



ST. LOUIS TENANTS ORGANIZING TOOLKIT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

[YOUR RIGHTS AND LEGAL RESOURCES](#)

[LANDLORD RESEARCH](#)

[TENANT UNIONS](#)

[WHAT ARE TENANT UNIONS?](#)

[ORGANIZING A TENANT UNION DURING COVID](#)

[PLATFORMS TO ORGANIZE MEETINGS](#)

[TENANT UNION MEETINGS](#)

[ONE-ON-ONES](#)

[TARGET\(S\) AND POWER ANALYSIS](#)

[TACTICS](#)

[RENT STRIKES](#)

[PRESS AND SOCIAL MEDIA](#)

[LANDLORD RESEARCH WORKSHEET](#)

[TEMPLATE: INDIVIDUAL LETTER TO LANDLORD](#)

[TEMPLATE: LETTER TO NEIGHBORS](#)

[TEMPLATE: TENANT UNION MEETING AGENDA](#)

[TEMPLATE: TENANT UNION LETTER TO LANDLORD](#)

[TEMPLATE: PRESS ADVISORY](#)

[TEMPLATE: PRESS RELEASE](#)

[CASE STUDY: TENANT UNION CAMPAIGN](#)

YOUR RIGHTS AND LEGAL RESOURCES

As a renter in Missouri you have rights: a right to a safe, sanitary, and livable home; a right to not have your utilities shut-off by the landlord; a right to privacy and respect; and a right to not have your landlord retaliate against you for reporting housing code violations. **You also have a right to ORGANIZE.**

Basic rights for Missouri tenants:

- Living conditions. Your landlord must provide safe, sanitary and livable housing conditions. (No mice or insect infestation, working plumbing, heat, ventilation, etc.)
- No retaliation. Your landlord may not retaliate against you for reporting housing code violations.
- No self help eviction. Your landlord may not force you or your things out of your home without a court order.
- Utility shut-off. Your landlord may not disconnect your utilities under any circumstance.
- Deposit. Your landlord may not charge you more than the equivalent of two months rent for your security deposit. The landlord must return your security deposit within 30 days from the date you move out along with an explanation for any deductions for repairs.
- Privacy and respect. Your landlord may not enter your residence without your permission or reasonable advance notice.
- Discrimination. A landlord may not deny you housing or treat you differently from other tenants because of your race, color, national origin, sex, disability, religion or family status. Sexual harassment is also prohibited.
- Late Fees. Your landlord may only charge you for fees (including late fees) that are provided for in your lease.
- Deceptive behavior. Your landlord may not misrepresent the condition of the home to get you to move in or make other false statements to you.
- Landlord sells the property. If your landlord sells the building to another, the new owner must provide you with notice, contact information and a copy of the deed before collecting rent.

LANDLORD RESEARCH

Before you start organizing your neighbors, or as you get started, you should research your landlord. Landlords are very good at hiding behind various corporate names and shadow companies. Tenants often mistake their property *managers* for property *owners*, when a lot of landlords simply contract with local companies to run the day-to-day operations while they're based in, say, California. This research can be really complicated, but there are a few tools that can help you zero in on who *actually* owns your property, where they're based, and how to hold them accountable.

- **Online reviews, Facebook, LinkedIn, News Articles:** This is a basic but helpful first step. Google your landlord and/or the property management company. Read google, yelp, and other reviews to figure out what other tenants have to say about them. This can also help you identify where else they own property, both in the city and around the country. Try looking up the property management company, landlord, and other related parties on facebook (business and personal pages) and LinkedIn. Search for news articles they've been featured in.
- **Websites:** Look up the landlord/management company websites. Sometimes they'll have contact info, or all their other properties listed right there.
- **Property manager:** If you live in a property that doesn't seem to care about the tenants, there's a good chance the company is not good to the property managers, either. *Sometimes* the property managers can be a good source of information about the owner, their other properties, etc. Be cautious about this approach.
- **[City of St. Louis Parcel Viewer:](#)** This is a St. Louis resource to access the name of your landlord and/or the limited liability company (LLC) that they use to do business.
 - Look up your address to find the name of your landlord or the LLC (property owner)
 - Search the LLC or landlord name for addresses of their other properties
- **[Vacant Property Explorer:](#)** A tool largely used to identify vacant properties, it can also be used to identify multiple properties owned under a single LLC.
- **[Case.net:](#)** This is the Missouri courts website. You can search for active or closed evictions or suits filed under the landlord or LLC name. This can give you information about eviction patterns, and you sometimes find info about past issues (i.e. if the landlord faced foreclosure or been sued by a tenant). You should be aware that just because your landlord doesn't come up (or doesn't come up much), it doesn't mean they don't evict. Many landlords use informal eviction methods, outside of the court. (That's illegal.)
- **[Missouri Secretary of State:](#)** You can look up business filings for a landlord or LLC to find ownership records and certain contracts.
 - Go to "Business Services" (top of page) > Business Search
 - Pull up LLC Records, including contacts and records of ownership

See appendix for a landlord research worksheet that can help you identify key questions to answer about the property owner/property.

