Renter Preferences Report

The key to renter satisfaction and retention

Introduction

In today's rental market, simply meeting resident expectations is no longer enough. To remain competitive and profitable, property management companies need to exceed those expectations — by delivering standout service, responsiveness, and value throughout the rental journey. Economic and industry shifts that have tightened operating margins and reshaped renter behavior highlight the growing importance of going above and beyond for your residents.

Slowing rent growth and rising operational expenses — from insurance premiums and utilities to maintenance and staffing — are squeezing profit margins across the board. These pressures demand a strategic shift:

Properties must rely more heavily on improving resident satisfaction to maintain healthy occupancy rates and add-on services to boost revenue.

Adding to this challenge is an increasingly saturated rental market. In metro areas across the United States, a wave of new apartment construction has given renters more choices than they've had in quite some time. According to the latest vacancy data available from Moody's, vacancies reached 6.3% in Q1 2025 and now sit at the highest level since 2010. With more alternatives available, renters are more empowered to leave communities that fail to meet — or exceed — their expectations.

Reflecting these market dynamics, prior (but recent) AppFolio research[1] shows that maintaining high occupancy is currently the number one concern among property management professionals.

In an environment where every resident counts and churn is increasingly costly, renter satisfaction is not a soft metric; it is an NOI-driver. This report explores the latest data on renter motivation, preferences, and satisfaction, offering key insights into how property management teams can improve performance and ensure long-term success through higher retention, better reputation, and ultimately, greater NOI.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

01   Resident satisfaction is critical to maintaining healthy occupancy rates. Satisfied residents are 71% more likely to be planning to renew their lease and more than 5x more likely to recommend their property manager.

02   Maintenance has the biggest impact on a resident's plans to renew, with residents who are satisfied with maintenance being 73% more likely to renew.

03   Communication has the biggest impact on a resident's likelihood to recommend their property manager, with residents who are satisfied with communication being 146% more likely to recommend their property manager.

04   Offering additional services to residents is a great way to stand out in a crowded market. For example, only 42% of renters say lease-attached resident services or bundles are available to them, but 71% say this would be important to them when evaluating a new rental before signing a lease.

05   We found that nearly 80% of residents are willing to pay for some type of residential service through their property manager, with internet and renters insurance being the services renters were most willing to pay an additional fee for.
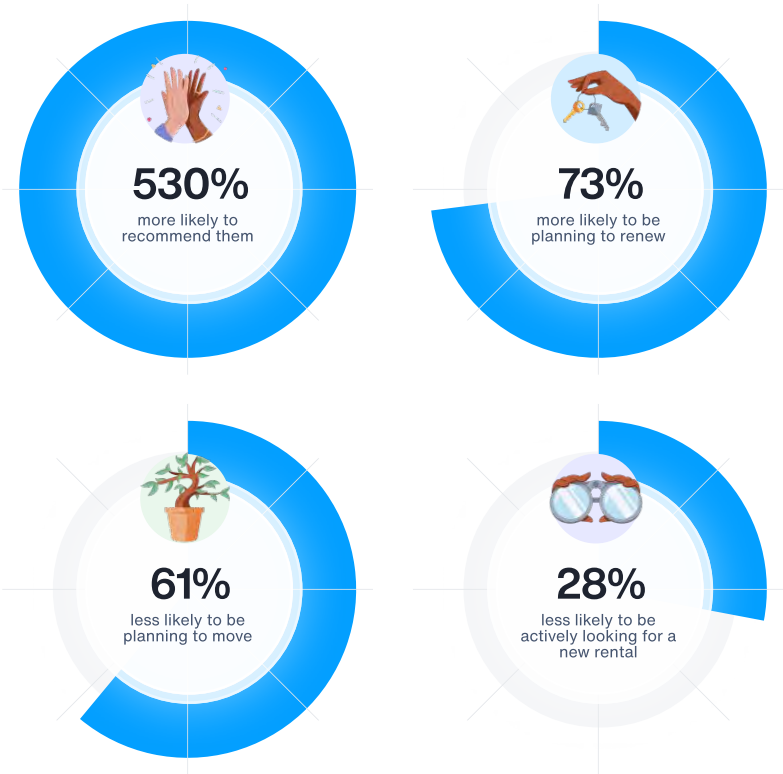
The Importance of Resident Satisfaction

In today's competitive rental landscape, resident satisfaction has become a critical differentiator that directly impacts your property management company's bottom line.

The good news is that 85% of renters are satisfied with their current property manager. But in competitive rental markets awash with new construction and rising vacancies, there's always room for improvement.

It's no secret that resident satisfaction is important to retention, and when we look at how both satisfied and unsatisfied renters answered questions about moving, renewals, and referrals, we were able to quantify just how important resident satisfaction really is.

Residents who are satisfied with their property manager are ...

