

TOOLKIT TO SUPPORT RENTER ENERGY CONSERVATION & WEATHERIZATION

Summer 2023 Catalyst Leadership Communities Fellowship
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Motivations

In terms of energy efficiency improvements, one of the most challenging aspects of the tenant-landlord relationship is known as the “split incentive” – a situation that arises when the landlord owns the unit and is responsible for property investment, while the tenant is usually responsible for ongoing energy costs and would be the likely beneficiary of the landlord’s investments.

As a result, rental units are often much less energy efficient than private homes, and **renters use over 30% more energy per square foot than homeowners (Energy Information Administration, 2009).** Closing this gap is a major equity concern for renters as well as an important opportunity to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Specific Ann Arbor Context

This toolkit was originally developed to support the City of Ann Arbor’s [Green Rental Housing Program](#), which will require landlords to meet a minimum energy efficiency in rental inspections every 2.5-3.5 years.

In focus groups to inform the program, **one recurring issue raised by renters was the fear of being punished (e.g. having their security deposit taken away) for taking simple weatherization measures** such as putting film over their windows. One common concern raised by landlords was that tenants wouldn’t make use of the energy efficiency upgrades, for example:

“Why would I install a programmable thermostat if tenants don’t even know how to use it?” or **“Why would I upgrade the insulation in my multifamily apartment building if I see tenants opening their windows in the winter anyway?”**

In response, this toolkit aims to provide procedural information to tenants regarding how to save energy at home (e.g. with How-To videos) so that they can show their landlords that they will be a good partner in bigger efforts like weatherization. **While incentivizing landlords to make energy efficiency updates is essential to furthering energy equity and addressing systemic issues**, hopefully this toolkit can empower renters to have more control over their energy bills and comfort at home in places where there is not yet any incentive infrastructure (such as the Green Rental Housing Program), making informal agreements regarding energy efficiency even more important.

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I. Energy Conservation

Flyer - [Top 3 Things Renters Can Do Today to Save Energy](#)

Flyer - [Lesser-Known How-To's of Saving Energy for Renters](#)

Flyer - [How to Look for Energy Efficiency Green Flags in Your Next Apartment](#)

BEFORE YOU USE

1. Search for (ctrl+f) sections of the flyers that say **"fill in" in red ink**. These are places that had Ann Arbor specific information that you need to tailor to your community.
 - a. Feel free to switch up the colors, but the current text colors used are:
 - i. Light green - #99cc33
 - ii. Dark green/blue - #003333
2. For **QR code placeholders**, [Adobe Express offers free QR code generation that will never expire](#). These were made to direct people to the City of Ann Arbor's website regarding energy efficiency for renters, but here are some options for where to link your flyers:
 - a. Your municipality's webpage on resources for renters or saving energy at home.
 - b. [The Department of Energy \(DOE\) Energy Saver Guide](#).
 - c. [DOE's website for IRA rebates and tax-credits for energy efficiency improvements](#).
3. Once you're done editing, **download the template using these steps**:
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HOW TO USE

1. **Focus on peer-to-peer engagement.** For example, train a group of renters in a big multifamily building, who can then knock on doors to engage their own neighbors and provide them with basic retrofits like LED lightbulbs or rope caulking. Some models to check out include:
 - a. For neighbor-to-neighbor engagement: [EcoWorks Eco-D](#).
 - b. For youth-led engagement: [EcoWorks Youth Energy Squad](#).
 - c. For low-income housing: [FLOWS](#).
 - d. For students living in dorms: [EcoVisits from Sustainable Buffs](#).
 - e. For Greek Life (buy them pizza, walk through energy efficiency): [Greek Sustainability](#).
2. **Incentivize landlords to educate their residents:**
 - a. [Boulder's SmartRegs program](#) offers 2 points to landlords towards achieving the minimum energy efficiency if they distribute educational resources, and their tenants [take the quiz](#).
 - b. Ann Arbor is considering offering points on their Green Rental Housing checklist to landlords who support tenant weatherization.