TENANT UNIONS

WHAT ARE TENANT UNIONS?

Tenant unions are building, neighborhood, or city-based organizations made up of, and led by, tenants to fight for our collective interests and rights. Building-based tenants unions are generally made up of tenants who live in the same building and/or have the same landlord. Neighborhood and city-based tenant unions are networks of tenants who often have similar issues and stand in solidarity with each other, but may live in different buildings or have different landlords.

Why organize a tenant union? We're stronger together than we are as individuals. A well-organized tenant union can win demands that no individual tenant could win. Collective power is all we have to combat money and influence.

You have a right to organize. Landlords cannot take any negative action based solely on a tenants' participation or membership in a tenant union or similar organization.

ORGANIZING A TENANT UNION DURING COVID

Whether we are experiencing a public health crisis or not, the first step of tenant organizing is talking to your neighbors. If you're feeling unstable or unsafe in your home, or if you just want some connection to your neighbors, there are probably plenty of others right there with you.

Where we might normally knock doors, have in-person one-on-ones, and convene tenant meetings in someone's unit, that's not an option right now. But there are plenty of ways to do it, and many tenants across the country have already successfully organized in the last few weeks.

Steps to organize a tenant union, COVID style:

1. **Relationship Map:** Who do you know? Who do you see a lot? Who do people go to for help? Buildings and neighborhoods have natural leaders and people who are hubs, take note of who those are.
2. **Canvass:** Distribute letters to the other tenants in your building, in other properties owned by the landlord, send messages on social media, get people's contact information. Stay at least 6ft away from others, wear mask/gloves, sanitize/wash hands right before leaving and right after re-entering your space. Follow up with people who reached out to you based on the letter. Invite them to do a one on one meeting with you and/or to attend a tenant meeting, provide date/time, and tell them to bring someone else (their roommate, someone else from the building).
3. **One on ones:** Deepen relationships with individuals, identify their self interest (motivations) in organizing with you and other tenants. Have people tell you others they know in the building and give you their contact info.
4. **Tenant meeting:** Meet with the collective to build relationships, craft a set of demands, determine the target (and what you know/don't know about them), establish commitment to one another (i.e. form a formal tenant union and write up community agreements).
5. **List management:** Make a list of people, unit/building numbers, contact info. Add to it as your ranks grow. Make notes about how down they seemed when you talked to them/when they contacted you. Note down people's issues and motivations.
6. **Action:** Take action together, using tactics that will help you win your demands.

See appendix for template letter to tenants, tenant meeting agenda, letter to landlord, and press advisory/release.

PLATFORMS TO ORGANIZE MEETINGS

There are a lot of useful tools for organizing and building deep relationships with your neighbors, even during an era of social distancing. With all of these tools, we recommend exercising caution about who gets the link/number to join the meeting. You want to monitor who's there, especially as you start strategizing.

- **Zoom:** This is a video conferencing service that requires you to either download their desktop or phone app. The free version can host up to 100 participants for 40 mins. You can have unlimited one on one meetings.
- **Google hangouts:** Another free video conferencing service. You can use this if you have a google account. Video calls can hold up to 10 people, and phone calls can hold up to 150.
- **Conference calls:** Free conference calls that can accommodate 1000 people. Not as good as video, but it can work as long as you've got a tight agenda and you're building one on one relationships as well.
- **FaceTime:** If you use an iPhone or Mac, this is a good video option. Its use is limited, though, because you can't include people who don't have those devices. FaceTime could work well for one on one meetings with others who have them.
- **Closed Facebook groups:** You can make the group private and monitor who participates. This can be a great way to get connected and get to know each other. It's like hanging out in the lobby... without the lobby!

TENANT UNION MEETINGS

Tenant meetings are a critical part of building collective power. This is where the group commits to act as a collective (i.e. as a tenant union), develops demands, strategizes about tactics and escalation, etc. The tenant union meeting space is sacred. It should be a place of community, radical honesty, and power.

- **Agenda and timeliness:** We've all been a part of terrible meetings, or meetings that feel like a waste of time. If you run a bad tenant meeting, people won't come back. Every meeting should have a clear purpose, desired outcomes, and agenda. Timeliness is an important way to honor your neighbors' time.
- **Reminders:** Remind tenants about the meeting. Then remind them again. Maybe one more time. It may feel like you're bugging people but this is important. This is your home.
- **Roles:** If you try to do everything yourself, people will not be invested in the campaign. Delegating tasks and letting people take ownership of tasks is key to organizing, even if you think you would do it better or you like your idea more.
- **Mapping:** Literally draw a map of the property/physical space in which you are organizing. Who do you still need to talk to? Who already knows each other? How are people already organized? Include each tenants' own social networks, churches, workplaces, and other communities.
- **Decision making:** When someone's input was included during the planning stages of an action they are more likely to stay engaged, participate and even help lead. Don't expect to plan an action and then have everyone "just show up."
- **Follow up:** 90% of an organizer's job is follow up. Reach out and thank folks for coming to the meeting, ask for their thoughts. Send notes to people who weren't able to make it but expressed interest. Hold people accountable to their commitments.

