

Resident Organizing Networks

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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.

Building a Movement

To build a powerful movement that advances systems change in housing and centers directly impacted people RONs:



Build a political power base among people with lived experiences of housing insecurity.

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. People who have experienced housing insecurity often live in closely congregated rent-subsidized apartments. They represent 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.



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 on housing justice advocacy and organizing. Through the RONs' diverse 1-1 and group training, convenings, and opportunities to test their skills internally and in the public arena, hundreds of people who experience housing insecurity have found inner strength, a sense of self-worth, and their voice and power to advocate for solutions to inequitable housing legislations and systems rooted in the experiences of those most impacted by them.

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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. As RONs progress in their development, they seek and obtain increasing voice and power in the parent organization's governance and strategy through—for example—representation on the 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.

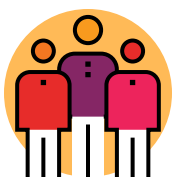


Develop and support residents-led policy solutions and contribute to shared policy and electoral wins and civic engagement.

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

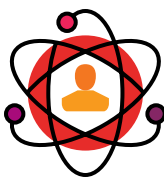
Common Lessons

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, including:



Organizing talent and capacity.

Building and sustaining a RON necessitates strong organizing talent, with a few years of experience, and supported by training and capacity building. RONs should ensure that they have 1) sufficient organizers to support statewide organizing and balance daily tasks with long-term goals, and 2) a second level of staffing to provide support, supervision, and direction to the field organizers in alignment with the overall parent organization's strategy.



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

External actors who are involved and have influence over RONs' work need to understand and accept that organizing is not an "advocacy strategy" or a tool to push a legislative agenda, but a way to democratize social change. Parent

organizations' policies and procedures also should take into account the unique circumstances of organizing. For RONS, this kind of understanding is facilitated by education and training for all actors involved in the RONS' 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.



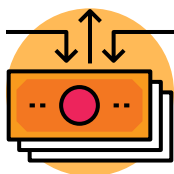
Fostering an equitable playing field for residents and developers.

Building authentic co-power across diverse lived experiences, power, and privilege, requires parent organizations to be explicit about how and why power and governance will be shared with leaders and residents, and willing to accept that building the power of residents entails allowing for self-determination, even if this may strain relationships with elected officials. This entails acknowledging and mitigating inherent power imbalances between affordable housing providers and residents and staff as they may manifest.



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, and climate change, and may have limited emotional and material bandwidth to engage in organizing efforts. To mitigate these challenges and make engagement safe and accessible RONS may use a variety of approaches including 1) restorative justice and/or trauma-informed approaches, 2) providing compensation, childcare, transportation, and translation, and 3) refining the training and support needed to increase the member-to-leader pipeline to create more capacity at the core-leader level.



Securing steady and sufficient funding and resource streams.

To secure the resources required to sustain effective and equitable RONS, partner 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 are also invited to 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 potential siloing of funding.

Since 2013, Community Change's Housing Justice team's support has also been central to the development and sustainment of new and existing RON. The team provides financial and technical support 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.