530%
more likely to
recommend them

73%
more likely to be
planning to renew

61%
less likely to be
planning to move

28%
less likely to be
actively looking for a
new rental

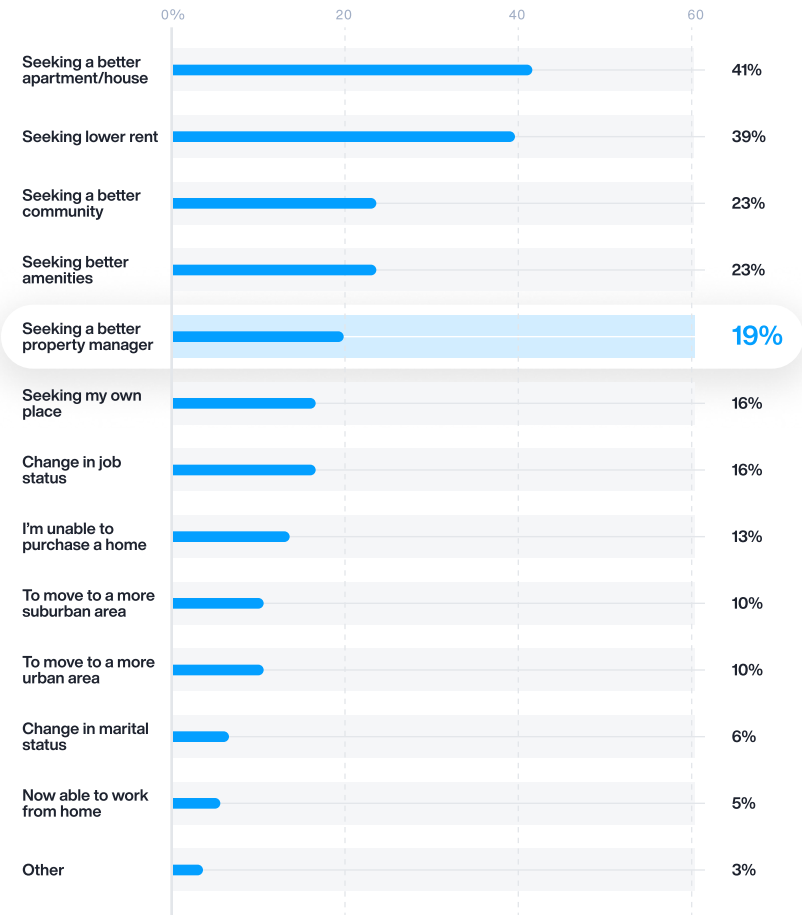# Moving Plans and Motivations in 2025

A little over one-third of those surveyed plan to move in the next year, nearly half plan to renew their lease, and 20% are not sure — presenting an opportunity for property managers to persuade some of these residents to renew their lease.
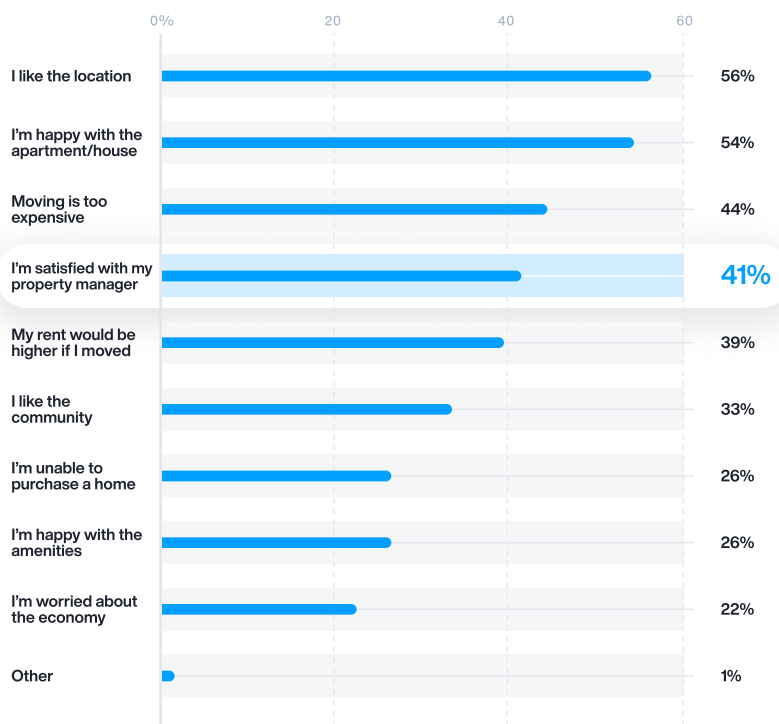
Do you plan to move in the next 12 months?

35%
I plan to move

45%
I play to renew or stay

20%
Don't know/not sure

Not surprisingly, desires for a better unit and for lower rent are the primary drivers of renters considering a move. However, "seeking a better property manager" was a factor for nearly one in five renters considering a move.

What are the main reasons you are considering moving to a new residence?

Reason	Percentage
Seeking a better apartment/house	41%
Seeking lower rent	39%
Seeking a better community	23%
Seeking better amenities	23%
Seeking a better property manager	19%
Seeking my own place	16%
Change in job status	16%
I'm unable to purchase a home	13%
To move to a more suburban area	10%
To move to a more urban area	10%
Change in marital status	6%
Now able to work from home	5%
Other	3%

The reasons for renewing are broadly similar to the reasons for moving, with fondness for the unit and location topping the list. Satisfaction with their property manager was a factor for nearly 41% of residents who are planning to renew.
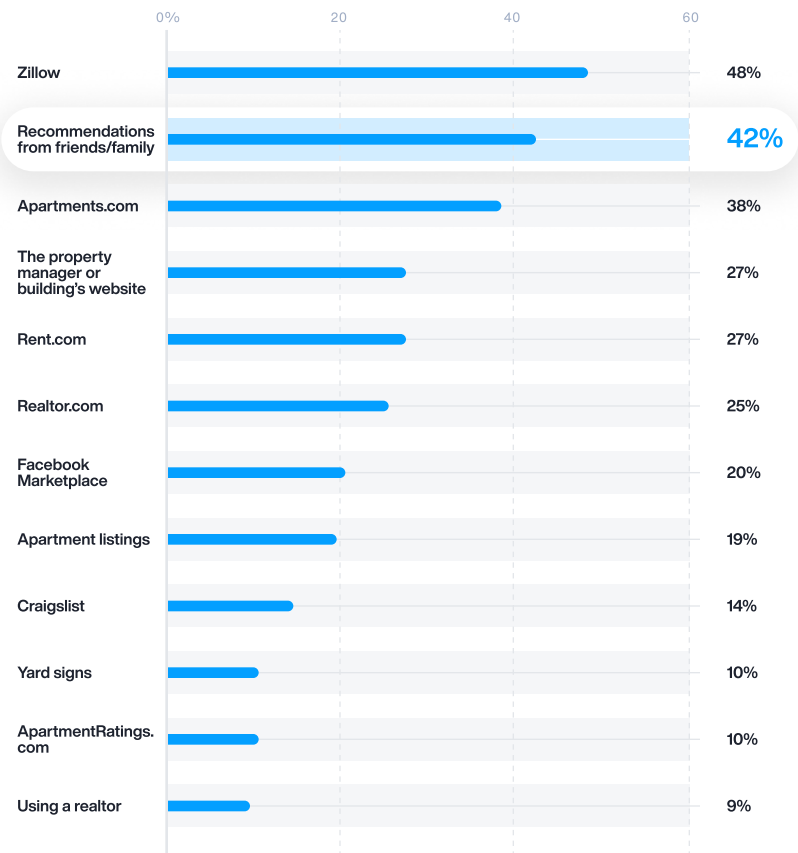
What are the main reasons you expect to remain in your current residence?

| Reason	Percent
I like the location	56%
I'm happy with the apartment/house	54%
Moving is too expensive	44%
I'm satisfied with my property manager	**41%**
My rent would be higher if I moved	39%
I like the community	33%
I'm unable to purchase a home	26%
I'm happy with the amenities	26%
I'm worried about the economy	22%
Other	1%

Attracting New Renters

Zillow remains the dominant internet listing service, but recommendations from friends and family highlight the importance of resident satisfaction not only in retaining renters but also in attracting new residents to fill vacancies faster.

