



## ***Beyond Recovery: Organizing Toolkit:***

*A 'how-to' guide for people who are ready to organize!*



# **BEYOND RECOVERY**



Now more than ever, it is clear that access to fair, affordable, and safe housing is not just a matter of public health, but a fundamental human right. The social and economic health of our society and the survival of our planet requires that we rethink our relationship to housing and land. Across the country, in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are doing our best to stay home and practice physical distancing. But what happens if we don't have a home? What happens if we've been laid off and can't afford the homes where we live? What happens if we are essential employees, but still don't make enough to cover rising rent costs? What happens then?

We know the crisis around housing and land existed before the COVID-19 pandemic. [Nearly half of U.S. renters were cost-burdened](#) before this pandemic, with 30-50% of their income going to cover housing. As this structural and public health crisis progresses, we expect a skyrocketing number of families to face eviction or lose access to a permanent home.

These struggles are not the fault of individuals. That's why we launched the [Beyond Recovery Campaign](#). Thousands of renters, low-income homeowners, small business owners, and others across the country are creating a people's plan to ensure a healthy, stable, and thriving future for us all. Our goal is to take this historical moment to build power and grow the movement to end housing and land exploitation. Now is the time to go beyond false solutions, short-term fixes, and the status quo. **This toolkit<sup>1</sup> is designed to support impacted people in getting organized to collectively fight for themselves, their families and their neighbors!<sup>2</sup>**



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<sup>1</sup> For questions about this toolkit or if you need additional support you can contact [info@righttothecity.org](mailto:info@righttothecity.org) and one of our field organizers will respond.

<sup>2</sup> To view a synopsis of Right To The City's response work in the face of COVID-19, please [click here](#).

# Beyond Recovery: Organizing Toolkit

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## COVID-19 & Housing as a Human Right<sup>3</sup>

COVID-19 is worsening a housing crisis that started long before the pandemic. Our homes, health, and collective safety and futures are on the line. Millions of us don't know how we are going to pay our rent, mortgage, or utilities from month to month, yet landlords and banks are expecting payment as if it is business as usual. It's not.

Our neighborhoods and homes have gone from places where we love, heal, grow, learn, play, rest and dream to the means by which landlords, corporate investors and financial institutions extract profit from our rents and mortgages. The real estate sector is being taken over by hedge funds and private equity entities, which are even less transparent and more extractive than the retail banks that give out mortgages. Without a mass response from tenants, landlords are able to manipulate the cost of housing, increasing rents by 13% since 2000 while incomes haven't budged. Those who can't keep up with the breakneck rent increases get pushed further out, especially communities of color in historic urban neighborhoods who are already contending with the legacies of financial racism.

This same period of increased investment in real estate and housing by a range of corporate actors was accompanied by significant disinvestment of public spending in housing, as well as deregulation of public protections in private market housing, land use, and zoning. State legislatures across the country have been swept up in a coordinated campaign to prevent cities from implementing rent control. Funding has collapsed for the Department of Housing and Urban Development's housing assistance programs, leaving more low-income tenants to bear their growing housing burden alone.

Federal policy continues to privilege the economic well-being of homeowners through tax deductions and low interest rates on mortgages, widening the wealth gap between. The central role that the real estate and housing sector plays in the global economy, along with the huge wealth



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<sup>3</sup> Adapted from *The Critical Role of Renters In Growing And Leading Working Class Struggle In The Next Period* by Dawn Phillips  
the Beyond Recovery website <https://cancelrent.us/demands>.

generated by renters for that sector, means that renters can disrupt and transform that system. Renters are uniquely positioned to exercise power over global capital in this moment by organizing collectively and reimagining housing and land as a human right!

At this moment, we demand:

- **Cancellation of rent, mortgages and utility payments for a debt free future**
- **Vacant units transformed into safe homes**
- **The release of people from all cages to decrease the spread of COVID-19**
- **City-sponsored comprehensive support to those "sheltering-in-place" outside**
- **Guaranteed unemployment, sick and paid leave, health care, and a living wage for all workers**
- **PPE equipment that is necessary to keep essential workers safe in addition to any necessary child or elder care for their loved ones.**

These are demands that will ensure a healthy, stable, thriving future not just during this period of recovery, but towards a better and sustainable life.



## Organizing 101: Getting Started

### Finding Your Power & Local Organization

If you're reading this you are probably one of the millions of people who are being forced to pay too much for housing, facing eviction, or constantly being forced to move. And maybe you're dealing with a slumlord or living in a home that is in poor condition.

#### **First things, first:**

- (1) you're not to blame,
- (2) you're not alone,
- (3) we're stronger together, and
- (4) you can fight back!

Alone we might be able to hold on to some things we cherish, but together we can win the things we all need and deserve. There is strength in numbers and the first step in finding our power is realizing that you are not alone and that organizing works! Connect to a local organization in your area or start your own tenants union! Use this guide to familiarize yourself with best practices on how to turn the challenges you and your neighbors are experiencing into collective and achievable demands.

