

# **HUD's Resident Organizing and Participation Toolkit**

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# Guide 1: Organizing and Running Resident Councils



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This document is part of the **Public Housing Resident Organizing and Participation Toolkit**. The full toolkit includes topical guides, customizable resident council documents and forms, tools related to tenant participation funds, and case studies of resident organizations around the country. To see the full toolkit go to: <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/public-housing/resident-toolkit/>

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# ORGANIZING AND RUNNING RESIDENT COUNCILS

**When neighbors in a public housing community come together and form an organization to improve their homes and community, you are creating a resident council.** Some other terms for the same type of organization include tenant association or council, resident association, or tenant/resident organization. Resident councils provide a way for you to negotiate with your landlord—in the case of public housing, that means the housing authority—work on community concerns, and get to know your neighbors. Through participation, residents can develop and strengthen skills related to communication, leadership, running an organization, and more.

As residents in public housing, you have specific rights related to forming and participating in a resident council. Resident councils may actively participate through a working partnership with the housing authority to advise and assist in all aspects of public housing operations.



## **HUD regulations: Role of a Resident Council**

*“The role of a resident council is to improve the quality of life and resident satisfaction and participate in self-help initiatives to enable residents to create a positive living environment for families living in public housing. Resident councils may actively participate through a working partnership with the [housing authority] to advise and assist in all aspects of public housing operations.”*

*—24 CFR part 964.100*

## Duly Elected Resident Council

**To be recognized by the local housing authority (or public housing authority or PHA) and HUD as an official resident council (a “duly-elected resident council”) your organization must follow certain guidelines.** Following the guidelines gives your resident council certain benefits, including access to tenant participation funds and better access to your housing authority. When this guide refers to a “resident council,” it is referring to one that follows these guidelines.

**Representation:** Resident councils can be made up of people living in one public housing property (also called a development) or a combination of properties (like scattered site developments). A *jurisdiction-wide* resident council (described in more detail below) may represent all residents served by a housing authority.

**Members:** To be a member of the resident council you must live at a represented property, be on the lease, and be at least eighteen years old or the head of household of any age. A resident council must represent all eligible residents and their families, and not discriminate.



## **Federal rules for public housing:**

*You can find public housing regulations in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR).*

*Most rules related to tenant participation are in Title 24, Housing and Urban Development, Part 964, Tenant Participation and Tenant Opportunities in Public Housing.*

## **24 CFR 964.100**

*links to the Role of the Resident Council subsection. Click the link to read the regulations in detail.*

**Governing Documents:** The organization must have written rules and processes such as bylaws and organizational procedures that set out how the organization will run.

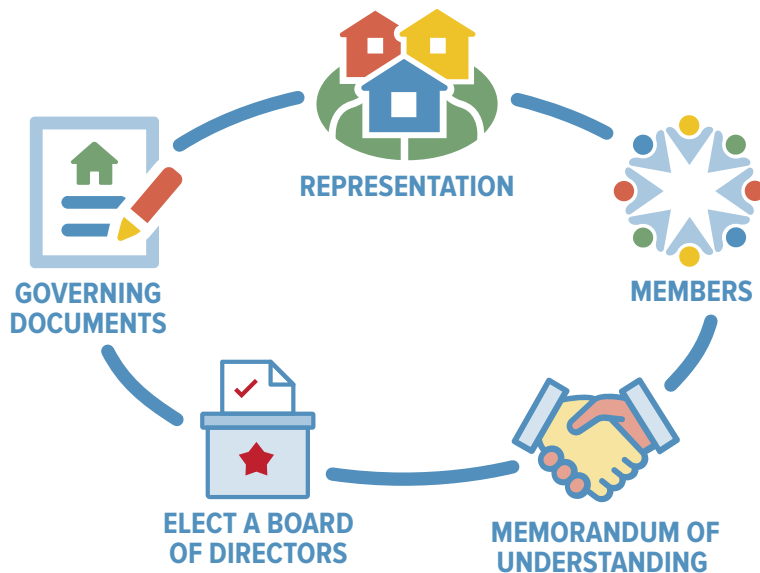
**Election of a Board of Directors:** A resident council must have at least five elected Board members who are chosen democratically by the members at least once every three years.

**Memorandum of Understanding:** Housing authorities with more than 250 public housing units *must* have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the resident council that describes their partnership agreement. This MOU must be updated every three years.



See the [Sample Resident Council and Housing Authority Memorandum of Understanding](#) in this toolkit.

## DULY ELECTED RESIDENT COUNCIL



### Customizable Documents

- [Guide to Creating Public Housing Resident Council Bylaws](#)
- [Sample Resident Council Bylaws](#)
- [Sample Resident Council and Housing Authority Memorandum of Understanding](#)
- [Sample Resident Council Procedures](#)
- [Sample Forms for Meetings](#)
- [Sample Forms for Elections](#)

## Forming a Resident Council

**In forming a resident council, you will want to do outreach to engage residents and bring people together, and then follow HUD guidelines for elections and the creation of your governing documents to ensure that you form a duly-elected residents council.**

1. **Find out if there is, or has been, a resident council:** There may be a resident council that is not very active that you can join and re-energize. If there was one in the past, some of the people involved may still be around and could share the history and what they learned.
2. **Talk (and listen!) to your neighbors:** Go door-to-door and talk to your neighbors about forming a resident council. Find out what people's concerns and interests are. Note any issues that should be addressed at the meeting. Be sure that the interests of different groups of people are included (for

example, if there are seniors and families make sure that there are issues on the agenda that appeal to both groups). If they are interested, get their contact information and invite them to a meeting.

- 3. Talk to other resident council leaders:** If your area has a jurisdiction-wide resident council, that's a great place to connect with other resident leaders. You can find out about meetings through the housing authority. If a jurisdiction-wide council doesn't exist, ask the housing authority to put you in touch with leaders from other properties.
- 4. Plan a meeting:** Talk to the property manager to reserve a space for the meeting. Choose a date and time that will be convenient for most people and put up flyers in key areas. If possible, distribute flyers door-to-door. If there are social media sites or email lists that residents use, you can also distribute invitations electronically.
- 5. Vote to form a resident council:** In one of the first meetings, you can vote to form a resident council and talk about what the primary purposes and goals of the resident council will be. If possible, invite leaders from another resident council or a tenant organizer to talk about their experience and give advice.
- 6. Decide on bylaws and procedures:** Use the [sample bylaws and procedures](#) to build your organizational structure. It will likely be best to have a small group discuss these and bring them to the larger group. The full group will vote to adopt the documents.
- 7. Elect a Board of Directors:** Following the rules you have set out, elect a Board of Directors.
- 8. Hold regular meetings and events:** Set out the goals the group would like to accomplish and set up a regular meeting schedule. Be sure to conduct regular outreach to invite residents to the meetings.

**The housing authority can only recognize one resident council for a property at a time, so if there already is a “duly-elected” resident council, you will need to work with the existing organization rather than create a new one.**

## Duties

**The basic duty of every resident council is to represent the residents.** Every resident council should work to democratically decide priorities. This means, getting input from as many people as possible and deciding as a group what issues to take on. **The activities in bold are required to meet the obligations of a “duly elected” resident council.**



### **Goals—Successful resident councils will work to do the following:**

- **Stay in good standing as the “duly elected” resident council** (required!)
- Represent resident interests with the housing authority regarding your community in areas like maintenance, security, housing authority policies, and programming
- Increase participation through outreach
- Build relationships with the housing authority and community organizations who can support the residents
- Educate residents on their rights and responsibilities as public housing residents
- Bring programs to the community to improve people's quality of life and opportunities

- Build a sense of community among residents
- Get funding through tenant participation funds and other grants to carry-out activities
- Secure community space for meetings and resident use
- Organize recreation, social services, and other resident participation activities
- Bring in new resident leaders



### **Methods—In order to achieve those goals, successful resident councils will:**

- **Have regular meetings and elections (at least every 3 years) that are well-publicized** (required!)
- **Negotiate a Memorandum of Understanding with the housing authority** (required when the housing authority has 250+ units)
- **Maintain accurate and transparent financial records of how tenant participation funds are used** (required!)
- Hold events for residents to get to know each other
- Invite speakers, including housing authority staff, to resident council events
- Coordinate programming opportunities with the housing authority and other organizations
- Meet regularly with the housing authority
- Participate in the housing authority Plan process
- Hold one-on-one meetings with interested residents
- Find and work with technical assistance providers who can provide training and support to your resident council

**An excellent resident council will work to recruit and engage residents.** It will work to bring people together to come up with specific goals to address community needs and work to problem solve and reach its goals. An excellent resident council builds community so that residents want to participate. Items not required above are still suggested best practices for strong resident councils.



*To learn more see the [Guide 2: Engaging Residents and Representing Resident Interests](#) in the Toolkit.*

## Role of the Housing Authority with the Resident Council

**HUD recognizes the “importance of resident involvement in creating a positive living environment and in actively participating in the overall mission of public housing” (CFR 24 part 964).** HUD requires the housing authority to recognize a duly-elected resident council. HUD encourages housing authorities to foster a constructive, working relationship with resident councils. The housing authority must also:

- Permit residents to organize a resident council
- Provide guidance and assist residents in establishing and maintaining a resident council.
- Provide the residents or any resident council with current information concerning the housing authority’s policies on tenant participation in management.

Housing authorities with more than 250 units of public housing are further required (and all PHAs are encouraged) to:

- Provide office space and meeting facilities free of charge and negotiate on use of the community space
- Ensure open communication and frequent meetings with the resident council(s)
- Encourage management-resident committees to work on issues and plan
- Negotiate a partnership agreement (a Memorandum of Understanding or MOU) with the resident council

In general, the housing authority should respond to reasonable requests, solicit feedback and suggestions from the residents, and maintain communication with the resident council to resolve issues. It's worth noting that while the housing authority can assist and support the resident council, the resident council must be led and run by the residents.

## What Can Resident Councils Do

**Across the country, public housing resident councils are having big impacts in their communities.**

### **Resident Councils:**

#### **Bring services and programs to their communities**



***In Cincinnati***, the Jurisdiction-Wide Resident Advisory Board (J-RAB) won grants from HUD's Resident Opportunities and Self-Sufficiency (ROSS) program. J-RAB formed the Business Service & Coordination Center. The Center offers residents support with employment, legal, mental health, domestic violence, and other issues, and offers case management and support.

#### **Impact development and modernization plans**



***In Baltimore***, the housing authority converted many public housing properties to Section 8 through the RAD program. Organized residents negotiated MOUs that included protections for residents during and after the RAD conversion, including a grievance process.

#### **Create resident management corporations**



***In New Orleans***, the Guste Homes began working toward self-management in 1988. Ten years later, they formally took over management, and now manage their own buildings and other affordable housing in New Orleans.

#### **Impact the housing authority Plans**



***In Fall River, Massachusetts***, the RAB is negotiating resident involvement in property inspections so that a resident council representative, in addition to the property manager and maintenance would accompany the inspectors.

#### **Organize people to vote and advocate with elected leaders**



***In Chicago***, resident councils organize get out the vote events for their residents.



***In Los Angeles County***, residents organized a visit to the Long Beach City Council to commend recent streetscape improvements, and advocate for more.



***In Charleston-Kanawha, WV***, a resident leader advocated with an elected official and got the streets repaved at the 40-acre property.



# Written Documents for the Resident Council

**Your resident council will create various written documents.** These documents help the resident council to have effective management. The resident council bylaws are the primary governing document. The bylaws establish:

- The decision-making process
- How leaders (the Board of Directors) are elected and, if needed, recalled
- How committees can be created and what they can do
- How the organization handles its finances



## [Sample Resident Council Bylaws](#)

While the bylaws create minimum requirements for decision-making, many resident councils will choose to create more detailed guides to various procedures. The resident council can delegate the writing of these procedures to committees. For example, the election committee may create a detailed guide to how Board of Directors elections are held.



## [Sample Resident Council Procedures](#)



## [Sample Forms for Resident Council Meetings](#)



## [Sample Forms for Resident Council Elections](#)

Finally, the Memorandum of Understanding is a document created jointly and negotiated by the resident council and the housing authority that spells out the working relationship between the two in areas like:

- what support the housing authority will provide the resident council
- what programming and services the housing authority will bring to the property
- ways members can have a voice with the housing authority on issues like safety, maintenance, and community life



## [Sample Resident Council and Housing Authority Memorandum of Understanding](#)



*For information on continually building new leaders, see [Guide 2: Engaging Residents and Representing Resident Interests](#).*

# Leadership Structure

**Effective resident councils engage all of their residents and make decisions through a process that includes the most people in identifying issues, creating plans, coming up with solutions, and making decisions.** Even resident councils with very strong, active memberships will have a Board of Directors and often utilize committees to do the day-to-day work of running the organization.

A Board of Directors, sometimes called the Executive Committee, is the group that ensures the running and day-to-day operations of the resident council.



*For more information on the roles and responsibilities of these positions see the “Board Member Responsibilities” section of the [Sample Resident Council Procedures](#).*

The Board of Directors should meet between general membership meetings and is responsible for:

- planning and providing notice for membership meetings
- representing the resident council to outside groups and the housing authority
- keeping the resident council in good standing as a duly-elected resident council

**It is important for the board to be representative of the community at large.** The board should include members that represent the overall membership, for example, by race / ethnicity (particularly if those groups speak a different language than the majority), age, family make-up (for example, families with children), and gender. If multiple properties form one resident council, board members should be geographically diverse as well (some groups may choose to have “floor captains” or “building captains” to make sure this happens).

**The Board of Directors should be people who are willing to put in work on behalf of the organization, who are trustworthy, and who will put the best interests of the community forward.** In order to recognize board members’ work, and to allow them to dedicate time to the resident council, some resident councils provide stipends to board members.



*For more information on stipends and tenant participation funds, see [Guide 9: Tenant Participation Funds in this Toolkit](#).*

**The Board should continually seek out training in order to strengthen the organization.** The housing authority can be a resource for training. You can also look for community organizations such as legal aid societies, local tenant organizing groups, or national organizations. The Board should also continually seek to bring in new leadership and voices.



## MEMBERSHIP:

Identifies issues, plans, finds solutions, and makes decisions



## COMMITTEES:

Organize activities, problem solve, take on specific tasks



## BOARD:

Day-to-day work of running and representing the organization



# Committees

**Committees are critical to getting work done in any organization!** Great ideas often come up in meetings but it's often a committee that will refine the idea and ensure that the works get done. Your resident council can have both ad hoc committees (that meet until a specific project is completed) and standing committees (that exist continually).

Examples of an ad-hoc committee, also called a working group are:

- A specific event, for example Mother's or Father's Day Lunch Committee
- A specific project, for example, putting together back to school backpacks and supplies for kids

Examples of standing committees are:

- Elections
- Finances and fundraising
- Member engagement and leadership development
- Youth / education
- Community services and programs
- Housing authority Plan / Resident Advisory Board
- Housing authority management-resident committee (*HUD encourages the formation of this committee to work on issues and planning*)

Committees can be formed in a membership meeting and should meet and carry out work between meetings. Committees report back to the full group at the membership meetings. Any major decisions such as holding an event or spending money should come back to the membership. The committee should make a proposal and explain why they think the proposal is a good idea. **Membership should be encouraged to join committees—this is a great way to build engagement and leadership!**

## Jurisdiction-Wide Resident Councils

**Resident councils may come together to form an organization, called a jurisdiction-wide resident council, that represents the interests of all public housing residents under the same housing authority.** This organization can be created by a number of resident councils coming together, by councils electing a representative(s) to the jurisdiction-wide group, or through direct elections open to everyone being represented. Just like a resident council of a specific development, the jurisdiction-wide resident council can advocate with the housing authority. HUD requires that the housing authority “meet regularly and plan with this organization, as well as the [development-specific] resident council(s)” ([24 CFR part 964.105](#)).

The housing authority must appoint the jurisdiction-wide resident council or its representatives to a Resident Advisory Board (RAB) when creating the housing authority “Plan.” The Plan is a comprehensive guide to the agency's policies, rules, programs, operations, and strategies for meeting its goals. The Resident Advisory Board is a group of residents that advises and assists the housing authority in creating the Plan. There may be additional RABs beyond this one. In some places, the jurisdiction-wide resident council and the RAB are the same organization.



**In Chicago**, the Central Advisory Council (the jurisdiction-wide resident council) is made up of the President of each Local Advisory Council. There is a Local Advisory Council (LAC) for each of the 11 family properties and 3 LACs for that represent the senior buildings in their part of the city. The Central Advisory Council has monthly meetings. The executive board, which is elected by the full CAC, also meets monthly and serves as the Resident Advisory Board.



**In Cincinnati**, the jurisdiction wide-resident council is called the “Jurisdiction-wide Resident Advisory Board” (J-RAB) and it is an incorporated 501(c)(3) organization. Each building has a resident council, and the presidents of the buildings form the Presidents Committee (the board) of J-RAB. J-RAB has its own staff, and receives grants directly from HUD and other sources.



*For ideas on how to organize and lead resident council meetings, see [Guide 3: Holding Effective Resident Council Meetings](#)*



*For more ideas on Outreach and Engagement, see [Guide 2: Engaging Residents and Representing Resident Interests](#)*



*For information on tenant participation funds, see the [Tenant Participation Funds guide and Sample Templates](#)*



## Resources

**Tenant rights information by state:** [https://www.hud.gov/topics/rental\\_assistance/tenantrights](https://www.hud.gov/topics/rental_assistance/tenantrights)

**National Low-Income Housing Coalition’s (2001):** Resident Participation in Public Housing, Part 964 Regulations, Outline of Key Features: [https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/Part-964\\_Resident-Participation-in-Public-Housing.pdf](https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/Part-964_Resident-Participation-in-Public-Housing.pdf)

**National Housing Law Project**, Resources related to public housing: <https://www.nhlp.org/resource-center/public-housing/>

**The Massachusetts Union of Public Housing Tenants**, whose members are the local public housing tenant organizations, provides training, advocacy, and resources. Many of these resources are applicable to public housing residents nationally: <https://massunion.org/>

**A Quick Reference Guide for Hosting World Café**, with suggestions for ways to invite residents into conversations <http://www.theworldcafe.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Cafe-To-Go-Revised.pdf>

**United States Code of Federal Regulations related to Tenant Participation and Tenant Opportunities in Public Housing:** Title 24 Housing and Urban Development, Part 964 Tenant Participation and Tenant Opportunities in Public Housing, Subpart B Tenant Participation: [https://www.govregs.com/regulations/title24\\_chapterIX\\_part964\\_subpartB](https://www.govregs.com/regulations/title24_chapterIX_part964_subpartB)



# Guide 2: Engaging Residents and Representing Resident Interests



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# ENGAGING RESIDENTS AND REPRESENTING RESIDENT INTERESTS

**Engaging residents in a resident council and ensuring that the council represents everyone's interests is an ongoing task.** It's important to recognize that people's interest and ability to participate will change over time. It's worth keeping people engaged (by inviting them to events, sending out a newsletter, catching them in the hallway, and having one-on-one conversations) even if they do not participate by coming to meetings or volunteering. Engaging residents is also important to build future leaders in your organization. A healthy resident council will have new and rotating leadership over time.

