

# Best Practices for Hotel Partnerships to House Refugees and Other Newcomers



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*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).*

**NOTE:** “Hotel” will be used throughout this document for all properties, including motels, rooming houses, and other short-term lodging properties.

# Introduction

As the housing market in the U.S. remains tight, resettlement agencies across the U.S. are tasked with housing an unprecedented number of refugees, humanitarian parolees, and other newcomers to the U.S. In 2023, the number is approaching 125,000, and in 2024, at least that many newcomers are expected. A variety of factors — a very limited supply of affordable housing, high and increasing rents, low rental property vacancy rates, landlord credit and employment verification requirements, and short arrival notices — are causing newcomers to spend more time than has historically been the case in temporary housing while they wait for permanent housing in a new home that lays a foundation to begin a new life.

Hotels provide a safe and well-maintained place for initial newcomer resettlement while they await permanent housing. But at an average of \$150 per night, after tax and fees, hotel costs can total \$1,000 a week. Partnerships with hotels and hotel booking platforms can help limit the cost of temporary housing and improve logistics when hotels must be used.

IRC has built several successful relationships with hotel franchises across the U.S. to provide hotel rooms at discounted rates to the newcomers the IRC welcomes. In this document, the IRC shares its experience and best practices for hotel partnerships.

## Benefits of Hotel Partnerships for Temporary Housing

- Using hotels that meet Federal government housing standards for resettlement programs ensures a modestly comfortable and safe living environment for newcomers while they await permanent housing.
- Formal partnerships help reduce temporary housing costs because they offer discounts and
  - improve booking, logistics, and billing
  - help ensure positive and clear communication between hotel staff and newcomers, and
  - reduce misunderstandings, or even conflicts, that arise due to miscommunications.
- Further, hotels
  - are often conveniently located near services, amenities, and essentials newcomers need, like public transportation, employment opportunities, grocery/drug stores, etc.
  - facilitate easy access to services if resettlement agency staff can set up an on-site office and use meeting rooms for group training and cultural orientations.

# Steps for Pursuing Hotel Partnerships

## PREPARATION

- **Identify your program needs as well as staff capacity and funding required to support hotel partnership(s).**
  - Using anticipated arrivals information, the number of hotel rooms needed to house newcomers awaiting permanent housing can be estimated.
  - Be sure there is agency staff capacity to coordinate and execute agency roles and responsibilities, which must be outlined in a written agreement with the hotel(s).
- **Research hotels and other short-term lodging to identify potential partners.**
  - The availability and quality of hotels, motels, and other short-term lodging will depend on your locality. Prioritize a preliminary, general visit to each property for an initial suitability assessment.
- **Analyze both property and partnership options: What type(s) of lodging and partnership will most benefit newcomers?**

Hotels will likely partner through discounted room rates and/or hotel blocks. The discount will depend on the property and the partnership agreement. Some possible offerings are:

- A discounted room rate based on the cost per room per night.
  - A room block discounted at a total price for a set number of rooms.
  - Donated hotel reward points that are redeemed for newcomer stays at any of the hotel properties throughout the U.S. NOTE: Deals like this and any protocols for them must be negotiated separately.
- **After analysis of financial and other benefits, e.g., how positive the hotel management is about the partnership, write a proposal and reach out to hotel management.**
    - Schedule a meeting to discuss proposal details and answer hotel management questions.
    - Visit several rooms to assess suitability for newcomers and tour the hotel to ensure the space meets newcomers, program, and governmental / funder requirements.
      - » This is the time to ask about the possibility and costs(s) of using conference rooms for education/training sessions and for an agency satellite office.

## NEGOTIATING & EXECUTING AN AGREEMENT

- **Coordinate with relevant national headquarters colleagues** in the case that hotel management requires partnership discussions to include national resettlement agency staff to start negotiations, join them, and/or approve them once drafted.
  - When a hotel that meets newcomer, program, and agency needs is identified, and the hotel's management is interested to move forward — and even if a national-level partnership agreement will be required — start to discuss and negotiate details of the partnership with the local hotel management staff.
  - Agreed partnership terms and conditions can be included in a memorandum of understanding (MOU) or another agreement document. Important points to discuss and include are these:
    - Key points of contact names and mobile phone numbers as well as email addresses.
    - Clearly defined roles and responsibilities of hotel management/staff, resettlement agency staff, other social service providers if they will be using hotel facilities, and — importantly — newcomers who are hotel guests.
    - The terms of the agreement can include discounted room rates, room block costs, and/or hotel reward points' use, as well as the occupancy limits for each room.
    - If the hotel rooms do not have kitchenettes, ask if providing basic kitchen appliances like a toaster oven, electric kettle, hot plate, or microwave oven is permissible so newcomers can prepare food in their rooms.
      - » Include this information explicitly in the agreement and information for newcomer hotel guests.
    - Possible additional requirements, such as additional insurance.
      - » Clarify what additional insurance is needed and who is responsible for securing and paying for it.
    - List other hotel space/facilities' access for resettlement and social service agency staff and clients (hotel guests) to use, such as conference rooms, office space, etc.
    - Agreement on what information/instructions newcomer hotel guests will receive about
      - » their roles and responsibilities
      - » basic kitchen appliances allowed or not allowed in individual rooms.
      - » services available, e.g., housekeeping, maintenance, laundry, common kitchen(s), athletic and leisure facilities\*, and service restrictions, if any.
- \* Depending on the property and the agreement, clarify access and restrictions to property-owned pools, hot tubs, etc., and provide detailed safety training and education to clients to ensure safety and mitigate risks.*

- Also add these details:
  - Partnership duration as well as extension or termination terms and conditions.
  - Discounted room rate(s) and booking processes, such as a special web link or a discount code.
  - Billing processes
  - Logistic coordination, especially for check-in/arrivals and check-out/departures.

**Once an MOU or other agreement document is drafted, have your agency's legal counsel/team vet the document for compliance with agency protocols for legal agreements before signing and finalizing.**

## ADDITIONAL PROTOCOLS

**These are a few more considerations for service provision, security, and communications.**

- Establish safety and security protocols to keep all newcomers, especially children, safe while living in hotels as temporary housing.
- Ensure the newcomers know whom to contact and how to contact if they need non-urgent safety-related assistance. All emergencies should be directed to 911.
  - Provide safety and security training with translation and a translated version of written safety materials to newcomers.

**Also, make plans to:**

- Create communication materials to educate hotel staff and newcomers about each other, such as a Frequently Asked Questions document and/or fact sheet for
  - **hotel staff** to improve their understanding of resettlement services and newcomers,
  - **newcomers** to make hotel rules clear, especially dos and don'ts while staying in a hotel.
- Communicate and coordinate with hotel staff and newcomers to ensure everyone knows each other's roles and responsibilities.
- In addition to other support, e.g., health care appointments, English classes, and document updates have regular check-ins with newcomers to see how they are adjusting and if any changes need to be made to their temporary housing situation.
  - Develop backup plans to be prepared to move newcomers to different housing if there are safety, health, or other concerns — for all newcomers in the hotel and for hotel staff.

## Conclusion

By leveraging hotel partnerships, temporary housing can be secured quickly at discount rates, with streamlined booking and billing processes, and in consideration of the welcome, well-being, and initial integration of the newcomers while they await permanent housing. Hotel or other lodging partnerships can also streamline housing logistics, communications, and service delivery coordination, which can help offset challenges commonly associated with temporary housing.

*If you have any questions about using hotels for temporarily housing refugees and other newcomers, or if you have ideas/successes to share, contact [info@refugeehousing.org](mailto:info@refugeehousing.org).*

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