



BUILDING POWER, GROWING MOVEMENTS

Participatory Research and Policy Updates

A review of our work during the COVID-19 Pandemic



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GREETINGS FROM THE PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH AND POLICY TEAM

Greetings from the Participatory Research and Policy Team at TakeRoot Justice.

As we make our way into 2022, we find ourselves reflecting on the past couple years. We wanted to take the opportunity to thank our remarkable network of partner organizations, community members, funders and allies, and to share with you our recent work.

The COVID-19 pandemic has radically shifted the landscape in which our community-based partners work and in which we support them. Their work matters now more than ever, as low-income people of color and immigrants are disparately impacted by increasingly stark economic inequities, health disparities and more.

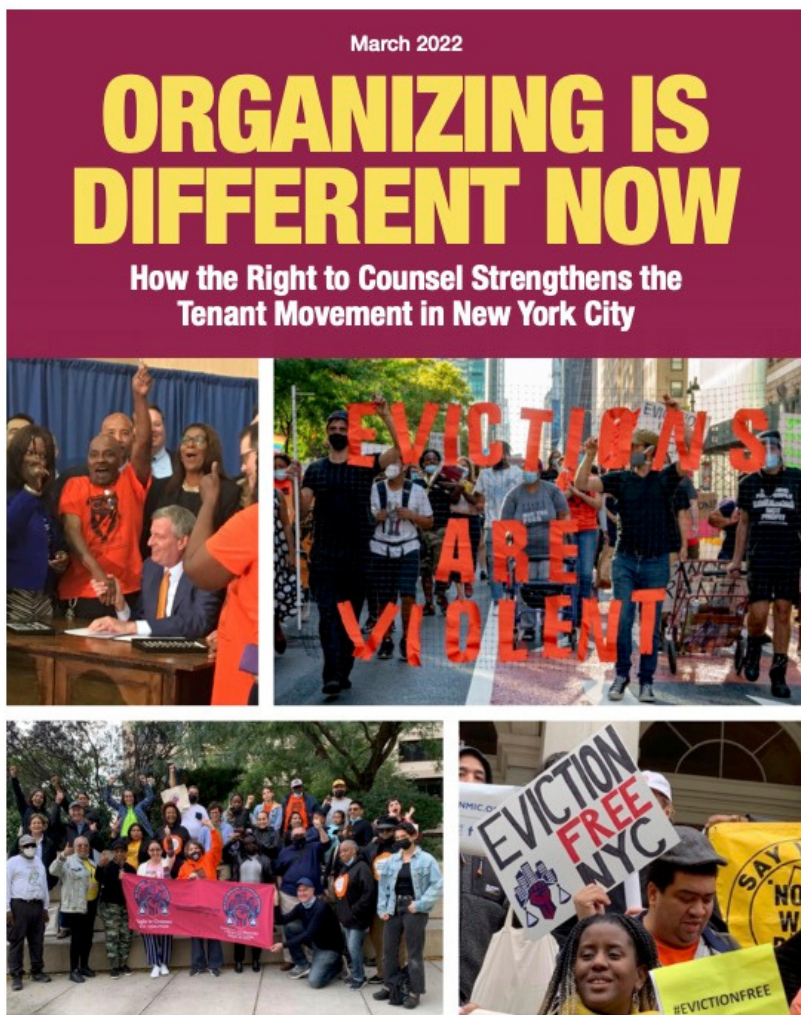
We have the deepest admiration for the work of our partners over the past two years. They have grappled with the realities of organizing with and caring for community in a time of unprecedented difficulty. We are honored to have supported their work during this time, and we have worked together to adapt to the changed context—developing new tools and trainings for remote engagement while ensuring that those directly impacted by the issues remain centered.

As New York City begins the process of reopening and reckoning with a landscape deeply changed by the COVID-19 pandemic we are more committed than ever to supporting the essential work of grassroots organizing groups fighting for racial, social, and economic justice.

We are proud to share with you the work we have accomplished together over the course of the pandemic.