If you need support with engaging residents there may be a local tenant organizing group that can support you. Try an internet search for "tenant organizing" and your state or city. You could also reach to housing counseling organizations, which may have a program focused on renters. To find these you can do an internet search or use the HUD website to search by your state: [https://www.hud.gov/topics/rental\\_assistance/local](https://www.hud.gov/topics/rental_assistance/local). Leaders from other resident councils, locally or nationally, can share their best practices and tips. Make sure that anyone you invite shares the goal of strengthening your resident council.

## Outreach

**Letting residents know about meetings and talking to residents one-on-one is key to getting people involved.** Many people do not have experience with resident councils so you will need to invite them to participate. The most effective form of outreach is to directly invite people:

- Let them know why you want them, personally, to participate.
- Find out their interests and concerns and let them know how the resident council can support them.
- Be sure they know how they can participate and that their involvement will be useful. As residents, they are experts on their needs and how to improve their community.



*In this document the term “resident councils” refers to those that have a duly elected board and follow HUD guidelines. A resident council may also be called a tenant council, tenant association, resident association, or tenant/resident organization or another name. For more information see [Guide 1: Organizing and Running Resident Councils](#).*

# Getting—and Keeping—People Involved

**People will want to get involved and stay involved if they know that the resident council is working for their interests and that their involvement can make a difference.**

- **Make it easy for people to participate:** choose an accessible location, a time that works for most people, and provide support like interpretation (as needed) and childcare, and snacks (if you use Tenant Participation Funds, there are some restrictions on spending for food).
- **Create plans and goals together** that respond to peoples' needs and interests
- **Be sure that everyone has a role and that their abilities are being put to use.** Engage people through tasks, activities, and committees.
- **Respect everyone's ideas:** members should be actively engaged in decision-making.
- **Make meetings welcoming and fun.** Think of ways to engage residents in different ways (like having a speaker or 5 minutes for resident shoutouts for participation going above and beyond). Rotate "icebreaker" activities to get to know your neighbors.
- **Invite speakers from the housing authority and community organizations,** and share resources during meetings.
- **Make an impact:** Focus on areas where the council has the ability to make a change.
- **Show impact and progress:** have a newsletter or post an update and celebrate when the resident council accomplishes a goal. Newsletters and updates can be done through social media and email but be sure to also post a print version in common areas.



For more information see [Guide 9: Tenant Participation Funds](#).

## Use Communication Tools

**When doing outreach for the resident council, or at a meeting, find out how people like to communicate.**

Explore using technology to supplement flyers and other written communication (*keep in mind that not everyone will use social media or other technology so you'll still need to use written and person-to-person communication!*). Ideas to consider include:

- **Newsletters or flyers with updates:** post or deliver important updates from meetings, successes, and announcements. Free programs exist to send newsletters by email (i.e., MailChimp, Sender, or MailerLite).
- **Text messages:** For quick updates and meeting reminders.
- **Group messaging apps:** For quick communications or raising issues (i.e., WhatsApp, Signal, Telegram)
- **Resident Council Facebook page:** Members can share news, ideas, and updates.
- **Email listserv:** for any kind of resident council communication. (With a newsletter format, organizers like the Board can send messages to members. With a listserv, any member can reply to the entire group, but organizers can moderate the discussion.)
- **Form a communications committee:** this group can engage members with technology experience (including young people) and can figure out what methods work best, create new communications tools (such as a website), and even train members to use technology for keeping in touch.



# Targeted Outreach

**Some resident councils find themselves with strong participation from a core group of members, but lacking in new leaders.** Other resident councils have participation of certain groups (such as retirees, or English-language speakers). This can be for many reasons:

- Existing leaders have strong relationships with each other, but not other members
- Some residents (for example, with small children or full-time jobs) have less time to participate
- Members do not see that their participation is needed and rely on existing leaders
- Younger residents may not feel that they have the experience required to help make decisions
- Outreach is not fully accessible (for example, English-only in communities with speakers of other languages)

In other cases, you may notice that participation in the resident council does not reflect the makeup of the community you represent in some way. Sometimes this is because of unintentional barriers. Consider ways to ask what may be preventing a group from fully participating. You may want to engage in *targeted outreach* to specific residents or groups. You may even want to create a committee for this purpose.

Some things to consider if you want to bring in more diverse membership:

- **Are meetings at a time and place that is accessible to all members?** For time, consider residents' work schedules. For place, consider transportation barriers and physical accessibility like ramps.
- **Are we providing support for people who want to come?** For example, childcare, transportation if meetings are off-site, technical support for remote meetings.
- **Are we communicating in the ways our residents do?** Consider providing notice by social media and/or email in addition to paper notices.
- **Are we providing interpretation that our community requires?**
- **Do we have opportunities for members to grow into leadership positions?** Some members may not feel comfortable joining the Board immediately, but might accept responsibility in a committee or working group.
- **Are we responding to the needs of that community?** For example, if maintenance is a concern, members may come to a meeting with management but may not come to a social event.

## One-on-one meetings

**A key technique for building leadership and engagement, particularly with harder-to-reach groups, is for leaders to meet individually with members.** You may want to plan a meeting over coffee to hear someone's concerns, explain the resident council more thoroughly, or offer ways to get more deeply engaged. Or, you may be able to have a quick catch-up conversation in the hallway.

A one-on-one meeting is an opportunity to find out a person's interests and how they might contribute to the organization. If their schedule or commitments do not currently allow them to participate, they may engage more deeply when they have the opportunity if they feel updated and included in the resident council. If they don't know what's going on, they may never participate.

As a leader, it's important for you to share why you are involved and if there are challenges that you had to overcome to be a leader in the organization. Talk to them about why it's important for them to get more involved.

- Share your motivations, interests, goals: how and why did you get involved?
- What do they like about their community?
- How do they think the community could be better?
- What are their interests?
- What is important to them? What are their values?
- Why are they involved?
- How would they like to contribute? What do they like doing in their spare time?
- Keep them up to date and engaged, even if they cannot personally participate.

## Meetings

**Meetings are the most important way that the resident council and the Board engages its membership.**

Sometimes, meetings can feel boring or not engaging, and that can discourage members from participating. However, a well-planned and well-run meeting can do the opposite: members leave feeling that their presence was important and will make a difference.

Meetings can also provide opportunities for leadership development. For example, someone considering running for a Board position might be delegated responsibilities (like presiding over a meeting) or be a “shadow” or supporting Board member for the meeting.

Outreach before meetings is also an important way to engage residents. Your bylaws will require that the meetings be “noticed,” usually by posting paper flyers around the building. You can build engagement into this process.

- Don't just slip flyers under doors, knock and have a conversation to individually invite people. Even if they can't come, ask them what's important to them, and make sure they know their presence is always welcome! Ask what would help them be able to attend.
- Catch people in the hallway as you are posting flyers
- 30 minutes before the meeting, knock on every door in the building and remind people “it's meeting time!” If your building is large, floor captains may take responsibility for this task. Having floor or building captains also builds leadership!



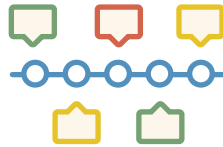
*For more ideas on running engaging meetings, see [Guide 3: Holding Effective Resident Council Meetings in this Toolkit](#).*

# Build Group Identity



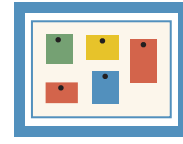
## CHANT

Who we are & why we're here



## TIMELINE

Note milestones & accomplishments



## VISIONING

Create a vision board together

**Strong organizations have a group identity that members connect with and are proud of.**

Some ways to do this:

- **Create a mission statement for the organization:** include it on your flyers, write it up on a bulletin board, and say it at the beginning of meetings. The statement should convey why the group comes together.
- **Have a chant for the organization that says who you are and why you come together.** This is something that everyone can say at the end of meetings.
- **Put up a timeline that shows the organization's accomplishments and future goals.** At meetings, mark progress on the timeline.
- **Create a group vision.** This works well as a small group activity where the groups draw or use pictures cut from magazines to show what the organization will create together. Hang these in a prominent place or bring them out during meetings.

# Leadership Ladder

**To have a strong organization you need to continually engage people and build leadership.** Bringing in new leaders is important to prevent burnout and so that new members feel needed and included.

**A leadership ladder** is a way to think about and track how to increase member engagement. Engagement level is noted on a scale of 1 to 5.

- **5s:** Are aware of the organization but do not participate. Everyone at the property should at least be a 5.
- **4s:** Are interested in the organization but generally do not participate. Invite them personally and find out what their barriers are to attending.
- **3s:** Participate but are not consistently engaged. Find out what they would like to do in the organization—can you invite them to join a committee, be a floor captain, or have a role at the meetings?

## LEADERSHIP LADDER



- **2s:** Are committed to the organization, they come to nearly every meeting and event, but are not in a leadership role. Invite them to take on more leadership—chairing a committee, organizing an event, or conducting outreach. Find out their interests and if there is training they need. They are likely the next Board members.
- **1s:** Are board members or other leaders. 1s should be regularly working to move others up on the leadership ladder.

## Committees and Tasks

**To engage the most people, work to create tasks and roles where people can participate and gain experience and skills.**

- **Committees:** Residents can gain leadership skills by taking responsibility for a committee or actively participating. Some common committees include:
  - » Management—Resident Relations
  - » Security
  - » Senior issues
  - » Children and youth activities
  - » Fundraising
  - » Social events
  - » Leadership development and recruitment
- **Working Groups:** These are time-limited groups for specific projects.
  - » Gardening
  - » Event-planning
  - » Voter registration
- **Activities:** Volunteers could take on planning an event.
  - » National Night Out (against crime)
  - » Coat give-away
- **Tasks:** Members can take on tasks in meetings (time-keeper, signing people in) or a task for the organization (finding a speaker for the next meeting).

# Interactive Planning and Decision-Making

**Residents will be most engaged when they are part of deciding the organization's goals and strategies.**

They will want to participate if they believe that what the group is working for is important and that they can make a difference. To keep people engaged you will likely want to have big, long-term goals, as well as shorter-term, smaller goals. This way, people will see progress and know that the organization can have an impact.

## Planning a Campaign or Long-term Goal

- **Start with your goal:** What would it mean to win (that's your goal!)? How will you win improvements in people's lives? What are short-term or interim wins on the path to the bigger win?
- **Organizational Needs:** What does the organization need to win (people, money, information)? Who do you need to bring in? Is there training or support you need? What do you already have?
- **Who else can support:** What other organizations care about the issue? Who else would benefit if you win?
- **Opponents:** Who are your opponents? What will your victory cost them? How might they try to oppose you?
- **Targets:** Who has the power to say yes to what you want (that's your target—the person you are trying to influence)? Secondary target: who could convince your target to say yes? (The target is a person with a name—the housing authority is not the target but the Director of the housing authority could be a target.)
- **Tactics:** What can you do to get the target to say yes? This might include calls, emails, meetings, media, a public action, hearings, negotiations, etc.

Figuring out the answers to these questions should be a group process. It may take multiple meetings to figure this out. You may need to consult others or do research between meetings. This process comes from the Midwest Academy. See the [link](#) to their strategy chart below.



## Conflict Resolution

**In any organization, some conflict is normal.** It's important though to deal with conflict in constructive ways, to allow people to be heard, and to come to solutions. Some tips for dealing with conflict include:

- **Deal with conflict sooner than later.** If the conflict is heated though, you should wait until people are not as angry.
- **Attempt to address conflicts in person when possible (not by email!).** Stay positive and keep the focus on specific issues and solutions.

- **Ensure that there is time for people to be heard in meetings.** Often conflict comes from people feeling that they are not being listened to or that their input doesn't matter.
- **Create meeting guidelines.** For example, no personal attacks and one speaker at a time. Have members help come up with the guidelines and post them during each meeting. Posting the guidelines will help members to maintain and enforce them.
- **Promote teambuilding and bonding.** When members know each other, they will have more trust and understanding. Members may also feel more comfortable addressing differences in positive ways.
- **Look for organizational solutions and be willing to compromise.** A conflict often sounds personal, for example, "You don't like me and don't want to hear what I have to say." But there may be an issue related to the organization, like "The meetings are not at a time I can attend." Focus on finding solutions that benefit the group.
- **Ask for help in resolving conflicts.** It's often helpful to engage a neutral third party. This could be someone from a community organization, the housing authority, or from another resident council.
- **Organize conflict resolution training for board members, committee leads and others who may benefit.** Some local governments or community organizations have conflict and dispute resolution centers that can offer free or low-cost training. Tenant participation funds can be used to support this type of training.



**In St Paul, Minnesota,** the resident councils receive training from the Minnesota Dispute Resolution Center. Receiving training before there is a problem is a great way to minimize and resolve conflicts!

## Getting Engaged on a Broader Level

**You may want to get your resident council involved in activities beyond your housing development.**

HUD promotes resident participation and the active involvement in all aspects of the housing authority's mission and operation. You should not feel limited to the ways your resident council can get things done!

### Jurisdiction-wide Resident Council

**A jurisdiction-wide resident council represents the interests of all public housing residents in the area.**

It can be formed by resident councils under the same housing authority coming together, by electing a representative from each resident council to the group, or through jurisdiction-wide elections. When made up of duly-elected resident councils this group has a specific role to weigh in on housing authority policies.

### Resident Advisory Board

**When the housing authority updates the PHA Plan (usually annually and every five years), the Resident Advisory Board (RAB) has a formal role in voicing residents' concerns and priorities.**



*For more information, see [Guide 5: Resident Advisory Boards and the Housing Authority Plan Process](#).*

## Policy-Making

**Resident councils can be active in advocacy at the local, state, and national level.** Public housing sometimes receives funding from local or state budgets. But you can also get involved in community issues, for example, how the police operate in your neighborhood, schools, or any other area that affects your residents. Many resident councils partner with larger, national organizations to do advocacy at the federal level. Many states or regions also have coalitions of organizations that you may want to join or partner with.

## National Trainings and Organizations

**By participating in national training events and organizations, you can meet resident leaders from across the country to learn best practices and build new skills.** You may be able to fund travel to events with the resident council budget or with grants. Travelling to be part of larger efforts can be an exciting opportunity for new resident leaders—they can see what is happening in other cities, get inspired, and be challenged to take on more responsibility.

Some nation-wide organizations that have conferences, trainings, or events that may be of interest to public housing resident councils include:

- [National Alliance of Resident Services in Affordable and Assisted Housing \(NAR-SAAH\)](#)
- [NeighborWorks America](#)
- [National Low Income Housing Coalition \(NLIHC\)](#)
- [National Alliance of HUD Tenants \(NAHT\)](#)



See the [Sample Forms for Resident Council Meetings](#) for customizable flyers and agendas,



See the [Sample Forms for Resident Council Elections](#) for customizable flyers and forms.



## Resources

**Midwest Academy Strategy Chart** for creating a plan to reach organizing goals: <https://mn.gov/mnddc/pipm/curriculumchangechart.html>

**Training for Change** has free resources on providing engaging trainings, facilitation, games and ice-breakers, and decision-making: <https://www.trainingforchange.org/> The Balance Careers offers a list of fun ice-breaker questions and ideas for creating your own: <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/fun-ice-breaker-questions-1918413>

# Sample Script for Inviting People to a Meeting

Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I live in apartment \_\_\_\_\_ (or the community).

I'm here to invite you to attend a resident council meeting

(OR: talk about starting a resident council in our building).

Ask the person questions to engage them and learn about what they are interested in:

- How long have you lived here?
- Have you ever attended a Resident Council meeting before?
- Is there anything that you would like to see improved here at the property?
- Are you interested in being more involved here?

Tell them about why the Resident Council is forming or what you are currently working on:

- We are joining together to work to improve our quality of life here
- I am interested in \_\_\_\_\_

Directly invite them to attend a meeting

- Would you be interested in coming to the next Resident Council meeting?
- We will be meeting on \_\_\_\_\_ (date) at \_\_\_\_\_ (time) in the \_\_\_\_\_ (location).
- Can I take down your name and your phone number to follow up with you for the meeting?

If they are very interested, you can ask them to support in additional ways

- Do you want to help us plan this first meeting?
- Would you be able to help with outreach in your building or community?





# Guide 3: Holding Effective Resident Council Meetings



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This document is part of the **Public Housing Resident Organizing and Participation Toolkit**. The full toolkit includes topical guides, customizable resident council documents and forms, tools related to tenant participation funds, and case studies of resident organizations around the country. To see the full toolkit go to: <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/public-housing/resident-toolkit/>

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# HOLDING EFFECTIVE RESIDENT COUNCIL MEETINGS

**Meetings are the primary place where neighbors come together and carry out the work of the resident council. Meetings should be productive, enjoyable, and efficient.** You should meet frequently enough to ensure that residents stay engaged. Active resident councils usually meet once a month for up to an hour and a half. If the resident council has a number of active issues, working groups or committees can meet between the general meetings.

## Preparing for an Effective Meeting

### Set a convenient date and time

**Set the date well in advance of the meeting.** If possible, stick to a regular schedule and keep that schedule posted. For example, the 1st Tuesday of every month at a specific time.

