

# IDENTIFYING MOM-AND-POP LANDLORDS TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS AND SUPPORT EVICTION PREVENTION

Developing relationships with landlords can help increase their participation in eviction prevention programs and in eviction prevention policy and program design. But cities struggle to build relationships with landlords because they do not know who their landlords are, and they struggle to reach landlords because of a lack of readily available data and information about them. This toolkit aims to help cities identify the landlords within their communities through quality data and information gathering and build stronger relationships with them.

## WHY CITIES SHOULD CARE

Developing systematic and standard methods to collect, share and update information on landlords is a key component of the relationship building process. Better information and data enable cities to build authentic relationships, conduct better outreach and develop more targeted programs and policies.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**MAKE A COMMITMENT TO AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND BUILDING LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIPS WITH LANDLORDS.** Relationship building takes time and requires cities to be open-minded and realistic about their local rental landscapes.

**LEVERAGE SHARED INTEREST.** Cities and landlords can and do share common interests. Starting from a mutual understanding and shared goal will help cities build better and more relationships with local landlords.

**BUILDING INTERNAL RELATIONSHIPS IS KEY TO SHARING DATA AND INFORMATION.** Data and information about local landlords often exist informally in many places, such as in city departments and with service providers. Inter-departmental coordination is key to accessing and sharing data and information on local landlords.

**DATA IS IMPORTANT BUT DOES NOT SUBSTITUTE FOR ENGAGEMENT AND RELATIONSHIP BUILDING.** Having data does not justify foregoing engagement with landlords. Data should serve the opposite purpose and bolster outreach and engagement efforts.

## WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit provides cities and their partners with best practices for building relationships with landlords and tactics for gathering information and data about their local landlords.

### ◆ **Engaging and Building Relationships with Mom-and-Pop Landlords**

- ◆ Have an open-mind and realistic view of your city's rental landscape
- ◆ Make a commitment to community engagement and building long-term relationships
- ◆ Align stakeholders around a clear strategy with common goals and indicators

### ◆ **Gathering Data and Information on Mom-and-Pop Landlords**

- ◆ Baseline
- ◆ Representative
- ◆ Comprehensive

### ◆ **Data Culture**

- ◆ Data collection
- ◆ Data maintenance
- ◆ Data sharing

### ◆ **Conclusion**

## Engaging and Building Relationships with Mom-and-Pop Landlords

Successful eviction prevention interventions require strong engagement and relationships between cities and landlords at all stages of the eviction process. By building relationships, trust and credibility over time, cities can provide mom-and-pop landlords access to critical resources and benefits they might not otherwise have known about. Relationships also help mom-and-pop landlords better navigate and strengthen their relationships with tenants, by providing them access to local government staff and elected officials to whom they can ask questions and raise concerns. These suggestions and best practices come from conversations with city staff, non-profits, landlords and researchers from across the country.

### HAVE AN OPEN-MIND AND REALISTIC VIEW OF YOUR CITY'S RENTAL LANDSCAPE

#### **DISPEL NEGATIVE STEREOTYPES**

Society harbors several negative stereotypes about landlords. While there may be some bad actors, most mom-and-pop landlords want to do the right thing. However, systemic challenges such as lack of information and language barriers disadvantage landlords who do not speak English or speak limited English. Dispel negative perceptions and stereotypes about mom-and-pop landlords and recognize that they are not a monolith.

One common stereotype about landlords suggests they are more likely male and more likely white. Particularly where mom-and-pop landlords are concerned, this is not necessarily the case. Be mindful of harmful stereotypes and assumptions that may hinder the city's ability to find and make connections with mom-and-pop landlords.

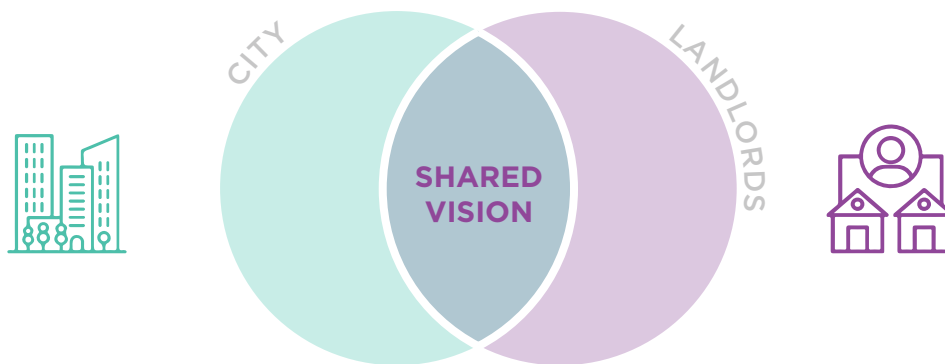
#### **UNDERSTAND LANDLORD MOTIVATIONS**

