



## Checking Out the Rental Property and the Landlord

### Module Notes:

Determining your housing needs.

How to locate rental housing—list resources you may use to find a rental unit.

Major items to inspect prior to making a decision to rent property.

Talking to the landlord/property manager—building a relationship.

### Remember:

The Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination in the sale, rental and financing of dwellings, and in other housing-related transactions based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status (including children under the age of 18 living with parents or legal custodians, pregnant women, people securing custody of children under the age of 18), and handicap (disability).

The Fair Housing Act covers most housing. In some circumstances, the Act exempts owner-occupied building with no more than four units, single-family housing sold or rented without the use of a broker, and housing operated by organizations and private clubs that limit occupancy to members.

### Questions to Consider:

- What features will you want/need in your rental unit? How will they affect the way in which you shop for housing?
- What resources can you use to help locate potential rental properties?
- How will you compare rental units?
- How will you prepare for talking to the landlord/property manager about a prospective rental unit?

### References and Resources:

Tenant Resource Center:

<http://www.tenantresourcecenter.org/>

Legal Action of Wisconsin, Inc. Tenant Source Book:

<http://www.legalaction.org/>  
(<http://www.legalaction.org/data/cms/march%202014%20Tenant%20Sourcebook.pdf>)

Video walk through on RentPrep site:

<http://www.rentprep.com/apartment-marketing/youtube-fill-rental-property-vacancies/>

Sexual Offender Registry Database:

<http://offender.doc.state.wi.us/public/>

Wisconsin Housing Search

<http://www.wihousingsearch.org>

Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity

[www.hud.gov/offices/fheo](http://www.hud.gov/offices/fheo)

References to websites used in this publication are for your convenience and not an endorsement of one product over other similar products.





## My Housing Needs

Looking for rental property is much easier if you know what is most important to you, before you start looking. This worksheet lists features that may or may not be important to you. Read the list and decide how important each item is to you.

I prefer to live in the following type of housing:

No preference

Duplex

Apartment

House (single family)

Boarding home

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Preferred location (area, zip code, neighborhood, etc.): \_\_\_\_\_

	Very Important	Moderately Important	Not Important
<b>Neighborhood</b>			
Near bus line			
Near family/friends			
Near work			
Near child care			
Near shopping, school(s)			
Safe			
Children can play outside			
Quiet			
Other			
<b>Building</b>			
Building Condition			
On-site management			
Type of units (apartment, duplex)			
Private entrance			
Off-street parking			
Pets allowed			
Laundry facilities			
Storage space			
Yard			
Other			
<b>Unit</b>			
Affordable rent of \$___			
Utilities included			
Enough bedrooms			
Storage & closets			
Appliances included			
Air conditioned			
Internet Connection			
Other			





## Affordable Rental Unit Options & Contact Information

### Housing Authority

Website listing all housing authorities in Wisconsin.  
<http://affordablehousingonline.com/housing-search/Wisconsin/>

### State Division of Housing

The Bureau of Housing is located within the Wisconsin Department of Commerce.  
[www.doa.state.wi.us/divisions/housing](http://www.doa.state.wi.us/divisions/housing)

### Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) – Wisconsin

[www.hud.gov/local/index.cfm?state-wi](http://www.hud.gov/local/index.cfm?state-wi)

Milwaukee Field Office  
Jurisdiction: State of Wisconsin  
Henry Reuss Federal Plaza  
310 West Wisconsin Avenue  
Milwaukee, WI 53203-2289

Phone: 414-297-3214  
Fax: 414-297-3947  
TTY: 414-297-1423

**Privately owned subsidized housing** - HUD helps apartment owners offer reduced rents to low-income tenants. Search for an apartment and apply directly at the management office.  
<http://www.hud.gov/apps/section8/index.cfm>

**Public Housing** - affordable apartments for low-income families, the elderly and persons with disabilities. To apply, contact a public housing agency at [http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program\\_offices/public\\_indian\\_housing/pha/contacts](http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/public_indian_housing/pha/contacts).

**Housing Choice Voucher Program (Section 8)** - find your own place and use the voucher to pay for all or part of the rent. To apply, contact a public housing agency at [http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program\\_offices/public\\_indian\\_housing/pha/contacts](http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/public_indian_housing/pha/contacts)

**HUD Resource Locator** - <https://resources.hud.gov/> - search for HUD field and regional offices, local PHAs, Multifamily and Public Housing locations, homeless coordinated entry system points of contacts, and USDA rural housing

**Rental help in your state** - [http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/topics/rental\\_assistance/local](http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/topics/rental_assistance/local) - find affordable rentals and special needs housing, get help with your utility bills, and more. Contact a housing counseling agency <http://www.hud.gov/offices/hsg/sfh/hcc/hcs.cfm> or call toll-free (800) 569-4287.

### Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA)

[www.wheda.com](http://www.wheda.com)  
E-mail: [info@wheda.com](mailto:info@wheda.com)  
Phone: 1-800-334-6873

#### Madison Office:

P.O. Box 1728  
Madison, WI 53701-1728  
Phone: 608-266-7884

#### Milwaukee Office:

140 51st St Suite 200  
Milwaukee, WI 53204  
Phone: 414-227-4039





## Affordable Rental Unit Options & Contact Information

### Renter Resources

#### Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity

[www.hud.gov/offices/fheo](http://www.hud.gov/offices/fheo)

#### Consolidated Court Automation Programs in Wisconsin (CCAP)

This site provides public access to Wisconsin Circuit Court Records. <https://wcca.wicourts.gov>

#### Department of Agriculture, Trade & Consumerism

The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) is the state's primary consumer protection agency. The Bureau of Consumer Protection has broad authority to regulate unfair business practices. This state agency handles landlord/tenant issues. [datcp.wi.gov](http://datcp.wi.gov)

Phone: 608-224-5012

#### Tenant Resource Center

Free Housing Counseling – Walk-In:  
1202 Williamson St., Suite A  
Madison, WI 53703  
Phone: 608-257-0006 (If reside in Dane County)  
Hours: M-F 9am-6pm  
Phone: 877-238-RENT (7368)  
(If reside outside of Dane County)  
Hours: M-F 10am-4pm

Housing Help Desk – Walk-In:  
1819 Aberg Avenue  
Madison, WI 53704  
608-242-7406  
Hours: M-F 8am-4:30pm  
[www.tenantresourcecenter.org/](http://www.tenantresourcecenter.org/)

#### Wisconsin Department of Commerce (Division of Housing and Community Development)

Phone: 608-266-1018  
[www.doa.state.wi.us/divisions/housing](http://www.doa.state.wi.us/divisions/housing)

**The following are local organizations that are helpful in locating units and obtaining assistance.**

- Housing Authority
- Building inspection departments
- Legal action programs
- Local non-profit housing or service agencies
- Community action agencies





## **Affordable Rental Unit Options & Contact Information**

Finding a decent and affordable rental unit can feel overwhelming. Often, affordable housing is not advertised in the same way that more expensive private market housing is advertised. You may need to search out these affordable options.

### **Public Housing**

There may be housing in the community that may be owned and managed by a local housing authority. These units may be located in apartment complexes or may be single-family housing or duplexes scattered throughout the community. Potential tenants must be income-eligible to apply. To find out about availability and whether you would be eligible, contact the local housing authority.

The Housing Authority staff can explain the application process. Because there is a high demand for these units, you may be placed on a waiting list once you apply. This will vary from community to community. Some housing developments may offer benefits like on-site daycare and community resource centers.

### **Rental Assistance**

The housing authority may also offer rent assistance. With this program, you would rent an apartment at a rental fee that is based on your income. You would be expected to pay about 30 percent of your income for rent. The difference between your payment and the full market rent for the unit would then be paid by the housing authority. You must be income-eligible to apply, and the property owner of the unit, you intend to rent, must be willing to participate in the program.

There are a limited number of rent assistance vouchers or certificates available. There can be waiting lists. You will need to contact the rental assistance program of the local housing authority to learn if you qualify and how to apply.

### **Private Market Subsidized Units**

Some private property owners have received funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development or Rural Housing to develop housing. In exchange, these owners agree to offer units at more affordable rent and make them available to families who meet income guidelines. The Department of Housing and Urban Development, Wisconsin Office has a list of these units. You may also contact your local housing authority or the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA) to determine what may be available in your community.

### **Non-profit Housing Developers**

Some communities have non-profit agencies which were created to make affordable housing available to the community they serve. These agencies may either renovate or build homes and make them available for sale or rental. Each agency defines its own mission. Some may offer housing in a broad geographic area, while others are restricted to particular neighborhoods. Contact the municipality or county office that administers these funds to learn which agencies may have rental housing available.