Most resident councils at family buildings have meetings on a weeknight in the early evening. At senior buildings, the resident council will often meet on a weekday morning. For example, 10:00 AM on the 1st Tuesday of the month. Some resident councils alternate monthly between an evening and a morning meeting in order to include people with different schedules. Try slight time adjustments if turnout is low or people arrive late or leave early.

### Make a turn-out plan for meetings

**Think about: How will your neighbors learn about the meeting? What will encourage them to come?**

Meeting outreach components:

- **Provide notice for the meeting.** Notice should be provided far enough in advance that people can plan (a week in advance, at least), but there should also be a reminder the day before. Post flyers in common spaces—elevators, by mailboxes, or in lobbies. Make sure you at least provide as much notice as is required in your bylaws.
- **Electronic communication:** some bylaws only require notice by flyers, but if your members communicate electronically, provide notice online too. Some resident councils have Facebook groups or listservs.
- **Door-to-door outreach:** If possible, place flyers under every door. If the property is large, consider recruiting floor captains. Knock on doors, or have a table in the lobby, to invite people personally.
- **Let residents know what issues the resident council will take-up and why these are important.** This can be done in person and by posting an agenda
- **Call, email, or text people** whose contact information you have, particularly with meeting reminders.
- **Day of:** have a specific person, or floor captains, knock on every door 30 minutes before the meeting as a last-minute reminder.



*See the [Sample Resident Council Procedures](#) in this toolkit for specific information related to meeting procedures, agendas, and decision-making.*

*See the [Sample Forms for Resident Council Meetings](#) for forms and notices related to these procedures.*

## Create an Agenda

**Work to create an agenda that meets residents' interests and furthers the work of the organization.**

- Include agenda items that meet the needs and interests of different communities at the property.
- Set a length of time to spend on each topic
- Invite a speaker who residents want to hear from
- Ensure that the same “old business” does not continually dominate the agenda—if necessary, a committee can be formed to bring resolution to an issue.

Some agenda items will require a decision by members, while others will be informational updates. Start the agenda off with something quick and easy but be sure to cover important items earlier on in the meeting.

Post the agenda in prominent locations around the property in advance of the meeting so that people can attend prepared. Offer a process for residents to contribute items to the agenda.

## Facilitation / Chairing the Meeting

**Having a well facilitated meeting is critical for ensuring that the meeting is effective, that people feel heard, and that there are clear outcomes.** The facilitator, or chair, is usually the President of the resident council or someone they designate. This person ensures that the meeting stays on track, objectives are met, and decisions are made democratically. A good facilitator ensures that everyone feels included in the meeting and can participate, even if they are not on the “winning” side of votes.



## Agenda

**Write the agenda up where everyone can see it.** Set times for each item and try to stick to the times. Check at the beginning of the meeting to see if anything important is missing. If it is something that can wait for the next meeting have the secretary note it for the next agenda. If a decision or action is needed, make space on the agenda.

## Ground Rules

You may want to review ground rules for the meeting, such as “one person speaks at a time.” You may also have a “take space, make space” rule to encourage those who tend to be quiet or have not yet shared to “take space” and request that those who have already spoken “make space” by waiting to speak again until others have spoken. You can then ask if there are additional guidelines and if everyone agrees. If you are going to have ground rules, be ready to enforce them by reminding people of the rule and why it exists. **Be sure that ground rules are being used to create a positive environment and not to tell people what they are doing wrong.**

### Provide background information and materials.

As possible, give a review of what is being discussed and provide any written information you have for people who were not at previous meetings. If someone is new and cannot be caught up during the meeting, ask to meet with them later.

### Write up notes and outcomes

**Encourage residents to share their ideas and ask questions.** This will ensure the best outcomes and continued participation. Writing up key points, brainstorms, or events, helps participants know that their points have been noted, and review what has already been said and agreed upon in order to move from discussion to a proposal.

When presenting a proposal for action be sure to write up the full proposal.

### Stay on Track

- If an item is taking longer than expected, check in with the group to see if they are ready to make a decision, move on, or devote more time to the subject.
- If the discussion shifts from the agenda or residents want to discuss a new issue, check in with the group to see if that’s how they want to spend their time.
  - *“It looks like we’ve moved on to a new issue. Let’s get a show of hands to see who would like to stay on this issue and who would like to return the initial issue we were discussing.”*
- Consider a “parking lot”—a place where ideas that are off topic, can be written down. At the end of the meeting, make sure you have covered everyone’s concerns or put them on the agenda for the next meeting.
- If a resident begins to speak in detail about an issue they alone are having (for example a leaking faucet), ask to talk with them after the meeting. Keep the discussion to issues that affect the group.
- If the meeting looks like it is going to go over time, check in to see if you can extend it for a certain length of time and make space for those with other commitments to leave if needed.



**DO**

*use ground rules  
to create positive  
environment*



**DO NOT**

*use ground rules  
to tell people  
what they are  
doing wrong*

# Facilitating an Engaging Meeting

**A good facilitator will ensure that everyone feels included in the meeting and has an opportunity to participate.** Residents should be encouraged to share their ideas and ask questions throughout the meeting. This will ensure the best outcomes and continued participation.


In a large group it can be challenging to get input from everyone. Some people are reluctant to speak in a large group and hearing from everyone can be time consuming. These are techniques that you can use to increase engagement from members.

## Brainstorming

**In a large or small group come up with as many ideas as possible to reach the goal you are working on.** Remind the group that during the brainstorm session you are just coming up with ideas (not saying what you think about other people's ideas). After there is a good list you can then vote on the best ideas or discuss the ideas.

## Go-round

**Go rounds refer to going around the room to quickly get the input of everyone.** If the group is more than a few people you will want to be clear about how much each person can offer.


 *“Let’s go around the room and have each person say one word or phrase that shows how you feel about the proposal. Remember just one word or phrase. We’ll have time after everyone speaks for a few people to offer more input. My word is “concerned.”*

Online or on the phone, it's best to call on each person by name. If the group is large use small groups.

## Pair sharing

**In pair sharing, people speak for a set amount of time with a partner.** They will often, but not always, report back to the large group. A pair share can be used to give participants a chance to reflect and discuss. In groups that need to process, or raise complaints, at the beginnings of meetings, pair sharing can be used to let participants discuss, reflect, or raise complaints about something before the actual meeting gets going.

For pair shares to be the most effective, it's helpful to give the participants a few questions to discuss and give them a set amount of time.

 *“With the person next to you, share what you most liked and least liked about the event last week. You’ll have 5 minutes. I’ll let you know when half the time is up in case you need to switch who is talking.”*

## Small groups / break out rooms

**Small groups (break-out rooms online) can be used to ensure that everyone can participate.** Small groups give participants a chance to have real discussions and reflections that cannot happen in a larger group. It's also a good place for practice—such as practicing giving testimony.

Generally, small groups will report out their points of agreement or best ideas to the large group. If you are coming up with ideas from more than a few small groups, have each group just give one point so that the first group does not dominate. After all groups have reported back, you can see any important ideas were missed.

## Decision-making process

**While the facilitator will guide the decision-making process, the resident council as a whole makes the decision.** Make sure that decisions are made by the group, and not simply one or two people.

The Sample Resident Council Procedures lay out a decision-making process based on **Robert's Rules of Order**. The benefit to this process is that it works to ensure that people are clear about the proposal and its purpose and that residents fully support the decisions being made. The drawback to using this process is that groups can sometimes become more focused on following the steps and proper wording, and lose sight of the goal of having an engaging decision-making process. If a resident wants to make a proposal but does not know the exact steps the facilitator can guide the process.

Another benefit of Robert's Rules is that it can be used with other decision-making models, including **consensus decision making**.

### The basic steps of Robert's Rules of Order are:

- 1. Proposal:** A specific proposal is introduced (as a motion). A proposal is a suggestion for an action that should be taken. A proposal should be specific so that the group is clear on the steps that are going to be taken.

**a.** A proposal should answer the questions: who, what, when, where, and why.

- 2. Second:** A different person supports the proposal by seconding the motion.

- 3. Discussion:** The proposal is repeated and discussed by the group.



**Consensus Decision-making:** Test for agreement (see below for ideas on how to do this)



- 4. Amendment:** If, through the discussion, the group realizes that changes are needed to the proposal, someone can suggest changes by moving to amend the proposal.

» Discuss the amended proposal and / or



**Consensus Decision-making:** Test for agreement

5. **Vote:** Once it seems that there is agreement around the proposal, the chair can call for a vote. Under majority rule or consensus decision making the group may realize they are not ready to vote and can refer the proposal to a working group or committee who will bring it back with more information.
6. **Next Steps:** Discuss how the proposal will be implemented

 <b>Consensus</b>	 <b>Majority Rule</b>
If everyone is in favor the proposal moves forward.	If a majority of people are in favor the proposal moves forward.
Listen to any concerns from people not in favor.	If the proposal does not pass, the discussion can be closed on the issue or a committee could take on improving the proposal.
If they are strong concerns go back to discussion and amendments, If the concerns are not strong, note them and move forward.	

## Consensus Decision-making

**Consensus decision-making is an interactive process of reaching agreement (a consensus) between all members of the group.** This process often takes longer than majority voting because the proposal is refined until everyone is comfortable with it. **The advantage over majority rule is that using consensus can lead to a better proposal that has buy-in from everyone in the group.** Most resident councils try to reach a consensus for important decisions, but will use majority voting if needed.

The basic process that is outlined through Robert’s Rules of Order can be used with consensus decision making. The difference is that in working to reach a consensus more time will be spent refining the proposal, exploring people’s concerns, looking for different options, and testing to see what people think about the proposal.

***It’s important to remember that in consensus people do not have to be in complete agreement. You are looking for a solution that everyone is OK with and no one strongly opposes (blocks).*** A member with concerns can state their concerns but still “stand aside” and allow the decision to go forward. A crucial part of the consensus process is generating ideas and engaging members in discussion. Once a proposal is made there should already be a large amount of agreement but the proposal will likely need to be refined.

### Test for Agreement

Once there is a proposal, you will want to see how much support there is for it. This may happen right away or once there has been some clarification and discussion. Some simple ways to test for agreement:

- **Do a “go-round”:** Ask everyone to share one idea or one sentence about how they feel about the proposal, etc
- **Take a straw-poll:** A straw poll is a non-binding vote that shows how people feel,



💬 *“If you think this is generally a good idea, raise your hand.”*

- **Ask for concerns:** If most people are speaking in support of an issue, it can be helpful to ask if there are people who disagree or have concerns.

💬 *“Let’s hear from someone who has a different opinion. Is there anyone who has a concern about the proposal?”*

- **Get more ideas.** If you think that people have different ideas or opinions, ask to hear those.

💬 *Let’s hear from someone who hasn’t spoken yet.*

💬 *Let’s hear from someone who has a different idea.*

💬 *Let’s see what the seniors think about this idea.*

- **Get frequent feedback.**

💬 *“Raise your hand if you would be interested in volunteering for this”*

- **Use the “Rule of Thumb”** to quickly see how people feel:

👍 **Thumbs up:** supports

👉 **Thumb to the side:** not sure/ not enough information

👎 **Thumb down:** against

When you do this regularly as a group, this is a very quick way to see how people are feeling.

Sometimes people are afraid to share a viewpoint that they think will be in the minority or to share a contradictory opinion. To be sure to get the full range of opinions and viewpoints, do an activity where everyone can share pros and cons.

- **Ask everyone to share one pro and one con**

- **Use dot voting:** Give people sticky note paper and ask them to write as many pros and cons as they can, one per sheet. These can be stuck up on the wall to visually see the list. This is a good technique if people are reluctant to share out loud. Once the ideas are up, people can then mark which ones they agree with by putting a dot next to ones they agree with (dots can be done with a marker or sticker). Limit the number of votes (ex: if there are 20 ideas, give everyone 5 votes). This same process can be used to prioritize issues!



## 5 FINGER DECISION MAKING



**FIST**

**Block because the decision would be against the group's mission or values**



**1**

**Strongly Disagree**



**2**

**Disagree**



**3**

**Will Go with Group's Decision**



**4**

**Agree**



**5**

**Strongly Agree**

- **5 finger decision making:** This decision-making technique takes some upfront explaining and reminding but can be really fast when a group is used to it. It gives everyone a quick visual as to where people stand on an issue. At an in-person meeting, people quickly hold up their fingers to show how they feel. For an online or phone meeting, they can either show their vote, put the number of fingers in chat, or say the number.
  - » **5**—Strongly agree
  - » **4**—Agree
  - » **3**—Will go with groups decision
  - » **2**—Disagree
  - » **1**—Strong disagree
  - » **Fist**—This is a block because the decision would be against the groups' mission or values.

For complex decisions, where the group does not initially have consensus, this process can be used to refine a proposal and to make a decision:

- » **Round 1:** If everyone shows a 3 or higher you can move forward. If there are fists, 1s, or 2s let those people (or some of them) explain. The proposal can then be revised, based on their feedback, and the group can vote again.
- » **Round 2:** If there are no fists or 1s, the proposal is accepted. In this case, some people disagree but no one strongly disagrees and no one thinks that taking the action would go against the mission of the group. If there are 1s, they and the 2s, can explain their stance and the proposal is revised and there is a 3rd vote.
- » **Round 3:** If the group still does not have consensus, the issue could be referred to a committee to better refine the proposal. If a decision needs to be made, it can move forward with a majority vote as long as there are no fists.

## End with next steps and action items

**When the meeting ends everyone should be clear on what decisions were made, who will do what, and by when.** These should be written up and restated.

## Committees

In some cases the larger group will delegate to a committee or working group who will figure out the specifics and bring back a proposal to the group. Committees are a great way to engage more members in the work of the resident council.



For more ideas on Outreach and Engagement, see [Guide 2: Engaging Residents and Representing Resident Interests](#)



## Resources

**Sociocracy** is a system of governance which uses consent, rather than majority voting, in discussion and decision-making by people who have shared goals or processes. You can learn more, including their inclusive, decision-making process at: <https://www.sociocracyforall.org/>

**Seeds of Change** offers resources to support consensus decision-making, including options on agreement / disagreement, and information on dealing with conflict: <https://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/consensus>

**Training for Change** provides free resources for holding engaging trainings and meetings, strong facilitation, and decision-making: <https://www.trainingforchange.org/>



# Guide 4: Partnering and Advocacy with the Housing Authority



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# PARTNERING AND ADVOCACY WITH THE HOUSING AUTHORITY

**Many residents are drawn to work with a resident council because they have immediate concerns about, or ideas to improve, their living situation.** Public housing residents often want more attentive maintenance, improved safety, clearer communication with property owners, and more responsive programs. Getting involved in a resident council is the best way to partner and advocate with the housing authority for the things you care about as a resident.

Advocacy from the resident council to the housing authority can sometimes feel contentious or tense. However, both residents and housing authorities share many goals: safe, decent, affordable housing, opportunities for residents, and community safety. Sometimes, having a resident council can be the key step to developing a more collaborative relationship.

*“Things get done when residents are organized and come with legitimate requests”*

— *Lynette Johnson, Resident Services Coordinator,  
Los Angeles County Development Authority*

## Needs assessment

**The first thing the resident council should do before advocating with the housing authority is understand the needs of residents.**

To do this you can conduct surveys, hold meetings, and have one-on-one conversations.

Some questions to ask might include:

- Do you have maintenance issues in your apartment? What are they?
  - » Have you made maintenance requests? How soon do you get an answer?
- Are there housing authority policies that you think should change?
- Are there programs or services you would like to see in your community?  
Or programs that could be improved?
- Have you been able to get your questions answered by the housing authority?  
If not, what do you need to know?

**Look at the answers you get. Often, many residents will have the same concerns or ideas.** In those cases, advocacy by the resident council is an appropriate way to get a response. When the resident council presents issues and concerns in an organized way, this can be a benefit to everyone. Residents are supported in getting their issues resolved and the housing authority has a streamlined process for receiving and



*In this document the term “resident councils” refers to those that have a duly elected board and follow HUD guidelines.*

*A resident council may also be called a tenant council, tenant association, resident association, or tenant/resident organization or another name. For more information see **Guide 1: Organizing and Running Resident Councils.***

addressing common concerns. This is particularly true when there are property-wide issues. The resident council can raise the concern on behalf of everyone (rather than numerous individuals submitting the same complaint) and the housing authority can provide any feedback or follow-up at a resident council meeting (rather than having to respond to numerous individuals about the same issue). This saves both residents and the housing authority time.

**“HUD promotes resident participation and the active involvement of residents in all aspects of a [housing authority’s] overall mission and operation.” (24 CFR part 964.11)**



See [Guide 2: Engaging Residents and Representing Resident Interests](#) for more ideas.

## Working together

In many cases, residents and housing authorities can work together productively. By meeting regularly, discussing ideas and issues, problem solving, and making decisions together, housing authority staff and resident leaders will build trust and cooperation. Key components to build the relationship are:

- **Get to know each other:** Find out why people are involved, what they like to do outside of work / resident council. This is a key part of building trust.
- **Consistent participation:** Having the same people participate regularly means that the group can build trust and make progress. It’s important that the housing authority and resident council have specific point people to maintain participation.
- **Meet regularly:** Having a standing, regular meeting (*for example the 1st Monday of each month at a certain time*) will ensure that meetings are consistent and prioritized. If there is nothing to discuss one month, you can always cancel the meeting or do a team-building activity.
- **Get things done:** Accomplishing goals and having an impact will keep people interested and excited about the group. Work together to create big goals but break those down into shorter-term goals. When the group accomplishes something together, take time to acknowledge it and celebrate.

### When the housing authority and resident council work together, they can:

- **Improve Communication:** The resident council can provide a venue for the housing authority to get input, communicate new policies, and resolve issues. Improve management, housing conditions, and community safety by having a clear line of communication and ensuring both parties understand their responsibilities.



### **Federal rules for public housing:**

You can find public housing regulations in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR).

Most rules related to tenant participation are in Title 24, Housing and Urban Development, Part 964, Tenant Participation and Tenant Opportunities in Public Housing.

