



Impact Report

2021-2022

Letter from the Executive Director

These are unprecedented times for renters in NYC. Covid-related eviction protections have expired, rents are soaring, and the availability of apartments with rent below \$1500 is at a 30-year low. It is more important than ever that tenants are able to remain safely in their homes.

The Twin Parks fire in the Bronx on January 9, 2022 brought the dangers of insufficient heat and neglected apartments into stark relief. After a space heater started a fire, several malfunctioning self-closing doors failed to contain the smoke and 17 people ultimately lost their lives.

Tenants have a right to safe housing. Heat Seek is working to ensure that no tenant suffers through another winter without heat.

During the 2021-22 heat season, we helped tenants collect over 129,000 hours of temperature data across 58 apartments, including 17,598 hours where the temperature was below the legal limit.

In collaboration with attorneys and organizers, tenants used their data to support **rent strikes**, **challenge rent increases**, **demand repairs**,

fight evictions, and request **rent reductions** for lack of services.

Building off of this track record, we're looking to tackle the systemic issues that make Heat Seek necessary in the first place — a broken city inspection system, a power imbalance between landlords and tenants in Housing Court, and a dispute resolution process that lacks teeth.

We're working to expand the city's Heat Sensor Program, which Heat Seek helped pass in 2019. The program requires the landlords of the 50 buildings with the most heat violations to install temperature sensors and submit to bi-weekly inspections by the city.

We're also working to expand our footprint throughout the city. This year we hired our new program associate, Helen, doubling our staff capacity for sensor installs. In the upcoming heat season we will be significantly expanding our program to cover up to 200 apartments city-wide, up from 50-75 in years past. With a bigger staff and more sensors in our inventory, we're poised to have our biggest season yet.

Noelle Francois
Executive Director

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"Heat Seek's records are much more reliable evidence, and much more compelling, than the landlord's baseless assertions that the heat is adequate when it is not. Now that the landlord is on notice that the sensors are installed in the units, he knows he must provide heat. The landlord cannot get away with freezing these long-term rent-stabilized tenants out of their apartments thanks to Heat Seek."

Catherine, Legal Services NYC



Keeping the Heat On in New York City



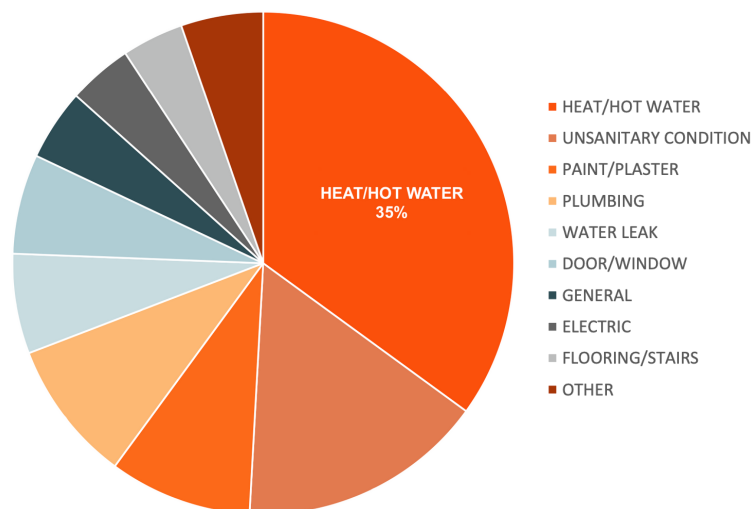
Heat Seek started with a very simple mission: No New Yorker should ever have to go to bed cold.

Under New York City’s Housing Maintenance Code, landlords are required to heat apartments from October through May. Yet last winter, NYC tenants made more than 222,000 heat complaints to the city, concentrated in lower-income neighborhoods in upper Manhattan, the northwest and south Bronx, and central Brooklyn.

Heat is consistently the #1 complaint city-wide, but due to a deeply flawed city inspection system, less than 7% of heat complaints result in an official violation being issued to the landlord. It can be exceedingly difficult for tenants to receive a violation for heat because outages are often intermittent, city inspectors do not schedule inspections directly with tenants, and cold temperatures often occur outside regular business hours. Thousands of New Yorkers are left freezing in their homes.

Heat Seek helps tenants resolve their home heating issues by providing objective, reliable indoor temperature data. Heat Seek makes web-connected temperature sensors available to tenants throughout the five boroughs, helping them install their sensors, view and interpret their data, and develop a plan to address their heating issues.