See appendix for a sample tenant union meeting agenda.

ONE-ON-ONES

One-on-ones are the most important tool for organizers. There is no collective power without deep relationships. A good rule of thumb: start small and build at the speed of trust. The purpose of a one-on-one is to have a natural, intentional, but uncommon conversation with someone you to build a relationship with, about their values, vision, life, and motivations.

Components of one-on-one organizing conversations:

- **Intro:** Introduce yourself and say why you reached out.
- **Life and motivations:** Ask the person you're talking to about themselves, where they come from, what their life has been like, what they do for work, what motivates them. This should not be like an interview or a fact-finding mission, this should be an authentic effort to get to know them as a person. It helps if you share and be personal, this will make people feel more comfortable sharing with you. LISTEN.
- **Issues:** Ask the person you're talking to about their concerns, the issues they have in the apartment/building/with the landlord. Go deeper and ask what impact those issues have on their mind, body, relationships. Ask the person what they would change about their living situation if they could.
- **Agitation:** Ask the person you're talking to whether they think they deserve better. Validate that you believe that you both do deserve better. This is about respect and dignity. Who is responsible and who has the power to change this? In these COVID times, it's really important to build a collective understanding that our inability to pay rent is NOT our fault, and it's nothing to be ashamed about. We have no control over layoffs, illness, school closures, etc. We DO have control over what we do to take care of our neighbors.
- **Vision:** Ask the person you're talking to to imagine what it would look like if you WON. Walk them through what it would take to win. What does it look like if they take action alone? What does it look like if we all take action together? We can get things done together that we would never be able to get done alone. Provide an example: If I emailed the landlord with my complaint about [issue], I probably wouldn't get a response at all. But if we delivered a letter with signatures from everyone in the building, it'd be a different story.
- **Ask:** Ask the person you're talking to if they will stand by and allow the issues they've identified to continue, or if they're ready to come together with other tenants and build power to take care of each other. (Typically, we don't recommend that a first conversation includes agitation or an ask BUT these are unique times, and you may need to move a little faster than normal.)
- **Inoculation:** Prepare for what to expect when the landlord finds out we're organizing. Spoiler: they won't like it. The question is, *Why won't they like it?* Because they know when tenants come together they can win big and that could impact landlord profits. When these things happen, tenants will be prepared and less likely to fall for it. The two most common approaches LL's take to try to break up organizing:
 - Divide and conquer: Acts surprised that there is an issue at all, offers special treatment to INDIVIDUALS who give info about organizing or choose to withdraw from tenant organization, tries to negotiate with tenants individually instead of as a collective, makes small concessions or improvements. Divide and conquer.
 - Intimidation: Threatens to withhold maintenance repairs, threatens to cut utilities, not renew lease or evict/sue. Retaliation against organizing or complaints is illegal, but that doesn't stop landlords from doing it.
- **Follow up:** Ask the person who else they know in the building/renting from the landlord. Will they connect you to them? Will they join a tenant meeting on [date/time] with other tenants to discuss these issues as a group?

Read this [handout](#) for more info and tools on one on ones.

DISCLAIMER: THE FOREST PARK SOUTHEAST NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION DOES NOT OFFER LEGAL ADVICE.
PLEASE CONSULT A LAWYER WITH LEGAL QUESTIONS. CALL THE LEGAL SERVICES OF EASTERN MISSOURI AT (314) 534-4200 OR APPLY AT
WWW.LSEM.ORG/GET-HELP-NOW FOR HELP

DEMANDS

What *exactly* do you want? Demands should be specific (what do you want), name a target (who can do it), be time-bound (when does it need to happen), and shared among the group (we all want this).

A winnable demand might be a rent suspension for three months, no late fees, and no evictions. Rent obviously is a huge concern, but other demands too. Demands could include things like free washing (especially during pandemic times), maintenance that hasn't happened, notice before entry into units, etc.

TARGET(S) AND POWER ANALYSIS

Who has the power to fix the problem? This is your target. What does your target want? What is your target afraid of? How can you bring what they are afraid of closer to them? And move what they want further away? You'll discover a lot of this through landlord research. Some will be speculation, but in general you should do a power analysis on your target using any/all facts you can gather.

What type of pressure will work against the target? Who/what influences them? For example, social pressure could be hurting personal relationships in the community. Political pressure would be leveraging media and elected officials to influence a target. Financial pressure would be hurting their profits. You might find out your landlord is religious and conclude that pressure from a faith leader (or, better yet, *their* faith leader) would help move them.

