

Toolkit for Organizing

About Us



The Resident Action Project is organizing a powerful network of people who live in or need affordable homes - many of whom have experienced oppression - and front line staff to demand changes in Washington state. We are building a force to demand that our state invest in communities that have been historically pushed aside and silenced for too long. **The state must invest in affordable homes and a housing system that does not leave anyone out.** We will fight for the state to pass policies that are equitable and protect people from systemic injustice in housing and beyond.

It is a fact - we are in a housing crisis. Across the state of Washington, people are struggling to find a home. Rents are too high and wages are too low. Thousands of kids don't have a home to go back to after school. Many of our cities allow gentrification that pushes people of color and people who have low incomes out of their communities. If evicted, people are stuck with a record that makes it even more difficult to find a home -- many facing homelessness. These are not the only challenges people face: transportation, healthy food, healthcare, and other necessities are expensive and often inaccessible. Interacting with the criminal justice system creates even more barriers to accessing a home.

While the crisis we are living in may seem new to some, many people have been facing these realities for years, their whole lives, even generations. People's struggles have not happened by accident. **Our problems cannot be explained by "individual fault." Our struggle is created by a system rooted in oppression - racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, and others -- and reinforced by years of policy decisions that favor the wealth, health, and happiness of a few at the cost of the livelihood, health, and happiness of the majority.**

Mostly, the people benefiting from our current system are those who make or influence policy decisions. Many of them rarely reach out to people directly impacted by systemic oppression - to hear about our lives, and the implications of the votes they cast. **We have to go to them to demand a change.**

At the Resident Action Project, we are coming together to build power, to build community, and to push for change. We live in affordable homes, work with people in affordable homes, currently (or are presently) experiencing homelessness, and have low-incomes. **We welcome all who share our values and are ready to fight for change to join us.**

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our values

We are fighting for housing justice because we believe that having a home is a human right. Currently, access to housing is left up to a volatile and unregulated market. The market does not adjust for the realities that people are experiencing because it doesn't have to. That means that there are people - and who have been for generations - systematically denied access to housing, and this is an injustice.

We hold values of anti-oppression and anti-racism. We will not ignore the way the system disproportionately impacts people of color, people who identify as LGBTQ+, single parent families, immigrants, people with disabilities, and people who are older. We will work to make policy we advocate for oppression-free, and we will work to make our group representative of the communities who are most impacted.

We will be intentional about undoing oppressions in our organizing spaces. We will educate ourselves, listen with empathy to each other's experiences, hold each other accountable for our actions and words, and dismantle professionalized culture that upholds white supremacy and patriarchy. We will hold each other accountable with compassion.

We value community, justice, and fairness, and these values inform how we work together. Building strong relationships is fundamental to effective organizing. This work is hard, and it is personal. As we fight for wins, we need to support each other to make our organizing sustainable so people don't burn out.

We believe in organizing that is more transformational than transactional. We want to create the opportunity to build skills and leadership and to provide input on our work. We will not simply tell people what to do. We will work together and be transformed by each other's leadership.

Finally, **we want to form a culture of appreciation and accountability.** We are not going to be perfect. We are going to have to remind ourselves and each other of our values, and we are going to have to have hard conversations sometimes. And that's okay. That means that we're committed to doing justice for ourselves and each other in this work.

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where we've been

Since early 2016, RAP has been working to grow, build leadership, and strengthen our sense of community. We've held gatherings and trainings, and several committees made up of community leaders and nonprofit staff have met to support our work. Here's a brief snapshot of where we've made through May 2017.

- Solidified a structure for RAP including resident leadership in the forefront
- Seated RAP's first statewide steering committee
- Held quarterly leadership trainings
- Voter registration and Get Out the Vote opportunities
- Opportunities to advocate on state policies
- Outreach across the state at the Conference on Ending Homelessness



Pictured Above: Matthew Anderson and Violet Lavatai at the Conference on Ending Homelessness in 2016

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why we are a part of the solution

We are here to build our collective power, raise our voice, and demand a change. As we have seen from history, there has been an intentional effort to stifle the voices of people directly impacted by this crisis. If enough of us come together to build power and bring a unified message to the state legislature, we could make a huge impact. Not only do we have stories to tell about what the problems really look like in our communities, but we also have strength in numbers. To lawmakers, that means votes. If we let them know that we are not only a force - but a voting force - they could be more inclined to listen to us.

What's more, people who are living the crisis are the experts on it. We deal with it every day, and we know things that our lawmakers likely do not. Community organizing is fundamental to democracy, but that's not something that we're taught in school. Part of community organizing is education -- educating each other based on our own experiences and educating lawmakers.

For any movement to be authentic, we have to be led by people who are directly impacted. Paulo Freire wrote that "freedom from oppression cannot be gifted." That means that for true, just, authentic change to happen, the solution has to come from the community. By following the leadership of community leaders in our work, we hope to create an organizing space that is community driven. We've seen this work with the civil rights movement, women's suffrage, immigration rights, and more. It's time for a movement around housing.

We know that our vision is huge, and it could take a long time to achieve it. We will always be working on pieces of that solution. As we get wins on some of these smaller pieces, we will continue to grow in our numbers, knowledge, and power. As we grow, we can push for bigger and bigger changes.