Erin Markman, Director of Research and Policy

Irene Linares, Senior Research and Policy Coordinator



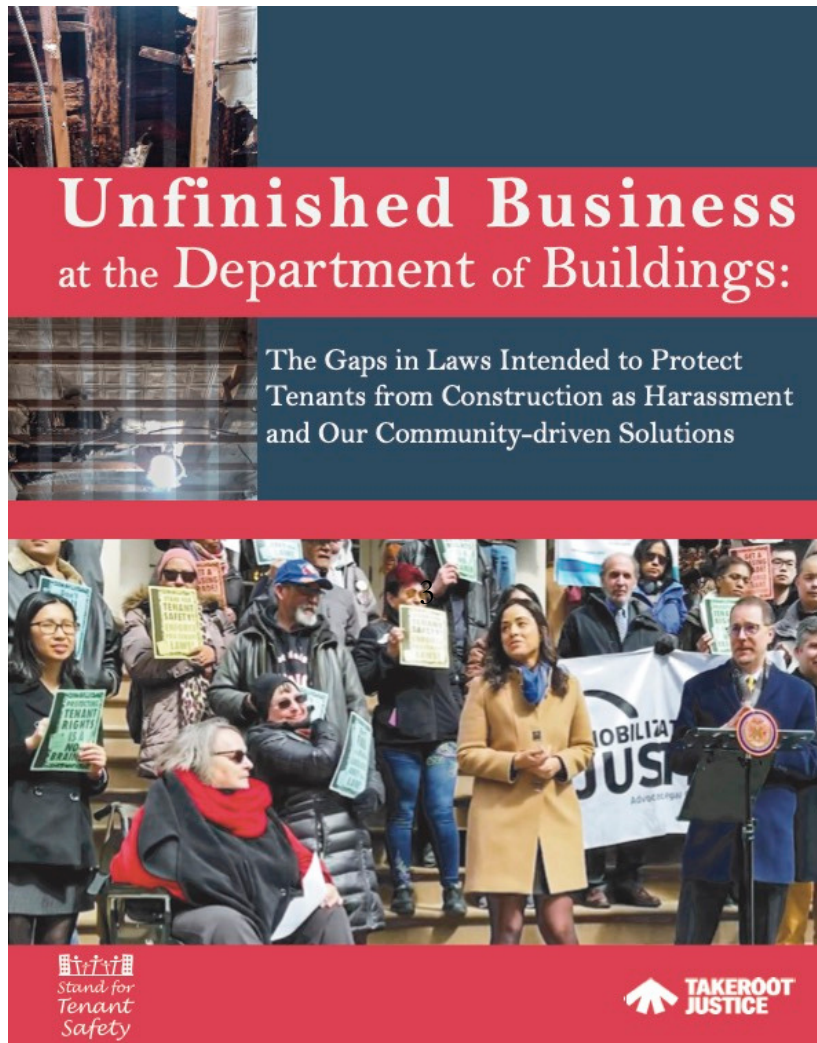
In March 2022, the Right to Counsel NYC Coalition (RTCNYC) and TakeRoot released “Organizing is Different Now: How the Right to Counsel Strengthens the Tenant Movement in New York City”.

In 2017, after a three-year grassroots campaign, RTCNYC led New York City to become the first city in the nation to establish a Right to Counsel for low-income tenants facing eviction. Four years after the win, we embarked on a participatory action research project in which tenants and housing organizers were trained to facilitate focus groups to explore the impact of Right to Counsel on their lives and on the organizing landscape in the City.

Our research shows that Right to Counsel strengthens organizing: it serves as a know-your-rights tool, helps build a base of involved tenants, and opens the door to new organizing tactics. Tenants feel less stress and fear knowing they have the right to legal representation, which helps them navigate housing court and prompts them to take action against their landlords. Right to Counsel also creates opportunities for tenants, organizers, and attorneys to navigate relationships and share knowledge, in the service of building the tenants’ rights movement. And RTCNYC is deliberate and successful in creating and sustaining movement-building spaces and a tenant-led infrastructure.

This research will be used to advance organizing efforts to win the Right to Counsel statewide in New York, as well as to inspire tenants and organizers nationwide to fight for and win Right to Counsel in their cities.

Read the report [here](#) and on our website.



In January 2022, the Stand for Tenant Safety Coalition (“STS”) and TakeRoot released “Unfinished Business at the Department of Buildings: The Gaps in Laws Intended to Protect Tenants from Construction as Harassment and Our Community-driven Solutions”.

STS organized previously to win a package of City legislation designed to protect tenants from construction as harassment. After this historic victory, STS noted deficits in the implementation and enforcement of the bills, leaving tenants vulnerable to continued construction as harassment and related tactics.