## Case Study Matrix

Module B	Case Study 1—Teen	Case Study 2—Single Parent	Case Study 3—Individual, Formerly Incarcerated	Case Study 4—Homeless Individual	Case Study 5—Older Person
<b>Description</b>	Lena wants to move into her own apartment, now that she has graduated from high school. She works in retail. She has been talking with a friend, Jenny, who may be interested in sharing an apartment with her. Jenny works full time at a child care center.	Ellen has two sons, Isaac and Andrew ages 12 and 10. She works 30 hours a week as a receptionist. Ellen needs to find a larger rental unit as the boys currently share a bedroom and they would like to have their own space.	John was released from prison 9 months ago. He started working through a temp agency and has been hired on as a permanent employee working full time for the past 3 months. He has two children, ages 8 and 9. They live with their mother, but he hopes to occasionally have them stay overnight with him.	Richard is homeless. He is a veteran who has struggled with civilian life. He works in a restaurant. He has met someone at the homeless shelter who also has a job and they would like to share an apartment.	Elizabeth is a 72-year-old widow who plans to sell her house and move into an apartment. Due to health issues, she is no longer able to maintain the house as well as pay for necessary repairs including replacement of the roof and windows.
	<p>Lena and Jenny are looking for a rental unit. They would like to visit three units. Before their appointment, they will need to determine a budget and come to a consensus. They are looking for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rent of \$450 - \$500 per month</li> <li>• Two bedrooms</li> <li>• Heat included</li> <li>• Appliances included</li> <li>• On-site laundry facilities</li> <li>• Adequate parking</li> <li>• Quiet neighborhood</li> </ul>	<p>Ellen is looking for a rental unit for herself and her children, ages 12 and 10. She would like to visit three available units. Before scheduling appointments, she determined her budget and needs. She is looking for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rent of \$550 - \$600 per month</li> <li>• Two bedrooms, three bedrooms would be desirable</li> <li>• Appliances included</li> <li>• Utilities included, but would pay own heat. She prefers a single-family or duplex unit.</li> <li>• On-site laundry facilities</li> <li>• A safe neighborhood where her children can play outside</li> </ul>	<p>John is looking for a rental unit that has two bedrooms so his children can occasionally stay overnight with him. Before scheduling appointments, he determined his budget and needs. He is looking for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rent of \$400 - \$450 per month</li> <li>• 1 bedroom apartment, but would consider 2 bedrooms, so his children could occasionally stay with him</li> <li>• Location near a bus line and/or work</li> <li>• A safe neighborhood where his children can play outside</li> <li>• Utilities included</li> <li>• On-site laundry facilities</li> <li>• Appliances included</li> <li>• Accepts felons</li> </ul>	<p>Richard and his friend are looking for a rental unit that has two bedrooms. Before scheduling appointments, he determined his budget and needs. He is looking for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rent of no more than \$400 per month</li> <li>• 2 bedroom apartment</li> <li>• Located near a bus line and/or work.</li> <li>• Utilities included.</li> <li>• Appliances included</li> <li>• Washer and dryer in building</li> </ul>	<p>Elizabeth is looking for a rental unit that has two bedrooms, so her granddaughter can occasionally stay overnight. Before scheduling appointments, she determined her budget and needs. She is looking for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rent of no more than \$650 per month.</li> <li>• 2 bedroom apartment</li> <li>• Garage or carport</li> <li>• Utilities included.</li> <li>• Appliances included.</li> <li>• Washer and dryer in building.</li> </ul>





## Case Study Matrix

Provide each participant a copy of the five questions found here for participants to have while they read the case study and are reviewing the *Case Study Comparison Units Completed Checklists*.

Which unit is most convenient?

Which rental unit has more of what the tenant wants? Why?

Which has the most features/conveniences?

Which feature would be important to the tenant?

If you were the tenant, which would you choose? Why?





## Rental Property Checklist

Once you have completed the search, you will need to visit each rental property to make sure it meets your needs and expectations. Use this form to compare different rentals so you don't forget important features of the different places you visited.