Recognize what motivates landlords. Motivations can include a desire to run a successful business or prosocial reasons. Some landlords may have fallen into the role because their parents passed property down through inheritance. Other landlords may own their properties but rent out a portion of their homes to help make ends meet or pay off their mortgages. Regardless of what drives them, gaining a better understanding of landlords' priorities and motivations will help cities build relationships with them.

## FIND COMMON GROUND WITH LANDLORDS

Finding common ground and shared interests is key to building relationships. Too often landlord and city interests seem mutually exclusive, but that feeling often stems from a lack of shared understanding. Recognize the different roles that landlords and cities play in the broader housing stability conversation, and recognize that, for the most part, landlords and cities share similar goals. For example, city staff and landlords may both want to address challenges like the eviction and affordable housing crisis, help alleviate poverty, or bolster neighborhood stability. But they may use different language to describe these challenges and differ in how they view their respective roles in addressing the challenge.

### Shared Vision Between the City and Landlords



## MAKE A COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND BUILDING LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIPS

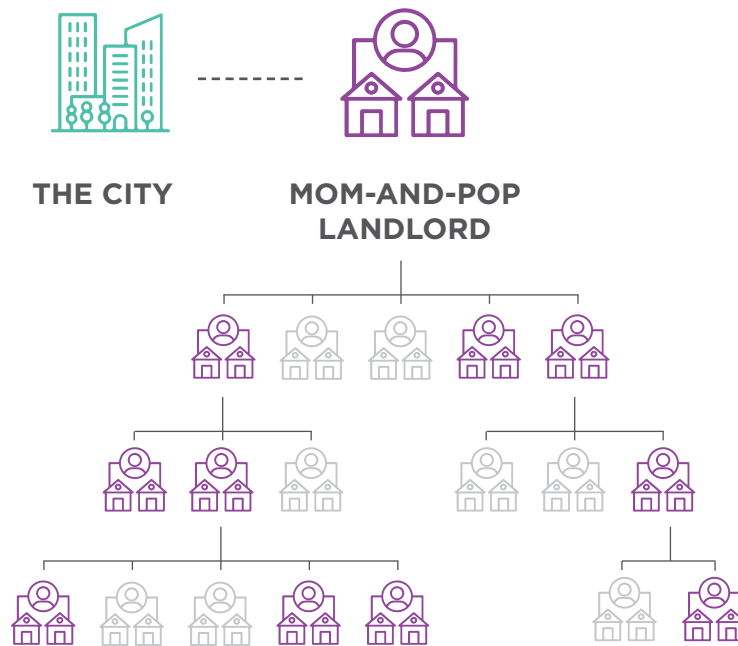
### BUILD LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships cannot form overnight. Building relationships with landlords is no exception. Cities need to dedicate resources and time to establishing trust and creating open lines of communication. Initially, the relationship-building process might be slow — it may be one or two landlords at a time. Gradually those relationships will blossom if the approach is rooted in shared interests and an eye toward the future.

In particular, the city should provide landlords with a clear way to get in touch, ask questions, and receive responses and help from the city. As cities build stronger relationships, community-minded landlords can become unofficial or official “ambassadors” or “advocates.” These landlords can spread the word about city programs and help dispel some negative perceptions landlords may have of city staff and agencies.

Trust is difficult to earn in the best of circumstances, and often more so when landlords may be people of color, come from immigrant families, or be immigrants themselves. Be mindful of who your landlords are when engaging and building relationships with them, knowing not every effort or approach will work in all cases.

### Relationship Building Can Have a Snowball Effect



### USE CREATIVE AND PERSISTENT STRATEGIES TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

There are many ways to create and build relationships — do not be afraid to experiment! Local leaders have found success in building relationships by sitting in on court hearings in an unofficial capacity and striking up conversations with landlords organically by sitting among them. One landlord liaison in Pennsylvania found a landlord in the community willing to serve as their “mentor,” or “connector.” This landlord helped them build connections with other landlords and providers and to join in on community meetings. Others have found success by hosting “meet and greets” as a low-pressure way for landlords and city staff to get to know each other. As much as possible, track engagement to record which venues and methods work and which do not. For example, the application [HubSpot](#) can help city leaders track if landlords are reading emails they receive.

