



Ask Me Anything!

Landlord Engagement
February 22, 2018

ABOUT AMAs

Ask Me Anything (AMA) sessions provide an opportunity for members of the [Community Workspace on Homelessness](#) to ask experts questions about homelessness. Engaging with landlords can be difficult. Building lasting positive relationships can be even more challenging. Join us, and a group of experts for our Ask Me Anything (AMA) session on how to best engage with landlords in the context of Housing First programs.

The success of Housing First programs depends on the availability of high-quality housing options for program participants to live in over a long-term period. Scattered site, independent housing is a cornerstone of the Housing First model. Private market landlords are critical to providing this kind of housing and are considered an “essential partner” in Housing First. One of the key tasks of Housing First programs is to build and maintain productive relationships with landlords who are willing to rent to program participants. Positive relationships with landlords can support the well-being of program participants, facilitate recovery and contribute to successful tenancies.

THE EXPERTS



Ashley Meilleur is managing Housing Plus, the coordinated program for the Housing First initiative in Winnipeg. Her main role is landlord procurement. Since starting with Housing Plus, she has increased available properties by 600! Ashley brings 17 years of experience within the homeless/mental health sector and is on her way to acquire her PhD in Psychology. On top of her busy work she also sits on a few boards within affordable housing development, support models around Housing First, mental health advocacy and homelessness prevention.



Jennifer Rae is a recent PhD graduate in the School of Psychology and a Researcher at the Centre for Research on Education and Community Services at the University of Ottawa. She is a co-author of *The Landlord Engagement Toolkit: A Guide to Working with Landlords in Housing First Programs*.



Dr. Tim Aubry is a Full Professor in the School of Psychology and Senior Researcher at the Centre for Research on Educational and Community Services at the University of Ottawa. He is currently holder of the Faculty of Social Sciences Research Chair in Community Mental Health and Homelessness. Over the course of his career, Dr. Aubry has collaborated on research projects with community organizations and government at all levels, contributing to the development of effective social programs and policies. He was a Member of the National Research Team and the Co-Lead of the Moncton site in At Home / Chez Soi Demonstration Project of the Mental Health Commission of Canada. He teaches graduate courses at the University of Ottawa in community psychology and program evaluation.

QUESTION #1 - BOB BARKMAN

At RentSmart Ontario (partnering with Ready to Rent BC) we have a suite of educational programs focused upon tenants, landlords/property managers, community educators, and housing organizations with the purpose of increasing and supporting the capacity of each of these to fulfill their tenancy-based role responsibilities. Each course provides knowledge and skills enabling tenants, landlords, and housing providers to more clearly understand and confidently fulfill their roles and to understand each other's role and how those roles work together in partnership.

"Essential Partnering" needs clarity, definition, knowledge, and finally commitment to a cause within which each role has a vital contribution. We all need to up our game, individually and collectively. Working from the same informed and skill-based page will greatly enhance a shared commitment to positively impact homelessness with increased housing stability.

Looking forward to joining this discussion on Feb. 22nd.

Bob Barkman,
Provincial Trainer, RentSmart Ontario

■ JENNIFER RAE

Hi Bob Barkman, thanks for your note.

Effective education can prevent many of the problems that threaten a tenancy. The Landlord Engagement Toolkit includes a section outlining the importance of education for tenants, landlords, and program staff. The RentSmart educational programs - particularly the train-the-trainer approach - can be a great resource to communities.

■ HPS/SPLI ADMIN

Hi Bob Barkman,

If you have any materials that you are open to share, we would be happy to include them on The Community Workspace on Homelessness!

Please feel free to contact us: NC-HPSINFO-INFO-SPLI-GD@hrsdc-rhdcc.gc.ca

■ BOB BARKMAN

Anyone interested in our materials or training program, please connect with us at www.rentsmartontario.ca. You can, also, connect with us at 289-362-4784. We would be happy to speak to you about our RentSmart Suite of education programs, including the RentSmart Landlord education and engagement program.

