

Resident Organizing Networks

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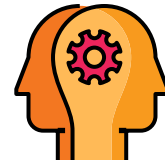
What Are Resident Organizing Networks?

Resident Organizing Networks (RONs) are statewide organizing initiatives aimed at **centering the wisdom of people with lived experiences of affordable housing, homelessness, and housing insecurity in statewide advocacy and legislative processes**. With the support of Community Change's Housing Justice team, state housing advocacy organizations host the formation of and provide ongoing support to the RONs to achieve better, more equitable housing legislation that protects people who need it the most and provides solutions for the root causes of homelessness and housing insecurity.

The RON Theory of Change (TOC) suggests **two main strategies** to build a powerful movement that advances systems change in housing and centers directly impacted people by:



Growing the power and leadership of residents who primarily live in affordable housing as well as those who are experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity (residents) to shape and implement organizing and advocacy that wins progressive housing legislation.



Jointly building residents' power with housing developers, service providers, and grassroots advocates to combine the expertise of those who have experienced housing injustice with those who build or support affordable housing development.

The RON model seeks to leverage existing affordable housing development infrastructures such as closely congregated housing and their existing staff to facilitate the organizing of constituencies overlooked in statewide advocacy. Knowing that liberation and freedom can thrive only when racial

This brief was created by Virginia Roncaglione and Anvi Mridul from [Innovation Network](#), Margaret Post from [Clark University](#), Katy Heins and Michael Anderson from [Community Change](#) with support from Katie Fox and Kurston Cook from [Grassroots Solutions](#).

justice is at the center of housing work, RONs incorporate a racial and gender equity as well as an intersectional lens in all aspects of the work.

The RON model was developed by Community Change’s Housing Justice team in response to states’ decreased investments in affordable housing due to the Great Recession, a conservative government approach to housing, and the consequent crisis in the rising number of people experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity. The model was developed and implemented first in California in 2014. Currently, there are RONs in four states: California, Washington, Oregon, and Louisiana including:



Resident United Network (RUN) | California | Founded 2014

MISSION: RUN builds power among residents and staff of affordable housing to change laws so that every Californian has a safe, stable, and affordable home.

PARENT ORGANIZATION: [Housing California](#)

Statewide advocacy coalition of multi-sector affordable housing providers.



Resident Action Project (RAP) | Washington | Founded 2016

MISSION: RAP builds power to change state policy through storytelling, organizing, and civic action.

PARENT ORGANIZATION: [Washington Low Income Housing Alliance](#)

Statewide advocacy organization for affordable housing and ending homelessness.



Residents Organized for Change (ROC) | Oregon | Founded 2019

MISSION: ROC is a statewide network of residents of, and those in need of, affordable housing and frontline staff of affordable housing providers, who are committed to advocating for safe, stable, and affordable housing for all Oregonians.

PARENT ORGANIZATION: [Neighborhood Partnership](#)

Statewide housing and economic justice organization and home to the statewide housing alliance.



Residents Organized for HousingLOUISIANA (ROHLA) | Louisiana | Founded 2023

MISSION: ROHLA launched officially in 2023 as a statewide network of residents who live in affordable homes and those who are housing insecure, fighting for resilient housing for all.

PARENT ORGANIZATION: [HousingLOUISIANA](#)

Statewide network of regional housing alliances for affordable housing.

As the RONS continue to develop leaders, promote equitable networks, and win concrete housing justice policies led by directly impacted people, in this brief we share key information about current successes (see “Why Are RONS Needed” below); communities and groups organized (see “Who Is Involved in RONS’ Organizing” beginning on [page 6](#)); the RON organizing model and examples of how the different RONS actualize it (see “How Do RONS Organize” beginning on [page 9](#)); and lessons learned about what it takes to build and sustain a RON (see “What Does It Take To Build and Sustain RONS” beginning on [page 17](#)).

Why Are Resident Organizing Networks Needed?

The remarkable impact achieved by the RONS in the last decade demonstrates its value as an innovative and unique approach that complements existing affordable housing advocacy infrastructures. The success of the model in varied ecosystems suggests that similar achievements could be replicated in other states. The following represent key examples of the intertwined contributions of the RONS to their states’ housing justice.



To build a political power base among people with lived experiences of housing insecurity

RON organizing brings new people and resources into the social justice movement. **RONS organize in states where millions of people have experienced homelessness and housing insecurity** or live in apartments and houses with some form of affordability requirement. Further, most people who have experienced housing insecurity live in closely congregated rent-subsidized apartments. This group represents **a potential political force that, when organized, can advance housing justice**. In these communities, RONS are often the only group that organizes residents of affordable housing and those who need and support affordable housing at the state level.

- In December 2022, the four RONS collectively counted approximately 50 core leaders, 700 active base members, and 4,000 contacts in their base.
- ROHLA has conducted nine listening sessions with residents across Louisiana. An average of 40 people participated in each listening session, which will set the ground for the launch of ROHLA’s chapters in the state.



