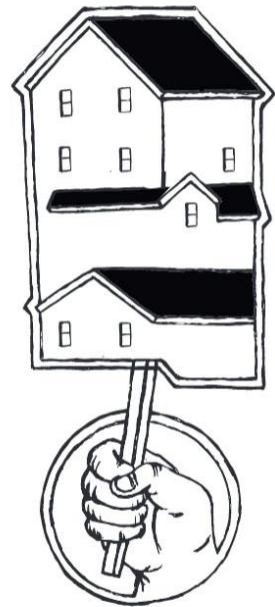


RENT
STRIKE
BARGAIN



**Rent Strike Bargain
Campaign Toolkit**

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Introduction

The Tenants' Rights Crisis

B.C.'s renters are in crisis, and current solutions are not working. Despite promises from provincial and municipal governments, few of their actions show a commitment to keeping people in their homes and safeguarding affordable housing. Across the province, we have seen too little action to end rent/demovictions, build a sufficient supply of affordable housing units, or protect those most vulnerable to skyrocketing costs of living. The pandemic has amplified the inequities in the housing market and working-class people are bearing the brunt of the global recovery.

Meanwhile, owning property is big business, with global real estate now a \$300 trillion industry. The overall decline of industry and commerce sectors in most major cities has left land speculation the only game in town for those hoping to turn a quick profit or enjoy a steady, idle income as a landlord. Speculation on land as an appreciating asset drives people out of their homes and disincentivizes the construction of new affordable housing. When housing is seen as just another commodity for trading, landlords and developers are encouraged to do whatever they can to maximize their returns. This leads to illegal evictions, demolition of perfectly fine, affordable rental units, and the destruction of invaluable community amenities without any input from the people that live there.

The primary victims of this framework are renters as we now make up over a third of all BC households. Average rent now accounts for 30% of gross income, especially in urban areas. Low and fixed-income renters have few options, which forces them to settle for substandard housing and to increase their daily commutes to an unsustainable time. There is little choice when it comes to setting down roots and making a home where children can thrive. Displacement and gentrification are rife, facilitated by municipal governments through rezoning approvals that encourage the destruction of secure, affordable rental units. The fact is that people are losing their homes at much higher rates than any other time in recent memory.

As renters continue to suffer from housing insecurity, we must also endure housing scarcity, thanks to failures by all levels of government to build adequate affordable housing. For years, real wages have remained stagnant, and welfare rates have failed to keep up with rapidly increasing costs of living. What renters need most is a huge investment in non-market housing that meets the needs of ordinary people to live and work in their communities. While we continue to fight for this, we also need strong tenant protections, to ensure that people can stay in their homes and that our affordable rental homes actually remain affordable, and the right to collectively bargain with our landlords.

Renters have been failed by every level of government, despite them having the tools and resources to fix these problems. It's now clear that meaningful positive change is not coming without a fight. Only tenants, united together, can take the bold action needed to address these problems. Together only we can shield what is left of our affordable housing from the destructive impulses of the for-profit housing market and its protectors in government. This toolkit will give you what you need to start making tenant-powered change happen in your community, as part of the Rent. Strike Bargain. Campaign.

Who Is This Toolkit For?

This toolkit is designed to help anyone to start a tenants' union in their local community or a tenants' association in their building, and start fighting for collective bargaining rights for renters. It provides key information about the campaign, steps and strategies for organizing your building and your community, and resources to help you in your work.

Whether you are familiar with the tenants' movement or just starting out, you should find useful information here that helps you to build power locally while remaining connected to our province-wide campaign.

What Exactly Is Rent Strike Bargain?

The Rent Strike Bargain is a campaign for workers and renters to come together. Along with our allies in the tenant and labour movements, we are proposing a form of collective bargaining rights for tenants. This kind of right already exists in labour law and is protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Section 2.d, which covers Freedom of Association.

However, we do not believe that we should simply rely on the government to give us these rights. We, therefore, seek to establish a province-wide solidarity movement between workers and tenants. Our movement is composed of workers and renters from across the province who want to come together and share their knowledge and experience. Together we can create a united movement based on community-directed action.

The 3 goals of our campaign are:

1. To develop tenant-renter solidarity.
2. To seed tenant unions in every region of BC.
3. To enshrine tenant collective bargaining rights into law.

