Powering Up: Examining Frameworks For Community Engagement And Collective Tenant Action Around Energy Efficiency In New Haven, Ct

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Powering Up: Examining frameworks for community engagement and collective tenant action around energy efficiency in New Haven, CT

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Abstract

Energy is an essential household need to sustain health and wellbeing. Connecticut has one of the highest energy costs in the nation and leaves a majority of residents experiencing energy insecurity, where households are not able to meet their energy needs. Energy efficiency retrofits have been introduced as an effective solution to sustain thermal comfort indoors. Despite increased funding and resources for energy efficiency, federal and state programs continue to go widely unused by tenants for several reasons from health and safety barriers, tenant-landlord power imbalances, and administrative challenges to name a few. This thesis aims to describe Connecticut’s energy landscape, previous collective tenant action efforts, and explore barriers to collective action with the goal of providing organizers with actionable steps to engage tenants in mobilizing around energy issues. Using the Human Impact Partners’ framework, this thesis outlines the ways in which Connecticut organizations build community power through three dimensions, as defined by the Grassroots Policy Project. This framework is used to identify where there are gaps in the organizing approach and provide next steps to advocates, tenant groups, and housing and energy organizations. As a result of this research, there are two key recommendations for organizations engaged in energy issues in Connecticut that put emphasis on the second and third dimensions of power: 1) organizations should focus on infrastructure-building to prioritize developing deep, long-term alliances across organizations to allow for more opportunities for collaboration towards achieving overlapping goals, and 2) organizations should create broad, core messaging will allow organizations across sectors to develop a concise narrative around social and political issues to allow each group to maintain their unique narratives and perspectives, while building power through a common overarching theme.
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I am deeply grateful to my clinic group and superstar TEA team, Aija, Gaby, Julia, and Noelle, for their assistance in conducting interviews, collecting data, and analyzing findings. This is one of the greatest teams I’ve ever worked on, and I appreciate you all so much.

I would like to extend my appreciation to the New Haven tenants, who so truthfully and candidly shared their stories and experiences with our team. Your willingness to participate in the TEA study has provided valuable insights into better understanding the challenges of tenants in the New Haven community.

Finally, I would like to extend my thanks to the representatives from Operation Fuel, the Central Connecticut Chapter of Democratic Socialists of America, the Connecticut utility companies, the City of New Haven, Desegregate Connecticut, Community Action Agency of New Haven (CAANH), the Connecticut Fair Housing Center, and the Center for Children’s Advocacy who took the time to share their unique experiences navigating New Haven’s energy landscape with me. Your expertise and input have been absolutely critical to the development of this thesis research.
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Introduction

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), temperature extremes are projected to become more frequent over most land areas on a global scale as a direct consequence of sustained excess greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. In the United States, the residential building sector accounts for 21 percent of energy consumption, in which 36 percent is dedicated to heating and cooling, and 21 percent of annual GHG emissions. High energy consumption in the residential building sector not only contributes to climate change, but also results in immediate adverse health impacts for those who struggle to afford the high energy costs.

Energy is an essential household need to sustain health and wellbeing. Lack of access to affordable, clean, and consistent energy is a significant public health and environmental concern. Energy insecurity is defined as the “inability to adequately meet basic household energy needs.” Connecticut has one of the highest energy costs in the nation; a majority of residents pay 11.8 percent of their income on energy, which is 4 percentage points higher than the national average. Further, this rate is significantly higher for renters that are low-income and Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) as energy insecurity is a direct consequence of socioeconomic and racial inequities. Housing conditions and energy security are closely linked as the lack of thermal insulation or energy efficient systems can drive up the cost of household energy. When the cost of energy is too high for households that are not well maintained or lack energy efficiency upgrades, many turn to reducing energy consumption that is often below the threshold of energy required to maintain adequate living conditions to reduce financial strain, which put them at higher risk for illness and death. This is especially true for low-income and BIPOC households in the United States where energy usage represents a large economic cost as these households pay approximately 14 percent of their income on energy bills. Ultimately, instability of access to and the high cost of energy result in a number of adverse health outcomes and drive residents to undertake alternative harmful methods of heating, cooking, and lighting, such as sacrificing thermal comfort, using an oven to heat the home, leaving hot water running to steam the home, and wearing excess clothing to stay warm.

Energy efficiency retrofits, which refers to modifications made to existing buildings to reduce energy consumption and improve energy efficiency, have been introduced as a primary
adaptation measure to sustain thermal comfort and brace housing units from the impacts of climate change, reduce overall energy costs for individual households, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. While funding for energy efficiency retrofit initiatives, which includes weatherization to insulate buildings and reduce energy consumption, has increased in recent years, energy efficiency programs still fail to serve highly burdened communities. There are a number of barriers that prevent low-income renters, who are disproportionately BIPOC, from accessing these upgrades including health and safety barriers, power differentials in landlord-tenant relationships, the landlord-tenant split-incentive issue, and tenant bandwidth, among many others.7,8

This thesis specifically explores the barriers to and potential for collective action by tenants to increase energy efficiency measures in rental buildings. The concept of collective action refers to voluntary engagement of a group of people with shared interests or concerns to achieve change at a systems level through methods such as resource mobilization, community organizing, and the dissemination of information. The power gained through collective action enables participants to build strong social networks and engage in involved decision making on a structural level.9 The role of collective action and community engagement around energy issues is crucial in addressing these health and safety and structural barriers to accessing energy efficiency as it may invoke policy change or more effective allocation of resources. Concerning energy efficiency, collective action may take the form of tenants from a housing block coming together to approach their landlord about making energy efficiency improvements, advocating for policies at the local or state level by attending protests or giving testimony, or supporting the dissemination of information through social media and newsletters.

In the Fall of 2022, students from the Clinic in Climate Justice, Law, and Public Health at the Yale School of Public Health worked with the Neighborhood Housing Services of New Haven on the Tenant Energy Advocacy (TEA) project. They conducted a total of twelve focus groups with 41 tenants and 5 landlords in New Haven, Connecticut to better understand the barriers that low-income tenants face when pursuing energy efficiency upgrades and the connections to environmental justice. Further, this project aimed to identify motivations for tenants to engage in collective action through tenant organizing around energy issues, advocating for legislation around energy efficiency program accessibility, or sharing resources and information with one another.
Initial analyses from these focus groups identified barriers to energy efficiency and highlighted a number of other housing-related issues such as difficulty paying utility bills, sustaining thermal comfort through summer and winter months, and coping with poor housing conditions. The TEA project has since continued in the form of tenant individual interviews with the goal of probing into these themes further and understanding perceived barriers to participation in collective action.