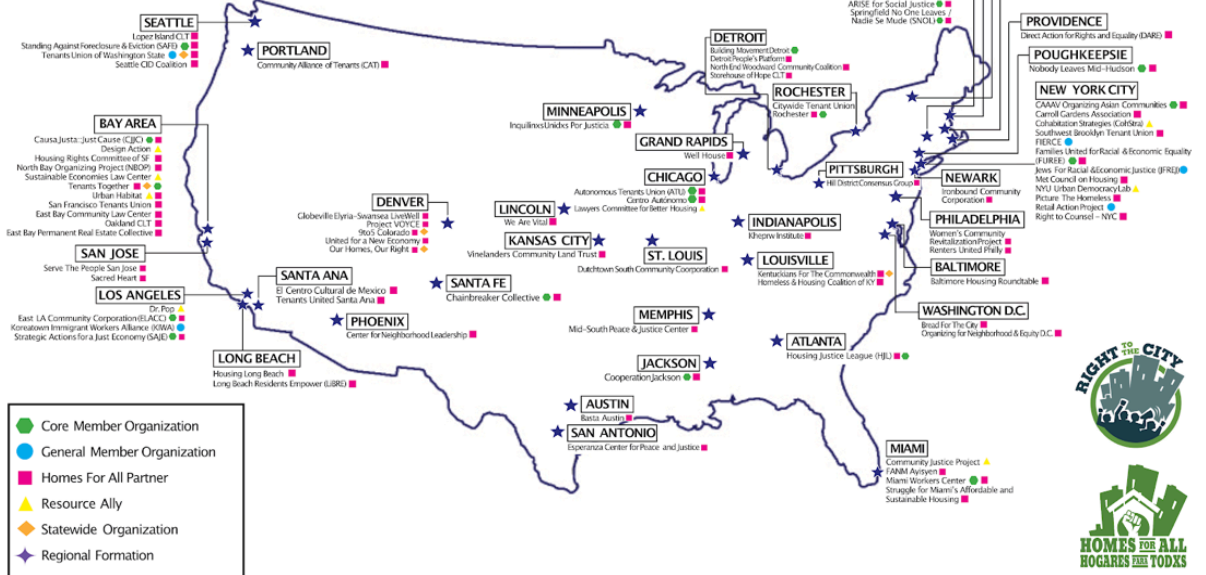
### Homes for All Network

Initiated in 2013, Homes For All is a mass movement of people organizing to win permanent, dignified and affordable homes for all people, where residents have democratic control over their communities. Homes for All includes 80+ organizations across 45 cities and 23 states. See if there is an organization local to your area who you can reach out to for support.

# Right To The City Alliance & Homes For All

Membership & Participation

Updated February 2020



ATLANTA, GEORGIA

[Housing Justice League](#)

AUSTIN, TEXAS

[building and strengthening tenant action \(BASTA\)](#)

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

[Right to the City Boston](#)

[Right to the City Vote](#)

[City Life/Vida Urbana](#)

[Alternatives for Community and Environment](#)

[Boston Tenant Coalition](#)

[Chinese Progressive Association](#)

[Chinatown Community LandTrust](#)

[Codman Square Neighborhood Development Corp](#)

[New England United for Justice](#)

BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

[Baltimore Housing Roundtable - NESRI](#)

CALIFORNIA STATEWIDE

[Tenants Together \(Statewide\)](#)

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

[Autonomous Tenants Union](#)

COLORADO STATEWIDE

[9to5 Colorado](#)

[United For A New Economy](#)

GRATON, CALIFORNIA

[North Bay Organizing Project](#)

DETROIT, MICHIGAN

[Detroit Peoples Platform](#)

INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA

[KHEPRW](#)

JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI

[Cooperation Jackson](#)

KENTUCKY, STATEWIDE

[Kentuckians for the Commonwealth](#)

LINCOLN, NEBRASKA

[We Are Vital](#)

LIVINGSTON, MAINE

[Raise Op](#)

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

[Community Power Collective](#)

[Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance](#)

[Strategic Actions for a Just Economy](#)

LongBeach, CALIFORNIA

[LIBRE - Long Beach Residents Empowered](#)

LOPEZ ISLAND,  
WASHINGTON

[Lopez Island CLT](#)

LYNN, MASSACHUSETTS

[Lynn United For Change](#)

MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE

[Mid South Peace & Justice Center & HOMELESS Organizing for Power](#)

MIAMI, FLORIDA

[Miami Workers Center](#)

[Community Justice Project](#)

[Struggle for Miami's Affordable and Sustainable Housing](#)

MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

[Inquilinxs Unidxs Por Justicia](#)

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

[CAAAV Organizing Asian Communities](#)

[Carroll Gardens Association](#)

[Metropolitan Council on Housing](#)

OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA

[Causa Justa::Just Cause](#)

[Urban Habitat](#)

NEWARK, NEW JERSEY

[Ironbound Community Corporation](#)

NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

[Jane Place Neighborhood Sustainability Initiative](#)

ROCHESTER, NEW YORK

[Citywide Tenant Union of Rochester](#)

PORTLAND, OR

[Community Alliance of Tenants](#)

POUGHKEEPSIE, NEW YORK

[Nobody Leaves Mid-Hudson](#)

PHILADELPHIA, PA

[Women's Community Revitalization Project](#)

[Hill District Consensus Group](#)

PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

[DARE Direct Action for Rights and Equality](#)

SANTA ANA, CALIFORNIA

[El Centro Cultural de México / Tenants United Santa Ana Rent Control Coalition](#)

SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

[Esperanza Peace and Justice Center](#)

SANTA BARBARA, CALIFORNIA

[CAUSE Santa Barbara](#)

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

[Housing Rights Committee of San Francisco](#)

[San Francisco Tenant Union](#)

SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA

[Sacred Hearts](#)

SPRINGFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS

[ARISE for Social Justice](#)

[Springfield No One Leaves](#)

SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO

[Chainbreaker Collective](#)

WASHINGTON STATEWIDE

[Tenants Union of Washington State](#)



