

# Landlord Engagement Network Working Groups

## Group 1: Understanding Landlord's Motivations and Concerns

### I. Appealing to motives

Landlords are typically motivated to rent for two reasons:

1. Financial
2. Pro-social or altruistic

What are some ways that you could "pitch" a potential tenancy to a landlord that would appeal to each of these motivations?

### II. Addressing Concerns

According to the Landlord Engagement Toolkit, research has listed some of the following major concerns for landlords renting to folks that are represented by housing professionals:

- Where will the rent come from? Will it be reliable?
- Participants' lack of housing references and/or poor credit
- Property damage, bedbugs, or pests
- Nuisance and disturbances for other tenants in the building
- Hassles of dealing with income assistance payments
- Whether tenancy rules can be enforced, whether evictions will be possible
- How renting to high-risk tenants will affect insurance rates

How could we, as housing professionals in Toronto, address these concerns with landlords in a way that makes them feel heard, understood, and reassured?

### III. Being realistic

Addressing landlord concerns must be done in a way that is realistic. Over-promising will only lead to negative experiences and disappointment, severing relationships with landlords that may be willing to work with you or your clients.

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Some key questions to ask when preparing to develop a relationship with a landlord include:

- What resources does your agency have? Are there funds available?
- What should be included in a tenancy support package? What information about case management should you include?
- What can landlords realistically expect from you? What incentives can you offer? How frequently will you communicate?
- What should a process of screening/placements/matching clients with tenancies include?

Does your agency have anyone dedicated to landlord engagement? Who's job is that? How do they do this work? Share your skills and experiences!

### Notes from Working Group One:

**This working group came up with tactics to achieve four strategies to engage landlords in a way that understands their motivations and concerns: Partnership creation; addressing financial concerns; clarification of in-house support; and an empathetic approach to education and capacity development.**

### Partnership creation

- Acknowledge and address concerns proactively
- Speak to their needs and concerns in their own language
- Have open communication and clarification of services/resources in the community that will save them money in the long-term

### Addressing Financial concerns

- Having guaranteed and consistent rental payments, and explaining the financial benefits, like the low-risk of someone who is receiving regular support and payments (they can set up direct, the money will be consistent)
- If there are financial issues, the worker is available to advocate for the

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landlord as well as the tenant to ensure that payments are made

### Clarification of in-house support

- Case management and home visits can help prevent having to file with the LTB, and the costs associated with that.
- Some agencies offer help with pests, hoarding, moving, and the costs associated with those
- Agency can have a quick fact-sheet available to provide landlords with an overview of the supports that are available

### Empathetic education and capacity development

- Hearing good referrals from other landlords and their good experiences will reassure landlords
- Bringing in a Circle of Care to support the tenants and educating landlords about what that means and looks like
- Education can sway landlords to be more empathetic towards their tenants
- Listen and empathize with landlords
- Tell landlords about populations that are under-housed, what supports and services different agencies provide to meet their needs, including outside of your own agency.

## Group 2: Marketing and Access

### I. Developing the "selling points"

Developing an effective marketing strategy means perfecting a "pitch" to convince landlords to rent to folks who are in need of supports. There are two targets for landlord engagement marketing: small landlords (single suites, small multi-unit dwellings), and larger landlords (buildings or property management groups). Some strategies will work better with smaller landlords, while others will work better with larger landlords. Each group will need to be appealed to differently.

- What should be included in a "pitch" to a small landlord? List the components.

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## Group 2: Marketing and Access

- What should be included in a “pitch” to a larger landlord? What are the barriers you have experienced, and how can you overcome them?

Don't over-promise. Remember the promise is not a problem-free tenancy. The promise is to respond when issues arise.

### II. Marketing Materials

Professional, eye-catching materials can be developed for your programs. What are some ideas that could be used to market to landlords? What should be included within them?

### III. Access Points

Where can your programs find landlords to connect with? It can be difficult to know where to start. Some access points include rent notices, real estate agencies, or classified ads. In Toronto, what are the local access points that you can identify to place these marketing materials? What are some tactics for accessing these?

Have your agencies developed any of these sorts of materials? What do they look like and where are they available? Share your strategies and experiences!