Where renters search for new rentals

Zillow	48%
Recommendations from friends/family	**42%**
Apartments.com	38%
The property manager or building's website	27%
Rent.com	27%
Realtor.com	25%
Facebook Marketplace	20%
Apartment listings	19%
Craigslist	14%
Yard signs	10%
ApartmentRatings.com	10%
Using a realtor	9%

It's worth noting that most of the internet listing services mentioned above feature property reviews, further demonstrating the important role resident satisfaction plays in attracting new residents.

Our survey also found that nearly 90% of renters consider a property manager's reputation on review sites to be important when evaluating a new rental.

88%
of renters consider a property manager's reputation on review sites to be important
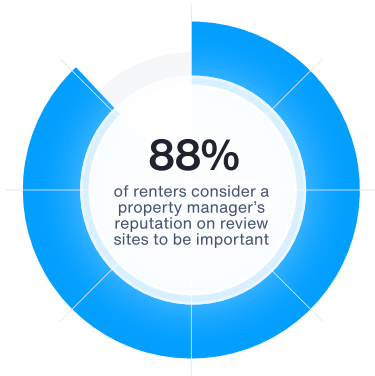
First impressions matter — especially during the discovery phase. A property manager's ability to attract and secure high-quality residents often hinges on how compelling and professional that initial experience is. From the first inquiry to the first tour, every touchpoint helps shape a prospect's decision to apply and ultimately sign a lease.

## Creating a Seamless Application Experience

Offering a seamless application process for potential renters gives them a sneak peek into how their potential property manager operates.

This starts with a clear and transparent listing, which is important to 95% of residents we surveyed.

A good listing instills trust and transparency from the start, validates their interest in the property, and encourages them to apply. But the application process needs to be smooth and simple. This ensures more prospects get through the funnel, providing property managers with a larger pool of high-quality applicants. Today, an overwhelming majority consider online and mobile applications to be "important" or "very important" when applying for a new rental.

To make the application process even more accessible, property managers should consider creating a mobile application, which 73% of respondents consider important.

Importance of listings and digital applications

95%

A clear and transparent listing

85%
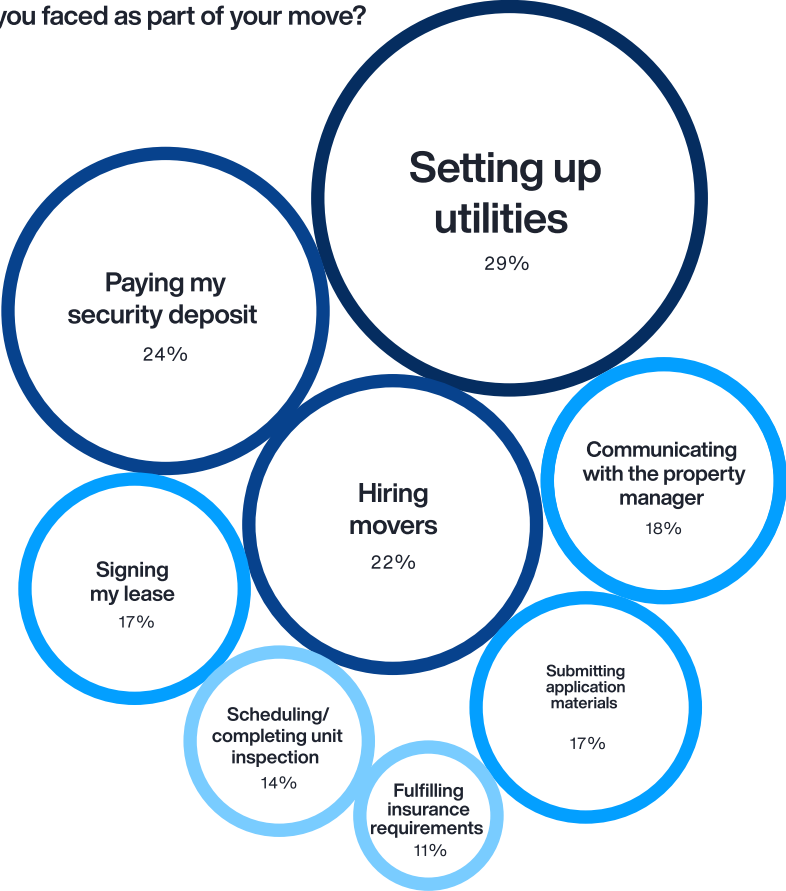
An online application

73%

A mobile application
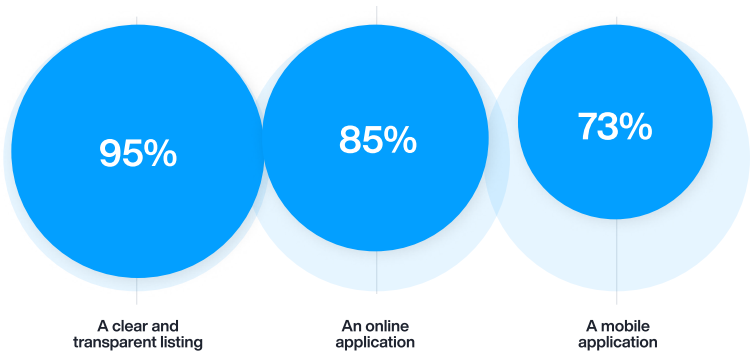
For property managers, processing and screening qualified leads is easier with an online and mobile application process. Potential renters can complete an application quickly, making the process of selecting qualified renters and then filling a vacancy faster.

Move-In

It's no secret that moving is stressful and challenging. Helping to provide a positive moving experience is a great opportunity for property managers to establish a strong relationship with new renters early on.

What were the biggest challenges you faced as part of your move?

Setting up utilities
29%

Paying my security deposit
24%

Hiring movers
22%

Communicating with the property manager
18%

Signing my lease
17%

Submitting application materials
17%

Scheduling/ completing unit inspection
14%

Fulfilling insurance requirements
11%

Property managers can use technology to differentiate themselves in the market by helping to address at least some of these challenges. Although only 38% of renters said their property manager offered a digital move-in service, 60% said the availability of this service would be important to them when they evaluate a new rental. Equipping renters with digital move-in tools can also help alleviate the burden of manual work that property management employees are traditionally required to do for each move-in.