## Mapping & Building a Team

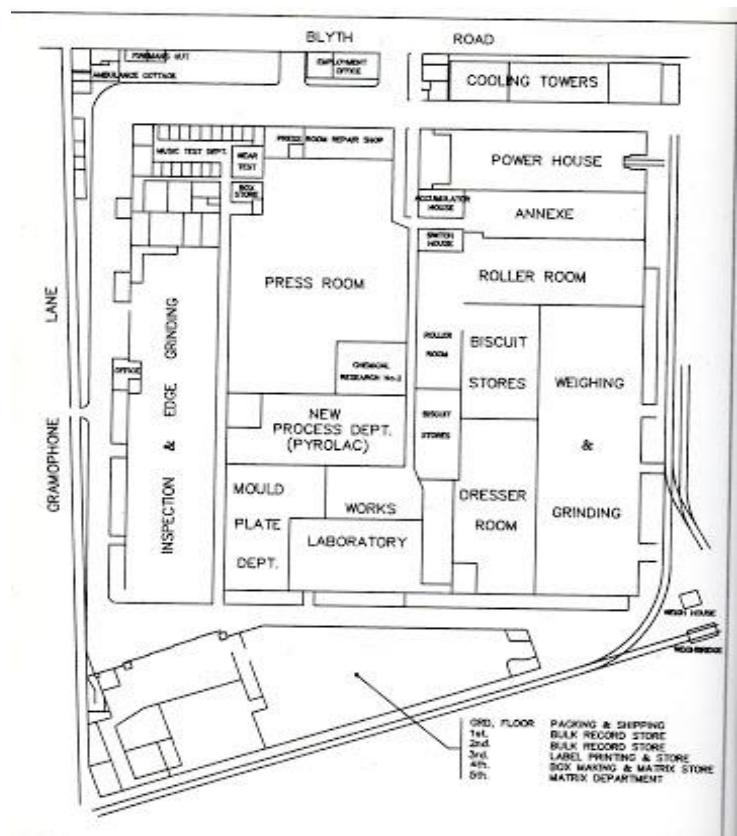
If we are going to take on the unfair practices of our landlord or challenge rising rents and gentrification, we have to get a clearer picture of who is on our side and who is experiencing the same hardships. Mapping is our tool!

**Mapping is exactly what it sounds like: it is simply drawing out where you live, who lives there and making a list of who you know.**

Do you know who lives in your building or apartment complex? How many residents reside there?

In organizing, mapping is utilized to help us get a better understanding of who we need to be talking to. It relies on the knowledge of who you already know and helps identify who else you need to bring on board in order to take action. For example, say there are 3 buildings owned by the same landlord or company. You've lived there for 2 years and you know most of the people in your building by face or name, but none of the people in the other two buildings. When you start mapping your own building you remember that your neighbor downstairs used to live in the second building for a few years. It's likely they know others there. In your outreach plan you will use mapping to tell you who to prioritize in outreach.

For instance, many organizers in labor unions will physically draw out a map of the workplace in order to better understand various sections of a jobsite or to pinpoint important areas, such as an outside smoke area or common break rooms where people gather. **Visualization is a useful part of mapping.** Having a visualization also helps us recall who you already know! If you know other residents by name or face, start to create a list. It may sound basic now, but you'll be able to draw on the power of your existing relationships down the line. Write down every name or a description of the neighbors you want to approach first. These should be people who you believe would hear you out if you approached them about the issues you all are facing.



**Lastly, mapping goes hand in hand with "categorization."** That means developing a system for identifying the people you plan to outreach to. Oftentimes, a

numerical system is developed to keep track of the people you want to organize. For instance, a person who is a "1" is someone who was eager to learn more about making change. They are engaged and interested in being part of developing efforts. Meanwhile a person who is a "2" might be somewhat interested or perhaps really care about the issues, but expressed some fear or hesitancy about being involved. A "3" would be someone who is against taking action or disinterested in talking with you.

Remember, you won't be able to neatly categorize every person you talk to, but it can help you make a larger assessment about whether or not your neighbors are ready to come together. It also helps you make sure you don't waste precious time on neighbors who can't be won over right now.

**To review, here are main steps for mapping and outreach:**

**1. Draw a visualization of where you and your neighbors live**

- a. Tip: you can likely draw this by hand or use the building map to see how many units, floors, and commons areas there are.

**2. Create a list of people you already know**

- a. Tip: Utilize this list of people to build your team.

**3. Develop a system of categorization in order to start outreach**

- a. Tip: always keep a pen and paper on you so you can jot down notes after talking with a neighbor. These notes should be transferred to an "Organizing Sheet" that you keep in a safe place. These notes will help you remember names and helpful information such as someone's phone number or any actions you need to take to follow-up with them.

**Here is an example of an "Organizing Sheet":**

NAME	APT BLDG & #	CATEGORY	CONTACT INFO	NOTES
Yannica Williams	BLDG 3, Apt number 16	1	801-555-8675	says text her info about the meeting; has 1 kid & works 12 hour shifts at the hospital 4 days/week; fired up and is in her union!
Maria Ramirez	BLDG 1, Apt 22	2	801-555-9030	couldn't talk long, took info and seemed interested; said come

				back fri when spouse was home to talk more
Anne (Renner or Wrenton ?)	BLDG 3, Apt 5	2, maybe 1		had a great convo w/ her, but before we could finish she got a phone call; need to go back for phone #
Luis ?	BLDG 2, Apt 12 or 13	2 or 3		agreed that the landlord wasn't being fair & things needed to change; said "if people don't like it they should just move."