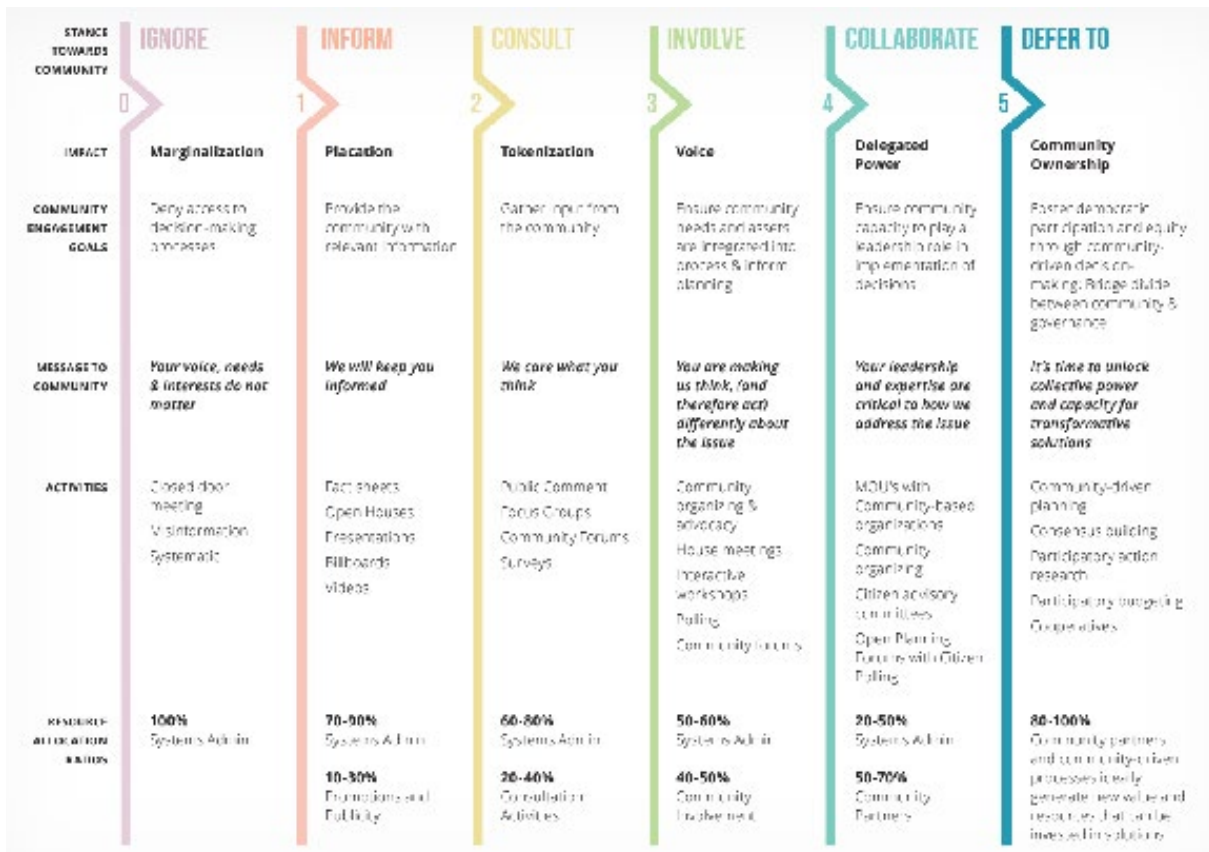
See [“Strategy 1: Find mom-and-pop landlords where they are”](#) for more ideas.

## ENGAGE LANDLORDS IN A TWO-WAY CONVERSATION

While listening sessions and surveys are great ways to engage and learn more about landlords, relationship building is a two-way street. Make the engagement interactive and mutually beneficial, especially during initial contact with a landlord. Starting a relationship with more interactive engagement will build the foundation for more collaborative relationships and make landlords feel their opinion is welcomed and valued. For example, while not every idea or proposal will be realistic or helpful, give landlords the chance to express their preferences and ideas out loud in public. Be honest about whether peoples' ideas or issues are feasible. Know who the decision-makers are and prepare to tell landlords when you can or cannot deliver on an idea.