The research design for this thesis began with preliminary research on current energy efficiency program opportunities and community power-building. Key informant interviews were then conducted with staff from administering agencies, government officials, and organizations engaged in policy and advocacy work to explore strategies for effective community engagement, which were used to supplement both preliminary research and highlight case studies as theories of change. The final written product provides actionable next steps for Connecticut advocacy groups, policymakers, and state agencies to collaborate to encourage collective tenant action.

This investigative thesis, and all products resulting from thesis work, are part of a larger effort identify potential strategies to address socioeconomic and racial disparities and barriers to energy efficiency programs for BIPOC and low-income renters in New Haven. More specifically, I aim to propose ways to activate tenants through collective action and community engagement on energy-related issues, while highlighting the connection between energy efficiency, health, economic stability, and environmental safety. The results of my thesis will serve as a resource for New Haven organizations to overcome existing barriers to energy efficient and affordable housing by building community power around energy issues and increasing tenant willingness to participate in collective action. Ultimately, this project aims to identify and apply theories of change that have been successful in cities with similar concerns around energy to promote equitable, safe, and affordable housing for renters in New Haven.

Research Design

Preliminary Research

As a primer to familiarize myself with community organizing and power building, I conducted research on frameworks for collective action that referencing examples from other cities where organizations have been able to successfully push mobilization around social and political
issues. I achieved this through reviewing literature on power-building, organizing, and social campaigns. Further, I conducted background research on current energy efficiency programs, funding opportunities, and operations on the local, state, and federal levels.

Key Informant Interviews

This study is a subset of a larger ongoing project with the Planetary Solutions Project (PSP) that the Yale Institutional Review Board (IRB) deemed all research activities exempt, which means that the identity of human subjects cannot be readily ascertained. However, the name of informant organizations may carry weight when stating information. With approval from each participant, I included organization identifiers in the thesis writing. All key informant interviews were conducted in-person on the Yale University campus or online over Zoom. I wrote interview questions that fell under two major topic areas: 1) barriers to implementing energy efficiency programs more effectively for income-eligible residents, and what support is necessary to move tenants through these programs, and 2) strategies that each organization has used to address energy issues through grassroots advocacy, legislation, and activism. I used the interview questions listed in Appendix A to guide semi-structured interviews. I recorded each interview and uploaded the audio to otter.ai for transcription. Following interviews, I replayed each audio recording, and carefully cleaned and deidentified the transcription document. Finally, I wrote a summary that focused on extracting processes and theories of change, which I highlighted as case studies in the contents of the final written product. All interview audio files, transcription, and summaries were stored in a password-protected Yale Box folder.

I conducted four one-hour, qualitative interviews with key informants including staff of administering agencies, government officials, and a utility company to document the historical and ongoing landscape of energy issues in New Haven. I chose key informants based on involvement with energy and housing issues, role in providing energy assistance, and perceived knowledge about the state’s energy programs. Grey literature, such as state management plans, and key informant interviews from the Fall 2022 focus groups, and local and state organizations informed other baseline information. I also conducted five one-hour qualitative interviews with key informants from organizations engaged in policy and advocacy work to explore strategies and frameworks for community engagement and collective action. I chose key informants using
recommendations and connections from both Dr. Annie Harper and Dr. Laura Bozzi who have been involved in general activism and advocacy around housing issues. I also relied on snowball interview recruitment where participants would suggest additional key informants to reach out to.

Using a framework from the Human Impact Partners, I outlined recommendations and actionable next steps to propel energy advocacy based on main takeaways from this qualitative research. The goal of this thesis is to understand the power-building ecosystem in Connecticut and create a tool that New Haven advocacy groups, policymakers, and state agencies can utilize to encourage tenant advocacy across the state.

Landscape analysis of energy programs and collective action

In this landscape analysis, I start by describing the ways in which systems keep tenants from accessing community power. I aim to present a comprehensive overview of the current state of energy efficiency programs, including a brief description of the barriers to energy efficiency programs and recent developments to expand programs. I also highlight both previous and ongoing housing-related advocacy efforts and perceived barriers to tenant engagement in collective action in Connecticut. The purpose of this analysis is to identify gaps and assess the strengths and weaknesses of existing systems, policies, and programs related to energy issues.

Affordable, available, and environmentally safe housing units in New Haven are few and far between. According to the United States Census Bureau, Connecticut has the country’s lowest rental vacancy rate at 2.1 percent compared to the national average of 5.6 percent, due to an overall lack of affordable housing. New Haven alone has a rental vacancy rate of 1.4 percent; 55 percent of rental households are cost-burdened and spend more than 30 percent or more of their income on housing costs. An economic report released in 2023 by the office of Governor Ned Lamont stated that Connecticut is experiencing a huge decrease in new housing construction and a shortage of 85,000 affordable housing units. Additionally, since March 2020, the cost of rent has risen by more than 17 percent in Connecticut and by 11 percent in New Haven, leading to high levels of displacement, homelessness, and eviction cases. Further, low-income households are more likely to live in poorly insulated or energy-inefficient homes, which leads to higher energy bills and exacerbates the financial strain on tenants. When coupled with rising costs of rent, these households have limited financial flexibility, resulting in many tenants having to choose between housing, food, healthcare, and energy bills. As such, the housing crisis in New Haven has
implications on tenants’ ability to cope with energy issues and on their access to energy efficiency upgrades.

Systemic Lack of Tenant Power

The Housing Justice Primer by the Human Impact Partners outlines a framework that reflects the ways in which tenants often have limited access to power across three dimensions, which I will further describe in the following section. Research has indicated that BIPOC and low-income renters have constrained political power regarding housing or energy-related issues due to systems designed to give power to those who benefit from maintaining the status quo.¹⁵ This analysis will reveal several barriers that hinder tenants from participating in decision-making processes, including competing priorities, hostile and intimidating meeting environments, and inaccessible jargon on legislative documents. On the other hand, predatory landlords and private management companies retain overwhelming power to restrict the rights of tenants to organize or advocate within their communities.¹⁶ Some may threaten eviction or rent increases for speaking out, leading many tenants to fear losing stable housing. During an individual tenant interview, one individual explained that her first priority is the safety of her children. For this reason, she refuses to participate in activities that may put them at risk.