TACTICS

How do you turn up the heat on your target to get a response and to see your demands met? You use a set of tactics, informed by what you know will move the target.

In any strategic campaign, it's critical to have an escalation plan. What will you do if the landlord doesn't respond to your letter? What will you do if they respond but they try to retaliate against you for organizing? Tenants who are hesitant about an action that is "too radical" may be radicalized when the group decides to settle on a less scary step first, and find it doesn't meet their needs. Escalating as a collective is key.

Key considerations:

- Will the tactic move the target to satisfy our demands?
- Is it visible: to your landlord, or to people who your landlord cares about?
- Are enough people ready to do it? How many?
- Will this unify people? Will it feel powerful?
- How will management react? How can we prepare for possible retaliation?

Tactics can include: letters to the landlord, press briefings, getting your Alderperson to contact owner/manager, signs in windows, social media pressure, rent strikes, etc. etc.

Tactics could escalate like this: Meet as a small group. Define demands, i.e. 3 month rent suspension. Gather signatures on a demand letter/email. Deliver a letter to the landlord's doorstep/email. Set up a facebook page for your tenant union. Name/shame the landlord on social media. Circulate an online petition. Get a Alderperson or other validator to stand in solidarity, write their own letter. Mass call-in to the landlord's office / cell. Send complaint letters to the charities the landlord works with and to their church. Contact the media. Plan a direct action. Circle landlord's office/house in cars, honking. Still no response? Consider a rent strike or some other collective escalation.

RENT STRIKES

Definition: Rent strikes are highly organized escalation tactics, involving mass withholding of rent, that you take with your neighbors and roommates when a landlord doesn't meet your demands. Rent strikes are serious and need to be executed strategically to be effective. Rent strikes are a tactic, not a demand. The most successful rent strikes are part of a broader strategic campaign that includes rallies, pickets, media, petitions, rent reductions, and other tactics to win your goals from a specific target.

Rent strike vs. non-payment: A rent strike means collectively withholding rent *even when people have the means to in order to meet a demand*. Non-payment of rent means... you have no income, and thus cannot pay rent. A rent strike is a demonstration of collective power, while mass non-payment of rent is collective desperation. If your goal is a "rent strike" but you have no income to begin with, then you have no financial pressure to get your landlord to do anything. Rent strikes can be powerful. Hitting a landlord's pockets obviously hurts. For a situation such as lack of repairs being done or other collective complaints, a rent strike is a strong tool when all else fails. But the rent strike is the means to the end, not the end itself. Think about what your demands are, and what tactics can best get you there.

Relationships and risk: If people are serious about organizing a rent strike, we gotta be serious about the risk, the deep organizing, relationships and the trust it's going to take to make it successful. Rent strikes sometimes last years, and sometimes they fail. That could end up hurting people, especially the most vulnerable people. That being said, if the union makes a decision to escalate to a rent strike, then don't do it half-heartedly. In order to take care of ourselves and our fellow neighbors, we must be serious about our tenant organization's capacity to successfully strike.

Before escalating to a rent strike, have you...?

- Built relationships with your neighbors and/or formed a tenant union?
- Attempted collective negotiation with your landlord?
- Attempted a one-on-one with every tenant under the landlord?
- If you live in a large building, then just the tenants in building are enough
- If you live in a small property, then you will need to reach out to the landlord's other properties
- If you live in a landlord's only property, then unfortunately it is extremely unlikely a rent strike will work and negotiation is the best bet
- Presented clear, collective demands to your landlord that haven't been met yet?
- Gotten commitments to strike from a supermajority (i.e. >75%) of tenants under the landlord?
- Organized a collective backup plan if the rent strike fails?

Legal support: We recommend talking to a lawyer so tenants can best coordinate with them on strategy, consolidate all of the individual cases so that they are heard on the same day in court, and tenants can build a relationship with attorneys. Call the Legal Services of Eastern Missouri at (314) 534-4200 or apply at lsem.org/get-help-now for help.

Public escalation: Rent strikes should be public to assert as much pressure as you can and to make your demands clear. You can send a demand letter to your landlord, outlining your demands and threatening that a rent strike will begin if your demands aren't met by a particular date, and on that date, you can send an announcement letter putting them on notice that you're officially on rent strike. You can also announce your rent strike to the media.

PRESS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Press and social media are very important tools in any escalation strategy. When used strategically, press/social media can help get a response from a landlord and/or apply public pressure on them to meet the tenant union's demands.

Newsworthiness: Before contacting traditional media, you should think about whether what you are planning to send is "newsworthy." That basically means: Do you have a particularly bad/otherwise unique story to tell? Is something you're doing of significance to the rest of the city? Is your target relevant in some way (i.e. is your landlord a known figure, a major company, or something else)? Is the story right for a particular outlet/reporter (i.e. KSDK looking for stories on rent strikes)? Are you ready for the backlash from your target that comes with going public?

