

How to Make Rental Operations Newcomer Friendly

This resource is designed to help housing providers make their rental processes inclusive for refugees and other newcomers. It offers practical strategies to overcome common challenges, ensures compliance with Fair Housing laws, and highlights the benefits of renting to newcomers of the United States. By using this guide, you can create a welcoming environment that supports the successful integration of newcomers into your community while ensuring you have reliable tenants.

Benefits of Renting to Refugees and Other Newcomers

Renting to refugees and newcomers offers unique advantages. These tenants are often long-term and highly responsible, contributing to the stability of your property and ensuring steady rental income. Below are the key reasons to consider renting to this group:

- **Highly Vetted:** Refugees undergo extensive vetting by multiple agencies, including U.S. Citizenship and Immigrant Services (USCIS) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), before arriving in the U.S. They are thoroughly interviewed, background-checked, and receive orientation on living in the U.S.
- **Identified and Supported:** Refugees receive government-issued photo IDs, Social Security numbers, and work permits shortly after their arrival to the U.S. They also benefit from financial assistance, managed social services, and employment guidance, ensuring they have the support needed to pay their rent and maintain their housing.
- **Seeking Stability:** Refugees and newcomers prioritize finding a safe and secure home, often becoming reliable long-term tenants.
- **Fact Sheet on Renting to Refugees and Other Eligible Newcomers:** The U.S. federal government supports refugees and other eligible newcomers with resettlement services as they begin to rebuild their lives in the United States. [This fact sheet](#) answers questions that landlords and property managers may have as they consider renting to refugees and other newcomers who are eligible for government support.

Operational Practices

Being a newcomer-friendly housing provider simply requires flexible practices and adjusting your screening and application processes:

- **Alternative Documentation:** Accept documentation such as travel documents, I-94 cards, promissory notes, and letters of support from resettlement agencies in place of traditional requirements like credit reports or rental histories.

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- **Flexible Lease Agreements:** Offer month-to-month or six-month leases with minimal termination fees to accommodate the potential need for relocation due to family reunification or finding a job in another city.
- **Rent Guarantee Funds:** Be open to accepting rent payments from resettlement agencies if the tenant cannot pay the rent for a month or two, or allowing agencies to act as co-signers or guarantors on leases.

Tenant Screening Process

Refugees and newcomers will not have the documentation typically required during a tenant screening process. To facilitate their applications, consider the following:

- **Alternative Screening Criteria:** Accept alternative documents such as I-94 cards for identity verification, promissory notes for proof of ability to pay, a higher rental deposit amount in lieu of income verification, a job offer letter showing ability to pay, and letters of support from U.S. relatives, sponsors, or resettlement agency staff for rental history.
- **Compliance with Fair Housing Laws:** Ensure that your screening process is consistent with these laws, which do apply for newcomers.

Provide Reassurance: Addressing Concerns and Questions

Screening Criteria	Typical Documentation	Comparable Documentation
Proof of identity	Driver's license or state ID	Official travel documents or I-94 card
Ability to pay	Credit report	Promissory Note or higher deposit amount
Ability to pay	Income verification, pay stubs, or bank statements	Promissory Note, higher deposit amount, or job offer letter
Criminal history	Background check	I-94 card
Rental history	References	Letter of support from a sponsor, resettlement staff, or U.S. relative

CASE STUDY

Operation Allies Welcome

Operation Allies Welcome (OAW) stands as a significant U.S. government initiative aimed at resettling Afghan Humanitarian Parolees following the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. The unprecedented effort not only provided critical support to thousands of Afghan individuals and families but also set a new standard for how housing providers can safely and confidently offer rental opportunities to newcomers. This case study explores the strategies employed by OAW to address housing challenges, particularly around fair housing concerns and alternative credit verification, offering valuable lessons for housing providers nationwide.

Fair Housing Concerns Addressed:

The federal government provided clear guidance to housing providers participating in OAW, ensuring that they understood how to comply with the Fair Housing Act and other civil rights requirements, especially in relation to screening and application processes.

Credit Check Exceptions:

One of the main concerns for housing providers was the requirement for credit checks. OAW provided a framework where exceptions could be made for Afghan arrivals due to their immigration status, offering alternative verification methods that could be applied equally to all in similar circumstances.

Use of Alternative Documentation:

HUD supported the use of alternative forms of verification for prospective tenants who might not have traditional credit histories. This included cases where resettlement agencies were willing to provide full rent payments, making additional credit checks unnecessary.

Learning from OAW:

Housing providers who participated in OAW gained valuable insights into how to make their operations more inclusive and newcomer-friendly. The lessons learned from this initiative can be applied more broadly to other newcomer populations, ensuring that all tenants are treated fairly and given an equal opportunity to secure housing.

Flexible Application Options

Offering paper applications alongside digital ones will help applicants who do not have access to the internet or are not proficient in English.

Flexible Lease Terms

Provide lease terms like short-term leases or month-to-month agreements that recognize the unique needs of refugees and newcomers. Consider implementing master lease agreements with resettlement agencies or allowing them to act as co-signers on leases.

Translation Support

All housing providers know that effective communication is key to a successful landlord-tenant relationship. Offering translation support, whether through family members, resettlement agency staff, or professional interpreters, helps ensure that tenants understand their lease agreements and responsibilities.

- **Provide Written Translations:** Offering well-translated documents can prevent miscommunication and ensure that tenants fully understand their rights and obligations.
- **Use Interpreter Services:** For some landlords, partnering with immigrant-focused nonprofits can provide necessary interpreter services. Larger landlords can consider investing in professional interpretation when needed.

Move-In Orientation

Helping tenants acclimate to U.S. rental practices through a move-in orientation can foster a positive landlord-tenant relationship and ensure that newcomers have the terms of their lease reinforced and understand more about how to live safely in their new home. Resettlement agency staff can be your allies in this and will likely have supporting informational materials, or even staff, to help.

- **Lease Review:** Go over the lease terms in detail to ensure newcomer tenants understand their responsibilities and rights.
- **Appliance Education:** Demonstrate how to use household appliances and provide illustrated written instructions to ensure safe use.
- **Emergency Preparedness:** Educate tenants on the difference between emergencies and non-emergencies. Provide fire safety training, including how smoke detectors work.
- **Neighborhood Orientation:** Provide a printed list of nearby amenities and resources to help tenants integrate into their new community.

Note: If you have concerns about compliance with Fair Housing laws when accepting alternative documentation, then consult your legal department or local Fair Housing Agency.

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