

Refugee Housing
SOLUTIONS

Engaging Landlords

Fostering Understanding and Compassion

cwsglobal.org | refugeehousing.org

Refugee Housing Solutions is a project of CWS under an agreement paid for by the U.S. Department of State.

Introduction



In the summer of 2024, the Refugee Housing Solutions (RHS) team conducted a comprehensive survey of landlords and housing providers to better understand the key concerns they face when considering renting to newcomers. The survey revealed six major areas of hesitation, reflecting challenges around communication, cultural differences, and perceived risks.

This presentation aims to provide actionable guidance for housing advocates and caseworkers on how to address these concerns with empathy, understanding, and clear communication. By fostering trust and offering solutions to these common issues, we can help create more housing opportunities for newcomers.

Purpose and Goals



Purpose:

The purpose of this resource is to equip individuals seeking housing for refugees and newcomers with effective strategies to engage housing providers. By approaching concerns with compassion and providing clear information, we aim to strengthen relationships between housing providers and refugee-serving organizations.

Goals:

- Educate stakeholders on the major concerns landlords have about renting to newcomers.
- Offer best practices for addressing these concerns in a way that fosters trust and mutual understanding.
- Encourage a compassionate, solution-oriented approach to landlord outreach and engagement.

In the anonymous **Landlord Incentive Survey**, RHS asked housing providers to share their thoughts on renting to refugees. A key question was:

"Do you have any general or specific concerns when vetting a potential tenant who is a refugee?"

The responses have highlighted six recurring concerns that landlords shared when considering renting to newcomers.

Real-Time Housing Provider Concerns



Communication
Limits and
Understanding of
Rental Care

Concerns and
Misunderstanding
About Immigration
Practice & Policy

Cultural and Social
Integration

Rental Risk and Tenant
Stability

Tenant Vetting and
Support Services

Safety and Legal
Considerations

Communication and Understanding



Housing Provider Concerns

- Language barriers and limits between housing providers and tenants, i.e., being able to communicate fully.
- Understanding of home care and maintenance, such as cleanliness and property upkeep.

How to Address Concerns

- Assure landlords that language barriers can be overcome through interpreters or other language assistance during application, lease signing, and routine communications.
- Highlight the availability of cultural orientation programs and educational materials that help refugee tenants understand U.S. home care and maintenance expectations.

Communication and Understanding



Talking Point: "We understand the importance of effective communication between landlords and tenants. To address language limits and challenges, we provide interpreter services during lease signings and ongoing communications. This can help ensure that both tenants and housing providers can understand each other."

Action: Coordinate with language service providers or bilingual staff to offer interpretation services for meetings, lease signings, and ongoing communications with refugee tenants.

Utilize innovative technology housing solutions like [Pacto](#), a rental housing platform designed to foster and sustain healthy rental relationships between landlords and refugee tenants.

Safety and Legal Considerations



Housing Provider Concerns

- Criminal background checks and concerns about prior criminal history.
- Verification of income sources and financial stability.
- Ensuring compliance with rental property policies and understanding tenant responsibilities.

How to Address Concerns

- Explain U.S. government screening processes, emphasizing background checks and thorough vetting procedures and orientation done by resettlement staff to help ensure the safety and security of rental properties.
- Offer to provide references or guarantees to address concerns about income verification and financial stability.
- Provide information on tenant education programs that cover U.S. rental rules and practices, tenant responsibilities, and legal rights to ensure compliance and understanding.
- Explain that newcomer tenants have the same rights as other Americans and are protected under the Fair Housing Act.

Safety and Legal Considerations



Talking Point: "Ensuring the safety and security of your rental properties is important to us, too. In addition to the refugee criminal background checks and other screening done by the U.S. Government, refugee resettlement agencies prepare newcomers specifically for the expectations of American rental housing providers -- landlords and apartment complex managers."