QUESTION #2 - SAMANTHA VITE

How do you procure new landlords that have never heard of Housing First before and ensure them that it is a good decision to join the program?

■ ASHLEY MEILLEUR

Samantha Vite to answer your first question: Finding and procuring new landlords can be quite difficult. In the past I have browsed local 'garage sale' sites such as Kijiji as well as calling numbers off of "For Rent" signs. I have also created a marketing letter which I put in the mailboxes of houses that are available for rent, highlighting the benefits of working with us. When first conversing with new landlords, I explain our program briefly and the benefits we offer to landlords. I then invite the landlord to meet in person to discuss the program in more detail and present them with a benefit package outlining our program and resources. I like to put a face to the program to ensure new landlords know there is a person behind the calls and program. I like to use landlords or management companies we have prior experience with, as a reference to our program, especially when dealing with larger management companies. I am currently working on a Letter of Recommendation from these landlords to include in the landlord benefit package.

QUESTION #3 - SAMANTHA VITE

If you don't have the budget to reserve units for participants of Housing First, how can you ensure vacancy for them?

■ ASHLEY MEILLEUR

Unfortunately we don't have a budget to reserve units here in Winnipeg, Our best defense to ensure vacancy for these suites is to keep consistent communication with both landlords and supporting agencies. As an example, when it doesn't work out with one participant of Housing First, ensuring we have another lined up to occupy the suite. We like to ensure our landlords that they can still advertise to the general public and we have created a position to call every two weeks and obtain vacancy updates on these properties and manage the database.

QUESTIONS #4, #5, #6 - SAMANTHA VITE

I have a few more questions for @timaubry:

- 4) What motivates landlords to rent to tenants of Housing First programs?
- 5) Why should the housing and clinical roles in Housing First programs be separate?
- 6) What are ways that relationships with landlords can be nurtured over the long term?

■ DR. TIM AUBRY

4) There are two main reasons that landlords rent to tenants of Housing First programs: (1) Financial reasons – the security of rent payment and coverage of damages as a result of the financial support that tenants of Housing First programs receive, and (2) prosocial reasons – some landlords cite prosocial reasons where renting to tenants of Housing First programs gives them an opportunity to contribute to their community and assist a marginalized group of people.

5) The housing staff and support staff in a Housing First team should work closely together but separately. This separation will make it much easier to deal with housing / tenant issues when they come up. As well, it will be much clearer for a landlord in terms of who to contact when issues come up. The Housing Coordinator focuses liaising with landlords and respond to any "housing-related" issues that arise between tenants and landlords in a timely manner. On the other hand, the support staff works on ensuring that tenants access the needed social services and health care other than those related to housing. It is optimal that all queries related to housing be referred to the housing staff since they will have the proper expertise.

6) First of all, find ways to thank landlords for their important role in a Housing First program. The toolkit suggests a number of different ways of showing appreciations for landlords, such as sending them cards or giving them small gifts during the holidays, holding appreciation breakfasts or lunches, and creating a landlord of the year award. It is also important to collect regular feedback from landlords. This can be accomplished by conducting surveys, interviews, or focus groups to gather their impressions. It is also vital to get the perspective of tenants about landlords to find out what is working and what can be improved in terms of relationships between the program and landlords. Again, data can be collected through surveys, interviews, or focus groups with tenants.

QUESTION #7 - NIVEEN SALEH

Hi everyone, a question about race and the current market. What can be done to combat the racism that Indigenous tenants encounter in the housing market?

■ JENNIFER RAE

The issue of racism against Indigenous people in the private rental housing market remains a very real barrier that Housing First programs must respond to. Housing Coordinators and Case Managers should be prepared to confront racism and discrimination if and when it arises during an initial meeting with a landlord and should be ready to advocate for the rights of the client if needed.

It may be helpful to partner with a community legal clinic, which could provide program staff with education and advice about how issues of discrimination and racism can be addressed under the Residential Tenancies Act and the Human Rights Code. A community legal clinic may also provide assistance in the event that a client requires representation at the Landlord and Tenant Board.

