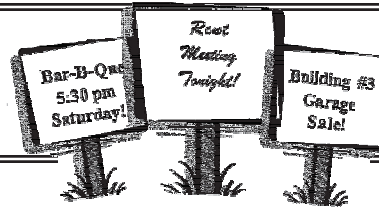


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# TENANT ORGANIZATIONS

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A tenant association is a group of residents who band together for any of a number of reasons. It may be formed by the tenants of a single apartment house, the tenants of a single landlord in many houses, or on a neighborhood basis.

Sometimes associations form on a social basis to organize adult or children's activities or just to visit. Sometimes they begin as organizations to make specific complaints against rent raises, evictions, or a landlord's refusal to make repairs. Sometimes they form for security.

Some tenants' associations last for short periods of time while certain people or certain issues are present. Others last over many years and can develop into strong positive bases for neighborhood activities or even community-wide activities such as housing code enforcement or neighborhood improvement.

There is no right way to organize and run a tenant organization because each situation is different. Still, tenant groups should keep a number of things in mind when planning and running an organization.

**Information:** Information on community resources, landlords, local issues, and politicians means strength for a tenant organization. Information can be used to educate your members and the public. It is essential in decision-making on issues and planning events. It can also aid in obtaining public support and providing better defense in legal situations.

**Recruiting:** Try and get people who are known by a lot of tenants to help get people out to the meetings. One-on-one personal or telephone invitations are the best. Offer people rides. Organize first on small problems which have solutions or limited activities so that your group has early successes.

**Social/Security:** One of the most effective ways to improve security in any neighborhood is to

have the neighbors know one another and look out for one another. So, social activities and interactions among tenants can make for a more secure complex and better living arrangement for everyone.

**Meetings:** People come to meetings for a variety of reasons – issues, fun, social. Potluck dinners or other ideas can increase attendance. Set meeting times carefully to avoid conflicts with work, social events, school events, popular TV shows, etc. Meeting places should be close and easy to get to. Sitting in a circle for informal meetings allows everyone to see each other. A sign-up list allows individual tenants to list their problems and/or interests and also serves as a future reference and volunteer list.

The point of the meeting is to get something done, build interest, and build commitment; people should want to come back. Agendas should be prepared in writing and followed. Avoid "What do you want to do?" statements, but have suggestions for how to proceed on problems or activities. Encourage participation by many. Share all information so that people feel like they know what's going on. Open discussion of issues that are not central to the work that needs to be done should have a limited time allotted and should come at the end of the meeting.

Everyone should leave the meeting with something to do. Form working committees for future activities. This reinforces commitment and will give members an opportunity to brag at the next meeting (if they have done what they said they would) or feel group pressure (if they have not).

**Roleplaying:** Take the part of each of the characters in a situation, either in your head or with the group. It can be a lot of fun, and, taken seriously, very instructive. Whether you are just trying to get more people in your building or

neighborhood out to events that you have planned or whether you are trying to plan arguments, tactics, and overall strategy in a major issue, understanding the point of view from the other side can be helpful.

**Tactics:** Tenant group tactics can include letters, negotiation, events in public places, meetings, and, in extreme cases, such methods as picketing or rent strikes. All activities should be carefully and sensitively selected, timed, and directed to meet the specific needs, goals, and objectives established by the tenants' association.

**Legal Help:** Lawyers are a necessary aid to any tenant group that is pursuing tenants' rights issues. They can buy time, give advice, and even win key cases. They may also serve as advocates in seeking changes in the law in legislatures and city councils. However, the lawyer's role should be no more than that of a

technical advisor who gives members legal information about what might happen to them if they try certain specific tactics. It is imperative that the tenants decide whether their action in a controversy will be moderate or militant.

**Publicity:** Leaflets, posters, and newsletters are basic methods of keeping tenants informed about the group's activities and accomplishments. Telephone "trees" are also very effective.

TV, radio, and newspaper coverage will also be helpful, but the media cannot substitute for the basic methods listed above.

**Community Support:** Every community group should be aware of the benefit which comes from exchanging advice, support, and resources with other groups. However, do not try to pattern your tactics or activities to be exactly like others. No two organizations are the same; you must look inward for your own direction.

## LEGAL REFERENCES

The term "K.S.A." refers to the **Kansas Statutes Annotated**. In book form, these Kansas laws are available at most libraries and often can be found at business and government offices. They are also available at [www.kslegislature.org](http://www.kslegislature.org). Do a statute search using the numbers listed here. Copies of the Kansas Residential Landlord and Tenant Act (K.S.A. 58-2540 through 58-2573), Mobile Home Parks Residential Landlord and Tenant Act (K.S.A. 58-25,100 through 58-25,126) and other items noted below can be ordered from Housing and Credit Counseling, Inc. Listed by order of appearance in this handbook:

**Definitions** – K.S.A. 58-2543, 58-25,103

**Before You Rent – Fraud on Applications**, Landlord remedies, K.S.A. 36-206 and 36-207; **Kansas Fair Credit Reporting Act**, 50-701 through 50-722; **Fair Credit Reporting Act**, 15 U.S.C. § 1681; **Possession**, 58-2552, 58-2560; **Metering**, 58-25,127.

**Security Deposits** – K.S.A. 58-2543, 58-2550, 58-2554, 58-2562, 58-2563; 1979 Kansas Supreme Court case Clark v. Walker, Forfeiture provisions; 1982 Kansas Court of Appeals case Buettner v. Unruh, When move-in inventory was not done; 2001 Kansas Court of Appeals case Wurtz v. Cedar Ridge, Landlord can't keep security deposit as liquidated damages.

**Leases/Rental Agreements** – K.S.A. 58-2543 through 58-2547, 58-2549, 58-2551, 58-2556, 58-2558, 58-2565; **Subleasing** 58-2511, 58-2512, 58-2515; **Disclosure of Ownership**, 58-2551, 58-2554; Kansas Contract Law (not detailed here) also applies; 1975 Kansas Supreme Court case Chelsea Plaza Homes, Inc. v. Moore, Kansas Residential Landlord and Tenant Act applies instead of Kansas Consumer Protection Act in Landlord/Tenant issues; Model Leases may be ordered from Housing and Credit Counseling, Inc.

**Rules and Regulations** – K.S.A. 58-2556

**Move-In Inventory** – K.S.A. 58-2548; 1982 Kansas Court of Appeals case Buettner v. Unruh, When move-in inventory was not done; Move-in Inspection Forms can be obtained from Housing and Credit Counseling, Inc.

*(Legal References continued on following page)*