Organizing doesn't happen alone and in order to start mass outreach, you'll need a team of neighbors to help you. Getting nervous about doing outreach or talking to people you don't know is normal. There can be a lot of things that can be scary about doing outreach. The good news is that you already have the tools necessary to get started. You've done your mapping!

To build a team find a group of at least 3 other tenants or residents who are fed up and ready to do something about the housing crisis with you. Remember that initial list of people you made? Invite those people to be part of your outreach team. Remember, take time to share your experiences with your team. Talk about the vision of what you want to do together. Ask each other who else in your community of residents is affected by the same issues? Your team will help you expand and deepen your mapping. The more unified you can be, the stronger you will grow as a team.

### Talking to Your Neighbors<sup>4</sup>

In organizing, we use what we call a "rap." A rap is not a script. Every outreach contact is going to be different. **The rap is a guide to help us keep the conversation on track.** A rap can be helpful because sometimes when we start talking to people 1-on-1, we realize that we either have a lot to talk about, or we get nervous and forget what we came there to talk about. A rap is helpful because it helps guide your conversation. It keeps you on track when you get nervous, forget what you were trying to say, or when the person that you're

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<sup>4</sup> "Talking To Your Neighbors" was developed by POWER as part of their training series POWER University. POWER was an organization made-up and led by low-wage workers fighting for real change in the San Francisco Bay Area.

talking to isn't very focused.

There are five parts of the rap: the Introduction, the Investigation, the Problem, the Solution, and the Crunch.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Introduce yourself, explain why you are reaching out to them. Ask who they are.



### **2. INVESTIGATION**

Ask questions about people's experiences. Asking questions about their opinions helps you to start a conversation. It shows that you're not just talking at someone, but that you are actually having a conversation with them. It also helps to give you a sense of what's important to folks, what they care about, what makes them angry, what their hopes and fears are. This will be important if fear comes up or people contradict themselves later in the conversation.

### **3. PROBLEM**

In this part, you want to connect how you see the issue with the problems that the person has already talked about. Tie what they tell you to the issues you're interested in bringing people together to solve.

### **4. SOLUTION**

This is the piece where you are talking with folks about how things can be different. One thing that we know is that people are hesitant to fight because they're not sure what they think or feel makes any difference. You're there to say that it does make a difference if people come together to fight for their rights.

### **5. CRUNCH**

We want people to commit to getting involved in something. You can talk a good game, but if they don't agree to do anything, you're right back where you started. When you're doing outreach, you want to think ahead of time about what action steps people can take. Make a list of the top two to three

priorities or the top two or three ways that you would want that person to get involved. It can be big or small, but it is got to be something.

Tip: In the best outreach exchanges, the person that we're outreaching to will actually be the person doing the most talking. While doing outreach, organizers typically shoot for a 2/3rds split when talking to people. Two-thirds of the time the organizer should be listening to the person and only talking one-third of the time.

## Meetings & Collective Decision-making

So you've done your mapping and you have a small team of residents committed to helping you organize. Additionally, you all should have just finished some successful 1-on-1s with dozens of our neighbors. Now it is time to get everyone to a meeting. During outreach you should have had an action step for people to take. Oftentimes the first action step is holding a meeting to get everyone together. It helps people



feel empowered when they realize they are not the only one facing a problem.

Attempt to hold a tenants meetings at a reasonable and accessible time. At that meeting find out when most people can meet regularly. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many people are connecting online or through phone. Here are the [best conference call or video call phone meetings services](#). Some are free and others are not. If you're having difficulty getting access to these services reach out to us and we will help you (info@righttothecity.org).

Things to consider when planning a meeting agenda are:

- A. **PREPARATION:** create an agenda; identify a facilitator; let people know about the meeting in advance. Keep in mind any need for interpretation, food and childcare, and a time that works well for folks.
- B. **OPENING:** make everyone feel welcome and give them an opportunity to introduce themselves; review your principles and/or purpose; choose a

notetaker and timekeeper so meetings run smoothly and on time.

- C. **CREATE NEXT STEPS:** make sure to identify the problem you are addressing. never assume; make plans on how to solve it and make key decisions democratically. Create "action items" as you go so people know what they need to do.
- D. **PARTICIPATION AND ROLES:** allow and encourage everyone to participate. Sometimes it may help to break into small groups or pair up for deeper discussions; provide opportunities for everyone to take different roles.
- E. **CLOSING:** review "action items" and make announcements, evaluate the meeting, and lift people's spirits with a song or a chant.
- F. **FOLLOW THROUGH:** It's important that we carry out decisions we made and follow through with our commitments; the notes are helpful to remind us what these were. You and your team will be responsible for following up with people.

Housing problems often leave us with fear or shame we must confront to move forward. We do this by getting together regularly, sharing our stories, listening to each other, supporting each other, and identifying our common suffering and ideas for solutions. This is a process, and it takes time, so it is important to build trust and consistency at every step.

