Resident Organizations

Why Have a Resident Organization?[1]

A resident organization can be a highly structured resident council or a simple social club. It is a group of residents in a housing development who join together to fulfill common needs and to accomplish specific goals. The organization can help to:

- Enhance the quality of life in the housing development.
- Plan the future of the community.
- Resolve community problems.

A resident organization can be a benefit to both residents and management.

Benefits for residents	Benefits for management
Enhanced mutual support	Enhanced job satisfaction
Increased sense of community and decreased isolation	Better, more satisfying relationship with residents
New experiences, new relationships	Reduced resident complaints
Shared responsibility, pride, and joy of accomplishment	Help in maintaining positive image for the property
Development of skills, especially leadership	Support in resolving property problems such as vandalism
Delivery of new services by accessing resources, developing activities, and creating opportunities	Creation of an orderly communications channel between management and residents

What Can a Resident Organization Accomplish?[2]

What CAN'T a resident organization accomplish? There is strength in numbers. A resident organization can be a catalyst to great things. It can be a force to create healthy working relationships among residents, management, and the broader community and an enhanced quality of life for residents.

Examples of possible activities for a resident organization include:

- Care for and beautify yards and grounds. Create community gardens.
- Help arrange for on-site childcare.
- Establish safety and security programs, such as Neighborhood Watch.
- Arrange loaner fishing rods and materials to teach residents how to fish.
- Hold an annual kite workshop, and kite flying contests.
- Hold an Easter egg hunt; a Halloween Haunted House, and hay wagon rides.
- Organize on-site basketball tournaments for children, teens, and adults.
- Host a summer evening street dance with refreshments and a DJ.

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[1] Patterson, HUD Connecticut Office, "Resident Organization Handbook"
[2] HUD Pittsburgh Office, "Starting Resident Organizations in Western PA" 1991.

- Establish a teens' club.
- Operate a food bank.
- Provide a channel for accurate, rapid, and orderly two-way communication between residents and management.

The possibilities are as limitless as your imagination, enthusiasm, and energy!

Resident Rights Involving Resident Organizations[3]

Residents of HUD-assisted multifamily housing developments have the right to:

- Organize as residents without obstruction, harassment, or retaliation from property owners or management.
- Post materials in common areas and provide leaflets informing other residents of their rights and of opportunities to involve themselves in their project.
- Use appropriate common space or meeting facilities to organize or to consider any issue affecting the condition or management of the property. This may be subject to a reasonable, HUD-approved fee.
- Meet without the owner/manager present.
- Be recognized by property owners and managers as having a voice in residential community affairs.

Management Relations with Resident Organizations[4]

Owners/agents must recognize legitimate resident organizations that meet regularly, operate democratically, are representative of all residents in the development, and are independent of non-resident owners and management agents. Owners/agents may not impede the reasonable efforts of residents to organize or activities of resident organizations to reasonably represent resident interests.

Meeting space for resident organizations:

1. Owners/agents are expected to provide an accessible meeting space within the premises of the development for legitimate resident associations to hold meetings.

2. Owners/agents may not reasonably withhold the use of community rooms or other available space within the development when requested by:

- A resident organization in connection with the representational functions of the organization; or
- Residents seeking to organize or to collectively consider any matter pertaining to the operation of the project.

3. The following restrictions apply to fees for resident use of community rooms:

- In projects subject to budget-based rent reviews, owners/agents may not charge residents a fee for the use of such rooms.
- For all other projects, owners/agents may charge residents a fee for the use of these facilities only if a fee is normally charged for the use of such space. If owners/agents do not normally charge organizations for the use of this space, HUD does not approve the fees for such facilities.

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[3] HUD, "Resident Rights & Responsibilities"
[4] HUD, "The Management Agent Handbook" 4381.5 REV-2

Resident Council By-laws[5]

By-laws should include:

- Name of the resident organization
- Purpose of the organization
- Membership – who is eligible, how are members selected?
- Officers – Number, duties, terms of office, nomination, and election procedures
- Committees – Number and duties, procedures for setting up ad hoc committees
- Finances – Accounting and auditing procedures
- Meetings – When, how often, who attends?
- Quorum – Percentage of members needed to pass a vote
- Amendments – Procedures for changing by-laws

Sample By-Laws for a Resident Organization are located under Sample Forms and Documents. Although they may seem complex, the details are intended to avoid many predictable questions or problems that simple by-laws often do not address. In the long run these by-laws may avoid arguments, misunderstandings, and amendments.

Nonprofit Status

For some resident organizations, it may be beneficial to be designated as a 501(c) 3 nonprofit organization. Organizations interested in raising money or accessing charitable dollars for specific projects should investigate whether they meet the eligibility requirements for nonprofit designation.