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TOP 3 THINGS RENTERS CAN DO TODAY TO SAVE ENERGY



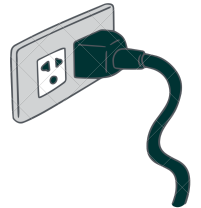
Program your thermostat to 78 in summer and 68 in winter.

Bonus! Turn your heat/AC down even more when you leave home for the day. Each degree could save you up to 3% on your annual energy bill.



Wash your clothes in cold water and dry them on the lowest setting.

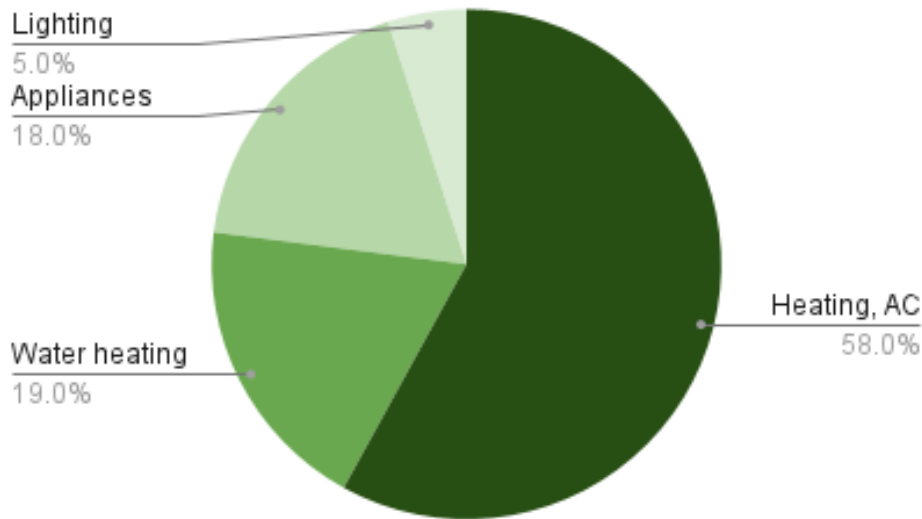
This will also protect your clothes from wearing out quickly!



Unplug phone chargers, TVs, and laptops when not in use.

Use power strips to make this easier & avoid wasting \$ on "phantom loads."

Home energy use for Michigan renters



Data from EIA 2015 Residential Energy Consumption Survey

Why these 3?

They'll help you save in the **biggest categories** of home energy use!

Find more energy-saving tips on our website:

(fill in:
QR code)

Our city is working hard to [fill in: your city's climate or economic goals regarding energy], because we care about **protecting the health of our most vulnerable neighbors** - like seniors and children - from air pollution and hotter temperatures.

Renters like you have a big role to play in helping us get there - [fill in: fact or anecdote to show renters' impact, e.g. in Ann Arbor, buildings produce 2/3 of emissions, and rentals make up 55% of the housing stock]

[fill in - how is your city already helping renters and/or working to solve this problem?], but we need your help too - **make a pledge to take one of these 3 energy saving actions today!**

(fill in:
Logo)

LESSER-KNOWN HOW-TO'S OF SAVING ENERGY FOR RENTERS

1. PROGRAM YOUR THERMOSTAT

Energy Star estimates that you can **save up to \$180 a year (for a single-family home)** in energy costs when you set these temperatures while you're away from home during the day:

- Up 8 degrees in summer
- Down 8 degrees in winter



Video: How to program your thermostat

2. USE SMART POWER STRIPS

Did you know that **leaving a computer on all day can waste about \$75 per year**? Smart power strips will switch off power to all unused devices at once.

For example, when you turn off your TV, the smart strip will also switch off power to video game consoles.



Video: How to use a smart power strip

3. CHECK FOR LED BULBS

LEDs, especially ENERGY STAR rated products, **use at least 75% less energy than incandescent lighting.**

Plus, they last up to 25 times longer, so you'll have to replace them much less frequently!



Video: Check for LED lightbulbs (skip to 8:24)

4. TURN DOWN YOUR WATER HEATER

Most manufacturers set your water heater to 140°F, but a typical household only needs it at 120°F. The U.S. EPA estimates that **a water heater set too high at 140°F wastes from \$36 to \$61 annually** in standby heat losses.

