



YEAR-END GENERAL ASSEMBLY

VOL. 2

2017 ~ 2018





Foto: Hacer arte para los DÍAS DE IRA, 13 de octubre 2017.
Photo: DAYS OF RAGE art-making, October 13, 2017.



L.A. TENANTS UNION (LATU)

P.O. Box 27354, Los Angeles, CA 90027

LATU Solidarity Casework Hotline: (213) 986-8266

info@latenantsunion.org
<http://latenantsunion.org/>
<http://www.facebook.com/latenantsunion>
<http://twitter.com/LATenantsUnion>

Printed 2018





PROPOSITIONS FOR DISCUSSION IN THE LOS ANGELES TENANTS UNION

INTRODUCTION

On Monday, 4 December 2017, members of the L.A. Tenants Union came together for the Union's second General Assembly meeting. The gathering brought together close to eighty people, including long-term union members, individuals attending their first L.A. Tenants Union meeting, and supporters from other groups in the movement.

In preparation for the General Assembly, the Outreach Committee of L.A. Tenants Union asked all the Local chapters and committees to set aside time to come together and reflect on the experiences of the previous twelve months. First, each participating Local and committee reflected on all of the campaigns undertaken in 2017. The groups discussed the goals, the specific actions, and coalitions or partnerships. From there, the groups ranked the two most pressing issues or challenges that emerged in the campaigns. In the end, five of the Locals contributed notes related to their organizing and campaigns. Those Locals included Hollywood, Northeast, Westside, Eastside, and Vermont y Beverly. The Policy and Research committee also undertook the process and submitted notes on their top questions for the Union. Having received all the notes, the Outreach Committee synthesized the responses and came up with ten propositions to focus the discussions during the year-end General Assembly. Many of the anecdotal elements in the propositions came directly from the Locals.





During the General Assembly, each proposition was assigned to a different small group made up of individuals from different Locals, committees, and newcomers. While some of the small groups delved deeply into their proposition, others rehearsed the union's fundamental positions and organizational structure. Despite the unevenness of the conversations, during the small group report backs a number of specific themes emerged. Some of those themes included the following.

1. The need to create a space in the General Meetings and the Locals for ongoing education work regarding policy issues, political differences, and strategy.
2. All of the Locals struggle to make a pathway for members who come to the union in crisis to then find their way into leadership roles for their apartment building, the Local, and for the union.
3. The need to cultivate leaders among the most vulnerable tenants, where vulnerability is conditioned by social disparities caused by racism, immigration status, age, and poverty.
4. The need to deliberately incorporate the process of naming the moment into the regular work of the Locals as a way to understand changes in conditions and therefore be responsive and flexible as situations unfold.



HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

What follows are ten propositions used in small group discussion during the December 2017 General Assembly. While the propositions come out of the specific experiences of Locals and committees, they are each suitable for generating discussion across the many spaces in our movement. Through such discussions we can assess the current situation and formulate goals for the next year. Here are the instructions given to each of the small groups on how to use the propositions compiled in this booklet.

1. Assign a facilitator for the group and select a secretary to keep legible and detailed notes.
2. Introduce yourselves: name, neighborhood (Local or committee), and preferred gender pronoun.
3. Suggested ice-breaker: Share one word to describe this historical moment in Los Angeles.
4. Read the proposition aloud.
5. See if there are any questions to make sure that everyone understands the proposition.
6. Talk about examples from your own neighborhood, Local, tenants union, or organization. Use the questions after the proposition to provoke discussion and brainstorm ideas.
7. Work together to turn your notes into a list of clear recommendations that respond to the proposition.
8. Draft a timeline for the actions the group has listed. Determine who will work on putting those actions into practice. Again, keep careful notes. The point is to accomplish your goals.