Our new report draws attention to this problem. Findings include the pervasive disruption of essential services in buildings with construction, health and safety hazards, physical and mental health consequences of construction as harassment, and insufficient notice and postings about construction and tenant’s rights during construction. STS calls for necessary reforms to the laws that are failing to protect tenants. The report lays out recommendations to address the gaps in implementation and enforcement of specific laws, and new proposals designed to keep tenants and their homes safe and harm-free.

Read the report [here](#) and on our website.

Alternative to Incarceration & Reentry Services for the LGBTGNCNBQI+ Community in NYC:

Research Findings,
Best Practices, and
Recommendations
for the Field



In January, 2022, TakeRoot, the Legal Action Center, and the NYC LGBTQI ATI/Reentry Working Group released “Alternative to Incarceration & Reentry Services for the LGBTGNCNBQI+ Community: Research Findings, Best Practices and Recommendations for the Field”. A leadership team of formerly incarcerated LGBTGNCNBQI+ individuals guided this participatory research project. The research findings are based on in-depth surveys administered to 40 Alternative to Incarceration (ATI) and reentry provider organizations.

Our research shows that while organizations focused on ATI and reentry are making strides in their service to the LGBTGNCNBQI+ community, more can and should be done. LGBTGNCNBQI+ people are overrepresented in the criminal justice system, and face discrimination, exclusion, and disparate access when it comes to accessing services after incarceration. Despite these realities, there are no ATI or reentry programs designed to specifically serve the LGBTGNCNBQI+ community in New York City. Existing ATI and reentry programs have gaps in LGBTGNCNBQI+ cultural competency and limited ability to meet the specific service needs of the LGBTGNCNBQI+ people they serve. The report seeks to celebrate and amplify the efforts that organizations are already making to ensure their services are LGBTGNCNBQI+ affirming and inclusive, and to highlight places where organizations can grow and change. Our recommendation section is designed to offer practical, actionable steps that organizations can take to better serve the LGBTGNCNBQI+ community. We include templates, sample documents and scripts which organizations can use as they implement the recommendations.

Read the report [here](#) and on our website.

