



# EVICTIION DEFENSE ORGANIZING TOOLKIT

On September 4th, 2020 the National Center for Disease Control (CDC) issued a Federal Eviction Moratorium through March 31st, 2021, banning evictions for nonpayment of rent nationwide. Despite this, many property owners are continuing to force tenants from their homes across the nation.

This toolkit exists to support tenants who;

- 1) Are facing eviction for reasons other than nonpayment of rent;or
- 2) Are experiencing property owner retaliation;, or
- 3) Have filed for protection under the CDC Federal Eviction Moratorium but are still being served an eviction.

**Before going any further, please review the [CDC Federal Eviction Moratorium](#) and [Tenant FAQ](#).**

**If you have any additional questions or need support, please fill out [this form](#) and the Anti-Eviction Network will reach out to you shortly.**



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## ORGANIZING TO STAY IN YOUR HOME

If you are facing eviction or are at risk of eviction, it's not your fault. It's the fault of a whole system of banks, property owners, and management companies that exist to make massive profits at the expense of your safety. It's the fault of a housing system that only provides safe, sustainable, and permanently affordable housing to a select few. It's the fault of courts that don't provide representation or justice. The only way that we can transform this system is if thousands of tenants, like us, unite and fight back by organizing our neighbors and community members to take **direct action** with us.

## WHAT IS AN EVICTION?

The Anti-Eviction Project believes that evictions aren't limited to formal eviction filings in courts. Instead, when we say "eviction" we mean any action taken by a landlord to force a person to move. Some examples: raising the rent every single year, refusing to renew the lease, not maintaining the property, threats. These are all tactics that landlords use to evict people without having to use the legal process, and to us these all count as evictions.

## WHAT IS A DIRECT ACTION?

Direct action sometimes means that we bring our crisis to the people who have the power to do something about it. Other times, direct action means we take matters into our own hands and just do what we need to do to take care of our families.

**A direct action is an action that people or groups take collectively to stop business as usual IMMEDIATELY.**

In this case, it would be an action that you, your friends, your family, and your neighbors take together to make sure that you are not evicted from your home.

This is usually referred to as an [eviction defense](#). Here are a few examples:

- You and your family, friends, and neighbors stop the property owner and sheriff from coming to change the locks. This is known as an eviction blockade.
- You and your family, friends, and neighbors all show up at the property owner's home or office and refuse to leave until they take back the eviction.
- You and your family, friends, and neighbors go to the sheriff's office and demand that they not serve your eviction, or carry out any evictions in the county.

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## STEPS TO ORGANIZING A DIRECT ACTION

1. **Research:** Get a clear understanding of the eviction process in your area, map out the actors who carry it out and their roles, and where you are at in that process.
2. **Identify a Target:** Identify a target and a direct action that can stop the eviction process from being carried out.
3. **One-to-Ones:** Reach out to your friends, family, neighbors, and other community members to start building relationships with people that can support you through this process and take action with you.
4. **Community Meeting:** Have a meeting with these people to decide what action is best to take and create a clear plan to execute it.
5. **Press:** Notify the press and make sure that your story is told.
6. **Action:** Take the action.
7. **Next Steps:** Debrief the action and come up with clear next steps.



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## EVICTIION PROCESS RESEARCH

The eviction process and who carries it out will look different based on where you live. Before taking any action it is really important to know how the eviction process works and who the people and organizations that play a role in it are. Each of these steps can take a few days or weeks which can buy you time for action planning. Here is how the eviction process generally works:

**The property owner takes you to court.**



**The judge hears the eviction case.**



**The judge rules in favor of the property owner and says you must leave your home.**



**The property owner delivers an eviction notice that says you have a certain number of days to leave your home.**



**You do not leave .**



**The property owner changes the locks or calls the sheriff's office to make you leave your home.**

Use this [worksheet](#) to get a clear picture of how the eviction process works where you live.



