

Leveraging College and University Housing for Newcomer Welcoming



Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Benefits of College & University Housing	3
Possible Housing Partnership Models	4
Discounted Housing through Traditional Residential Agreements	4
Traditional Residential Agreement and Assistance with Services	4
Co-Sponsorship or Community Partnership	4
Every Campus a Refuge (ECAR)	4
Steps to Implement a College/University Housing Program	5
What to Include in a College/University Housing Residential Agreement or MOU	6

This Best Practice document is written for refugee resettlement agencies and their housing partners nationwide. It draws primarily on the experience and learning of the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and acknowledges other successes like the ones achieved by the Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC) and World Learning, Inc., among others.

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www.refugeehousing.org

Introduction

America's affordable housing crisis continues to unfold as housing shortages and rising rents persist across the nation. As a result, creative solutions to housing must be created in order to house the 125,000 newcomers arriving to the United States in fiscal year 2023 (October 1, 2022 to September 30, 2023).

To help address the housing challenges faced by refugee resettlement agencies, some are partnering with higher education institutions that have housing available to meet the needs of some newcomers — either temporarily or longer term.

Benefits of College & University Housing

Colleges and universities may have dorm rooms or suites, faculty, staff, and graduate student housing, or other housing close to their campuses that are not used at full capacity or not used at all during summer, or, in some cases, throughout the year.

How on or near-campus housing can be mutually beneficial to refugee newcomers and colleges/universities

Refugees and other newcomers

- Newcomers need a safe, secure, and affordable place to stay temporarily before finding permanent housing after arrival in the U.S. Housing provided by higher education institutions can meet resettlement agency requirements for housing safety.
- The costs of temporary housing in hotels, Airbnbs, Vacation Rentals by Owner (VBR), etc., are relatively high and can drain newcomers' limited cash assistance before permanent housing is secured. Newcomers who can stay on a campus at a low cost (vs. hotels, etc.) will save money while they search for permanent housing.
- College and university communities, both on campus and nearby towns/cities, can provide additional support — material and human — to newcomers, too.

Colleges and universities

- By offering low-cost housing to newcomers, colleges and universities can bring in additional income. With low-cost or even free housing — and in line with institutional missions — higher education institutions provide a cross-cultural education and exposure to students, faculty, and staff while helping newcomers in their community who need welcome and support, especially housing.

Possible Housing Partnership Models

Depending on the interest, needs, and capacity of education institutions and resettlement agencies, there are a variety of options for housing partnerships, from discounted housing through a traditional residential agreement to co-sponsorship or community partnerships. Partnership arrangements are diverse, and hybrid models are also possible.

Discounted Housing through Traditional Residential Agreements

Some higher education institutions may be interested in offering available campus housing to newcomers at a discount, or even offering housing for free. This arrangement can reduce temporary housing costs and ensure stability for newcomers during initial resettlement. In this model, a partnership between the resettlement agency and the institution is formed through the execution of a traditional residential agreement. For example, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) formalized agreements with the University of Maryland, College Park and Notre Dame de Namur University in Belmont, California to secure 10 college apartments as temporary housing for newcomers in 2022.

Traditional Residential Agreement and Assistance with Services

In addition to discounted housing, some higher education institutions may be interested in assisting with other services to refugees and other newcomers. This will vary by institutions and program capacity, program needs, and identified service gaps. Services such as enrolling newcomers in English classes and cultural orientation, or even employment, are possible with higher education institutions' engagement. In all of the IRC's and others' college housing partnerships, the universities provided services in addition to housing.

Co-Sponsorship or Community Partnership

Another model for collaboration with higher education institutions that resettlement agencies can consider is co-sponsorship or community partnership. In this model, higher education institutions become official resettlement agency co-sponsors or community partners to support agencies with core service delivery and provide temporary housing to newcomers free of charge for a set period of time. In some instances, colleges have enrolled newcomers in regularly scheduled classes. For example, as part of a co-sponsorship program with the IRC, Arizona State University (ASU) sponsored 67 students from Afghanistan in 2021 as they started to rebuild their lives in Arizona. ASU provided students with housing, meals, scholarships, and additional support, enabling some to continue their education at ASU campus while they and their families settled in.