2021 New York City Housing Complaints



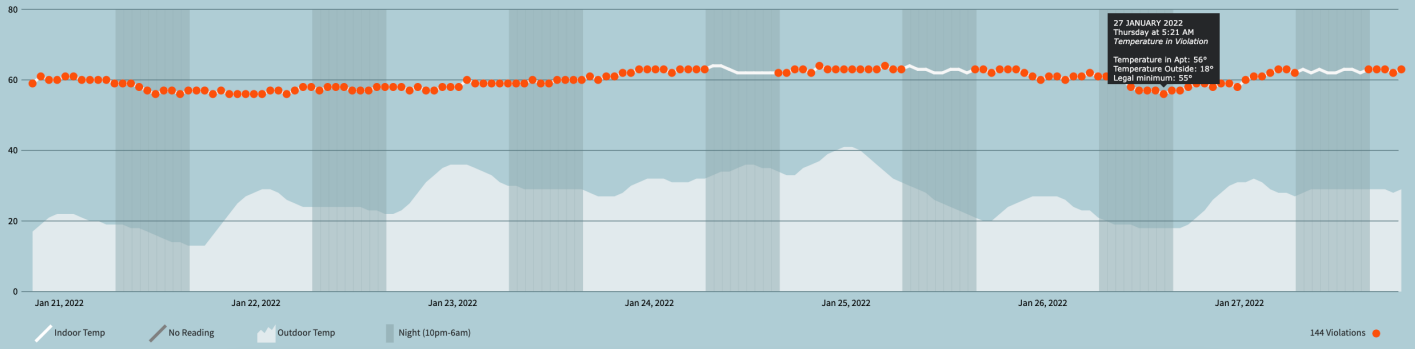
63°

Current indoor temperature

1466

Hours of violation

Indoor and outdoor temperatures (last 7 days)



Heat Seek sensors are installed in a discrete location within an apartment. Tenants receive detailed instructions on how to select the coldest room in the apartment, while avoiding areas where window AC units and space heaters are in use.

Once installed, the sensors take hourly temperature readings all winter long, creating a clear and consistent heat log.

The Heat Seek web application analyzes sensor data, alongside the outdoor temperature, in order to identify violations in real time. Data is displayed in a graph as well as a comprehensive heat log, so that tenants and their advocates have robust data to take to take action to get their heat restored.

Tenants can opt to receive a daily SMS message if their sensor registers 3+ hours when the temperature is below the legal limit. Organizers and attorneys receive a daily email summarizing all their tenants who meet that criteria.

Armed with this data, tenants, organizers, and attorneys can take action in real time to address heating outages as they occur. They can notify landlords, submit 311 complaints, and in some cases, when Heat Seek data has shown serious violations during nights and weekends, tenants have been able to coordinate with the city to arrange heat inspections outside of normal business hours.

Tenants and their advocates also use Heat Seek data to inform long-term strategies aimed at holding bad landlords accountable and demanding repairs to the underlying conditions that make the heat insufficient in the first place.

