



A Sponsor's Guide to Housing Newcomers

NAVIGATING THE HOUSING PROCESS FROM PRE-ARRIVAL TO SETTLING IN



Refugee Housing
SOLUTIONS

The Sponsor's Guide to Housing Newcomers is a comprehensive toolkit designed to support sponsors through every step of the housing process, from the moment they commit to sponsoring a newcomer to when the newcomer has settled into their home. This resource equips sponsors with essential tools and knowledge to navigate housing challenges, set clear expectations, and ensure the successful welcome of newcomers. With guidance on housing preparation, landlord engagement, and the cultural aspects of helping a newcomer settling in a new home, this toolkit ensures that sponsors can provide the best possible support for newcomers throughout their housing journey.

CONTENTS

Preparing for Housing: Steps Before Arrival	2
Overview of Challenges Faced by Newcomers When Securing Housing	2
Setting Boundaries and Expectations	2
Clarifying Roles and Responsibilities	2
Overview of Sponsor Housing Support Tasks	3
To Co-sign or Not to Co-sign	3
Explore Alternative Support Options	4
Finding and Securing Housing Upon Arrival	4
Landlord Engagement Strategies	4
Overview of Housing Search Process	5
Touring and Securing a Rental	6
Lease Agreement Overview	6
Settling In: Finalizing Housing and Supporting Newcomer Transition	7
Preparing the Home for Move-In	7
New Home Orientation and Welcome	8

Preparing for Housing: Steps Before Arrival

This section focuses on laying the foundation for a smooth housing search experience by addressing common housing challenges, setting clear expectations, and defining roles and responsibilities. This section helps sponsors understand the importance of preparation, including considering lease co-signing and alternative support options. By proactively addressing these factors, sponsors can ensure they are well-equipped to provide safe, stable housing from day one.

Overview of Challenges Faced by Newcomers When Securing Housing

Newcomers do frequently encounter challenges when seeking housing. Common challenges besides a lack of U.S. credit history and rental references, are language limitations and unfamiliarity with local housing laws. These obstacles can make it difficult to find suitable, affordable housing, especially for larger families or those with specific needs, such as disability access.

This process often involves managing both temporary and long-term housing solutions. Upon arrival, most newcomers will need to be housed temporarily before being able to sign a lease for longer term housing. Sponsors should be prepared to assist newcomers with both temporary and long-term housing arrangements, understanding when and how to transition from temporary solutions to more permanent housing.

Setting Boundaries and Expectations

It is essential for sponsors to set boundaries and expectations to ensure a smooth transition. Early communication helps clarify roles and responsibilities, reducing the chance of misunderstandings later. Defining what support, including housing and financial assistance, will be provided helps create clarity for both parties. This approach also helps newcomers understand the extent of support they will receive, promoting a sense of independence. Setting expectations early fosters mutual respect and trust, creating a foundation for a successful resettlement.

Clarifying Roles and Responsibilities

The sponsor's role in securing housing involves supporting the newcomer throughout the process, from identifying suitable options to finalizing the rental agreement. This may include assisting with the search, providing guidance on lease terms, and helping with paperwork. It is crucial to communicate these responsibilities — and their limits — clearly to the newcomer early on. It is important to be clear about the length of time you will be providing support, both financial and otherwise. Addressing these details upfront — aligns efforts in securing and managing the housing arrangement effectively.

It is just as essential to clearly define the newcomer's roles and responsibilities in the housing process. This includes understanding their involvement in selecting potential properties, taking part in lease negotiations, and both understanding and managing the day-to-day responsibilities of tenancy, such as paying rent and maintaining the property. The newcomer must be informed about their obligations under the lease agreement, including adherence to terms and conditions, respecting the property, and communicating any repairs needed or other issues with the rental. Setting these expectations early helps empower the newcomer, fosters a collaborative approach, and ensures both parties have a shared understanding of their roles, leading to a more successful housing arrangement.