Every Campus a Refuge (ECAR)

A partnership facilitated by Every Campus a Refuge (ECAR) is also a college housing partnership model. ECAR is a nonprofit organization with a mission to "mobilize colleges and universities to host refugees on campus grounds and support them in their resettlement" (Source: [ECAR](#)). Education institutions and resettlement agencies may be interested in partnering but are not familiar with each other's processes and services. ECAR's involvement

can help connect refugee resettlement agencies with colleges and universities interested in housing refugees on campus and helping in their initial resettlement. ECAR's introduction and facilitation of conversations between resettlement agencies and education institutions help both parties come together, find mutual ground, and resolve concerns to form a meaningful housing partnership for newcomers. Colleges and universities can join ECAR to become an ECAR Campus or an ECAR Chapter and access ECAR resources and training.

Steps to Implement a College/University Housing Program

- Determine your need. Are you only seeking housing for newcomers, or would you like the college or university to also provide some core services such as cultural orientation, food (some meals), employment support, or direct employment, etc.
- Identify colleges or universities in your area that could be a good fit for your needs.
- Reach out to key personnel, such as president, provost, vice president, chief enrollment officer, chief financial officer, et al. who could be instrumental in securing this partnership. As appropriate, meet with as many key personnel as necessary to determine the institutions' level of interest.
- But, before meeting campus personnel, prepare a proposal to introduce your organization's mission and the resettlement process. Clearly state your needs and timelines. Also outline (1) the services your organization provides to support newcomers and share key staff names, titles, and contact information, and (2) the roles and expectations for each party.
- If there is real interest, tour the available housing — dormitory rooms or suites, on campus apartments or townhouses, or off campus housing — to ensure that the options meet the needs of newcomers as well as housing standards and safety requirements for.
 - Determine what housing types will be the best for your clients and further assess what the college or university can offer.
- When key personnel agree to move forward, discuss and agree next steps. It is possible additional approvals will be needed before a decision is formalized. The college or university will most likely require a formal agreement, or a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), drafted by the institution's legal department. This process will vary, but there will be time needed for reviews, edits, negotiations, and document finalization before moving forward.
 - As a possible addendum for the MOU, prepare a resident/house rules list and a campus and housing orientation so newcomers know what to expect. Keep in mind that your partnering institution may have its housing rules that it prefers to use. The rules and orientation will prepare newcomers for their new life on a college campus and reduce potential conflicts and property management issues.

- Finally, be sure to prepare transition plans for moving newcomers from campus to their permanent housing — if the agreement is for temporary housing. Be prepared to talk through the process to help newcomers make another transition in rebuilding their lives in the U.S in their next housing journey.

What to Include in a College/University Housing Residential Agreement or MOU

Each college or university housing partnership is unique. The education institution and your organization will work together to develop a unique residential agreement or MOU with terms specifically for your partnership as agreed by the institution and your organization. In preparing your agreement or MOU, the following key components are usually included. This is not an exhaustive list of components and there could be unique features in your partnership that also need to be included in your agreement or MOU. The information provided in this section or in other parts of this article does not and is not intended to constitute legal advice. Please consult with an attorney when working on an agreement or MOU.

- **Costs and Term:** As applicable, ensure all costs, including utilities, and payment methods are included in the agreement as well as timelines (term) and move-out expectations.
- **Housing Use:** The educational institution may outline very specific use of its housing and the number of units to be included in the agreement.
- **Property Management Responsibilities:** Be sure to discuss property management with the institution and specify property management roles and responsibilities in the agreement.
 - If the institution is responsible for property management, know how to reach the main point of contact, especially for emergencies, and to what extent the institution, or the tenant/resettlement agency, is responsible for repairs, cleaning, etc.
- **Insurance and Liability:** Consider all possible liabilities and outline concerns with the institution before signing an agreement. For example, the institution may require newcomers to have renters insurance at a minimum coverage prior to move-in and may also have specific requirements for the amount and types of liability or other insurance your organization carries.
- **Use of Non-Housing Campus Facilities and Class Enrollment:** Discuss and agree with the institution whether newcomers residing on or near campus can access other campus facilities and/or enroll in classes. Ensure those details are included in the agreement.
 - Plan to discuss these details with newcomers during their orientation.

- **Service and Information Provision:** Include details of (1) services your organization will provide to newcomers and (2) information your organization will provide to the education institution. If the institution is also providing services, include their details, coordination, and communication procedures, as applicable.
- **Notice, Default, Damages, and Termination:** The MOU or agreement must also include details on methods of notices for both parties, contact personnel, penalties and remedies for defaults, if any, and responsibilities for property damages, and termination procedures.

If you have any questions about using college or university housing temporarily or even long-term for refugees and other newcomers, or if you have ideas and successes to share, please contact info@refugeehousing.org.

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