In some communities, engaging landlords in a two-way conversation will require city staff to speak different languages or work outside typical 9-5 hours to attend community meetings. Be mindful of assumptions about mom-and-pop landlords and the ways people of different backgrounds and experiences will prefer engaging.

### The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership



Source: Facilitating Power

## ALIGN STAKEHOLDERS AROUND A CLEAR STRATEGY WITH COMMON GOALS AND INDICATORS

### MAKE SURE CITY AGENCY GOALS ARE ALIGNED AND REALISTIC

Many city agencies work and interact with landlords. Imagine being a landlord and being contacted by different people from five separate programs — that is difficult to keep track of and overwhelming! Cities should have internal conversations across agencies and departments to streamline communication with landlords and ensure staff can make cross-referrals at the very least.

With the right funding and resources, cities could instead hire or train existing staff to serve as point people for all landlord-related programs and benefits as the [City of Philadelphia, PA](#), is piloting in 2022-2023 or how the [City of Norfolk, VA](#) has been doing since 2013 via its Landlord & Tenant Relations Officer. City leaders should discuss priorities, audience, assumptions, goals, experience and expectations while developing a coordinated landlord engagement strategy.

## Gathering Information and Data on Mom-and-Pop Landlords

For cities to engage and build relationships with mom-and-pop landlords they first need to identify them. Identifying landlords is no easy task, and in most cases cities do not have a reliable mechanism to gather this information easily. Once cities can identify their local landlords they can engage and build relationships that help prevent evictions and promote housing stability.

Below are the data points and data characteristics a city would have in an “ideal world” to identify their local landlords:

Ideal Data
Landlord name
Landlord contact information (email, phone number)
Landlord demographic information (age, race/ethnicity, gender)
Landlord languages spoken (including dominant language if not English)
Number of properties owned, including how many units are located at each property
Location of each property
Types of properties owned
Number of tenants in each rental unit
Rent charged at each rental unit
Landlord interactions with the city (e.g., citations, misconduct, participation in different programs)*

*\*Data the city would likely need to consolidate internally*

### Characteristics of High Quality Information

- 1 Is the data **accurate**? Is the data accurately captured and not full of errors?
- 2 Is the data **complete**? Is the data as comprehensive as you want it to be and include all the information you want for a particular entry?
- 3 Is the data **consistent**? Are there consistent naming conventions in the data and unique identifiers to make it easy to read and match records across multiple data sets?
- 4 Is the data **reliable**? Does this information contradict any other information in a different source or system?
- 5 Is the data **timely**? Is this information up to date for your purposes?



## Strategies for Gathering Data

### BASELINE

Baseline information might take the form of a list maintained with non-standard details in a Word document with an ongoing list of the city's landlord contacts. For example, the city might just have the name and contact information for half of the landlords, and for the other half the city might have additional information such as contact information and how many properties they own. While this data is not standardized and comprehensive, it is a great first step at getting a better sense of your local landlord community.

These baseline strategies are useful for cities as they start gathering data and information on landlords.

### STRATEGY 1: MEET MOM-AND-POP LANDLORDS WHERE THEY ARE

City engagement historically required residents to come to the city, to community engagement meetings held at city hall, for instance. That approach is becoming less of a default as city leaders work to minimize barriers between residents and civic engagement. Cities will find greater success by going to mom-and-pop landlords rather than assuming mom-and-pop landlords will come to them.

- ◆ Leverage social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Nextdoor, Instagram and TikTok to find online communities of landlords in your region. Be mindful of which generations and demographics use which platforms.
- ◆ Smaller landlords may frequent local businesses including residential hardware stores like The Home Depot, Lowe's or Ace Hardware. Work with local stores to set up a stand where city staff can talk to landlords in-store or post fliers informing them of city services and other resources.
- ◆ Post ads and other marketing material on Craigslist, public access TV, in local newspapers and on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Nextdoor and Instagram.
- ◆ Contact the local landlord association or property management association to see if the city can join a meeting to make a brief presentation and answer questions. If there is initial hesitation, ask to slip a brochure into their information packets or newsletters.
- ◆ Mom-and-pop landlords can be non-English speaking or speak limited English. Consider your city's demographic breakdown, find culturally relevant communication platforms and engage culturally specific community organizations for conducting outreach.
  - ◆ For example, the [City of San Jose, CA](#) includes tutorials on how to use the city's rental registry in Spanish and Vietnamese.

