



Refugee Housing
SOLUTIONS



Best Practices for Resettlement Agencies

- ◆ Forming Local Government Partnerships to House Newcomers

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).

Refugees and many newcomers to the U.S. leave their home countries for different reasons. Almost all their reasons are rooted in escaping harm or conflict. Newcomers arrive in the U.S. seeking safety and the opportunity to rebuild their lives. As a first step upon reaching the U.S. during their resettlement journey, finding secure and stable housing lays the foundation for newcomers' successful integration and long-term self-sufficiency. In many U.S. cities and towns, local government involvement in this process is key to finding safe, decent, and affordable housing for recently arrived newcomers.

By understanding the nuanced challenges newcomers face, creating policies to address their unique needs, and fostering an environment of inclusivity, many local U.S. governments have the power to help shelter and empower these communities. Resettlement Agencies across the U.S. can benefit from partnering with local governments for housing and other support to newcomers.

To form an official partnership, you must identify key local government leadership personnel, such as Mayor, County Commissioners, City Manager, Director of Housing Department with the city or county governments, etc. You will also need to develop outreach strategies to secure meetings to discuss collaboration. Keep in mind that formalizing a partnership with local government will likely take a significant time investment and many meetings, emails, and phone calls that may not identify housing resources right away but are essential in securing government support to benefit resettling refugees and other newcomers.

This document explores local government partnerships with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) to help house and empower recently arrived newcomers and assist them in their adjustment to life in the U.S. The IRC then suggests how other resettlement agencies might form similar partnerships.

Step 1: Identify the task, roles and relevant colleagues needed to advocate for newcomers' housing support.

Identifying who among your colleagues is the point person for government outreach for partnering and newcomer inclusive initiatives is key. Often there is a designated position, or a leadership team member is the primary stakeholder for government partnership-building efforts. Either way, talk with your supervisor to ensure you are following office protocol.

If you have an advocacy, government relations coordinator, or a similar role in your local office, connect with them to learn about processes and protocols for establishing a government partnership. You will also want to know if your agency already has connections or initiative on which to build.

If you do not have a role like this in your office, speak with your supervisor or leadership team to get a better understanding of what the process can be and if, and how, you can engage.

Step 2: Identify specific housing resources and opportunities that can – through a local government partnership – help meet newcomers needs and address their challenges in finding housing.

The housing market varies across the U.S., and different locations will have different housing challenges. Identifying your market's specific housing opportunities as well as challenges will help define your exact engagement strategy. To ensure you are not asking your local government for support or resources that already exist, research the existing resources in your area. [Review this article](#) to learn more about public housing and other housing programs in your area. Once your research is done, examples of your suggestions and ideas for your local government might include these:

- **Policy development** for inclusive housing protocols that align with national refugee resettlement goals and set guidelines for housing quality, safety, and affordability.
- **Resource and financial support** such as grants, emergency funding, and additional funding for existing local housing programs from which local residents and newcomers alike can benefit. This includes making it possible for newcomers to enroll in existing local housing programs while also leveraging community support and volunteer efforts to ensure newcomers settle well in their new communities.
- **Collaborate with local housing providers** by reaching out to and encouraging individual landlords and large rental property managers to rent to newcomers with favorable lease terms as well as some understanding of the newcomer journey.
- **Additional services that support newcomer resettlement** through existing or new programs such as English language classes, job search assistance, childcare support, and connection to other local groups to join for mutual support and benefit.

Step 3: Identify the task, roles and relevant colleagues needed to advocate for newcomers' housing support.

External stakeholders who can help advocate for your housing needs will include:

- Elected officials not directly responsible for housing policy and practice, including those responsible for education and health.
- Other nonprofit organizations, including those working with newcomers as well as others that might be interested to join your efforts
- Affordable housing agencies and networks
- Refugee and newcomer community leaders and other community leaders interested in inclusivity.
- Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) field office and Continuums of Care (CoC) staff.

Participating in city, town, and community meetings can help identify key external stakeholders who will be helpful in designing and executing your government partnership plans. Joining such meetings will help you know who is interested in:

- Open dialogue during which you will have a chance to inform the public about newcomer housing needs
- Building awareness and support for refugee housing initiatives in, and
- Networking fosters collaboration and partnerships.

As noted at the beginning of these suggestions, having an effective partnership with local government is time-consuming, with many and varied interactions that may immediately identify newcomers housing resources. But the complexities are the reality, and investing time and effort in securing government partners is essential for success.

Government and Resettlement Agency Partnership Examples from the IRC: Temporary and Permanent Housing

Temporary Housing: King County Temporary Housing Facility in Response to Afghanistan Evacuation

Location: Seattle, WA

Resettlement Agency: The IRC in Seattle

Government Partnership: King County Department of Community and Human Services, Washington State Dept. of Social and Health Services (DSHS), the City of Redmond

In September of 2021, King County Department of Community and Human Services, and the Washington State DSHS worked with IRC Seattle to provide a recently purchased 'Health Through Housing' hotel and staffing in Federal Way, Washington, with 90 rooms as a temporary housing facility in response to the Afghan evacuation. The project included seven months of free meals and language assistance. In April 2022, through a partnership with the City of Redmond, the temporary housing operation moved to the former Silver Cloud Hotel, a Redmond Health Through Housing building and welcomed refugees until December 2022. Throughout the duration of this project, nearly 800 Afghan newcomers were provided with temporary housing, meals, and language assistance. With the average timeline from temporary to permanent housing being 60 days during Afghan evacuation responses, an estimated more than \$2 million was saved in temporary housing expenses from this partnership.

Permanent Housing: Partnership with the City of Wichita to implement a Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8) Referral Program

Location: Wichita, KS

Resettlement Agency: The IRC in Wichita

Government Partnership: City of Wichita (Mayor, Mayor's Office, City of Wichita Housing)

One of the housing challenges low-income newcomers encounter in the U.S. is continuing access to affordable rental units over the long run. IRC Wichita advocated and negotiated with the City of Wichita to include a "Refugee Referral" for Housing Choice Vouchers (Section 8) to help newcomers receive housing assistance in a timely manner. The referral program started with a conversation with the Mayor's Office, where IRC staff members advocated for assistance with clients obtaining Housing Choice Vouchers, where processing times can take several months before receiving a decision. Approval for Housing Choice Vouchers provides long-term rent sustainability for low-income newcomer families. Since the implementation of this program, the IRC resettlement staff in Wichita have noticed a more streamlined application process due to a better understanding of newcomers documents and processes. Since the beginning of this partnership, 11 newcomer families resettled by the IRC in Wichita have benefited from this initiative.

By partnering with the local government agencies, the IRC expanded housing options in temporary housing and permanent housing for newcomers. Resettlement agencies can pursue many different forms of partnerships with government agencies, from leveraging resources available through existing government housing programs, applying for grants to implement housing services, and partnering with government agencies to implement new, innovative solutions. These partnerships benefit newcomers through new housing options and improved housing services, providing new pathways for longer-term housing stability.

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