



Ten Tips for Small

Alliance Française Chapters Looking for Affordable Space

Finding a permanent home can feel out of reach for a small Alliance Française. Traditional office space can mean taking on rent, utilities, insurance, parking, furniture, maintenance, and other expenses that have little to do with the organization's primary mission.

But there are alternatives. Alliance Française Reno Tahoe (AFRNT) recently found a way to establish a professional home while keeping its costs manageable. Here are ten lessons from our experience.

1. Think beyond the traditional office.

Before signing a conventional commercial lease, look at shared office communities, coworking spaces, nonprofit centers, community hubs, libraries, cultural centers, and other facilities that already have the infrastructure you need.

AFRNT rents a cubicle in a shared office community rather than an entire office suite. We have access to classrooms and meeting rooms when we need them, a theater, full kitchen space, communal work spaces, and more without having to pay for those spaces when we aren't using them.

2. Start with what you actually need.

Make a list of your organization's *essential* needs rather than beginning with the assumption that you need a traditional office.

For AFRNT, we needed a place to conduct administrative work and, most importantly, a reliable location for classes and meetings. We also wanted Wi-Fi, parking, utilities, insurance, and access to meeting space.

Once we separated our needs from our assumptions, more possibilities opened up.

3. Look for shared-space opportunities in your community.

Facilities designed around shared use are becoming increasingly popular as organizations and businesses look for ways to reduce overhead.

Search for terms such as *coworking space*, *shared office*, *community workspace*, *nonprofit center*, and *shared classroom space*. Ask local chambers of commerce, economic development organizations, universities, libraries, and other nonprofits what facilities they know about.

If your community doesn't have a facility like this, consider whether another nonprofit might be interested in **co-renting space** with you.

4. Don't be afraid to say that you're a nonprofit.

Make your nonprofit status part of the conversation from the beginning.

AFRNT did not wait until negotiations were underway to mention that we were a nonprofit. We explained who we were, what we do, and the role we play in the Reno-Tahoe community.

Some landlords or shared-space operators may have nonprofit rates, discounts, or flexibility that aren't advertised.

5. Ask for a better rate.

This may be the most important lesson of all:

Don't ask, don't get.

AFRNT approached KILN Reno and simply asked whether they would consider a reduced monthly rate for a nonprofit organization. We also asked about a longer lease term.

There was no guarantee that they would say yes, and they did have to obtain approval from their headquarters, but there was no downside to asking.

The very first step was to come up with an exact budget. With our Treasurer and our Board Members' approval, we came up within price range appropriate for our needs and negotiated from there a rate that was within that scope.

6. Consider offering something in return.

Negotiation does not have to be about asking for something without giving anything back.

A longer lease may provide a landlord with greater stability and predictability. A nonprofit tenant may also bring something valuable to a shared community: diversity, cultural programming, new audiences, educational opportunities, or connections within the community.

Think about what makes your Alliance an attractive tenant, not simply what you need from the landlord.

7. Calculate the *real* cost, not just the rent.

A \$xxx monthly rent may not sound dramatically different from a \$xxxx office until you add utilities, internet, insurance, parking, meeting rooms, maintenance, furniture, and other expenses.

For AFRNT, the monthly payment includes:

- Rent
 - Utilities
 - Wi-Fi
 - Insurance
 - Parking
- Twenty meeting-room credits each month

Additional meeting-room credits are available at reduced rates depending on the number purchased.

And since our meetings as well as our reading and conversation groups meet during off-peak hours, namely in the evenings and on the weekends, we're able to take advantage of other elements that would otherwise be out of our reach.

So when comparing options, calculate the **total cost of occupancy**, not just the monthly rent.

8. Think about flexibility.

Small Alliances often have uneven space requirements. You may need a classroom for 25 students twice a week but not need that space every day.

Why pay for an entire classroom, or a large office, seven days a week?

A shared facility allows AFRNT to use larger meeting rooms and classrooms when needed while maintaining a much smaller permanent footprint.

Our largest available classroom can accommodate approximately 24–30 people, giving us room to accommodate classes and special programs without paying for a classroom full-time.

9. Remember that a “home” can be more than an office.

For AFRNT, having a physical home has done more than solve an administrative problem. It has made the organization look more established and professional, made classes easier to organize, increased our visibility in the Reno community, and strengthened our identity as an organization.

Most importantly, it has given our students a consistent place where they can gather and experience the sense of community that is such an important part of *la vie française*.

A physical presence can help an Alliance feel less like a collection of activities and more like a **permanent part of the cultural landscape of its community**.

10. Don't underestimate what your Alliance has to offer.

When approaching a potential landlord or shared-space operator, don't describe your Alliance simply as an organization looking for inexpensive or discounted office space.

Explain what ***you* bring to the community**.

An Alliance Française offers language education, but it also offers **culture, international connections, social experiences, and a different way of seeing the world**. We introduce people to French language and culture through classes, conversation, film, food, music, travel, literature, and other experiences.

That makes us more than just another tenant. We are part of the cultural fabric of our communities.

One final piece of advice: be creative.

There may not be a facility such as **KILN** in every community. But there may be a nonprofit with extra space. A community organization with an underused classroom. A coworking facility looking for new kinds of tenants. A university or library with rooms available at certain times. Or another small nonprofit that would benefit from sharing the cost of a space.

Start by asking: What do we actually need? Who already has it? And what can we offer in return?

AFRNT would be happy to share our experience with other small Alliances Françaises that are looking for creative and affordable ways to establish a home in their communities.

Sometimes the solution isn't finding a cheaper office.

It's rethinking what an office needs to be.



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**Federation of
Alliances Françaises
USA**

4938 Hampden Ln #

264

Bethesda, MD 20814

Get in touch

federation@afusa.org

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