



On Affordable Housing

A step-by-step guide to sparking meaningful conversation on Texas' affordable housing issues and their impact on your community.

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Texas Tribune Community Conversations: On affordable housing

Why is it so hard to find affordable housing in Texas? The Texas Tribune has been investigating this question — and others related to what many are calling a crisis — for the past several months. We’ve pressed lawmakers, advocates, homeowners and more for their take on why affordable housing remains so elusive and what the possible solutions are. Now we want to hear from you.

Through our Community Conversations series, [The Texas Tribune](#) hopes to catalyze a constructive dialogue on affordable housing in communities across Texas. This involves fostering spaces where community leaders, neighbors, local business officials and other stakeholders can connect with one another, share stories and broach possible solutions. We hope this toolkit will help you convene these conversations.

If you’re thinking about hosting a community conversation on affordable housing in your neighborhood, please let us know by filling out [this brief form](#) so we can share your event with our readers. All we ask is that you [report back to us](#) on the outcome of your discussions.

*Thanks for your interest in leading this important conversation.
Our team is here to help or answer any questions you may have along the way:*
communityconversations@texastribune.org



About The Texas Tribune

The Texas Tribune is the only member-supported, digital-first, nonpartisan media organization that informs Texans — and engages with them — about public policy, politics, government and statewide issues.

About the series

Our investigative series, led by Texas Tribune reporters Brandon Formby, Neena Satija and Edgar Walters, examines why publicly-funded housing in Texas continues to be segregated by race and socioeconomic status, 50 years after the passage of the federal Fair Housing Act that sought to break down housing segregation across the country.

Poor people — often people of color — remain stuck in neighborhoods that can keep them in a cycle of poverty as Texas lawmakers, policymakers and the business lobby maintain the status quo.

Our reporting explores the factors that contribute to this problem — laws that allow property owners to discriminate against voucher holders, the demise of old-school public housing and the revitalization of urban areas that, in turn, prices middle-class Texans out of cities — and whether there are any solutions to help address the lack of affordable housing for so many Texans.



Community Conversation Guidelines

A few important guidelines to note before you host a [community conversation](#):

- **Impartiality**

The Texas Tribune is an independent, nonpartisan media organization. While we support civic engagement, **we do not endorse any candidates, advocacy groups or positions on any issue**, nor will we endorse any advocacy that results from your event. We may use event feedback in our continued reporting and community engagement efforts on affordable housing issues. If your event involves advocacy, or support for a political/legislative agenda, you must distinguish our reporting as being independent from this activity.

- **Branding & Positioning**

We encourage you to use this toolkit as a framework for your community conversation, but please note that any **event that you convene is not an official Texas Tribune event**. All event-related print materials, invitations and web listings must include this phrase: “This is an independently organized event inspired by reporting from The Texas Tribune, a nonprofit, nonpartisan media organization that informs Texans — and engages with them — about public policy, politics, government and statewide issues.”

- **Registration**

Before you host a conversation on housing affordability in your community, first [tell us about what you are planning here](#) or by signing up at texastribune.org/series/community-conversations.



First things first: Deciding to host a conversation

We hope this toolkit will serve as a step-by-step guide to sparking meaningful conversation on Texas' affordable housing issues and their impact on your community. To foster a successful discussion, you will need to create a space for attendees to both share their individual experiences and also zoom out to look at the scope and impact of affordable housing challenges across the state. The following pages include a few questions you should consider before organizing a community conversation.

Set a goal

What do you want to accomplish with your event? Which community voices do you need to include to make sure you are getting a complete view of the issue?

Goals may include:

- Raising awareness in your community about the impact of the affordable housing problems on local residents and [comparing your experience](#) with other communities across the state.
- Bringing together members of various groups within your community (residents, local business owners, developers, etc.) for a broader understanding of the issue, and to discuss systemic problems and solutions from their unique vantage points.
- Educating local residents about the realities of the affordable housing landscape in your neighborhood, exploring the factors of affordability and proposing solutions for your community.



Your goals should drive your planning decisions, with everything you do designed to help you reach them.

Identify which voices should be at the table

- Which perspectives from your community will help give a holistic view of affordable housing in your area?
- Who are the people most affected by this issue?
- How are people affected differently?
- Which voices are most often heard, and which ones are often left out or ignored?

Making sure your event includes a diverse set of viewpoints (both among speakers and attendees) is critical to creating a meaningful dialogue. Getting it right at this step is the foundation of a successful event.