A Provincial Campaign with Local Roots

Every fight starts at a local level and working to put pressure on your local Mayor, Councillors, and municipal staff can be an excellent way to start building power. Tenants living in well-organized buildings and communities can make real change at a local level.

Housing policy is controlled by a piece of provincial legislation called the *Residential Tenancy Act* (RTA - see Terms & Definitions section). That means that Victoria, as the province's capital, is the obvious place for our campaign to focus its efforts. However, there are benefits to also calling on municipalities to support collective bargaining rights for renters. Municipal councils often pass motions to call on senior levels of government to enact legislative change that is out of their jurisdiction. These calls may not necessarily be binding, but they can be highly persuasive. We need supporters at all levels of government and in every community across the entire province in order to win.

Our Campaign will help local renters in every region of the province to form tenants' unions and reshape their communities into strong and well-structured organizations.

Building Partnerships with the Labour Movement

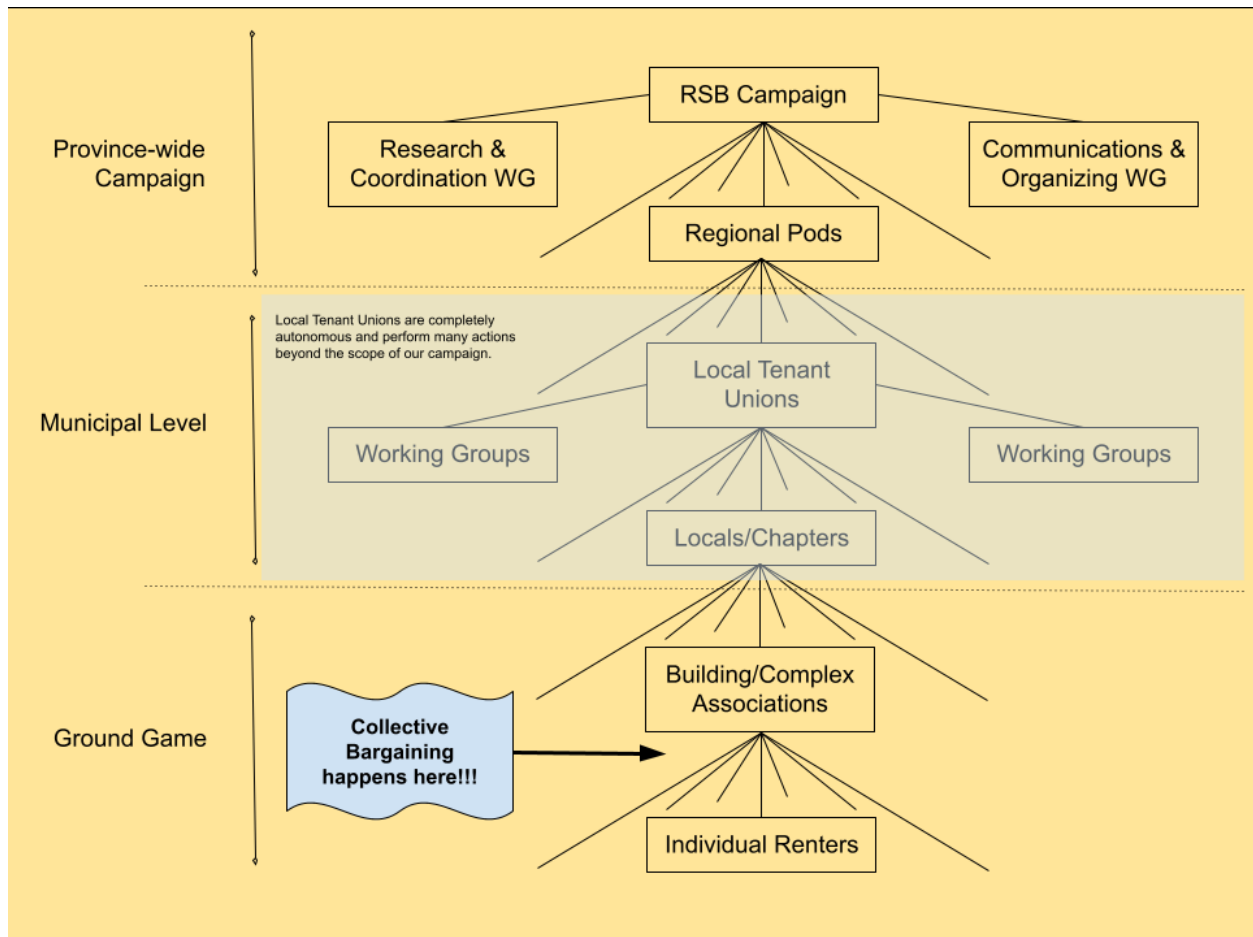
Our campaign is not interested in reinventing the wheel. The rights we seek already exist in labour and we hope to learn from their movement. One of our 3 main goals is to foster solidarity between workers and renters so that they can both bring their unique skills and experiences to the campaign.