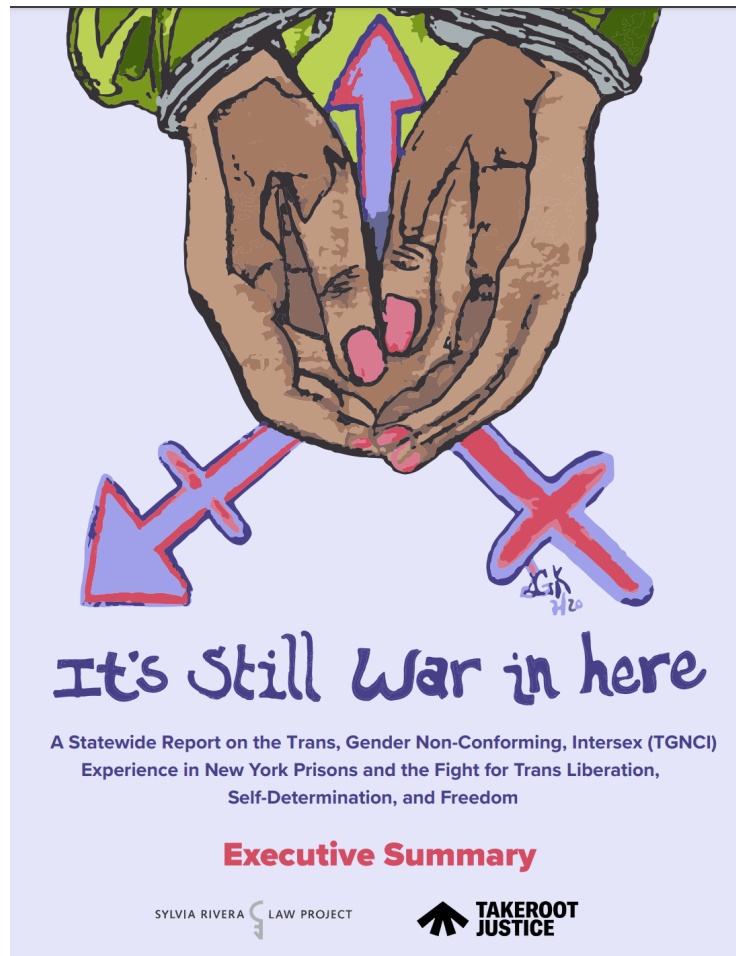


Updates to the Right to Counsel Toolkit

In December 2021, we made some important updates to the Right to Counsel NYC Coalition’s (RTCNYC) innovative Right to Counsel Toolkit, which we helped create in 2018 to tell the story of the powerful organizing campaign fought by the coalition, which led to New York City becoming the first city in the nation to establish a Right to Counsel for tenants facing eviction.

The toolkit shares a variety of documents, strategies, and activities used by RTCNYC throughout the campaign, and includes templates and guides for others to tailor to their local context. We updated the Toolkit to include new resources and information on the organizing that takes place after the win to ensure that the law is implemented justly and helps build tenant power. The updates were featured in RTCNYC’s first ever National Organizing Convening on Right to Counsel for tenants facing eviction, which focused on deepening learning by sharing lessons learned from cities that won the right to counsel and by digging into the struggles and opportunities around implementation. Over 100 tenants, organizers, lawyers, and advocates from over 40 regions attended the virtual event.

Access the toolkit [here](#).



In June 2021, together with the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, we released "[It's Still War in Here: A Statewide Report on the Trans, Gender Non-Conforming, Intersex \(TGNCI\) Experience in New York Prisons and the Fight for Trans Liberation, Self-Determination and Freedom](#)". The report sheds light on the ongoing crisis for Transgender and Gender Nonconforming (TGNC) people in New York State prisons.

Based on 44 in-depth written surveys completed by incarcerated TGNC people, the report demonstrates the discriminatory, violent, and abusive experiences faced by TGNC people in New York State prisons. Findings from the survey include lack of access to medical services, verbal abuse, physical and sexual violence by corrections officials, discrimination in programming, and retaliation for placing grievances. The report lays out comprehensive recommendations as harm reduction measures, as Sylvia Rivera Law Project members continue their work towards a world without prisons. These urgent recommendations were developed by a leadership team of currently and formerly incarcerated TGNC people. They include: the creation of TGNCI housing units within existing facilities, creating a facility transfer process to address the needs of TGNCI people, updating DOCCS procedures to hold staff accountable for verbal abuse and violence, addressing the crisis of sexual violence in prison, improving the quality of and access to health care and mental health services, protecting against discrimination in programming, improving the grievance system, monitoring for retaliation, and allowing TGNCI people to determine their gender fully and without reprisal.

Read the report [here](#) and on our website.

AN UNAVOIDABLE SYSTEM

THE HARMS OF FAMILY POLICING AND PARENTS' VISION FOR INVESTING IN COMMUNITY CARE

FALL 2021



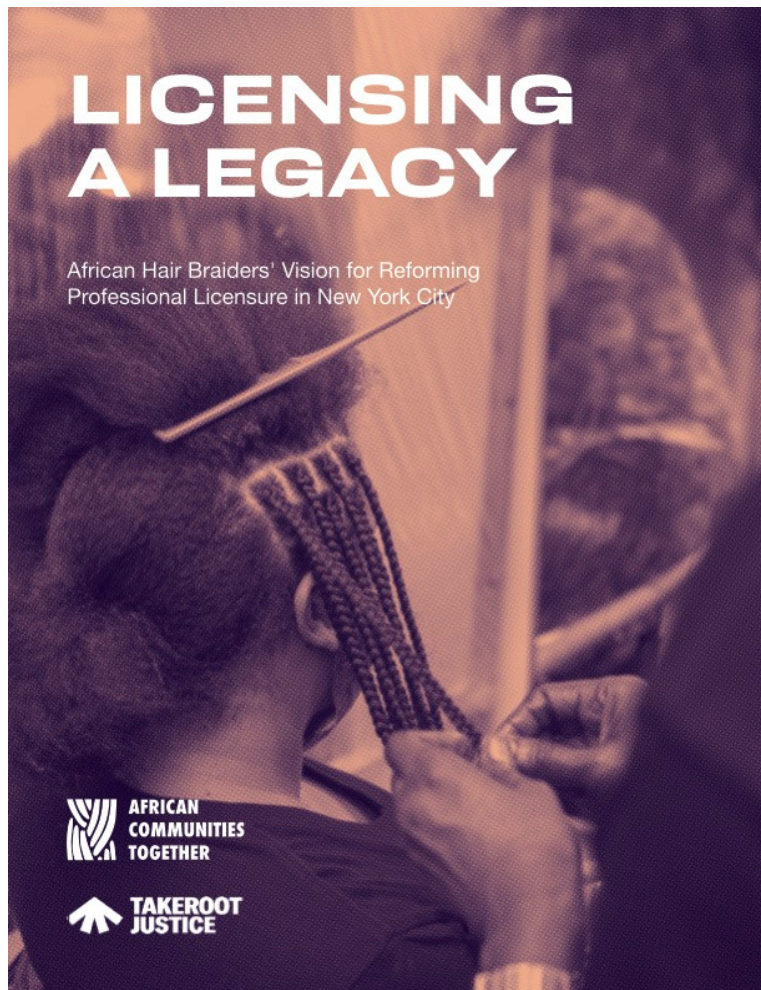
PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH LED BY PARENTS IMPACTED BY THE FAMILY POLICING SYSTEM



