

## DIY Home Repair for Middle Neighborhoods

Home Repair Resource Center (HRRC)  
Cleveland Heights, OH

Interest rates are up, contractors are hard to find, and households in middle neighborhoods need help to repair, maintain and update their homes. For more than 50 years, the Home Repair Resource Center (HRRC) in Cleveland Heights, Ohio, has provided accessible and affordable DIY home maintenance and repair support to homeowners, filling a critical gap in the home maintenance ecosystem.

Geared toward women at first, HRRC is now a co-ed program serving households of all incomes. HRRC's education program helps new and existing homeowners build the skills they need to care for their homes, increasing efficiency and durability and increasing home values overall. The tool lending library helps them save money not only through affordable access to tools but by helping homeowners do projects themselves and not having to hire a contractor. The program also supports neighborhood preservation and improvement of local housing stock. Maintenance programs help alleviate the negative consequences when homes fall into disrepair, which provides economic benefits to the community overall.

### HRRC offers:

- Home Buyer Education Programs
- Financial Education and Counseling
- Down Payment Assistance Program
- Foreclosure Prevention
- Tool Library
- Project Repair Workshop
- Home How-To Women's Only Series
- Senior Repair Program (SRP)
- Financial Assistance Programs (FAP)
- Contractor Database
- Home Repair Technical Assistance

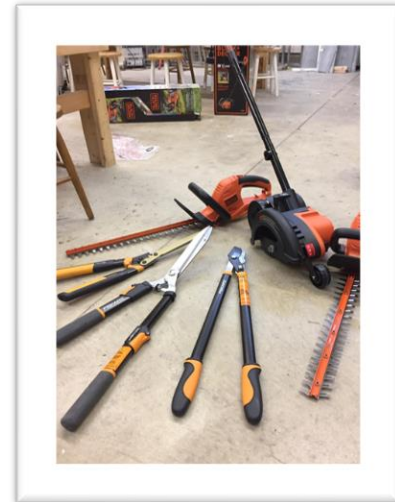


At its start, HRRC conducted a single home repair class at participants' homes, but challenges with this model emerged quickly: if projects did not get completed during class, HRRC had to return to finish the job, which became expensive. Though the initial model was not sustainable, HRRC evolved the training program and other key services such as the current tool lending library to become a terrific success.

Current programs serve larger geographical areas, populations, and financial abilities, filling a niche for community members in older homes who struggle to maintain them while adhering to strict local housing codes. Nominal fees are charged for each class, but discounts are available for those in need. Financial assistance programs, loans, and grants are available in certain locales while the education program and tool library are open to anyone. Classes are taught in the HRRC classroom by local professional contractors.

### Tool Lending Library

Among the most popular programs at HRRC is the Tool Lending Library. When the Tool Lending Library began, tools were rented on an individual basis. The program now operates through a membership platform where members pay \$25 a year to get access to over 1,000 tools and other resources. Members simply log into the portal and reserve any tool for particular dates through the online catalogue. They then pick up the tool and return it when done. The tool library is in a dedicated space at the office, and everything is labeled and stowed in specific categories. The full workshop for classes is right next door to the library.



The Tool Lending Library is open three days a week from 12:00 – 6:00 p.m. Most tools are free for members, though there are a few specialty tools available for an extra fee or deposit; for example, tools that require more maintenance, like the power snake or floor sander. Also, a late fee is imposed for any items returned late. HRRC offers small useful items for sale (i.e. caulk) to create ease of use for members and save them a trip to the store. Tutorials and handouts help prepare members for safe use of the various tools.

HRRC uses a web platform called My Turn, which is based in Seattle, to host its online catalogue. The price for HRRC is \$250 a year and is a great asset to the program: users can register and pay for classes, sign up to become a member, and pay membership fees directly through the portal. The membership model started in 2016 and now has over 450 members.



HRRC notes it is important to have strategies and policies in place to deal with the tool usage, timely returns, and safe use. It is also important to have referrals available for homeowners in need. For jobs that need additional help, HRRC maintains a database of over 400 contractors, who are suggested, promoted, and reviewed by program participants. The database is full of community contractors who are willing to work on smaller projects. Many contractors also take on teaching roles in the Home Repair classes.

Funds to start up the program and purchase tools came from local partner organizations and donations, and ongoing expenses are covered by membership dues and local donations.

**Program Trends**

HRRC’s Home Maintenance program helps homeowners to understand their homes and increase their ability to do their own repairs correctly and of good quality. The most popular classes focus on electrical, plumbing, basic carpentry, ceramic tile, and flooring topics. HRRC offers many other topics, but these are the most popular.

