

Opening Lines of Communication

Whether we are experiencing a public health crisis or not, the first step of tenant organizing is always talking to your neighbors. The best way to protect yourself and your neighbors against retaliation from your landlord in the future is to **form a tenants union as soon as possible**. We know from experience that we are always stronger together, and if tenants band together we are able to get huge concessions from landlords.

Note: Remember to wash your hands before and after leaving your unit, maintain six feet of distance when talking, and don't leave your unit if you feel sick. Learn more about COVID-19 prevention [here](#).

1. **Assess your situation.** Will you be able to pay rent on April 1st? Do you already know any of your neighbors? If so, reach out to them first. Are any of them unlikely to be able pay? This information will help you as you contact other people in your building.
2. **Get contact information from your neighbors.** Go door to door in your building, making sure to stand six feet back when your neighbor answers. If no one answers, you can also leave a letter introducing yourself and sharing your contact information. [Here](#) is a template you can use. When meeting someone for the first time, introduce yourself and ask questions to understand how they've been affected by the crisis. You should be open about your rent situation, but try to let them do most of the talking.

If they share your concerns, introduce the idea of acting collectively as a building. **No matter how the conversation goes, be sure to get their contact information.** If someone speaks a language you don't speak, find a friend who does, or let ATU know and we may be able to help.

3. **Set up a group communication channel.** This can be a group text, email thread, WhatsApp, a Facebook group, or whatever tenants are most comfortable with. If the group is multilingual, commit to translating the most important points for monolingual speakers. Google Translate is a good resource for quick translation.
4. **Check in with neighbors directly.** As much as you can, call and text people individually to check on how they are doing and encourage them to participate. Talk to them about what they want, need, and have to offer others. Organizing is relationship building toward collective action. Try to share this work with other tenants.

One possible outcome of group communication could be to draft a group letter addressed to your landlord requesting a rent suspension. Detailed tips on drafting these types of letters can be found in upcoming organizing resources. But simply talking to your neighbors as soon as possible is the best way to start, even if a specific goal is yet to be decided on.