Running a Productive Meeting

Efficient and productive meetings are critical to attract residents to the organization. Meetings will run smoother and more efficiently if an agenda is prepared and some adaptation of *Robert's Rules of Order* is followed.

Guidelines for Running an Efficient Meeting[6]

A key component in getting and keeping resident interest is the quality of the organization's meetings. If meetings are unproductive, members tend to be unproductive or do not attend.

A high quality meeting requires planning, an agenda, and rules of order. A notice of the date, time, and location of the meeting should be sent several weeks before the scheduled meeting. Even if the meeting is always the same day of each month, a reminder notice is important. And <u>always</u> start and end on time.

Agenda:
- Welcome. Review Agenda. Ask members if they have additional agenda items and the Chairman may place some of these items under new business.

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[5] Community Technical Assistance Center
[6] Adapted from the Pennsylvania Non-Profit Handbook

- Approve minutes of last meeting. Minutes may be read or sent out in advance. A member should make a motion to approve, second, discuss, and then vote.
- Old Business. The only items belonging in this section are ones raised at previous meetings. The Chairman should remind the members when the item was raised originally and why it was postponed.
- New Business. Reports from Treasurer/Budget/Finance or other standing committees. Any other major items of business. Member should make a motion to approve, second, discuss, vote on each item.
- Good and Welfare. Many organizations provide an opportunity for members and guests to make short announcements, raise issues to be discussed at future meetings, or to comment on items of interest.
- Adjourn. No formal action is needed. The Chairman announces the date, time, and place of the next meeting, reminds members of steps to be taken before the meeting, and adjourns the meeting.

Rules of Order
Members who wish for a policy to be adopted or an action to be taken should be recognized by the Chairman before they speak. Then they begin the discussion by making a motion. If another member seconds the motion, discussion can begin; if not, the motion fails.

Once a motion is seconded, the Chairman opens the floor for discussion. Members are recognized by the Chairman before they may speak, and they can discuss only the motion on the floor. When the discussion has ended, the Chairman announces that a vote will be taken.

Voting
The easiest way to vote is by a show of hands. The Secretary can then record the vote. If more than a majority of residents approve an action, it is adopted.

Troubleshooting Common Problems of a Resident Organization[7]

Difficulty in finding residents willing to hold office
- Meet with residents face-to-face. Find out about their gifts and interests, and sell the job to their interests.
- Make the term and scope of officer duties manageable.
- Arrange for leadership training.

Residents are hesitant to preside at meetings
- Initially, the manager, resident leader, or community organizer can chair the meeting while helping residents build their leadership skills.
- Have officers share the duties so that no one feels overwhelmed.

Poor attendance at meetings
- Hold meetings regularly, at the same time, in the same place.
- Make sure that all residents know when and where meetings take place. Use flyers, announcements on the bulletin board, newsletter, etc.

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[7] HUD Connecticut Office, *ibid.*

- Start with simple activities, projects that are exciting and have wide appeal and let everyone know what they will be.
- Start with success. Nothing is as attractive as success.
- Make the meetings fun as well as productive.

Members focus on personal issues instead of group issues during meetings
- Acknowledge the importance of the issue. Arrange for a private meeting later.
- If there is a grievance committee, the resident may be referred there.

Members are disruptive
- Overly talkative members should be tactfully interrupted. Acknowledge the person's contribution, and then ask others to add their comments.
- Argumentative members – Keep your cool and make sure others keep theirs. Ask for clarification and specific examples of general complaints. Steer discussion away from personal attacks to dealing with the issues raised. After the issues have been discussed, summarize and move on to the next point. If he continues to argue, explain that the issues have been covered, and offer to meet with him privately after the meeting to resolve any remaining personal issues.
- Know-it-all – Acknowledge her expertise. Assure her that she has a valuable contribution to make, and then seek comments from other members. Give her more responsibilities. ("Sue, we will be able to tap your experience in fund-raising. Does anyone have similar experience?")

Members are passive
- Shy – Call on him by name and smile at him. Ask him easy questions, especially about his area of knowledge. Give him an assignment.
- Disinterested – Ask her direct questions about her area of special knowledge. Ask her advice. Mention something she said to you at another time. Give her an assignment.

Troubleshooting Common Problems outlines strategies for dealing with problems common to many resident organizations.

Keys to Success[8]

A resident organization is not an end in itself. It is a vehicle whereby residents can work on issues of mutual concern. Success doesn't come automatically or easily. Success requires:

- Residents to be unified in a common purpose
- Active, cooperative and enthusiastic leaders
- Good organization with an emphasis on completion of projects

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[8] HUD Pittsburgh Office, *ibid*.

- Accountability for all funds
- Avoiding conflicts of interest and petty personality feuds

If a resident organization starts with these 5 basic qualities, it can be successful in creating and developing a higher quality of life in the housing community.