We could fix everything and create a new system, but without the community engaged, the system won’t stay fixed. And, frankly, we need the community’s help. Community needs to be leading the way in order to fix the system.”

— ROHLA Organizer



To develop the leadership and power of people impacted by housing insecurity

RONs' leadership development model strives to build leaders' and members' skills and confidence to be centered in housing justice advocacy and organizing. Across the four RONs, **hundreds of people who experience housing insecurity**

have found inner strength, a sense of self-worth, and their voice and power to advocate for their own solutions to inequitable housing legislations and systems.



Being able to learn how to see myself as someone who is valuable, and important, and who has strengths and gifts has been one of the most important things [that I have gotten from my engagement with RAP]. Because when we see that in ourselves, we empower others to see that in themselves. I battle every day with self-worth and self-value. RAP has given me a deep well to pull from when, and it's just been very empowering to be a part of that work, and be told, 'Your story was so inspiring to me and now I'm ready to tell mine.' It's not only about me telling my story, which is important, but it's being a part of that shared strength and shared power, by giving somebody else the strength, courage, self-worth, and value."

— RAP Leader



I found my gift, which is speaking. I'm a fairly good writer. I'm good at writing speeches. I'm not always good at ad-libbing, but I'm getting better because of practice. I find that I can really dig down into my inner self, feel what I'm feeling, write that out, and then speak it. And so, I did find a gift that I didn't know I had. And I think many of us have that, and we just don't realize it. And so, once I found that then I started looking at others that I felt could be leaders, but they hadn't found that they were."

— ROC Leader



To foster equitable and shared power with nonprofit housing developers, providers, and grassroots advocates

The RON approach aspires to change the mindset of the housing development world by dismantling the paternalistic tenant-landlord relationship and jointly building power with residents on an equitable playing field. This theory of change builds from the history of the community development movement and community development corporations growing alongside and directly out of community organizing efforts that address affordable housing and housing insecurity. While possibly the most complex and least actualized strategy, **as RONs progress in their development, they seek and obtain increasing voice and power in the parent organization's governance and strategy.** For example, RUN of California instituted a "Transitional Steering Committee" to advocate for RUN to be represented as an integral program on the board of their parent organization, Housing California. The Committee has been successful and a newly instituted "Steering Committee" of RUN leaders will now be a committee of the Housing California board.

The leadership skills and connections developed through their engagement with RON, also prepare **members and leaders to take on decision-making roles with other organizations focused on affordable housing**. For example, leaders become board members of other affordable housing development nonprofits such as East Bay Housing Organization as well as national groups such as the National Low Income Housing Coalition. Members may also get employment with housing-related services that they interacted with while advocating with the RON. These positions enable leaders to improve both their financial and housing security.

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Because of being an outspoken advocate at RAP and gaining a reputation in my county, people contact me personally to ask me if I have any resources to help with issues with rent and fear of being unhoused. Because of that, I went to my own City Council because we didn't even have a Human Services Department for a city of 42,000 people at the time. I started testifying or giving public comments to highlight that there are still also a lot of people who are struggling financially, and are either on the financial cliff, or have already fallen off it, and asking them to do something. After doing this for eight months, in January of 2020, my city finally developed a Human Services Division and started with a part-time, 20-hour a week position. After two full open application series and rounds of interviews, they didn't find who they wanted and they reached out to me and asked, why wasn't I applying? I said, 'Oh, you made it inequitable. You asked for a four-year degree. I don't have that. But if you want somebody connected to organizations in the county, and working in this space as an advocate, and has some policy knowledge, then I'm your person.' So, they changed the posting to, 'Four-year degree or equivalent volunteer, volunteerism, and community work.' I applied and I ended up getting the job. So, the job that I advocated for because of my work with RAP is what led me to the position that I'm in now. This job then bumped me off of Section 8, and now I am fully paying rent on my own."

— RAP Leader



To develop and support residents-led policy solutions and contribute to shared policy and electoral wins and civic engagement

The four **RONs have contributed to significant policy and civic engagement impacts**. These include historic allocations of state housing revenue in CA, OR, and WA; extensions of state eviction moratoria; and precedent-setting victories around civil rights protection based on source of income and right to representation.

- In 2020, RAP advocated for the passage of the Right to Counsel (5160) and the just cause (HB 1236) bills helping low-income tenants obtain free legal representation to prevent or work through an eviction. The National Low Income Housing Coalition honored the Washington Housing Alliance and RAP for their work in passing this legislation.

- In 2022, ROHLA experimented with digital organizing and voter mobilization as they participated in the electoral work of their parent organization's sister 501(c)(4) organization, Greater New Orleans Housing Alliance, which led to the election of a progressive candidate in the utility commission race. ROHLA will use the learnings from this success to build base in 2023.

Most importantly, in 2022, **RONs have developed and advocated for signature bills**, based on the experiences and needs of their leaders and members. These bills expand alliances' policy agenda to provide needed solutions to the root causes of homelessness and housing insecurity.