By soliciting endorsements from labour unions we can then encourage their members to get involved in local tenant organizations. We know that there are many workers who rent across the province and we are interested in exploring the intersection of those identities. We hope to learn both the successes and the failures of the modern labour movement as we work to enshrine collective bargaining for tenants into law much the same as it has been for workers.

For a full list of organizations that have endorsed our campaign go to:

www.rentstrikebargain.com/endorsements

Organizational Map



Our province-wide campaign is organized into two working groups and many regional pods that represent every area of the province. Those regional pods then support the formation and activities of local tenants' unions. These municipal level unions are autonomous and independent from the province-wide campaign and are free to focus on any local issues that their members choose to take up.

The ground game of our campaign requires that our province-wide campaign work together with local tenants' unions at the municipal level to organize individual renters into formal associations by building or housing complex. These associations mirror collective bargaining units found in the labour movement and are intended to act as the bargaining agent for tenants during negotiations with their landlords.

Terms & Definitions

We have done our best to keep this guide as jargon-free as possible. However, at times using some technical language is unavoidable, so we've provided some definitions here to help keep all concepts easily understandable.

Affordability: A rate specified by regulation, usually about 30% of the average income, below which new rental units must be put on the market if the development is to be eligible for municipal subsidies, often in the form of levy waivers or tax exemptions.

Gentrification: A product of urban planning that transforms truly affordable (below-market), often more marginalized areas into more financially valuable, luxury areas. This process generally results in the displacement of low-income populations that historically inhabited these areas, by demolishing more affordable homes and pricing low-income residents out of the communities they grew up in. This is due to the prioritization of the financial value of a neighbourhood over its social or cultural value.

Reno/demoviction: Both are forms of bad-faith evictions, in which a landlord uses renovation or other redevelopment projects as an excuse to force out tenants. Often, people are forced to leave only because their rent was below-market.

Rent Cap: The maximum amount that rental costs may be increased in a given year. Ex. In 2022, this will be 1.5%. Rent caps only apply during a tenancy.

Residential Tenancy Act (RTA): Provincial legislation that governs the landlord-tenant relationship: www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/housing-tenancy/residential-tenancies

Residential Tenancy Branch (RTB): The quasi-judicial body that arbitrates disputes between landlords and tenants in British Columbia.

Vacancy Control: A form of rent control that ties rental rates to the unit instead of the tenant like our current rent control does. With tenant collective bargaining, collective leases would enforce a form of building-by-building vacancy control as a new tenant would inherit the rent of the old tenant through successorship.

Organizing Guide

In most cases, individuals begin tenant organizing because of a personal experience with housing insecurity. The vast majority of tenant organizers aren't experts or lawyers with decades of training, and they almost certainly aren't politicians looking for votes. They are your neighbours coming to help in your time of need and helping you to stand up for yourself. Becoming a good tenant organizer can be a long journey **that can only be started by getting involved** - that is why this section is a little short.

The only sure way to learn is to go out and start knocking on doors and talking to tenants. We want to give you the tools to know what you are doing and to have the confidence to get out there.

How To Organize your Building

Organizing rental buildings or complexes is one of the most important things we do as tenant organizers. In every building, there will be tenants that are experiencing a specific issue, such as landlord harassment or eviction prevention. You will also meet many tenants who are not currently fighting their own dispute but still want to contribute to the tenant movement. As an organizer, it is your job to get all of those people working toward a common aim. From gathering petition signatures to organizing events and lobbying elected officials, the Rent Strike Campaign has room for people with a vast range of skills and experience.