### Addressing Apathy & Fear<sup>5</sup>

One of the biggest mistakes organizers can make is to assume that their neighbors don't care. You may think apathy is partly to blame. It's a common gripe. If you ask yourself reasons why people don't get involved typical answers include:

- lack of time
- they don't know how
- conflicts with other neighbors
- scared of rocking the boat
- they are looking for individual solutions
- they don't feel anything can change

It may feel like some of your neighbors don't care. But push a bit, and that's never really true. **Apathy isn't real. Everyone cares about something in their**

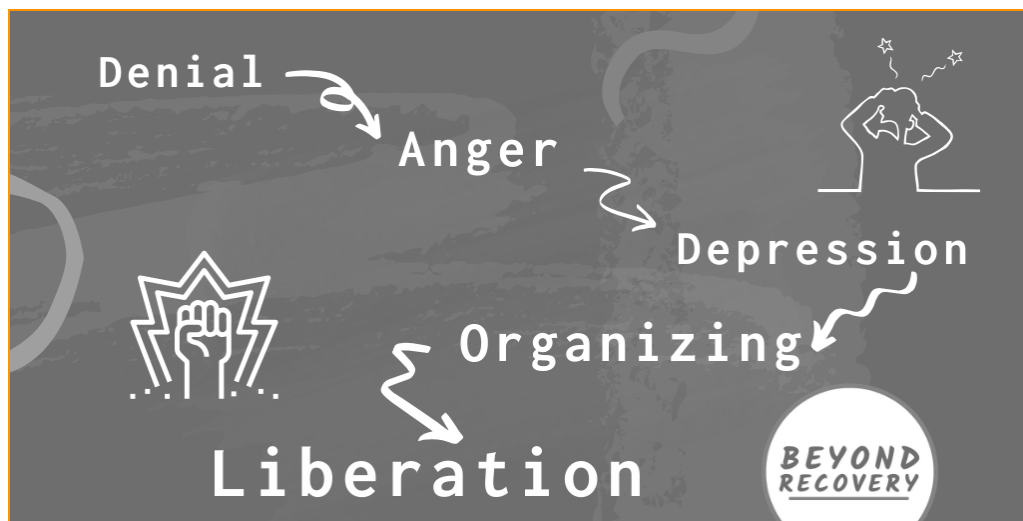
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<sup>5</sup> This section and language was adapted from Labor Notes' *Secrets of a Successful Organizer* training and book. [Labor Notes](#) is a media and organizing project that has been the voice of union activists who want to put the movement back in the labor movement since 1979.

**neighborhood.** Just about everyone cares about keeping a roof over their heads and their bills down. **No one is indifferent to rising rent costs. It's more likely that people's barriers to getting involved has to do with one of the reasons listed above.**

And if it does then persistence and connection can help your neighbors see that they have the power to change things for the power. Don't give up on your hard to reach neighbors, they may join efforts down the line.

Most times people are paralyzed by fear when they are in crisis. Sometimes when people feel powerless they are scared to do anything. They might say everything is fine because they don't want things to get worse. Organizing is the anecdote. When you're facing a neighbor who is fearful, tap into the righteous anger about the conditions that you all are living in. Help them find the courage and determination to act. Perhaps you can bring another neighbor who overcame fear. That person can share their story. Remind your neighbor that being scared is natural, but that we are all in this together. Action collectively is our greatest protection. Lastly, give them space to think and check in on them outside of the organizing effort in order to let them know you care and that they are welcome to be involved at any point.



### Shared Work & Supporting People to Lead<sup>6</sup>

As the initial organizer, you never want to get weeks into your organizing and realize you're the one still carrying all the responsibility. It's common that this happens but it is fixable by taking time to develop other people into leaders. **Every community has informal leaders.** They influence others and they likely command respect. Don't think about the loudest person, think about the person everyone says hello to admires. Perhaps it is the person who has lived

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<sup>6</sup> This section and language was adapted from Labor Notes' *Secrets of a Successful Organizer* training and book. [Labor Notes](#) is a media and organizing project that has been the voice of union activists who want to put the movement back in the labor movement since 1979.

there the longest or the person who is always keeping residents up to date on new information. Look for people who are good judges of their neighbors or who can soothe fears.



**Fundamentally, a leader is someone who others follow. That may not be you and that's okay! You want to support the people who are informal leaders in directing the efforts.** Invite them to be part of your organizing team. Share this toolkit with them. Ask them to play a certain role and help them learn new skills. This slow development work will make sure that you have many hands to help to share the work. Shared work is key. Too many tasks on one person will lead to burn-out. Be willing to let go of responsibility so others may pick them up. Thinking like an organizer means that you must work to make sure the collective is strong and not just you.

## Organizing 102: Building a Campaign

### Identifying the Issue & What Unites You

We've learned that the strongest organizations or tenant associations are ones that take time to develop shared vision, goals and demands together.



**Ask your group: what do we want to be different about our situation or our community in 3, 5, 10, 30 years?** What kind of power do we want to have as a group or a community right now? What do we want to win together? How big do we need our effort to be to be successful?

These questions can help you set internal goals and external goals and bring you closer to developing a strategy for tackling the problem.

### Naming the Target

When you are clear on what you want (your demands) ask each other - and allies in your community: *Who are the people, organizations or institutions we need to pressure to get what we want? Who has the power to give us what we are demanding?*

In order to take strategic action you have to know who has the power or authority to meet your demands or who has the power to get your target to



respond to your demands. **A strong campaign is always centered around 1 or more targets.** Having a target ensures our campaign won't become aimless.

## Creating a Strategy

Strategy always comes before launching a campaign or any specific tactics or actions. When you start getting clear on demands and targets, start thinking about the people in your community who you need to bring into our efforts. Ask your team:

- Who are the people who are for us or against us?
- What actions or tactics will it take to win our demands and advance our vision?
- How do we want to grow and gain new skills through our campaign?
- How can we bring more people into our organization/group to grow our power?

Developing a strategy for your campaign is not an easy process. We won't always agree on every idea, so it takes time to develop a solid plan that members agree to and are ready to carry out. The process is as important as the campaign. You can always reach out to other Homes For all organizations for ideas and support in developing your strategy into campaigns!