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## IDENTIFYING A TARGET AND AN ACTION

An effective direct action will look different based on where you live and what stage of the eviction process you are in. After mapping out the process and actors involved in it you should be able to identify a target. **Your target is the person or system that you are trying to stop from carrying out their part of the eviction process.** The property owner and the Sheriff's Office are usually good targets to start with. Here is a table with common targets and action examples.

TARGET	REASON	DEMAND	ACTION EXAMPLE
The <b>Sheriff's Office</b> is often the law enforcement agency that serves evictions.	Taking a direct action against them that harms their reputation and relationship with the community can lead them to suspend serving evictions.	Stop serving evictions.	Refuse to leave the Sheriff's Office until they agree to stop serving evictions.  Do an eviction blockade at a tenants' home to prevent the Sheriff from being able to change locks.
<b>Judges</b> rule on eviction cases and are responsible for interpreting the CDC Federal Eviction Moratorium.	Judges can decide to suspend eviction court hearings or enact an eviction moratorium in their circuit.	Enact a full eviction moratorium.	Disrupt eviction court hearings.  Hold a die-in at the judge's home.
<b>Property owners and corporate management companies</b> have power over hundreds of tenants and use evictions as a means to increase their profits.	Property owners file the eviction cases.	Stop evicting tenants.	Refuse to leave the office of the property management company until they agree to stop filing evictions through the end of the pandemic.



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<p><b>Government Officials</b> like mayors and governors also may have the power to enact an eviction moratorium.</p>	<p>Some government officials have the power to enact an eviction moratorium. They also control budgets that would allow for the cancellation of all rent and mortgage payments.</p>	<p>Enact an eviction moratorium.  Cancel all rent and mortgage payments.</p>	<p>Have community members call the elected person's office and demand an eviction moratorium.  Refuse to leave the elected person's office until they agree to enact an eviction moratorium.</p>
<p><b>Banks</b> are at the core of racial capitalism and exist to intentionally keep rich people rich and the poor people poor.</p>	<p>Property owners may feel pressured to evict tenants if they have an outstanding mortgage with a bank or private equity firm.</p>	<p>Suspend all mortgage payments.</p>	<p>Refuse to leave the bank that holds a large number of mortgages in your community until they commit to suspending all mortgage payments.</p>

Once you have identified an action that fits your situation, it's time to start talking with your friends, family, and neighbors to gather as much support as possible.

**For more details and tips on planning an action, visit [this link](#).**

## REACHING OUT TO YOUR NEIGHBORS

Direct actions use the strength of numbers to disrupt business as usual and transfer power away from property owners, government officials, or CEOs to tenants, community

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members, and workers. But it's not just about building numbers, it's also about building deep relationships. Taking direct action is risky and requires that all of the people involved have radical trust in one another. Building these deep relationships with your neighbors and community members starts with one-to-one organizing conversations.

**Mapping:** Before heading out to have one-to-one conversations with your neighbors, take some time to do some mapping. Draw or print a map of your neighborhood or apartment building and take note of people who you know or have relationships with and those that you don't. Having an actual map in front of you can really help you to recall who you know, who you need to know, and who might have connections to people you need to know.

**List Tracking:** It's important to keep track of who you have conversations with and whether or not they are ready to take action. Organizers often use spreadsheets like this [one](#) to keep track of conversations and note a person's readiness to take action using this system:

- 1: ready to take action
- 2: hesitant about taking action
- 3: neutral about taking action
- 4: will not take action

## Having the Conversation:

- [Here](#) are the key components of a one-to-one conversation.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, always wear a mask and step away from the door after you knock. That way if the person answering the door isn't wearing a mask you may still both feel comfortable having a socially-distanced conversation.
- If you have a family member or roommate, go knock on doors together. It's always better in pairs.
- Make a flyer that has some information and a way to get in touch with you for people who are not home or do not answer the door.