Action: Share a handout that explains who different newcomers (e.g., refugees, humanitarian parolees, et al.) are, why they are here, and the screenings they go through when entering the U.S., including criminal background checks, to reassure landlords of the safety and reliability of refugee tenants.

Cultural and Social Integration

Housing Provider Concerns

- Cultural adaptation and following local customs and laws.
- Concerns about cultural differences, or even clashes, affecting other tenants and neighbors.
- Insufficient integration support from resettlement agencies or sponsors.

How to Address Concerns

- Share success stories of newcomers integrating well into communities and emphasize the importance of multi-cultural awareness and mutual respect between tenants, neighbors, and landlords.
- Highlight the support services offered by resettlement agencies or community organizations to facilitate cultural adaptation and to address any potential conflicts or misunderstandings.

Cultural and Social Integration



Talking Point: "Cultural integration is complex, and we are committed to facilitating positive interactions and mutual understanding between newcomer tenants and housing providers. We offer cultural orientation programs and resources to support newcomer tenants in adapting to their new community. We also have information and resources for housing providers."

Action: Organize cultural orientation workshops or events to promote understanding and respect among tenants from diverse backgrounds and housing providers, fostering a sense of community and inclusion. Give tenants the [RHS Tenant Toolkit](#) and other resources for first-time renters, and give housing providers the [RHS Landlord Toolkit](#).

Housing Provider Concerns

- Concerns about early and/or sudden departures or lease breaking.
- Risk management related to damage to the property or non-payment of rent.
- Uncertainty regarding eviction processes and legalities for tenants without SSNs or US IDs.

How to Address Concerns

- Explain the support systems in place to help refugees rent housing and find employment, reducing the risk of early/sudden departures or broken lease.
- Offer assurances that refugee tenants receive cultural orientation, with specific details about lease commitments, timely rent payment, and proper U.S. rental property care responsibilities to mitigate concerns about property damage or lost rent.

Risk and Stability



Talking Point: "We understand the importance of stability for both landlords and tenants. Our support systems include help with renting safe, secure housing and in finding employment, reducing risk of early/sudden departures, or lease-breaking."

Action: If possible, provide housing stabilization services, such as rent assistance, lease co-signing, and/or landlord incentives, to mitigate the risk of tenant turnover and lost rental income, ensuring a mutually beneficial relationship.

Vetting and Support

Housing Provider Concerns

- Perceived challenges in vetting refugees due to their lack of verifiable U.S. tenancy or work history or other qualifications.
- Concern about being responsible for integration and support services, preferring agencies and sponsors to provide that support.

How to Address Concerns

- Give the housing provider information about how agency staff will work with them to ensure proper vetting of newcomer tenants and to offer ongoing support throughout the tenancy.
- Highlight partnerships with social services agencies and/or sponsors to provide additional support services, such as financial assistance, transportation, career readiness training, and job search, to refugee tenants.

Vetting and Support



Talking Point: "We prioritize ongoing support for newcomer tenants to ensure successful tenancies. Our collaboration with community partners allows us to provide comprehensive support services, including financial assistance, career readiness training and job search support."

Action: Strengthen partnerships between resettlement agencies and other local organizations to offer holistic support services to refugee tenants, addressing their housing, employment, and integration needs.

Policy and Immigration Concerns



Housing Provider Concerns

- Views on the current immigration system and concerns about unvetted newcomers
- Desire for better SW border control and immigration reform before considering housing refugees
- Legal impracticalities on accessing credit or criminal history for non-citizen tenants

How to Address Concerns

- Acknowledge concerns about immigration policies and SW border issues while citing the importance of providing housing opportunities to vulnerable people who are coming lawfully to the U.S.
- Offer to engage in dialogue and advocacy to address broader immigration issues while focusing on the immediate housing needs of refugees in the community.
- Reiterate the commitment to complying with fair housing laws and regulations while advocating for comprehensive immigration reform.