- RUN members developed a concept for new legislation aimed at simplifying the affordable housing application process by making it online and statewide. They worked with Housing California's policy team to approach an allied member of the Assembly who authored and introduced the bill, AB 1961.
- ROC membership prioritized universal basic income as the policy they wanted to work on in the upcoming legislative session. While not directly tied to housing, ROC members agreed that universal basic income would have the most impact and remove the most barriers for Oregonians struggling with housing insecurity. A ROC policy work group conceptualized the bill and brought in experts to talk about cash assistance programs and pilot programs, and submitted the concept to an elected representative who has attended ROC's summit and who committed to sponsoring the piece of legislation.



Two bills that come from RUN went to Sacramento and are not dead yet, we still have a chance to get those bills put back in and won. So that's something that we can be proud of. So that's something that we have gained over the years."

— RUN Leader

Who Is Involved In Resident Organizing Networks' Organizing?

RONs bring together diverse groups to collaborate and coordinate their efforts to advance housing justice. Each network involves members and leaders, parent organizations, organizers, Community Change, and other allied organizations. See the following pages for an overview of those currently involved in RON organizing.



MEMBERS AND LEADERS

RONs members and leaders are the beating heart of RONs' organizing. They are primarily **residents who live in affordable housing**, as well as **people who experienced homelessness and housing insecurity**, and are **all people who want to advocate for housing justice**. The RON model was designed to focus on organizing affordable housing residents and service providers. As the model evolved and replicated, the scope of RONs' organizing expanded. While the membership remains focused on affordable housing residents, individuals who are currently experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity are welcome participants. In terms of allies, RON membership also expanded to family members and friends of people impacted by housing issues and anyone who wants to support housing justice advocacy centered on and led by most impacted communities.

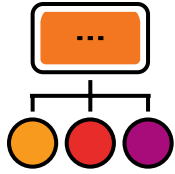
While members and leaders share experiences of housing insecurity or a passion for housing justice, they also represent a **diversity of demographics and geographies in each state**. These may include Black, Brown, or white individuals; disabled persons; LGBTQ individuals; working, unemployed, or retired individuals; seniors; farmworkers; immigrants; people who have left the prison system; and people who have been impacted by natural disasters. The members' diversity of lived experiences deeply enriches organizing as these groups bring different priorities and perspectives to the housing justice work. At the same time, recognizing the deep connection between housing justice and racial justice, **RONs strive to center Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities, particularly the women of color** who head an overwhelming proportion of households living in affordable housing. This entails developing intentional relationships with and elevating the voices of BIPOC members and leaders while also asking white people, particularly those without lived experiences of affordable housing, homelessness, and housing insecurity (e.g., affordable housing staff and other allies), to take on a supportive role.

Because RONs also target state-level policy, they strive for membership that represents geographic diversity. RONs aim to **recruit members from different "regions" or "areas,"** which can vary in scope and encompass diverse locations including urban, suburban, and rural areas. Members and communities may also be recruited because they experienced housing justice issues and/or have an active partner organization that wants to support resident organizing work.

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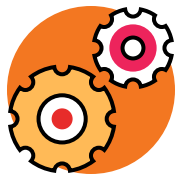
A lot of our current members live in affordable housing, are Section 8 voucher holders, and live in HUD buildings or subsidized housing. Those that have experienced homelessness have joined ROC while they were homeless. We have members that live in rural communities that just don't feel far removed from that housing insecurity. The commonality is they are passionate and tenacious and realize that they don't want to be just one of the lucky few people that have managed to find affordable housing, but they want to help other people achieve that.”

— ROC Organizer



PARENT ORGANIZATIONS

RONs began in partnership with state housing advocacy organizations that provided the initial impetus and capacity to start them as parent organizations. **Parent organizations are usually statewide advocacy coalitions supporting a network of nonprofit housing providers, affordable housing organizations, and other organizations focused on housing insecurity and homelessness** advocating for housing justice in the state. Given their unique role in state affordable housing advocacy, parent organizations and their networks understand the importance of building a power base among constituents with lived experiences of housing insecurity. Also, they understand and value how their existing infrastructures, where large numbers of residents live and frequent, are well-suited for engaging and empowering people with lived experiences of housing insecurity. **Parent organizations recruit and employ the staff dedicated to RON organizing, and are responsible for raising funds for the RONs' sustainment.**



RON ORGANIZERS

Organizers are the cornerstone of RONs' success, spearheading all activities related to the RON, including base building, leadership development, and advocating for equitable power across the RON and the parent organization. The bond between organizers and leaders runs deep: leaders view organizers as instrumental in helping them to see that their voices and experiences matter and encouraging them to take responsibility for the work that addresses housing insecurity.



The key relationship I developed as part of my engagement with RON is with the [RAP] organizer. She's kept me going and has encouraged me. We have all been inspired by each other. And I think that's what being a good partner and collaborator and leader together is all about. [The organizer] has got this special something about her that just makes things glue. She's sort [of] the glue with all of this, not just because [of] her position as statewide organizer, but because of the person she is. There's just something that flows through each of us into all of us."