## SETTING UP A MEETING

Having a meeting with the people that you have built relationships with is a critical step in planning the direct action. This meeting will be the space where everyone agrees to act as a collective and creates a clear strategy to make sure that you are able to stay in your home. Come to this space with honesty, vulnerability, and urgency.

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You can have the meeting through an online platform or in-person with precautions in place for COVID-19. See a sample meeting agenda [here](#).

## Online Platforms

[Zoom](#)

[Jitsi](#)

[Google Hangouts](#)

[Facetime](#)

[Conference Call](#)

[Facebook Group Messenger](#)

**\*\*\*Make sure to send out a reminder to everyone before the meeting. We are all busy and sometimes information gets lost in the chaos of the day!\*\*\***

## MAKING A PLAN

Here is a [list of roles](#) that are needed for most actions.

There may be a lots of moving parts to keep track of in the days before the action. You can use a [tic-toc](#) like this one to keep track of the tasks and who is going to make sure that they get done.

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT WHEN PLANNING YOUR ACTION

- Since you may not know the exact time and date that the eviction will be served, what is your plan to mobilize people quickly? A group text message or a phone tree would be great ideas!
- If the action is going to last longer than a few hours (it probably will), will you have shifts? Do you have someone who can bring food and snacks? Is there a place for people to camp out?
- How will you and those taking the action with you respond if the Sheriff's Office starts trying to push through you or use force?
- What are the possible outcomes/scenarios? What happens if they leave but come back later in the day or tomorrow?
- Are people willing to be arrested? Remember that just because they are threatening arrest, doesn't mean that they will actually arrest you. The more people who are willing and ready to be arrested, the less likely the Sheriff's Office is to make actual arrests.
- Do you want [legal observers](#) or lawyers present?
- Do you have a plan for escalation if this action does not end your eviction process?

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## PRESS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Your story is powerful and sharing it is an essential part of winning your demands and turning your private pain as a tenant into public power. Negative publicity for the Sheriff's Office or your property owner may lead them to drop your eviction. And a powerful story that shifts the narrative from personally blaming tenants for their inability to pay rent to the failure of our government and politicians, can lead other people in the community to act. Here are a few key tools for using press and social media to your advantage:

**Press Contacts:** Before the action, you can organize a list of reporters and press contacts that you think will tell your story. Click [here](#) for a spreadsheet to keep the list organized.

**Press Advisories:** Press advisories are used to contact press and alert them that something that they should cover is about to happen. You email an advisory out 24-48 hours before your action. Here is a template [press advisory](#).

**Press Releases:** Press releases are used to send a summary and statement to the press after something has happened. You should have a press release prepared before your action that you can send out as soon as it is over. Here is a template [press release](#).

**Social Media:** Twitter, Facebook, and other social media sites can be really useful for sharing your story and organizing. You can use them to find other tenants or community members who are concerned about evictions and create calls to action. For example, you could make a post asking people to call your property owner or the sheriff's office telling them that it is not okay to evict people in the middle of a pandemic. Using Twitter to tag the sheriff or property owner and encourage followers to tweet at them can be an important tool in the toolbox too.

**Petitions:** Creating a petition can help to raise more awareness and bring attention to the injustice of your eviction. It can also be a great way to gather a list of more contacts in your area or people from across the country who can support from afar. [MoveOn](#) and [Change.org](#) are platforms that will hold your petition for no cost.

## AFTER THE ACTION

The action isn't over until all people are out of jail and the tenant (you) has a safe place to stay.

**Jail Support:** If people are arrested, you will need a team of people who can locate where they are being held, what the charges are, and post bail. This is called the jail support team. [Here](#) is a more detailed document on how to run jail support.

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**Debrief Meeting:** Regardless of whether or not you have won your demands, it's important to have a meeting with all the people who took part in the action to debrief. If you did win your demands, use this time to show appreciation, build relationships, and identify what lessons were learned throughout the process. If you are still in the process of escalating your demands use this time to show appreciation, identify what the next steps are, and what lessons you learned from this direct action that you can use in the next one.