Recruiting tenants to join the campaign is also a great way to convert individual victories into a fully-fledged, tenant-led movement. Tenants who have recently challenged an eviction, whether successful or not, know better than most the impact stronger tenant protections would have on the availability of safe, secure, and affordable housing. They also have a wealth of firsthand knowledge to bring to the Campaign and are in a strong position to connect with other tenants over their shared experiences. Ideally, on your first time out, you will be joined by an experienced organizer who can help show you the ropes, but this is not always possible. Here are a few tips to get you started:

1. Work on a brief pitch and get comfortable with it

Get comfortable with a strong, concise rap to introduce yourself and the campaign at the door or in initial meetings with tenants. Refer to the **Introduction** section for some quick talking points on how organizing with your neighbours will improve your conditions and the conditions of renters all across B.C.

Keep it brief and avoid overloading tenants with too much information. Always include an ask for contact details (phone number is best!) and an offer to follow up at a later time for a more detailed conversation. Keep it simple if it's your first time out!

2. Go knock on some doors

You've got your pitch, now it's time to get out there! The most effective way to reach out to new tenants and initiate face-to-face conversations in buildings is to go door-knocking. People may be hesitant to speak to a stranger at first, but once they realize that you are there to help, people are usually interested to hear what you have to say. If you are knocking in your own building, introduce yourself as a neighbour. If not, it can be helpful to bring someone with you that lives in the building, as it can help build trust.

Your pitch is great, but remember to listen at least as much as you talk. You will want to take note of any useful details, such as any issues a tenant is experiencing with their landlord. So make sure that you take a pen and notebook with you, and try to leave with some contact details. If someone says they are not interested, take a note to come back later. Their disinterest may change over time or as the movement inside the building gets more traction. They may just be having a bad day and be more open later. Don't give up on your first "no"!

3. Identify potential leaders and encourage greater engagement in the campaign

Organizing tenants is all about relationship building. Through this process, you will meet tenants who are more engaged in the broader struggle and have the capacity to take on more outside just their own building. Identify these people, ask them to join the Campaign, and even offer suggestions as to how their skills can most benefit the Campaign. Of course, you should always use your own judgement to avoid overloading people in crisis. For example, the period immediately before or during an eviction dispute is usually a bad time to ask for more from tenants.

4. Create a building map

Mapping does not mean you have to draw the floor plan of the building. It means knowing who lives in each unit and whether they are supportive of your efforts to organize. Start by focusing your conversations on folks that already agree with you, but if we want to win majority support we will have to persuade folks that are harder to reach. Mapping rent is also a great way to get your neighbours interested in organizing. You can find links to an example building map in the Campaign Materials section.

5. Always feel free to ask for advice

Tenants internalized too much landlord propaganda? Not getting the engagement you hoped for? Have trouble getting physical access to the last building in your neighbourhood? Your partners in the Rent Strike Bargain Campaign are here for any thorny issues you come across. If you think your building is ready for the next

steps, get in touch with us and we can discuss how a **Formal Building Association** might work.

Remember - when you speak to tenants about the Campaign, you're not asking a favour, but building a movement that will benefit all tenants across British Columbia.

Community Meetings

Once you've knocked on a few doors and found a core group of committed allies that want to join in our work, it's time to get together and make a plan. Tenant groups can leverage incredible power when we work together. Some areas will have the benefit of having well-developed tenant organizations that are active in their communities. Reach out to those organizations and invite them to your meetings.

The Rent Strike Bargain Campaign is a great springboard and conversation starter on the path towards more robust tenant organizing in your community. We have a long-term goal with province-wide implications, so it is important to connect your work to more local issues as well. Build relationships with tenant advocates and other legal experts that you can refer people to when they ask for help.

More short-term mini-projects might help win folks over to the Campaign. Tenant power can be the solution to many different problems that tenants face. We can't rely on conventional advocacy tools to protect our neighbours. Eviction prevention and standards of maintenance cases can be won through negotiating pressure without the Residential Tenancy Branch (RTB). Even if the RTB is used to win, these cases mitigate the harms caused to tenants by the current legislative framework. These kinds of direct support efforts will also prove to your community that your group is truly there to help.