### Notes from working group Two:

**Four strategies emerged from this working group, with tactics that could be used to achieve the goals of accessing landlords and marketing our clients to them: promoting what we do and demonstrating support; proactive and innovative approach to education; providing resources and consistent communications; being innovative in our approach to accessing/finding landlords.**

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## Group 2: Marketing and Access

### **Promote what we do and demonstrate support**

- Accompany clients to appointments with landlords and/or viewings
- Talk to landlords on clients behalf, if needed, and demonstrate your role
- Talk about the reliability of rent from folks who are on OW and ODSP, discuss direct payment options
- Provide cell phone number and times of day that the landlord can call
- Create a calendar of regular inspections that you will make in the unit, to reassure landlords that the tenancy will be monitored in some way

### **Proactive and innovative education**

- Have face-to-face conversations with the landlords
- Let landlords know that when a client comes with support, the landlord is supported too.
- Have testimonials from landlords who you've worked with in support of their experience.

### **Resources and communications**

- If client is able, encourage them to contact the landlord directly and provide them with coaching on how to have those conversations
- Be intentional and direct in your conversations with landlords
- Create a plain-language letter explaining the context of your client's housing need and the way that supplements and/or rent payment can happen
- Create an educational document that informs landlords of basic RTA roles and responsibilities.

### **Innovative access approach**

- Call and ask about units before identifying yourself and set up a viewing for the client
- Introduce yourself as a Housing Worker rather than a case manager (it is more neutral)
- Create multiple kijiji accounts with different strategies to reach out to landlords

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## Group 3: Transparency and Persistence

### I. Adopt a Transparent Approach

Developing an open and honest relationship with landlords is critical for the program's success. Be as upfront as possible with landlords so they know what to expect and they understand what the program can and cannot do. Never hide the facts; doing so risks the program's reputation. Never promise things that cannot be delivered or are outside of the program's control. Similarly, always follow through on any promises that are made.

How can you talk about potential challenges in a way that is transparent, but risk-mitigating?

What realities about renting to folks that are using your services should you discuss with a landlord, and how can you talk about those transparently but reassuringly? Develop and list strategies for doing this.

### II. Making the Call

What does transparent and persistent communication look like? You cannot guarantee an incident-free tenancy. What can you guarantee? Scenario: you have identified a landlord that could potentially rent to one or more of your clients.

What do you need to research and understand before making the call?

What should you say during the call?

### III. Navigate these roadblocks:

You will encounter landlords that will speak in derogatory ways. Responding with patience and compassionate correction will only help your clients become housed. Be sure to do a temperature check before making calls to understand yourself and anticipate your reaction to roadblocks you will encounter in the recruitment process.

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## Group 3: Transparency and Persistence

Here are some common roadblocks. How can you respond to them during a call or meeting with a potential landlord?

- The landlord had a “bad experience” renting to someone in the past.
- The landlord is worried (and assumes) that the potential tenant will disrupt other tenants.
- The landlord is worried (and assumes) that rent will not be paid on time, or consistently.
- The landlord is worried (and assumes) that the property will become damaged.
- The landlord says something derogatory about people on social assistance.
- The landlord says something racist, sexist, or homophobic.

Are there other roadblocks you have experienced at your agency that aren't listed here? How did you respond to them? Share your skills and experiences!

### Notes from working group Three:

**Six strategies emerged to transparent and persistent pursuit of good relationships and overcoming roadblocks: demonstrating a team approach; following up quickly and consistently; providing mediation; having an action plan; encouraging accountability; and navigating roadblocks. Several tactics are included in each strategy.**

#### Team Approach and Supports:

- Let landlords know there is a team supporting the tenants.
- Give landlords confidence in knowing that a team supporting the tenant exists
- Let landlords know they can contact you if there is any unusual activity, or if they are having any suspicions about anything.

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## Group 3: Transparency and Persistence

- Provide a letter of support that the tenant can give to a potential landlord.
- Reassure landlords that resources (and wrap-around services) exist

### **Follow up quickly and with consistency**

- Have a quick response time - deal with things immediately!
- Have weekly check-ins with the landlord to reassure them that the client is being supported and to identify and mitigate conflict/problems early on.

### **Mediation:**

- Act as a mediator to support both the tenant and the landlord.
- Sometimes agencies can cover costs of damages (mitigation funds). Other times workers can set up and support a payment plan with landlords and tenants.

### **Action Plan:**

- Support consistent rent payment and encourage tenants to set up direct deposit.
- Create an action plan prior to any challenges

### **Accountability (both of tenant AND landlord):**

- Create clear boundaries to client on accountability
- Call landlords out on stigma, racism - educate them!