— RAP Leader



COMMUNITY CHANGE HOUSING JUSTICE TEAM

The Community Change Housing Justice team has sought to build power for housing justice since 1984. In 2014, Housing California advocates and affordable housing developers were losing important political and legislative battles they reached out to Community Change's housing team to develop with them what became the RON model for engaging residents of affordable housing. Since its beginning, **Community Change has been the catalyst for establishing each RON and remains the main source of operational support for the existing RONs.**

While the type of support depends on a RON's context and stage of development, the assistance that Community Change provides includes:

- Supporting organizers and parent organizations to gain experience and capacity to build and grow a RON
- Providing mentoring to organizing staff on campaigns and organizational development
- Developing curriculum and popular education materials for leadership training
- Providing on-the-ground support for training and meetings
- Connecting staff and resident leaders in peer-to-peer learning spaces
- Convening RONs across geographies for shared learning and cross-pollination of ideas
- Providing financial support and collaboration on local funding



ALLIED AND ALIGNED ORGANIZATIONS

RONs also engage aligned organizations and other groups in their organizing work. These groups include organizations, alliances, and coalitions working on affordable housing, homelessness, and housing justice at the local, state, and national levels. Also, RONs may partner with organizations focusing on issues that are aligned and tangential to housing justice such as climate change in Louisiana or immigrant rights in California. Relationships with these organizations help RONs identify, recruit, and train new members, and build collective power for social justice.

How Do Resident Organizing Networks Organize?

Overview

RONs build the power of residents who primarily live in affordable housing as well as those who are experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity to be centered in advocacy and legislation that directly impacts them. They provide opportunities for members and leaders to build their confidence and skills, develop, participate in, and lead advocacy strategy and implementation, and engage in decision-making processes that impact them directly.

Aspiring to the same theory of change, RONs also adapt to internal conditions such as capacity or funding, as well as related to the external context in which they operate including the state's political landscape and nonprofit ecosystem. Further, RONs are at different stages of development having started at different times over the last 10 years. While at different stages of development, all RONs organized during the COVID-19 pandemic and are currently grappling with the opportunities and challenges presented by the online-to-offline transition. As these circumstances are in constant change, the model evolves and adapts. **Context, conditions, and growth also influence how and to what extent the different aspects of the theory of change are actualized by each RON.**

In this section, we offer a snapshot of the key approaches to organizing that the RON theory of change strives for and that, in 2022, may be applied by one or more of the RONs. Wherever possible, we provide examples and quotes showcasing how these approaches are implemented by the four operating RONs.

Organizing Model

Organizing starts with recruitment and continues with different engagement opportunities for members and leaders to cultivate their individual and collective voice and power. Particularly at the beginning, RON organizers are the catalyst of the project's work, spearheading base-building and leadership development. As the RON progresses in development, leaders and members are encouraged to take on more responsibility for leading and sustaining the work.



The beauty of advocacy is that everyone has a comfortable space where they're at. So, some people may not want to be a leader and are okay with being a member. That's not to say that they don't care about the issues, but that just speaks to how comfortable they are being on the forefront. Because eventually, everyone will be a leader in some capacity."

— ROHLA Organizer



Recruitment

A distinct advantage to the RON organizing model is being present in venues frequented by people who have experienced housing insecurity (particularly affordable housing). These are key entry points for inviting prospective members to join RON's organizing efforts. To recruit new members, organizers, supported by

leaders as possible, engage individuals or groups of prospective members to understand what their housing experiences and needs are, to share about the RON's work, and to assess if they would be interested and suitable as RON leaders. Tactics vary depending on the venues where recruitment takes place (as outlined below).

In affordable housing developments: Organizers may table in lobbies or convene groups for house meetings (Power Hours), do door-knocking, and provide education sessions in the affordable housing developments they work with (usually parent organizations' partners and affiliates). They may also seek the support of resident service coordinators in buildings to get their residents involved.

- ROC conducts tabling outside affordable housing developments. This is often the first time they meet new members and organizers engage them with "old-fashioned tools," a sign-up sheet and a clipboard, utilizing assessment skills similar to those used in other types of organizing. For leaders, this is an opportunity to assess their capacity to engage in a community meeting or, for frontline staff, to recruit and turn out potential members and how they talk about their residents.

In community venues: RONS operating in states with fewer affordable housing developments (e.g., ROHLA from Louisiana) or that seek to diversify their recruitment approaches, may conduct Power Hours or listening sessions in other community venues (e.g., churches or community centers) or at events (e.g., Ending Homelessness conferences), attended by people who may experience housing insecurity or homelessness.

- ROHLA conducts listening tours across the state of Louisiana. During these sessions, organizers provide fact sheets created by their parent organization on how housing insecurity and natural disasters affect that area, and include available funding opportunities (e.g., the American Rescue Plan). At these meetings, people are asked to sign in and express whether they're interested in continuing the conversation, and eventually becoming a member of a ROHLA chapter.

In relationships with other organizations: RON organizers also reach out to and develop relationships with organizations and coalitions that may have memberships or constituencies that could be interested in housing justice.

- RAP collaborates with Washington state homeless organizations to identify and connect people to RAP.