Press contacts: Reporters are really easy to find on the internet. You should organize a press list of names, contact info, and social media accounts of reporters who you think might tell your story. You can use the following:

NAME	OUTLET	EMAIL	PHONE	TWITTER
Reporter 1	KSDK	reporter1@ksdk.com	###-###-####	@reporter1
Reporter 2	KMOV	reporter2@kmov.com	###-###-####	@reporter2

Press advisory and release: Sending a press advisory is the traditional way of reaching out to press to alert them of something coming up. A press release is typically sent after something happens, giving a summary and statement about what occurred. You don't have to do it this way. Twitter and individual emails are also good ways of pitching reporters directly. [See appendix for template press advisory and release.](#)

Spokespeople: When you invite press to something, or send something to reporters, you should always be ready for someone to represent the tenant union as a spokesperson. This person should be well prepared to talk about the group, how you formed, and what you want. Spokespeople should (ideally) be willing to share their full names and contact info. If you want to, you can always talk to reporters "off the record" or "on background," meaning you won't be named or quoted as the source. You can ask that your name is changed for the story, if you feel it's necessary. And you NEVER have to answer a question that makes you uncomfortable.

Social media: Facebook, instagram, and twitter are particularly useful for organizing. You can find other tenants this way, and you can also escalate against your landlord. FPSE Neighborhood Association may post calls to action on our Facebook page, citing a big issue and listing landlord/elected official contact info + a script for folks to use. Your union can do this to drive calls/messages into your landlord's number.

LANDLORD RESEARCH WORKSHEET

PROPERTY OWNER	PROPERTY	OTHER
Who is the property owner?	How many units are there?	What Ward is it in?
What type of property owner is it? (Small local, out of state, corporate, public housing, etc.)	What type of property is it? (Single family, multi-family, townhomes, high rise, multiple building complex)	Could we possibly target a "decision-maker" who is not the property owner? ie. the city, state, health agency, non-profit or HUD
Does the property owner have everyday control over the property or have they hired a management company?	Are tenants paying market-rate, income based or receiving housing vouchers?	What is the surrounding neighborhood like? Mostly renters or homeowners? Is the area gentrifying?
Are there any court filings we can access involving the owner?	Has the property received any kind of public funding? (developer tax incentives, HUD, federal mortgage lenders)	Is there mention of the property/owner in any news stories?
How many evictions do they process a year? How much are they evicting people for (\$50, \$1000)?	What are the documented issues? What do their online reviews tell us?	Who owns the properties near this target?
Does the property owner belong to any property owner associations?	Is there a high turnover for tenants or do people tend to stay for a long time? Why?	How could unionizing this property help build tenant power across the City?
Is the property owner someone with a lot of power or influence? How do we know?	Who are the tenants? Demographics like age, race, single/married, children or no children, economics, students, etc.	
Would we need to organize more than one property to force the property owner to change?	Are the other units accessible to the organizer? (Are buildings locked? Separated in some way?)	

TEMPLATE: INDIVIDUAL LETTER TO LANDLORD

[DATE]

[LANDLORD/PROPERTY MANAGEMENT COMPANY]

[STREET]

[CITY, STATE, ZIP]

SUBJECT LINE: COVID-19 and Rental Payments at [ADDRESS/APT #]

Dear [LANDLORD/PROPERTY MANAGER],

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to make you aware of how the COVID-19 crisis is affecting me in the hope that we can come to an agreement.

[SELECT ONE OR MORE]

_____my employment was terminated on _____.

_____I was temporarily laid off on _____.

_____My hours were cut from _____ per week to _____ per week.

_____I had to stop working because my children's school closed.

_____I had to stop working for _____ days because I was quarantined.

_____I had to stop working for _____ days to care for an ill family member.

_____ Other:

Because of the above, I am not able to pay:

[SELECT ONE]

_____any rent at this time.

_____full rent at this time but I will be able to pay _____ by _____.

As you know, this crisis is far outside our control and millions of Americans are in the same situation as me. I will keep you abreast of my situation as the crisis unfolds. In the meantime, I ask you to consider forgiving rental payments to the extent possible and working with me on payment plans for what money, if any, you are still collecting once the crisis recedes.

Please call me if you would like to discuss the situation further.

[NAME]

[PHONE NUMBER]

Please note that negotiating an individual deal may compromise the collective organizing of a tenant union. If you are part of a tenant union, you should follow guidance set by the group about landlord communications and, at a minimum, alert your fellow union members before you communicate with the landlord individually. Please consult a lawyer with legal questions. call the legal services of eastern missouri at (314) 534-4200 or apply at www.lsem.org/get-help-now for help.

TEMPLATE: LETTER TO NEIGHBORS

Hi [THEIR NAME or TENANTS OF UNIT #]!