Some programs provide cultural education or sensitivity training for landlords. Focus on helping landlords understand and appreciate that an Indigenous tenant may have different traditional values and systems that may not conform to Western norms or expectations in housing. Educate landlords about colonialism and systemic racism, and how colonial policies have affected the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being of individuals and communities.

Education can also occur informally, through daily interactions between landlords and the Housing Coordinator or Case Manager. Program staff can model appropriate language and can impart some of their values through a slow, consistent relationship-building process with landlords.

Consider developing a community advisory committee or working group made up of key stakeholders in the sector with a dedicated subcommittee, such as an Indigenous cultural lens committee, to make sure all aspects of the Housing First program take into account Indigenous perspectives. Partner with local agencies that provide services to Indigenous communities.

Hire Indigenous staff members. Ensure that all program staff receive cultural education and sensitivity training.

QUESTION #8 - NIVEEN SALEH

Also, I was wondering can you clarify the differences between a standard lease and a master or head lease arrangement?

■ JENNIFER RAE

Here's an overview of the different lease types:

Standard lease

In the Housing First model, the preferred approach is to have a tenant to sign a standard lease directly with the landlord. This approach is considered more desirable in terms of tenant rights and empowerment, ensuring that the tenant has legal control over their living space, and protecting tenants against illegal eviction. This approach may also be more desirable for the program because it limits the program's legal liability for the unit.

However, a standard lease may be considered less favourable by some landlords, who may be concerned about the housing readiness of program participants and the risks associated with renting to them as tenants.

Master or head lease

In the case of a head lease, the Housing First program holds legal title to a rental unit and subleases to program participants as tenants. Head lease arrangements are often preferred by landlords.

For the Housing First program, a head lease may have the following advantages:

- Retention of a set number of units
- Efficient housing search and leasing process
- Expedited move-in process
- The right to enter a unit in an emergency

- The right to ask tenants to voluntarily move between units when problems arise
- Simplified administration and paperwork
- Improved standards of unit condition and safety

Housing First agencies that serve youth have found that head lease arrangements are a strong tool. Convertible leases also work well, especially for programs serving youth under the age of 18. With a convertible lease, the Housing First agency holds the lease in its own name at first, but the youth takes over when they are older and able to sign the legal agreement.

It is important to note that head leases may be problematic in terms of tenant rights. They may result in less separation of housing and clinical services and less opportunity for participant choice. The housing team may take on the role of a surrogate landlord that closely monitors tenant behaviour. Head leases may compromise the tenant's self-determination, independence and sense of personal responsibility for the unit.

In head lease arrangements, the Housing First program must obtain adequate insurance coverage.

QUESTION #9 - FRANCIS PIGEON

(Asked in French) What could the HPS do more in this area to support community efforts? Are there innovative approaches? What are the gaps, including in capacity building, for communities and front-line organizations?

■ ASHLEY MEILLEUR

Francis, here in Winnipeg I am the coordinated program between 11 agencies. I find the hardest thing is consistency among agencies. Training varies and should be the same across the board. It is hard for a Housing liaison to supply offers of support and it be inconsistent between agencies.

■ DR. TIM AUBRY

(Answered in French) The HPS could support Housing First programs in networking and training with landlords. As well, the HPS could fund evaluation and research activities on the relationship between Housing First programs and landlords. This is a subject where there is currently very little research.

QUESTION #10 - VIA EMAIL TO WORKSPACE MODERATOR

A question via email: In a tight rental market, how do you convince landlords to rent to program participants?

■ JENNIFER RAE

Landlords are typically motivated to rent to Housing First program participants for two reasons:

1. Financial reasons – guaranteed rent, cost savings
2. Prosocial or altruistic reasons – possibly as a result of personal experiences

Conduct a survey of local landlords to understand their needs and gain insight into effective marketing strategies in your local context. Develop professional, eye-catching promotional materials. Host media events to promote the program and raise awareness.

