



How to Build an Eco-Tenant Union?

Workshop Curriculum

Welcome/Intro

- Welcome everyone to the workshop on building a tenant union!
- This workshop will go over steps to form a tenant union in your building, share an example of tenant organizing and small group discussion.

What are tenant unions and why do we need them?

- A tenant union is exactly what it sounds like. A group of tenants with something in common (the building they live in, the landlord, the neighbourhood, or even the fact that they're all tenants) coming together to increase their power in order to win concessions from the landlord.
- The overarching goal of building tenant unions is to rebalance the power between landlords and tenants
- There are 2 important levels of organizing when we are talking about tenant unions.
- Organizing hyper locally at the building level. Tenants who live in the same building or complex coming together to fight for changes from their landlord.
- Organizing tenant unions and tenants in the city and province and country wide to fight for changes at the overarching policy level
 - We need to do both of these because the issues in all of our individual buildings are systemic. They are happening all over our cities and provinces
 - The policy solutions needed to solve issues in our buildings are determined by government
 - We can only win better policies if we work with other tenants around the city, province and country
 - ACORN is the only organization that helps us fight locally in the building and with other tenants across the province and country at the policy level at the same time.
 - Landlords are ORGANIZED. Landlord associations and lobby groups have long existed and have heavily influenced housing policy everywhere in Canada. To combat this, tenants need to match that level of organization.
 - That starts at the individual building level, but must go further to influence policy



- **Housing justice is climate justice**
 - We won't be able to effectively address the climate crisis without organized tenants
 - Apartment buildings are the 2nd biggest carbon emitters behind cars.
 - Therefore, tenant organizing is essential to address the climate crisis
 - ACORN conducted a Tenant Survey in Alberta about carbon emissions and substandard housing last year in 2022
 - Overarching results
 - Substandard housing, energy poverty and energy inefficiency are **common** and **connected** issues in Calgary's tenant community
 - Heating and cooling:
 - In winter, 43% of respondents rate their heating system as poor to bad, 12% have used their ovens to heat their apartments, 43% have bought space heaters to deal with the cold
 - Of those who reported bad heating, 51.5% have drafty windows; 33% report poor insulation
 - Of the 80% of tenants who reported at least one chronic maintenance issue in their unit 58% also reported having heating problems.
 - Of the 20% of tenants who reported having no chronic repair issues in their unit 0.0% reported having bad heating in their units.
 - **Our survey shows a clear relation between having maintenance issues in your building and having heating issues.**
 - This is all to show that the climate crisis will not be solved from the top-down.
 - Low-and-moderate income people, most of whom are tenants need to be organized and at the centre of the climate justice movement, if we want to save the earth. And in order for this to happen tenants need to be organized.

Tenant Union Example

- **Manor Village Ottawa ACORN**
 - Started in Sept 2020
 - Neighbourhood was facing 2 problems: The 1st was that the city of Ottawa was planning to demolish their neighbourhood to build the next phase of the LRT
 - The 2nd was that a new landlord bought the property and was attempting to renovate all the tenants



- Tenants tackled the LRT situation first because it was more urgent: we did actions in the neighbourhood, at an LRT station, at City Hall, and many more, culminating in an action outside the Mayor's home which finally got us a meeting with the mayor
- The city of Ottawa eventually changed their plan for the LRT to go around the neighbourhood rather than demolish it
- After winning the fight with the City, tenants turned their attention to the landlord, doing actions outside the landlords many offices in Ottawa and in the neighbourhood itself.
- Eventually the remaining tenants turned down the final buyout offer of \$65,000 from the landlord forcing the landlord to allow the tenants to stay in new units at the same rent and number of bedrooms that they originally had
- The Manor Village ACORN tenant union is an example of one of the most successful tenant unions I know of. In the span of 3 years, we beat the City and the Corporate landlord and forced both parties to concede to all the Tenant Unions demands

Steps to form a tenant union

1. Talk to the people you know in the building - even just 3 or 4 tenants - and develop your organizing team. Choose a date and location for your first meeting
2. Develop an outreach strategy to reach people in your building
 - a. Prepare a flyer with the date and time of your first meeting and some of the issues you have noticed in the building and start knocking on doors to inform everybody of the 1st meeting. Leave flyers underneath doors if there is no answer
 - b. Post flyers in common areas of your building and anywhere tenants will see them.
3. Hold your first meeting!
 - a. What is a tenant union and why you believe the building needs one
 - b. Issues brainstorm - come up with a list of the issues tenants want to see addressed
 - c. Show of hands who is in favour of forming a tenant union
 - d. Choose a date/time and location for a monthly tenant union meeting
4. Petition to form a tenant union
 - a. To legitimately form the tenant union, you need to have 50% +1 support in the building
 - b. Have tenants who attended the meeting sign the petition and do the math of how many more signatures you need
 - c. Ask for volunteers to help get the remaining signatures
 - d. Plan a date and time to go door to door to get remaining signatures



- e. The goal is to have 50% +1 signatures by the next meeting

Tactics of Landlords

- **Divide and conquer:** Landlords will always try to deal with tenants individually, claiming privacy reasons. We always recommended interactions with the landlord are done as a group. It's easier to intimidate or influence an individual than a group.
- **Intimidation:** Threats of eviction are most common, lack of repairs and maintenance. Any form of intimidation is illegal and is something that ACORN would want to address if happening
- **Buyouts:** Sometimes landlords will offer individual tenants money to move out. Know that the longer a tenant holds out, the larger buyouts usually become (Manor Village started at \$2000 buyouts per household and ended at \$65,000)

Examples of actions:

- Phone blitz, started during covid
- Demand Letter delivery
- March/tour
- Protest outside targets office/home
- Protest inside targeted location: Ex. City Hall, RTDRS, Landlords office

Breakout Groups

One-Month Plan: Start a tenant union

- Plan your outreach
- Plan your first meeting and what you'll discuss
- Plan your first action
- Make a 1-month timeline with all your events and outreach