## History

### Past - What have we done in the past?

- Offer free student renter counseling with a highly trained staff member and assistance from Legal Services;
- Manage the Neighborhood Ambassador Program with 10 paid student ambassadors that serve as liaisons between student renters and homeowners in the neighborhoods bordering our campus;
- Create renter education campaigns on campus, in the community, and in the residence halls where around 75% of first-year students will move off-campus after their first year;
- Write new legislation to be added to the Montana Residential Tenant and Landlord Act to further protect renters;
- Manage the UM Housing Finder to provide a safer housing search engine for UM students;
- Manage the Landlord Review Website to provide students with a venue to post and search student reviews of their experiences with local landlords and property management companies;
- Recruit and work with the Student Housing Board to give students opportunities to build leadership and political experience while guiding the ASUM Renter Center in its mission;
- Maintain & build professional relationships with local non-profits advocating for housing rights, lawyers, community members, and property management companies;
- Coordinate the annual Housing & Community Resources Fair every spring to provide a one-stop shop for students to meet all of their off-campus needs.

### Present - What are we currently doing?

The ASUM Off-Campus Renter Center provides a variety of services to UM students that reside off-campus. The agency's mission is to empower students to assert their rights, encourage neighborhood relationships, advocate for student renting rights policy, and assist students with the rental process. In the 2015-2016 academic year, the Renter Center provided 1-on-1 landlord/tenant counseling to over 300 students (or groups of students) free of charge. In addition to this valuable service, the Renter Center maintains a number of online resources to assist students in every step of the renting process. The UM Housing Finder website, Rate My Landlord review site, online Guide to Finding Housing, and sample grievance letters are just a few of the resources that empower students to make wise renting decisions and assert their renting rights.

The Renter Center also strives to create a stronger sense of community amongst off-campus residents by linking them to their neighbors and to community resources. The Neighborhood Ambassador Program, a student-run program overseen by the Renter Center Director, focuses on bridging the gap between student renters and permanent residents living in the neighborhoods surrounding the UM campus. The ambassador team works to educate student renters on their rights and responsibilities as residents of the University District. The ambassadors also provide conflict mediation services to student renters and their neighbors as needed in addition to designing and implementing programming to improve the quality of life for all residents living in the neighborhood.
### Moving Forward

#### VISION - where we should go and why?

The ASUM Renter Center should continue to offer support to students who are looking for off-campus housing, or experiencing a conflict with a landlord. The Neighborhood Ambassador Program should continue to educate student renters about their responsibilities to their neighbors, and promote positive relationships. Additionally, the ASUM Renter Center should locally study the national trends of rising student homelessness and food insecurity, and adopt best practices to help students prevent these problems or get help to resolve them.

#### MISSION - who we are, how we work toward our vision, what makes us unique?

- Empower students to assert their rights.
- Encourage neighborhood relationships.
- Advocate for student renting rights policy.
- Assist students with the rental process.

#### CORE VALUES - guiding principles of our work and how we operate?

- The university, students, and the community benefit from students integrated in the community through private rentals.
- Off-campus housing works best when students are educated about their rights and responsibilities.
- Students are best served when they are empowered to advocate for themselves to the greatest extent possible.
## Organization Analysis

| Strengths- What is the agency already doing well? | Due to market forces, high demand for help finding housing and resolving landlord tenant issues.  
| High satisfaction reported by |
| Weaknesses- What does the agency not do well? | Historically, there has been high turnover in the Director position.  
| Funding for the Neighborhood Ambassadors program from the City of Missoula creates a potential conflict of interest when lobbying local government about issues that affect student life such as land use, parking, etc.  
| The ASUM Renter Center has focused on helping students find housing and resolve landlord-tenant disputes, but has overlooked the growing issues of student homelessness and food insecurity, and we do not know the extent of these problems at UM. |
| Opportunities- What can we do better, or start doing? | Technology allows the ASUM Renter Center to eliminate inefficiencies, and serve students on a larger scale. Examples include the ASUM Renter Center’s new web apps and articles on the website. Future projects could include YouTube videos, and online class, a community resource database, and remote appointments.  
| Partnerships with public agencies and human services nonprofits could improve the ASUM Renter Center’s ability to ensure that student homelessness and food insecurity are addressed.  
| There is a political appetite for addressing affordable housing in Missoula, as demonstrated by the City’s new housing office and the movement to establish a Renter’s Union.  
| Where assistance from the ASUM Renter Center saves students hundreds or thousands of dollars, students could be gently encouraged to make a small donation to the ASUM Renter Center. |
| Challenges- What obstacles face the organization? | Declining enrollment and reduced capacity for the University to engage in the community.  
| Missoula’s growing economy will likely make housing more expensive over the next few years.  
| As the University District and other nearby neighborhoods become more expensive, there could be proportionately fewer student voters in those city council wards and legislative districts.  
| Missoula’s low unemployment also makes recruiting and retaining staff and student workers more difficult.  
| Reduced capacity from ASUM Legal to represent tenants could make landlords less willing to work with the Renter Center.  
| With many public programs being cut, students’ housing issues could be a lower priority when public officials triage with their reduced resources. |
Changes at the University of Montana and Missoula’s local economy present some real headwinds, but with creative use of technology and partnerships with outside entities, the ASUM Renter Center has the opportunity to create meaningful impact on students’ housing issues.
LONG-TERM GOALS - what we will do to realize our vision in the next 5 years?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Renter Center Director</th>
<th>Town and Gown Coordinator</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Provides housing counseling appointments</td>
<td>• Coordinate Neighborhood Ambassador Program, reaching areas all over Missoula with student renters</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Homelessness prevention and re-housing for students</td>
<td>• Develop committee of students and neighbors</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Develops classes and events for renter education</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Maintains web apps to help students find housing and roommates</td>
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Two full-time classified staff: Town and Gown and Renter’s Rights