### **Navigate Roadblocks:**

- Reframing prior scenarios in a humanistic approach
- Keep it real! Just because someone is on OW/ODSP doesn't make them "different" than any other tenant.
- Language: use the word "disability" rather than "mental health"



# Landlord Engagement Network Working Groups

## Group 4: Education

### I. Educate landlords

Landlord-worker relationships may place you in an unanticipated teaching role, especially early on in a relationship. Sharing important information and education with landlords that can benefit both them as well as the folks you are working to house is part of the work of relationship building. What are things that you anticipate a landlord may need or want education about?

### II. Information Packages:

There are no required courses or certifications to become a landlord. What sorts of educational materials can your agency develop that could be offered to landlords in an information package? What resources exist in the community that you can refer to, or refer landlords to? What workshops or educational opportunities exist for landlords in Toronto?

### III. Educate tenants

Many of the folks we are working to house may have been experiencing chronic homelessness, or have had little to no long-term housing experience. Promoting successful tenancies and reassurance to landlords can include educating tenants, and letting landlords know the type of education and training that a potential tenant has or will receive. Effective education can prevent evictions and lead to long-term tenancy.

What might tenants want or need education on before, during, and after a tenancy? How can that be provided?

**Some agencies offer resources, packages, and training workshops for landlords and tenants, and/or have invested in Rentsmart certification for staff to provide workshops to tenants. Others offer more informal education through daily interactions. How does your agency offer education to landlords? What has and has not been effective? Share your skills and experiences.**

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## Group 4: Education

### Notes from working group Four:

**This working group came up with tactics to achieve five strategies to approach the necessary education piece involved in successful landlord engagement: Educating and preparing tenants; creating resources to share with tenants and landlords; myth-busting, or breaking down stigmas and interrupting mis-information; referring landlords to existing educational opportunities in the community; and providing face-to-face education through social interactions.**

#### **Educate and prepare tenants**

- Help with budgeting, support the use of trustees if possible
- Ensure they know about Rent Bank if they go into arrears
- Provide life skills education to the tenants (RentSmart)
- Education on how ODSP and OW forms work
- Help them understand the eviction process and what would be grounds for evictions.

#### **Create resources**

- Provide a 'move-in' package for landlords and tenants with different resources in each, but some overlap - be clear on the boundaries
- Have a list of community resources in the neighbourhood for both clients and landlords
- Have resources on pests
- What happens when a lease becomes a month-to-month
- Resources or 101-type documents on HSF and THAP

#### **Myth-busting**

- Educate landlord on resources available to the tenant during your in-person meetings
- Educate landlords on stereotypes and break some of those down
- Educate about homelessness and the shelter system, break down stereotypes

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## Group 4: Education

### Refer to educational opportunities

- Landlords need answers to questions - refer them to [Landlord Self-Help Centre](#)
- Educate landlords on the Outcome Star Model as a tool for understanding their tenants better

### Face-to-face education

- Connect OW or ODSP Worker with Landlord and yourself to educate the landlord.
- Landlords will ask questions to the workers.
- Meet with landlords to explain how trustees work
- Schedule regular follow-ups so landlords can ask questions through the transition
- Let landlords know there will be no judgment if they have a question they can call

## Group 5: Effective Communication with Landlords

### I. Effective Communication with landlords

In using a Housing First model, maintaining relationships with landlords is crucial for success. Landlords need to know who to contact and what after hour's service is available in cases of emergency. Don't waste Landlords time, be purposeful with communication. What are ways that a Case Manager can communicate effectively with landlords and continue maintaining a good relationship?

### II. Treat Landlords like a business partner

Treat the landlord with respect and try to understand their needs and goals. Be a mediator between both the tenant and landlord and solve problems collaboratively through open dialogue, consensus building and mutual respect. A landlord has called you and stated that a tenant you support has been having lots of guests and traffic in and out of the building. The landlord is very upset and is threatening to evict the tenant, how would you respond?

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## Group 5: Effective Communication with Landlords

### III. Carefully Screen tenants

Screening tenants and matching them to a unit can promote successful tenancy. A landlord who has a first positive experience with a new referral will be more inclined to continue to rent from your program. To prevent frustration and burnout from the landlord try not to house all high need service users in one building. In Housing First participants should be given options that identify their housing needs such as location, amenities, and accessibility. How would you work with and assist a service user who is homeless find and secure appropriate housing. In the past this service user was evicted for damage to property. What steps can be taken to look at housing options from a housing first approach?