Common parts of strategy:

- (1) **Assessment of conditions (aka identify all opportunities & weaknesses)**
- (2) **Overall goals (aka your demands)**
- (3) **Tactics (aka collective actions you want to take)**
- (4) **Timeline & escalation plan**
- (5) **Evaluation (and adjustment of tactics or goals if necessary)**

**TIP:** Your timeline must show multiple tactics, each one escalating the pressure we put on the target. Sometimes we win after step 1 or 2 and others we have to keep ratcheting up the pressure. Most campaigns start small, like with a petition, in order to reach a broad layer of people. Others start off big, like a mass protest, because the situation is dire or an important deadline is approaching. You and your team, with



input from other neighbors, will decide when to use certain tactics.

## Tactics

A quick note about tactics: sometimes people confuse tactics with strategy. But tactics are the actions we take in order to realize our strategy. Our strategy is our overall plan to go from individuals dealing with crisis to a collective force.

Common tactics:

- petitions
- leafleting
- rallies
- press conferences
- op-eds
- bird-dogging
- protests
- vigils
- rent strikes
- lobbying elected officials
- packing the court
- a march
- teach-ins
- banner drops



There are many types of tactics. Strong tactics help to unite different kinds of people in order to effectively weaken our target, and pressure the decision maker to give us what we are asking for. The more different kinds of people we have - such as residents, religious leaders and elected officials - the more likely it is we can make that happen. Don't be afraid to think outside the box.

## Preparing to Win or Lose or Both<sup>7</sup>

At the end of the day, from each organizing efforts we want three things

1. **Victory:** Did we get solid improvement in our living conditions? Did we reach our goal(s)?
2. **Lessons Learned:** Did we get smarter about the forces we're facing and what it will take to win? Did we hone our skills and our understanding of strategy?

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<sup>7</sup> This section and language was adapted from Labor Notes' *Secrets of a Successful Organizer* training and book. [Labor Notes](#) is a media and organizing project that has been the voice of union activists who want to put the movement back in the labor movement since 1979.

3. **A stronger Organization:** Did we build personal connections of trust and alliance that can be called upon again? Have more leaders stepped forward?

Each fight should build off the last. It often happens that we don't win the concrete gain we wanted or we lose a little bit and gain a little bit. Either way, we come out smarter and better organized. It's an organizer's job to point out concretely what we won and what we didn't win. This makes it more likely that our next efforts will yield an even bigger victory.

Remember, however, even in victory, we might not feel victorious. We might have taken a lot of hits and there may be more work to do to keep the victory. That's normal. Prepare to celebrate yourselves along the way. Build camaraderie and a space to appreciate each other for the powerful work you're doing. When victory comes - no matter how big or how small -- you will have created a culture of resilience and optimism that will sustain you for the long-haul.

## Organizing 103: Taking Action

### Ingredients of a Successful Action

Whatever tactic you choose, make sure you understand the ingredients of a successful action to ensure that you meet the goals of your action and also keep everyone safe and informed.



- ❑ **Scoping out the location.** Where will your action take place? Is it outfront of the leasing office, the bank, perhaps the apartment building itself? Make sure you and your team have an idea of how the action will look from start to finish.
- ❑ **Scenario Planning:** You and your team should talk about likely scenarios. For example: what to do if police show up, what to do if your landlord shows up, what to do if the media doesn't come and you expected them.

Scenario planning helps us pivot in the moment to still achieve our goals.

- ❑ **Permits**. depending on the site of your action your city might require permits to assemble large groups. You might want to call a local organization who does direct actions to get advice on if this is necessary. If a permit is required make sure you print a copy out and have it on you the day of the action.
- ❑ **Assign Roles**: everyone on your team should have a role to play to ensure no one is stretched too thin and that each aspect of your action is covered. You might want to ask allies or other residents not on your core team to also help with small tasks. Check out the list below of important roles.
- ❑ **Inform speakers and participants**: if you're going to have speakers make sure they are aware of their task + where they should be during the action. Additionally, when you are inviting people to the event make sure you let people know what type of action it is. We have to protect people in vulnerable groups and make sure we don't print "vigil" on our flyer knowing we plan to sit down in the street as part of the action. This could put undocumented residents or allies in danger. Participants should be informed about the action they are supporting.



❑ **Interpretation**: language justice is important. If your neighbors speak different languages you should (hopefully) have already found a way to engage them in the organizing efforts. The same goes for the action, make sure you have someone there who is willing to provide interpretation so everyone can participate.

❑ **Accessibility**: When you scouted your location is it accessible to people who are in a wheelchair or use canes to walk? Access needs go beyond this too. If you plan to gather a large group do you have a speaker system or megaphone to make sure everyone can hear? Think about your

neighbors: who should you keep in mind when considering accessibility?

- ❑ **Marshals**: Marshals help keep the people attending your action safe. If you're rallying near a busy street marshals are there to make sure people stay on the sidewalk or help people cross the street. Marshals can also double as Police Liaisons. Police Liaisons are people who talk with police or security guards if they show up. Marshals are also there to de-escalate the situation if things get heated. Usually marshalls are allies in our community who can train your neighbors on how to fulfill this role. Use

this [Act Up Marshal Training](#) for additional do's and don'ts.

- ❑ **Supplies:** make sure you check that you have all the supplies you need for the day of. There is nothing like forgetting the candles at your house during a vigil or the ropes for a banner drop to disrupt your plans.