Existing networks comprising landlords, utility companies, and private management companies hold significant amounts of power and are used to fight legislation addressing housing and energy justice. Tenant unions are new, and housing and energy advocacy organizations are relatively small and close-knit in Connecticut; this may result in organizations having trouble prioritizing advocacy efforts due to limited resources and competing demands for time and attention. Additionally, municipalities lack regulatory tools and leverage to pressure landlords to maintain safe and healthy rental units, thereby limiting tenants’ bandwidth for organizing. Finally, poor data sharing, data accessibility, and coordination between government agencies, organizations, and utility companies administering social programs restrict tenants from participating in advocacy efforts due to a lack of information on opportunities and inability to connect with other organizations working on similar issues.
Current strategies to addressing housing and energy issues are founded on the principles of self-sufficiency and individual responsibility. These approaches reflect the prevailing worldview, which defines access to safe and affordable housing and energy as private consumer goods, rather than fundamental human rights. In Connecticut, the perspectives and beliefs of landlords, utility companies, and private management companies have significant influence in shaping public opinion on social and political issues. As a result, the status quo is reinforced, perpetuating existing power relationships and keeping the power of those who already hold it.

Energy Efficiency Opportunities

Two primary government programs support weatherization and energy efficiency upgrades in Connecticut. First, the United States Department of Energy (DOE) created the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) under the Energy Policy and Conservation Act of 1976, to help low-income families reduce energy consumption and energy-related costs through retrofits and home improvement measures. While this program is a cornerstone of public energy assistance in the United States, it focuses solely on weatherizing homes. In Connecticut, the WAP is administered by the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) and delivered by two Connecticut Community Action Agencies (CAAs), New Opportunities in Waterbury and the Community Renewal Team in Hartford. Second, established by the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) was created to assist families with costs related to home energy bills. While primarily used to help low-income households pay for heating and cooling their homes, there is some funding set aside for low-cost energy-efficiency improvements. This program is administered by Connecticut’s Department of Social Services and local CAAs throughout the state.

While traditionally the WAP and LIHEAP are the two main government programs for energy efficiency, a number of new funding streams are being introduced. As a result of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021, the WAP saw an influx of $3.5 billion in funding to assist states in reducing energy use, reducing emissions, and improving the health and safety of homes in communities disproportionately impacted by the energy burden. More recently, the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) of 2022 directed $375 million in funding for DOE Weatherization Assistance grants, which is projected to weatherize 700,000 homes when used in tandem with the
Last year in Connecticut, Governor Ned Lamont directed $3.5 million in Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) funds to utility-administered energy efficiency programs, such as the Home Energy Solutions-Income-Eligible (HES-IE) program, part of a suite of programs offered through Energy Connecticut.

Energize Connecticut is an initiative sponsored by DEEP, the Connecticut Green Bank, the Connecticut Energy Efficiency Fund (CEEF), and local electric and gas utilities. The fund receives support from multiple sources, including Eversource and United Illuminating (UI) customers who pay into the fund through their electricity bills, as well as from Connecticut Natural Gas (CNG), Southern Connecticut Gas (SCG), and Eversource customers who contribute through a conservation charge included in their rates. The HES-IE program offers no-cost home energy assessments, delivered by the local utilities including Eversource, UI, CNG, and SCG. Depending on the conditions of a home, residents may qualify for rebates for additional energy efficiency services such as insulation, window replacements, or heating and cooling system upgrades.

Tables 1 and 2 below list the eligibility requirements and program overviews for the WAP and HES-IE programs.

Table 1: Eligibility requirements and criteria for the Connecticut WAP and HES-IE programs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Eligibility Requirements/Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Connecticut Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP)          | • Must meet 60% of State Median Income  
  • Properties that have been weatherized by a federal program within the last fifteen years will not be eligible  
  • Property cannot be listed for sale within six months of work completion  
  • For renters, landlord contribution of 20% of material costs may be required to receive services                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Home Energy Services - Income Eligible (HES-IE)              | • Must be a customer of Eversource, United Illuminating, Connecticut Natural Gas, or Southern Connecticut Gas  
  • Must meet 60% of State Median Income  
  • For renters, landlord must complete a Landlord Service Agreement  
  • Properties that have received an energy assessment within the last 36 months will not be eligible  
  • Households with residents that are over 18 with no income must fill out additional forms                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
Table 2: Program overview for the Connecticut WAP and HES-IE programs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Overview / Operations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut WAP</td>
<td>1. Contact local Community Action Agency (CAA) to apply through a Weatherization Card or Referral Form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. The Community Renewal Team or New Opportunities Inc. will contact household to schedule an initial energy audit to determine weatherization measures to be installed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HES-IE</td>
<td>1. Submit an application to local utility company by mail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. An authorized contractor or Community Action Agency will contact household asking for more information and to schedule an appointment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. A technician will complete a home energy assessment and coordinate qualifying installations, if necessary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

City of New Haven Infrastructure

In 2022, the City of New Haven used $5 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding to establish the Office of Climate and Sustainability. The office aims to work with community organizations, residents, and other local governments to advance the city’s climate and environmental initiatives, policies, and practices. The establishment of this office is groundbreaking for New Haven as it signifies the city’s commitment to addressing urgent climate impacts and public health inequities. Approximately $2 million is allocated to residential investments, $2 million is allocated toward city-wide initiatives to reduce New Haven’s carbon footprint, and $1 million is allocated toward staffing the executive director and policy analyst positions in the new office.

The newly-appointed director of the office plans to leverage the city’s resources to increase access to the above-mentioned existing energy programs, through support of the innovative I Heart My Home program, offered through the Neighborhood Housing Services of New Haven. I Heart My Home offers energy counseling to renters, landlords and homeowners, including assistance navigating available energy programs. The aim is to enhance the visibility of the I Heart My Home program through marketing and outreach, connect with potential partner organizations, and direct funding towards the program. He also intends to work with I Heart My Home to streamline the application process for energy efficiency programs and audits by taking a neighborhood-level
approach to identify census tracts with the greatest need. In addition, he plans to collaborate with utility companies and local organizations to increase data sharing and accessibility, thereby reducing barriers to energy efficiency programs and improving coordination between agencies and organizations at an administrative level.

**Barriers to Energy Efficiency Programs**

Despite the influx of federal funding to and seemingly expansive number of opportunities to access these energy efficiency programs, a number of barriers prevent uptake, especially among low-income households.

**Health and Safety:** Approximately 20 percent of potential energy efficiency upgrades are cancelled due to health and safety barriers in Connecticut. Asbestos and mold are the most common, as completing an energy audit when these are present would be hazardous to the health of those living in the home. Further, older housing stocks and low-income households may run into other health and safety barriers such as elevated carbon monoxide levels, knob and tube wiring, structural issues, and pests that prevent the installation of energy efficiency retrofits, lengthening the process of accessing potential upgrades and putting the onus on residents to pay for the cost of remediation. To address health and safety barriers to weatherization, the state of Connecticut launched the Weatherization Barrier Remediation Program in 2022, which will help fund the remediation of hazards for those looking to pursue energy efficiency upgrades.