Trending projects tend to be seasonal spaces like outdoor kitchens and lounges. Other popular projects include modifying or replacing existing items such as kitchen counters or bathroom cabinets or building something new like a butcher block or back yard picnic table.

Certain tools are used more than others, but power tools and ladders are highly requested items. One important lesson regarding power tools is to provide safety training, but to also to purchase tools that plug in, rather than battery operated. Tools with battery packs generally do not last as long and do not provide a solid ongoing investment. HRRC offers plug-in options and a good extension cord which offers better longevity.

**Popular Tools**

- Ladders
- Power washers
- Power saws
- Hand saws
- Sanders
- Yard tools

Yard tools like rakes and shovels are also great for supporting neighborhood cleanups and community gardens.

**Program Benefits**

HRRC is more than just a place to learn about home repairs - it is a community where individuals can invest in themselves through skill development, and experience ongoing learning opportunities with others. By offering these programs, HRRC is empowering homeowners to build skills, gain confidence, and achieve personal growth. It also is helping to maintain and restore the housing stock in Cleveland Heights, which has many homes over 100 years old.

“Pairing the repair of housing conditions with strict housing codes can create challenges,” says Executive Director Keesha Allen. HRRC sees this as an opportunity however, and instead of focusing on the problem, focuses on the solution. “Simply put,” says Allen, “if you move here, we can support you. We have a tool library and excellent education program -- we can help!”

**Resources**

Home Repair Resource Center	<a href="https://hrrc-ch.org/">https://hrrc-ch.org/</a>
Story about HRRC	<a href="https://thelandcle.org/stories/repairing-homes-supporting-home-ownership-home-repair-resource-center-offers-help/">https://thelandcle.org/stories/repairing-homes-supporting-home-ownership-home-repair-resource-center-offers-help/</a>
Seattle Tool Lending Library	<a href="https://neseattletoolibrary.org/">https://neseattletoolibrary.org/</a>
Story about Seattle Tool Lending Library	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-DGqXvS60Z4&amp;t=10783s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-DGqXvS60Z4&amp;t=10783s</a>
Berkely Public Library – Tool Library	<a href="https://www.berkeleypubliclibrary.org/locations/tool-lending-library">https://www.berkeleypubliclibrary.org/locations/tool-lending-library</a>

Tips for Success

<b>Gather Information</b>	Know your housing stock and your audience. This will inform the types of projects and tools needed. Take the time to research popular trends and projects that will help increase the value of homes. Also, be sure to look closely at liability and insurance needs.
<b>Build Funding Sources</b>	Seek partnerships with ongoing donors but also consider one-time investors to support start-up. Once up and running, membership fees can help cover overhead and staffing. Create MOUs with local CDCs to offer mobile classes in neighborhoods and charge a small fee. Create a budget, especially as the program progresses: new tools and replacements will be an ongoing cost.
<b>Hire Dedicated Staff</b>	A tool lending library needs a dedicated staff member to maintain items and administer the program. Provide good customer service training for that individual – the job requires good management and people skills.
<b>Identify Target Areas</b>	Start by targeting neighborhoods with older homes, higher homeownership rates, first time buyers, and older homeowners.
<b>Understand Insurances</b>	The risk of injury is elevated with this type of program so investigate insurance fully. Different tools will have different insurance needs; for example, power tools and ladders come with more risk. Items like generators and chainsaws may not be insurable at all.
<b>Understand Liability</b>	Hire a good legal team to review liability and make sure the organization is protected. Create an agreement which specifies that members use tools at their own risk.
<b>Provide Training for Members</b>	Tools and safety training are critical pieces of this program. Hire a good instructor and build in requirements for members to attend safety training on an ongoing basis. Offer free lectures and tool-training sessions, which should be hands-on and led by a professional.
<b>Set Rules and Boundaries</b>	Know the boundaries that need to be in place to keep members safe and keep the program going. Have a policy for how broken tools are paid for or replaced by the member if used improperly. Also, develop a plan to cover the cost of replacing tools when needed – some will simply break after time.
<b>Create a Contractor Database</b>	Providing access to a trusted list of contractors is a true benefit and of great value to members. Develop a rating and feedback system so members can provide advice and feedback on projects.
<b>Use Stories to Market</b>	Success stories are easy to find and provide a great marketing opportunity. Photos are excellent content for social media and these stories promote the organization overall. Be inclusive and demonstrate the supportive nature of the program.

Questions

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