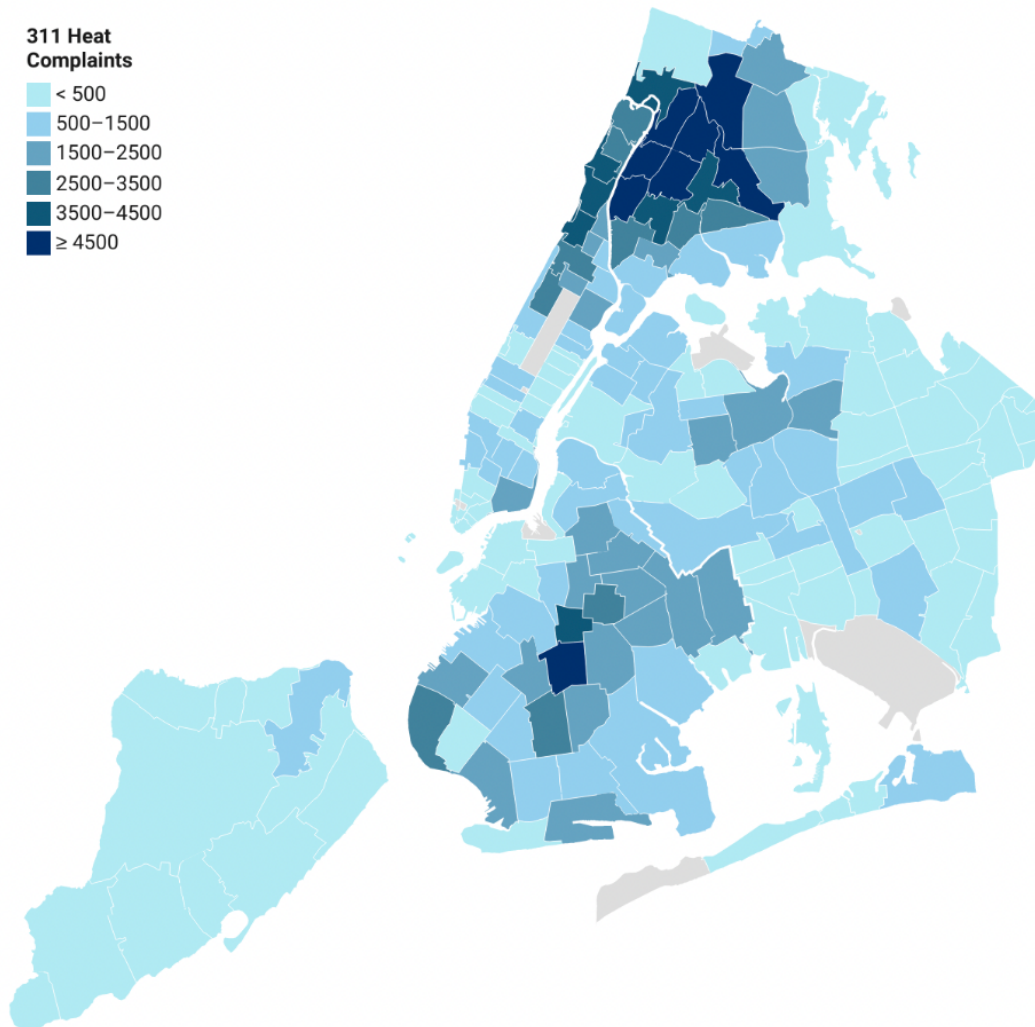
Heat Seek also supports tenants in housing court, providing affidavits and expert testimony to demonstrate the accuracy of the data.

At the end of the heat season, Heat Seek collects sensors back from tenants so that they can be reused the following season.

Winter 2021-2022: Exploring our Work

Heat Seek uses city-wide open data to target our work to the neighborhoods with the highest number of heat complaints. We partner with community organizations, elected officials, and legal service providers in target neighborhoods to ensure sensors are deployed where they will have the greatest impact.