#### Common Roles:

- Coordinator(s)
- Interpreter(s)
- Marshalls
- Set-up Crew
- Clean-up Crew
- Crowd Engagers - *do you need people to sign a petition while at your event? Having a few people who engage the crowd is a great way to make sure this happens*
- Chant Leaders
- Speakers
- Spokespeople to talk to the press
- Volunteer Medics - *if your action involves walking for a distance or being out in the heat or cold you might want to consider having a volunteer medic there. This should be someone from the neighborhood or a community organization who has been through CPR, first aid or basic life support training.*

#### Telling Our Stories

Our stories can be part of our strategy. By sharing our stories we connect with each other and break free from fear, isolation and trauma caused by crisis. Through stories we teach and learn from each other, find our power, tell our truths and share the solutions we need. Our stories transform us & the world. Story-telling is a big part of organizing. It happens at the door during your 1-on-1 outreach to neighbors. It happens at monthly meetings and actions. It also happens in the media when we are trying to get public attention to our issue. Here are some tips for turning our stories into strategic narratives that advance our demands:



**Tip 1:** Remember to familiarize your neighbors and community allies with your central messaging and demands. That way whether they are recruiting other residents, speaking at a march or giving an on-camera interview they can deliver the *collective message* and *their own unique story*.

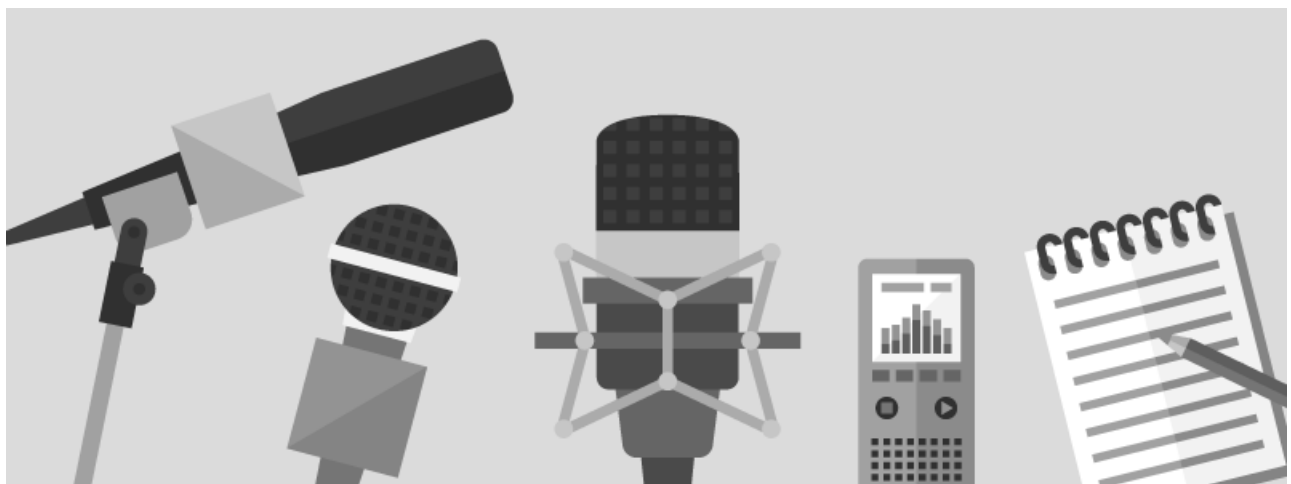
**Tip 2:** Make sure that whatever you share you are comfortable with it being repeated or shared widely. Our stories can be powerful, but also it can take a toll talking about your conditions. Make sure you get comfortable with what you do and don't want to share.

**Tip 3:** Storytellers are not speakers. Speakers are normally allies who we invite to speak to our issues and lift them up. We can tell our own stories and be our own spokespeople. At every opportunity we should allow directly impacted residents to lead the conversation and give interviews or speak at a rally. Our voices have to fuel the fight. It also puts a face to the issue.

**Tip 4:** Practice! Whether you plan to talk to a neighbor and share your story or to a policy-maker, practicing it can help you feel prepared and comfortable.

## Tips for Organizing the Media

When it comes to the media, remember it is not the individual outlet who is our audience, but it is the wider public. When trying to organize the media to cover your issue get familiar with writing press releases or advisories to let the media know what's going on. Start compiling the contact information of local news stations and the emails for reporters and editors of local newspapers (both online and print). If you are having a public action or meeting, tell the press 1-3 day prior. Make sure you have residents, who are willing to tell their stories, prepared to talk to the media when they arrive.



**Tip:** It's always a good thing to call the press the day of your event in order to check and see if they intend to cover the story. It's as simple as saying

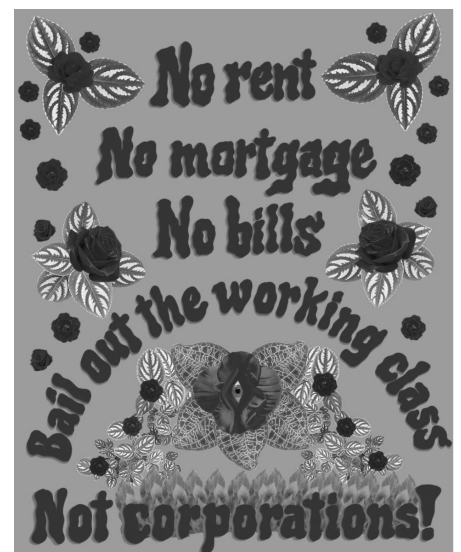
"Hello, this is Jane and I'm calling because I sent you all a press release a few days ago. I wanted to check to make sure you received it and to see if your station, News Channel 20, plans to cover the event?" Normally the employee answering the phone will know whether or not the station has chosen to assign someone to the action. Most news stations don't post assignments until that very day so calling the morning of the event is recommended.