RESOURCE

[Managing Newcomers' Housing Expectations](#)

Overview of Sponsor Housing Support Tasks

- **Securing Housing:** Sponsors help identify suitable temporary or long-term housing, considering family size, needs, and budget, and may need to advocate for newcomers with landlords.
- **Coordinating with Landlords:** Sponsors communicate with landlords, explaining the resettlement process and, as relevant, financial support that the newcomer tenant has, while assisting newcomers in navigating lease agreements and understanding rental requirements.
- **Setting Up Utilities:** Ensuring essential utilities (e.g., water, gas, electricity, internet) are connected and properly set up before the newcomer moves into a long-term rental is crucial, along with clear guidance on billing and payment processes.
- **Furnishing the Home:** Sponsors should furnish the space with essentials like beds, couch/chairs, dining table/chairs, and kitchen items, taking into account cultural or personal preferences to ensure comfort and familiarity.
- **Ensuring Safety and Accessibility:** A home walkthrough is needed to check for safety features (working locks, smoke detectors) and, if necessary, ensure the home is accessible for any special needs.
- **Cultural Considerations:** Sponsors should familiarize themselves with cultural norms around privacy, shared spaces, and living arrangements to find a space that feels comfortable and respectful of newcomer preferences.
- **Creating a Welcoming Environment:** Small touches like welcome notes, basic groceries, and culturally significant items can make newcomers feel immediately at home.
- **Educating Newcomers About Local Rental Housing Norms:** Sponsors should explain local norms around housing, from using appliances safely and amenities, like air conditioning, heat, and running water properly, to managing utilities to understanding tenant rights and landlord expectations.

To Co-sign or Not to Co-sign

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased Chances of Approval: Co-signing can make it easier for newcomers to secure housing, especially if they lack a credit history or rental references. It provides the landlord with added security that the rent will be paid.• Support for Newcomers: Co-signing shows a strong commitment to supporting newcomers by helping them overcome initial barriers in the housing market.• Strengthening Relationship with the Landlord: Co-signing can help build trust and a positive relationship with the landlord. By demonstrating commitment and willingness to support the newcomer, the co-signer can reassure the landlord of the newcomer's reliability and stability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Legal Responsibilities: Co-signers are legally responsible for paying the rent if the primary tenant fails to do so. This can lead to potential financial liability and complications if disputes arise.• Financial Risks: If the newcomer defaults on the lease, the co-signer may face unexpected financial burdens, including potential damage to their own credit score.• Dependence: Relying on co-signing might not encourage newcomers to build their own credit or rental history, which can affect their ability to secure future housing independently.

Explore Alternative Support Options

- **Finding Landlords Open to Renting Without Co-signers:** Some landlords are willing to rent to newcomers without requiring a co-signer, especially if the newcomers can provide proof of income, rental assistance programs, or other forms of financial support.
- **Rental Assistance Programs:** Explore options such as rental subsidies, security deposit assistance, or transitional housing programs that can help newcomers without needing a co-signer. [Locate rental assistance programs by state.](#)
- **Paying in Advance:** Offering to prepay a few months' rent at the beginning of the lease term may show housing providers that you are committed to supporting the newcomer while they get on their feet and secure proper employment.
- **Promissory Notes:** Promissory notes serve as an alternative to co-signing by providing a formal, legally binding commitment to cover rent or financial obligations if the primary tenant defaults. Unlike co-signing, which assumes full legal and financial responsibility for the lease, promissory notes specify conditional commitments, offering targeted security without transferring complete responsibility for the lease. These notes can be tailored to address specific needs and conditions, but it is important to ensure that landlords are open to this option and that all parties understand the legal and financial implications involved.

Finding and Securing Housing Upon Arrival

This section provides guidance for securing both temporary and long-term housing for newcomers. It covers strategies for talking with landlords, tips for finding suitable housing options, and steps to take once a property is secured.

Landlord Engagement Strategies

- **Introduce the Newcomer Professionally:** Start by contacting the landlord with a brief introduction letter or call that explains the newcomer's situation, the support they will receive, and their commitment to being a responsible tenant.
- **Explain the Refugee Resettlement Process:** Take time to explain the U.S. refugee resettlement program to the landlord, highlighting the newcomer's commitment to being a responsible tenant and the ongoing support they will receive from the sponsor group.
- **Address Concerns with Clear Communication:** Acknowledge that renting to a newcomer may be new for the landlord and address any concerns they may have, such as language barriers or financial stability. Provide clear information about the newcomer's support system, such as rent payment help, to reassure the landlord.
- **Arrange In-Person Meetings:** Schedule a meet-and-greet between the landlord and prospective newcomer tenant to build rapport and address concerns.
- **Offer Additional Assurance:** Consider offering a higher security deposit to ease the landlord's concerns and make the offer more attractive. Emphasize the ongoing support provided by you as the sponsor and/or a local resettlement agency to assure the landlord of the newcomer's reliability.