Choose an event model that makes the most sense for your community

Who are you inviting to this event, and what is the best way to structure the conversation to accomplish your established goal? The Texas Tribune has tested a variety of models that serve different audiences and goals.

A few examples you may consider:

- **Panel Discussion**

This is what we refer to as the “traditional” Texas Tribune event model, and it entails a panel discussion with experts on the issue representing a diverse set of perspectives and viewpoints, as well as a knowledgeable moderator whose role is to get the panelists to provide the audience with a base

understanding of the issue and ask the tough questions. The panel is then followed by an audience-led question-and-answer period, where those in attendance are invited to ask questions of the panel and offer their perspectives. This model works best for large groups.



Texas Tribune event with Dallas Mayor Mike Rawlings on Feb. 9, 2018.

- **Roundtable Discussion**

This model entails dividing attendees into small groups (four to eight people per group) to dive deeper into one aspect of a broader topic (i.e. the impact of rising housing costs and gentrification on communities of color) through small group discussions. Attendees at each table then work together to compile a list of key insights from their discussion and proposed solutions or takeaways to be shared with the larger group. This model works well for groups of any size.

- **Reading Club**

This model entails inviting a small group (20 people or less) of diverse participants to read a book or set of articles on various aspects of an issue, and then discuss the readings.

- *You can find a list of recommended reading on affordable housing on page 10 of this toolkit.*

- **Virtual AMA**

While it can be difficult to convene a group of people with busy schedules for an in-person event, a well-organized online discussion can offer a meaningful alternative. You can host an online discussion in the AMA (Ask Me Anything) format, in which an expert on the topic of affordable housing in your community takes questions from a virtual audience. To convene this discussion, you will need to identify one or more experts and an online space to hold the discussion (such as Facebook, Reddit, etc.). You'll also want to define the scope of the AMA as a topic that your expert(s) can speak to for at least an hour, though you may also want to limit the duration of the discussion for experts and participants alike (Will questions be answered live? Over the course of a day? Or a week?). This model works well for groups of any size.

Provide relevant reading and resources to help inform the conversation:



Explore how affordability in your area compares to other Texas communities.

Texas

- Texas Tribune: [How to know if you're spending too much on housing in Texas](https://trib.it/housingcosts) [interactive] <https://trib.it/housingcosts>
- Texas Tribune: [Despite "Texas Miracle," affordable housing difficult for many urban dwellers](#)
- Business Insider: [American cities are so expensive that they could increase the risk of a 'demographic time bomb'](#)
- Point2Homes: [Housing Affordability: How Fast Could You Pay off Your Home in the 50 Most Populous Cities in North America?](#)
- Texas Tribune: [Texas' homeless youth slip through cracks of disjointed support system, new report says](#)
- Texas Tribune: [Report says gentrification threatens to displace Austin's low-income residents, communities of color](#)

Austin

- Austin American-Statesman: [UT researchers unveil findings in East Austin gentrification study](#) (\$)
- The Nation: [Activists in Austin Have a Novel Plan to Tackle its Affordable-Housing Crisis](#)
- KVUE: [City of Austin unveils new affordable housing map](#)
- Austin Monitor: [Four Council members urge for new direction on CodeNEXT](#)
- Austin American-Statesman: [Where can you still afford the "American dream" in Austin?](#) (\$)
- Austin American-Statesman: [Economist: Austin area needs more housing supply](#) (\$)

Dallas

- Texas Tribune: [In Dallas County, life continues to be harder for people of color](#)
- WFAA: [Why DFW's widening wealth gap matters to everyone](#)
- Texas Tribune: [With no relief from the Legislature, West Dallas mom scrambles for a place to live](#)
- Dallas Morning News: [Why do D-FW apartment rents vary so much, even within the same complex?](#) (\$)
- Fort Worth Star-Telegram: [New apartments mean more affordable housing in this North Texas city](#) (\$)
- Dallas Morning News: [A look at North Texas' hot housing market, from the skyrocketing prices to what's affordable](#) (\$)
- Texas Tribune: [A lawmaker might have just lost his fight to address West Dallas gentrification](#)