1 **Determining how and when to escalate a campaign to reach victory.**

In several current campaigns, the tactics employed have brought us to a stalemate. Landlords and developers (particularly those with deep pockets) have refused to budge. This is the case for the 1815 E. 2nd St building in Boyle Heights where the tenants are on a rent strike after many of them received up to \$800 rent increases. In order to avoid a protest at his residence, the landlord BJ Turner first agreed to negotiate only to then stab the tenants in the back and begin eviction proceedings against them.

We are convinced that our demands are reasonable; keeping people in their homes at rents they can afford. Additionally, in the case with the VyBe led campaign against HCID, protests, public campaigns, planning and public meetings, confronting politicians, and even the courts are not succeeding in resolving the fight and delivering victories.



Foto: Protesta en la residencia del dueño de los apartamentos Mariachi Crossing, 11 de diciembre 2017. Photo: Protest at the residence of the Mariachi Crossing landlord, December 11, 2017.





DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In the cases in the Eastside and the fight against HCID, among others, are our members willing to escalate the struggle?
2. What might escalation look like for these different kinds of cases (e.g. committing civil disobedience)?
3. Who is willing to take those risks?
4. What does LATU need in place to prepare for escalation – legal support, financial support, art and media support?



[Discussion notes for propositions 1, 9, and 10 not available.]





2 Developing new committed members.

As the L.A. Tenants Union grows, more and more people come into our movement seeking support for their individual housing crises. Newcomers quickly learn that we are a movement of tenants standing together to defend our housing and our communities. Helping people transition from getting help to taking leadership can be a challenge for any movement.

Across the Locals folks are struggling with retaining members and developing new leadership. Sometimes interested people show up to one or two meetings but then we never see them again. Other times, tenants in crisis come to meetings, gather the information or help they need, but then they do not return.



Foto: Capacitación de Facilitación, 14 de enero 2017. Photo: Facilitation training, January 14, 2017.





DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do we keep people involved? What is an obstacle to creating commitment?
2. Are the locals spaces of meaningful community that engages people in ways that are larger than individual crises?
3. How can we transform the Locals into community spaces that feel and act less like spaces of conducting business? How do we make Locals the spaces where people want to be, that people look forward to engaging, and add meaning to their everyday life?
4. What are some strategies for increasing engagement and building the Local for the long haul?

DISCUSSION RESPONSES

Designate a mentor or buddy who checks up on new members. Just because someone misses a meeting doesn't mean they're not interested.

Counter ideas around inability to get involved with, "we are all volunteers!" What are folks good at doing?

After door knocking, develop concrete steps to follow-up and encourage involvement?

Make Locals spaces of engagement. Ex. Give the floor to newcomers!!! Provide opportunities for people to process trauma. Provide childcare. Evening meetings need to feed tummy and mind. Incorporate songs, art, and culture. Connect to worldwide movement. Ask everyone to make a financial, labor, or material contribution?



3 **Expanding the fight against artwashing across Los Angeles.**

For nearly two years the Eastside Local has boycotted businesses bringing speculative development to Boyle Heights. Speculation triggers rent hikes, forces out needed services, and displaces the existing community. Many of the businesses targeted by the boycott are art galleries. The boycott is not against artists or against art. The boycott targets businesses, including art galleries that have a stake in gentrifying the community. The Eastside boycott has drawn attention from around the world and stimulated a debate about the role of art galleries and art-oriented development within gentrification.

While the Eastside Local has been the only Local to target gentrifying businesses, we see art galleries and development in the name of art leading gentrification across the city. Other affected communities include Downtown, Highland Park, Frogtown, Leimert Park, Mid-City, Hollywood, and North Hollywood.



Foto: Celebración de la comunidad en el cierre de un negocio que causa aburguesamiento, PSSST gallery en Boyle Heights, 29 de abril 2017.
Photo: Community celebration at the closing of a gentrifying business, PSSST gallery in Boyle Heights, April 29, 2017.





DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How might the Eastside Local expand support for their struggle against the galleries and gentrifying businesses in Boyle Heights?
2. Do you see similar things happening in your neighborhood with gentrifying businesses, like art galleries, triggering an increase in rents and evictions?
3. How might a boycott of businesses like gentrifying art galleries be useful in your Local? Who would call for the boycott? What would the boycott demand?
4. What do you think is the best way to educate the community about the reasons for the boycott and how community members can get involved?

DISCUSSION RESPONSES

Distinguish between businesses that gentrify and those that do not based on ownership, clientele, role in real estate speculation, and whether the business is useful to the poorest residents in the neighborhood.

Hold a community forum and workshops to identify threats in the neighborhood.

Create a neighborhood coalition to meet with councilman and/or do direct action.

Call for a boycott with clear targets and demands. Set up pick-et-lines at gentrifying businesses.

Create a list of what businesses to support.





4 Expanding the fight against short-term rentals.

Venice and Hollywood are ground zero for the conversion of apartments into accommodations for tourists (e.g. AirBnB). These trends are not inevitable or the result of individual greed. They are the result of specific policies that enable hotel conversion and the failure of the city to pass or enforce policies that protect tenants and communities.

City officials approve permits and Ellis Act evictions that allow developers to demolish rent-stabilized homes to make way for hotels. City planners give owners permission to convert existing and new apartment buildings into short-term rentals for corporate use. Short-term rentals and boutique hotel conversions take away union jobs.

The problem isn't confined to Venice and Hollywood. Short-term rentals are spreading across Boyle Heights, Highland Park, Downtown, South LA, and North Hollywood. The city, developers, and landlords are giving away our homes to tourists and businesspeople on short-term contracts.



Foto: Casas no hoteles protesta en Hollywood, 27 de octubre 2017.
Photo: Housing not hotels protest, Hollywood, October 27, 2017.





DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Are you seeing these same problems in your own community—the prioritizing of hotels and short-term accommodations over accessible housing? What does this problem look like in your community?
2. Is the fight against short-term rentals already happening in your neighborhood or does it need to happen in your neighborhood?
3. What are ways that your Local or group can address or are addressing the fight against short-term rental conversions, or ways that other groups are taking on this problem?
4. Who is the target of those fights (e.g. occupants, developers, short-term leasing company, planning commission, city council, etc.) Why are they the targets?

DISCUSSION RESPONSES

Research whether a vacancy tax would de-incentivize short-term rentals.

Change the discussion from scarcity of housing supply to how speculation works, including short-term rentals.

Educate tenants about how owners abuse the Ellis Act to convert RSO units into short-term rentals.

Educate tenants about how owners use LLCs (Limited Liability Companies) to avoid scrutiny.



5 **Translating ground battles into policy battles.**

The battles taken up by different L.A. Tenants Union Locals may look different from one neighborhood to the next. Some Locals are dealing with the precarity of non-RSO housing. Some Locals are struggling against run-away speculative development that is destroying communities. Some Locals are struggling with wild-west zoning changes that force tenants out of their homes. Some Locals are struggling with transit-oriented development that is ripping up entire communities of once-affordable housing. But in all of these struggles, the fight on the ground brings into sharp relief the need to change policy.

Our experience with struggles at home and in our neighborhoods connects us to battles around city policy, state policy, and even federal policy. And yet, for many of us, “policy” seems abstract and something that is only accessible to academics and highly trained experts.



Foto: El cartel publicitario de la Medida S, Boyle Heights.
Photo: Measure S endorsement billboard, Boyle Heights.





DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the values of LATU – values that need to be taken into account when pursuing policy battles?
2. Can you think of one or two examples where a policy issue was concrete, urgent, and understandable? What do you need in order to feel like a policy battle connects with your life?
3. What steps should the Union take when elected officials and policy makers just don't listen and are unwilling to make the necessary changes in the policies that are harming tenants?
4. What steps should the Union take when the proposed changes to a policy are so small or partial that it seems to make no real difference in people's lives yet the process has taken enormous amounts of effort by tenants and leaves them feeling exhausted and discouraged?