**Tenant-landlord relationships:** A number of barriers center around tenant-landlord relationships. Renters require written consent from their landlords to install energy efficiency upgrades. Tenants in low-income housing often experience difficulties identifying or contacting their landlords, even for basic maintenance, creating a barrier to access of these programs. Additionally, the power differential between landlords and low-income renters may discourage tenants from pursuing energy efficiency upgrades out of fear of jeopardizing their landlord-tenant relationship or being perceived as a problematic tenant. The split-incentive paradigm describes a barrier to energy efficiency programs where there is a lack of appropriate incentives for landlords to pursue such upgrades as there is no short-term financial benefit for them (when they do not pay
utility bills), while tenants are left paying for utility bills and have no control over energy efficiency improvements.

**Administrative burden:** On the administrative side, the agencies and utility companies that deliver energy efficiency programs lack staff bandwidth, resources, or data to serve all tenants who need such upgrades. While the overview of federal programs in Table 2 appears to be straightforward, both tenants from focus groups and key informants in our study mentioned pursuing energy efficiency programs and never hearing back or a lack of program funding, which can discourage tenants from applying again as the application process is extensive and frustrating. As identified through focus groups, tenants stated that when they expressed their confusion to program representatives, they were often unsympathetic and disrespectful. Although federal funding for energy efficiency programs is increasing, a representative from the local utility companies states that there is a lack of communication and coordination among government agencies and utility companies that creates silos across programs, preventing the programs from working efficiently.

Although the process for applying to energy efficiency programs appears to be straightforward (Table 2), tenants have trouble reaching program administrators, completing lengthy applications, and following up after applications are submitted. Further, tenants are often unaware of the programs and funding available to them, as information is not sufficiently shared. Finally, many low-income renters struggle to meet their basic needs such as paying rent to ensure secure housing or providing food for themselves and their families. With basic needs not being met, energy efficiency is not an immediate priority for low-income households.

**Energy Assistance**

Due to the need for immediate financial relief from the burden of paying rent and energy bills, many tenants turn to energy assistance programs such as the Connecticut Energy Assistance Program (CEAP), which is administered by the Connecticut Department of Social Services (DSS) and delivered through local CAAs. This program is primarily funded by the federal Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and offers benefits paid directly to a household’s utility companies to assist households that struggle to afford their heat bills. However, we heard in
our focus groups that similar barriers as those experienced in apply for energy efficiency programs exist for assistance programs including agency capacity, secure funding, and administrative burden.

Collective Tenant Action in New Haven

Tenant unions are collective bargaining organizations that empower communities to demand stronger housing and tenants’ rights. In response to financial hardship and housing inequities in Connecticut, tenant unions have gained major traction in the past few years, with help from the Central Connecticut Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) Chapter. In 2021, five tenant unions formed a group called the Connecticut Tenants Union (CTTU) to address issues such as poor housing conditions, rising cost of rents, no-fault evictions, maintenance problems, or other harmful practices.33,34

One issue that tenants have successfully organized around is the Right to Counsel. In 2019 alone, 90 percent of landlords involved in eviction cases were represented by lawyers compared to only 7 percent of tenants who found lawyers for eviction cases.35 In 2021, tenant organizers and advocates from DSA and CTTU pushed to pass the Right to Counsel bill, which provides legal representation to tenants who are facing eviction proceedings. Prior to this, tenants in eviction cases were not ensured legal services. The Right to Counsel movement showcases the ability of using tenant organizing as a tool for driving systemic change in housing policies and practices. Further, this movement laid the groundwork for future organizing efforts. This movement and the growing power of tenant unions in New Haven was part of the inspiration for the TEA project.

More recently, housing activists utilized tenant unions to respond to the unsafe living conditions and rising cost of rent.36 Fair Rent Commissions are municipal level legislative bodies responsible for investigating housing-related matters such as rent complaints, holding hearings, and issuing subpoenas. The commission also has the power to prevent landlord retaliation against tenants who file complaints.37 In 2022, New Haven became the first city in Connecticut to legally recognize tenants unions. The ordinance amendment codified the right for tenant unions to participate in investigations, studies, and hearings during the Fair Rent Commission process.38 Ongoing organizing efforts focused on addressing social and political issues persist to this day.
Barriers to Collective Tenant Action

Although tenants have successfully organized around various housing issues as detailed in the previous section, there are many obstacles that hinder tenants’ ability to engage in such movements. This section aims to describe these obstacles. All barriers discussed in this section were identified from key informant interviews and individual interviews with New Haven tenants.

Tenants view their living situation and housing issues as temporary

When tenants perceive their housing issues as temporary, it can hinder their participation in collective action towards addressing broader housing issues. This lack of investment stems from poor living conditions or avoidant landlords, which prevents tenants from seeing the value in organizing with other tenants to push for systemic change.

One key informant, who previously lived in a building where most residents were associated with Yale University, had electric floorboard heaters that were both inefficient and led to monthly electric bills of over $600. There was no heating in the common area of the building and individual apartments were not well insulated. Despite attempting to organize other tenants who faced similar challenges in his building, he found that many were more inclined to relocate to a higher-quality building than invest in improving the quality of their current residence. While this situation was unique to this informant as most tenants in his building had the financial stability to move with ease, deciding to leave may prove to be more challenging for low-income individuals.

“Everyone feels that they can go somewhere else. If they don’t like where they’re living, they’ll just move.”

Another key informant, who works at the City of New Haven and is also a landlord, notes that tenants often have shorter time horizons in a housing unit compared to landlords. For example, he spoke with a neighbor who was uncertain whether their housing management company would raise their rent to the point where they would be forced to move, resulting in his forced displacement. The informant poses the notion that the fear of displacement may discourage tenants from participating in campaigns. Furthermore, tenants who do not own their homes may lack a sense of investment and are less likely to allocate time and money towards energy efficiency upgrades.
“So like, for that person, like you said, are you gonna want to wage this like, campaign to get these incentives you're entitled to if like, you may not think you'll even be in that apartment for much longer.”

Mistrust in institutions that have failed tenants

One key informant actively participated in organizing efforts during the Right to Counsel campaign by engaging in deep canvassing with the Connecticut Chapter of the Democratic Socialists for America. Deep canvassing aimed to understand what challenges tenants were facing, build relationships, and see where there were prospects to organize. However, many tenants in Connecticut were reluctant to participate in advocacy efforts due to their profound mistrust in the institutions that had previously failed them or their belief that the system is inherently biased against them. As a result, they were less likely to engage in collective action due to a lack in faith that these institutions will bring meaningful change.

“People, of course, have so much going on in their lives, and rightfully mistrust so many institutions that have failed them, you know. At the city level, the solutions that are supposed to work for people who are facing issues with their landlords, obviously, don’t work.”