### Notes from Group Five:

**This working group came up with tactics to achieve five strategies to effectively communicate with landlords: Engage in compassionate communication; clearly communicate processes and roles of tenant/landlord/organization/worker; have clear expectations set for all parties; engage in problem-solving if/when problems arise; and use a humanistic approach, in-person if possible.**

### Compassionate communication

- Be transparent and honest
- Have open and honest communication
- Be honest about all potential tenants and ensure the tenancy is the right fit for the landlord as well as the tenant
- Secure resources to ensure tenants have a positive start and are set up for success

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## Group 5: Effective Communication with Landlords

### **Clear communication of processes and roles**

- Clearly explain your role as a worker
- Liaise while also guiding tenants towards autonomy
- Streamline communication to single person or small team
- Build wrap-around supports and let landlord know what those are

### **Clear expectations**

- Lay out boundaries
- Offer 24-hour support if possible
- Clarify hours of support if 24-hr isn't possible
- Educate tenant to the realities of their tenancy and expectations the landlord has of them
- Be honest and forthright with the behaviour/responsibility expectations of a tenant

### **Problem solving**

- Investigate issues as they arise, update landlord
- Allow landlord to feel you are on top of all issues
- Treat Landlord as a partner to problem-solving
- Collaborate with the team to find a right fit in the case of an eviction

### **In-person, humanistic approach**

- Explain the circle of care approach
- Meet with the tenant and landlord
- Acknowledge their concerns
- Set up dialogue with landlord

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## Group 6: Responsiveness & Maintaining (Relationship with Landlords )

### I. Responsive Support to Landlords

Landlords need to know what support is available, from whom, and how quickly. Be clear about your response time and don't leave landlords hanging, even when the situation is difficult. Don't shy away from hard conversations these are opportunities to listen and problem solve with the landlord. How would you handle a landlord who is constantly calling you with complaints regarding a tenant you are supporting? The landlord is stating that the client is not picking up after her dog, the dog is barking at all hours and that when the landlord tried to discuss with the tenant the tenant swore at the landlord.

### II. Anticipate and Mitigate Risks

When working from a Housing First model one should strive for prevention and early intervention. Can the group discuss and share common experiences that service users deal with in housing? What are the recurring themes that tenants are facing with housing and how has your organization dealt with these issues?

### III. Evictions

Preserving relationships with landlords during eviction can be difficult, particularly if the landlord is evicting a challenging client. Work with all parties on an agreement and if possible avoid a formal eviction if the tenant can be re-housed. Be mindful of tenant's rights and make sure the agreement is fair. What steps should be taken during an eviction, how would you support the landlord and the tenant in this process?

### Notes from Group Six:

**This working group came up with tactics to achieve four strategies to be responsive and maintain healthy/good relationships with landlords: Negotiate; mitigate risk; put out fires; validate concerns; and reframe issues and educate.**

# Landlord Engagement Network Working Groups

## Group 6: Responsiveness & Maintaining (Relationship with Landlords )

### **Negotiate**

- Act in mediation between client and landlord
- Always be ready and prepared to keep the peace with the landlord
- Tenants know to call the worker if something is wrong, then staff calls landlord
- Negotiate with landlords to avoid eviction if possible

### **Mitigate Risks**

- Have an emergency contact schedule
- Standardize procedures so landlord is confident with processes
- Stick to that standardization to build confidence and security
- Have a strategy for after-hours concerns (24-hour support or process for first-thing in the morning response)
- Inspect and be vocal about property issues and technical issues in unit

### **Put out fires**

- Have one or two contacts at the agency with a clear schedule of when they can be reached
- Stay involved and be prepared to talk to landlord and give a response immediately to concerns

### **Validate concerns**

- Be responsive to concerns and follow up on all complaints
- Workers should understand both sides and support and agree with landlords
- Be ready to pull tenants through the process and vacate if necessary (support landlords in legitimate/reasonable evictions)

### **Re-frame issues and educate**

- Link pest control with housing standards
- Bring awareness to the lack of community resources and accessibility barriers
- Educate about advocacy for the need for more community supports
- Build relationship and use the opportunity to change relationship with landlords into a partnership