

Tips for Screening Tenants

A thorough screening reduces problems in your buildings and saves money in the long run. There are companies that specialize in screening; these are listed in the yellow pages under credit reporting agencies. If you choose to do your own screening, the following process may be used. **To avoid discrimination complaints you must use the same process for all applicants.** This process should be in writing and shown to each person who applies.

I. Application Process

- A. If you choose not to use a rental screening company and you plan to check criminal history records, have the applicant sign a form that indicates that you are doing it with their knowledge. The form must include full name and middle initial (including other names used in the past five years), date of birth, driver's license or Minnesota ID number, and Social Security number for each person over the age of sixteen who will be living in the unit.
- B. Have applicants complete the application form which includes rental history, financial information, family information, and personal references.
- C. Compare applicant's identification with their written applications. If the information doesn't match, ask why.
- D. If applicants have been on your waiting list for more than one month, have them fill out a new application when a unit becomes available. Compare the new information with that on the previous application.
- E. Charge a non-refundable screening fee to all applicants. Some rental property owners apply this to the first month's rent of the tenant they select.
- F. Take the time to talk with the applicants to learn more about them.
- G. Discuss your written code of conduct with the applicants. This should clearly state behavior expectations for your tenants. Inform them that they must sign off on the code of conduct when they sign the lease.
- H. State on your application that giving false or incomplete information during the application process is grounds for rejecting their rental application and will violate the rental agreement if discovered later.

- II. Check rental references at the current and previous addresses. Be aware that the current property owner/manager may not give completely accurate information because they want to get rid of the tenant. Drive by the applicant's current and previous addresses to verify the information on the application. You may also want to talk to the manager/caretaker if they are available. **You can verify ownership of property by calling Property Tax Information at 612-348-3011 or Rental Licensing at 612-673-5856.**
- III. Check all applicants for previous unlawful detainer/evictions. These records are available on the 8th floor of the Hennepin County Government Center. The phone number is 612-348-5185. If the applicant holds a Section 8 certificate or voucher, you may review their file if they sign a release.
- IV. Call all personal references.
- V. If you choose to do criminal history checks, you need a release signed. Public records can be checked through Hennepin County by calling 612-348-3724, Room 22 City Hall. Minneapolis arrest records can be checked by calling 612-673-2808, or by going to room 31 in City Hall. It is recommended that you limit your inquiries to three names. Call Tuesday to Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. There is no charge for checking the record, but there is a nominal fee if you want copies.

FOR QUESTIONS CONCERNING POSSIBLE LIABILITY WHEN USING CRIMINAL HISTORIES, CONTACT THE MINNESOTA MULTI-HOUSING ASSOCIATION OR YOUR ATTORNEY.

VISION

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For individuals with disabilities:

If you need this material in Braille, large print, computer disk, or cassette tape, call 612-673-2912. Sign language interpreters available — call 612-673-3220 or 612-673-2626 (TTY). Please allow two weeks for accommodation.

