



RTCNYC Tool 8.2

Town Hall Facilitation Guide

Town halls were critical in getting the word out about Right to Counsel, for building our base and for building momentum in our campaign. This is a sample town hall facilitation guide to help coordinate programming. In this particular town hall format, we incorporated a skit about housing court that we put together so that participants could get a sense of the experiences in housing court and why a right to counsel is critical for tenants navigating housing court. You can find a sample skit script [here](#). You can find a checklist for planning a town hall [here](#).

RTCNYC Coalition Town Hall Agenda

1. Welcome and Opening 6:00 pm
2. Overview of Housing Court and RTC NYC 6:30 pm
- **Overview:** Tonight is an important night. We are here to talk about making NYC the first City in the Country to make it a right for tenants to have attorneys in housing court! That is a huge deal. How many of you have been to housing court? How many of you had to defend yourselves? How many of you won your cases? Congratulations to you—you are the true heroes!!! No one should have to do this alone. Am I right?!

But if you've never been to housing court, it's hard to understand what exactly goes on and why this is so important, since many people think it's just a simple calculation about money. So, since we can't take you on a tour of housing court right now, though that would be fun, we are going to bring up a team of fabulous actors to demonstrate what court is like for the more than 5,000 people that go to housing court every day.

- **Skit about the current state of housing court**
- **Questions and debrief of the skit:**
 - What did you all think? What words come to mind about what you just saw?
 - How did you think the woman in the skit felt?
 - What about if she didn't speak English, what do you think her experience would have been like?
 - Did you hear the attorney or anyone bring up any issues about conditions, harassment or anything like that?
- **Conclusion:** So this is what we are trying to change. We believe that it is this dynamic that causes people to be wrongfully evicted. We believe that if that woman and thousands more like her, had a qualified and experienced attorney representing her, we could prevent literally thousands of evictions!!! So to learn more about that, I want to turn your attention to a short video.
- **Show the [Video](#)**



3. Overview of the Coalition (use website for reference)

7:00 pm

Goals

Outline the goals of the campaign:

- Our short term goal is to pass Intro 214, a bill in City Council that was introduced by Council Member Mark Levine and Council Member Vanessa Gibson, which would provide for all tenants (at 200% of the poverty line or below) to have an attorney from a qualified non-profit agency like legal aid/legal services. This would cover 2/3s of the people who are taken to housing court right now. This doesn't mean that everyone would get an attorney. And it doesn't mean that we would stop all evictions. It also doesn't mean that tenants have a right to attorneys in pro-active cases against landlords, like HPs, which right now are about 3% of all of the cases in housing court. It means that most people would have an attorney to defend themselves and that they'd have a better chance of winning their case. Make sense?
- Beyond preventing evictions, we also want to change what housing court is. Right now, it is a landlord controlled center of displacement. We want it to be a place where tenants can go to find justice. If tenants have the Right to Counsel, landlords will bring less cases against tenants because they know they'll lose and that means they will be forced to use the court less than they do now as a tactic of harassment. It also means that tenants will be more likely to proactively sue their landlords in court!
- Ultimately, we believe that this will help to change the balance of power in the city between landlords and tenants. Right now, we are teaching tenants that they don't have power and that their rights don't matter. Tenants who face the housing court like it is are less likely to call 311, less likely to organize a tenant association, to be actively involved in their community because the highest form of justice--the court system, tells them their voices don't matter. Passing RTCNYC, means continuing to work to ensure that tenants can know and claim their own power.

History: Where we are now

- In June of 2014, a huge coalition of tenant organizing groups, tenant advocates, academics and legal services providers joined forces to form the RTCNYC Coalition to achieve the goals above that we just talked about.
- Right now, the bill, Intro 214 has 34 sponsors, which is enough to pass the bill. So that means that there is widespread support in City Council!
- The main barrier to passing the bill is funding. The initial costs show that it will be about 200 million. And we certainly don't want an unfunded mandate. We need the mayor to understand that he must fund this. We are working with the city council now to call a hearing on the bill.
- In December, we had a big conference and have gotten a lot of press. We also have built a city-wide coalition with close to 1000 contacts through our website. And the Mayor and the Speaker have both acknowledged the unjust system of power in housing court and have dedicated money and resources to begin to change this. The mayor added \$36 million to the



budget for legal services for tenants. And the Speaker committed to establishing an office to oversee this work.

- But we still have work to do to get a law passed. Funding and offices can come and go. Laws are much harder to take away. If we can get de Blasio to make this a reality, then it will be impossible for any future mayor to take it away.
- So we've done a lot!!!! But we still have much more to do!!! That's what we want to explore with you tonight! Do you want to be a part of making Right to Counsel a reality?! Ok, so we need to all work together to come up with more strategies to move this work forward. This is what we are going to do now in small groups. Also, if you have any more specific questions about the bill or the coalition, you can ask your facilitator in the small group.

4. Small Break Out Groups ([Facilitator's Guide](#))

7:10 pm

- Review RTC and the work ahead
- Questions
- Suggestions
- Report Backs

7:30 pm

5. Call to Action, 5 minutes

7:45 pm

- Sign the petition
- Sign up on the website
- Get ready for an action at the end of April/early May!
- Attend the City Council Hearing
- Testify at the City Council Hearing
- Meet with your local elected official
- Commitment cards

5. Thank you and Good Night, 5 minutes

8:00 pm