### **24 CFR 964.100**

*links to the Role of the Resident Council subsection. Click the link to read the regulations in detail.*



***In Baltimore County, MD,*** plans to stop the spread of COVID were initially being made separately by the management of each of the senior buildings. In some buildings, residents thought the policies prohibiting visitors went too far. The jurisdiction-wide resident council, the Resident Advisory Board (RAB), brought all the resident councils together to provide input and push the housing authority to come up with a uniform plan of action that included distributing masks and food at senior buildings. The RAB was able to provide a space for everyone to come together to discuss the issues and come up with policies including safe ways to allow for some visitors.

- **Conduct joint problem solving:** By bringing residents together, the resident council can determine issues that are affecting the most people, develop priorities, and directly communicate with the housing authority to come up with a course of action.



***In Charleston-Kanawha, WV*** resident councils have two monthly meetings, one is just residents and the other meeting is with the management. In the meetings with management the resident council will bring up issues that they have identified and work with property management to come up with solutions. For example, to address security concerns, they have decided on where to improve lighting at the property or add a security camera. If the resident council feels an issue has not been properly addressed, a Board member can bring it to the quarterly meeting with the Chief Executive Officer of the Housing Authority. Because residents and management talk out the issue and potential solutions, the result better meets the residents needs.

- **Better address resident needs,** including bringing improved services to the community. Residents are the experts on their community's strengths and needs. At the same time, the housing authority may have more community connections and capacity. By including residents in planning, any services and programs that the housing authority brings to the community are likely to be more responsive to community needs and desires.



***In St Paul, MN*** computer labs were set up through a ROSS grant. When the ROSS grant ended they needed to figure out how to maintain functioning computer labs. The resident councils and the housing authority came up with the idea of hiring residents, who receive a stipend, as computer peers. When a resident puts in a ticket for a technical issue that comes up in the lab, the housing authority assigns a computer peer who uses their skills to fix the problem or refer it to IT.

- **Develop Long-Term Plans:** There are numerous areas in which the housing authority and resident council can work together around policies and long-term plans. Most notably, this can be done through the housing authority Plan process. It can also happen on the property-level, particularly if there are plans for redevelopment or modernization (likely, these changes would be part of the housing authority Plan). Having a strong working relationship and a foundation that is built on trust and shared goals will allow the group to work together to tackle more complex issues.



***In Chicago*** the resident councils and citywide advisory board meet regularly with the housing authority. During the modernization process, the residents and housing authority were able to build on their existing structures and relationships. Resident councils were very active in the redevelopment process through working groups with developers and service providers, and ensuring a strong policy on residents right to return. Resident councils even helped track residents through the redevelopment process.



- **Work to Resolve Conflicts:** Conflicts or disagreements between the housing authority and residents should be dealt with proactively. This means, as possible, working to resolve disagreements before they become a major issue. It may be helpful to have an in-person meeting to address a specific disagreement and work towards solutions. If needed, bring in a neutral facilitator who can support the groups in discussing the issue and working towards a solution. This could be someone from a community organization or local government. Tenant participation funds may be used to pay for a facilitator or mediator.



**In St Paul, Minnesota,** the resident councils receive training from the Minnesota Dispute Resolution Center.

## Resident Council—Housing Authority Partnerships

**HUD encourages residents to “be involved and participate in the overall policy development and direction of Public Housing operations.”** HUD regulations suggest specific ways the housing authority and resident council can collaborate, including through:



Training



The housing authority Plan



Tenant participation funds



Resident management corporations (RMCs)



MOUs (written agreement) between the resident council and the housing authority



Service coordination programs

### Training

HUD encourages housing authorities to provide training for residents, so they can make better use of HUD programs and other opportunities. In the regulations, HUD provides some suggestions for trainings:

- Community organization and leadership;
- Organizational development training for resident management corporations and resident councils;
- Public housing policies, programs, rights and responsibilities; and
- Business entrepreneurial training, planning, and job skills.

However, training can be arranged for other relevant topics. HUD suggests using local resources for training, including: resident organizations, community colleges, vocational schools, HUD, federal and local agencies, and community organizations.



**In St Paul, Minnesota,** housing authority staff supports the resident councils by providing training to board members on their roles and responsibilities, running meetings, and how to track expenses and file taxes. Individualized training is provided to resident council treasurers and secretaries around their specific duties. The housing authority contracts with the Minnesota Dispute Resolution Center to provide training on conflict resolution and communication to the resident councils to support them in having productive meetings and resolving differences constructively.

## The Housing Authority Plan

Housing authorities must prepare a “Plan” that is updated regularly. Some housing authorities do an annual component and a five-year component. The Plan sets the housing authorities policies like:

- How residents are selected
- Rent determination
- Grievance procedures
- Pet policies
- Types of housing offered (such as elderly / disabled housing)
- Housing authority programs (such as ROSS and FSS programs)
- Changes to public housing, like RAD conversion

**All of these things affect residents!** Residents can participate through a Resident Advisory Board. If there is no jurisdiction-wide resident council, but there are resident councils in individual buildings, make sure the housing authority knows you want to participate. Even if you are not part of a resident council, you can request the draft Plan and submit comments for the Public Hearing.



*To learn more see [Guide 5: Resident Advisory Boards and the Housing Authority Plan Process for more information.](#)*

## Tenant Participation Funds

The housing authority must provide funds that it receives from HUD for tenant participation to duly elected resident councils. When Congress approves enough funding, the amount must be \$25 per occupied unit per year, with \$15 designated for the resident council’s (and / or jurisdiction-wide resident council) and \$10 per unit per year which can be used by the housing authority for costs related to tenant participation activities **24 CFR 964.150**. If Congress approves less funding, HUD may provide less funding.

Tenant participation funds may be used to assist residents in establishing and operating a resident council, including elections, support the resident council in carrying out their duties, and capacity building for resident councils.



*To learn more see [Guide 9: Tenant Participation Funds and the Tenant Participation Funds section of the Toolkit.](#)*

## Resident Management Corporations

Resident Management Corporations (RMCs) are organizations that manage public housing and are run by the residents of the property. RMCs may fulfill all or some of the responsibilities for the property management. If your resident council wants to take more responsibility for your housing, creating an RMC may be a good option.



*To learn more see [Guide 8: Resident Management Corporations.](#)*

## Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs)

Housing authorities and resident councils can work together to define their relationship through the process of creating or updating a memorandum of understanding (MOU). This is a legal agreement between the two groups that spells out their relationship, including what support the housing authority will provide to the resident council. The MOU ensures that the housing authority is aware of its responsibilities to involve tenants in shaping its policies and residents can define how they will participate in making decisions around housing authority plans. HUD requires housing authorities with 250 units or more to have a MOU with the resident council(s), which is updated at least every 3 years. Smaller housing authorities are encouraged to have MOUs, but are not required to.



To learn more see the [Sample Resident Council and Housing Authority Memorandum of Understanding](#).

## Service Coordination Programs

HUD offers programs that can provide funding to place program or service coordinators that support public housing residents. The coordinator might be on the staff of the housing authority, or occasionally, be employed by a resident-led organization like the jurisdiction-wide resident council.

The Resident Opportunity and Self-Sufficiency Grant Program (ROSS), Family Self Sufficiency (FSS), and Jobs Plus programs all offer opportunities for residents and the housing authority to work together to plan community services and programs.



To learn more see [Guide 7: Resident Training and Self-Sufficiency Programs](#).

## Tactics for advocacy

*Often, residents have tried individually to get answers or results. If not, encourage members to be self-advocates, too!*

### Maintenance issues

Be sure that residents have the correct contact information for maintenance requests, encourage them to document their attempts to get repairs, and have them follow-up. They should also document the issue by taking photos.

### Housing authority policies

What is the policy or rule that is concerning to residents? Is it a written policy? Is it evenly enforced?

When many residents have the same issues and/ or there are property-wide problems that are not getting resolved, the resident council can try an “escalating” series of tactics to obtain results. In escalating, the resident council will start with the first, and most direct, action. If that does not get results, the resident council moves to the next step, generally focusing on a person or group that has influence over the previous person.

### Examples of escalating tactics:

- Write a joint letter on behalf of the resident council to the housing authority. Include survey results of what issues residents have. (Make sure you have permission from residents to share any information that was given to the resident council)
- Request that a representative from the housing authority attend a resident council meeting. Be prepared with specific questions and concerns
- Create a report to present to the housing authority, using a detailed survey of what issues need be addressed in every unit
- Raise concerns to the board of the housing authority at their meeting
- Involve housing inspectors or other local government officials
- Reach out to the constituent services staff of your elected Representative and Senators in Congress
- Contact officials at HUD. Start with your local Field Office (HUD has a helpful map on [its website](#)).

**Remember that the goal is to work cooperatively with the housing authority, and tactics shouldn't be chosen merely to "shame" or "win."** However, if the resident council makes efforts that are not successful, it may be time to try other tactics.

**You can also be creative in your approach to advocacy!** There are many ways to involve residents, conduct advocacy, and build community. You can involve youth, make art, hold social events, and even do plays or other media.



## Resources

**United States Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) relating to resident involvement in housing authority operations** can be found at <https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/CFR-2011-title24-vol4/CFR-2011-title24-vol4-sec964-135>. Title 24, Housing and Urban Development, Part 964, Tenant Participation and Tenant Opportunities in Public Housing, Resident involvement in HA management operations.

**United States Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) relating to resident training** can be found at <https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/CFR-2002-title24-vol4/CFR-2002-title24-vol4-sec964-140>. Title 24, Housing and Urban Development, Part 964, Tenant Participation and Tenant Opportunities in Public Housing, Resident training.

**The HUD website provides resources by state**, including links to legal aid offices and housing counseling organizations: <https://www.hud.gov/states>

**HUD Guidance on the Use of Tenant Participation Funds.** PIH 2021-16(May, 2021): <https://www.hud.gov/sites/dfiles/PIH/documents/PIH2021-16.pdf>

**HUD Exchange Training: Running ROSS Step-by-Step:** <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/ross/guide/collaboration-and-partnerships/what-is-a-ross-pcc/who-should-join/>

**Report from the Urban Institute:** Building Public Housing Authority Capacity for Better Resident Services. By Sarah Gillespie and Susan J. Popkin (August 2015): <http://kresge.org/sites/default/files/Building-Public-Housing-Authority-Capacity-for-Better-Resident-Services-1.pdf>



# Guide 5: Resident Advisory Boards and the Housing Authority Plan Process



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This document is part of the **Public Housing Resident Organizing and Participation Toolkit**. The full toolkit includes topical guides, customizable resident council documents and forms, tools related to tenant participation funds, and case studies of resident organizations around the country. To see the full toolkit go to: <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/public-housing/resident-toolkit/>

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# RESIDENT ADVISORY BOARDS AND THE HOUSING AUTHORITY PLAN PROCESS

**Housing authorities are required to develop a guide (the Plan) detailing their mission and goals and how they plan to meet them through activities, programs, and any updates to their policies.**

The Plan has two parts: the Annual Plan and Five-year Plan. The documents are used to inform HUD, families served by the housing authority, and the public. Resident involvement in developing the Plan is critical since it outlines the housing authority rules, policies, and programs.

*The Plan includes changes or updates to housing authority policies such as:*

- How residents are admitted
- How rents are determined and collected
- Grievance procedures and eviction
- Resident programs and services such as homeownership, community service, and self-sufficiency
- Safety and crime prevention
- Budgets for maintenance, repairs, security, and other programs

*The documents describe any new activities that the housing authority will undertake, such as:*

- Development and redevelopment projects
- Changes to housing subsidies and programs (including converting public housing to RAD)
- Modernizations
- Designation of housing for specific populations such as the elderly

## What is a Resident Advisory Board?

**A Resident Advisory Board (RAB) is a group of residents that participates in the Plan process.** HUD requires that the housing authority establish one or more Resident Advisory Board(s) as part of the Plan process. The housing authority must consider the recommendations of the RAB(s) and make revisions that it deems appropriate to drafts or to the Plan. The RAB must be able to participate through the entire Plan process, including if the Plan is amended or modified after it is final.

The RAB is made up of public housing residents, including resident leaders, from different properties. If more than 20% of the households that the housing authority serves receive Section 8 tenant-based vouchers, the housing authority must make efforts to get voucher-holders to participate on the RAB.



**Federal rules for public housing:**

*You can find public housing regulations in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR).*

*Most rules related to tenant participation are in Title 24, Housing and Urban Development, Part 964, Tenant Participation and Tenant Opportunities in Public Housing.*

*When you see a reference to 24 CFR 964 that is a reference to the CFR. The legal requirements for RABs are generally found in **24 CFR 903.13**,*

*What is a Resident Advisory Board and what is its role in development of the Annual Plan? Click the link to read the regulations in detail.*

# The Plan Process & the RAB

**The housing authority and the RAB should develop a reasonable timetable, including the meeting schedule, to promote participation.** Many housing authorities are required to publish an Annual Plan once a year. However, housing authorities with 550 or fewer public housing units and/or housing choice vouchers combined may be exempt. More information on these designations and the templates for specific plans can be found on [HUD’s webpage](#).

The housing authority must follow a step-by-step process to create the Plan. Resident participation, primarily through the Resident Advisory Board, is a key piece of that process. The Resident Advisory Board ensures that tenants are able to participate and have a meaningful voice in the creation of the Plans.

HUD guidelines suggest a 6-month process for the development of the Plan. The Resident Advisory Boards (below, we will say “RAB” though there may be more than one) should be recruited and appointed early in the process in order to ensure effective resident participation.

In an example where the housing authority fiscal year begins on January 1st, the housing authority would begin compiling background materials in May, the public hearing would take place at the beginning of October, and the plan would be submitted in mid-October and receive approval before the start of the new fiscal year. Note that the PHA is required to make the proposed plan/documents available to the public at least 45 days prior to the hearing and to publish the notice of the hearing.

A housing authority must consider the recommendations of the RAB but are not required to agree with them. When the housing authority sends the Plan to HUD, they must include information about which, if any, suggestions the RAB made. The housing authority must also include how they analyzed and made decisions around the recommendations. If the housing authority disagreed with the RAB recommendation, it must explain why.

Time before the Plan is due	Phase	PHA Tasks related to the RAB
6 months	Preparation to develop the Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gather information to develop the Plan</li> <li>Establish the <b>Resident Advisory Board</b> and begin meeting</li> </ul>
4.5 months	Plan development and drafting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consult with the RAB and local government agencies related to community needs, resources, and PHA policies</li> </ul>
3.5 months	Public Hearing Notice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plan for a public meeting, with at least 45 days notice, to receive public comments</li> <li>Plan to make proposed documents available to the public at least 45 days before the public hearing</li> </ul>
2 months	Update draft	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue drafting and consultations, as needed</li> </ul>
30 days	Public Hearing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Obtain written recommendations from the RAB</li> <li>Revise Plan, as needed</li> </ul>
<b>Plan Due (75 days prior to the beginning of the PHA’s fiscal year) to HUD</b>		



After submission		
75 days after submission	Approval or Disapproval by HUD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Substantive Disapproval:</b> the RAB and public, through the same process, must be consulted again to revise the Plan.</li> <li>• <b>Approval:</b> The Plan and all attachments must be available for public review at the PHA main office and provided to the RAB.</li> </ul>

## Housing Authority Support to the Resident Advisory Board

**The housing authority must allow the RAB sufficient time, information and resources to fully carry-out their role, including:**

- Sufficient time to review and make recommendations on the Plan.
- Advance notice of meetings (at least 48 hours)
- Adequate information about the housing authority’s programs and policies included in the Plan. This may include gathering and compiling data and materials or providing initial recommendations to the RAB.
- Any existing documents that will assist them in making recommendations
- Resources to carry-out their duties, including communicating with other residents and holding meetings with residents. These resources may include:
  - » Meeting space
  - » Printing
  - » Office supplies—such as paper, pens, etc.
  - » Phone
  - » Computer
  - » Internet

Following the process, the housing authority should continue to keep the RAB engaged. The housing authority must make the final Plan and any attachments available to the public. The housing authority may also share the HUD notice of the Plan’s approval.

# Resident Advisory Board Membership and Formation

**Officially recognized resident councils and jurisdiction-wide resident councils have the right to select members for the RAB.** How members are selected depends on if there is a resident council, or councils, that follow HUD resident tenant participation rules. Resident councils that meet those requirements are called “duly-elected” resident councils. If there is:

- **A duly-elected jurisdiction-wide resident council**, the housing authority must appoint the group or its representatives as the Resident Advisory Board.
- **No duly-elected jurisdiction-wide council**, but one or more duly-elected resident councils, the councils or their representatives should be appointed. The housing authority may have the resident councils choose a certain number of representatives to serve as RAB members, and may select residents from properties with no qualified councils to fill out the remainder of the positions.
- **No duly-elected resident councils**, then the housing authority must appoint members that reflect and represent the diversity of all residents.

In cases where the housing authority must recruit and select RAB members, the housing authority should provide enough notice of their plans so that residents can volunteer to participate with the RAB or else form resident councils that could provide members to the RAB.

The RAB should be as diverse as the residents of the assisted housing are—in age, race, properties, geography, etc.

If there is a jurisdiction-wide resident council that forms the RAB, the housing authority may need to create another RAB to represent any residents with tenant-based vouchers (Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers). The housing authority may also create RABs for other groups of interested residents (for example, by geography). Unless there is a jurisdiction-wide council, the housing authority may choose to include all residents in only one RAB.

Participation in a RAB is limited to residents in public housing and the Section 8 tenant-based program. The housing authority is not required to include residents in project-based Section 8 properties, though these residents are welcome to participate in the public meeting.

Whether or not residents choose to participate in a RAB, the Plan process still requires that the housing authority conduct outreach, and all residents may participate at the public meeting.



*For more information on resident councils, see [Guide 1: Organizing and Running Resident Councils](#).*

## RAB Membership Term

**Each housing authority may decide on a policy for terms on the RAB.** They should consider the number of RABs, resident interest in volunteering, aligning terms with the Plan process, and how to maximize resident participation. When the jurisdiction-wide resident council serves as the RAB, it is common that the residents will participate for multiple years and that the RAB will meet nearly year-round. It is also common for the RAB to be a more ad-hoc group that comes together to discuss the housing authority in a meeting or two and does not meet again.

## Why Participate in a RAB?

**As a resident, you are an expert on the strengths and needs of your community.** Participating on the RAB is an excellent way to share your experience and provide input on decisions that affect your housing and communities. The information you share will help the housing authority set priorities for improvements and resident services.