## WITHHOLDING RENT

Withholding rent or a rent strike is another tactic to use when property owners and municipal systems do not meet your demand to stop evictions in your community. Calling for a rent strike is extremely serious and requires lots of planning and radical trust in one another. The same principles and processes that you use to organize a direct action also apply to organizing a rent strike or withholding rent.

Here are some questions to answer before initiating a rent strike:

- Have you made clear demands of the property owner?
- Have you used multiple other tactics to escalate your demands?
- Have you consulted with legal support?
- Are enough people willing to take this action for it to change the balance of power?

## LEGAL SUPPORT

Taking direct action or withholding rent involve risk. Consult with local lawyers or legal aid to understand exactly what risks are associated with any actions that you are taking. Make sure that you clearly communicate these risks to anyone that is joining you in action.

## EVICITION DEFENSE NETWORKS

Eviction Defense Networks are groups of tenants, community members, and organizations that mobilize to protect tenants within their community from evictions through [direct actions](#) such as [eviction blockades](#).

## COMPONENTS OF AN EVICITION DEFENSE NETWORK

**Tenant Outreach:** this is how you get in touch with tenants who are facing eviction.

**Eviction Blockades:** these are direct actions that you can take to keep individual tenants in their homes.

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**Eviction Defense Direct Actions:** these are direct actions that you can take to shut down eviction processes that will keep multiple tenants in their homes.

## TENANT OUTREACH

There are many ways to make sure that tenants in your community know that your eviction defense network is there to support them in taking action to stay in their homes. Here are a few:

- Open a tenant hotline
- Post on social media
- Run Facebook ads
- Find the court records of tenants who are facing eviction
- Distribute flyers over apartment complexes and neighborhoods that have a lot of renters
- Put yards signs on busy street corners in neighborhoods
- Get in touch with any local mutual aid projects
- Call and text your membership base if you have one
- Do an action or protest against the sheriff or courts to gain publicity

## INTAKE

Once tenants reach out to you, get back with them as quickly as possible. It is important to call them rather than texting or emailing them so that you can get a clear picture of their situation and whether or not they are ready to organize. **Here are a few tips for intake calls:**

- Be a sympathetic and good listener.
- Be prepared to test the tenant around their willingness to fight back.
- Have a place where you can send tenants who are looking for direct services.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- **Don't let perfection be the enemy of progress.**  
It is always better to defend than not to. We will only win if we have the courage to engage in hundreds of fights, not because we did one perfect eviction defense.
- **Don't judge.**  
Eviction defense networks exist to keep tenants in their homes, not to determine who has the right story or message. Our racist and classist society impacts people in a million different ways, so be kind, open, and empathetic.
- **Always center those most impacted—the tenants!**  
Tenants should always be at the center of direct actions. If they are not willing to share their story with the press, turn out friends and family, and engage in direct action, then find another target!

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## **ADDITIONAL MATERIALS**

- [Federal Eviction Moratorium FAQ](#)
- [Eviction Process and Target Research](#)
- [Direct Action Planning Tips](#)
- [One-to-One Conversation Tracker](#)
- [Press Contacts List](#)
- [Press Advisory Template](#)
- [Press Release Template](#)
- [Jail Support Toolkit](#)

## **GLOSSARY:**

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**DIRECT ACTION:** an action that people or groups take collectively to stop business as usual IMMEDIATELY.

**EVICITION BLOCKADE:** a specific type of eviction defense where a group of people block the entrance of a tenant's home from the sheriff or property owner who is trying to force the tenant from their home.

**EVICITION DEFENSE:** a type of direct action that puts a wrench in the eviction process and keeps a tenant in their home

**LEGAL OBSERVERS:** trained people that attend protests and direct actions to document police misconduct and any arrest of participants.

