

Getting Fellow Tenants Involved

Getting people to spend time at the meetings requires effective outreach techniques. The following are the most common outreach tools used by tenants association to increase participation.

Door-Knocking: Talking to fellow tenants face-to-face and listening to their ideas is the most effective way to get them involved.

Flyers: The most common and easiest way of reaching people in the building. Flyers must be legible and to the point.

Newsletters: A newsletter is a way of making periodical contact between leaders and the tenants. Through this, you can inform tenants about upcoming events/meetings. The most important thing to remember is that your association is going to be viable and successful only to the extent that it achieves the purpose(s) for which it was formed. This means that concrete action must follow every meeting.

Get Things Done

Negotiations with your landlord, court actions and rent strikes are among the possible weapons the organization can use to achieve its goals. And in the end, just as tenant can get more when they're united within the building, they can get more when they unite with other tenants and tenants associations in their neighborhoods and in the City at large.



Connect with Us

WE CAN HELP...

-  Answer Housing Questions,
-  Provide legal assistance and referrals,
-  Help organize residents to fight harassment,
-  Build a tenants association & much more!

Need one-on-one assistance?

Book an appointment now to meet with a housing specialist to discuss housing code violations, lease renewals, succession rights, rent overcharges, J51s, MCIs, and building-wide service complaints.

TENANT CLINIC:

Monday—Thursday 11AM—6PM

LEGAL CLINIC :

Saturday 10AM—5:00PM

HOW TO FORM A TENANT ASSOCIATION



P.A.L.A.N.T.E.

People Against Landlord Abuse & Tenant Exploitation

1411 Amsterdam Avenue
New York, NY 10027

(212) 491 2541

www.palanteharlem.org

Why a Tenant Association?

A tenants association is a union of all, most, or some of the tenants in a building. When tenants work together, they can apply the most pressure to make a landlord provide services, make repairs, and stop harassment - and get the best possible home for the rent they are paying. A strong tenant association can force a landlord to listen; as a group, tenants will have more leverage to negotiate, file complaints with city and state agencies, get help from elected officials, go to court, or – if push comes to shove – go on rent strike. There are no precise rules for starting a tenant association. Nevertheless, based upon the experience of thousands of associations, we can provide guidelines for forming an effective tenant association.

First Steps

If you think that your building needs a tenant association, it is almost certain that other tenants in the building feel the same way. The first step is to find those tenants and talk to them about the need for a meeting to discuss problems and what to do.

The purpose of this first meeting is to form a core group, or steering committee, for the new association. This group should decide on a date and time for the first meeting with all the tenants of the building, choose the person or persons who will run the general meeting, and agree on a clear, written agenda.

At this meeting, try to focus on the common problems of the building, but at the same time let people know that the association's aim is to solve both general and individual problems. The next step is to advertise the meeting as much as possible among all the tenants. Some methods for getting information out includes posters, flyers, and most importantly, talking to people face-to-face.

Running a Good Meeting

Running an effective meeting is crucial, both for the purpose of getting things done and to build confidence among the tenants. Understandably, few tenants will continue to participate if the meetings are unproductive. An effective meeting is one that results in an agreement as to what needs to be done, who is going to do it and just as important – when it should be done. Some tips on running an effective tenants meeting are as follows:

- You should have a clear, written agenda, prepared before the meeting by the steering committee. The agenda for an early tenant meeting should usually focus on specific building problems and possible ways to solve them.
- Allow everybody to speak, but always try to go back to the agenda. An agenda for a first building-wide meeting should usually include the following:
 - introduction: this should include a report on why the meeting was called and why there is a need to form a tenant association.
 - discussion of the main problems of the building and updates on any recent developments.
 - proposals for what to do about the problems.
 - who's going to do what? It is important to share responsibility. Tenant commitment will be proportional to the extent that they participate in the decision making process. Everybody should know what is going to be done and who is going to do it.

Formalizing the Organization

A formal structure is not required for a tenant organization to function effectively. It is usually better to wait until after the first work plan has been implemented and evaluated, so tenants have the chance to get to know each other well enough to determine who has leadership skills.

In most tenant associations, the officers who form the new steering committee consist of a president, vice-president, secretary and treasurer, plus floor captains.

President: Calls chair meetings and performs functions that are given to him/her at meetings.

Vice-president: Assists/sometimes substitutes the president.

Secretary: Takes minutes at meetings; keeps the associations files and is responsible for correspondence.

Treasurer: Collects dues (if there are any), opens bank accounts (if necessary), keeps track and reports on finances.

Floor Captains: Work on their floors distributing flyers, talking to tenants, knocking on doors, etc.

Elections

The acting steering committee should call a general meeting, announcing that the purpose is to formalize the structure by means of a vote by the majority of the tenants. Every tenant in the building should have the right to participate in the elections. The election of officers can be done by nominating slates or on an individual basis, filling one position at a time.

By-Laws

If necessary, the organization can draw up by-laws, a set of rules and procedure on how the association and its elected officers operate in order to regulate the function of the organization. By-laws should be as simple as possible and PA'LANTE can help you draft it.