First off, I am not sick with the virus. This paper was only handled with gloves from my door to your door. It has not made contact with anyone or anything. I hope this is all right.

This is [YOUR NAME] from [UNIT #]. Just wanted to check in as the pandemic continues to escalate. How are you doing? You are welcome to call/text/email if you need help. If you need anything, I can support you by [OFFER OF AID IF YOU ARE ABLE- HELPS TO BUILD TRUST].

If you are scared, isolated, and facing a great deal of uncertainty in your future, I want you to know that you are not alone. I'm feeling it too. And that's why we need each other now more than ever.

I am proposing that we meet as a building via [PLATFORM OF YOUR CHOOSING] to talk about our mutual needs, conditions in the building, and how we can support one another. I also wanted to see who else was worried about rent and bills and whether anyone has lost stability with their income because of the pandemic. [YOUR STORY IF YOU ARE IMPACTED BY JOB LOSS OR SICKNESS OR SOMETHING- AGAIN, HELPS WITH TRUST].

My number is [YOUR NUMBER] - give me a text or call when you can. I'd love to talk to you soon.

[YOUR NAME]

[YOUR NUMBER]

[YOUR EMAIL]

TEMPLATE: TENANT UNION MEETING AGENDA

PURPOSE: To get to know one another, discuss our housing, and figure out how to support one another moving forward.

OUTCOMES: We have a plan to organize and get our landlord to meet our needs in the building.

AGENDA:

- **Intros (15):** How are you doing? What support do you need? How long has everyone lived here? How have you been impacted by COVID-19? (You should model vulnerability and active listening.)
- **Demands (15):** What do we want? How could things be better? What would satisfy our needs as tenants? Can someone write up a demands letter?
- **Target (15):** Who can satisfy our demands? What do we know about our target? What don't we know? Which tactics will move our target? Who can do research?
- **Agreements and next steps (10):** Do we want to form a tenant union? If so, what are our agreements about how we will function? Who's responsible for what? When's the next meeting?
- **Evaluation (5):** One feeling word from everyone on the meeting. Any tensions? (Give space for people to name if they are anxious/scared. No need to resolve tensions- just hear them.)
Political lesson (Someone should share a quote or reflection that they have related to the meeting.)

TEMPLATE: TENANT UNION LETTER TO LANDLORD

To the owners and management of [PROPERTY ADDRESS OR COMPANY NAME]:

We the residents of [PROPERTY ADDRESS(ES)] declare that housing is a human right and our right to live on the premises for the duration of the COVID-19 crisis.

Here are the conditions we're facing:

- Many of our neighbors have been laid off or are unable to work since March 13, 2020;
- Many of our neighbors have been ordered by the Governor to stay at home regardless of ability to work or pay rent;
- Unemployment claims at unprecedented levels have overwhelmed the State's Department of Labor;
- The COVID-19 crisis in Missouri is certain to continue throughout the month of May at minimum, according to statements by health experts and the President;
- Eviction proceedings have been suspended in [COUNTY];
- The relief provided by the federal CARES Act is insufficient to cover the housing and healthcare expenses of most individuals and families, and won't come in time for us to get real relief;
- [OTHER ISSUES SPECIFIC TO THE BUILDING/TENANTS]

In this context, we demand that [LANDLORD/COMPANY]:

[PICK ALL THAT APPLY]

- Recognize our organizing committee;
- Suspend rent for all residents for the duration of the crisis;
- Forgive, cancel and return all late fees incurred in the month of March 2020 and thereafter for the duration of the crisis;
- Agree not to retaliate against residents unable to pay due to unemployment or illness;
- Freeze rent increases indefinitely;
- Make laundry in our building free for the duration of the pandemic;
- Repair [ISSUE] immediately;
- [OTHER TENANT UNION DEMAND]

We are [WORKERS, STUDENTS, ETC.] who depend upon employment to pay for our leases. Some of our neighbors work on the front lines of the pandemic without adequate protection. Many others have been ordered to stay home indefinitely for the public welfare. In these extraordinary times, a significant number of households have stated they will not certainly meet their rent obligations without extraordinary intervention. In solidarity this letter is endorsed by us, the undersigned:

[AS MANY NEIGHBORS SHOULD SIGN AS POSSIBLE, PRINT NAME, WRITE APARTMENT #]

Hot tip: Send this and all communication to the landlord from a tenant union email account so they don't single out the organizers and retaliate against them.