In September 2021, we released a powerful report in partnership with Rise called "[An Unavoidable System: The Harms of Family Policing and Parents' Vision for Investing in Community Care](#)". The report documents the trauma experienced by families subjected to the New York City child welfare system, which Rise calls the family policing system, and the failure of that system to help families.

This participatory research project was led by people directly impacted by the family policing system— parent leaders at Rise. Our research shows that the system, which claims to protect children and help families, is in fact harming them. The report also elevates a vision for change: dismantling the current system and replacing it with community-centered structures of care. The report draws on data from 10 focus groups with people impacted by the family policing system, and from 58 impacted parents. Rise calls for abolition of the system and deep investment to support families and communities. The report's recommendations include reducing reports to the Statewide Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment by shrinking the pipelines that funnel families into the system and divesting from ACS and investing in communities.

Read the report [here](#) and on our website.



In December 2020, TakeRoot and African Communities Together (ACT) released "[Licensing a Legacy: African Hair Braiders' Vision for Reforming Professional Licensure in New York City](#)". The report is based on nearly 350 surveys, three focus groups, and interviews. Hair braiding is a profession largely by and for Black women and an integral part of many African cultures. For many African immigrant women, braiding is also the most marketable skill and accessible form of employment. African braiders are a marginalized workforce facing numerous regulatory and structural barriers to practicing their craft. Most have not been able to obtain the Natural Hair Styling license required by the State. Our research found braiders want licenses and feel the pressure and fear of being unlicensed. Most lack information about the requirements to apply, and barriers like language access, literacy and the cost put the license out of reach. The report details recommendations to improve African braiders' access to licensure. The report was released at a virtual community briefing, which included testimony from African hair braiders, and discussion with Council Member Mark Levine and Deputy Public Advocate for Civic and Community Empowerment Xamalya Rose.

Read the report [here](#) and on our website.

VOUCHERS TO NOWHERE:

How Source of Income Discrimination
Happens and the Policies That Can Fix It



**TAKEROOT
JUSTICE**

In September 2020, TakeRoot and VOCAL-NY released "Vouchers to Nowhere: How Source of Income Discrimination Happens and the Policies That Can Fix It".

The focus of this report is source of income discrimination, the illegal practice by landlords, building owners and real estate brokers of refusing to rent to current or prospective tenants who plan to pay for their housing with housing assistance vouchers, subsidies or other forms of public assistance, an issue that VOCAL-NY members have experienced first-hand. Findings from the report are based on matched pair testing, a methodology often used to determine the presence of discriminatory treatment. VOCAL-NY members made calls to 114 real estate agents, brokers, and landlords who advertised available apartments. Each agent was contacted once by a tester presenting as someone with a housing subsidy, and once by a tester presenting as having income from employment.

The data from our testing reveals a pattern of discriminatory practices by landlords and their agents against the callers with subsidies, creating a significant barrier to obtaining permanent housing. Findings from the report show that voucher holders heard back less often, more slowly, and with fewer positive results than callers with income from employment.