	Rental A	Rental B	Rental C
Address/Name of unit			
<b>Terms &amp; Conditions</b>			
Date available			
Monthly Rent			
Date Rent Is Due			
Deposit			
Pets allowed			
Pet rules/deposit			
Late payment charges			
Length of lease			
Frequency of rent increases			
Subletting/breaking a lease			
Utilities included (water/sewer/heat/garbage/recycling)			
Other			
<b>Dwelling</b>			
Square footage			
Number of bedrooms			
Number of bathrooms			
Dishwasher/garbage disposal/microwave included			
Available storage			
Air conditioning			
Fireplace			
Amenities (pool, gym)			
Number of outlets per room			
Blinds/curtains			
Cable TV connection in each room			
Number of phone jacks			
High speed internet			
Decorating allowed			
Outdoor space			
Locks/security			
Noise level			
<b>Neighborhood</b>			
Safe walking outside after dark			
Safe for children to play outside			
Crime rate in neighborhood			
Issues with unsupervised children			
Neighbors loitering			
Noise level of neighborhood			
Near bus line			
Near work			





## Don't Rent Trouble

It is recommended that you bring the following items for the first unit inspection and use them to check for problems.

- Flashlight
- Light bulb
- Hair dryer
- Pen/pencil and paper – to take notes of the property

### Electrical

- Turn on each switch to see if it works. If there is no light bulb in the socket, use the one you brought.
- Check every outlet by plugging in your hair dryer and turning it on. There are problems, if a fuse blows out or the dryer won't turn on.
- If outlets or sockets don't work, there could be dangerous defects in the electrical system that could cause a fire.

### Plumbing

- Turn on the sink and bathtub faucets to see if they work or leak.
- How long does it take to get hot water?
- Flush the toilet to see if it operates properly or leaks.
- Do drains operate properly?
- Are ceilings and/or walls stained or cracked? These may indicate a leaking roof, defective rain gutters, or defective plumbing upstairs. Water damage could cause the ceiling or walls to collapse.
- Look at the water heater to see if it is leaking.

### Safety

- Does the rental unit have smoke detectors?
- Does the rental unit have carbon monoxide detectors?
- Are there deadbolt locks on the rental unit doors and building's exterior doors?

### Windows

- Are there storm windows and screens?
- Very gently push on the windows to see if they are secure or loose in the frame.
- Do windows open and close?

### Rodents and Other Pests

- Open cabinets and immediately shine in flashlight to detect roaches. Look for roaches.
- Look for rat and mouse holes and droppings in the back of cabinets and closets.

### Heating and Cooling

- Even in summer, push the thermostat up to see if the furnace works.
- Even in the winter, turn on the air conditioner to make sure it works.





## Interviewing Landlords/Property Managers

Here is a list of things to ask regarding the landlord/property manager and current tenants.

### I. General Information

- How long have you been a landlord/property manager?
- What are you looking for in a prospective tenant?
- How soon are you looking to fill the unit?
- What payment methods do you accept for rent?
- Is crime an issue in this neighborhood? Has this property experienced any break-ins, thefts or assaults?

### 2. Rules and Policies

#### Rental agreement Applications

- Must prospective tenants submit an application for a rental agreement?
- Is a fee required with my application? If so, what happens to that money?
- Does the act of giving you an application commit me to signing a rental agreement?

#### Security Deposits

- How much is the security deposit? When must it be paid? When is it returned? What must I do to have my security deposit returned in full?
- Which financial institution will hold my security deposit?

#### Rental Agreement

- Will the rental agreement be written or oral? What rules and regulations must I follow upon signing the rental agreement? How much notice is needed to renew or terminate the rental agreement?
- What is the rental agreement duration?

#### Rental agreement Termination

- Is notice required to terminate or renew the rental agreement, or will it automatically renew for another year? When must notice be given and in what form? If the rental agreement automatically ends (terminates), will I have the first right to renew it?
- Is it possible to end, terminate the rental agreement before the stated date? What fee, if any, is charged for early termination? How much notice is required for early termination? In what form?
- If the rental premises are destroyed, does the rental agreement affirm my right to move elsewhere and cease paying rent?

### 3. Neighborhood

- Is the landlord/property manager familiar with the neighborhood?
- Does the landlord/property manager mention membership in any neighborhood group concerned about crime prevention or neighborhood improvement?





## Module B: CHECKING OUT THE RENTAL PROPERTY AND THE LANDLORD

### 4. Property Management On-Site

- Is there property management on-site?
- What is the process for dealing with emergencies or maintenance issues?
- Are there regular inspections?
- What is the policy for maintenance personnel entering the rental unit? Your landlord should follow a procedure for notifying you about entering the rental unit.
- How much notice is given prior to entering a property?

### 5. Unit Inspection

- Is the unit clean and in good repair?
- Does the landlord/property manager agree to make repairs? Does he/she sound sincere?
- Does the landlord/property manager listen to what you say?
- Does the landlord/property manager speak respectfully to and about other tenants?
- Does the landlord/property manager try to rush you into a decision?