SAFETY WARNING: Consider the risks (mentioned in the video) of turning it down if you are immuno-compromised or have a dishwasher without a booster heater to kill nasty bacteria.



Video: How to turn down your water heater

(fill in:
Logo)

HOW TO LOOK FOR ENERGY EFFICIENCY GREEN FLAGS IN YOUR NEXT APARTMENT

Our city is working hard to [fill in: your city's energy goals], because we care about **protecting the health of our most vulnerable neighbors** - like seniors and children - from air pollution and hotter temperatures.

As a renter, you can **help our city reach its energy goals** and **save money on your energy bills** by asking these questions before you sign your next lease:

1) To find out how your future utility bill compares to other options...

“
Can I see a recent utility bill so I know how much utilities cost for a typical month?
”

“
Who pays the utilities - the tenant or the landlord?
”

2) To find how relatively energy efficient the unit might be...

“
“Is this building well insulated? When was the last time the weather stripping was replaced?” (replacing this every 2-5 years is good practice)
”

“
Does this unit have any Energy Star appliances or LED lightbulbs?
”

3) To find out your role in setting energy-saving temperatures (68 in winter, 78 in summer)...

“
Who controls the thermostat - the landlord or the tenant?
”

If it's the landlord

“
What's the best way for me to reach you about changing the temp if it's uncomfortable for me?
”

If it's the tenant

“
Does this house have a programmable or smart thermostat to help me save energy?
”

Find more energy-saving tips on our website:

(fill in:
QR code)

II. Weatherization

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Quiz - [Tenant Quiz: Become an Energy Efficient Renter!](#)

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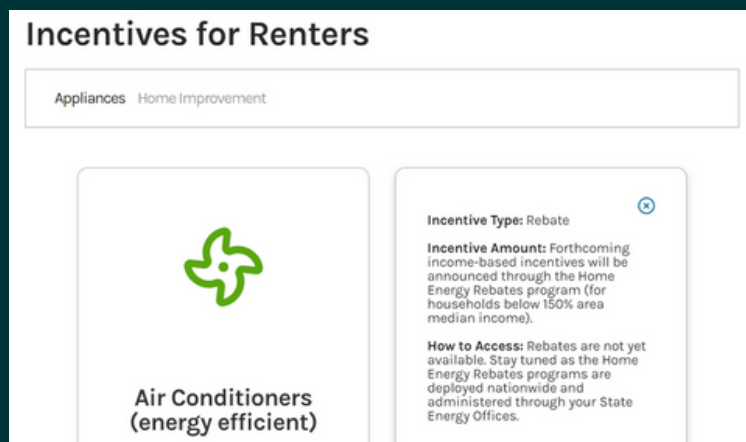
HOW TO USE

1. **Distribute these resources (and offer peer-to-peer training workshops and/or basic weatherization materials) to:**
 - a. Local renters' rights orgs (e.g. [Ann Arbor Renters Commission](#)).
 - b. Tenants' associations (e.g. [McKinley Tenants Association](#)).
 - c. Landlord education groups (e.g. [Washtenaw Area Apartment Association](#)).
2. **Clarify existing tenants' rights regarding weatherization.**
 - a. The Ann Arbor Renters Commission mentioned that many tenants live in units that are so drafty that they can't keep a decent temperature in the winter, and they don't know that weatherization is an option.
 - b. Tenants should already be allowed to make temporary improvements:
 - i. [Rope caulk](#) (a removable putty to seal cracks around windows).
 - ii. [Window film](#) (a sheet you can attach around windows with removable adhesive).
 - c. In Ann Arbor, [Section 8.528 of Chapter 105 \(Housing Code\)](#) requires basic winterization in rental units.
 - i. Does your city have any similar ordinances or parts of your housing code?
 - ii. If so, is there any legal pull there to require landlords to pay for weatherization?