Consistent with their anti-racism commitment, **RONS intentionally build relationships with and actively recruit in BIPOC communities**, particularly in majority-white states. They also create vetting processes for new members to ensure that people joining the work are committed to racial equity.

- Cognizant of Oregon's history of white supremacy, segregation, and inequitable resources distribution, ROC organizers are constantly thinking about and working towards stronger relationships with BIPOC communities. To ensure that engagement is safe for BIPOC people, they have created systems to vet new members to ensure that they understand and are committed to racial justice.

First contacts culminate with a specific ask, most often to sign up for the Listserv and/or join the upcoming statewide calls (see below). Prospects may also be invited to recruit other people, attend training and convenings, and join actions and campaigns. Those who provided their contact details also receive welcome emails and newsletter outreach keeping them in the loop and inviting them to the statewide calls and other engagements that may be going on. Organizers may also hold one-to-ones and build relationships with people who expressed interest during first contact, seeking to understand their self-interests and offering ways for how they could be engaged.

Statewide calls are designed to convene prospective and current members. During these video meetings, people from across the state meet each other and the organizers, learn about the legislative process, and build a collective strategy for the issues they want to prioritize working on. RONS may also have new member orientation meetings designed to provide a more in-depth

introduction to the RON and opportunities for engagement, for new members who may be less familiar with the work.

- RUN holds weekly online Community Care Calls that are designed to be a potential landing place for residents across the state, who were engaged during outreach and are interested in RUN's work. During the calls, residents who have just started engaging meet others who have an ongoing engagement with RUN and work on RUN's legislative campaigns. Residents who participate regularly in Community Care Calls are considered "members." During Community Care Calls, members develop their knowledge of the legislative process and have the opportunity to hone their communication and facilitation skills by speaking on an issue in front of other members or leading a group discussion or a breakout group.



Leadership Development

Leadership development is the RON model's primary strategy for building the power of people who have experienced housing insecurity. RONs offer multiple pathways for leaders and members to develop skills and capacity to participate in, design, and lead organizing and advocacy and opportunities to engage in governance and the legislative process.

To develop the knowledge, capacities, and attitudes that will support their engagement with advocacy and decision-making, **RONs and Community Change provide members and leaders with diverse one-to-one and group training and opportunities to test their skills internally.** Leaders and members receive issue training on topics related to affordable housing and homelessness, the connection between race and gender with housing justice, and organizing and advocacy skills training. During member meetings, summits, and other internal engagements they hone their communication and facilitation skills by speaking on an issue in front of other members or leading a group discussion or a breakout group. Community Change organizes a yearly Movement-Building Training (MBT) and other opportunities like the Housing Justice Narrative Fellowship, which are training spaces for leaders to put into practice the skills they learn at training. The MBT in particular is a week-long training for newly committed RON leaders to be trained by their peers from previous MBT training and by organizers from across the RONs and Community Change.



I was trained on housing justice narrative and being able to explain that more in-depth to people and using that presentation style to help people understand what's happening in the community from a local context, and not just using snapshots and stock photos from the website, but really taking photos from our community so that people can see what's happening, and understand how these things impact and affect them and their housing conditions locally."

— ROHLA Leader

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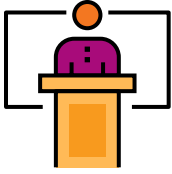
At every event, big or small, there always seems to be an open mic where everybody can speak. The first year I was just watching everyone else speak freely, and seeing that everyone had a voice. And then, slowly but surely speaking, raising my hand to speak, and then speaking more, and then being called on to speak, and then being expected to speak, and then just expecting myself to speak when I get into that space. I think that raises your level of confidence in what you're saying.”

— RUN Leader

RON organizers provide an individualized leadership development approach to those who self-identify or show up in calls as keen on deepening their engagement and developing their capacity to participate in and lead organizing and advocacy. This allows **members and leaders to decide how they want to participate and when and how they want to grow their leadership based on their interests and capacity**. In supporting an otherwise organic development, some organizers have found it **useful to utilize ladders of engagement** that help define pieces of training, experiences, and commitments moving people into progressive leadership roles according to each person's skills and interests.

- To categorize engagement for their members and leaders, RAP adapted the **“Circles of Commitment”** from the Saddleback Church. RAP's system has concentric circles of engagement, progressively less populated by more engaged people:





Opportunities for Governance and Co-Governance

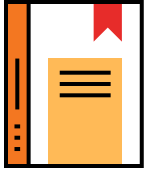
RONs' internal structure and relationship with the parent organizations are set up to provide leaders with opportunities for governance and co-governance, respectively. These opportunities serve two main purposes: 1) to **build leaders' power by allowing them to self-determine the RONs' work**, based on their wisdom, experiences, and priorities, and 2) to jointly **build power with residents and affordable housing developers on an equitable playing field** and change the mindset of the housing development world by dismantling the paternalistic tenant-landlord relationship.