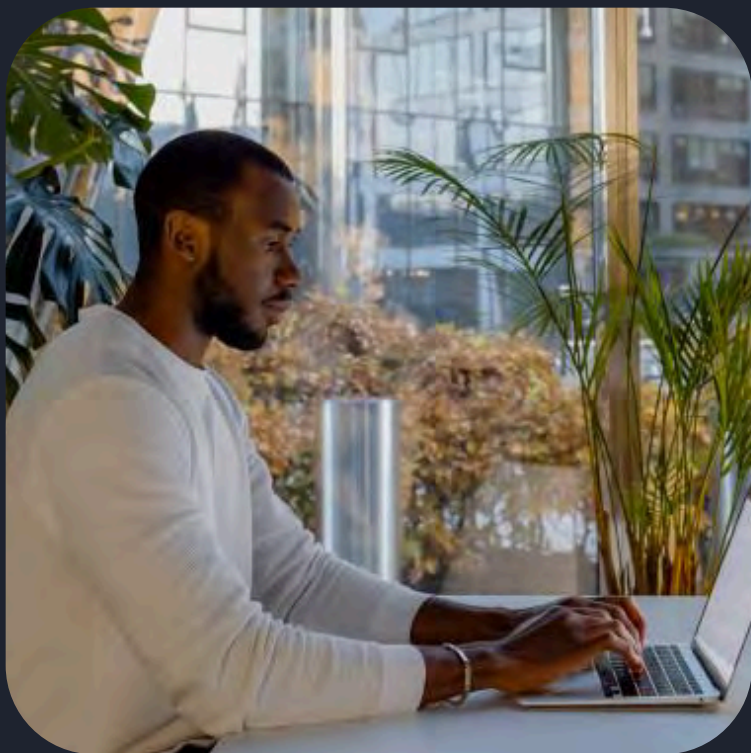## Importance versus availability of digital move-in services

🔵 Availability   🔵 Importance

38%

60%
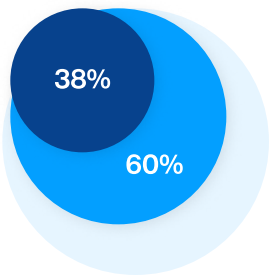
Although a digital move-in tool was available to 38% of renters surveyed, among those who used this digital move-in service, 81% said it was helpful.

Was completing move-in tasks through an online portal or resident app helpful?
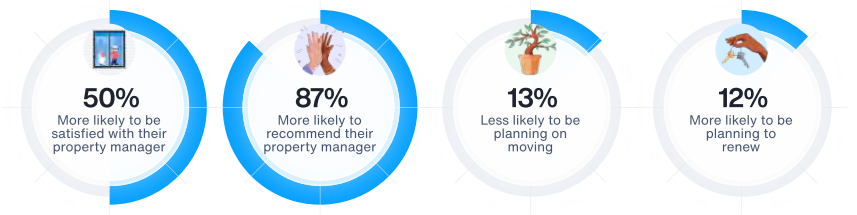
81% Yes

19% No

Resident Services and Technology

We know that using technology during the rental application and move-in process is helpful to both renters and property managers.
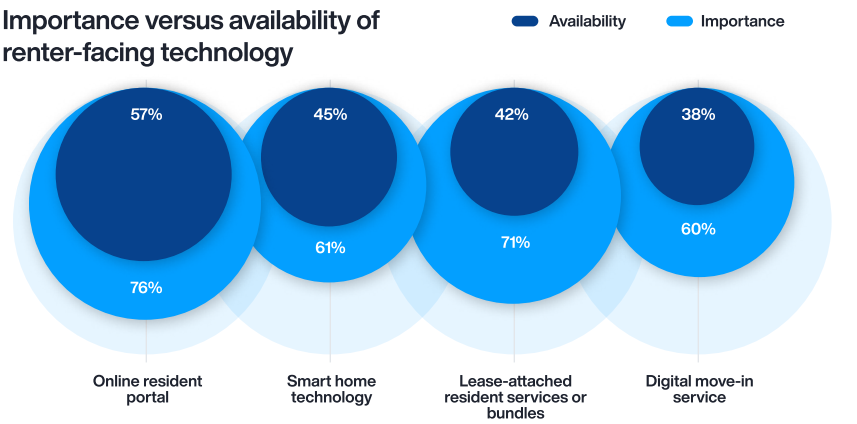
That's why renters who use online portals, apps, digital move-in services, online payments, and other technology are more satisfied with the technology their property management company provides. This satisfaction with technology corresponds with higher overall satisfaction and other benefits related to retention and referrals.

Residents who are satisfied with renter-facing technology are...

50%
More likely to be satisfied with their property manager

87%
More likely to recommend their property manager

13%
Less likely to be planning on moving

12%
More likely to be planning to renew

The importance of renter-facing technology far exceeds its current availability. For example, only 42% of renters say lease-attached resident services or bundles are available to them, but 71% say this type of technology-enabled service would be important to them when evaluating a new rental before signing a lease.

Importance versus availability of renter-facing technology

● Availability   ● Importance

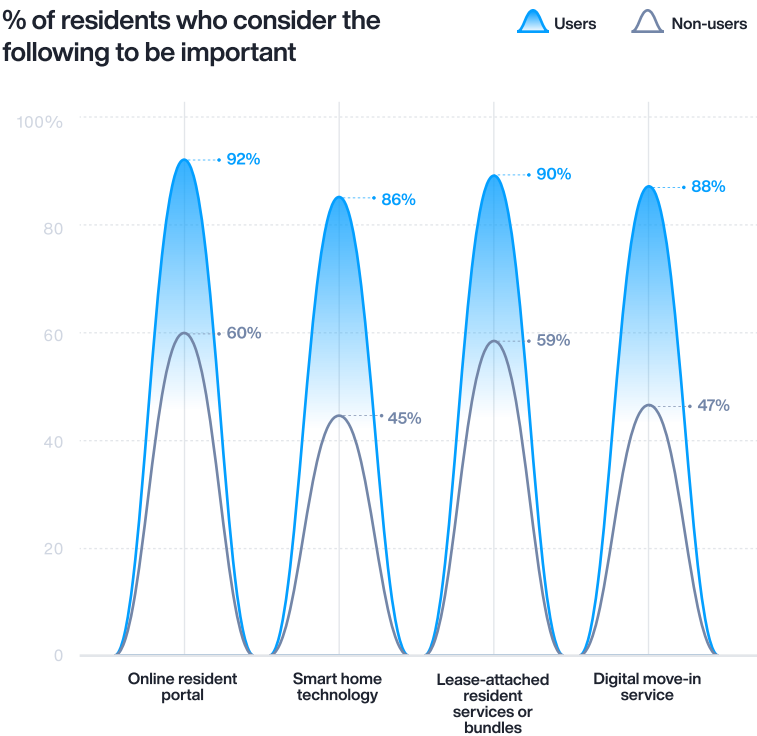| Online resident portal	Smart home technology	Lease-attached resident services or bundles	Digital move-in service
57%	45%	42%	38%
76%	61%	71%	60%

Perhaps not surprisingly, younger renters place the most importance on the technology available through their rental. This strongly suggests the importance of these services will increase as more members of Gen Z form renter households over the next few years.