The positions support each other to increase continuity when there is turnover in one position. Neighborhood Ambassadors for areas beyond the University District with high concentrations of students. Neighborhood events and newsletters targeting those areas.

Renter Center has relationship with students through their full housing cycle:
Students are aware of and trust the ASUM Renter Center because of on-campus media and life-skills class for all freshmen living on campus.
Students use ASUM Renter Center’s website for affordable, convenient rentals and roommates, and use online classes or videos that help students get started renting and understand their rights and responsibilities.
Off-campus renters receive newsletters and social media updates that help them understand their rights and responsibilities as renters, and activate them for legislative issues that affect affordable housing.
Students make appointments with the ASUM Renter Center when issues come up with landlords.

SHORT-TERM GOALS - what will be done YR1 and YR2, etc?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>2018</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Deploy new web apps</td>
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<td>• Video with Klaus Sitte</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Improve telework capacity for paternity leave</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Recruit next year’s Neighborhood Ambassadors</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Request increased funding from City of Missoula</td>
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<tr>
<th>2019</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Recruit intern to study homelessness and food insecurity among UM students</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Attend #RealCollege or International Town and Gown Association (ITGA) Conference</td>
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<td>• Complete the “Optimal Town and Gown” study</td>
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<td>• Set up for Donations</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Landlord training for Continuing Education</td>
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### MEASUREMENTS OF SUCCESS - what benchmarks will be used as indicators of success

- Completion of research that better points the way on community needs on student homelessness and “town and gown” relations
- Increased use of the agency’s website and web apps, increased sign-ups on our email lists and social media
- Creation of a presentation or online class for students

### OBSTACLES - what could prevent us from realizing our vision

- Turnover, reduced funding from the City, ASUM, or other departments at the University of Montana

### Summary

The ASUM Renter Center needs to use technology to continue its existing efforts in more efficient ways, and needs more information about emerging problems that it has not addressed historically.

### STRATEGY

**RESOURCE ASSESSMENT – infrastructure and finances necessary to realize vision**

The ASUM Renter Center has many of the basic tools to increase its capacity through technology, including the agency’s website, social media, and email lists. In the future, the ASUM Renter Center should move resources away from printed material and print advertising to more online marketing. A mobile work station such as a Surface tablet or laptop would be helpful to
convert in-person outreach to engagement with our website and web apps. A CRM database would also be very helpful to efficiently track client interactions and learn more about student needs through queries. Increasing the Director’s knowledge of online marketing through continuing education would also be valuable.

Depending on what the Renter Center learns about homelessness and food insecurity, the agency should look into options like providing housing or vouchers, or establishing an on-campus food pantry.

In the future, more funds may be necessary to create two staff positions: one that addresses student homelessness, food insecurity, and landlord-tenant issues; another that promotes positive “town and gown” relationships.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>DISSEMINATION</th>
<th>how the plan will be announced, and who will oversee progress towards which goals, monitor success, and implement revisions</th>
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<td></td>
<td>The plan should be disseminated to the public through the ASUM Renter Center’s existing channels, including our website, email marketing, and social media; and through press releases to UM and Missoula media. Releases to media should emphasize the online “self-serve” resources that may be enough for many students, and reorient the high-touch services such as one-on-one appointments for students whose issues are urgent.</td>
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**Summary**

ASUM will continue its