

The Basics of Organizing Your Neighbors

Why organize your neighbors?

People organize because they agree there is an issue or problem and they believe that their collective actions can address that issue or solve that problem.

Consider your life as a tenant:

- Is your apartment in decent condition?
- Are repairs made in a timely fashion?
- Is your rent affordable?
- Do you know your neighbors?
- Do you feel safe where you live?
- Chances are good that if you can identify a problem that is serious to you as a tenant, others will share your concern.

Is it my right to organize?

Yes! Under ORS 90.385(C) tenants have the right to organize and landlords are prohibited from retaliating against tenants who organize or become members of tenants' organizations.

***Remember to document everything you do as part of your organizing efforts*
Write things down, keep a record of all that you do.**

How do I go about organizing?

The first step is simply to talk to your neighbors. Find out what their concerns are, find out if they are willing to take leadership roles, find out if they would be interested in attending a tenant meeting.

How do I involve others?

Go door to door. Meet your neighbors. Do an Issue Survey or invite people to a planning meeting.

What is the purpose of tenants meetings?

Meetings can help identify issues and set goals, provide people with information, assign responsibilities and identify new volunteers. Meetings can also be social events and a chance to get to know one another better. The best meetings are those that make people feel that they got something by coming (information, ideas, support, a plan), they have something to do when they leave (recruiting, phone calls, door knocking, baking cookies, etc.) and they want to come back to the next meeting to find out more. Remember that time is very valuable to people. People will not come back to meetings if they feel meetings are a waste of time. To have good meetings, plan your meetings very carefully.

Preplan your meetings

To have a successful meeting, form a small committee to help you plan it. You will want to think about the following issues:

- Determining the purpose or goal of the meeting;
- Publicizing the date, time and location of the meeting;

- Getting out a flyer with plenty of advance notice, knocking on doors, or calling people to make sure they are coming;
- Communicating why this meeting is important, how it fits in with what the group is doing, and why they should come.

Make meetings convenient

Hold your meetings at a time and place convenient for the majority of the group. Delegate the tasks of the meeting ahead of time. Decide who will:

- Distribute flyers
- Give reports
- Facilitate the meeting
- Provide refreshments
- Draft and print agendas, etc.

Talk to as many people as possible ahead of time about the meeting to plan the agenda. Make sure people agree on the purpose of the meeting.

Make meetings effective

Lots of time people spend so much effort inviting people to come to a meeting, they forget to focus on what they want to get out of the meeting. It is important that each meeting allows people to be heard and there are clear decisions and goals produced.

Before each meeting you should:

- Talk to who is coming and ask what issues they want to address
- Draft and addenda and try to send it out before the meeting
- Make sure you have people's contact info
- Call or email the night before to remind people to come; make use they have the proper address and directions
- Make signs at the meeting place if the meeting room is not obvious

During each meeting you should

- Post the agenda and ground rules for everyone to see
- Assign a note taker and facilitator- major issues or ideas should be written on a flipchart or whiteboard so everyone can see
- Make sure to give everyone a chance to speak, and no one dominates the discussion
- By the end of the meeting, make sure key decisions are made and that there are clear steps moving forward. Who is assigned what task? Is there another meeting planned? Who do folks contact if they have questions?

What comes next?

Sometimes one meeting is all it takes to address a problem and take a collective action, such as writing a letter to your landlord, or calling a lawyer or inspector. If there are many issues or major problems, consider establishing an on-going group or Residents Association, with a formal structure, rules and officer positions. Call the Renters' Rights Hotline if you want more information about organizing your neighbors.