Example: The Vancouver Tenants Union often begins community meetings by asking people to describe the stability of their current housing or any problems they are currently experiencing with their housing or landlord. This practice allows tenants to hear that their concerns are not isolated and that more people are experiencing similar hardships. By showing tenants the breadth of these problems, they are more likely to understand that only collective action will achieve the changes that we all want.

NOTE: Please respect any public health restrictions that limit gatherings in your region. The health of your neighbours is a priority. While they are no replacement for in-person events, virtual meetings should be used if health concerns are too high.

Phone Banking

One of the best ways to drive large numbers of volunteers and supporters out to an event or other Campaign activity is to phone your contacts and ask them to confirm that they will attend.

Even though many volunteers may be hesitant to join a phone bank at first, once people start making calls, they're often surprised by how enjoyable it is. The key is to screen the list of people you are calling; the better the screening, the more likely the caller will end up talking to someone that will actually care about the cause. Screening is easier with bigger contact lists. Smaller groups may not find phone banking to be too potent a tool for them until they grow.

Other than a good list to call from, another key to a successful phone bank is a flexible script and well-trained volunteers. The script should be descriptive enough to provide all the information that the caller might need, but it can't be too rigid. Experienced callers will learn how to adapt any script to make the best of the specific circumstances of their call. Every tenant is unique and no script in the world is good enough for every situation. A sample script is available on our website at www.rentstrikebargain.com/campaign_materials.

The main components to any good organizing phone call are:

- 1) Introduce yourself and why you are calling
- 2) Connect and remind them why they got involved
 - a) If they can't remember, ask if anything about their tenancy is bothering them.
 - b) Listen to their problems and either tie them to the Campaign or refer them to other resources.
- 3) Discuss why the Rent Strike Bargain Campaign is so important.
- 4) Ask them to sign the petition/come to the event/become a volunteer.
- 5) Remind them that they are joining a movement of tenants and together we will win!
- 6) Confirm their information to make sure that they stay informed and get invitations to future actions.

Tabling at Events

Tabling in your neighbourhood and at community events is a great way for you to meet your neighbours, talk about the Campaign, gather signatures, and recruit volunteers.

1. Assemble the things you need to table:
 - Table, chairs, a banner, and placards
 - Rent Strike Bargain flyers, contact sheets, and copies of any other documents relevant to your work (e.g. a petition or letter to the government, a volunteer sign-up sheet for an event or door-knocking drive etc.)
 - A donation jar
 - Your local tenant association swag (Membership forms, stickers, or other promotional materials)
2. Set a date and time, and find at least one other volunteer to join you.
3. Find a spot in your neighbourhood with lots of foot traffic. If you are in a designated spot at an event, have one person behind the table and another roaming the crowd to pull people in.
4. Don't be afraid to approach people - the worst that will happen is that they say no! Come up with a quick hook to attract people's interest as they pass by.
5. After you have finished your shift, be sure to collect any remaining flyers and outreach materials to save for next time. (Next week? Tomorrow? Awesome!)
6. Input all data into a spreadsheet (you can download a template at www.rentstrikebargain.com/campaign_materials), and send them to the Rent Strike Bargain team so we can add the signatures you collect to our online petition.
7. Thank your volunteers and have a debrief. What worked? What didn't? Set a date and time to go out next week, and don't forget to watch out for other local events for ideas of where to table next.

NOTE: Please respect any public health restrictions that limit gatherings in your region. The health of your neighbours is a priority.

Host a Town Hall

Town Halls are great ways to announce the arrival of the Rent Strike Bargain Campaign in a new area or to expand our roots in an area where we are already active in. They are meant to educate people in the community about why this issue is important and ask folks to get involved in the Campaign, in whatever capacity their skills and resources allow them to. Town Halls do not have to be long events, and one of the most important parts of a Town Hall is what happens after - make sure to set aside time for people to mingle and get to know each other better.