II. Weatherization

HOW TO USE (CONTINUED)

3. **Emphasize any and all financial assistance available to tenants and landlords.**
 - a. Check out the City of Ann Arbor's list of [funding available to landlords, including:](#)
 - i. [DOE's website for IRA rebates and tax-credits for energy efficiency.](#)
 - ii. [Better Buildings Funding Resource Hub](#) (can search for Multifamily).
 - b. Highlight your county's **weatherization assistance program.**
 - i. For example, [Washtenaw County's Office of Community and Economic Development](#) wants to do more tenant-specific marketing.
 - ii. Over the past year, only 6 out of 57 (10%) total homes weatherized in Washtenaw were rental units. The state has since contracted with a group that will be able handle larger scale 5+ unit properties starting July 1st, 2023 (they were previously restricted to working only on 1-4 unit buildings).
 - c. Advertise your local utility's programs.
 - i. **DTE offers free home energy assessments** and [rebates for things like insulation and Energy Star washers and dryers.](#)
 - d. If a tenant quiz is offered, include an incentive for tenants to take it.
 - i. For example, a [healthy homes kit like that from EcoWorks.](#)
4. **Understand when to direct people to which resource.**
 - a. Emergency weatherization (apartment can't keep a livable temperature in the winter and the landlord is uncooperative):
 - i. DIY weatherization 1-pager, tenant can take immediate and low-cost action.
 - b. Longer-term interest in energy savings (tenant wants to make improvements in partnership with the landlord):
 - i. Tenant quiz, template agreement, how to talk to your landlord flyer (anything to help them feel more knowledgeable and comfortable in talking to their landlord about it...[more great suggestions here](#)).



A snapshot of [DOE's financial assistance hub for renters](#). Inflation Reduction Act **rebates will be the most accessible for renters** (because they often don't fall into high enough of a tax bracket to benefit from [tax credits](#)), and these are slated to be rolled out in late 2023 through State Energy Offices. Highlight rebates once they are available.

(fill in:
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DIY WEATHERIZATION FOR RENTERS

STEP 1: HOME ENERGY AUDIT

Watch this video to conduct your own audit in 15 minutes, including:

- Checking your windows and doors for air leaks.
- Checking the efficiency of your lighting and shower head.



Video: home energy audit



Optional: fill out this report as you go

STEP 2: CONSIDER FUNDING OPTIONS

Options for **free weatherization** (mostly for renters in single-family homes or duplexes):

- [fill in: e.g. DTE free home energy assessment]
- [fill in: your county's weatherization assistance program]

Or, try talking to your landlord. For bigger updates, consider offering to sign a longer lease or pay a small premium (\$10/month) to split the costs with your landlord.

In the meantime, try these low-cost, **REMOVABLE** (so you don't have to risk your security deposit) weatherization measures you can do yourself!

STEP 3: MAKE IMPROVEMENTS



Photo: Canva



Rope caulking:

\$5 for a 30ft roll to seal air leaks



Photo: Pinterest



Window films:

\$10-15 for enough to air seal two 3x5ft windows

Average cost -->

Tenant Quiz (pt. 1)

Landlords are more likely to support energy efficiency improvements when tenants show what they are already doing to save energy at home and take care of the rental property. Tenants can use this quiz, the flyer with conversation starter tips, and the template weatherization agreement to work in partnership with their landlords on making their rental units more energy efficient. Additionally, quizzes can be used to engage renters at community tabling events at the local public library or farmer's market, on your city's website, or in peer-to-peer training workshops.