Tenant bandwidth and lack of time

Several key informants identified tenant bandwidth and a lack of time as one of the most prominent barriers to collective action. One informant, an attorney with the Connecticut Fair Housing Center, noted that those with multiple jobs, children, or who work long hours have limited ability to participate in advocacy efforts. Additionally, low-income households’ need for short-term financial relief may impede their ability to fully engage in the long-term process of tenant organizing.

“There’s a tension between needing short term relief from a lot of these pressures versus the long term work it takes to shift these systems, which is a gradual process.”

As a result, many people are deterred from participating in collective action as they must prioritize their immediate needs. This informant emphasized that advocacy efforts must be structured to leave space for individuals to come in and out of the organizing process and encourage them to do what they can with the time they have.
Building or informational meetings where tenants have the opportunity to express their concerns are often held during the day or in locations that may be difficult to reach by public transportation. Tenants who participated in individual interviews for the TEA project spoke of busy work schedules or other priorities that hinder those interested in participating in collective action. This gives the illusion that tenants have the ability to participate but prevents many from having a meaningful seat at the table.

“No, they usually have meetings in my building. I live in this building for the last, past eight years or so. So they pretty- stuff like that. They have meetings, I think, believe once a month and I don’t quite make them often because I’m at work. But they usually send little memos of what’s going on and things like that. Other than that. I’ve never kind of like collabed with somebody on things to do in the building.”

Process of advocacy can be disempowering

In 2023, the Cap the Rent campaign aimed to apply pressure to the Connecticut State Legislature to pass House Bill 6588 (HB 6588), which sought to prevent landlords from increasing the cost of rent during the first year of a tenancy. Just prior to an interview with an informant who played a leading role in that campaign, the Housing Committee decided not to bring HB 6588 to a vote, despite support from 72 percent of Connecticut voters. In the aftermath of this resolution, the informant expressed that a major obstacle to collective action and advocacy is that the process can be particularly disempowering. Shifting well-established systemic processes requires a significant investment of time and energy and when substantial efforts do not lead to an expected result, it can leave people feeling worn down and demoralized.

“It’s incredibly demoralizing too and feels very disempowering to go to all these meetings and see nothing change.”

“You have this right. Are you really going to be able to exercise it? Maybe not. I mean, so many injustices happen on a daily basis.”

While the bill was not passed, the Cap the Rent campaign was monumental in garnering community support and mobilization from a diverse range of individuals, once again highlighting the crucial role of collective tenant action and organizing.

Meetings and courtrooms can be hostile
The setting and environment for legal proceedings can be hostile. One key informant, who works with Desegregate Connecticut as an organizer, states that it can be intimidating for tenants to go in front of a board or commission to advocate for themselves, especially as commission members tend to be older, white men. Further, inaccessible language and jargon at meetings or on bills can be difficult for the average person to understand, making it intimidating for many to engage in political processes or advocate for themselves in front of policymakers.

“It’s intimidating. How to go in front of a board or a commission and try to advocate for yourself in a potentially hostile environment. Because a lot of commission members are oftentimes older, white men. It’s an intimidation of not feeling able to advocate for yourself or knowing exactly what to say.”

As a result, hostile environments may lead tenants to feel unwelcome or discouraged from participating in advocacy efforts, especially if they do not feel like they have a valuable contribution to the discussions. Ultimately, this can lead to a lack of meaningful engagement from those who are most affected by housing or energy issues.

Legislative processes create silos around issues

Advocates in the fields of housing, energy, and climate often fail to coordinate their organizing efforts, despite the benefits of collaboration. According to a key informant from Desegregate CT, the government’s structure itself limits the ways in which citizens interact with legislative processes and impedes cross-sector collaboration. Connecticut, for example, has 26 legislative committees, including Housing, Public Health, Energy and Technology, and Planning and Development, that address issues separately. This siloed approach creates barriers to collaboration across sectors, as agencies and committees divide responsibilities to focus on single issues.

Organizational bandwidth and priorities

Another barrier to collective action is limited organizational resources and capacity. The CTTU and the local chapter of DSA closely collaborate on housing and energy issues. However, because the infrastructure of tenant unions in Connecticut are fairly new, there are fewer resources and a smaller number of people organizing. A key informant who participates in advocacy efforts
with the CTTU and DSA shared that the rent stabilization campaign emerged at the same time he was attempting to organize tenants in his building around energy issues. This caused many organizers to shift their focus and prioritize the rent stabilization campaign, resulting in the energy efficiency campaign losing momentum.

“Because Central Connecticut DSA is pursuing this legislative rent stabilization campaign, all of the energy that had been going towards this landlord-wide organizing campaign has now been shifted to that. So that’s more of a deeper organizational problem.”

While it makes sense that organizations placed greater emphasis on the rent stabilization campaign than the energy efficiency campaign at that time, given that the ability to afford rent trumps all other concerns, the need to focus on a single issue highlights the need for more resources and organizers.

Lack of resources and information

During individual interviews, tenants reported that a lack of information, resources, and support to participate in advocacy efforts as some of the largest barriers. When asked for their general thoughts on collective action, most said they would be interested in participating, but are unsure about where to start or how to get involved. Additionally, most tenants expressed a strong willingness to share information with their families, friends, and neighbors, but lack the information themselves to do so.

Fear of losing stable housing

Some tenants expressed hesitation towards collective action during individual interviews, stating that they fear landlord retaliation, such as rent increases or being perceived as a “problem tenant”, if they were to speak out against their landlords or work with other tenants to approach housing issues.

“Because you don’t know, somebody might go back to the office and say, oh, you guys ask your questions. You know what I mean? Some people are like, you know, yeah, scary. So, that will make it hard for me because my landlord might raise up my rent for talking too much.”
This fear of losing stable housing is especially common among low-income tenants and those with limited options for relocating. Further, the lack of legal protections for tenants exacerbates the power imbalance in tenant-landlord relationships and further increases their vulnerability.

Frameworks for Community Power-Building

In this section, I highlight the importance of community power and introduce a framework for community-power building as outlined by the Human Impact Partners, based on the Grassroots Policy Project's three dimensions of power. I present and analyze case studies using interviews with community organizers, focusing on how they utilize each dimension of power. All case studies are based on conversations with key informant interviews. However, online resources such as organization websites, legislative documents, and relevant news articles were utilized to fill storyline gaps.

Importance of Community Power

The University of Southern California (USC) Dornsife’s Equity Research Institute defines community power as the “ability of communities to sustain and grow an organized base of people who act together through democratic structures to set agendas, shift public discourse, influence who makes decisions, and cultivate ongoing relationships of mutual accountability with decision-makers that change systems and advance health equity.” When historically marginalized and underserved communities organize to build community power, they gain the ability to shape the decision-making processes that impact their health.