Statewide steering committees: All the established RONs have a steering committee comprising leaders and, for some of the RONs, housing nonprofit staff from across the state. Steering committees are the center of RONs' self-determination and governance, **setting RONs' annual policy agenda and strategy**, based on information collected from members at large. Steering committee members ideally also lead other organizing work such as recruitment, Power Hours, and one-to-ones.

- ROC has a steering committee led by residents and front-line staff and each committee member is a representative of a particular region in Oregon. ROC's steering committees started in 2020.

Representation on the parent organizations' board: A key strategy to build shared power among people with lived experiences of housing insecurity and affordable housing developers and staff, is to have a significant representation of RON leaders on the parent organization board if this is the state's housing alliance. Representation can be achieved through individual RON leaders having voting seats on the board or the RON being a project represented at the board level. This strategy requires the most intentional development and has only been actualized by the two longest-standing RONs. With this approach, **board representation can ensure that decision-making around affordable housing advocacy and legislation shifts to center the voices of the most impacted communities.**

- RUN has recently instituted a "Transitional Steering Committee." The Committee has advanced and achieved RUN's request to have an organized, elected body that represents the needs of affordable housing tenants in Housing California's board structure. The RUN Steering Committee operates as a board committee, with RUN leaders representing the six active regions. Also, RUN has two direct representatives on the Housing California board.
- RAP has three leaders who are voting members of the Washington Low Income Housing Alliance Board.



Legislative Influence

Through the RONS, people affected by housing insecurity develop and execute advocacy strategies aimed at influencing state-level governance and have their interests, values, and voices centered in the legislative process. Influence work is a vehicle for members and leaders to express their power in the public arena, showing to public officials that people who experience housing insecurity cannot be overlooked and that they have the political power to demand and expect public decision-making that meets their self-interests and goals. RON members wield their power to influence legislation through three main approaches:

Developing and supporting member-led policy agenda and advocacy strategy.

Recognizing that prioritizing impacted communities necessitates that they choose which issues to advocate for and how, **steering committees work with the membership at-large to set the RONS' yearly policy agenda.** To gather input on prominent housing issues, RONS can host annual or bi-annual summits at the regional or statewide level. They can also field member surveys (typically in the Fall). Through these opportunities, new and established members provide their input on key housing issues that they are seeing in their communities and prioritize the ones they want to work on in their upcoming legislative work. Results from this process are used by steering committee members to decide the RON's priorities—for both bills and the budget—for the upcoming year. **Priorities and policy ideas directly emerging from this process may become bills** and RON leaders may work with the partner organizations' policy teams and their elected representatives to bring these legislative priorities in front of policymakers. Leaders and members will also **develop and test their advocacy and organizing strategy skills by designing and implementing strategies** aimed at pursuing said agenda.

- Between September and November, RUN organizes "Regional Convenings." During the convenings, RUN organizers explain to participants RUN's purpose and approach and hold a brainstorming session called "There Ought To Be A Law." During this process, facilitated both in English and Spanish, RUN members and leaders discuss housing insecurity issues experienced by them and their communities. After brainstorming, ideas are prioritized through a survey fielded to all RUN members, providing the steering committee with a list of issues for the upcoming year's legislative agenda.

Leading and participating in campaigns, public actions, and testimony.

RONS' campaigns may be **in support of member-originated bills or bills supported in partnership with the parent organization and other allied partner organizations.** Through campaigns and public actions, RON members and leaders exercise their power in the public arena, and their ability to create and implement advocacy strategies that support their self-interest, and the issue priorities of the RON, parent organization, and allied groups. **In the Spring, all members are invited to participate in Lobby Day at the State Capitol.** During Lobby Day as well as other testimony opportunities, members and leaders contact first-hand the power their individual and collective lived experiences and voices can have with elected representatives or the media.

Civic and electoral engagement.

All RONS engage in a variety of civic engagement activities aimed at **educating voters on housing issues and how electoral candidates stand** related to those issues. Some RONS provide opportunities for members to participate in **electoral activities** such as ballot initiatives and candidates' support/opposition, **conducted by their parent organizations**. Electoral work is also aimed at strategically building base in areas whose political will the RONS would like to sway.

- In Louisiana, the Public Service Commission (PSC) race decides on several matters close to ROHLA's members such as utility fees, jail fees, and fines. ROHLA participated in HousingLOUISIANA's sister 501(c)(4) organizations Greater New Orleans Housing Alliance's PSC election work, using it as an opportunity to engage and educate people on the commission, encourage people, from a nonpartisan standpoint, to get out and vote and use their voices and their people power to cast their ballot for the person they believe would best carry their ideals and best support their interests.



Developing Relationships and Collective Power

Relationship building is important to RONS' organizing approach, and members and leaders develop various relationships throughout their participation. They connect with other RON members at the regional and state levels, RON organizers, members, and organizers from the other RONS, Community Change staff, and other organizations working in the field of housing justice. All these **relationships foster a sense of collective identity and power**. Connecting across different RONS also provides members, leaders, and organizers with new insights and ideas on housing justice advocacy and organizing, that they may use to develop new strategies and mitigate challenges they encounter in their housing justice work.