TEMPLATE: PRESS ADVISORY

Send this to press contacts at least 24 hours before taking an action.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[DATE]

For more information contact: [TENANT UNION CONTACT]

[HEADLINE i.e. FAKE APARTMENTS TENANT UNION DEMANDS RENT SUSPENSION]

ST. LOUIS, MO— [1-2 SHORT PARAGRAPHS WITH CONTEXT ON THE DEMANDS/ESCALATION]

The union is demanding that [LANDLORD/COMPANY] take the following actions:
[DEMANDS]

WHAT: [TYPE OF ACTION i.e. Press briefing on [ISSUE/DEMANDS] or Rent strike launch at [PROPERTY]]

WHO: [TENANT UNION and NAMES OF ANY SPEAKERS/GUESTS]

WHEN: [DATE AND TIME]

WHERE: [LOCATION i.e. Zoom link or building address]

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[DESCRIPTION OF THE FAKE APARTMENTS TENANT UNION i.e. The Fake Apartments Tenants Union formed in April 2020 with the goal of protecting tenants across St. Louis City-area Fake Apartments Properties from exploitation during the COVID-19 pandemic. The union consists of 133 tenants (to date). We are building long-term power with our neighbors and across the state.]

TEMPLATE: PRESS RELEASE

Send this to press contacts immediately after taking an action.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[DATE]

For more information contact: [TENANT UNION CONTACT]

[HEADLINE i.e. FAKE APARTMENTS TENANT UNION DEMANDED RENT SUSPENSION, RALLIED OUTSIDE OWNER'S HOME]

ST. LOUIS, MO— [1-2 SHORT PARAGRAPHS WITH CONTEXT ON THE DEMANDS/ESCALATION AND THE ACTION THAT WAS TAKEN]

The union is demanding that [LANDLORD/COMPANY] take the following actions:
[DEMANDS]

[QUOTES FROM TENANTS (can be anonymous) AND/OR STATEMENT FROM TENANT UNION]

###

[DESCRIPTION OF THE FAKE APARTMENTS TENANT UNION i.e. The Fake Apartments Tenants Union formed in April 2020 with the goal of protecting tenants across St. Louis City-area Fake Apartments Properties from exploitation during the COVID-19 pandemic. The union consists of 133 tenants (to date). We are building long-term power with our neighbors and across the state.]

CASE STUDY: TENANT UNION CAMPAIGN

Background: TEH Realty is a notorious out-of-country slumlord who leverages federal money to buy run down properties and rent them out to tenants who have no other options. TEH owned dozens of properties throughout the Midwest, all of which were consumed with issues ranging from employees not getting paid for weeks at a time, to tenants living without working toilets and heat for months. This was TEH's business model; they bought cheap properties, ignored maintenance requests, profited off of desperate people, and evicted tenants who refused to pay rent in protest. Rinse and repeat.

September 2019

- Fannie Mae files a foreclosure against TEH Realty at Crestwood Apartments in Kansas City, Kansas citing parking lot and asphalt safety violations. KMBC's Matt Flener reports on the foreclosure, interviewing Crestwood tenants who have been living in unsafe conditions for months and who are worried about what the pending foreclosure means for them.
- KC Tenants, who had been following TEH for over a year, canvasses Crestwood Apartments and meets dozens of tenants who are pissed, many of whom have stopped paying rent in protest of the conditions. KC Tenants organizers and leaders do dozens of one-on-one conversations with tenants. Many are just fed up and want to leave but there are also many who have lived at Crestwood for years, whose children grew up there and who remember when Crestwood was a good place to live, before TEH took over.

October 2019

- Crestwood tenants meet as a group for the first time and decide they want to form a tenant union to address the issues they're facing under TEH and to have collective protection facing the looming foreclosure. As they continue meeting one another, it becomes clear that many of them are facing the same issues: roaches, mold, appliances that don't work, security, HVAC systems that don't work, constant flooding. Many have also stopped paying rent by now. The tenant union comes up with a list of demands for TEH Realty and the tenants go door-to-door, recruiting almost every tenant in the property to sign on. Management knows something is up and starts asking tenants about the meetings but nobody gives in to the intimidation.
- On October 30th, Crestwood Tenants Union, an affiliate of KC Tenants, executes their first direct action, presenting the [demands](#) to the on-site property managers. Tenants tape the demands all over the front of the office building, with dozens of maintenance requests, and the deadline by which the Tenant Union expects a response: Nov. 6. They also send the signed demands to TEH's corporate office and to TEH's attorney. The deadline rolls around without any response.

November 2019

- Fannie Mae moves forward with the [foreclosure](#) and asks the Judge to appoint a Receiver-- a person or company to take possession of the property to collect rent, care for, and maintain the property. This is a scary thing. This temporary Receiver could be better or just as bad as TEH, but who knows? Crestwood tenants find themselves at the mercy of the court, unless they organize. In response, CTU works with attorneys from Heartland Center for Jobs and Freedom and Bell Law to file a Motion to Intervene which would make the tenant union a party to the foreclosure case, with equal status as TEH and Fannie Mae.

