



Downtown Eastside SRO Collaborative Society  
203 - 268 Keefer Street  
Vancouver B.C. V6A 1X5



**JOB POSTING: Multilingual SRO Fire Safety Organizer**

Posting date: May 5, 2023

Office Location: Chinatown, Vancouver

Deadline for applications: May 12, 2023 but posting will stay open if this position is not filled by then.

Requirement: Fluency in one or more of the dialects spoken by seniors who live in the Benevolent Society SROs in the Downtown Eastside/Chinatown.

*"And we have a restaurant under there, and I always have this feeling: what happens if a fire starts from the restaurant? Who is going to get it first? I'm above the parking lot so I'm way in the back, right, so I wouldn't get hit, but it would be people who are in the front. Now if there was an explosion in there, we would get hit also. You know, and that's my biggest issue...is the downstairs. It scares me, mainly because they're always cooking, constantly, and there's lots of grease down there, cause my son goes and cleans out their vats. And he comes back and he's like, 'Woah!' Cause sometimes they're like 6 to 10 inches thick on the ground. Now think about how much he has to clean, a small area of grease all around? And that's underneath the stoves and stuff, like, why are you doing that? That's not very hygienic! Or even safe!"*

*- Tenant from Keefer Rooms, Transcribed by SRO-C Evaluator, Spring 2022*

Recent media about growing number of fires in hotels and the response by the SRO Collaborative and City of Vancouver:

<https://globalnews.ca/news/9449532/sro-fire-safety-plan-vancouver/>

**PURPOSE**

The Multilingual SRO Fire Safety Organizer will work with the lowest income tenants in the region living in 35 hotels, ranging from some of the most decrepit and depressing Downtown Eastside hotels to more charming and stable places. This new staff person will be someone who has the aptitude and diplomacy to connect easily with all people, comfortably striking up conversations and inspiring people into action. They will have to carefully attend to power differentials while successfully bringing together a wide variety of people together in this project including tenants who have been structurally excluded and oppressed, fire

department officials, and landlords who are of different ethnicities but predominantly cisgendered heterosexual men. Through this experience, they will grow in their leadership and connection to the Downtown Eastside community, gaining a rare breadth of skill and experience as a community organizer. They would be well supported by SRO-C's staff team and learn a lot about both the systemic stuckness of the hotels and about strategies to loosen the glue! This new staff person would blaze new trails by bringing their own skills and passion to learn and share on this very challenging journey to bring us all together in the collective actions to save lives, save people's homes, and build a better future with a stronger and united community.

One of the biggest challenges of this project will be to strategically navigate in and around landlord's interests, which are not often aligned with the needs and desires of tenants. Sometimes the best actions forward are counterintuitive. Missteps can cause hidden and unintended long-term consequences for tenants. SRO-C has a track record of skillfully navigating these complexities and staff with experience will be on hand to provide this new staff member with the support they need for success. Change must be gradual and it is okay to take a slow, "lead from behind" approach.

As always, tenants are the underestimated missing link who are capable of stepping up and gradually taking more control of their lives, buildings, and community. A successful pilot could mean Downtown Eastside and Chinatown residents could see a small but significant and permanent shift or increase in emergency service resources into the hands of tenant workers who want more support to lead and help keep their homes safe.

## **ABOUT US**

The SRO Collaborative (SRO-C) is a non-profit organization that works to improve habitability, affordability, health, and a sense of belonging for 4,000 tenants living in privately-owned Single Room Occupancy hotels (SROs). These are typically single rooms with shared bathrooms in residential hotels or rooming houses in Vancouver. Established in 2015, the SRO-C has grown to operate multiple tenant-based initiatives in sixty hotels around harm reduction, food, repairs and maintenance, cultural connections, and tenant committees. Twelve of these sixty hotels have Cantonese, Mandarin, Toisanese, Hakka, and Vietnamese speaking tenants, property managers, and owners. The initiatives are supported by 15+ staff members, over 100 tenant workers, and dozens of funders and community partners. Our goal is to create a large, long-term network of multilingual,

multiracial tenants who can grow to support each other, address collective needs, put down roots and give/receive support in the wider community. Through this network, tenants can be part of ongoing efforts to eventually redevelop—where appropriate—their own historic SROs into decent, affordable, self-contained housing.

## **ABOUT THE SRO FIRE SAFETY PILOT**

The Fire Safety Preparedness and Response in SROs pilot program is a new initiative that aims to improve fire safety in privately-owned and -operated SROs and Chinese Benevolent Society buildings in the Downtown Eastside and Chinatown. This pilot program will build on our extensive experience implementing tenant-based initiatives and ability to motivate and mobilize SRO tenants (as well as landlords and other stakeholders in the SRO sector) into action. Our approach puts tenants at the centre of programming because it is the most sensible strategy given that SRO tenants have the most to gain and the most to lose when it comes to improving the fire safety and conditions of their homes.

This one-year pilot project will operate in 35 SROs, many of which SRO-C has well established inroads:

- Full fire safety programming, including training an in-building Tenant Worker in 18 buildings: 8 SRO Hub buildings (where the SRO-C has established a strong network of tenant-led programming) as well as 10 Chinese Benevolent Society buildings.
- Light fire safety programming in 17 additional SROs that have been identified as having a history of fires or as lacking proper sprinkler systems where the SRO-C has fewer pre-established connections, and accessing these buildings will require creative problem-solving.

## **MORE ABOUT THE SRO FIRE SAFETY ORGANIZER POSITION**

The SRO Fire Safety Organizer will oversee the implementation and day-to-day operations of the SRO Fire Safety Preparedness and Response pilot, working in collaboration with SRO-C staff and SRO tenants themselves in a manner that supports and guides the organization's mission.