Energy Conservation

1. Heating and cooling accounts for what percent of a typical Michigan renter's energy bill?
 - a. 26%
 - b. 34%
 - c. **58%**
 - d. 75%
2. In the winter, set your thermostat to 68 when you're home. To save more energy in the winter before leaving home or going to bed, it is best to:
 - a. Turn up the thermostat
 - b. **Turn down the thermostat**
 - c. Leave the thermostat where it is
 - d. Open all of the windows
3. In the summer, set your thermostat to 78 when you're home. To save more energy, what should you do before going on a summer trip and leaving the house empty?
 - a. Open the windows for airflow
 - b. Unplug the refrigerator
 - c. **Turn up the thermostat & close all the curtains/blinds**
 - d. Turn down the thermostat & turn all the ceiling fans on
4. Thick drapes or curtains are a great way to save energy. How much of a home's heating energy is typically lost through windows?
 - a. 10%
 - b. 20%
 - c. **30%**
 - d. 40%
5. A vampire load is the electricity wasted by an electronic device while it is "turned off" but still plugged in, thus still drawing energy from the outlet. How can you avoid wasting energy on "vampire loads"?
 - a. Unplug phone chargers when not in use
 - b. Let your computer go to sleep if you're not using it
 - c. Use a smart power strip to turn off gaming consoles when you turn off your TV
 - d. **All of the above**
6. How much of the energy used by a washing machine goes towards heating the water? (Hint: you can save a lot of energy by washing COLD)
 - a. 25%
 - b. 50%
 - c. 75%
 - d. **90%**
7. How efficient is an LED light bulb compared to a standard bulb?
 - a. 25% more efficient
 - b. 50% more efficient
 - c. **75% more efficient**
 - d. 99% more efficient

Tenant Quiz (pt. 2)

Weatherization & the Landlord-Tenant Relationship

1. How can you check for air leaks around exterior windows and doors?
 - a. Toilet paper test: Take a strip of toilet paper and move it over every place where the window meets your wall or the window frame to see if it flutters
 - b. Wet palm test: Put some water on your hand and move it all around where your door meets the frame to see if you feel any air on your wet palm
 - c. Light a candle or incense near the window to see if the flame/smoke blows away from it
 - d. **All of the above**
2. How can you get rid of air bubbles in window film after you install it?
 - a. You can't; rip it off and try again
 - b. **Use a hair dryer**
 - c. Nail it to the wall to make it tighter
 - d. Window film doesn't work and you shouldn't use it
3. What question can you ask while apartment hunting to determine the relative energy efficiency of a potential apartment?
 - a. "Can I see a recent energy bill for this apartment?"
 - b. "Who pays the utilities and/or controls the temp - the tenant or the landlord?"
 - c. "Does this apartment have a programmable thermostat?"
 - d. **All of the above**
4. If your landlord controls your thermostat and it's too hot for you in the winter, what should be your first step?
 - a. Open your windows to cool it down
 - b. **Contact your landlord to explain that it's too hot and ask them to turn it down**
 - c. Make a complaint to the city's rental housing services
 - d. Turn your ceiling fan up as high as it goes

Ann-Arbor-Specific Questions

1. Where can you look for financial assistance to make your rental unit more energy efficient?
 - a. DTE free home energy assessment
 - b. Washtenaw County weatherization assistance program
 - c. Rebates on Energy Star appliances from the state (look for this in late 2023)
 - d. **All of the above**
2. What does Section 8:528 of the Ann Arbor Housing Code require from landlords?
 - a. Basic winterization in rental housing
 - b. All gaps around exterior windows and doors to be sealed
 - c. Cracks to be sealed with caulking, foam, rubber, or another weather resistant sealant
 - d. **All of the above**
3. How often are rental units inspected for compliance in Ann Arbor?
 - a. Every 1 year
 - b. Every 2 years
 - c. **Every 2.5 years (or 3.5 years, if they pass on the first try)**
 - d. Every 5 years (or 10 years, if they pass on the first try)

(fill in:
Logo)

HOW TO TALK TO YOUR LANDLORD ABOUT WEATHERIZATION (PART 1)

[fill in: fun fact, e.g. "Did you know that caulking to fill cracks around external windows can save you 10-20% on your annual energy bill?"....OR "Did you know that the median year built for Ann Arbor rentals is **1964**, which was **before Michigan required energy efficiency to be considered in buildings in 1977?**"]

If you are renting an older apartment or home, check out this home energy audit video that will show you how to:

- Check around your windows and doors for air leaks.
- Check if your lighting and shower head are efficient.



Video: home energy audit

ONCE YOU IDENTIFY ENERGY EFFICIENCY ISSUES IN YOUR APARTMENT, EXPLORE YOUR OPTIONS:

Start Small

Ask your landlord to...