RESOURCES

- [How to Recruit and Retain Housing Providers](#)
- [Landlord Conversation Guides](#)
- [How to Vet Housing Providers and Properties Toolkit](#)
- [Rental Application Essentials: How Newcomers Can Use Alternative Documents](#)

Overview of Housing Search Process

The housing search process for newcomers will typically involve securing both temporary and long-term housing. Temporary housing offers a safe and stable place for newcomers to stay upon their arrival. Many landlords prefer to meet potential tenants before agreeing to rent to them, so having temporary housing in place ensures newcomers are not left without a place to stay while they look for housing and navigate the U.S. rental process. Long-term housing provides stability and is secured once a landlord approves the newcomer application. Sponsor groups usually need to arrange both types of housing to ensure newcomers are settled in a safe environment to start and then facilitate a smooth transition into a more permanent home.

Tips for Finding Temporary Housing

- **Consider Short-Term Rentals:** Look for options such as short-term rental properties (Airbnb, vacation rentals, etc.), motels, or hostels. These can provide flexibility and safe immediate accommodation while you search for more permanent housing.
- **Explore Extended Stay Options:** Some hotels offer extended stay rates that are more affordable than nightly rates for longer durations. Some may even include kitchenettes, providing a more home-like experience.
- **Reach Out to Local Support Networks:** Contact local refugee resettlement agencies, community organizations, and faith-based groups that may have emergency housing or temporary accommodations available.
- **Use Social Media and Community Boards:** Look for temporary housing opportunities on local online forums, social media groups, or community boards. Post inquiries about availability or resources for short-term housing.
- **Understand Lease Terms:** For any temporary housing, clarify the lease terms, including the duration of stay, renewal options, and any additional fees or deposits required.
- **Check Availability for Flexible Move-in Dates:** Some temporary housing options may have limited availability or specific move-in dates. Check for these details.

Tips for Finding Long-term Housing

- **Prioritize Long-Term Needs:** When selecting permanent housing, focus on factors like location stability, job accessibility, school proximity, and long-term affordability. Consider how well the property meets the newcomer's needs for the next 6-12 months.
- **Local Rental Listings Websites:** Use popular rental listing websites like Zillow, Apartments.com, Craigslist, Facebook Marketplace, or AffordableHousing.com to search for long-term housing options. Most of these platforms allow you to filter results by price, location, size, and amenities.
- **Support Organizations:** Reach out to refugee resettlement agencies, community organizations, and cultural centers. They may have partnerships with landlords or networks of rental listings that welcome newcomers.
- **Rental Agencies and Property Managers:** Inquire with local property management companies that oversee apartment buildings or multi-unit complexes. They often handle long-term leases and can provide information on available units.
- **Gather Necessary Documents:** Many landlords require proof of income and/or a co-signer for new tenants. Prepare documents, such as pay stubs and/or employment verification, or a sponsor's financial support commitment letter. Keep in mind that newcomers will not have the typical documentation.

usually required by landlords. Use [this guide](#) to explore alternative documents that can be provided, subject to landlord approval.



RESOURCES

- [Step-by-Step Guide to Securing Housing](#)
- [Strategies for Community Sponsors Assisting with Newcomer Housing](#)
- [Search Federal Housing Waiting Lists](#)
- [RHS Information on Housing Search Tools](#)

Touring and Securing a Rental

- **Schedule Property Viewings:** Arrange times for the sponsor and the newcomer to tour potential properties.
- **Evaluate Property Conditions:** During the tour, check the condition of the property, including the state of appliances, plumbing, heating/AC, electrical systems, and any potential issues like mold or pests. Ensure newcomers have the language accessibility to ask questions.
- **Discuss Lease Terms with the Landlord:** Review key lease terms, including rent amount, utilities, lease duration, and any additional responsibilities or restrictions. Clarify the rent payment schedule and any penalties for late payments. If weekly or bi-weekly rather than monthly payments are best for the newcomer, ask if this is a possibility.
- **Assess Neighborhood:** Evaluate the neighborhood's proximity to key services like grocery stores, pharmacies, schools, public transportation, and check overall safety.
- **Provide Support in Completing Application:** If property / unit is assessed as a good option, help the newcomer complete the rental application, provide necessary documentation, and ensure all required materials are submitted on time.
- **Secure Co-signing if Necessary:** If willing, the sponsor may offer to co-sign the lease or provide a promissory note.