What You Need

1. The Hall (30-100 people), or online
2. Chairs
3. A/V gear (Mics, PA, projector)
4. A Presentation (You can find ours at www.rentstrikebargain.com/campaign_materials)
5. Speakers - Host/Facilitator, Presenter, Guest(s) (if available)
6. Registration Table & Sign-up Sheet
7. Volunteers
8. Attendees!
9. **BONUS** - Snacks & Refreshments

How To Run a Town Hall

- Consider the role of facilitator/moderator/host. This person needs to have a good understanding of the issues, and be able to keep the discussion focused and equitable (e.g. among genders).
- The accessibility of your venue is important to people who have disabilities. Ask attendees ahead if anybody requires any particular accommodations to be able to participate.
- Make sure to set an agenda and stick to it. Also, ensure it's accessible to everyone in attendance (either project it or print plenty of copies).
- Everyone that attends should sign in and give a method of contact. You need to know who came to the event.
- Do your research and know the concerns and needs of the renters in your community.
- Keep energy high. Chants are highly recommended.
- If possible, invite questions and comments from the community before the town hall, which can be incorporated into the presentation.

- Consider the different ways to approach a Q & A session. You can ask attendees to write down their questions throughout the presentation, and submit them to the facilitator for review. It might be useful to have a microphone available and offer follow-up on any concern or question that is unanswered or needs a more in-depth response.
- Encourage healthy discussion and be prepared to confront attendees' misconceptions about the roots of the rental housing crisis.
- Appoint a volunteer to take thorough notes.
- After you get people excited make sure you get them to commit to the next steps! Coming to a meeting, going door-knocking/tabling, or helping with data entry are all great avenues of engagement.
- You might provide a simple post-meeting survey or feedback form, either at the end of town hall or online.

The Benefits of a Town Hall

1. Getting the word out about the Rent Strike Bargain Campaign
2. Educating your local community about the ins and outs of organizing
3. Creating solidarity between renters and workers in your area
4. Inspiring enthusiasm for change and action among local renters
5. Unearthing the skills and resources of the local community
6. Building relationships, trust, and connection in a community/neighbourhood

NOTE: Please respect any public health restrictions that limit gatherings in your region. The health of your neighbours is a priority. While they are no replacement for in-person events, virtual meetings should be used if health concerns are too high.

Meeting With Officials

Meeting with officials is a key part of building relationships with people who have power, and connecting them with tenants in their ridings/districts. This gives them a chance to learn more about the lived experience of the tenants they represent and learn more about our organizing work around Rent Strike Bargain. Officials need to see and understand tenant power!

In the “Provincial Campaign with Local Roots” section on page 4, we outlined why it’s important to get local governments on board, even though we are fighting for provincial legislation. Local efforts amplify the concerns of the constituents and put pressure on the provincial government to act on those concerns. So make sure both your municipality’s council and your MLA know that we need collective bargaining for tenants!

These skills also apply to meetings with union officials or community groups to try and arrange meetings with their members or to solicit an endorsement.

Make the Meeting Effective

If you are meeting your MLA or Municipality Councillor for the first time, think about how you will help them understand the negative impact that the absence of collective bargaining rights is having on renters. Invite people with lived experience of rent/demovictions or unreasonable rent increases to the meeting or have their stories on hand. The voices of the people directly affected need to be heard by officials and their stories will demonstrate the need for stronger tenant protections. Know your demands regarding the legislature, but focus on the stories and fostering a relationship with the political leader. In subsequent conversations, once the MLA or Councillor is familiar with the need for tenant collective bargaining and the Rent Strike Bargain Campaign, you can clarify how they are willing to support the Campaign.

Following these suggestions will help you organize a meeting with little to no hassle:

1. Get in touch with the Rent Strike Bargain Campaign at rentstrikebargain@gmail.com. They can let you know which officials have already been contacted. If you are interested in being a part of the Rent Strike Bargain Campaign, let us know!
2. Use the MLA finder (www.leg.bc.ca/learn-about-us/members) to find your local MLA, and then phone or email them directly to request a meeting. Check your local government website to find your municipality’s councillors. You can find the link for your municipality on the Union of B.C. Municipalities website at: www.ubcm.ca/EN/main/about/ubcm-members.html

3. Use these resources to help you focus and inform your meeting:
 - The B.C. Poverty Reduction Coalition ABC Plan website has detailed and party-targeted guides for meeting with MLAs. The guides' talking points are for a poverty reduction plan, but they are worth reading to get an idea of how the meeting can go. You can find the guide here:
 - www.abcplan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Meet-Your-BC-Liberal-MLA-2018.pdf
 - Public Interest Alberta's website also has a detailed MLA Advocacy Guide - www.adwa.ca/files/MLA_Advocacy_Guide_PIA2017.pdf
4. Connect as a group with the people you invite to join you, to make sure everyone is clear on purpose and strategy for the meeting with the politician.
5. Take notes on what happens during the meeting.
6. Ask whether the politician you are speaking with has any suggestions for who you could meet with next and if they would be willing to put you in touch.
7. Let us know how your meeting went!