% of renters who consider the following to be important, by age

Online resident portal

83%	18-24
78%	25-34
75%	35-44
69%	45-64
51%	65+

Smart home technology

69%	18-24
63%	25-34
58%	35-44
50%	45-64
46%	65+

Lease-attached resident services or bundles

77%	18-24
72%	25-34
70%	35-44
59%	45-64
57%	65+

Digital move-in service

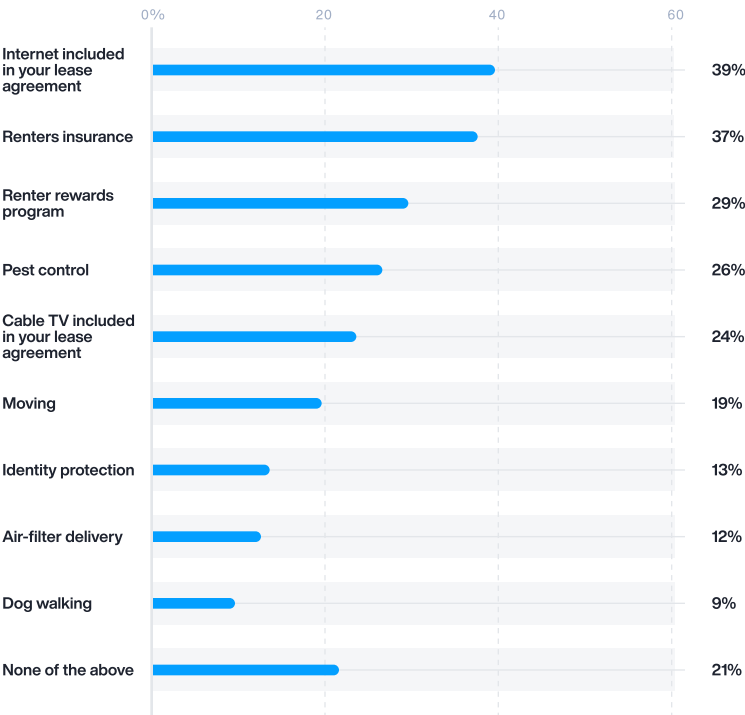|	
71%	18-24
59%	25-34
58%	35-44
53%	45-64
34%	65+

The importance of resident services to both users and non-users can also tell us a great deal about the likely future growth of these tech-enabled services. With current users placing so much more importance on these services, this suggests that as usage increases, their importance will increase as well. Some of these services, such as bundled services attached to the lease, offer ways for property managers to collect additional revenue.

% of residents who consider the following to be important

Users   Non-users

- Online resident portal: 92% / 60%
- Smart home technology: 86% / 45%
- Lease-attached resident services or bundles: 90% / 59%
- Digital move-in service: 88% / 47%

We asked residents if they would be willing to pay for specific services often included in lease-attached resident services or bundles. We found that nearly 80% of residents are willing to pay for some type of residential service through their property manager, with internet and renters insurance being the services renters were most willing to pay an additional fee for.

Which of the following would you be willing to pay an additional fee to your property manager for providing?

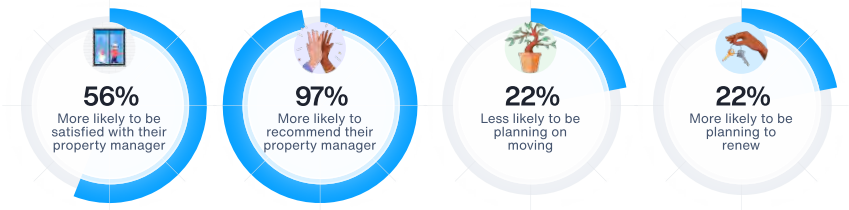| Service	Percentage
Internet included in your lease agreement	39%
Renters insurance	37%
Renter rewards program	29%
Pest control	26%
Cable TV included in your lease agreement	24%
Moving	19%
Identity protection	13%
Air-filter delivery	12%
Dog walking	9%
None of the above	21%

Adopting renter-facing technology comes with benefits for property management companies. When renters have the option for more self-service technology, it means less work for the property manager, including maintenance and repair coordination, saving time for everyone involved.

These resident services create convenience for renters, but they can also generate significant revenue for a property management company through time saved and increased renter retention.
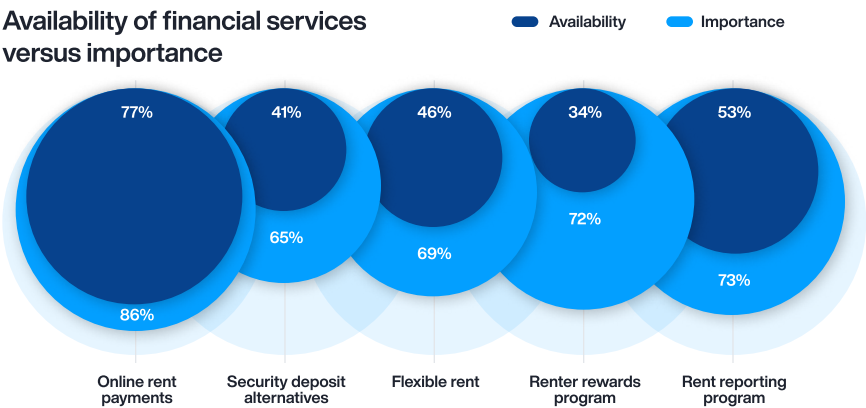
Financial Services

Providing renters with flexibility in how they pay rent, as well as benefits related to paying rent on time, can enhance their rental experience and their overall satisfaction with their property manager. Financial services also benefit property managers in many ways, including prompt payments, higher retention rates, referrals, and operational efficiency.