The relationships that you have with the other residents from other complexes throughout the city where you live are important. It helps. In a convening, if we have a problem, we can get on the phone and talk about it and find out what we could do. So before, the only time we really got to see everyone was Lobby Day. And the one thing that the COVID pandemic has changed is that we get to see everybody on our Zoom meetings from all over the state. So we have those friendships now, too."

— RUN Leader

RON leaders, members, and organizers also develop relationships with actors who have historically held more power and privilege such as housing nonprofit developers and elected representatives. Developing **co-power with developers contributes to changing the mindset of the housing development world** such that there is not a paternalistic tenant-landlord relationship talking about tenant-landlord issues but policy issues. Some RON members have developed **close relationships with legislators** who have become champions for the RONS' issues and bills.

“

One of us had an excellent relationship with one of her legislators. At one of our Lobby Days, she ran after him down the corridor. At that time, he was a Republican. And through that relationship and her showing up, she changed him over to a Democrat who is behind us and what we have been fighting for.”

— RUN Leader



Local and regional structure

As tried-and-true organizing necessitates **in-person community building rooted in local work**, all RONS endeavor to conduct activities in the areas or regions where they work. **Local and regional work also supports leaders in developing relationships with their local elected representatives.** Funding availability, as well as the capacity of both leaders and organizers, deeply influences how regional work is structured. Further, the COVID-19 pandemic has constrained the in-person organizing characteristic of local work. Still, most RONS are devising how to implement regional and local work. Two main approaches are surfacing, both leverage regional/chapter meetings to foster relationship-building among members and the development of a regional identity and work agenda, while they are distinguished by who is responsible for organizing activities:

- **Local chapters led by leaders and organizers:** ROHLA and RAP are building powerful leader-led chapters in key areas of their states that can contribute to the statewide work and also exert pressure on city and local administrations.
- **Regional work led by regional organizing coordinators:** For RUN, regional work is led by regional organizing coordinators, who are employees of RUN’s partner organizations, and are funded by Housing California to work part-time on RUN organizing.

As RONS operate in collaboration with a variety of other organizations, many leaders and members are also engaged at the local, regional, as well as federal levels through allied and aligned housing justice efforts and groups. The network approach strengthens and diversifies affordable housing advocacy while affording leaders and members an opportunity to build and wield their power in venues responsive to their interests and needs.

What Does It Take To Build and Sustain Resident Organizing Networks?

Though each RON is operationalized differently depending on the existing ecosystem and the context in their state, some common lessons regarding what it takes to do this work well emerged from their experiences.



Organizing talent and capacity

Organizers are central to RONS' success. However, the organizing field has experienced decades of underinvestment and, most recently, a staffing crisis, which has made it increasingly challenging to hire and retain organizers and to have the sufficient organizing capacity to effectively build the power of people with lived experience of housing insecurity. Building and sustaining a RON necessitates navigating this crisis to:

- **Find talent with the right mix of skills and experiences.** Since most RON organizers have a few years of experience, providing training and organizing capacity building is necessary for them to thrive.
- **Ensure that there are 1) sufficient organizers** to support statewide organizing and that they have the capacity to attend to the different and competing roles and responsibilities intentionally and to balance daily tasks with long-term goals, and 2) **a second level of staffing** dedicated to organizing (e.g., Organizing Director) who provides support, supervision, and direction to the field organizers in alignment with the overall parent organization's strategy.
- **Avoid turnover** and the toll it takes on staff and members' morale and institutional knowledge.
- **Address burnout** by providing additional support and resources.



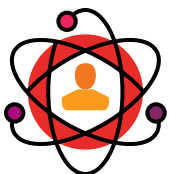
This is not something we can do for free. I'm very proud of the fact that we knew that, and we've been really clear about the fact that we needed to have resources to secure paid organizers. We had to have an infrastructure to support them."

— ROHLA Organizer



[The former RUN organizer] recently switched jobs, and that does hurt. And it slows the momentum. You hope they're continuing the movement in other ways, but still having them not with us, does hurt."

— RUN Leader



Experience with and understanding of organizing by parent organizations and their networks

RONs are vehicles for grassroots-led change and the model hinges on organizing and power building. For these initiatives to thrive, they necessitate that those external actors who are involved and have influence over their work, particularly **parent organizations and their networks, understand and accept what community**

organizing entails and what conditions and supports it needs to be sustained. In particular, it is important for parent organizations and their network to appreciate the unique values and approaches of organizing. Organizing is not an “advocacy strategy” or a tool to push a legislative agenda, but a way to democratize social change. It seeks to not only work within existing power structures but also to disrupt those structures and build the agency and capacity of communities most impacted by injustice and inequities to advance change. Parent organizations’ policies and procedures also need to take into account the unique circumstances of organizing including accommodating the ebbs and flows of the organizing and legislative cycle, ensuring that organizers are able to dedicate themselves fully at peak times.

