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.

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.

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.

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.

Everyone Can Participate · · · · · ● GOOD FACILITATION ● · · · · · Better Outcomes

Maintain Positive Environment · · · · · ● ● · · · · · Buy into Decisions & Steps

Clear Outcomes

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.

*DO
use ground rules
to create positive
environment*

*DO NOT
use ground rules
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what they are
doing wrong*

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.

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

Consensus	Majority Rule
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	1	2	3	4	5
Block because the decision would be against the group's mission or values	**Strongly Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Will Go with Group's Decision**	**Agree**	**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/**