Residents who are satisfied with financial services provided by their property manager are...

56%
More likely to be satisfied with their property manager

97%
More likely to recommend their property manager

22%
Less likely to be planning on moving

22%
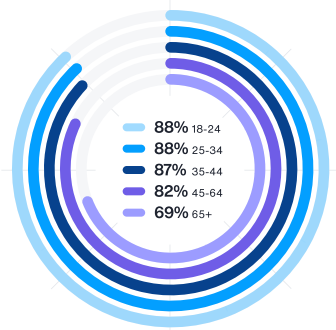More likely to be planning to renew

Much like resident services, the importance of financial services far exceeds their current availability. For example, only 34% of renters say a renter rewards program is available to them, but 72% say this would be important to them when evaluating a new rental before signing a lease.

In a competitive rental market, offering financial services is an effective way to differentiate yourself and fill vacancies faster.

Availability of financial services versus importance

● Availability　● Importance

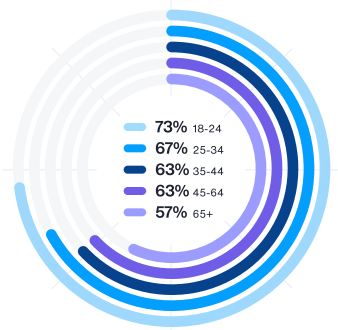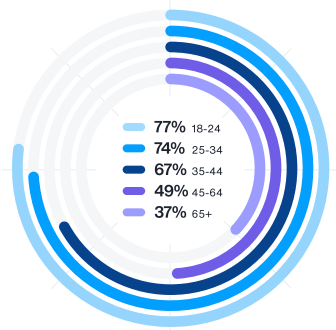|	Online rent payments	Security deposit alternatives	Flexible rent	Renter rewards program	Rent reporting program
Availability	77%	41%	46%	34%	53%
Importance	86%	65%	69%	72%	73%

Importance of financial services, by age

Since younger renters also place more importance on these financial services, we can expect the importance of these services to grow even more over time as more Gen Zers leave the nest and form renter households.
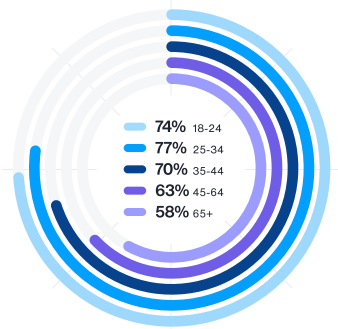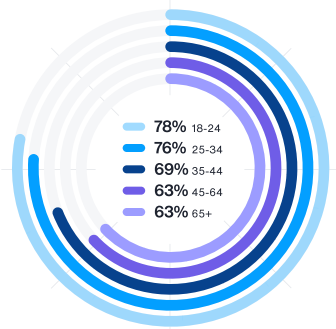

88% 18-24
88% 25-34
87% 35-44
82% 45-64
69% 65+

Online rent payments

73% 18-24
67% 25-34
63% 35-44
63% 45-64
57% 65+

Security deposit alternatives

77% 18-24
74% 25-34
67% 35-44
49% 45-64
37% 65+

Flexible rent

74% 18-24
77% 25-34
70% 35-44
63% 45-64
58% 65+

Renter rewards program


78% 18-24
76% 25-34
69% 35-44
63% 45-64
63% 65+

Rent reporting program

A further indication that the importance of these services will continue to grow is that current users already view them as more essential than non-users. This suggests that as adoption rises, so will the perceived value over time. Offering these services before they become the expected norm provides a competitive advantage for property managers.

Satisfaction rate, users versus non-users

Users   Non-users

	Online rent payments	Security deposit alternatives	Flexible rent	Renter rewards program	Rent reporting program
Users	94%	88%	92%	92%	93%
Non-users	75%	52%	57%	65%	62%
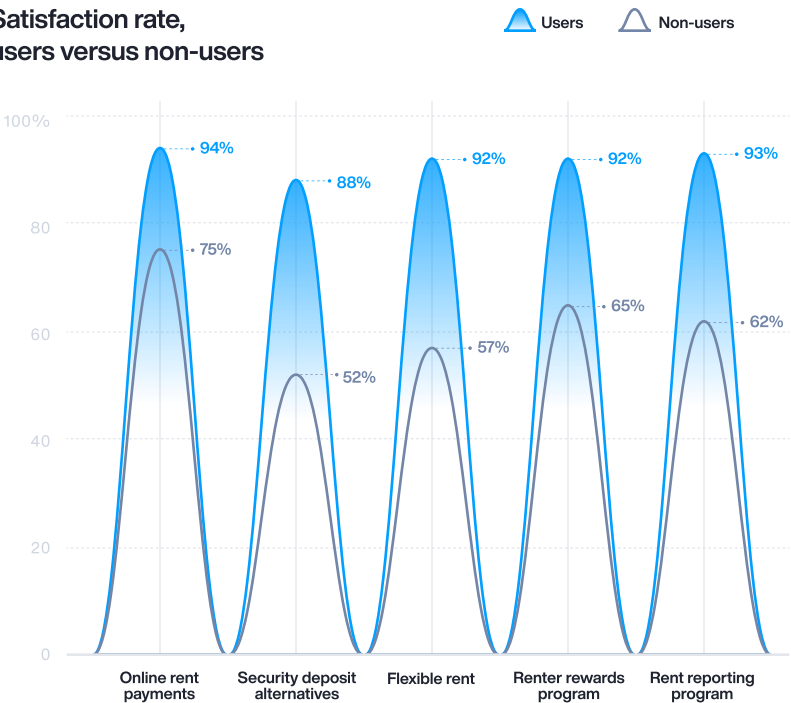
Offering renters greater flexibility and meaningful benefits around rent payments not only improves their satisfaction — it also delivers tangible advantages for property managers, including more consistent on-time payments and efficiency gains from faster payment processing.
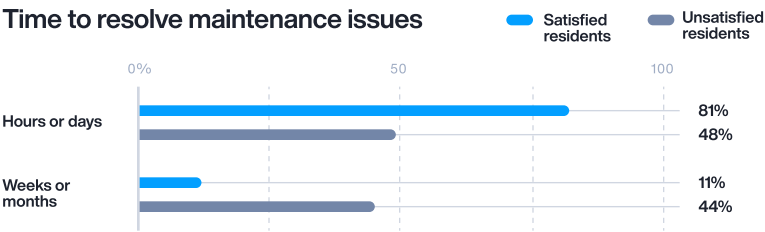
The Importance of Maintenance

Maintenance has long been recognized as one of the most significant factors in resident satisfaction.