## Public Hearings and Comment on the Plans

**The housing authority is required to hold public meetings to receive comments from the public on their proposed activities.** Anyone from the public can attend—not just members of the RAB! The housing authority must work with the RAB, and consider all the comments they receive at the public hearing. The housing authority must give at least 45 days notice for the hearing, and tell residents where related documents are available to pick up. The housing authority must conduct outreach to promote public participation.

Any significant amendment or modification to the Plan must also include input from the RAB and requires a public hearing.

## Questions to ask the housing authority

**If you are considering participating in a RAB, you may want to ask the housing authority:**

- What is the time commitment for serving on the RAB?
- What is the term of service?
- When and where are meetings usually held?
- What decisions have been changed in the past because of RAB participation?
- What will my role be?
- How will decisions be made?

## Examples of RABs in practice



**Los Angeles County, California:** The Los Angeles County Community Development Authority (LACDA) serves as the county’s housing authority. LACDA does not have a jurisdiction-wide resident council, but does have some active property-based resident councils.

During the Plan process, LACDA coordinates with the active resident councils to make sure they have time to choose representatives to the RAB. LACDA then identifies other active residents in buildings not represented by resident councils. ROSS service coordinators contribute to the selection, as they know many of the residents.

RAB meetings are held at the largest LACDA property. Transportation is provided for RAB members. When the public hearing is held, it is publicized ahead of time at all LACDA properties and again transportation is provided to residents who live at other properties.

LACDA is aware that most of the participants are seniors, and that younger families are underrepresented. LACDA makes an effort to recruit younger RAB members, and also takes into account how representative the RAB is when weighing the RAB’s suggestions.



**Fall River, Massachusetts:** The Fall River Housing Authority has a jurisdiction-wide resident council, the Joint Tenant Council (JTC). JTC trains its representatives on the Plan process, so they can fully contribute. Because the JTC is a jurisdiction-wide resident council, the JTC representatives automatically serve as the RAB.

The Fall River RAB has a history of resident engagement and has influenced the Plan. One change that the RAB influenced in the Plan is a new grievance policy, which was implemented several years ago.



## Resources

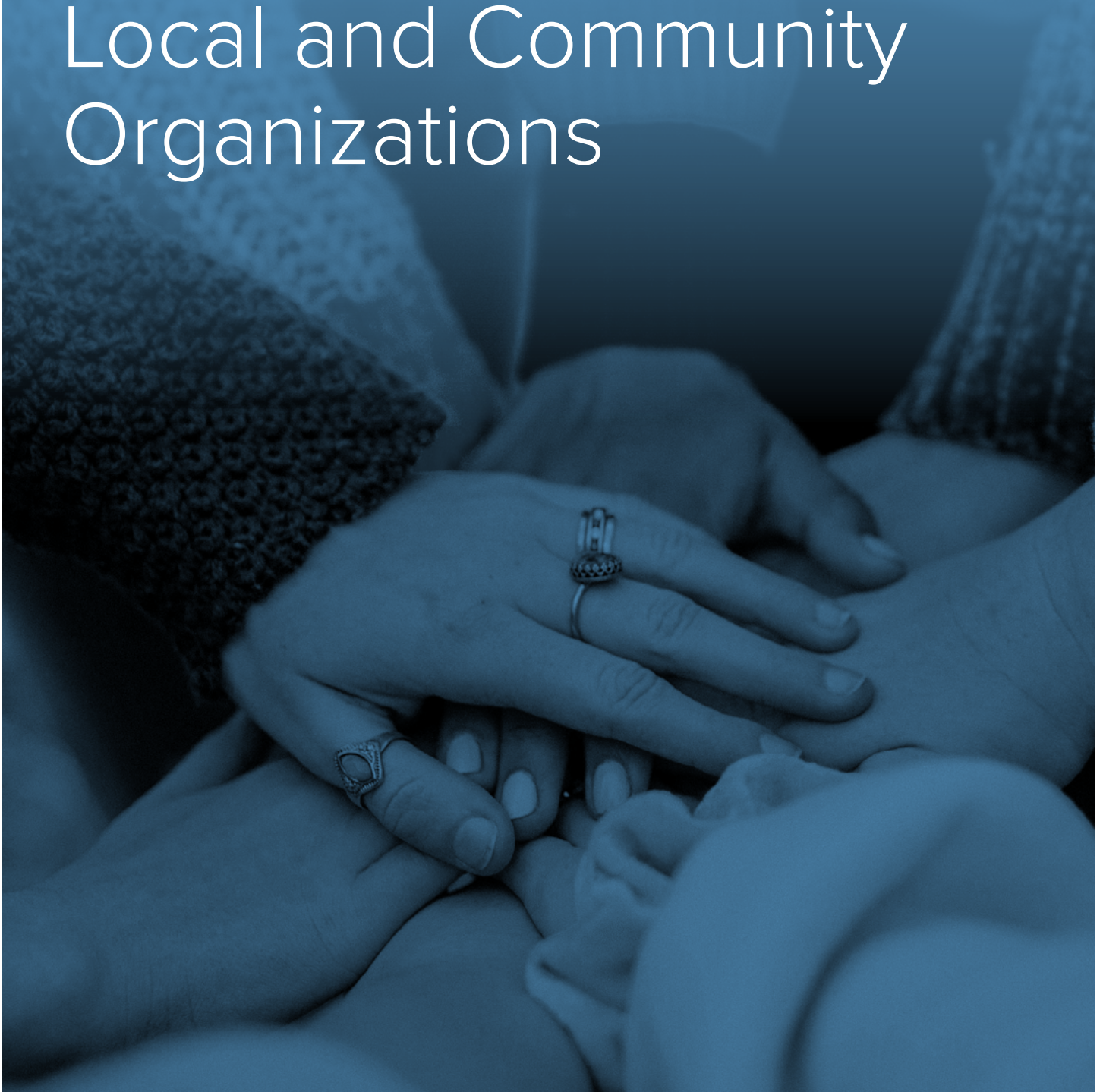
**United States Code of Federal Regulations related to Public Housing Agency Annual and Five Year Plans and Resident Advisory Boards:** Title 24 Housing and Urban Development, Part 903 Public Housing Agency Plans: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CFR-2011-title24-vol4/pdf/CFR-2011-title24-vol4-part903.pdf>

**HUD website.** Resident Advisory Board—Public Housing Agency (PHA) Plans. This website includes templates and definitions for the different types of PHAs (Standard, Troubled, Small, High Performing, and Section 8 only): [https://www.hud.gov/program\\_offices/public\\_indian\\_housing/pha/about/rab](https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/public_indian_housing/pha/about/rab)

**National Housing Law Project.** Public Housing fact sheet #2: The Resident Advisory Board: <https://nhlp.org/files/08A%20FS-02%20v5%20030804%20rab.PDF>



# Guide 6: Partnering with Local and Community Organizations



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# PARTNERING WITH LOCAL AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

**Strong resident councils benefit from working with other organizations.** Partnering with community-based organizations allows resident councils to bring programs and services to their communities, receive training, and respond to issues. Partnerships can help residents respond to their community's needs, and improve their housing and quality of life.

Resident councils should work with outside organizations that support the resident council, but do not make decisions for, or take over, the resident council.

HUD further encourages partnerships that help connect public housing residents with health care, education, and social services. The resident council can find partner organizations by reaching out to them directly or can coordinate with the housing authority to bring in programs that will meet resident needs.

You may think it could be difficult to find organizations willing to make time for resident councils or come out to your property. However, many organizations that serve the community value working with resident councils because doing so helps them fulfill their mission too. Many organizations understand that for people to achieve other goals, they must first have affordable, stable housing. The national housing first model, for example, recognizes that people must first have stable housing before addressing other needs in their lives such as improving their health, education, employment, or careers. Public housing offers this platform of stable housing on which services and programs to help both residents and the broader community can be added.



*In this guide we use the term “Resident Council” but you might call your group of residents a tenant council, tenant association, resident association, or tenant/resident organization or another name.*



## Assess: What Needs do Residents Have?

**Your resident council should look for programs that will best meet the needs of the residents.**

You, better than anyone from outside the property, know what those needs are. As the resident council, you want to make sure that you are engaging and building relationships with your fellow residents, and bringing services they need will help do that.

When doing outreach to your neighbors (for example, posting flyers or door-knocking for upcoming events), you might notice there are residents or communities of residents that are not engaged in the resident council. For many resident councils, it is difficult to engage residents with busy family lives and employment. Attracting services that meet their needs may be a way to engage.



**In Los Angeles County** they noticed through surveys that families were most interested in job placement opportunities rather than a job training program that might or might not lead to employment.

When determining what needs exist you might consider:

- **Community outreach:** Conduct door-to-door outreach at your property or set up a table in the lobby to talk with residents about their needs and interests. This is a great way to introduce residents to the resident council and board and listen to residents to ensure that the resident council is responsive. Be sure that residents can always provide ideas to the resident council through a dedicated email and phone number, and an idea box where residents can leave comments.
- **Brainstorming:** add this discussion topic at a resident council meeting (see “dot voting” below for one idea on how to do this).
- **Survey:** Use a paper or online survey to get ideas from residents. You can find resources and examples at the end of this guide. For most properties, it will work best to offer this survey online and by paper in order to reach the most people. **Surveys work best when there are specific, concrete options.** So this will likely work best after having a brainstorming session. That way you will have concrete options. Give options around how programming would work:
  - » **Areas of interest:** education, financial literacy, programming for seniors, employment
  - » **Timing:** ongoing, one-time workshops, day/ evening/ weekends
- **Ask service providers:** existing service providers or coordinators (like a ROSS service coordinator) may know what community needs are not being met. If you ask services providers, still survey your community directly.
- **Committee:** the Board can nominate a committee of interested residents to take on this task, or to conduct any of the activities above.



*For more information on service programs and coordinators, see [Guide 7: Resident Training and Self-Sufficiency Programs](#).*

**Using multiple methods is recommended to make sure all residents can participate in the way that is most comfortable to them.** If you don't get responses with one method, try another! No matter which method(s) you use, consider asking residents:

- What needs are unmet by the surrounding community?
- What services require travel (either that residents already use, or would like to use but cannot due to the distance)?
- What services are not available at the times residents are free?
- What needs are the most urgent?
- What groups would these services support? Are there any groups in the community that are not being supported? (For example, are there programs for seniors but not after school activities?)
- What programs would residents want to participate in themselves?

*Some examples of programs that may interest families include:*



*Employment training programs*



*Credit and financial counseling*



*Free tax preparation for families*



*Programs for children such as homework support*





**Dot Voting:** Dot voting is a group decision-making process that starts with a brainstorm and then has the group narrow down the ideas to ones that have the most interest or agreement.

- To begin, give all the participants sticky notes and have them write one idea on each note. They stick these ideas on the wall.
- The facilitator can then group the ideas (ex: health, education, youth).
- Participants are then given dot stickers to vote on the ideas that they like the best. For deciding on services or programs, direct them to only put dots next to ones that they would use. You can vary the number of dots participants receive. Generally, give people enough dots for about 25% of the options (1 vote for every 4 options).
- The group will then be able to see visually which ideas have the most support.



*For more information on engaging residents, see [Guide 2: Engaging Residents and Representing Resident Interests](#).*



*For more information on group decision-making, see [Guide 3: Holding Effective Resident Council Meetings](#).*



## Assess: Who is Doing the Work?

**After assessing needs and interests, look for which organizations exist that may be able to serve your community.** You may also have ideas for services that do not yet exist. A good place to start is to look to who is already doing the work:

- Ask residents which community organizations they are already working with.
  - » **Be creative!** Many organizations offer services you may not know about. For example, many school districts have support services for students and families outside of the classroom. Housing counseling organizations and some banks offer classes on personal finance.
- What organizations or people share the goals that our community has identified?
  - » For example, if you have identified the need for fresh food look for organizations that organize farmers markets, health centers with a focus on nutrition, and food pantries.
- Ask residents in your community if they volunteer or work for any organizations?

- Talk to the organizations you have identified.
  - » Tell them what needs you have identified.
  - » Ask them which services they do or could provide.
  - » Ask them what other organizations they know of.

**Do an internet search:** Type in the name of your city or community and the need. See who comes up and do some research on them.

- Who is already working with people in your community?
- Is there a relationship you could deepen?
- Do they do something that your organization does not do (research, policy work, work with different communities, etc)?

## Examples of Partnerships



***In Fall River, Massachusetts***, public housing resident leaders benefit from support, training, and guidance provided by two statewide organizations, the Massachusetts Union of Public Housing Residents (Mass Union) and the Mel King Institute, and a national organization the National Alliance of Resident Services in Affordable and Assisted Housing (NAR-SAAH). These organizations provide residents with training, advocacy support, technical assistance, and networking opportunities with resident leaders from other areas of the state and country.



***The Orchard Manor Resident Council***, which is part of the Charleston-Kanawha Housing Authority (CKHA) in West Virginia brought a mobile food pantry to their community. The resident council partnered with Feeding America Program and the Mountaineer Food Bank to provide food to over 50 people Monday, Wednesday, and Friday each week. The pantry has a small space in the community center but when it's nice weather the group provides food from their community garden.



***Public housing resident councils in St Paul, Minnesota*** regularly partner with the Resident Services and Resident Initiatives departments of the St Paul PHA to apply for outside grants that the councils are eligible for as nonprofit organizations. For example, they partnered with the St Paul-Ramsey County Public Health Department for 8 years to bring wellness initiatives, including physical activity, nutrition, and smoking cessation, to the residents.

## Meet with the Housing Authority

**The housing authority may have community partnerships, connections to service providers, or programs that can be expanded to your community.** Or, they may want to partner to bring on a new program.



For more information, see [Guide 4: Partnering and Advocacy with the Housing Authority](#).

# Resident Opportunity and Family Self-Sufficiency Programs

**Your community may already have a service coordinator through a program such as Resident Opportunity and Self-Sufficiency (ROSS), Jobs Plus, or Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS).** Talk to the service coordinator about how you can partner with them or support their programming. The service coordinator will have connections with programs in the area and may be interested in partnering to bring new programs or do better outreach for programs that do exist. The resident council can connect residents to these programs, suggest partnerships, or work with these programs to expand them.

If the property does not have a coordinator, the resident council can talk to the housing authority about working to bring a service coordination program to the property. Through the Annual or Five-year Plan process the housing authority could decide to apply for one of these programs or start another program at the property. The resident council can also directly apply for a ROSS grant or partner with a nonprofit service organization to bring the ROSS program to the property.



**In Los Angeles County** ROSS service coordinators find that working with resident councils helps them ensure that residents can connect with outside services that are available to them. Resident council meetings provide a way for service coordinators to introduce programs and organizations to residents. The service coordinators are often given a space on the agenda to speak or invite speakers from partner organizations.



**In Cincinnati, Ohio** the Jurisdiction-Wide Resident Advisory Board (J-RAB) is organized as a non-profit organization with tax-exempt, 501(c)(3) status. J-RAB has a ROSS grant which funds three service coordinator positions which are filled by residents. The coordinators work to connect other residents to services.



*For more information see [Guide 7: Resident Training and Self-Sufficiency Programs](#).*

## Look at National Directories of Local Service Providers

- **211**—Is a nation-wide 3-digit number (and website) for information and connections to local services.
- **Boys and Girls Clubs**—Uses a club experience to support young people to reach their full potential through. They currently have 290 clubs in public housing communities.
- **Find Help**—Find Help connects people to food assistance, help paying bills, education and job training programs and other free or reduced cost programs by zip code.
- **HRSA Data Warehouse**—This U.S. Department of Health & Human Services website includes tools to locate health programs funded by the Health Resources & Services Administration by your location.
- **Eldercare Locator**—Created by the U.S. Administration on Aging, this searchable database connects people to services for older adults and their families. The service can be reached by phone at 1-800-677-1116.
- **The United Way**—Has local chapters that work with many nonprofit agencies.

# Find Support for your Resident Council

**In addition to partnering to support the residents in your community you may look for support to build your resident council capacity, get technical assistance with HUD programs, engage in advocacy, and impact decisions affecting your community.**

Working with other organizations can increase your impact on larger issues, like community development. Think about what you need in order to make an impact:

- More resources?
- Expertise?
- More people?
- New strategies?

Think about what types of partners would be helpful and who else shares the goals that your community is working towards.

To impact community decisions and advocacy look to partner with:

- Other resident councils—including those at other types of housing, like privately owned buildings or other affordable housing that isn't owned by the housing authority
- Tenant rights and tenant organizing groups
- Legal aid organizations
- Educational institutions (universities, colleges, and community colleges)



## Plan to Meet with Potential Partners

**Before you meet with a potential partner organization, make a plan for the meeting.**

Some things you may want to consider before the meeting:

- What are the goals and mission of the organization?
- Who are the organization's clients, members, or stakeholders?
- If they have clients, what are their clients' goals?
- Why would it be in the organization's self-interest to partner with you?
- How would the partnership help them reach one of their goals?
- Would any of the organizations' priorities put them in conflict with the resident council?

Some ways that a partnership may benefit partner organizations are:

- **People:** Most organizations want to (and need to, in order to keep their funding!) serve their community. Resident councils can connect organizations with the people they want to serve
- **Space:** Many organizations do not have the space to conduct large-scale events, and especially do not have space everywhere they want to serve people. Your resident council may have access to community space.

- **Knowledge:** You know your community better than anyone. Some organizations need that knowledge so they can modify their programs to better serve the community.
- **Advocacy:** If an organization serves your community, you may be able to support them by telling your story to funders and elected officials.



**Example:** *A community organization may have the goal of helping people find employment. Your property may have a lot of people in need of this service (potential clients for them) and may be able to provide the organization with free space to host workshops on writing a resume, or hold job fairs with employers.*

## Surveys

**The survey provided below and those included here can be updated for your community.** You can use these examples to choose the most relevant questions and options. Be sure to think about whether you actually need to collect information that may be private such as a family's income. **Only ask for information if there is a specific reason.** For example, you may need to ask a general question about income to see if families will qualify for a program. Do not collect contact information on these surveys.