Lease Agreement Overview

- Once a newcomer has been approved to rent an apartment or house, sponsors should assist them in understanding the lease agreement before signing. This includes reviewing key terms such as deposit requirements, lease duration, tenant responsibilities, and any additional clauses. Provide translation / language support as needed to help newcomers understand these terms.
- Details to focus on when reviewing a lease:
 - Lease Start and End Dates
 - All Lease Addendums
 - Number of Occupants Allowed
 - Monthly Rent, Due Date, and Late Charge Policies
 - Accepted Methods and, if necessary, timing of Rent Payment
 - Security and Pet Deposits Required / Deposit Return Policy and Timing
 - Utilities: Included or Not Included
 - Appliances: Included or Not Included
 - Renter Insurance Requirements
 - Notice of Entry Policy
 - Renewal Conditions
 - Early Termination Terms, Including Fees
 - Notice to Vacate Terms and Conditions
 - Subletting: Allowed or Not Allowed
 - House or Apartment Modifications: Allowed or Not Allowed
 - Visitor Policy
 - Smoking Policy

Settling In: Finalizing Housing and Supporting Newcomer Transition



RESOURCES

- [How to Understand a Lease](#)
- [Understanding Your Lease Agreement](#)

This section focuses on the final steps of securing a home and supporting newcomers as they settle into their new home. It includes ensuring the home is move-in ready, doing a thorough walkthrough, and preparing for move-in. Additionally, it covers the importance of cultural orientation and providing a warm welcome to help newcomers start to adjust and feel comfortable in their new home and community.

Preparing the Home for Move-In

- **Housing walkthrough:** This is important before move-in to ensure that the property meets the standards outlined in the lease. A walkthrough helps verify that the property is safe, functional, and ready for occupancy. It allows for the identification and resolution of any safety hazards, such as non-functional smoke detectors or insecure locks, and ensures that essential utilities like water, electricity, and gas are properly connected and functioning. The walkthrough also confirms that the property is clean and in good condition. Additionally, it provides an opportunity to document any pre-existing issues or damage, which can help prevent disputes with the landlord and costs to the tenant when they are moving out.



RESOURCE

[Sample Housing Walkthrough Checklist](#)

- **Furnishing:** Sponsors can turn to their community for support in furnishing a newcomer's new home. Charities, businesses, nonprofits, and furniture banks can provide essential household items either through donations or at low cost. Organizing community drives or using social media to request items can mobilize neighbors to contribute goods. Schools and universities may also have community service programs or student organizations willing to help. Collaborating with volunteer organizations can aid in the collection, organization, and delivery of contributed items.



RESOURCE

[Home Set-up Guide](#)

- **Utilities:** When setting up utilities for a new rental home, start by reviewing the lease to see which utilities are covered by the landlord, such as water or trash removal services, which will be clearly outlined in the agreement. For utilities not covered, like electricity, gas, or internet, contact the service providers in your area to establish accounts. You may need to provide the address, sign up for the service, and schedule activation. Be sure to clarify billing responsibilities and methods (email or U.S. mail to receive the bill; online, in-person, or U.S. mail to pay the bill) and due dates to avoid service interruptions.
- **Renter's Insurance:** Renters insurance is an important safeguard that protects personal belongings from unexpected events like theft, fire, or water damage. It can also cover liability in case someone is injured. Many landlords require renters' insurance as part of the lease agreement to ensure tenants have coverage in case of accidents or damages. Even if it is not required, having renters' insurance is a smart way for the newcomer tenant to protect themselves financially for a relatively low monthly cost.

New Home Orientation and Welcome

- **Overview of Housing Appliances:** Familiarizing newcomers with household appliances and systems and with U.S. norms for rental housing use and upkeep — both for safety and cleanliness — is essential for both temporary and long-term housing situations. Introduce key appliances, such as stove tops and ovens, dishwashers and microwave ovens, plus washing machines and dryers — either in the unit or in shared spaces. Provide clear instructions and demonstrations of their use. Additionally, explain typical U.S. practices related to heating and cooling systems, kitchen and bathroom plumbing, plus trash disposal and recycling. Clarify tenant responsibilities, such as maintenance tasks and property rules.



RESOURCES

- [Welcome to Your New Home – An Illustrated Guide \(translated\)](#)
- [Please Repair – An Illustrated Guide \(translated\)](#)
- [Home Safety](#)
- [Cultural Orientation Resource Exchange: Housing](#)

- **Neighborhood Walkthrough:**
 - Doing a neighborhood walkthrough with newcomers is a valuable step in helping them acclimate to their new community. During this walkthrough, introduce them to important nearby services, such as grocery stores, schools, the public library, which may be the place they access computers, the Internet, and Wi-Fi, plus healthcare options, and public transportation.
 - Providing additional resources, such as a physical map, a list of important addresses and phone numbers, bus routes, a bus pass, or even memberships at grocery stores, can further help newcomers settle in and feel more at home.
- **Language Resources and Interpretation Services:** Access to interpretation services is important during the housing process. Use local community centers, online resources, or apps that offer interpretation services to help communication and ensure that newcomers can fully understand and engage with housing-related matters. Providing these resources helps bridge language gaps and helps ensure that newcomers can access the support they need.
- **Tenant Rights and Fair Housing Laws:** Understanding tenant rights and fair housing laws is essential for both sponsors and newcomers. Basic tenant rights include protection from discrimination and the right to a safe and habitable living environment. Sponsors should familiarize themselves with local, state, and federal fair housing laws and provide newcomers with resources where they can learn about their rights, advocate for themselves, and report any issues.