Our survey found that residents who are satisfied with maintenance are nearly 80% more likely to be satisfied with their property manager, 146% more likely to recommend their property manager, and 71% more likely to be planning to renew.
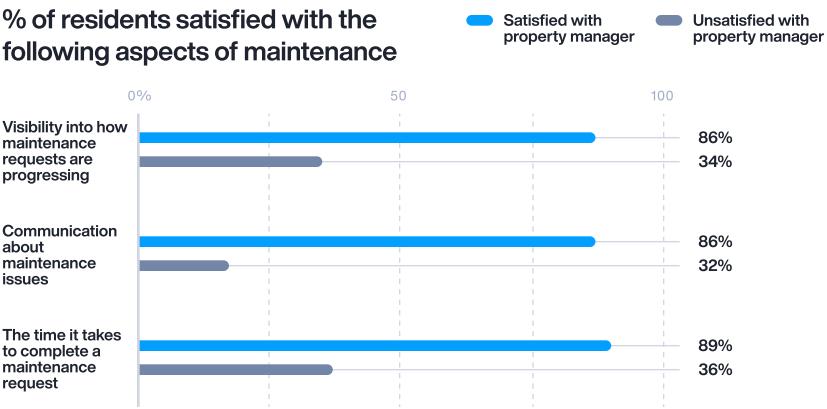
Renters who are satisfied with maintenance are ...

79%
more likely to be satisfied with their property manager

146%
more likely to recommend their property manager

38%
less likely to be planning to move

71%
more likely to be planning to renew
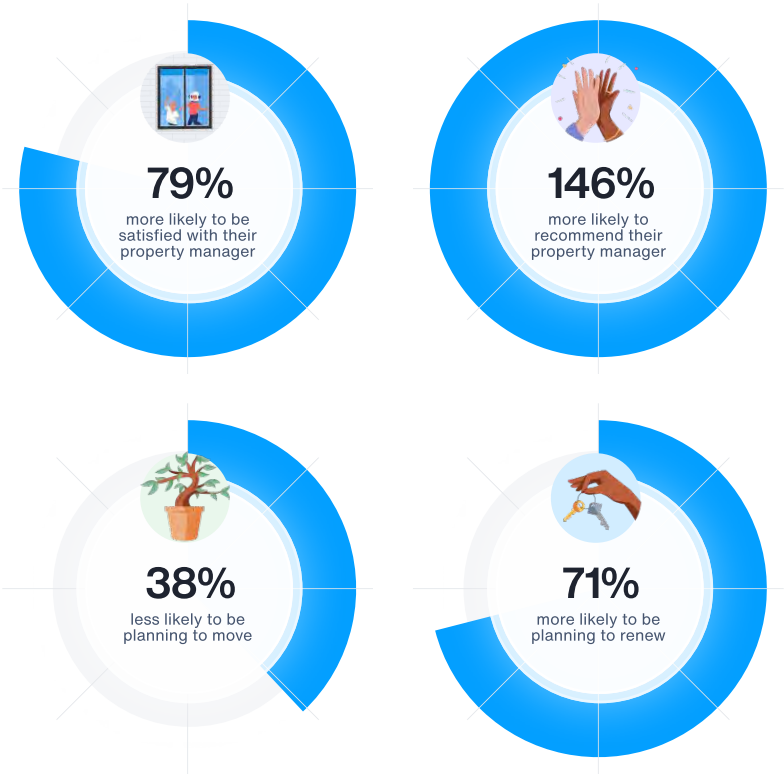
When asked how long it typically takes to resolve a maintenance issue, satisfied and unsatisfied residents gave very different answers about the wait times they experienced. Eighty-one percent of satisfied residents reported issues being resolved in a matter of hours or days. On the other hand, 44% of unsatisfied renters reported that issues took weeks or months to be resolved. This suggests the longer a resident waits for maintenance tasks to be completed, the less satisfied they tend to be with their property manager.

Time to resolve maintenance issues

● Satisfied residents   ● Unsatisfied residents

Hours or days		81%
		48%
Weeks or months		11%
		44%

Although resolving issues quickly is important, transparency and communication around these issues is also essential. For example, 86% of renters who are satisfied with communication about maintenance issues are also satisfied with their property manager, but only 32% of residents who are unsatisfied with maintenance communication are satisfied with their property manager. Another important aspect of effective maintenance communication is providing renters with the visibility they need into the progress of their work orders and when they can expect resolution.

% of residents satisfied with the following aspects of maintenance

● Satisfied with property manager   ● Unsatisfied with property manager

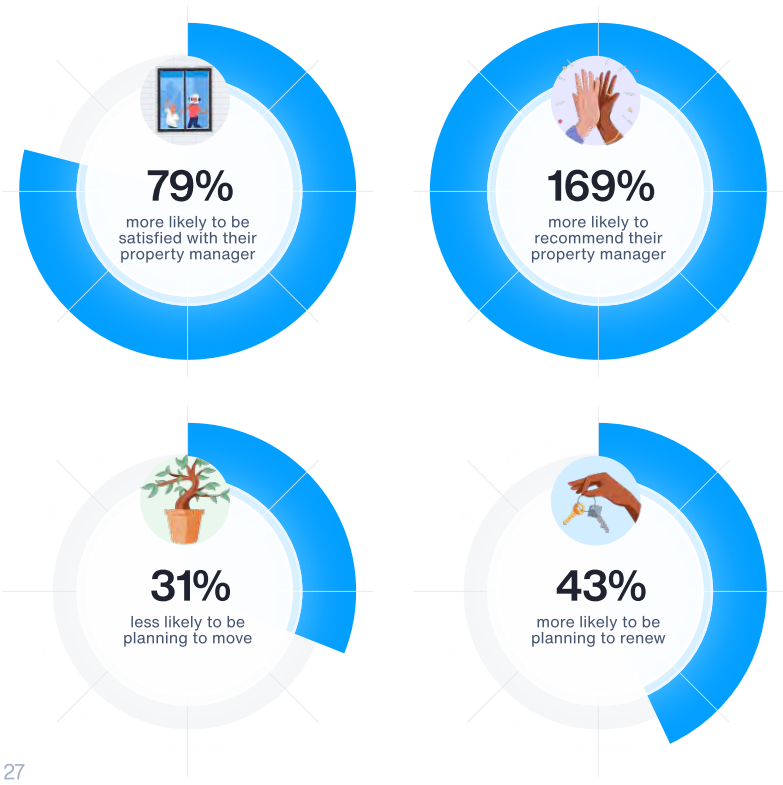|		
Visibility into how maintenance requests are progressing		86%
		34%
Communication about maintenance issues		86%
		32%
The time it takes to complete a maintenance request		89%
		36%