Dimensions of Community Power

The Grassroots Policy Project defines community power in three unique, but dynamic and interrelated dimensions:

1. Organizing people and resources for direct political involvement in visible decision-making arenas.
2. Building durable, long-term political infrastructure--networks of organizations that are aligned around shared goals, who can shape political agendas.
3. Making meaning on the terrain of ideology and worldview.
Building community power requires changing the current unequal distribution of power across social groups. It is important to recognize that simply organizing does not automatically grant power; rather, collective action can help change the structure of relationships and, through those changes, build community power. By organizing and increasing their power, tenants can exert influence and demand changes from those in positions of power. It should be noted that while each dimension of power is separable, they work in tandem to transform power relationships. In this section, I illustrate four case studies from local New Haven organizations that utilize each dimension of community power to effect change.

1. Organizing people and resources

The first dimension of power as outlined by the Human Impact Partners focuses on the notion that power is gained through the organization of people and resources. The Grassroots Policy Project explains that most campaigns and social movements focus their energy on this dimension of power.

**CASE STUDY:** The local chapter of DSA utilizes deep canvassing as a form of community engagement around energy issues.

A member and organizer with the Central Connecticut DSA Chapter describes his experience deep canvassing around energy issues and the organization’s approach to harnessing community engagement. During the first winter he lived in an apartment in New Haven’s Edgewood neighborhood, he experienced high electricity bills caused by poorly insulated apartments and an inefficient heating system. The only source of heat was through electric baseboards, which was ineffective in maintaining warmth for prolonged periods and necessitated frequent use. Despite tactics such as being careful about how much heat he was using and keeping doors closed to rooms he was using, he experienced electricity bills of upwards of $600 a month. Because of his prior involvement with DSA, he was already engaged in organizing efforts and serendipitously canvassed his own building. Through this process, he found that some residents in his building were paying up to $1,600 a month in the winter for electricity and others experienced snow getting into their apartments through the windows.
With DSA, he used deep canvassing to encourage community engagement and support on a building-level. This approach involved engaging in one-on-one conversations with every tenant in a single building to build relationships and gain insight into the challenges they were experiencing in a “labor unionist” type of approach. It began with catalyzing conversations based on shared experiences as one would do in workplace with unsafe conditions or unfair salaries. To progress, he identified community leaders that would be committed to working together and trained them to become organizers themselves who would continue to connect with their neighbors. The next step involved implementing structure tests to gauge the strength of the organization being established. For example, he invited identified leaders to meetings or protests, which in turn, would hopefully attract other tenants.

While this process proved successful in engaging the community, the informant recognized several areas for improvement. He notes that organizing on the building-level requires a commitment from everyone in the complex. As a suggestion, he notes that landlord-level organizing, where organizers canvas across buildings among tenants who share a landlord, would be more effective in bringing in a critical mass of tenants from across the entire city. He also points out underlying organizational challenges within DSA and the Connecticut Tenants Union regarding the prioritization of the issues they address. Given the recent establishment of the CTTU, they do not have sufficient resources and bandwidth to undertake organizing efforts around multiple issues, which has led to a reduced focus on landlord-level organizing around energy issues. Lastly, he emphasizes the importance of speed and having a clear timeline for an organizing effort to be successful. In his efforts organizing around energy issues, he realized that high electricity bills were a seasonal problem in his building, and without a contingency plan, it became difficult to maintain engagement once concerns about electricity bills were no longer a top priority. Although the effort did not result in widespread energy improvements for these buildings, there are lessons to be learned in this case about how to effectively engage the community.
CASE STUDY: The first sustained movement for rent stabilization in 40 years from the Cap the Rent campaign.

From 2022 to 2023, Connecticut’s Cap the Rent campaign brought together a coalition of over 50 organizations to testify in support of House Bills 6588 and 6589 before the Connecticut General Assembly Housing Committee. This coalition included various groups including tenant and labor unions, housing rights and legal aid organizations, and community and student groups, who held the committee floor for upwards of 20 hours in February of 2023. The two bills aimed to publicly challenge corporate landlords by instituting a 4 percent rent cap on rental units in the state. During the public hearings, most advocates challenged this and argued that the bill should be amended to create a 2.5 percent rent cap.

A staff attorney with the Connecticut Fair Housing Center and organizer with DSA recounts her experience organizing across the state over the past few years and recent efforts mobilizing people at the to build relationships in support of the Cap the Rent campaign. Tenant organizing took off during the COVID-19 pandemic, where people from different organizations, such as DSA, were involved in the Cancel Rent campaign. During the statewide shutdown, nearly one million residents filed for unemployment, which further exacerbated the housing crisis as many tenants were unable to pay rent. This campaign urged the governor to implement an immediate executive order to halt evictions, cancel rent until 45 days after the state of emergency is lifted, and offer government funding to landlords to recover the lost income. While the campaign was not successful in its demands to cancel rent, an eviction moratorium was implemented (that went beyond the terms of the nationwide CDC moratorium). Building on the base of organizations built and strong reputation in the organizing space from the Cancel Rent campaign, the attorney began organizing with DSA around the Right to Counsel campaign in 2021. She shares that the primary goal of the campaign was to build power, because she recognized the importance of not only having good ideas, but also the power to effect change. The Right to Counsel campaign was successful; in July 2021 a law
was passed giving eligible tenants who had been issued a Notice to Quit by their landlord the right to legal counsel.

This informant explains that first step in the organizing process is deep canvassing to understand the challenges people were facing, build relationships, and identify prospects to organize. During this process, she recognized that organizers will not succeed every time, which led DSA to experiment with multiple different approaches. One in particular was organizing around landlords with bad reputations, which seemed to work much better because she mentions that there was always one person in the building who already had a mindset of pushing back against these systems. Ultimately, the Cap the Rent campaign was born out of the base-building that had been built from previous campaigns and had the backing of numerous tenant groups, organizations, and tenants from across the state who were all facing similar issues.

The Cap the Rent campaign mobilized around the idea that housing is a fundamental human right and aimed to persuade legislators to impose restrictions on rent hikes by landlords. In a concerted and focused effort, organizations involved in the campaign disseminated useful information about the bills, hosted phone banks, distributed petitions, and provided testimony writing workshops around the core messaging that safe and stable housing is necessary for people to thrive. At the time of our conversation, the Housing Committee had just decided not to bring HB 6588 to a vote. Despite the failure to vote on the bill, this campaign was a major feat for tenant organizing in Connecticut, as landlords typically dominate legislative spaces and hold significant power in public hearings. Nearly 400 people registered to testify, and over 750 people sent in written testimony in support of the bill. Through long-term base-building and organizational coordination, this effort has ultimately raised awareness and changed the way people perceive the challenges experienced by Connecticut renters.