- ◆ Mom-and-pop landlords are often engaged community members, so consider going to civic meetings and sessions hosted by community organizations.
- ◆ Enclose fliers that include city contact information and details about particular policies, programs or initiatives in residents' utility bills.

## **STRATEGY 2: BRING LANDLORDS TO YOU**

Bringing landlords to the city is still a good strategy when used in concert with other strategies. Be mindful that asking landlords to come to City Hall might intimidate some, so consider how to make sessions accessible and welcoming. For example, host events and/or trainings at community centers and neighborhood libraries.

- ◆ Host landlord appreciation days to meet landlords, show the city's appreciation and help alleviate potentially tense relationships. This can prove a powerful demonstration of good-faith efforts to truly work constructively with landlords.
- ◆ Host landlord training programs and be specific about collecting landlord contact information before or after the session(s).
- ◆ Host "meet and greets" as a low-pressure way to get to know landlords in your community.
- ◆ Host webinars geared toward landlords to share resources, tools and information, including translation in multiple languages.
- ◆ Host roundtables or feedback sessions to gain input on specific policies or programs.

## **STRATEGY 3: WORK WITH COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS AND/OR RESIDENTS TO IDENTIFY LANDLORDS**

Residents and organizations "on the ground" may have lots of information on landlords because they are tenants, neighbors and friends of landlords. Consider connecting with these individuals and organizations to informally gather information about landlords in the community, including who they are and how best to contact them. These individuals and organizations can also help connect local government staff to landlords directly. Use publicly available data like a city's or county's Geographic Information System (GIS) data and/or Census data to identify neighborhoods with high percentages of renters and/or populations most vulnerable to evictions. Perform dedicated outreach to them.

Consider engaging culturally relevant organizations to identify landlords who may not typically engage with city or service-provider led programs. **Emphasize that shared information and data will not be used to target or penalize landlords.**

## REPRESENTATIVE

Representative information might take the form of an excel spreadsheet with a standard set of information collected for each landlord. The data may be representative of a particular program such as a landlord education or emergency rental assistance program. While the data is not comprehensive of all local landlords, it is more detailed and representative of a specific group.

These strategies are useful for cities looking to capture additional details about landlords.

### STRATEGY 1: CONDUCT A LANDLORD SURVEY

Surveys can be useful for getting a “pulse” on landlords in your community in response to a particular shock (such as the pandemic) or to garner feedback on a policy, program or plan. You can ask questions such as:

#### General Questions

- ◆ What types of properties do you own?
- ◆ Where are these properties located?
- ◆ How many properties do you own? How many units are in each of those properties?
- ◆ What issues and challenges do you face as a landlord?
- ◆ What do you know about your rights and responsibilities as a landlord?
- ◆ What do you know about tenants' rights and responsibilities?
- ◆ What incentives would motivate you to participate in X program?
- ◆ What information or resources do you want from the city?
- ◆ What concerns do you have about renting to tenants generally?
- ◆ What concerns do you have about renting to tenants with an eviction record and/or low-income tenants?
- ◆ What steps do you take when a tenant is behind on rent or may be in violation of their lease?
- ◆ How would you prefer to receive information from and communicate with the city?
- ◆ What questions or needs do you have for the city?

**Demographic  
Questions**

- ◆ To what race/ethnicity do you most identify?
- ◆ To what gender expression do you most identify?
- ◆ What is your age?
- ◆ What is your annual income?

Make sure to include a question asking for their consent to subscribe them to a newsletter and to be contacted by the city. Include any relevant links to city webpages or programs too.

Be careful not to overuse surveys. Surveys tend to have low response rates and overuse — or overly long surveys — may be off-putting. Consider offering an incentive, such as a gift card, to increase response rates.

**STRATEGY 2: CONNECT WITH STAKEHOLDERS IN THE CITY WHO MIGHT HAVE DATA ON LANDLORDS**

Data and information on landlords exist across multiple city stakeholders and agencies. For example, a Licensing and Inspections department may have information and data that the Housing and Community Development does not, and vice versa. Aggregating data across departments can help cities develop a more comprehensive understanding of landlords in the community. Consider asking for specific program data, such as Emergency Rental Assistance program dispersal data, information from landlord trainings or other eviction-related or human services programs.