- Swap all your lightbulbs with **LEDs**
- Install a **programmable thermostat**
- Have your HVAC **air filter replaced**

Basic DIY

Make these **temporary** improvements...

- **Window films:** \$10-15 for enough to air seal two 3x5ft windows
- **Removable rope caulking:** \$5 for a 30ft roll to seal air leaks

Bigger Impact

With your landlord's approval...

- [fill in: county weatherization program] will update worn down insulation, heating systems, and more if you qualify

Schedule a **free home energy assessment** from [fill in: e.g. "DTE if you live in a single-family home, duplex or condominium to potentially receive some of these upgrades for free!"]



Photo: Pinterest

For tips on how to ask for your landlord's support in fixing any air leaks...

FLIP ME

(fill in:
Logo)

HOW TO TALK TO YOUR LANDLORD ABOUT WEATHERIZATION (PART 2)

NEXT, EXPLAIN TO YOUR LANDLORD THE BENEFITS:

1. Better insulated homes don't just keep energy in, they also keep bad things out! Weatherizing a home reduces the risk of mold damage to a property and reduces the effects of childhood asthma.
2. Tenants are more likely to stick with a landlord who helps them out, allowing landlords to avoid the costs of tenant turnover.
3. Do your research. Tell your landlord how you're already saving energy at home (e.g. programming your thermostat), helping to maintain their property (e.g. not turning the temp. below 55 when you're away in the winter to prevent the pipes from freezing), or willing to help with improvements (e.g. calling contractors).

Start with a request for a conversation, not a complaint. For example:



My apartment has been pretty drafty and hasn't been able to keep a decent temperature this winter. I've been working from home more so this has become a big comfort issue for me. Would you be open to talking about ways to improve this?



Photo: istockphoto.com



Photo: Canva

[fill in: e.g. "find videos on how to make DIY improvements here:" or "find financial assistance options here:"]

(fill in:
QR code)

Agreement between Landlord and Tenant

Regarding: Basic weatherization of the rental unit

Why?

Simple weatherization measures to seal air leaks around windows and doors can be a huge help in keeping rental units warm in the winter. In addition to helping your tenant feel more comfortable and save money on their energy bills, better insulated homes don't just keep energy in, they also keep bad things out. **Weatherizing a home reduces the risk of mold damage to a property** while also reducing the effects of childhood asthma and other health complications caused by outdoor air. So, weatherization benefits both landlords and tenants.

Tenants should already have the authority to make temporary improvements to their rental units as long as they can remove them without causing damage, including putting up window film and using rope caulk (a removable putty) to seal air leaks around windows. Use this agreement to make sure you are on the same page about what other weatherization or energy efficiency improvements you will allow the tenant to make or assist them in making.

Addressing common concerns from landlords

If you are concerned that your tenant does not know how to properly perform weatherization improvements, please direct them to [\[fill in: link to your website, or print DIY weatherization flyer and/or quiz on the back of this sheet\]](#) for "How-to" videos and other training materials.

Specific improvements to be allowed

Landlords: Please specify which improvements the tenant is allowed to make without risk of penalty (e.g. loss of security deposit). Check all that apply:

- Adding window film around windows to prevent air leaks
- Caulking around windows and/or exterior doors
- Replacing or adding weather stripping around windows and/or exterior doors
- Other: _____

Tenants: Please specify how you can assist with making energy efficiency improvements:

- Adjusting the heat/AC when away to save energy (but not below 55 in winter to prevent pipes from freezing)
- Alerting the landlord about heating/cooling issues as soon as possible (instead of just opening windows in the winter)
- Other: _____

If the landlord wants to do larger retrofits (e.g. installing a heat pump), tenants could:

- Coordinate with contractors (help get quotes, let them in the apartment to do work, etc.)
- Identify options for free home energy audits, rebates, or other financial assistance
- Pay a small premium with their rent (e.g. \$10/month)
- Other: _____

Landlord Signature: _____

Date: _____

Tenant Signature: _____

Date: _____