2. Building durable networks
The second dimension of power centers the idea of “infrastructure-building”, which focuses on building the infrastructure that allows advocates and organizations to sustain longer-term engagement in collective action.\textsuperscript{41} Taking the first dimension a step further, building deep alliances across social movement groups allows organizations to function more effectively within larger political systems.\textsuperscript{41} The Grassroots Policy Project suggests that large corporations have been using this infrastructure-building approach successfully to advance their own interests by working together through overlapping networks at the national, state, and local levels.\textsuperscript{41}

**CASE STUDY**: Achieving zoning law reform through coalition-building and advocacy around the “Work Live Ride” Act.

Desegregate Connecticut is a coalition of almost 80 local and non-profit groups that advocates for more equitable local and state land use and zoning practices. The organization’s formation was unique for multiple reasons. First, it emerged in the wake of George Floyd’s murder, which “renewed the conversation on racial justice”, and caught the energy of young people across the state. Furthermore, the statewide shutdown during the COVID-19 pandemic granted many the time and opportunity to get involved with organizing efforts, resulting in a rapid coalition-building process. The timing of base-building efforts motivated people to work towards effecting change on a local level in a short period of time. Despite the return to pre-pandemic routines and the newness of the organization, the coalition endured, achieving significant momentum organizing around Public Act 2129 (PA 21-29) during its first legislative session in 2021. This act successfully became law, promoting equity in zoning regulations by legalizing accessory dwelling units (ADUs), capping parking space mandates for new housing units, and requiring training for planning and zoning commissioners.\textsuperscript{44}

Desegregate CT keeps coalition members involved by collecting and disseminating data that can be easily digested, organizing meetings for coalition members, and hosting public educational events. More recently, the organization is working to promote collective action and advocacy around transit-oriented communities. The “Work Live Ride” Act, or House Bill 6890 (HB 6890), aims to address the state’s
housing crisis by allowing the construction of affordable, multifamily housing units around transit stations, which were previously restricted by zoning laws. Transit-oriented development offers residents easy access to public transportation and walkable communities, reducing the need for cars and stimulating local businesses. The director of Desegregate CT emphasizes the importance of a precise and inclusive message to achieve effective campaigns by providing clear calls to action to give people the agency and excitement to be involved with the time that they have. This includes laying out specific deadlines and actions to take such as submitting testimony, emailing legislators, and speaking at hearings.

During the 2023 Legislative Session, the Planning and Development Committee passed HB 6890. An organizer at Desegregate CT explained a recent strategy of encouraging community engagement around transit-oriented development through community walk audits. These walk audits assess walkability, bike-ability, and livability around different transport stations in Connecticut by evaluating sidewalk conditions, public transportation accessibility, and overall safety. The audits have attracted a diverse crowd of community members, mayors, congressional members, and justice groups, each with unique motivations for participating. These walk audits promote greater understanding of transit-oriented developments, leading to greater advocacy for these developments. Desegregate CT’s coalition-building efforts are the perfect example of building durable, long-term networks and infrastructure that shape the political agenda.

3. Shape the narrative on prevailing worldviews

The third dimension of power stresses the power of narrative and the ability of individuals or organizations to shape people’s conscious and unconscious worldviews. Organizations who often hold this type of control include religious institutions, educational institutions, mass media, consumer culture, and major political parties. The Grassroots Policy Project suggests that conservative groups have been successful at giving meaning to social and political issues, using core overarching themes that are invoked and articulated together to create a narrative to understand society.
CASE STUDY: Changing the way in which healthcare professionals frame health issues to provide holistic care through medical-legal partnership.

Medical-legal partnership (MLP) is a unique model of healthcare delivery that provides both health and legal services at a single site to address the social determinants of health. This model allows health care professionals to collaborate across disciplines including lawyers, social workers, and community health workers. Physicians are trained to screen for legal issues that drive poor health as they relate to access to government programs, substandard housing, employment, and immigration, for example. If such issues are identified, physicians may work with lawyers to intervene by counseling patients on their legal rights, writing demand letters to landlords, or representing the patient in court cases. Additionally, some MLPs create new partnerships to connect patients to social service providers, including as assistance signing up for SNAP benefits. The Yale New Haven Health (YNHH) system has eight MLP programs including in the departments of oncology, geriatric, and pediatrics. Overseen by a MLP attorney, Yale Law School (YLS) students offer legal services through the program and collaborate with organizations such as the New Haven Legal Assistance Association, the Center for Children’s Advocacy, and the Connecticut Veterans Legal Center.

A staff attorney at the Center for Children’s Advocacy, who previously worked in the children’s hospital at YNHH, describes MLPs as a form of preventative care that acknowledges and empathizes with patients’ unique circumstances and engages with individuals on a more personal level. A prime example of the impact of MLP is a story about a family whose son was in and out of the emergency room due to chronic asthma, which caused him to begin failing the fifth grade and prevented his mother from being able to continue working. After a home visit from her YNHH Pediatric Care MLP team, it was clear that the carpet in the home was the cause of her son’s debilitating asthma. The MLP team wrote a letter to the family’s property management company, saying that the carpet must be removed as accommodation for his asthma was required by law. As a result, the boy was
able to recover and return to school, and his mother was able to return to work full time.49

When asked about MLP as it relates to energy efficiency, she recalls an initiative in which her team conducted a survey of every person who requested medical utility protection, which prevents utilities from being shut off regardless of bill payment due to life-threatening illness, over the span of a year. Results showed that 90 percent of the survey participants expressed their interested in energy efficiency. She stresses the importance of encouraging physicians to think about their patients differently and using that moment as an opportunity to provide the public with information such as their legal rights, government programs, and how to advocate for themselves.

While this case study is not directly focused on collective action, it provides insight into the conditions necessary for power-building, such as changing how we view health issues, spanning beyond one person, one program, or one hospital. By propelling the idea that access to affordable and stable housing and energy are human rights, rather than consumer goods, and that they impact human health, communities will feel more empowered to advocate for themselves and hold policymakers accountable for ensuring access to these resources. The conversation around MLP extends beyond one-on-one interactions and looks at entire populations, emphasizing the need for widespread behavior change.

Conclusion

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

The landscape analysis and key informant case studies reveal that most barriers to collective action stem from a lack of social power, leading to inability to participate in legislative processes. Further, reforming power relationships requires transformation on a systemic level that may be achieved through organizing. However, such changes require a significant time commitment that many cannot offer because they are struggling to meet their immediate needs, perpetuating the vicious cycle of an oppressive and broken system. This research project describes
a framework that will enable organizations to advance their organizing efforts by contextualizing their objectives using three dimensions of power.