**A survey will work best if it is specific.** So, you will want to first talk with residents to get ideas about their needs, interests, and ideas. You will also want to have an idea of potential programs or resources. For each of the questions include options but also include a space to receive additional ideas and comments. You can set up a survey to receive online answers through Survey Monkey, Google Forms, or another program. If you have an online option, be sure to also have a paper option for residents who are not comfortable using a computer.



- **Sample survey below**
- **Community Needs Assessment Questionnaire** from Survey Monkey:  
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/3RNQD5Y>
- **The ROSS Notice of Funding Availability** also includes a needs assessment template related to employment with questions on community and household needs, barriers to employment, interest around education and training programs, and healthcare needs:  
[https://www.hud.gov/program\\_offices/spm/gmomgmt/grantsinfo/fundingopps/fy2020\\_ross](https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/spm/gmomgmt/grantsinfo/fundingopps/fy2020_ross)



## Resources

**Community Toolbox** is an online series for developing a plan to build engagement among diverse groups for community change. The first section focuses on Increasing Participation in Community Action and may provide you with outreach and engagement ideas. You can also contact them for help with using the toolbox: <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/participation/encouraging-involvement/increase-participation/main>

**County Health Rankings guide on Building Your Partnerships Capacity for Change** explores how to consider your partnership's strengths and capacity needs, and how to develop and expand your network. The guide also links to a number of useful tools for building successful partnerships: <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/sites/default/files/media/document/Building%20Your%20Partnership%27s%20Capacity%20for%20Change.pdf>

**The Community Café** offers resources for building conversations that can create change: <https://thecommunitycafe.org/our-work/>

**National Alliance of Resident Services in Affordable and Assisted Housing** (NAR-SAAH) provides technical assistance to resident services staff and members of resident councils by helping to shape national housing policy, expand partnerships with community agencies, leverage funds to support resident programs, and speak on matters impacted by changing economic conditions and shifting political priorities. <https://www.narsaah.today/>

This survey should be adapted to be specific to your community.

## Survey for Residents of

---

*(name of property)*

The \_\_\_\_\_ Resident Council is conducting a survey on our community's needs and interests!

We want to partner with organizations that will best serve our community. We need your help to determine which organizations to work with.

### **Which community-based or non-profit organizations already help you or your family?**

*For example, food banks, after-school programs, health clinics, etc. (Select all that apply)*

Boys and Girls Club

Health clinic/center

Community Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Are there other organizations that you would like to receive help from, but cannot?**

**Why not (distance, hours, etc.)?** *(Select all that apply)*

The food pantry

Afterschool programs

Free health clinic

Community College

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Are there services you would like to receive, but do not know what organization could help? Which needs are most important to you?** *(Select all that apply)*

Computer literacy

GED classes

Job training

College courses

Childcare

Food assistance

Health programs for seniors

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**The resident council is considering bringing other organizations to share about their services at resident council meetings. What one organization or issue would make you definitely attend the meeting?** *(Select all that apply)*

Computer training organization

Job training center

Community college

Local clinic

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**When are you most likely to engage in programs or services?** *(Select all that apply)*

Weekdays during the day

Weekdays after 5 PM

Saturday

Sunday

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please let us know a bit about you so we can make sure the services and programs fit your needs.**

*(Select all that apply)*

I am a senior

I am an adult without children currently living in my household

I have small children (5 and under)

My children are 6 – 12

My children are teens

Any other comments about services that should be brought to the resident council, or about the resident council in general:

**Thank you for filling out this survey! Please return it to:**

*[Fill in contact information of Board member or committee member who will collect surveys, or location of drop-box]*





# Guide 7: Resident Training and Self-Sufficiency Programs



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This document is part of the **Public Housing Resident Organizing and Participation Toolkit**. The full toolkit includes topical guides, customizable resident council documents and forms, tools related to tenant participation funds, and case studies of resident organizations around the country. To see the full toolkit go to: <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/public-housing/resident-toolkit/>

***This document is provided for informational purposes only and is not an official, or required, HUD document.***

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# RESIDENT TRAINING AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY PROGRAMS

**HUD is committed to advancing self-sufficiency and financial stability among public housing residents.**

HUD, housing authorities, and community organizations offer programs to support public housing residents to become more financially self-sufficient. Your resident council can participate and advance these programs.

This guide will discuss the Resident Opportunity and Self-Sufficiency (ROSS) grants, Jobs Plus program, and the Family Self-Sufficiency program. In each program, HUD provides grants that mostly pay for service coordinators or case managers. Who can receive the grants, and what the service coordinators can do, varies among the programs.

While the general outline of each program does not change, HUD may make changes from time to time in the requirements for receiving grants for these programs. HUD publishes Notices of Funding Availability (NOFAs) that have guidance on what is required to receive funding for a specific program for the upcoming cycle. NOFAs are published on HUD's website at [hud.gov/grants/](https://www.hud.gov/grants/).



## Resident Opportunity and Self-Sufficiency (ROSS)

**Who can receive grants:** housing authorities, tribal housing organizations, resident councils (jurisdiction-wide or property specific), or other organizations that partner with residents

**What the program does:** Pays for coordinators who can organize services for residents, provide case management, directly support residents, and in some cases, directly support the work of the resident council.



## Jobs Plus

**Who can receive grants:** housing authorities, though an “implementation partner” (another organization chosen by the housing authority) can run the program

**What the program does:** The goal is to address poverty among residents by developing employment opportunities, promoting a community support network for work readiness, career education, and financial literacy.



## Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS)

**Who can receive grants:** housing authorities

**What the program does:** When a housing authority creates an FSS program, residents can enroll voluntarily. Residents who participate create specific goals for their household and receive case management.



*For more information on partnering with community organizations, see [Guide 6: Partnering with Local and Community Organizations](#), in this toolkit.*

# Resident Opportunity and Self Sufficiency Grant Program (ROSS)

**ROSS grants give housing authorities, resident groups, tribal housing organizations, and other organizations that partner with residents funding for service coordinators.** Those coordinators can provide services that benefit residents: such as case management, social work services, connections with outside resources, and even support for the resident council. ROSS is designed to allow flexibility to meet local needs, so each ROSS program can look very different.

## Program Goals

**Services funded by ROSS grants aim to help participants be more self-sufficient.** For people who are not elderly or who do not have a disability, HUD considers several factors as moving toward self-sufficiency:

- increasing earned income (wages from work)
- reducing or eliminating the need for cash assistance, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- progress toward achieving economic independence so that the family is not relying on government assistance programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- progress toward housing self-sufficiency so that the resident no longer needs public housing and can afford market rate housing,

In the case of elderly residents or residents with disabilities, HUD sets self-sufficiency goals that:

- improve living conditions
- enable residents to age-in-place
- enable residents to avoid nursing homes or other institutional facilities.

## Service Coordinators

**ROSS service coordinators, sometimes called program coordinators, help participants move towards their goals.** They use needs assessments, case management, and referrals to services as tools. Service coordinators identify community- and internet-based services to meet residents' needs, including: transportation, child care, education, training, and work supports. ROSS can work with other service programs for public housing residents that are offered by the housing authority or a community organization by providing funds for the case management portion. However, ROSS cannot directly fund services themselves. Only residents of public and Indian housing can receive case management services from ROSS service coordinators.

*ROSS may connect residents to a variety of services, including:*



*Employment*



*Disability services*



*Health and well-being*



*Basic needs*



*Education and youth*



*Financial literacy*



*Aging in place*

Residents may be connected to a variety of services, including:

- **Employment:** assessment, job search, computer literacy, resume writing and interviewing
- **Disability services:** accessible transportation, assistance with daily living, disability services counseling
- **Health and well-being:** healthcare referrals, nutrition education, drug and alcohol treatment
- **Basic needs:** benefits enrollment, childcare, life skills
- **Education and youth:** afterschool programs, tutoring, early childhood education
- **Financial literacy:** financial coaching, long-term financial planning, money management
- **Aging in place:** health care coordination, meals services, transportation

Check the current [Notice of Funding Availability](#). Sometimes, HUD requires that certain services be offered.

## Resident Eligibility

**When a property has a service coordinator all public housing residents are eligible for services.** If your development has some units that are public housing and others that receive assistance from some other program (like Section 8), those residents will not qualify to receive support from ROSS service coordinators.



### Resident Councils and ROSS

**A unique feature of ROSS is that resident groups may apply for and receive funding.**

Housing authorities, resident councils, tribally-designated housing entities, and nonprofit organizations can receive ROSS grants. Nonprofit organizations must have a letter of support from the local housing authority or a resident council. A resident council can support a nonprofit's application for a service coordinator that will be assigned full-time to their property. By law, at least 25% of ROSS grant money must go to resident councils, as long as there are enough applications.

As part of the application review process, your resident council's capacity to manage grant funding and implement the program will be evaluated. If your resident council does not yet have the experience and skills to manage the grant, you have several options. You can seek training to build the necessary skills or partner with your housing authority or local community organizations to implement community programs. You can also work with local nonprofits or the housing authority to support their applications for ROSS funding.

Even if the resident council does not receive funding directly, resident councils and resident leaders can help make a ROSS program successful. Some ways you can do this include:

- Working with the service coordinator to design a program that meets residents' needs
- Including the service coordinator in resident council meetings
- Using resident council communication (emails, social media, bulletin boards) to encourage residents to take advantage of the ROSS service coordinator or information they want to present
- Introducing new residents to the ROSS program or the service coordinator
- Conducting surveys of resident council members on what needs they see

Many service coordinators work closely with the resident council and can help the resident council conduct outreach. As long as the resident council and the service coordinator share the same goals, collaboration can help each side.



**In Cincinnati**, the jurisdiction-wide resident council, J-RAB, receives ROSS funding directly from HUD. J-RAB uses ROSS, tenant participation funding, and some outside funding for its programs. J-RAB has several service coordinators working in public housing buildings. One service coordinator works out of J-RAB’s office, which also serves as the Business and Service Coordination Center (offering services for residents through ROSS service coordinators).



**In Los Angeles County**, service coordinators report that “empowerment is key” to self-sufficiency—and resident councils are an important tool for resident empowerment. Resident service coordinators there may help a resident council and its members with capacity building and skills. Additionally, Lynette Johnson, a resident service coordinator at the Los Angeles County Development Authority (the local housing authority) points out that participating in a resident council builds many skills that are also important for finding a job or advancing in your career. Budgeting, public speaking, outreach, meeting facilitation, consensus building, and administrative experience, are all skills that resident leaders need to be successful. An effective service coordinator can encourage residents to build those skills within a resident council, and translate them into success in the job market.

## Jobs Plus

**The Jobs Plus Initiative provides a strategy, which has been shown to work, for increasing the employment opportunities and earnings of public housing residents.** A key component to the Jobs Plus model is that it supports entire properties rather than individual households, encouraging work throughout the community—this ensures that everyone in the development has equal access to work readiness resources.

The program can vary depending on local needs but has three main components:

- 1. Employment-related services:** services such as work-readiness training, connecting residents with employers, financial counseling, educational advancement, job placement, and employment counseling. Residents enroll in these services to help attain sustainable long-term employment at a livable wage.
- 2. Financial incentives:** Participants in the Jobs Plus program can choose to enroll in the “Earned Income Disregard.” Normally, an increase in your wages could also increase your public housing rent. This program allows the housing authority to “disregard” increased wages earned while participating in the program, so that your rent does not increase because you earn more money.
- 3. Community support for work:** Housing authorities must advertise the program so that all residents know they can participate. Sites are required to hire residents as community coaches who recruit participants. As resident leaders engaged directly with the Jobs Plus program, community coaches help shape program offerings and outreach efforts based on their intimate knowledge of the needs and strengths of the community. Informal interactions between staff and residents is a key part of the program. Housing authorities must partner with local work development boards, and can partner with other organizations too.

Housing authorities receive Jobs Plus grants and usually implement the program. However, they can work with “implementation partners” for some or all of the implementation. Housing authorities are also required by HUD to show they have “Community Support for Work.” Before beginning a Jobs Plus program, housing authorities are expected to work with local organizations—government agencies, nonprofits, and employers—in designing their approach. Resident councils are also part of this effort. Housing authorities are expected to work with the resident council, if one exists.

In Jobs Plus, services should match participating residents’ individual needs. The goal is to be “place based” and offer services on-site at public housing developments, but referral services can also be offered. Employment services are provided at a job center on the property and referrals are made to complementary services in the community, such as childcare.

For participants who are unemployed, case managers help identify short and long-term employment goals and create plans to accomplish them. Employed participants can also work with case managers to advance their careers and learn new skills. Program services may be provided directly by the housing authority or by a partner, for example a community organization that provides job training and case management.

## Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Program

**The Family Self-Sufficiency Program promotes increased earnings and savings for families receiving HUD-funded rental assistance, including public housing residents.** The program supports participants in finding employment that will allow them to move off of federal or state cash assistance, sometimes called welfare, and reduce their need for rental assistance. They may remain in other government programs such as SNAP or Medicaid.

In order to successfully complete FSS, participants must become independent of federal and state cash-assistance for at least 12 months, and a household member must seek and maintain suitable employment.

**Housing authorities must apply to HUD for funds to participate in FSS.** For residents, participation in FSS is voluntary. If the local housing authority has an FSS program, and there is space available, interested public housing residents can apply to participate. The program generally lasts five years, though families can complete the program early by meeting certain goals.

**FSS service coordinators** provide assessment, case management and coaching to support participants in developing goals, accessing services to overcome barriers to employment, strengthening their financial capability, and addressing other challenges.

A key feature of FSS is that participants identify their own financial and employment-related goals.

FSS participants may access services and supports in the areas of:

- Employment: resume building, job search assistance, and job training
- Educational programs: skills development, GED preparation, college courses, and job training
- Financial capability: credit counseling, financial education, savings programs
- Wrap-around services: health and mental health services, child care, transportation

## Resident Involvement in FSS Decisions

**FSS programs must be run by housing authorities directly.** Housing authorities create a Program Coordinating Committee which secures resources, develops the FSS action plan and procedures, identifies service gaps, and works to implement the program. This group may include community organizations, local government agencies, local colleges, and public housing residents. If your housing authority has an FSS program, check to see if resident voices are already included in the Program Coordinating Committee. If not, see if the housing authority would invite a representative of the resident council to the Committee.

For communities that do not have FSS, residents and resident councils could advocate with the housing authority, for example using the PHA Plan process, to encourage an application for FSS funds.



## Resources

**About the Resident Opportunities and Self-Sufficiency (ROSS) Grant:** General information about ROSS. Published by HUD. [https://www.hud.gov/program\\_offices/public\\_indian\\_housing/programs/ph/ross/about](https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/public_indian_housing/programs/ph/ross/about)

**Running ROSS Step-by-Step:** An online training for any organization that receives ROSS grants. Available on HUD Exchange. <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/ross/guide/introduction/>

**Basic Facts About HUD's Family Self-Sufficiency Program:** Article covering the history of FSS, the program requirements, how residents benefit, and the effectiveness of the program. Published by the nonpartisan Center for Budget and Policy Priorities. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/housing/basic-facts-about-huds-family-self-sufficiency-program>

**Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Program:** A fact sheet with general information about FSS. Published by HUD. [https://www.hud.gov/sites/documents/FSSFACTSHEET\\_FEB2016.PDF](https://www.hud.gov/sites/documents/FSSFACTSHEET_FEB2016.PDF)

**Family Self Sufficiency (FSS) Program Training:** An online training for any organization that receives FSS grants. Available on HUD Exchange. <https://www.hudexchange.info/trainings/fss-program-online-training/contents.html>

**HUD's Jobs Plus Pilot Program for Public Housing Residents: Ongoing Implementation Experiences:** A report on the early implementation of the Jobs Plus Initiative. Published by MDRC. <https://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/JobsPlusReport.pdf>

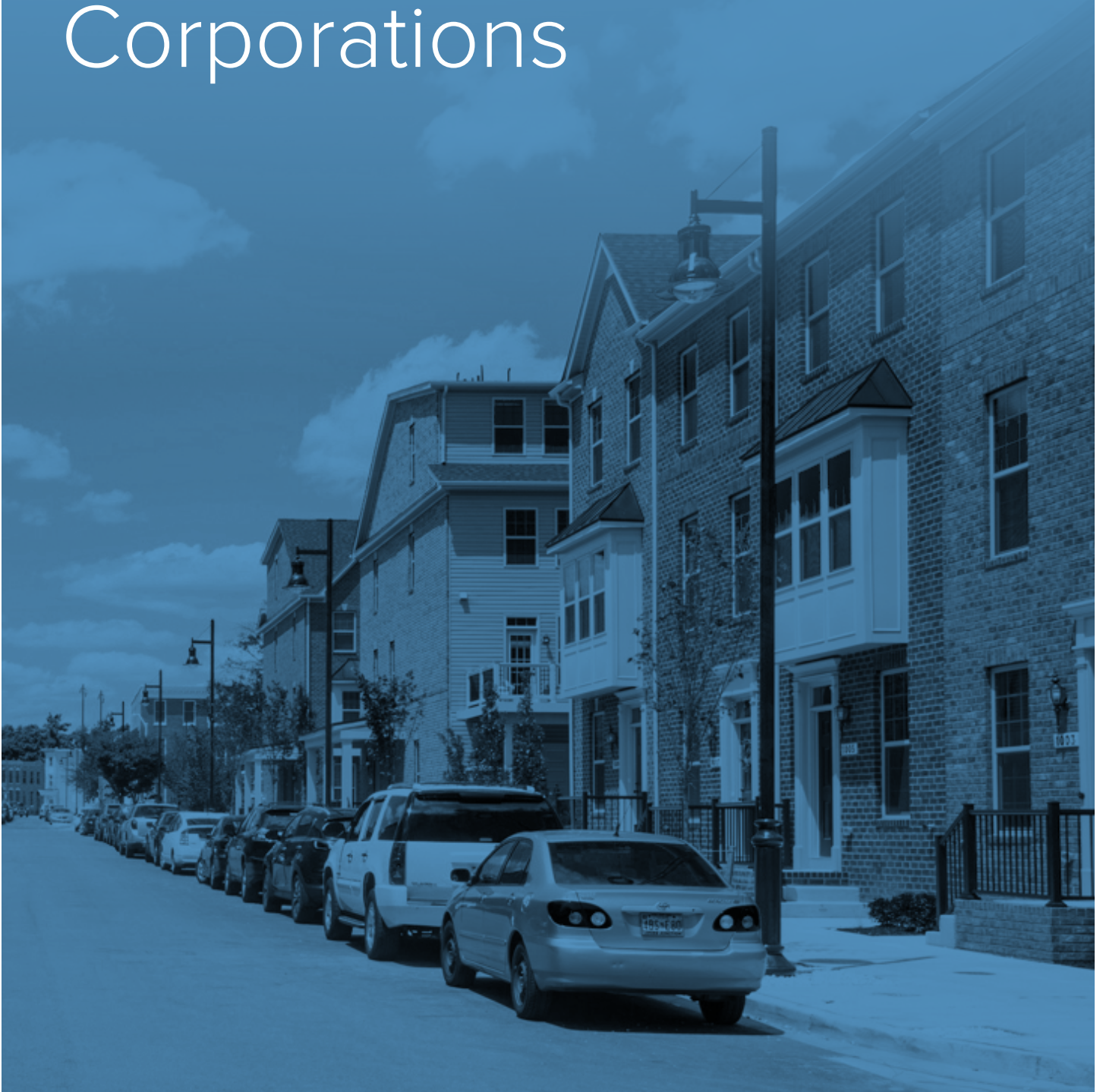
**Building Public Housing Authority Capacity for Better Resident Services:** Research article discussing the way public housing can be a "platform" for services. Published by the nonpartisan Urban Institute. <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/65441/2000333-Building-Public-Housing-Authority-Capacity-for-Better-Resident-Services.pdf>

**The National Alliance of Resident Services in Affordable and Assisted Housing (NAR-SAAH):** An organization that provides technical assistance to Resident Services staff and Resident Councils through training, advocacy, and leveraging funding. <https://www.narsaah.today/>





# Guide 8: Resident Management Corporations



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This document is part of the **Public Housing Resident Organizing and Participation Toolkit**. The full toolkit includes topical guides, customizable resident council documents and forms, tools related to tenant participation funds, and case studies of resident organizations around the country. To see the full toolkit go to: <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/public-housing/resident-toolkit/>

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# RESIDENT MANAGEMENT CORPORATIONS

**Resident management corporations (RMCs) are organizations formed by residents of public housing to manage their own property.** The housing authority still owns the property. Depending on the arrangement, the RMC may take over some or all of the management. Resident Management Corporations have a long and successful history of managing public housing, though very few RMCs exist today. RMCs are generally paid by the housing authority (or HUD) through operating or capital funds and have paid staff who are residents.