NOTE: An in-person meeting is the most effective. However, if you only have a moment, email the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and other key provincial political leaders with tenant stories and collective bargaining rights for renters as our legislative demands.

Further Activities

Social Media Posts

You can amplify your advocacy using social media. It's a great way to get the attention of political decision-makers and to connect with fellow tenants. Below, you'll find some simple shareable posts for Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, etc.

On Twitter, it's best to target or modify these sample messages. You can tag key people in the B.C. government by including their Twitter "handle" in your message. For example:

Use **@jjhorgan** for Premier John Horgan and **@dave_eby** for David Eby, Attorney General and Minister Responsible for Housing.

Sample Posts

#unionathome means real security for renters. We can stop profit-motivated evictions and keep our communities intact. Start organizing in your area and join the fight for housing justice www.rentstrikebargain.com

Every eviction means another affordable unit is lost. With collective bargaining, landlords wouldn't be able to jack up the rent in between tenants, meaning we keep more housing available for the people who need it most www.rentstrikebargain.com

Which rises faster, your wages or your rent? Without a #unionathome, rising wages and increases in programs like welfare and disability go straight into the landlords' pockets. Join our campaign to keep more of your money in your hands. www.rentstrikebargain.com

Renting shouldn't be stressful. There's a real simple solution to stop landlords from harassing tenants to maximize their profits. #unionathome will end profit-motivated evictions, so tenants can stay in their homes. www.rentstrikebargain.com

Deeper Engagement

To win collective bargaining for all renters in B.C., we need to recruit volunteers with many different skills. British Columbian renters are talented people with deep roots in their communities. As a movement, we need to trust the expertise that our volunteers bring with them when they decide to participate in making change. Listen to what skills people have to offer, and take actions that allow them to contribute. These activities might include:

- Web/Graphic Design
- Fundraising
- Research
- Writing Op-eds
- Educational Workshops
- Data Science
- ...many more

Let your community and their skills guide the actions that you take together. To fully develop the whole range of talents that your volunteers bring to the Campaign, it may be necessary to divide your group into separate working groups or committees. For ideas on how to undertake these sorts of actions contact us at the Rent Strike Bargain Campaign.

Campaign Materials

Go to www.rentstrikebargain.com/campaign_materials to find downloadable versions of all the materials we have mentioned in this toolkit. You will find everything you need to start campaigning for tenants' rights in your community. Included in these resources are:

- Sample **Petitions**
- **Building Maps**
- Campaign Literature - ex. **Stickers, Brochures, Pamphlets and Posters**
- **Data entry spreadsheet** templates
- **Phone banking script** example
- **Town Hall presentation** example
- Boiler-plate **Constitution** to formalize a Building Association
- Designs for **Membership Cards** to Authorize Building Associations to be Bargaining Agents
- Links to other **organizing resources**, including Jane McAlevy's *No Shortcuts* and related YouTube videos

More resources will be added constantly, so keep checking back for more.

If you have any questions or concerns on how to deploy these materials, or you feel any topic was not adequately covered in this toolkit, please contact the Rent Strike Bargain Campaign. We will be happy to address any questions you might have as quickly as possible.

Join Our Campaign

If your group is interested in shaping this Campaign moving forward, we encourage any allied group to nominate a representative for our Rent Strike Bargain Campaign Working Group meetings.

Organizing & Communications WG meets Thursdays, at 7:30 PM Pacific Time, on a Zoom call.
Research & Coordination WG meets Saturdays, at 11:30 AM Pacific Time, on a Zoom call.

To join either working group sign up on our website or email us with the information below.

Contact us



Email: rentstrikebargain@gmail.com

Linktree: [@rentstrikebargain](https://www.linktree.com/@rentstrikebargain)

Twitter: [@RentStrikeBarg](https://twitter.com/RentStrikeBarg)

Website: rentstrikebargain.com