DISCUSSION RESPONSES

Preserve horizontalism in policy battles (e.g. when meeting with politicians and city officials, show our collective presence). Focus on the most vulnerable and fight for language justice.

Prioritize policies that connect to the lives of tenants and then educate union members.

Call out politicians, using direct action (make it personal). Study where candidates stand on our issues.

Manage expectations around legislative battles. Keep people engaged by ensuring that Locals direct policy issues.





6 Addressing levels of vulnerability.

Our movement is made up of a diverse population. Not everyone in Los Angeles or in L.A. Tenants Union shares the same vulnerabilities. Migration status, age, health, income, racism all contribute to different kinds of vulnerability. For example, we know that landlords divide tenants by preying on vulnerabilities such as threatening undocumented residents in ways that landlords would not threaten professionals or white residents. Undocumented people have real fear that one complaint will land them out on the street or that ICE may show up at their door. Landlords also use language differences to intimidate tenants or keep them in the dark about their rights, change of sales, etc. Section 8 tenants may put off complaining about habitability issues for fear of having to look for new housing in a market that discriminates against Section 8 tenants. Vulnerability and fear determine who feels empowered and who feels powerless.



Foto: Protesta contra el desplazamiento en Highland Park, 9 de septiembre 2017. Photo: Protest against displacement in Highland Park, September 9, 2017.





DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Who are the most affected by the housing crisis in your neighborhood and across Los Angeles?
2. As we think about who is most impacted by the crisis, are those people currently in the union? How might the fact that some people are more vulnerable than others inform who we outreach to?
3. What type of outreach is needed to support the most vulnerable tenants? How can we make the Local and LATU more accessible to those who are most vulnerable in the housing crisis?
4. Should we prioritize the people who are most vulnerable in terms of outreach, leadership, the campaigns we pursue, and the policies for which we advocate?

DISCUSSION RESPONSES

- Outreach to the schools and parent centers, partnering with groups like NDLO.
- Call to remind Local members about events and check-in on how they're doing.
- Train tenants on their rights, in relation to immigration. Hold workshops during the day as well as on weekends.
- Outreach to at-risk households, including people without housing. Outreach at family parties, Metro buses, and trains.
- Having a LATU office in a RV decorated with signs and art to invite people to learn and ask questions.
- Demand that HCID support vulnerable tenants.





7 How do we prioritize what buildings to organize?

The displacement of low-income and poor tenants, in particular those of color, and often seniors, or folks with disabilities, is a clear strategy of greedy owners who want to bring in higher paying and often white tenants. Many of these tenants are in buildings without rent control protections, and find themselves in a situation where earning the biggest buyout seems like their best bet. This is just one example of complicated situations that we encounter in organizing building struggles, where there is not a clear push to remain in their homes.



Foto: Protesta en apoyo de los inquilinos de los apartamentos Mariachi Crossing, Boyle Heights, 25 de abril 2017. Photo: Protest in support of the tenants of Mariachi Crossing apartments, Boyle Heights, April 25, 2017.





DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. As a union, are we interested in organizing buildings where there is a clear majority who does not want to fight to stay, but instead only win a buyout?
2. In general, how do we determine which buildings are important to organize?
3. What would a set of criteria look like for determining which buildings are important to support and organize?

DISCUSSION RESPONSES

Over the course of three meetings determine how many tenants in the building are interested in fighting. If the majority are not interested, then refer them to a lawyer.

If the majority of the tenants are willing to fight, assess whether they are able to meet other tenants in the struggle and share their story through the local.

Prioritize buildings with the potential to set a strong example of tenants coming together, defending their homes, and experimenting with new forms of struggle.

Prioritize buildings where the tenants are willing to join LATU.