The SRO Fire Safety Organizer will be supervised by the SRO-C's BOLTS Program Coordinator and mentored by the Executive Director. They will also share

strategies and support with SRO-C's Chinatown Organizers, who have been leading programs other than fire in multilingual hotels where they have developed extensive networks with tenants and caretakers.

The SRO Fire Safety Organizer will set up and coordinate walk-through trainings in 35 hotels with lead tenants (once a week), their neighbours and VFRS educators. Working in conjunction with other SRO-C staff, they will assist in the organizing of fire safety workshops, helping tenants create fire safety plans in select hotels, and helping tenants in these select hotels identify which of their neighbours will need extra support in case of fire.

### **Responsibilities**

- Working with SRO-C staff to develop a project implementation plan and timeline.
- Working closely with SRO-C staff to organize Tenant Workers to do the walk throughs with the fire department educators in hotels.
- Leading direct tenant outreach in SRO buildings, notably where the SRO-C has not yet identified tenant leaders.
- Building relationships with SRO tenants, managers, and caretakers as well as various organizations to ensure the successful implementation and ongoing operation of the pilot program.
- Assisting SRO-C staff with regular one-on-one check-ins with Tenant Workers, called Fire BOLTS, who are paid a weekly stipend to volunteer with the BOLTS coordinator on regular fire safety checks, fire safety plans, and an annual fire drill/BBQ in the 18 hotels.
- Organizing translation and interpretation to be available for tenants at each stage of the project, with a budget for interpreters and translators provided.
- Sharing insights and data with the SRO-C's Reporting Coordinator, who provides support in continually developing and improving SRO-C programs.

### **Requirements**

- Must have language skills that complement the diverse languages in the hotels and be able to coordinate interpreters (volunteers/contractors) to assist with translations and interpretations.
- Flexibility, patience and willingness to help our organization, tenants, our partners including the Vancouver Fire Rescue Services and the community we work with to face our collective challenges around language injustice in housing organizing.
- Bachelor's degree in community development, healthcare, social services, or a related field; or extensive experience living and/or working in and with the DTES and Chinatown communities.

- Comfortable working inside SRO hotels and rooming houses or willingness to be courageous in learning to be more comfortable and confident in these spaces.
- Willingness to establish new relationships with individuals and organizations of influence including funders, partner agencies and government officials.
- Solid organizational abilities, including planning, juggling logistics, delegating, program development, and task facilitation.
- Capable of working independently and in a collaborative team.
- Strong analytical and critical thinking skills.
- Excellent listening, oral, and written communication skills.
- Nonjudgmental attitude and excellent conflict resolution skills.
- Self-reflexivity and sound judgment in navigating diverse perspectives and sensitive relationships.
- Capable of maintaining equanimity while working in challenging and high-stress environments.
- Integrated knowledge of structural oppression, cultural safety, and anti-racism and patience relating to community members who are not yet as advanced.

**Qualities:**

- Self-aware
- Reflective
- Courageous
- Punctual
- Humble
- Appreciative
- Team-oriented
- Detail-oriented

**Values:**

- Community Organizing
- Listening
- Growth
- Compassion
- Accountability

**Compensation and Contract details**

- 40 hours a week
- \$28.50 – \$30.00 per hour, based on experience
- 5 weeks paid vacation
- Some opportunity to work from home
- Generous sick and flex time

- Laptop, internet and cell phone allowance
- Extended health benefits
- The length of this contract will be less than one year -ending March 31, 2024. At the conclusion of the SRO Fire Safety pilot there will be a strong possibility of permanent employment from April 2024 onward if funding for this project is renewed or for other projects.
- 3-6 month review period

## **WORK CULTURE**

Organizing is the heart of SRO-C, and tenants are the soul. SRO-C tenants are disproportionately affected by poverty, colonialism, and discrimination. The tenant community includes people who use drugs, have physical and mental health concerns, people with behavioural issues, criminal records, and histories of trauma, among other challenges. As a result, the tenant organizing work we do can be very demanding, but equally rewarding. Our staff are our most valuable resource and we prioritize their well-being. Staff are continually building skills around trauma-informed practice, de-escalation, and conflict mediation in order to address the complex challenges of our work, and helping tenants do the same. We strive to cultivate a supportive work environment that encourages continuous learning, where staff can think creatively and act courageously, with the understanding that failing better is a crucial stepping stone on the path to positive and meaningful change for our community.

## **CULTURAL SAFETY & ANTI-OPPRESSIVE PRAXIS**

The ideal candidate will have a solid understanding of the issues impacting communities living in and around the DTES and Chinatown and committed to an intersectional, anti-oppressive, anti-racist praxis. We are looking for an Organizer who can work in this challenging environment, be extremely patient, and provide practical, emotional, and human resources support to the team. This person will have experience using non-violent communication, conflict resolution, and coaching skills while effectively and compassionately setting and maintaining expectations and accountability with their team. The candidate should be dedicated to growing their knowledge about the history of Vancouver's Chinatown and be capable of working with its diverse multi-ethnic, multi-dialect tenant population and their landlords.

## TO APPLY

Please send a resume and a one-page cover letter outlining why you would be a good fit for this job via email to [office@srocollaborative.org](mailto:office@srocollaborative.org) by May 12th 2023. If we do not get applications before May 12, the deadline will be extended.

We thank all prospective applicants for their time; however, only those selected for an interview will be contacted. BIPOC and/or LGBT2SIQ+ applicants are strongly encouraged to apply.