The report offers policy recommendations and reforms to address the systemic challenges faced by subsidy holders, including raising the City FHEPS voucher to market rent, ensuring that subsidy holders know their rights, increasing financial penalties for source of income discrimination, and passing legislation to eliminate credit checks for subsidy holders.

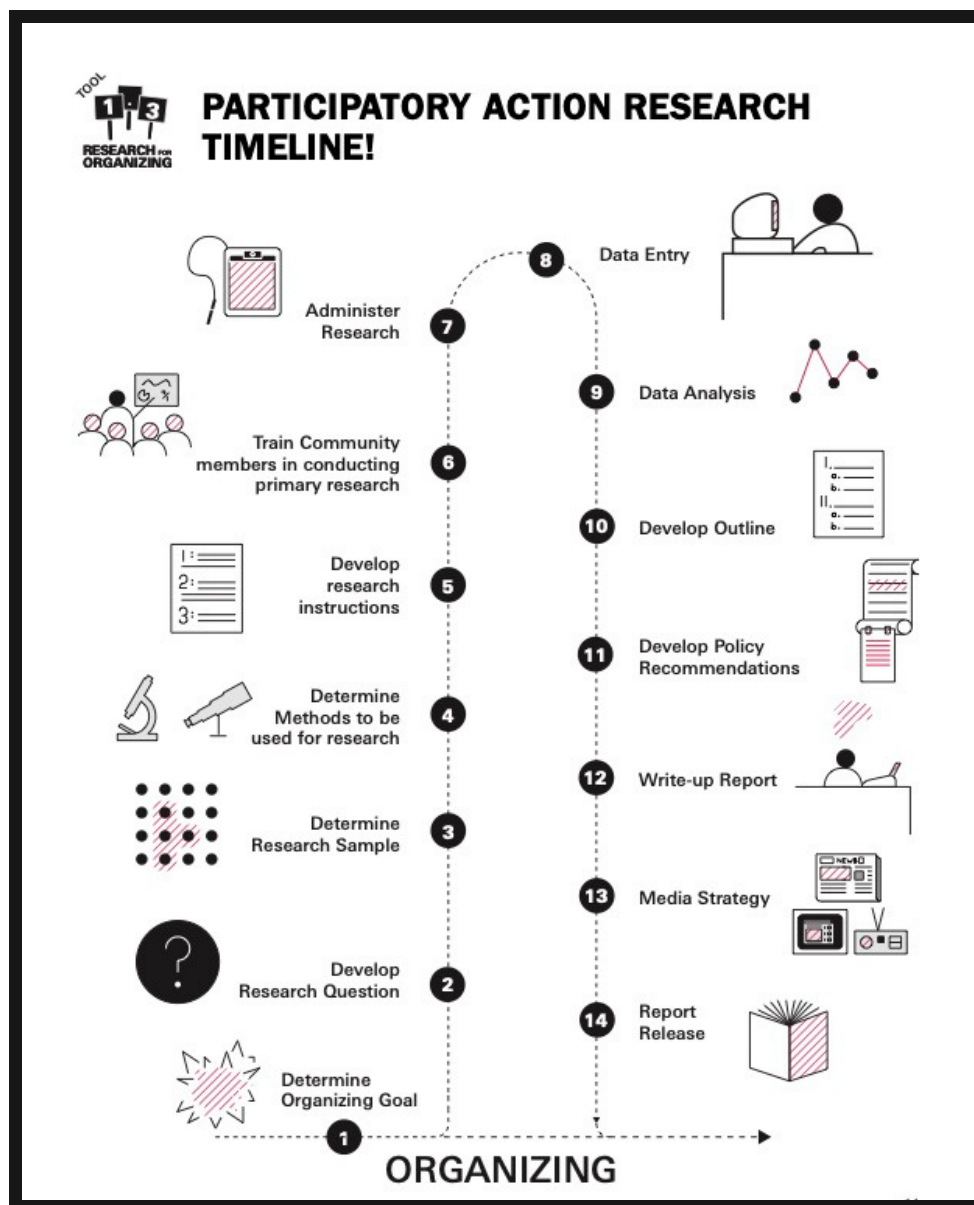
Read the report [here](#) and on our website.

OUR RESEARCH FOR ORGANIZING TOOLKIT

Our online Research for Organizing Toolkit is designed for organizations and individuals that want to use participatory action research (PAR) to support their work towards social justice. The toolkit includes tools, facilitator guides, worksheets and templates that can be tailored to meet the needs of each group.