Advocates and organizations have demonstrated that they are well-versed in using the first dimension of power, which involves strategies for organizing people and resources. From deep canvassing efforts to educational events to setting clear calls to action, DSA, Desegregate CT, and various other Connecticut organizations were able to rally significant support during the 2023 Legislative Session. However, a key takeaway from this research is the importance of consciously devoting more effort to organizing using the second and third dimensions of power, infrastructure-building and making meaning on worldviews.

Regarding the second dimension of power, tenant organizers in Connecticut have built a reliable base network of organizations and gained strong reputation through previous campaigns, including Cap the Rent and Right to Counsel. However, the network is still relatively new and small, which limits its capacity to take on multiple issues at once, as detailed in the first case study. This can lead to sudden shifts in priorities, impeding the effectiveness of the network’s organizing efforts. By focusing on infrastructure-building, tenant organizers can prioritize developing deep, long-term alliances across organizations to allow for more opportunities to work together towards achieving overlapping goals.

Lastly, the third dimension of power is crucial in bridging the gap between sectors and eliminating the silo that exists within the legislative process. Although housing and energy organizers share similar goals, they often work independently from each other. Creating broad, core messaging will allow organizations across sectors to develop a concise narrative around social and political issues. For example, mobilizing around the notion that housing, energy, and healthcare are fundamental human rights. This will allow each group to maintain their unique narratives and perspectives, while building power through a common overarching theme. As a result, building community power through this dimension will enable groups to function together to effect change and shape people’s perceptions of society.

Future Research
PERE, the USC’s Program for Environmental and Regional Equity, developed a framework for community power-building centered around organizing and base-building. This framework is supported by ongoing work from complementary power-building organizations with diverse capacities, skills, and expertise. Figure 1, as defined by PERE, illustrates a “flower power” diagram of organization types that work together in the base-building and community-power building ecosystem. This includes organizations such as health care clinics, non-profit coalitions, government agencies, and academic researchers. Organizing and base-building play an integral role in this process, as they establish a foundation of grassroots leaders and members who share a common identity shaped by similar experiences through interpersonal, one-on-one engagement. Further, this structure prioritizes historically-excluded voices in decision making while using the reach of local, regional, and state level organizations that align with a community’s equity-oriented goals.

Understanding and evaluating the ecosystem of base-building organizations in the state is an important step to challenging systems and achieving energy justice. Using this framework, PERE conducted an analysis of the power-building organizations in California to guide emerging opportunities for investment and resource allocation by identifying and categorizing organizations.
and understanding the strategies that each employ. In this study, “maturity” of the ecosystem was indicated by the reach of base-building organizations and power-building alliances in all counties of the state. The final product of this study included an “ecosystem database” with over 740 organizations. Employing this strategy to measure base-building organizations in Connecticut would be beneficial in understanding the capacities and strategies of different coalitions to drive political systems, and where gaps in collaboration can be filled.

As we recently experienced with the recent Senate Bill 4 (SB4), advocates from specialized organizations remained focused on organizing in a single capacity. SB4 aimed to implement a 4 percent rent cap in Connecticut, but the bill also included language that would provide additional funding to retrofitting projects for multifamily residences in environmental justice communities. While coalitions garnered immense public support for this bill, it was apparent that housing and energy advocates were not on a united front in advocating for both components, again showing how siloed issues become in legislative processes. A potential venue for further research is conducting an analysis of how organizations coordinate and share information around a specific piece of legislation. Public testimonies can serve as valuable data to further research on barriers that prevent diverse organizations from collaborating. This would allow for a better understanding of how organizations can break down legislative silos and implement policies that dismantle oppressive systems.

Limitations

To enhance the scope of this research study, it would have been valuable to conduct additional interviews with individuals involved in organizational-level advocacy and policy work, such as through the Connecticut Tenants Union or organizations out of state. Due to time constraints, I was only able to interview five individuals conducting this type of work. Engaging a broader range of housing and energy justice organizations would provide a deeper understanding of the perceived aspects of power-building and ultimately increase foster a greater exchange of ideas and knowledge among groups.

While this thesis includes some initial findings from the TEA project’s individual interviews with tenants, it does not fully capture the perspective of those who are directly impacted
by the barriers to and efforts of collective action around energy issues. To address this limitation, it may be beneficial to develop a new interview guide aimed at tenants in New Haven who have previously participated or are currently participating in advocacy efforts for a more comprehensive understanding of the tenant experience with collective action, perceived barriers, and where additional support is needed.
References


Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Introductions

1. Tell me about yourself, your organization, the work you do, and/or the ways in which you’ve been engaged in energy issues in the past few years.
2. What is your motivation for doing this type of work?
3. What other types of organizations do you collaborate with?

Current landscape of energy efficiency and energy assistance programs

4. What barriers need to be overcome to more effectively implement energy efficiency programs for low-income residents or tenants who are eligible for HES-IE?
5. How might regulatory agencies be able to encourage tenants to apply to programs?
   a. What support do you believe is necessary to get tenants through the system and from who?
   b. Closing gaps between organizations? Engaging landlords? Data collection?
6. Is there anything else that you believe is important to know about current state/federal funding for or structure of energy efficiency programs?

Collective tenant action for energy efficiency

7. Please describe any experience you have organizing around energy issues, organizing tenants in general, or other campaigns you’ve worked on.
   a. How and what can we learn from energy-related activism and general activism?
   b. What have been the challenges that you’ve experienced when working to engage your community? Anything unexpected?
8. We know that it can be difficult for tenants to engage in collective action around energy efficiency because they have so many other pressing needs (i.e., navigating disconnections, food insecurity, or stable shelter). Based on your experience, can you suggest some strategies that might encourage tenants to engage in collective action around energy efficiency despite, or building on those immediate concerns?
   a. What do you believe are the most effective lenses through which we should frame the issue to various key players?
9. We also explored the split-incentive issue through landlord focus groups. How might you increase engagement of landlords in energy issues when there are little to no incentives for them to participate?
   a. What pressures can the state or local government put on landlords? What are the steps to achieve this?
10. Based on your experience, how do you believe your organization might be able to better support the uptake of energy efficiency programs, specifically for low-income folks?
a. In what ways are you able to best promote community engagement?

**Closing**

11. Would you be able to tell me about any larger changes that you believe need to happen beyond what we’ve already discussed?
12. Are there any questions that you suggest I should I be asking that I haven’t already?
13. Do you have any recommendations for folks that may have expertise in this field?
14. Do you have any resources that you’d like to share/promote that may help move this agenda forward?
15. Is there anything else you’d like to share?