



Guide 1: Organizing and Running Resident Councils



Table of Contents

Organizing and Running Resident Councils	3
Duly Elected Resident Council	3
Forming a Resident Council	4
Duties	5
Role of the Housing Authority with the Resident Council	6
What Can Resident Councils Do	7
Written Documents for the Resident Council	8
Leadership Structure	9
Committees	10
Jurisdiction-Wide Resident Councils	10
Resources	11



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.

Cover photo credit: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

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.

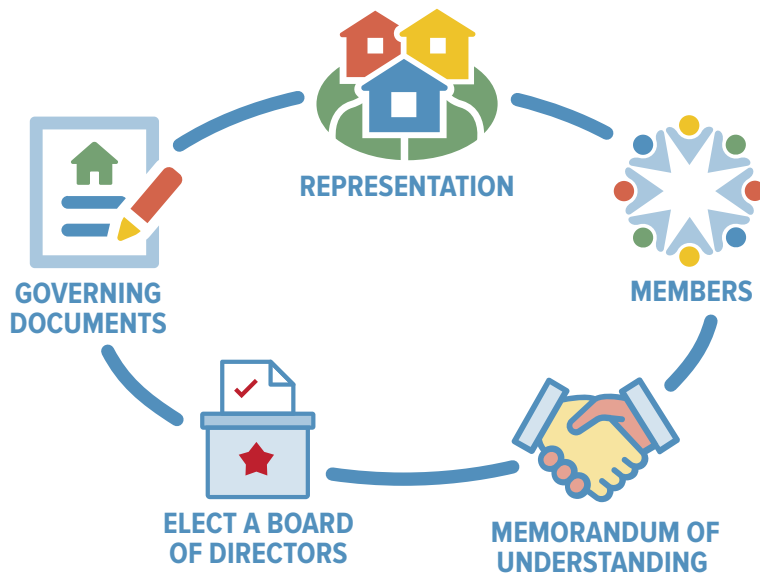
Election of a Board of Directors: A resident council must have at least five elected Board members who are chosen democratically by the members at least once every three years.

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

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

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