The toolkit can be accessed at: <https://www.researchfororganizing.org/>

We encourage you to share the toolkit with organizations and individuals who would benefit from PAR resources!



A sample tool from our Research for Organizing Toolkit. Each stage of the research project has many tools, templates and case studies to inform and guide the work of community groups and individuals.

RESEARCH AND POLICY IN THE NEWS



The Imprint: Steps New York City Can Take to End Reliance on Administration for Children's Services (Op-Ed by Bianca Shaw and Erin Markman)



Harlem World Magazine: New Report Shows Construction As Harassment Remains A Threat To Rent-Stabilized Tenants Despite Tenant Protection Laws



USA Today: I was sexually assaulted in prison. Overhaul the system to protect the trans community. (Op Ed by Grace DeTrevarah)



Harlem World Magazine: New Research Shows Barriers To Using Housing Vouchers From Harlem To Hollis



AMNewYork: Welcome centers failing immigrant students (Op Ed by Jean Kerbensky Altesse)



Haitian Times: New Report Reveals Significant Barriers In Equal Access To Education For New York City Haitian Immigrant Students

WHAT OUR PARTNERS SAY ABOUT OUR WORK

ACT is a community-based organization, and when we wanted to create a campaign to assist our community of hair braiders, we had the membership and the base-building capacity, but those weren't enough. We needed strategies to develop a successful campaign, and TakeRoot's Research and Policy team provided that support by bringing a wealth of resources to our hair braiding project.”–
Maimouna Dieye, Program Manager, ACT

The expertise and guidance TakeRoot offers has allowed us to lay out informed, data driven public policy to fight some of the most pervasive harassment our members face. Most importantly TakeRoot has a deep respect for our leaders as individuals, and the model of organizing we use at VOCAL-NY. This allowed us to put directly impacted people at the forefront of the work, strengthening their leadership development, and the relationship they have with our organization. I believe the work TakeRoot has done to illustrate this problem is essential to find solutions and saving lives. It is difficult to find partners that truly listen and uplift the voice of the leaders at VOCAL-NY, but TakeRoot went above and beyond to accomplish our goals alongside us.”

–Joe Loonam, Housing Campaign Coordinator, VOCAL-NY

“Working with the TakeRoot Justice Research and Policy team has enabled the coalition not only to develop new leadership but to engage community members in Participatory Action Research. The results of this research will help our coalition and achieve our campaign goals to ensure that no tenant in New York City undergoes construction as harassment.”

–Rolando Guzman,
Deputy Director, St Nicks Alliance Community Preservation Unit

“At Rise, I was introduced to the PAR project, which has led me to great growth, new knowledge and insight into life. I've become an advocate for impacted families, a facilitator and a researcher. In this project, I work with an amazing team of women who are very passionate. They are not just a team, but a family, for we help each other find our inner strengths.”

– Yvonne Smith, Contributor and PAR Team Member (from “An Unavoidable System”)

ABOUT OUR RESEARCH AND POLICY WORK

TakeRootJustice provides legal, participatory research and policy support to strengthen the work of grassroots and community-based groups in New York City to dismantle racial, economic and social oppression. We employ a unique model of partnership with grassroots and community-based groups. Our partners take the lead in determining the priorities and goals for our work and advance our understanding of justice. We believe in a theory of change where short-term and individual successes help build the capacity and power of our partners, who in turn can have longer-term impact on policies, laws and systems that affect their communities. Our work has greater impact because it is done in connection with organizing, building power and leadership development.

The research and policy support that we provide includes:

Participatory Action Research:

From start to finish, we work with our community partners to design, administer, analyze, and write participatory action research reports. These reports are used by our partners to educate community members, engage elected officials, garner media attention and advocate for socially just policies. We also provide trainings and tools to assist communities in conducting their own research.

Grassroots Policy and Advocacy Assistance:

With community organizations, we research and develop ground-up policy solutions to problems they identify and document. We use our expertise to help groups develop advocacy plans and provide legal and policy advice and assistance with groups' advocacy campaigns.

Popular-Education Curriculum Design and Research Training:

Our trainings and tools assist communities in conducting their own research, including our “Research for Organizing” toolkit and website to build the research and grassroots policymaking capacity of community partners.

For more information please contact:

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