The law that established the federal public housing system allows for resident management of public housing in order to improve living conditions. HUD has implemented regulations which describe the rules for forming RMCs. You can find a [link](#) to these regulations in the resource list at the end of this document.

HUD encourages resident management. In the regulations, HUD describes the potential benefits as including improved quality of life, dignity from meaningful work, and meaningful participation in the management of the housing development.

If you are considering forming a resident management corporation with your neighbors, you can learn more in this guide and by exploring the resources and organizations listed throughout.

*“[Forming a resident management corporation] is an opportunity to improve your conditions. Get a lawyer, get a consultant, and negotiate your deal!”*

*– Cynthia Wiggins,  
Guste Homes  
Resident Management  
Corporation in New  
Orleans, LA*

## Background

**Resident participation in the management of public housing grew out of the civil rights movement of the 1960s.** Conditions in some public housing were deteriorating. In 1971, out of frustration with poor management and housing conditions, residents of Bromley-Heath public housing in Boston officially formed the first resident management corporation. This success was closely followed by residents in St. Louis who waged a rent strike to protest poor conditions and rising rents. As part of the strike settlement, the housing authority gave the resident councils control over specific management functions at some properties. In a **1992 report**, HUD cites these accomplishments as the beginning of a resident management movement.

In 1987 Congress **amended the law** to encourage resident management by permitting RMCs to keep any funds that they were able to save through efficient operation. These funds could be used for new improvements or services.

The 1992 report, **“Evaluation of Resident Management in Public Housing,”** found that RMCs performed well compared with traditional housing authorities in most areas of management, particularly in the areas of annual inspections, resident move-outs, and resident recertification. Additionally, full-service RMCs (those performing all of the management duties at the property) performed especially well in maintenance and provided about twice as many social service programs as comparison sites managed by the housing authority.

The evaluations showed that RMCs had high performance levels and greater resident satisfaction at lower costs compared to their housing authority.



## Resident Management today: Guste Homes in New Orleans, LA

**The residents of Guste Homes in New Orleans** first took steps toward resident management in 1996. The Guste Homes Resident Management Corporation was formally incorporated with the state of Louisiana in 1998. By 2000, the RMC entered a dual management contract with the Housing Authority of New Orleans. With dual management, the housing authority and the RMC share responsibility for management of the building.

Cynthia Wiggins is the president of Guste Homes RMC and of the National Association of Resident Management Corporations (NARMC). She describes the history of Guste Homes and the transition to resident management. At the beginning, a staff person from the RMC shadowed every job function performed by the housing authority. Ms. Wiggins says that dual management “shadowing” period was vital. RMC staff learned to complete maintenance work orders, recertify residents, perform move-in and move-out inspections, landscape the yards, make purchase orders, and prepare a budget. “We didn’t do the gradual thing,” says Ms. Wiggins explaining that the RMC took over all management functions at once in 2004.

Since 2004, the Guste Homes have been entirely self-managed. The RMC launched a redevelopment project, which closed on its final round of funding in 2012. Because redevelopment today requires funding outside of traditional public housing, the Guste Homes now includes financing from Low Income Housing Tax Credits.

However, the housing authority is still involved. The Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) completes an audit of the RMC’s finances every year. As an extra step, the RMC also hires an outside accounting firm to audit their books. “Our files are immaculate,” says Ms. Wiggins. The housing authority is also required to be involved in certain large purchases. In exchange for these oversight services, the housing authority receives a percentage of the operating income from Guste Homes.

Guste Homes is looking to the future. Ms. Wiggins notes a goal to develop future leadership. While the RMC board is strong and stable, many members are looking to retire. The RMC is looking for new leaders to take on the responsibility of running the organization. If resident management is not successful, an RMC can return to management by the housing authority. However, Ms. Wiggins is dedicated to using her remaining time as president to recruit new board members.

## Before Considering Resident Management

**There are very few resident management corporations today.** Ms. Wiggins cautions that RMCs “are not for everybody.” Before considering forming a resident management corporation, she suggests examining how strong your resident council is.

You do not have to know everything about public housing, government funding, or community organizing in order to start the RMC journey. However, you and your fellow residents will need to be willing to learn, and put in hours of effort. Many of the organizations and resources listed at the bottom of this guide can help.



*Also see [Guide 2: Engaging Residents and Representing Resident Interests](#) if your resident council could be strengthened.*

## Forming a Resident Management Corporation

**A resident management corporation is a nonprofit organization.** HUD has several requirements for RMCs, found in the Code of Federal Regulations section linked below.

### **The RMC must:**

- Incorporate as a nonprofit under state law
- Be established by the residents directly or through resident council(s)
- Have a board that will oversee staff, generally including a property manager
- Have a “qualified housing management specialist” to help with training and needs assessment
- Contract with the housing authority (or HUD) for any management roles

### **Resident councils that form the RMC must:**

- Follow HUD guidelines as the “duly elected” resident council
- Approve the establishment of the RMC
- Have representation on the RMC board

One organization may serve as both the RMC and the resident council so long as it meets all of the HUD requirements for both. Residents may also form an RMC without forming a resident council. In that case, a majority of the residents living in the affected building(s) must vote to approve the RMC.

## Taking On Management Responsibilities

**First, the RMC must show that it is able to take on the functions it wishes to.** Training and planning are key. A dual management contract, like the one negotiated by the Guste Homes, is a good way to gain the experience the RMC will need. Residents can also pursue training with local or national organizations.

The RMC may identify certain responsibilities that it has particular expertise or interest in taking on. Or, the RMC may decide to shadow housing authority staff through dual management. Over time, the RMC may add to its list of responsibilities or transition from dual management to complete management. In any case, the RMC should consider hiring a lawyer to draft a specific proposal.

**Second, the housing authority must negotiate, in good faith, with the RMC.** The housing authority and RMC then sign a “management contract” which describes which responsibilities will transfer to the RMC and which will stay with the housing authority. If a housing authority does not negotiate or enter into

a contract with the RMC, the RMC may appeal with HUD by contacting the local office. HUD will require written documentation of the past negotiations, will support further negotiations and conflict resolution.

If the housing authority is preparing to “modernize” (conduct major repairs at) the buildings the RMC manages, the RMC must be consulted. If the RMC will perform or manage the repairs, it must be in full compliance with all requirements for bonding, insurance, and licensing.

**Finally, the housing authority will monitor the RMC’s performance at least annually.** The RMC and the housing authority should be clear ahead of time about what will be monitored and how, so the RMC can prepare.

An RMC can also petition to be directly funded by HUD through an Annual Contributions Contract. If this is approved by HUD, the RMC no longer reports to the housing authority and instead is responsible to HUD much like housing authorities are.

## Resident Management Corporation Responsibilities

**Resident Management Corporations may take on any (or all) of the following responsibilities:**

- **Personnel:** hire and supervise management and maintenance staff
- **Resident Screening:** receive applications, screen applicants, and assign units
- **Resident (re)certifications and orientation**
- **Lease Enforcement:** rent collection, billing, enforce rules, monitor tenant accounts, and carry out evictions
- **Financial Management:** prepare and oversee budgets, payroll, and accounts
- **Security:** provide personnel and coordinating with police
- **Property Maintenance:** conduct annual inspections, take work orders, carry out regular maintenance and extraordinary repairs
- **Procurement:** maintain inventory, purchase supplies, solicit bids
- **Services:** provide supportive services for residents, such as community center space, trainings, and after school programs

The RMC can take on any responsibility that is in line with the HUD contract for public housing funding and complies with the law.

## HUD Funding and Technical Assistance

**The RMC is required to work with a qualified housing management specialist, in consultation with the housing authority to support residents forming an RMC to:**

- Determine if an RMC would be possible and worthwhile, including
  - » Internal conversations with residents about the time and effort required
  - » External conversations with a qualified housing management specialist

- Decide which responsibilities the RMC should take on
- Train residents as potential employees of an RMC with skills related to operation, management, maintenance, finances, fair housing, negotiating contracts, and planning.
- Design and implement programming for residents
- Understand HUD rules and regulations, like procurement, contracting, and financial accountability

In general, operating and capital funding is provided to the RMC by the housing authority, as set by the contract they negotiated. The housing authority remains responsible for oversight of the RMC.

HUD regulations also allow for direct funding to RMCs. The RMC can petition HUD to shift to direct HUD oversight and funding through an Annual Contributions Contract. This may make sense after an RMC is well-established. Direct funding may be provided if the RMC:

- Petitions HUD for the funds
- Has or is assuming the primary management responsibilities
- Has been designated as at least a “standard performer”
- Is not in violation of any requirements that call into question the organization’s ability to carry out its responsibilities



## Resources

**United States Code of Federal Regulations related to Resident Management Corporations:** Title 24 Housing and Urban Development, Part 964 Tenant Participation and Tenant Opportunities in Public Housing, Subpart B Tenant Participation, subsection 135, Resident involvement in HA management operations: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CFR-2011-title24-vol4/pdf/CFR-2011-title24-vol4-sec964-130.pdf>

**Evaluation of Resident Management in Public Housing:** This 1992 report from HUD’s Office of Policy Development and Research evaluates resident management corporations and their successes. <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/Publications/pdf/HUD-006093.pdf>

**An Operations Guide for Resident Management Corporations:** This 1990 guide was meant for residents considering resident management. It is now available online from the National Housing Law Project. <https://www.nhlp.org/wp-content/uploads/Operations-Guide-for-RMCs-Nov.-1990.pdf>

**National Alliance of Resident Services in Affordable and Assisted Housing:** NAAR-SAH offers many services to resident councils or jurisdiction-wide resident councils, such as training, advocacy, and certification. <https://www.narsaah.today/>

**National Association of Resident Management Corporations (NARMC):** Contact the NARMC through the Guste Homes Resident Management Corporation: <http://ghrmc.org/index.html>

**United States Code, Title 42 – The Public Health and Welfare, Chapter 8, Low-Income Housing, Subchapter 1 – General Program of Assisted Housing.** This section includes the laws related to resident management corporations: 42 U.S. Code 1437(r). <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2010-title42/html/USCODE-2010-title42-chap8-subchapl.htm>



# Guide 9: Tenant Participation Funds





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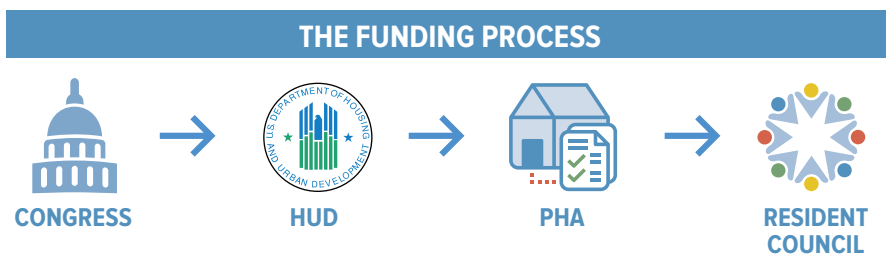
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# OVERVIEW

## HUD encourages public housing residents to be actively involved in their communities particularly through duly-elected resident councils.

Resident councils work to improve residents' quality of life and support residents in creating a positive living environment in their community. To support resident participation, HUD provides funding to public housing authorities (PHAs) for resident participation activities. Part of this funding is reserved for resident councils. This transfer of funds from the housing authority to the resident council and the related agreements, creates a partnership between the housing authority, resident council, and HUD.



In years when Congress provides sufficient funding, HUD provides \$25 for every occupied, public housing unit. The housing authority receives this money for tenant participation activities. Of this amount, \$15 for each unit annually goes to the resident council and the other \$10 can be used by the PHA to pay for costs related to tenant participation. The PHA may choose to fund resident councils above \$15 per unit each year. No matter the amount, the housing authority always remains responsible for supporting tenant participation activities as well. Funds for the resident council may go to the duly elected resident council, or a jurisdiction-wide council, or be shared between the two groups. Funding can only be provided to a resident council through a written agreement between the housing authority and resident council.

Resident councils may have funding from other sources besides tenant participation funds. This guide is specifically about the tenant participation funds provided by Congress through HUD to the housing authority and then to resident councils.

## Written Agreement

### A written agreement (sometimes called the TPF agreement) between the housing authority and the resident council is always required.

HUD encourages housing authorities and resident councils to develop agreements that establish a collaborative, flexible partnership. The



### Federal rules for public housing:

You can find public housing regulations in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR).

Most rules related to tenant participation are in Title 24, Housing and Urban Development, Part 964, Tenant Participation and Tenant Opportunities in Public Housing.

### **24 CFR 964.100**

links to the Role of the Resident Council subsection. Click the link to read the regulations in detail.



This toolkit includes a sample, customizable, agreement for the use of funds, a sample budget and workplan, and a decision-making tool for the use of the funds.

agreement should balance the independence and leadership of the resident council, with the need for a working partnership and appropriate oversight by the housing authority.

This agreement:

- Establishes each party's role related to tenant participation funds
- Governs decisions on how tenant participation funds are spent
- Spells out how these funds are disbursed and audited
- Includes a budget
- Assures that all expenses will be made following the law
- Assures that all expenses will promote "serviceability, efficiency, economy and stability"
- Requires the resident council to account to the PHA for the use of the funds
- Permits the PHA to audit the resident council's financial records related to the agreement.

It is also a best practice to include remedies (such as stricter future oversight or repayment agreements) if funds are misspent.



[See the \*Sample Resident Council and PHA Tenant Participation Funds Agreement\* in this toolkit.](#)

## Resolution of Disputes

**Residents and the housing authority are encouraged to work to resolve any disputes concerning the use of tenant participation funds, how funds may be divided with a jurisdiction-wide council, or any other proposals related to use of the funds.** If the parties are at an impasse, the issue should be referred to a conflict resolution mediator. Tenant participation funds may be used to pay for this assistance.

As a final step, the issues may be referred in writing with any supporting documentation to the HUD Field Office. The Field Office will have the groups further negotiate, which could include the assistance of a neutral party or the Field Office. If a resolution cannot be reached within 90 days from the date the Field Office becomes involved, the issue will be referred to HUD Headquarters (HQ) by way of a formal memo for final resolution. HUD HQ will look at the underlying policies and cannot overturn actions that are in line with regulations. If any corrective actions are prescribed by Headquarters, the Field Office will monitor that these actions are taken correctly.

## Activities



### Resident Council Allowable Activities

**Tenant participation funds must be used to fulfill the mission of resident councils.** Therefore, the funds can be used to support resident council operations and activities that will improve residents' quality of life, satisfaction, and a positive living environment.

Resident councils and housing authorities should work together to define activities that will fulfill these goals. The activities, or categories of activities, should then be included in the agreement. HUD encourages both resident councils and housing authorities to partner with local organizations to carry out activities. HUD

also encourages creativity—while there are restrictions on the costs being “reasonable and necessary,” a broad range of expenses may qualify.



***Some examples of expenses that support the operation of the resident council include:***

- **An enclosed bulletin board** to post resident council notices
- **Stipends** to residents who carry out resident council work, including resident council officers
- **Reimbursing for transportation to meetings** (for example, to a jurisdiction-wide resident council meeting)
- **Training of resident leaders**, including training with local and national organizations
- **Conflict resolution training or mediation support**



***Some examples of activities that support resident quality of life, satisfaction, and self-help initiatives include:***

- **Coordination of support services**
- **Youth activities** such as afterschool care or homework help
- **Training for residents** related to child care, early childhood development, and parent involvement
- **Holding a back-to-school event for kids** at the property where backpacks and school supplies are provided
- **Planting and maintaining a community garden** or beautifying the property
- **Healthy living classes** such as exercise or smoking cessation classes, or having a chef train residents on healthy cooking
- **Senior programs** such as health, wellness, staying active
- **Financial management or literacy classes** and support
- **Mental health and wellness classes** such as meditation and yoga
- **Childcare** for any eligible event
- **Youth sports programs**—such as basketball tournaments or bike riding classes
- **Violence prevention programs**
- **Computer lab and/ or computer classes**

## Stipends

**HUD encourages stipends to support residents in volunteering as resident council officers.** The amount of the stipend can be decided by the resident council and housing authority. A stipend cannot be more than \$200 per month for each officer. These stipends come from the resident council portion of the funds. Stipends are not considered salaries and should not be included as income for rent calculations. Stipends should be paid after the work has been done (for example, after the officer has attended the monthly meetings).