Over time you might build rapport with certain reporters or journalists. This is a good thing. But be careful. Reporters are not friends. They have a job and that's to produce a story. Just because you have a relationship with them doesn't mean they are automatically on "our side." We should think of the press as a tactic and utilize them to reach more people and put pressure on our target.

Tip: Be sure that when you're sharing details that are not meant for the public that you tell the reporter or journalist "this is off-the-record."

#### Interviews:

- When giving interviews you should avoid discussing your strategy or your process, i.e. the tactics, the small steps we are taking to win. Instead talk about your plight and the solution!
- Stick to your story, your values. If you don't know the answer to a question be honest and go back to why you're speaking out in the first place.
- Feel free to give details about your life, your reason for standing up and fighting back, but avoid giving details about others' lives if you don't have permission. If a question takes you off your chosen message, answer with a "yes" or "no," and then bridge back to your messages. See below for helpful pivot phrases.
- Message the momentum not our weakness. Talk about what we've done and that our efforts are growing. Stay positive.
- You don't need to give specifics unless it benefits your cause. Reporters might ask you about how many residents are at your event. For example, instead of saying "Oh about 50 residents came out today", say "a majority of the people in this crowd live here and we are not stopping until we end this rent increase." Give enough detail and end on a powerful note.
- An interview is not a conversation. Try to talk in sound bites and repeat yourself. The news will likely edit the interview down which means they may end up



misrepresenting what you said. Practice talking in 10-15 second soundbits. Journalists for newspapers, however, will likely print more of your words so practice talking in 25-30 second soundbites. Repeat yourself more often than if you were in a normal conversation.

- Stop talking after you have made your point.
- Use value words and accessible language; avoid jargon and technical terms.

<b>Common to Hard Questions the Press Might Ask ...</b>
Can you tell me about what's going on today?
Do you think what you're doing is going to change this situation?
The company who owns these homes had said they have given extensions and tried to work with residents, what do you say?
What does your landlord think about this?
If you lose your apartment, what will you do?
A lot of people say this is about developing the city, do you not agree this can help the city?
Are people really unable to pay their rent?
Who organized this event?
Last year X happened, do you see that happening again?
What would you like to see happen?

<b>How to redirect (aka Bridge Phrases)</b>
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Maybe, but...
The real point is...
The only important issue today is...
A more useful way to look at it is...
That's not the issue, the issue is...
I'm not sure I know where you're going with that, but I am sure...
What I think you're getting at is...
That's down the road. The issue now is...
I can tell you from my own experience ...
Let me tell you what the real issue is ...

## Calling on our Allies

In every fight we need allies. Allies can amplify our issues, provide resources and leverage their influence to support our cause. When you created your strategy you should have identified the people or groups on your side or who you need to get on your side. Here are key questions you can ask your team to identify your issue.

1. Who are the elected official(s) whose districts cover your neighborhood? Could you contact them for help?
2. What labor organizations or non-profits exist locally to help people get justice? Could they help move your strategy?
3. Are there legal aid groups who can provide support to residents?
4. Are there prominent community or religious leaders who have tackled these issues



before? Can we call on them to get involved?

## Resources

### Homes For All: Take the Pledge

Ready to Fight for Homes For All? Take the HFA Pledge! Our core Homes For All values define us and bring us together. They guide our strategy, actions and vision. By signing the pledge you join us in collectively moving forward these values all across the country. Visit our website at [cancelrent.us](https://cancelrent.us) and fill out our survey if you haven't so we can connect you with statewide campaigns and local organizations



### Tools to Contact Your Representative

Visit [cancelrent.us](https://cancelrent.us) to "tweet" at your representative or call their office to ask them to support the #cancelrent and #cancelmortgages demands.

### Can't Pay?: Sample Letters to Landlords

Use this free letter builder that will create a strong letter from you to your landlord. This tool was built with lawyers and non-profit tenants rights organizations across the nation to ensure that your letter gives you the most protections based on your state. It will cite any local, state or federal policies that apply to renters at this time. JustFixIt:  
<https://www.norent.org/en/>

### Collective Care & Emotional Support

COVID-19 has presented an immense opportunity to grow our practice of interdependent community resilience. Right to the City is offering *Collective Care* events over zoom to support our emotional well-being during this crisis and beyond. Seeking to embody a commitment to building the strategic movement infrastructure to free the land and its inhabitants, we have coordinated this collective care initiative to advance our practice of interdependence through healing, learning, self-expression and good times.

- Click this link to view the calendar as a website:  
[bit.ly/CollectiveCareCalendar](https://bit.ly/CollectiveCareCalendar)

- Click to view and subscribe in iCal or Google Calendar:  
[bit.ly/RTTC\\_CollectiveCareCalendar\\_Subscribe](http://bit.ly/RTTC_CollectiveCareCalendar_Subscribe)
- To learn more or join our team: [Collective Care Programming](#)

### Thank You Credits

This Organizing Toolkit was developed by Right to The City Alliance staff and includes important contributions and adaptations from the following organizations:

**POWER and POWER University**

**Labor Notes**

**National Participatory Defense Network**

**Just Fix It**

We thank them for their brilliant tools and frameworks. This toolkit is “copyleft” and can be utilized freely with attribution to Right To the City and the above listed organizations.



**HOUSING IS A HUMAN RIGHT!**  
**ORGANIZING IS OUR POWER!**