Houston

- Texas Tribune: [In battered Houston apartments, residents wonder whether to stay](#)
- Houston Chronicle: [City sits on bond funds despite affordable housing needs](#) (\$)
- Houston Chronicle: [HUD, Houston come to agreement on city's affordable housing efforts](#) (\$)
- Houston Public Media: [Houston Has Large Backlog In Affordable Housing](#)
- Bisnow: [Harvey Nearly Halved Houston's Affordable Housing. Here's What's Being Done.](#)
- Houston Public Media: [Houston Faces Shortage Of Affordable Rental Housing](#)
- Texas Tribune: ["It's our form of apartheid": How Galveston stalled public housing reconstruction in the 10 years after Ike](#)

San Antonio

- San Antonio Express-News: [San Antonio homebuyers getting outbid and frustrated in tight housing market](#) (\$)
- San Antonio Express-News: [San Antonio home prices reach a new high](#) (\$)
- San Antonio Express-News: [Housing task force to deliver recommendations to City Council](#) (\$)
- San Antonio Express-News: [City's population growth largest in nation, census data shows](#) (\$)



Planning your event

Please remember: Community conversations inspired by Texas Tribune content and this toolkit **are not** endorsed by The Texas Tribune and are not official Texas Tribune events. For a full list of upcoming official Tribune events, visit texastribune.org/events. Texas Tribune logos, official slogans or likeness may not be used for community events inspired by Texas Tribune reporting.

While we are not able to help you find a venue for your event or reach out to community partners on your behalf, our team is here to provide guidance or answer any questions you may have along the way:
communityconversations@texastribune.org.

Before your event

Finding a location

When considering where to hold your event, first consider your invitation list. If you're familiar with all of the event invitees, your home or a neighbor's backyard may be a good choice. If you're inviting people you may be less familiar with, consider a neutral place such as a private room at a local restaurant, a community center or a public library. Ask yourself, "Does the location fit the guest list and tone of the conversation I wish to host?" Here are a few additional questions to consider when selecting a location for your event:

- How many people do I think will attend this discussion? What is the seating capacity?
- Where is a convenient, community-friendly space where people naturally congregate?
- What area of my community would encourage attendance by a diverse audience? Which areas would limit a diverse audience?
- When are my guests most likely to be available to attend, based on their schedules? What venues have available space for those times?
- Can the venue accommodate my audio/visual or other technical needs?
- Is the venue accessible by public transportation? Is parking easily available? Is it easily accessible to those with disabilities?
- Is there a fee to use this space? If budget is a consideration, a few low cost venue options may include: libraries, school auditoriums, community centers, churches, synagogues, temples and mosques.

Securing speakers

If you choose an event model that requires speakers, be sure to choose people who have expertise with the affordable housing landscape in your community and, if you choose to have multiple speakers at your event, make sure their expertise and perspectives represent the diversity of your community. Speakers at your event may include:

- City or local officials working in housing and affordability
- Developers
- Local business owners
- Residents impacted by rising housing costs.

A few best practices after securing speakers for your event:

- After you have received confirmation from your speaker(s), introduce them to the other speakers you've invited. Additionally, if they will be speaking in a moderated discussion, introduce them to the moderator.
- Inform your speakers if you will be recording the event or have invited press to attend. Be mindful that due to the intimate nature of this issue, some may not be comfortable speaking publicly about their personal experience.
- Ahead of your event, share with your speakers a draft of the event agenda, as well as your desired outcomes and goals.

Promoting your event

It is essential to promote the event within your community and to do so in a way that encourages a diverse audience to attend and participate. Here are a few suggestions to help you get there:

- **Send personal invitations.** One of your most effective strategies will be to send personal email invitations to local organizations, businesses and individuals who have a stake in or affinity for the topic of affordable housing or gentrification.
- **Ask community partners to help promote your event.** Make a list of key local groups and advocates that you can work with to bring more diverse voices to your discussion and help get the word out about your event. Affordable housing is an issue that touches each member of a community, and looking to other groups who care about the issue can help enhance your discussion and encourage participation.

