'm out here to let you know about an upcoming meeting I'm putting together with some other renters that focuses on tenant rights here. Do you have a few minutes to chat with me?

Resident: Hi, no I don't I'm sorry.

Door-Knocker: That's okay! I know everyone is so busy, would you mind taking a flyer for the event? The address for the meeting is on here and so is my phone number if you have any questions! We hope to see you at the meeting.

Resident: Thank you, goodbye.

Important Notes about Door-Knocking

- This space is in the control of the resident, who can leave the conversation at any time by shutting the door or asking you to leave.
- Hostile response: this is something that may occur during this interaction, we prevent and lessen this by going in pairs, when possible, and listening to our gut. If something feels off, or if you're not comfortable, disengage and walk away.
- The way that you knock on the door is the first interaction you make with a resident. Many people living in apartments are not ever approached by anyone but maintenance or management.
- Each time we go out, stay focused on one identified goal, it can be expanded on future door-knocks
- Door-knocking can help create a space where a real connection can be made with your neighbors and community