## KEY COMPONENTS OF A ONE-TO-ONE ORGANIZING CONVERSATION

- **Intro:** Introduce yourself and tell them why you are reaching out, e.g.:
  - "My name is Jane and I live in apartment 32A. I'm having trouble with property owner and am now facing eviction, do you have a minute to talk?"
- **Questions:** Ask the person you are talking with about their life. How long have they lived here? What is their life like? What excites them? This shouldn't feel like an interview, but a genuine conversation to get to know one another. Don't be afraid to share things about yourself, it will make them feel more comfortable doing the same. Lastly, the most important thing that you can do is listen and show genuine interest.
- **Issues:** Ask the person that you are in conversation with about what they are worried about or what issues they are facing. Are they a renter? Or is someone that they love a renter? If so, what has their experience been like? How have the issues

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that they are facing impacted their life and relationships? What would life be like if those issues were fixed? If they could change anything about their situation, what would it be?

- **Agitation:** Ask them why they think that we are being treated this way? Can you believe that they are evicting people in the middle of a pandemic? Don't we deserve better? Who's responsible for this? Be clear that not being able to pay rent is not our fault. In the face of our government failing to protect us, we have to do whatever it takes to protect one another.
- **Vision:** Ask the person that you are talking to what it would look like to fight back and win. What would we be able to accomplish if we all worked together? What will happen if we don't? Paint a clear picture: If I try to block the door by myself, the property owner will still be able to come in and change the locks. But, what if we all stood in front of the door together? The property owner wouldn't be able to get in. We are much more powerful when we work together.
- **Ask:** Ask the person you're talking to if they are going to let things continue as they are or if they will join with you to take action and protect one another.
- **Inoculation:** Prepare the person for what to expect. If they have the same property owner as you, let them know that the property owner may try to intimidate them because when people join together they can win big things, and that could cut into their profits.
- **Follow up:** Ask the person who else they know in the neighborhood or building and if they will connect you with them.
- **Next Steps:** Show that you are excited about them joining you. Give them your contact information and make sure that they know what the next step is, e.g., join a meeting at (date/time) to discuss a plan to protect tenants in the neighborhood from eviction.

## SAMPLE ACTION PLANNING MEETING AGENDA

**PURPOSE:** To create an agreed upon direct action plan to stop an individual person from being evicted or to stop evictions in the community.

### OUTCOMES:

- We will have an agreed upon plan for taking direct action to stop people from being evicted in our neighborhood.
- We will have clear roles and responsibilities in planning and executing the action.

### AGENDA:

- **Intros:**
  - What's your name and pronouns?
  - How are you doing?
  - What led you to join this meeting?

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- **What's at Stake:** Tell your story and let people ask questions.
- **Vision:** Lead everyone in envisioning what could be possible if everyone took action together.
  - Immediately: What would it mean for you to stay in your home?
  - Future: What would life be like if there were no evictions? Or even property owners? Or if everyone had a house?
- **Strategy:** How do we make this happen? Joining together to take direct action and create the change that needs to happen.
- **Action Plan:** Propose an action plan(s) to the group. Go through all of the details and why it's so important.
- **Commitments:**
  - Ask people to commit to taking action by filling [certain roles](#).
  - It's important to be as specific as possible about what each role will do and what level of risk it entails.
  - Make sure to create roles and opportunities for all people. You can plug people into various roles based on the amount of time that they have and what level of risk they are comfortable with assuming.
    - For example: If someone does not have a ton of time or is not able to attend the actual direct action, then ask them to assemble the press list and help send out the press advisory the day before.
  - Also make sure to get commitments from everyone for how many people they can ask to join the action.
- **Next Steps:** Don't let anyone leave without being really clear about the next steps. The next step could be an eviction blockade tomorrow, another planning meeting, or an action practice.
- **Appreciations/Grounding:** Show your gratitude for everyone who is taking a risk to fight with you and make sure everyone leaves feeling grounded in the importance of this fight.