And prioritize buildings where most of the tenants have the least amount of options if they lose their homes.





8 **Determining priorities around policy demands as a Union.**

L.A. Tenants Union has taken positions and got behind multiple public policy campaigns: Measure S (Neighborhood Integrity Initiative), city Anti-Harassment Ordinance, repeal of the Costa-Hawkins Act, repeal of the Ellis Act, and rent control campaigns in Glendale, Pasadena, Inglewood, and Long Beach. All of these efforts have been supported by our members and connect directly to the struggles of renters to defend their homes and communities.



Foto: Taller sobre derechos de los inquilinos en North Hills, 16 de noviembre 2017. Photo: Tenants rights workshop in North Hills, November 16, 2017.





DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you know about any of the policy campaigns listed above? In your estimation what have the campaigns achieved?
2. At this point given our movement's size and ability to show power, how should LATU go about prioritizing these and other policy battles?
3. What are your ideas for how the Locals and how Union members like yourself can realistically support these campaigns?
4. Can you think of examples where a Local needs information, research, analysis, or suggestions from the Research and Policy Committee?

DISCUSSION RESPONSES

Pick one issue based on what makes the most impact (e.g. Costa Hawkins repeal).

Localize the battle by expanding the discourse of struggle.

Lend solidarity to other struggles with overlapping interests.

Locals can support policy efforts by circulating petitions and educating tenants in the local and out in the community.

LATU could expand its impact through a Los Angeles County tenant assembly as well as by partnering with other organizations such as Coalition for Economic Survival.

It would also be helpful to have research on the communities for each local; demographics, inventory of other organizations and groups, and assessing which of those groups are currently (or potentially) allies, and which are opponents.





9 Learning from Tenants Associations.

One of the key strategies for building tenant power in our communities has been organizing Tenants Associations. We know that when the tenants of an entire building come together they are stronger than one tenant fighting for their rights. Tenants Associations become important spaces for tenants to build community and nurture leadership. Several Locals in L.A. Tenants Union have successfully helped tenants organize their building and lead powerful fights against rent hikes, landlord harassment, and evictions.

A challenge for the Union has been encouraging those new leaders to help organize other apartment buildings in the neighborhood and to maintain a connection between the tenants in an association with the larger movement.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the successes you've seen in organizing tenants in a building? What are the challenges and how has your Local overcome those challenges?
2. How and why have people come into leadership roles in buildings and in Tenants Associations? What makes an effective leader?
3. How can Locals spread the model of Tenants Associations across the community? What are some of the challenges and possibilities for the leaders of one Tenants Association helping to organize other buildings?
4. Why is it important for Tenants Association members to stay active in the Local? Should the Local organize Tenants Associations only if they affiliate with the Union? What are some of the ways to foster participation in the Local?





10 **Building and transferring leadership in our Union.**

We are a young union, only 2 ½ years old that has tried to build a horizontal movement with no single leader, but instead many leaders. We are not a non-profit with folks in designated leadership positions like an Executive, Policy, or Development Director. Our structure is based in committees and local chapters. Many, but not all take on the labor of organizing meetings, expanding our memberships, building and implementing campaigns etc.

In the context of the Locals, many are struggling to develop leadership amongst their existing members. Often the bulk of the organizing work falls on a few people within each Local. This can lead to burnout or can create dependence on a small number of people. New members may come to rely on others doing the work or feel like there is no space for them to grow and develop their skills as leaders.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do we define leadership in a horizontal union?
2. How does one come into leadership?
3. For those taking on leadership roles, how would you describe that process and work?
4. What does the process of leadership development look like? What does it mean for others to take on those roles?
5. What is a process for bringing new leaders into the different roles of the local specifically?







Foto: Asamblea General de final de año de Sindicato de Inquilinos de Los Ángeles, 4 de diciembre 2017. Photo: L.A. Tenants Union year-end general assembly, December 4, 2017.