CASE STUDY: TENANT UNION CAMPAIGN (CONTINUED)

December 2019

- At the receivership [hearing](#) on December 13, Crestwood tenants show up en masse. Wearing red shirts that say, "Crestwood Tenants Union," they are joined by KC Tenants yellow shirts and fill every seat of the courtroom. TEH doesn't even show up. The Judge appoints a corporation called Trigild to be the receiver of Crestwood Apartments and listens to and addresses the tenants, who are [rightfully angry](#). Trigild could just be another slumlord. The Judge asks for regular reports from the CTU's attorney regarding repairs and conditions of the property under the new Receiver.
- A week later, Trigild takes control of the property and starts making some repairs, but not all. No one is paying rent but there is so much chaos that no one is being evicted. Tenants are aware of the risk they are taking together by not paying rent but they also know now that they are [stronger together](#). This new corporation can't evict them all.
- Two weeks later, TEH throws CTU a curveball. They file a motion to Approve the Sale of Crestwood Apts. Apparently they have found a Buyer that would be able to pay off their debt to Fannie Mae and still have enough money to fix up Crestwood Apt. The catch is: this Buyer is anonymous. Their name is literally whited out in the documents they file in Court. Super fishy. At worst, it could be TEH under a different name. At best, this Buyer wants to remain anonymous so the tenants can't check them out. Either way, it's a bad look.

January 2020

- CTU meets and decides to file a motion to oppose the Approval of Sale. With an anonymous Buyer there is no assurance of their intentions to improve conditions. Fannie Mae and Trigild also oppose the Sale. Tenants show up en masse AGAIN to this court hearing and the Judge agrees with them. She sets it aside and the CTU has successfully stalled the sale.
- The very next day, the Buyer requests a meeting with CTU to discuss the purchase of the property. They know they're going to need the support of the tenants in order to go through with the sale. CTU agrees to meet, selects a representative and along with a KC Tenants organizer and their counsel, meet with the Buyer and their counsel. The Buyer promises a lot: they will not raise rent, they will fix everything, they will put new cabinets in every apartment, they are good landlords, they swear. They also own another property in KCK. They invite CTU to take a look at this other property themselves to see how well they take care of their tenants. No agreements are made until CTU has a chance to meet again.
- A few days later, CTU takes them up on their invitation to visit the Buyer's other property. There is a bad roach infestation and trash build up. Tenants there complain that management staff is rude. CTU doesn't leave feeling comforted at all. They immediately regroup and come up with a plan. CTU has two choices: they either oppose the sale out right and wait for another Buyer to come in during the foreclosure auction-- but that could be anyone, or they use their leverage to make sure that if the Buyer does purchase Crestwood, they do so only under certain conditions. CTU files a Motion to Amend Order, outlining the conditions they witnessed at the Buyer's other property and outlining their terms for approving the sale.
- Buyer freaks out. Threatens to sue KC Tenants for trespassing (even though they invited us) and deliberately postponing the sale, thereby costing the Buyer in attorney fees and more. Basically, all they give a shit about is profit and the tenants threatened it. This is when CTU knew they were going to win. They sent the Buyer their list of demands, saying they will only set aside their opposition if they were met in full.

CASE STUDY: TENANT UNION CAMPAIGN (CONTINUED)

February 2020

- At the final court hearing approving the sale of the property on February 14, 2019, the Crestwood Tenants Union [wins](#). The Buyer responds and accepts every single demand the Crestwood Tenants Union made. The two parties signed a settlement and the sale moved forward, with these conditions:
 - All active maintenance requests must be addressed and completed within 30 days or less;
 - All (ALL!) past due rent, between the date of sale and prior were forgiven. Dozens of tenants had been withholding rent for months in protest of the inhumane conditions they were forced to live in. The possibility of a new owner opened up a very real threat of tenants past due rent being pursued either by TEH or the new Buyer. Tenants moved forward with 100% clean slate;
 - In the future, the buyer must repair and maintain Crestwood Apartments in accordance with Kansas law. This means working heat, working appliances, a safe, healthy and comfortable home now and into the future; And,
 - Tenants maintained the right to pursue legal action against the former owners, TEH Realty.
- Crestwood Tenants Union meet to celebrate and to plan their next steps to hold the new owner accountable.

Media

Sep. 29: [KCK residents worry about apartments facing foreclosure](#)

Oct. 30: [Crestwood apartment residents demand better living conditions](#)

Nov. 25: [Fannie Mae asks judge to take action at KCK apartment complex](#)

Dec. 13: [Judge Appoints New Manager For Mold- And Roach-Infested Apartment Complex In Kansas City](#)

Jan. 22: [Last-minute buyer appears for troubled KCK apartment complex](#)

Feb. 14: [Possible resolution reached for Crestwood Apartment tenants](#)

OTHER RESOURCES

*DISCLAIMER: THE FOREST PARK SOUTHEAST NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION DOES NOT OFFER LEGAL ADVICE.
PLEASE CONSULT A LAWYER WITH LEGAL QUESTIONS. CALL THE LEGAL SERVICES OF EASTERN MISSOURI AT (314) 534-4200 OR APPLY AT
WWW.LSEM.ORG/GET-HELP-NOW FOR HELP*