## Examples of Stipends



### **St Paul, MN**

In St Paul, where there are property-based and jurisdiction-wide resident councils, officers for the property-based resident councils receive stipends ranging from \$10 to \$25 per month for officers. Residents also volunteer as “peers” in more technical roles such as QuickBooks Peers who are trained in QuickBooks and support other resident councils with financial management. The Peers are paid up to \$50 per month.



### **Baltimore, MD**

In Baltimore, officers for the property-based resident councils, called tenant councils, do not receive stipends. Stipends are provided for members of the jurisdiction-wide resident council, the Resident Advisory Board (RAB), to cover residents’ transportation costs and help to ensure strong participation. RAB delegates receive \$15 for participation in a 2 hour meeting. RAB members can also receive a \$25 stipend for at least 4 hours of secretarial work.



### **Chicago, IL**

Stipends are currently provided only to members of the jurisdiction-wide resident council, the Central Advisory Council. These leaders are Presidents of their Local Advisory Council which may represent a number of property-based resident councils. There are 15 CAC members and they are required to volunteer for at least 20 hours a month to receive the stipend but generally work many more hours. The stipends range up to \$200 per month for the CAC President.

Some resident councils choose not to provide any stipends. These groups will often reimburse residents (usually Board members) for direct expenses related to participation. For example, they may reimburse for bus or taxi fare to a jurisdiction-wide meeting.



## Housing Authority Specific Activities

**The housing authority may use their portion to support the operation and work of the resident councils, including helping tenants form a resident council** (for example, hiring a facilitator or trainer, paying for a portion of staff time for outreach or capacity building). Typically, the housing authority’s main tenant participation costs are related to providing an office for the resident council, conducting elections and recalls, or arbitration to resolve disputes. If requested, the housing authority should provide a duly recognized resident council with office space and meeting facilities, free of charge. As possible, these should be within the development the resident council represents.

Housing authorities may need to use staff time to carry-out these activities or may have staff that support and liaise with the resident councils. In these cases, tenant participation funding can only be used for the staff time directly related to the tenant participation activities.



## Reasonable Expenses

Expenses must be considered “reasonable” and clearly necessary for the group to meet its goals and carry out the activities included in the agreement. A cost is generally considered reasonable if it does not exceed what a reasonable person would pay under the same circumstances.

HUD guidelines for determining if a cost is reasonable, suggest that you consider:

- Is the cost ordinary and necessary in order to operate?
  - » For an activity to train residents, an ordinary and necessary expense would be printing signs to guide participants to the correct room. Valet parking for attendees would not be ordinary or necessary.
- Were sound business practices used including arms-length bargaining, laws, and regulations followed?
  - » Groups negotiating an expense are independent (no conflict of interest) and on equal footing.
  - » A Board member’s private company may have a conflict of interest.
- Is the cost the same or less than the market price in that geographic area?
  - » Do an internet search to determine fair prices. If it’s a large purchase save the proof showing that the cost you paid was reasonable.
- Did the people involved act cautiously and consider their responsibilities?
  - » Ensure that there is not a conflict of interest and get multiple prices or bids.
- Did the group follow its own practices and policies?
  - » Did the Board approve the expense?



## Unallowable Expenses

**Tenant participation funds may not be used for activities that are not within the scope of the agreement between the resident council and the housing authority or are not in line with HUD requirements in the regulations.**

Expenses are not allowed for:

- Any activities prohibited by fair housing, non-discrimination laws.
- Purchase of alcoholic beverages
- Entertainment (tickets, meals, lodging, rentals, transportation, tips), if the purpose of the event is:
  - » Amusement (examples: trips to theme parks, county fairs)
  - » Diversions (examples: theatre, movies, sports events)
  - » Social activities (examples: parties, bowling nights)
- Organized fundraising (including financial or political campaigns, requesting gifts, expenses to raise capital)
- Gambling events

This is not a complete list. When questions arise, PHAs and resident councils should consult **2 CFR 200 Subpart E** related to permissible use of federal funds.



*Resident councils are encouraged to use the [Tenant Participation Funds Decision Support Tool](#) included in this toolkit to decide how to use tenant participation funds.*

# Best Use of Funds

**Along with determining if activities are allowable, resident councils should evaluate whether a proposed use is good use of limited tenant participation funds.** Most organizations use their previous year's budget when creating a new budget. This allows them to see how many they really spent. In addition to looking at the amount of the expense the resident council should take this time to determine if the activity or expense was a good use of funds. The resident council can ask:

- What was the impact of expense or activity? It's best to decide how you will measure impact before starting the activity.
  - » How many residents benefitted?
  - » Did it benefit a diverse group of residents or just one community?
  - » What did residents learn or gain from an activity?
- Is there a way to obtain the same result without spending funds, or by spending less?
  - » Can the resident council obtain a donation?
  - » Is there a resident who can provide the service?
- Is there another activity or expense that would benefit residents more?

Take time during a resident council meeting to brainstorm new activities. Use a survey such as the one in **Guide 2: Engaging Residents and Representing Resident Interests** in this toolkit to understand residents' needs and interests. Talk to other resident councils and see what they are doing. You can also ask the housing authority for ideas.

## Jurisdiction-wide Resident Council

**When both property-based resident council(s) and a jurisdiction-wide council exist, the housing authority and the councils must agree on how to divide the tenant participation funds.** A resident council may also transfer their funds to another eligible resident council or a jurisdiction-wide council as long as this is allowed under the agreement with the housing authority.

### Examples of Funding Agreements



**In Cincinnati, OH,** the housing authority does not retain any of the tenant participation funds so that it provides \$10 per unit to the jurisdiction-wide resident council and \$15 per unit to building resident councils.



**In Chicago,** The Central Advisory Council, the jurisdiction-wide resident council, administers the tenant participation funds and passes on \$3 per month per unit to the Local Advisory Councils, which represent the family properties and groups of senior properties, for resident activities.

## Mixed Income Communities

**Public housing residents in mixed-income communities are eligible to use tenant participation funds.**

HUD recommends that the amount of tenant participation funds that are used for an eligible activity be proportional to the amount of public housing residents. For example, if half of the residents in a building are public housing residents, then tenant participation funds could pay for half of the expense for an activity.

## Absence of a Resident Council

**If there is no duly elected resident council, the housing authority should let residents know about the availability of tenant participation funds.** The housing authority should also use its portion of the funds, up to \$10 per unit annually, for tenant participation activities. This includes training and supporting residents to establish and run a resident council.

If a duly elected resident council is formed, the housing authority must provide it with a minimum of \$15 per unit per year for resident activities.

If residents are interested, a housing authority may engage a jurisdiction-wide council or another local council to carry out activities at a development without a resident council. Tenant participation funds for that property may be used. If a resident council is formed during the year, then the housing authority must provide the council with the remaining funds.



***In St Paul, MN,*** experienced resident leaders can apply for a position as a Peer Advisors. Peers Advisors receive a stipend to provide support resident councils that are forming at another property or to assist new resident council board members.

At the end of the funding year, if a duly elected resident council has not been formed and the tenant participation funds have not been used, the housing authority may use the remaining funds for any eligible operating fund expense.



## TENANT PARTICIPATION FUNDS ROLES/RESPONSIBILITIES



### Housing Authority

- ✓ Collaborate with resident council on written agreement
- ✓ Provide tenant participation funds in a timely manner
- ✓ Ensure resident council's requested expenses are allowed
- ✓ Ensure council's requested expenses incorporate appropriate financial controls
- ✓ Advise resident council on supporting documentation needed
- ✓ Maintain accurate records of tenant participation funds
- ✓ Inspect and audit resident council's financial records



### Resident Council

- ✓ Determine how tenant participation funds will be used to improve quality of life for its residents
- ✓ Ensure that expenses are in line with written agreement with PHA
- ✓ Ensure that expenses comply with HUD requirements for use of tenant participation funds



### Residents

- ✓ Ask questions to understand where the money goes
- ✓ Hold the Board accountable by reviewing records and reports
- ✓ Insist that funds cannot be spent without a budget approved by the resident council
- ✓ Elect treasurers who have the required skills for the job
- ✓ Contact the housing authority if they suspect something is not appropriate.

## Roles

### The housing authority's role is to:

- Collaborate with the resident council on a written agreement that details how funds will be distributed and used;
- Provide tenant participations funds in a timely manner and following the agreement;
- Ensure the resident council's requested expenses are allowed under HUD guidelines and the written agreement;
- Ensure the council's requested expenses incorporate appropriate financial controls, including any applicable requirements to seek bids or insurance;
- Advise the resident council on the supporting documentation needed to verify and audit expenses;
- Maintain accurate records of tenant participation funds and expenditures and provide this information to resident councils; and
- Inspect and audit the resident council's financial records.

### The resident council's role is to:

- Determine how tenant participation funds will be used to improve the quality of life for its residents;
- Ensure that expenses are in line with the written agreement with the PHA; and
- Ensure that expenses comply with the HUD requirements for use of tenant participation funds.

### All residents should:

- Ask questions to understand where the money goes;
- Hold the Board accountable by reviewing records and reports;

- Insist that funds cannot be spent without a budget approved by the resident council;
- Elect treasurers who have the required skills for the job; and
- Contact the housing authority if they suspect something is not appropriate.

## Financial Management

### Accounting

The housing authority may use its portion of tenant participation funds to provide, or pay for, technical assistance and training in financial management.

**The best accounting system is the one that works for your organization to keep track of all income, expenses, accounts, and related documentation.** Try to keep the system as simple as possible to ensure that it will be used and that as many people as possible can understand it.

The organization may use a financial record book, Excel document, Google Sheets spreadsheet, or, if training is available, paid programs like QuickBooks to track the finances. Any system that you use should allow you to:

- Input when funds are available (in the case of reimbursements) or received
- Input expenses
- Compare the budget to the actual funds received and spent
- Keep a running list of the amount of funds in any accounts
- Track documentation related to income and expenses
- Track tenant participation funds specifically, if the resident council has other funding



#### Best practices in accounting:

- Use paper checks in order. Write the purpose in the memo area. If a check needs to be voided for some reason, save the voided check and make a note.
- Maintain controls of plastic cards. Some housing authorities issue debit or credit cards to resident councils. Anyone holding the card should understand its proper uses, and statements should be checked to make sure charges are approved.
- The treasurer should create a monthly financial report. This report should include a reconciled bank statement, account balance, and total of funds available.
- Make the current financial record book available for resident review by appointment.
- After 6 months, compare the budget and actuals and plan for the rest of the year.
- Use “cash” basis accounting: record income when it’s received and expenses when the bill is paid (not when the work is done or the bill is received).
- Obtain three competitive quotes or bids when purchasing equipment (such as a tablet or computer) or any purchase over \$300. Choose the lowest price, assuming quality is about equal. Quotes should be saved for the audit.

# Distribution

**The resident council agreement with the housing authority will determine how and when payments are made to, or on behalf of, the resident council.** How these disbursements are made vary greatly among housing authorities and often depend on the capacity of the resident councils. HUD encourages that payments be made on a regular schedule, two or four times a year. This helps the resident council plan for and use the funds.

Depending on the capacity and size of the housing authority and the resident council(s), there are many options for distributing tenant participation funds to resident councils. Some resident councils are large, and have multiple funding sources. They may be able to fully take on the accounting required to track tenant participation funds, have their own bank account, and may be able to receive only one or two large distributions for the entire year.

However, if the resident council is smaller, or has less capacity to manage funding, it may be appropriate for the housing authority to maintain more control. Some housing authorities have the capacity to issue debit cards, which allow them to closely track spending. Some resident councils do not make any purchases themselves, but instead authorize the housing authority to make purchases on their behalf.



***In Charleston-Kanawha, WV,*** the housing authority either provides money for specific expenses or makes the purchase directly for the resident council based on an annual budget. This lowers the accounting burden on the residents and avoids audit-related issues.



***In St Paul, MN,*** the hi-rise senior buildings receive direct deposits from the housing authority and use a bill pay program or checks for some stipends. The resident councils may apply for debit cards that are linked to their bank accounts. At the family sites, property managers keep the cards. A resident council officer can sign out the card for 24 hours, use it to make a purchase, get a receipt, and sign the card back in. The 16 councils get about \$2,000 per year in two distributions. The first comes at the start of their fiscal year in September. Assuming the council has properly tracked all of their expenses, they receive the remainder halfway through the fiscal year.

## Internal Controls

**In addition to strong financial management and following the agreement with the PHA, the following policies are recommended:**

- Ensure (and document) that all expenses are authorized by the resident council (or the Board, if the Board is authorized to make certain expenditures). The Treasurer should retain resident council minutes, especially if they reflect any changes to the budget.
- The Treasurer should create a monthly report which includes all account balances, income received, and expenses paid out since the last report. This report should be provided to the resident council membership at meetings.
- Treasurer books and all related information should remain in the resident council office under lock and all electronic records should be securely protected. Passwords should be shared like physical keys—only with those who need them, usually select Board members.

- Checks must have two signatures (usually the Treasurer and one other officer) and a description in the memo line.
- Officers beyond the Treasurer, particularly the President, should review the records.
- Mistakes should be corrected as swiftly as possible. For example, if a Board member accidentally takes money or a checkbook home, return it to the office immediately. Document the incident. If you need outside help, consult the housing authority or an independent accounting expert.

## Misappropriation of Funds

**If funds are misspent in any way, a remedy should be negotiated between the resident council and the PHA.** The negotiation process and possible remedies should be included in the written agreement between the housing authority and resident council. As possible, both the resident council and the PHA should have the support of a lawyer to negotiate an agreement. Possible remedies include:

- The PHA may withhold funds if it finds that money it previously distributed was spent in a way that violated the agreement.
- The Resident Council may be responsible for returning any funds that were spent in a way that was not consistent with the agreement.

## Tracking and Documentation

**It is critical to clearly document that the resident council approved expenses and where all money comes from and goes.** This information will be checked during an audit. In order to show that the budget or specific expenses were approved by the resident council, you will need to record:

- Meeting minutes, including the proposal and vote for budget approval, budget changes, or expense approval (Treasurer should keep a copy of the minutes)

**For any income that is received, you should record:**

- The source (where it came from), like: tenant participation funds from the housing authority, vending machine revenue, cash from a fundraiser
- The date the funds were received
- The date the funds were deposited
- A copy of the bank deposit receipt
- The specific purpose of the funds (any restrictions related to the funds).  
For example, "\$200 from the housing authority for spring beautification."

**For any expenses, you should record:**

- When the expense was approved
- The date the payment or purchase was made
- What the expense is, including any details that show why it was necessary
- Invoices
- Receipt or signature if the funds were paid to an individual

- Bids received or market analysis showing the expense was reasonable (as appropriate)
- Insurance for events

HUD recommends that the resident council use a form for disbursements (payments) to record all of this information. See the [Budget and Workplan Template for Tenant Participation Funds](#).

## Funds remaining at the end of year

**HUD encourages housing authorities to distribute the entire \$15 per unit to resident councils by the end of the year.** HUD also encourages resident councils to fully spend their tenant participation funds by the end of the year.

At the end of the year, any tenant participation funds in the resident council's accounts may remain for future allowable expenses. The funds are considered to have been spent by the housing authority. However, the housing authority may retain any undisbursed tenant participation funding in the housing authority's possession. Put another way, if the \$15 per unit has not been paid out by the housing authority because the resident council did not have allowable expenses for all of the funds, the housing authority does not have to pay the resident council the balance.

These restrictions do not apply to funding from other sources, which usually can carry over from year-to-year (unless there are other restrictions, like from a grant). Because of this, it may be a good idea for the resident council to reallocate certain eligible expenses toward tenant participation funds at the end of the year in order to fully use all of their tenant participation funds each year.

## Auditing

**The housing authority is permitted to inspect and audit the resident council's financial records related to the agreement.** The audit will look at three main areas

- **Financial statements and documents.** For example:
  - » Do bank statements match the resident council's logs?
  - » If cash was used for purchases, are there receipts and was the change deposited?
- **Internal controls**
  - » Do policies exist, and were they followed?
  - » For example, did two officers sign every check?
- **Compliance with federal laws and the agreement.**
  - » Were expenses necessary for meeting the resident council's mission?
  - » Were three bids obtained for high cost purchases?

**Items that must be provided for an audit include:**

- Checkbook or other register (book or print out) of account balances
- Approved budget and approved budget revisions

- Disbursement (expense) records including when and where it was approved
- Deposit records for all income
- Receipt (or signature if no receipt is available)
- Bank statements
- Meeting minutes
- Cash records with documentation (if there is a cash account)



## Resources

**United States Code of Federal Regulations, Part 964, Section 964.150—Funding tenant participation.**  
The HUD regulations related to tenant participation funds: <https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/CFR-2016-title24-vol4/CFR-2016-title24-vol4-sec964-150>

**United States Code of Federal Regulations, Part 2, Section 200, Subpart E—Cost Principles**  
Regulations about accounting for federal funding, including for tenant participation funds: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CFR-2014-title2-vol1/pdf/CFR-2014-title2-vol1-part200-subpartE.pdf>

**TPA Planning Ideas for Community Health.** New York City Housing Authority.  
<https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/nycha/downloads/pdf/TPA-PLANNING-IDEAS-Health-FINAL-Aug.pdf>

**US Department of Housing and Urban Development.** (2021) Notice PIH 2021-16 (HA) - : Guidance on the use of Tenant Participation Funds. <https://www.hud.gov/sites/dfiles/PIH/documents/PIH2021-16.pdf>