For RONS, this kind of understanding is facilitated by **education and training for all actors involved in the RON’s work, as well as structures and processes for organizers and leaders to provide input in organization-wide policies and decisions** that will impact the RON structure and functioning. Creating this shared understanding supports authentic relationships and collaboration, facilitating success for all parties involved, and environments that support organizers and leaders not burning out.



We need to educate and set boundaries with our co-workers and leadership to what they want us to do/think organizing is to make sure that ROC is growing.”

— ROC Organizer



Fostering an equitable playing field for residents and developers

A cornerstone of the RON theory of change entails joining equally the expertise of those who have experienced housing injustice with those who build or support affordable home development, with the aim to design equitable housing policy and affect systems change. Parent organizations are uniquely positioned to model equitable collaboration with people experiencing housing insecurity, providing their networks and decision-makers with inspiration for pursuing housing justice work and legislation that centers most impacted communities. Building authentic co-power across diverse lived experiences, power, and privilege, is a complex endeavor that requires intentionality. Across the RONS these are some of the lessons learned about what this requires:

- **Being explicit about how and why power and governance will be shared** with leaders and residents, including clarifying how the RONS’ work will coalesce or be independent of that of the parent organization and their networks, how, and under what conditions.
- **Acknowledging and mitigating inherent power imbalances** between affordable housing providers, residents, and staff as they may manifest in venues where the different groups come together to ensure that most impacted communities are safe to voice their opinions and concerns.

- **Understanding that leaders' and members' legislative and issue priorities may not align with the parent organization** and being willing to accept that building the power of residents entails allowing for self-determination, even if this may strain relationships with elected officials.



There's still an extreme power imbalance even with these nonprofit housing providers, and that's part of the complicated ecosystem that we're working within."

— ROC Organizer



Navigating communities' capacity for participation

RONs organize individuals and communities affected by stigma and who experience housing insecurity as well as the multiple overlapping crises of racism, sexism, climate change, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Facing these pressing and daily struggles may cause disillusionment, despair, and anger and

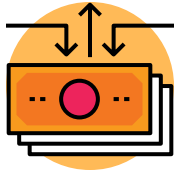
RONs are finding that **community members sometimes have limited emotional and material bandwidth to engage in organizing efforts**. Further, a small number of core leaders often shoulder vast portions of work, eventually leading to burnout. Ensuring that organizations can count on enough leaders and members to carry the work alongside paid staff is an ever-present challenge for RON and many other organizations in the field. To mitigate these challenges and **make engagement safe and accessible**, RONs are experimenting with a variety of approaches:

- **Using a restorative justice and/or healing, trauma-informed approach** to support and sustain people engaging in harder-to-win fights or working in adversarial advocacy spaces.
- **Providing compensation, childcare, and transportation** to remove logistical barriers to engagement for leaders and members.
- **Offering translation and interpretation** allowing resident leaders to fully engage in the work.
- **Refining the training and support needed to increase the member-to-leader pipeline** to create more capacity at the core-leader level.



We've got a relatively small number of people who are really engaged and involved. One of the challenges is that the people that we're working with are still struggling. Even though people have affordable housing, they're still very low income, and things come up in their lives and they're taking care of their families. People come in and out as they can."

— RAP Organizer



Securing steady and sufficient funding and resource streams

The RON model has demonstrated to be an innovative and unique approach that complements existing affordable housing advocacy infrastructures by developing the power and leadership of affordable housing residents and their allies. Effective and equitable RONs necessitate a steady stream of funding that allows RONs to attract and retain talented organizing staff, create accessible spaces for leaders and members to engage, and sustain infrastructures for the RONs and the parent organizations' teams that support the RONs' work. This requires that:

- **Parent organizations commit to strategic fundraising and allocating adequate resources** for their RONs. This includes creating and fulfilling concrete fundraising goals, set in partnership with the RON organizing staff.
- **Funders of social movements and housing justice appreciate that, living at the intersection of these two fields, the RON model presents a unique opportunity to further both fields' successes.** To achieve this, it is important that the approach is not affected by the potential siloing of funding but rather has an opportunity to be supported by actors from the two spaces. In this, national funders can play the distinctive role of educating and agitating regional and local funders.

Since 2013, Community Change's Housing Justice's team support has also been central to the development and sustainment of new and existing RON. **The Housing Justice team provides financial and technical support** (see an overview of the "Community Change Housing Justice Team" on [page 8](#)) that is both complementary and supplementary to that of parent organizations and plays a central role in creating and fostering connection and collaboration among all actors involved in the RONs' network efforts so that people most impacted by housing insecurity can lead efforts to achieve better, more equitable housing policy for their states.

“

We were only able to get it moving with the pass-through funds from Community Change/ Gulf South for a Green New Deal. These were funds expressly raised to cover the organizing effort.”

— HousingLOUISIANA Executive Director

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While there are several California funders that care deeply about grassroots organizing and power building, it is my sense that most of them are largely unaware of RUN and/ or don't yet see RUN operating at a scale that causes them to view RUN as an important component of their statewide power building strategy. It feels important to continue familiarizing funders with RUN and the vision and theory of change we're trying to execute.”

— Housing California Executive Director