Policy and Immigration Concerns



Talking Point: "While we understand concerns about immigration policies and our Southwest border issues, our focus is on addressing the immediate housing needs of vulnerable individuals and families already in our community. We are committed to complying with fair housing laws and regulations while advocating for comprehensive immigration reform."

Action: Engage in community outreach and advocacy efforts to raise awareness about refugee housing needs and advocate for policies that support refugee resettlement and integration, while respecting fair housing principles.

Building Trust: Empathy-Driven Conversations

- **Actively Listen:** Listen attentively to their concerns without interrupting or judging. Reflect back to show understanding.
- **Validate Feelings:** Acknowledge their emotions behind their opinions, expressing empathy even if you disagree.
- **Seek Common Ground:** Identify shared values like safety or fairness to build rapport and find areas of agreement.
- **Ask Open-Ended Questions:** Encourage deeper conversation by asking questions that invite reflection, avoiding confrontational assumptions.
- **Share Personal Stories:** Humanize the issue but sharing personal anecdotes related to immigration, fostering empathy.
- **Stay Calm and Respectful:** Avoid personal attacks and focus on a productive dialogue.
- **Find Opportunities for Education:** Offer factual information to address misconceptions, sharing reputable sources for an informed perspective.

Conclusion



Fostering Long-Term Partnerships

Building trust and fostering understanding between landlords and refugee-serving organizations is essential for expanding housing opportunities for newcomers. By addressing landlord concerns with empathy, clarity, and solutions, we can create more sustainable and compassionate housing arrangements.

Key Takeaways:

- Understand landlord concerns and respond with empathy and facts.
- Approach each conversation with a focus on relationship-building.
- Be prepared to offer support and resources that mitigate concerns.

Resources for Engaging with Landlords



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Fair Housing Act 101

The Fair Housing Act of 1968 is the cornerstone of tenant rights in the United States, designed to protect individuals from discrimination and ensure equal access to affordable housing opportunities. This federal law prohibits discrimination based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status, and disability. It extends protections to tenants and prospective renters, safeguarding their rights throughout the housing process—from application through tenancy and move-out, and even in cases of eviction. This resource provides a comprehensive overview of the rights and protections guaranteed under the Fair Housing Act, offering guidance on navigating the housing landscape, understanding tenant rights, and acting against discriminatory practices.

www.refugeehousing.org

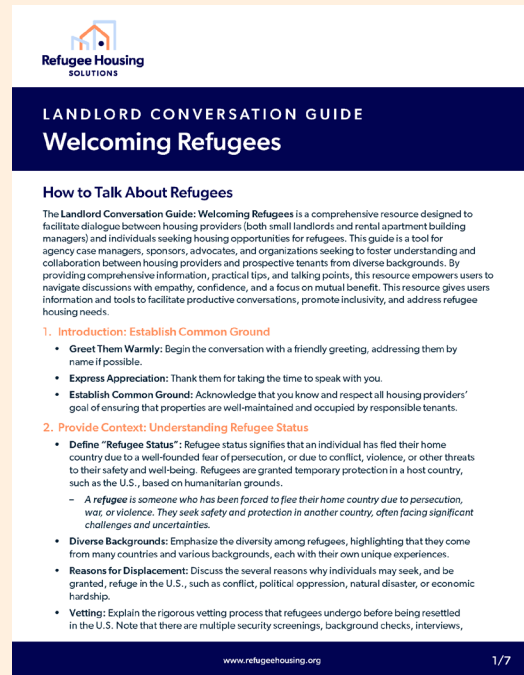
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How to Vet Housing Providers and Properties



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LANDLORD CONVERSATION GUIDE

Welcoming Refugees

How to Talk About Refugees

The Landlord Conversation Guide: Welcoming Refugees is a comprehensive resource designed to facilitate dialogue between housing providers (both small landlords and rental apartment building managers) and individuals seeking housing opportunities for refugees. This guide is a tool for agency case managers, sponsors, advocates, and organizations seeking to foster understanding and collaboration between housing providers and prospective tenants from diverse backgrounds. By providing comprehensive information, practical tips, and talking points, this resource empowers users to navigate discussions with empathy, confidence, and a focus on mutual benefit. This resource gives users information and tools to facilitate productive conversations, promote inclusivity, and address refugee housing needs.