**STRATEGY 3: ESTABLISH A MOM-AND-POP LANDLORD ADVISORY GROUP**

Establish a landlord advisory group and set restrictions on who can join. For cities particularly interested in engaging mom-and-pop landlords, set a cap on the number of properties a landlord can own to be eligible for the advisory group and a requirement that they live within city boundaries. Be intentional about recruitment and ask for referrals from existing landlord connections in the city. Clearly define the benefit for mom-and-pop landlords and pay them for their time. For example, if a landlord is asked to participate in a one hour-long call every month as part of the landlord advisory group, give \$40 each session for their time and contributions.

## COMPREHENSIVE

Comprehensive information will likely take the form of an excel spreadsheet with standard and unique identifiers and data validation.

Use these strategies to gain a comprehensive understanding of who landlords in the community are and to develop a more systematic way of identifying them going forward.

### STRATEGY 1: USE PUBLIC DATA

Public data sources like assessment and property tax data from the county or state can help cities understand the city's local landlord landscape. These [data sources include](#) information such as the owner's name and address, taxpayer's name and address, address of the unit, and more. There are ways to manipulate the data to determine if the property is owner-occupied or not, such as comparing the tax mailing address and the house address. However, many cities struggle to make sense of unclear property ownership under multiple owners and taxpayer names. For instance, some landlords will sign multiple properties under different limited liability corporations, thereby making it seem like there are three different owners for three properties when the same landlord owns all of them.

Search the data for key terms such as LLC, LP, Agency, Partners, Association, Limited, Development and Group. This will help aggregate properties that are likely under the same ownership even if the taxpayer names are different. For example, in [Minneapolis](#), Invitation Homes, formerly owned by Blackstone, had multiple owners and taxpayer names (e.g., "IH3 Property Minnesota LP," "IH2 Property Illinois LP" and "IH4 Property Minnesota LP") associated with a single taxpayer address in Dallas.

#### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For more comprehensive examples and methodologies on using public assessor and property tax data, look at the following examples:

##### Minneapolis, MN

The [Urban Institute and Center for Urban and Regional Affairs](#) used publicly available county assessment data to identify LLCs and corporate single-family rental owners in Hennepin and Ramsey Counties.

##### Philadelphia, PA

[Azavea and the Public Interest Law Center](#) set out to understand which entities are responsible for substandard housing by comparing tax mailing addresses and house addresses and determining the number of limited liability corporations.

*See here for the R project on [GitHub](#).*

## STRATEGY 2: BUILD A LOCAL DATA COLLABORATIVE

Several organizations and non-profits collect and analyze eviction and eviction-related data across the country. Consider leveraging existing local data organizations, collaboratives or research institutions to advance initiatives around collecting data on property owners. In particular, universities may have the capacity, interest and funding to support these efforts.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For examples of local data collaborations, see the examples below.

#### Open Justice Oklahoma

Open Justice Oklahoma developed the [Oklahoma Court Tracker](#) which tracks evictions filed across the state of Oklahoma since March 15, 2022.

#### Eviction Solidarity Dashboard

The Eviction Solidarity Network launched a [dashboard](#) to track eviction filings in Travis County since the start of 2020.

## STRATEGY 3: INSTITUTE A RENTAL REGISTRY

Rental registries are increasingly popular mechanisms that help cities gather better data on rental property ownership. While many rental registries exist to support code enforcement, they also identify landlords and [support more upstream intervention strategies](#) by giving cities a direct line of communication with landlords about tenant rights, fair housing laws and any government services available to them and their tenants.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For examples of rental registries, see the examples below.

#### Syracuse, NY

In 2007, Syracuse passed a [rental registry](#) that requires landlords of one- and two-family, non-owned occupied rental properties to register with the city. In 2020, [Syracuse enacted legislation](#) that prohibits landlords from collecting rent during any period of noncompliance with the city's rental registry. Through the rental registry, Syracuse has been able to collect extensive data on the local housing stock, which has allowed the city to develop a [data-driven code enforcement strategy](#) and engage proactively with renters and landlords.