2021-2022 Heat Complaints by Zip Code



Winter 2021-2022: Exploring Outcomes



58
families



17,598
violation hours

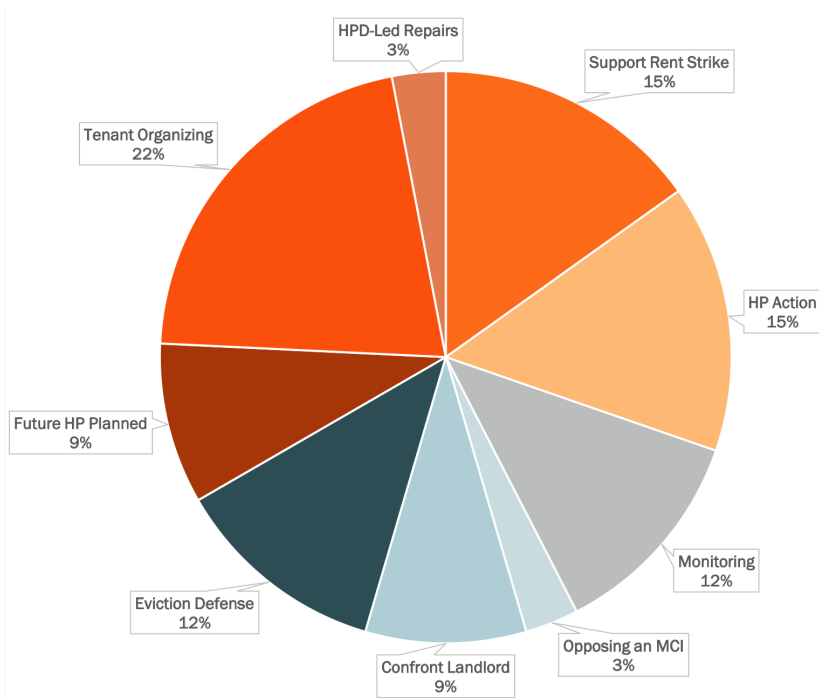


13
community partners



25
neighborhoods

2021-2022 Tenant Outcomes



Support a Rent Strike	Heat Seek data provides evidence that tenants are justified in withholding rent until necessary repairs are made
HP Action	Heat Seek data is used in a type of housing court case called an HP Action in order to compel landlords to make necessary repairs
Monitoring	Heat Seek data can monitor for landlord compliance with a previous court settlement, or serve as evidence to justify a future court case
Opposing an MCI	When landlords attempt to increase the rent after making Major Capital Improvements, Heat Seek data can demonstrate that conditions have not improved and rent hikes are not justified
Confront Landlord	Tenants and their attorneys email Heat Seek violation reports directly to landlords, demanding restoration of the heat.
Eviction Defense	Tenants use Heat Seek data to demonstrate that landlords aren't providing full services, forcing the landlord to negotiate the amount of back rent owed and allowing tenants to stay in their homes
Future HP Planned	Tenants collect data for an entire heat season while applying pressure to the landlord, with the intention of filing an HP Action the following fall if conditions do not improve
Tenant Organizing	Heat Seek data is used as a tool to help facilitate and bolster tenant organizing
HPD-Led repairs	The city's housing department, HPD, can initiate emergency repairs to restore heat

Results: Heat Seek helps tenants and advocates take swift action

Heat Seek provided Jordana with a sensor in November 2021. Throughout the following months, the sensor documented 92 hours of illegally cold temperatures in her apartment.

Like all Heat Seek advocates, Jordana's attorney received an email anytime the temperature in her apartment fell below the legal limit for more than two hours throughout the course of the day. Her attorney would forward those emails directly to the landlord, demanding that he fix the issue immediately. And it worked.

The emails her attorney sent to the landlord demonstrated that both she and Jordana were closely monitoring the heat in the apartment, and that they were prepared to take swift legal action if the landlord failed to provide consistent heat.

Jordana and her attorney plan to continue using the Heat Seek sensor in order to capture another full season of temperature data. If necessary, they will take the landlord to court next winter with Heat Seek data in hand, in order to force him to provide heat.



Results: Heat Seek data helps prevent an eviction in the Bronx

Sharon is a senior citizen living on a fixed income in a rent-stabilized apartment in the Kingsbridge Heights neighborhood in the Bronx. Her building is owned by the Edelstein family, notorious slumlords with a history of displacing tenants from rent stabilized units across their portfolio of almost 30 buildings. Sharon had been withholding rent due to the landlord's failure to make repairs, and in the fall 2021 was facing eviction for nonpayment.

Among other issues, Sharon experienced erratic heating outages that made it very difficult to live in the apartment. Over the past 3 years, 137 heat complaints had been made to 311 by residents of the building, making it the #1 complaint for the building. Sharon experienced heating outages that would mysteriously resolve for a day or two after she called 311, and then resume after HPD had come to inspect the apartment.

Knowing they were likely to be in litigation over the nonpayment case, Sharon and her attorney reached out to Heat Seek in November 2021 to see if they could obtain a Heat Seek sensor. Although Sharon had had little luck with 311, she wanted strong evidence of the heating issue in her apartment.

Heat Seek helped her install a sensor, and throughout the winter it captured approximately 100 hours of violations in her apartment. Her nonpayment case also began working its way through court after the pandemic eviction moratorium ended, and a trial was scheduled for June 2022. Heat Seek prepared to provide testimony about her temperature data in court.

On the appointed date, and after hours of negotiation between attorneys, both parties agreed to settle the case and avoid a trial. Sharon received a rent abatement of over \$2600 and her nonpayment case is now closed. Sharon's attorney confirmed that Heat Seek data played a critical role in the positive outcome, noting that the judge referred to paperwork showing the lack of heat when encouraging both parties to negotiate a settlement. The settlement allows Sharon to remain in her apartment, and her landlord is on notice that future heating outages will not be tolerated.

Thank you!

Heat Seek wishes to thank our Board of Directors as well as the following supporters for making 2021-2022 a great season!

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Communities Resist

Tenant Organizations

Urban Homesteading Association Board

Catholic Migration Services

Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation (NMIC)

Flatbush Tenant Coalition

Crown Heights Tenant Union

Our Team



Noelle Francois, Executive Director

Noelle is co-founder and Executive Director of Heat Seek. She comes from a background in sociology, with a focus on housing policy and community development. She holds a Master of Public Administration from New York University and a bachelor's degree from the College of William and Mary.



Helen Guzman, Program Associate

Helen has been a community organizer in NYC for racial and economic justice for the past 8 years. She's organized with parents for education justice, helped launch a survivor-led worker-owner cleaning coop, and campaigned for NYC budget justice. She has her Bachelor's of Arts in Women, Gender, and Sexuality and Hispanic Studies.



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NYC



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