- 1. Introduction: Establish Common Ground**
 - Greet Them Warmly:** Begin the conversation with a friendly greeting, addressing them by name if possible.
 - Express Appreciation:** Thank them for taking the time to speak with you.
 - Establish Common Ground:** Acknowledge that you know and respect all housing providers' goal of ensuring that properties are well-maintained and occupied by responsible tenants.
- 2. Provide Context: Understanding Refugee Status**
 - Define "Refugee Status":** Refugee status signifies that an individual has fled their home country due to a well-founded fear of persecution, or due to conflict, violence, or other threats to their safety and well-being. Refugees are granted temporary protection in a host country, such as the U.S., based on humanitarian grounds.
 - A *refugee* is someone who has been forced to flee their home country due to persecution, war, or violence. They seek safety and protection in another country, often facing significant challenges and uncertainties.
 - Diverse Backgrounds:** Emphasize the diversity among refugees, highlighting that they come from many countries and various backgrounds, each with their own unique experiences.
 - Reasons for Displacement:** Discuss the several reasons why individuals may seek, and be granted, refuge in the U.S., such as conflict, political oppression, natural disaster, or economic hardship.
 - Vetting:** Explain the rigorous vetting process that refugees undergo before being resettled in the U.S. Note that there are multiple security screenings, background checks, interviews,

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Tenant Toolkit



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RESOLVE

Best Practices for Resettlement Agencies Forming Local Government Partnerships to House Newcomers



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Landlord Toolkit



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LANDLORD OPPORTUNITIES: Renting to Newcomers

WHAT IS THE NEED?

The United States is facing a housing crisis. According to recent studies, the market is short 7.4 million affordable housing units. The most affected renters come from vulnerable populations, despite ample financial assistance. This is due to high rental prices, as well as less access to property management companies and landlords due to language, transportation, and other factors.

WHO DO WE SERVE?

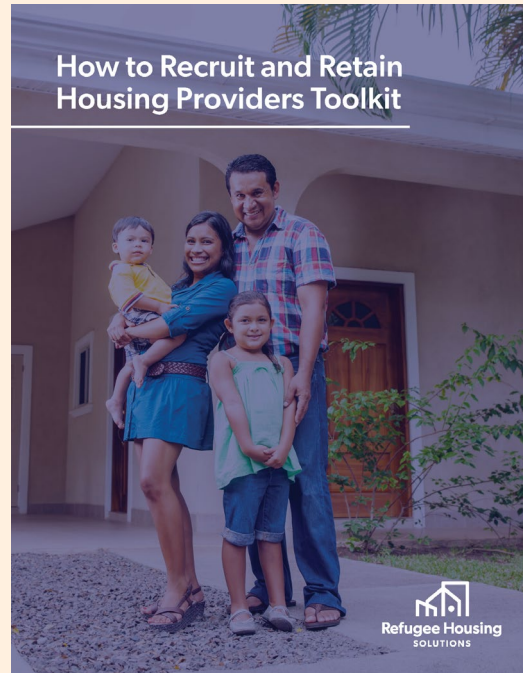
Refugees, Afghan evacuees, and asylum seekers – these individuals all have one major thing in common: they are driven from their home country and unable to return due to fear of persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a social group.

HOW ARE REFUGEES RESETTLED?

Newcomers are assigned to a local resettlement office, which provides them with core services and assists families starting their new lives in the United States. A list of resettlement offices may be found [here](#) in the USRAP Affiliate Directory.

INTERESTED IN RENTING TO A NEWCOMER?

Connect with your local contact for housing to get started!



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How to Recruit and Retain Housing Providers Toolkit