**Portland, OR**

In 2018, Portland [passed a law](#) mandating all landlords register their properties annually when filing business taxes. The income Portland receives registry funds the Rental Services Office and a telephone hotline and email help desk for landlords and tenants with questions about housing laws or need referrals to eviction prevention services.

## Data Culture

Collecting data and information is one thing, but building a strong data culture is another challenge. Data culture describes the collective beliefs and behaviors of people in an organization toward leveraging data to improve performance or outcomes. Why does this matter? First and foremost, it establishes that data is important and valued. More than that, data culture implies a commitment to establishing and sustaining data literacy at all levels of an organization. Paying specific attention to methods of data collection, sharing and maintenance will help cities build a stronger data culture around data on mom-and-pop landlords.

### DATA COLLECTION

When collecting data on landlords, capture information such as their name, contact information, demographic information (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, and age) how many properties they manage, how many tenants they are leasing to, how many units are in each property, how much they charge for rent.

Many actors collect information on landlords, formally or informally. To facilitate better sharing, consider gathering stakeholders to agree on a standard data collection method that involves:

- ◆ Conducting a data source audit
- ◆ Determining what information to capture
- ◆ Standardizing data entries (e.g., someone may enter data for “street” as: St., Street, st, St)
- ◆ Cleaning existing data

Be mindful of the fallacy that having some data means the city has a comprehensive understanding of mom-and-pop landlords, or that having information and “knowing” things on paper about mom-and-pop landlords means that engagement and relationship building is not necessary. Be mindful of who may be excluded or overly represented in the data.

### DATA SHARING

Stakeholders will likely need to sign [data sharing agreements](#). In drafting and reviewing these agreements, pay specific attention to privacy stipulations, work across stakeholder groups, and seek legal advice to determine the right conditions for sharing.

While gathering data on local mom-and-pop landlords is key, in some instances, landlords will operate across multiple localities. Consider strategizing with neighboring cities to facilitate information sharing. This becomes particularly important in the case of landlords who are serial evictors, or consistently shirk responsibilities and have properties across multiple jurisdictions.



**DATA MAINTENANCE**

Maintaining data is almost as important as collecting it. Answer key questions such as who the responsible party is, or parties, in charge of maintenance and how regularly to update the data. Consider designating someone as the data steward, for the city, a particular department, or agency, to ensure the data is kept up to date and regularly updated. Consider how the data will be maintained before starting to collect it.

## Conclusion

Cities must create a viable and long-term strategy for identifying and engaging mom-and-pop landlords to successfully implement eviction prevention and housing stability strategies. This effort must start with a plan for collecting information on who landlords are. With this key information, cities can have meaningful touch points with mom-and-pop landlords throughout the housing journey of a tenant and the eviction prevention process.

### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Many resources and best practice documents exist for engaging landlords for specific programs – housing choice vouchers, homelessness prevention, emergency rental assistance, etc. While these documents are geared toward addressing other issue areas, best practices are consistent across this work and there are many good practices, strategies and examples to glean from these documents.

#### **Landlord Engagement & Recruitment Desk Book**

This resource from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development includes landlord outreach and recruitment resources, such as tips for working with landlords, a landlord benefits checklist, landlord marketing letter, landlord information template, and landlord-tenant-case manager communication agreement.

#### **Emergency Rental Assistance: “How-To” Resources for Equitable and Effective Programs**

This resource from the National League of Cities is a series of worksheets and resources developed for city leaders and program administrators interested in building or refining an equitable and effective ERA program in their communities. The 13 resources offer a step-by-step approach to the important phases and critical elements of implementing local assistance for both tenants and landlords.

#### **Developing an Intentional Landlord Engagement Strategy**

This resource from the is one of the 13 resources available in the [Emergency Rental Assistance: “How-To” Resources for Equitable and Effective Programs](#). This resource specifically talks about tips for landlord engagement to support the success of programs such as emergency rental assistance, eviction diversion and mediation.

### **[The Landlord Engagement Toolkit: A Guide to Working with Landlords in Housing First Programs](#)**

This resource from Employment and Social Development Canada includes detailed step-by-step instructions on how to work with and engage landlords to participate in Housing First programs. While not explicitly linked to eviction prevention strategies, this resource includes detailed and practical steps on strategically approaching landlords to participate in housing programs.

### **[Landlord Outreach Strategies](#)**

This resource from the National Alliance to End Homelessness is a quick list of strategies for landlord recruitment such as landlord events, social media, networking and more.