- **Advertise at popular community gathering places.** If your event is open to the public, a good way to get the word out is to create flyers and hang them at community centers and events, coffee shops, local businesses and other popular gathering locations. Be sure to include your event title, time, location and an explicit invitation for members of the community to attend.
- **Create an online event posting.** Promote your event online by creating a Facebook event, Eventbrite listing or other online event promotion. This will also help you collect RSVPs so you will be able to message attendees event information as needed.
- **Use social media.** Post about your event on social media platforms that your community uses regularly (i.e. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Nextdoor, etc.). Encourage your event attendees, partners and speakers to post about your event as well by sharing sample posts with them that they can easily copy and paste to their networks.
- **Collaborate with community partners:** Which local groups and advocates in your community can you work with to help bring more voices into the conversation? Which organizations can help you diversify the viewpoints at your event? Affordable housing is an issue that touches each member of a community, and looking to other groups who care about the issue can help enhance your discussion and highlight creative new solutions. Potential partners may include:
 - Neighborhood associations
 - Housing advocacy groups
 - Developers
 - Parents and families
 - Veterans groups
 - City and county planners (planning/zoning)

Make a list of local leaders and organizations you could potentially join forces with. Partnering with them will strengthen your efforts to bring a diverse group of perspectives to your event, identify experts on the topic and promote your event.

During your event

Discussion questions

We encourage you to communicate about the issues that are most important to you and your community. Feel free to use these questions as a starting point to springboard your discussions.

- How accessible is affordable housing where you live?
- Can you afford to live near where you work? Near where your spouse/partner works?
- What do you like/dislike about the area you live in?
- What's the quality of apartments and rental homes in your neighborhood?
- Have you lived outside of Texas? If so, how do housing costs compare?
- How have housing and apartment costs in your area changed over the last 10 years?
- How do you manage the long-term effects of increased housing costs?
- Do you feel trapped because of the lack of options in other neighborhoods?
- What solutions do you see to address affordable housing in your community?

Record your community's findings & report them

What key insights emerged from the discussion at your event? What did your attendees agree on, and what were the points of tension? How did attendees' individual experiences with rising housing costs compare to that of the larger group and to those in communities across Texas? What solutions were proposed?

Assign at least one note taker to record the key insights, takeaways, solutions and action items that emerged from your event discussion. You may also record the event (audio and/or video) for this purpose, or assign multiple note takers for smaller breakout discussions. Share these findings with your event attendees and with us by [completing our post-event survey](#) here or by emailing us at communityconversations@texastribune.org.

Please be sure to record the names and affiliations of your speakers, experts and other community members cited. We want to know about the affordable housing insights from your community as we continue reporting on this issue ahead of the 86th legislative session beginning in January 2019.

After your event

Send us a recap of your event by filling out [this form](#) or emailing us at communityconversations@texastribune.org. A Texas Tribune staff member will be in touch to follow up.

Here's a list of questions to consider when sending us your emails:

1. When and where was your event? What was the turnout like?
2. What were your main insights from the event? What did you attendees learn and take away from the discussion?
3. What was the most successful aspect of your event? Did you see any challenges in your discussions?
4. What proposed solutions did you come up with?
5. Do you have any photos/videos from your event that you are willing to share with us?
6. Did you have an event posting (i.e. how did you promote your event)?
7. What other resources would've helped your event that weren't included in this toolkit?
8. Which materials in this toolkit did you find most helpful?
9. Would you be interested in hosting another community event based on Texas Tribune reporting?
10. Anything else that you think we should know?

Community conversation checklist

Thanks again for hosting a community conversation on affordable housing issues in your neighborhood. As you're planning your event, we hope this checklist helps keep you and your event on track, with takeaways in mind. Still have questions? Reach out to us at communityconversations@texastribune.org.

✓ Set a goal

What do you want to accomplish with your event? Which aspect of the affordable housing issue do you want to dive deeper into, and which community voices do you need to include to make sure you are getting a complete view of the issue?

✓ Invite key voices to the table

Making sure your event includes a diverse set of viewpoints (both among speakers and attendees) is critical to creating meaningful discussion and establishing connections among event participants. If you choose an event model that requires a speaker or speakers, choose people who have expertise in and are familiar with the affordable housing landscape in your community.

✓ Secure a location

If you're familiar with all of the event invitees, your home or a neighbor's backyard may be a good choice. If you're inviting people who you may be less familiar with, consider a neutral place such as a private room at a local restaurant, a community center or a public library.

✓ Promote your event

Send personal text/emails, ask community partners to promote your event, create an online event posting and use social media to spread the news of your event.

✓ Record and report your findings

What key insights emerged from the discussion at your event? What did your attendees agree on, and what were the points of tension? Let us know that, and more, at texastribune.org/series/community-conversations.

Stay in touch

Thank you for using our toolkit! This toolkit is part of our Community Conversation series, which seeks to catalyze a constructive dialogue on affordable housing in communities across Texas. Learn more about Community Conversations [here](#).

Here are a few additional ways you can stay in touch with The Texas Tribune and our work.



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