Clear and timely communication plays a critical role in shaping how renters experience maintenance. This helps build trust and reduce frustration — making communication just as essential as the repair itself. Let's take a closer look at communication's broader role in the resident experience.
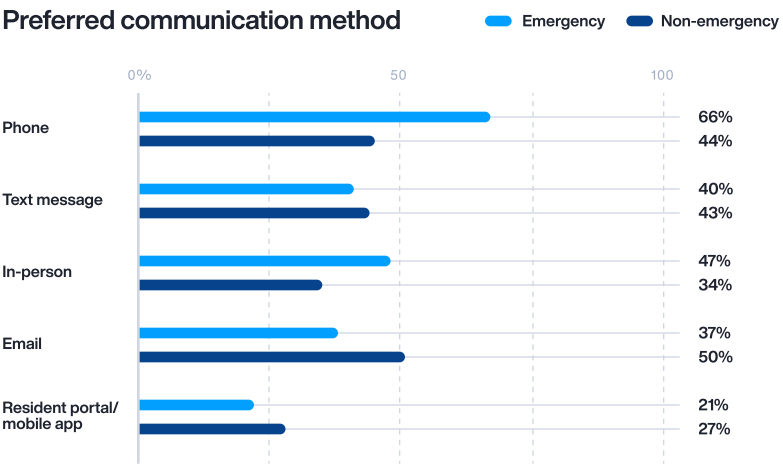
Communication is Key

Along with maintenance (and often closely related to it), communication is the area of property management operations that has the biggest impact on resident satisfaction as well as the likelihood of a resident recommending their property manager.

Renters who are satisfied with property management communication are ...

79%
more likely to be satisfied with their property manager

169%
more likely to recommend their property manager

31%
less likely to be planning to move

43%
more likely to be planning to renew

Satisfaction is not simply about the amount of communication that takes place but also about the methods of communication that renters and property managers use to connect. Therefore, it's important to understand resident communication preferences. The survey found that in emergencies, residents overwhelmingly prefer phone communication. In non-emergency situations, preferences are more diffuse.

Preferred communication method

● Emergency   ● Non-emergency

Method	0%	50	100	Emergency	Non-emergency
Phone				66%	44%
Text message				40%	43%
In-person				47%	34%
Email				37%	50%
Resident portal/ mobile app				21%	27%

Communication — especially when it is timely, thoughtful, and aligned with resident preferences — is crucial in shaping the resident experience. Effective communication helps property managers build stronger relationships, improve renewals, increase referrals, and run more responsive, efficient operations.
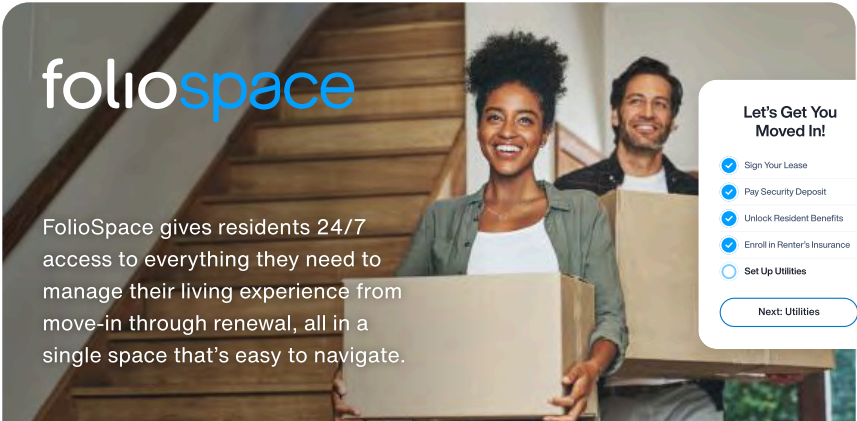
Staying Competitive in a Renter's Market

Rising vacancies and increased competition have pushed concern about occupancy rates to the forefront for many property managers.

Ensuring a positive renter experience has grown in importance. Technology solutions can play an important role in helping achieve this.

While features such as online maintenance requests, digital payments, and text messaging are table stakes for any property management technology platform, AppFolio takes resident satisfaction to the next level, and it begins even before the renter moves into their new home.

foliospace

FolioSpace gives residents 24/7 access to everything they need to manage their living experience from move-in through renewal, all in a single space that's easy to navigate.

Let's Get You Moved In!

- ✓ Sign Your Lease
- ✓ Pay Security Deposit
- ✓ Unlock Resident Benefits
- ✓ Enroll in Renter's Insurance
- ○ Set Up Utilities

Next: Utilities

Online Applications

With the convenience of online rental applications, you can convert more prospects to renters and streamline your leasing process. Your future residents will recognize your elevated service from the start as they easily complete and submit applications from anywhere and on any device.

Resident Services by Second Nature

Offer a collection of essential services through our strategic partnership with Second Nature that can be seamlessly bundled into each lease, providing residents with additional convenience and property managers with a new recurring revenue stream.

Resident Onboarding

Say hello to hassle-free move-ins. A configurable move-in checklist with built-in concierge support allows residents to complete key move-in tasks in FolioSpace with ease. Meanwhile, a fully integrated move-in dashboard provides you with real-time visibility and control needed to give each resident an onboarding experience that feels uniquely tailored to them.

While an efficient move-in process is essential, resident satisfaction requires ongoing attention. Modern renters have heightened expectations — as we learned earlier, 71% consider bundled add-on services important when evaluating potential rentals. Yet only 42% report having access to such offerings.

This gap represents a prime opportunity for forward-thinking property managers to distinguish themselves from their competitors and establish value early in the resident relationship by providing the convenient, integrated services today's renters clearly desire.

We've partnered with Second Nature to make move-in and day-to-day living easier. With this strategic partnership, property managers can give residents access to a suite of in-demand resident services — such as air-filter delivery, pest control, credit-building programs, group-rate internet, and rewards — all integrated within the AppFolio platform.

Ready to See How AppFolio Can Transform Your Resident Experience?

Visit appfolio.com to sign up for a customized demo to see how much of an edge AppFolio can offer in the ever-changing rental environment.

appfolio