Partner with the municipal government. The municipality can offer public endorsement of the program, lending its legitimacy to the cause. The municipality may also be in a position to offer incentives such as property tax breaks, lower processing fees, and fast tracking of housing proposals to landlords and property developers who agree to rent units to Housing First programs.

Reach out to local landlord/property management associations and industry groups. Attend a meeting, make a presentation, set up an exhibition booth or stand, ask to slip a program brochure into their information package, place an advertisement in their newsletter. This can be a way to reach landlords, raise awareness about the program, and learn more about the landlords in your area and what their needs and concerns are.

Consider targeting medium landlords to start. Small landlords may be more risk averse and have lower tolerance for challenging behaviour, especially if they live in the building themselves. Large landlords have property management firms that may have overly strict screening policies and staff who have less autonomy to make exceptions on a case-by-case basis.

Employ program staff with dedicated time for landlord recruitment. Never under-estimate the importance of relationship building and developing a personal connection between program staff and landlords.

■ ASHLEY MEILLEUR

For landlords, the benefits of our program sometimes far out way the risk. We offer free advertising for their listings, a repair budget to fix damages caused by the tenant, eviction prevention when it may not be working out, direct rent payments, a contact person for any issues they may face and education.

QUESTION #11 - MOJDEH KHAN

What are some general rules that landlords want tenants to adhere by?

■ ASHLEY MEILLEUR

Mojdeh Khan, We have heard all sorts of outlandish rules and requests from landlords. At the end of the day each province has a governing body that stipulates the rights and responsibilities of each tenant and landlord. In Winnipeg this is Residential Tenancy Branch. Some buildings have a curfew, some buildings have a noise policy, and most have a maximum guest policy. It is really dependent on the landlord but should stay within the provisions of the governing body. The rules do not change because the tenant is a part of a specific program. I hope that answers your question.

QUESTION #12 - DANA CHRISTIAEN

When a tenancy doesn't workout with a new landlord what are some strategies for maintaining the relationship and their buy in for the program?

■ ASHLEY MEILLEUR

When a tenancy doesn't workout with a new landlord what are some strategies for maintaining the relationship and their buy in for the program? Dana Christiaen . It is really important to be on top of the reasons why it didn't work out. Whether eviction prevention is necessary, or if damages need to be completed. At that point it is really communicating with the landlord and ensuring everything is done in a timely manner to the landlords liking.

■ MEMBER ANSWER - CORRY COMEAU

As for strategies to maintaining landlord relationship. I (we) have found it beneficial to be present through the eviction process. (Or agreement to end tenancy)

If possible, paying for some of the damages. Filling the unit with someone else. (Again if possible)

Open communication and dialogue regarding the issues in hopes to resolve them. A lot of he engagement begins with responding to any issue that arises and offering to help out when feasible before it become an eviction etc

■ ASHLEY MEILLEUR

Corry Comeau, this definitely paves the way to building solid rapport with landlords. My program is a little different as I do not work directly with the participants but work with the landlords and support workers. Consistent communication goes a long way in developing these relationships! Keep up the good work!

QUESTION #13 - SARAH FRALEIGH BULCKAERT

Hello everyone!

Here in Chatham-Kent we just launched our youth housing first program (yay!) and are fortunate enough to have a dedicated landlord engagement position. We are using the Landlord Engagement Tool as a guide for the position. In the guide, outputs and outcomes are listed and this has been wonderful to give us an idea of possible measures. But I am wondering if anyone has created a logic model specific to the landlord engagement position that connects these (and possibly other) outputs and outcomes? And if so, would you be willing share the model? Thank you!

■ DR. TIM AUBRY

As far as I know, there is no logic model that has been developed to conceptualize landlord engagement. You are correct that outputs and outcomes are presented in the Landlord Engagement Toolkit. So you would need to come up with the landlord needs, inputs, and activities. Doing this work with your program colleagues could be quite useful in clarifying the role of a Housing Coordinator.