

Tenant Resource Center Introduction For Applicants to the Board of Directors

The Tenant Resource Center (TRC) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit membership organization, located in Madison, Wisconsin. Currently we serve primarily Dane Co residents due to funding restrictions but our Housing Justice work extends nationally. We have a long history as a tenacious agency that fiercely advocates for the most vulnerable communities. Every person at the TRC believes deeply in the need for housing justice in Wisconsin - Housing is a Human Right. In our current programming, we offer:

- **Housing Counseling:** Rental Rights counseling for tenants, landlords, service providers and other stakeholders throughout Dane County*.
- **Case Management:** Case management serves as a means for achieving client wellness and autonomy through advocacy, communication, education, identification of service resources and service facilitation. The case manager helps identify appropriate providers and facilities throughout the continuum of services, while ensuring that available resources are being used in a timely and cost-effective manner in order to obtain optimum value for both the client and the reimbursement source. Case management services are best offered in a climate that allows direct communication between the case manager, the client, and appropriate service personnel, in order to optimize the outcome for all concerned.
- **Mediation:** Mediation is a voluntary process in which people with a disagreement meet together with a trained, impartial mediator. The mediator listens to both sides and guides the parties in clarifying and discussing the issues, identifying areas of agreement, developing possible solutions, and writing their own mutually satisfying agreement.
- **Eviction Prevention:** the TRC was funded through CORE and CORE 2.0 to offer eviction prevention funding (i.e., back rent payments) for folks who were facing homelessness due to covid related income loss. TRC currently provides services primarily with clients who are court-involved (i.e., have eviction cases pending).
- **Eviction Defense:** The TRC is the founder of the Eviction Diversion and Defense Partnership program. By bringing this to fruition we have fulfilled a long awaited piece of our mission; in short it provides not only free legal services for tenants facing eviction but also interdisciplinary services (aka wrap around care) with court navigation, housing navigation, financial assistance and more. As this program continues to build steam we will be able to not only serve those involved in eviction but also push upstream to ensure that court filings for eviction do not occur.

Board details: The board of the TRC is crucial to its long-term stability.

- **Elections:** The board is elected annually by the TRC's membership during the annual membership meeting in June. If there is a mid term vacancy the Board can add members mid-year. The membership body is essentially made up of staff, volunteers and board members from the past 2 years.
- **Role:** We are concluding a strategic planning process, and hope to develop a clearer role for the board based on the priorities of the organization. The role of the board is to govern through oversight and policy, as well as support the TRC's work through fundraising, advocacy and volunteering.
- **Time commitments:** Each board seat is for a 2-year term, with no current limit on the number of terms. The time commitment is: one board meeting per month (on the 3rd Thursday of each month at 6pm), one committee meeting per month (current committees are: governance, fundraising, human resources and finance), fundraisers and other varying commitments. For example, right now, we are concluding a strategic planning process which has required ~5 hours per month, and we will be working to implement whatever direction comes from that process. It is reasonable to expect to commit 5-10 hours per month for each Board member.
- **Application process:** Folks who want to be on the board start by filling out the application available here: <https://www.cognitofrms.com/TenantResourceCenter1/BoardOfDirectorsApplicationForm>. Mid-year, those applications go before the Board and any attending staff during a monthly board

meeting. The board asks some short questions that are provided to the applicant in advance of the meeting, receives feedback from staff, and then votes on the application. During the June Membership Meeting, applicants submit that same application, and go through an interview and ranked voting process with the entire membership body.

History:

- The TRC was officially established as a non-profit in 1980; born out several tenant organizing groups one of which was the Madison Tenant Union (which evolved in the late 1960s). For a nonprofit, we are old, and we have been through many evolutions over the years but are a well established fixture within the community.
- The TRC began as a volunteer organization offering information to community members about housing and rental rights. We started having a significant contingent of staff housing counselors in the early 2000s, and started offering housing case management services in the last 10 years. Throughout the pandemic, we have disbursed more than \$26 million in direct financial assistance to prevent evictions in Dane County.
- Tenant-landlord law has also changed greatly since our inception, and underwent significant changes 2011-2018, resulting in decreased legal protections for tenants across Wisconsin but especially for those in Dane County and the City of Madison.
- Until recently, TRC served all of Wisconsin with housing counseling services (due to funding cuts), at one point there was an office in the City of Milwaukee. We have consistently provided housing law seminars across Wisconsin to promote housing justice through the education of landlords, service providers and attorneys (those classes qualify as CLE credits for attorneys).

Long term goals: While we are working on this in the strategic planning process with Step Up for Equity, here are some goals that have been consistently identified.

- **Continuing to diversify funding:** much of the funding available through grants comes with restrictions ("strings attached") which, at times, conflicts with our mission of Housing Justice.
- **Expanding partnership with community organizations to assist in building capacity by leveraging our structural supports**
- **Restore housing counseling support for all of Wisconsin:** We are the primary agency in Wisconsin that offers education about tenant-landlord laws. We are working diligently to secure statewide funding.
- **Expand our efforts in Right to Counsel* across Wisconsin** (*legislation that required tenants to have free legal representation in eviction proceedings.)
- **Continue to prioritize staff and volunteer safety, health and housing stability.**
- **Continue our work in expanding and maintaining diversity, equity and inclusion at all levels of the organization.**