



## Rent Smart

### Situation

Wisconsin renters currently make up more than 750,000 households—approximately one-third of all households in the state (2016 American Factfinder, US Census). In the first quarter of 2018, the median rent was \$954.

For many Wisconsinites, paying the rent can pose an ongoing challenge. According to a 2017 report from the National Low Income Housing Coalition, in Wisconsin at the minimum wage it requires 89 hours of work to afford a 2 bedroom rental home. To pay rent for a two bedroom home on 40 hours per week a wage of \$16.11 per hour is required.

In addition to coping with the financial realities, many renters experience conflicts with their landlords. In 2017, the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, received 1,141 tenant/landlord complaints (2<sup>nd</sup> in the top ten of consumer complaints). Complaints commonly involved security deposit returns, evictions, unauthorized entries, inadequate disclosures, and unsatisfactory services. Renting may be the best housing option for many families and individuals. But as the rental population grows, more and more people need information to navigate the rental market.

### Response

Studies have shown that teaching people about the rental process can be an effective way to improve relationships between tenants and landlords. In counties around the state, UW-Extension educators are committed to providing access to housing information based on the knowledge that stable, affordable home environments are essential.

**Rent Smart 2017** is designed to provide practical education to help potential renters acquire and keep housing by offering guidance to those who may encounter difficulty obtaining rental housing due to a lack of experience, or poor rental and credit history. Educators may also modify the program to meet the needs of the changing audiences: high school and college students renting for the first time, individuals transitioning out of corrections, organizations who assist homeless veterans, families of veterans, and older adults moving from owning to renting.

**Rent Smart 2017** focuses on the essential knowledge and skills for a successful renting experience. Emphasis is on forming a strong partnership between tenant and landlord. It guides participants to know and understand their rights and responsibilities as a tenant, as well as those of their landlord.

*Our post training survey results show*

***Rent Smart***  
*training was successful in creating*  
***confident***  
***trainers***  
*on a*  
***critical topic***  
*in the state of Wisconsin.*

### Results

Changes in Wisconsin Landlord-Tenant Law, coupled with increased interest in tenant education for a variety of audiences, prompted a re-working of the entire **Rent Smart** curriculum and delivery method ([fyi.uwex.edu/rentsmart/](http://fyi.uwex.edu/rentsmart/)). UW Extension Educators conducted three in-state workshops for 78 professionals for Extension and non-profit agencies. Nine to twelve months after training, participants reported that **Rent Smart 2017** had “thorough, complete material,” “a wealth of information,” and was “well-organized, with great examples.” They also felt confident that the information in Rent Smart provided value to their clients.



# WHO attended Rent Smart Train the Trainer?



**594** in a classroom setting



**120** one-on-one



**75** as professional development

In 2017, a total of **789** trainers attended training in Wisconsin. **89%** completed the training, paving the way for the future use of **Rent Smart**. Created to allow for maximum flexibility, **Rent Smart** was designed to be presented in its entirety or parts used as best fit.



## HOW did they use their training? **With flexibility!**

**36%**

**36%** presented materials from all 6 modules: **14%** indicated they used "all modules" and nearly all the activities and **22%** more used parts of all 6 modules, but not every activity.

**1/3**

**A third** used "selected modules" or "selected activities" depending on time and audience needs.

**48%**

**48%** chose pieces that were appropriate to their specific audience, such as individuals transitioning from incarceration, homeless veterans, and first time renters.

**1/2**

**Nearly half** continue with past partnerships by sharing the new **Rent Smart** with individuals and organizations they worked with previously.

CONFIDENCE



CONFIDENCE

**Rent Smart** provides online support and materials that can be modified.

**4** (out of 5) trainees have the **confidence** to present the course to others.



## KEYS to Continuous Improvement



### Most helpful to learners:

- ♥ Budgeting activities
- ♥ Understanding the lease module

### Trainers would like:

- 41%** A blog with updated information
- 27%** To be part of a Community of Practice network
- 16%** To receive reminders to input evaluation data

The foundation of **Rent Smart** is the website which allows for **FLEXIBILITY** and continuous improvement.

- ♥ **Spanish materials** available Summer 2018 online.
- ♥ **Users modified Rent Smart class** by nesting it in other programs or providing unique portions.
- ♥ **Users requested an online option.**
- ♥ **Users desire more activities** that require less reading for adults with learning disabilities.