RESOURCES

- [Know Your Rights: State-by-State Housing Guide](#)
- [Fair Housing 101](#)
- [FAQs About Fair Housing](#)

For additional support and questions about housing newcomers, visit the [Refugee Housing Solutions website to schedule a technical assistance call.](#)

Housing Checklist

Preparation and Planning

Assess housing needs (size, type, location)

Consider housing proximity to essential services (transportation, schools, etc.)

Set a monthly budget, including rent, utilities, and other living expenses

Identify neighborhoods that fit needs, budgets, and preferences

Collect rental documents, like proof of income, identification, etc.

Arrange for temporary accommodations while searching for permanent housing

Housing Search

Research local housing availability within budget

Use online platforms, community bulletin boards, and local networks to find available rental properties

Contact landlords or property managers to arrange unit tours

- Be ready to explain your newcomer's status and address potential concerns

Prepare questions about rent, lease terms, utilities, and maintenance responsibilities

Submit applications with all required information and documents

- Be prepared to pay application fee or deposits

Securing Housing Checklist

Lease Signing and Initial Costs

Carefully review and understand all terms before signing the lease

- Provide translation support if needed

Ensure both the tenant and landlord sign the lease agreement

Provide the required security deposit as outlined in the lease

Submit the first month's rent payment as required

Prepay additional months of rent if needed to secure the lease

Obtain a copy of the signed lease

Document any other costs, such as pet fees or utility setup fees

Evaluate and decide whether to get renter's insurance

Confirm Move-in Arrangements

- Verify the move-in date with the landlord
- Confirm the time and location for key pick-up or access to the property
- Ensure necessary repairs and maintenance are completed before move-in
- Confirm any move-in fees or requirements, such as building access codes
- Have a communication plan, in case of emergencies, with the landlord
- Plan for transition from temporary to long-term housing, as relevant

Preparing the Housing Checklist

Prepare the Accommodation

- Arrange for utilities (electricity, water, gas, internet) to be active before move-in
- Schedule a final walkthrough with the landlord to inspect the property
- Ensure the property is clean and in good condition for move-in
- Conduct a safety and functionality walkthrough (ensure working heating systems, appliances, etc.)
- Ensure smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, and electrical outlets, work
- Check security features (locks, windows, alarms)

Furnish and Equip the Home

- Provide essential furnishings: bed, dresser (if needed), sofa/chairs, dining table/chairs.
- Equip the kitchen with dishes, utensils, cookware, and storage containers.
- Supply bed linens and hygiene products (toothbrush, soap, etc.).
- Offer appliance instructions in the newcomer's first language, if needed.
- Provide basic cleaning supplies (broom, mop, vacuum, cleaners).
- Ensure sufficient lighting (lamps for bedrooms and living areas).
- Provide a basic toolkit (hammer, screwdriver, pliers).

Settling In Checklist

Move-In Support

- Organize basic supplies: food, toiletries, and essentials for arrival
- Plan transportation to the new home
- Schedule a home orientation meeting to discuss the home's features
- Review U.S. housing norms and safety practices, including tenant rights and responsibilities
- Provide basic home safety guidelines
- Schedule follow-up meetings to support adjustment
- Address issues promptly and offer ongoing guidance

Create a Welcome Packet

- Home orientation guide, including instructions for operating appliances (stovetop, oven, microwave, etc.), heating/cooling systems, and property maintenance guidelines
- Transportation options (bus routes, train stations, etc.)
- Healthcare facilities (hospitals, pharmacies, etc.)
- Local grocery stores, banks, and other essential services
- Nearby community centers, places of worship, and ethnic community groups
- Landlord's contact information
- Maintenance or emergency repair contact information
- Local emergency services (fire, police, medical) and non-emergency numbers
- Trash and recycling rules pickup schedules
- Parking and building access rules (e.g., permits, guest parking)
- Overview of tenant rights according to local, state, and national laws



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