

LANDLORD COLLABORATION GUIDEBOOK:

Working with Landlords to Help Households Move Out of Homelessness



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FORWARD

We know how hard you work to end homelessness. That is why we wrote this guidebook – it serves as an additional tool in your toolbox as you work to provide access to a safe, affordable, and lasting home for people experiencing homelessness. The guidance offered here focuses on increasing access to existing affordable housing by reaching out to landlords, working collaboratively to offer more housing options, and improving permanent placement and housing stability with the help of landlord partners.

We recognize that at the time of this guidebook’s publication, the Florida housing market is increasingly unaffordable, particularly for the most housing insecure families. Communities across Florida are experiencing tightening rental markets with more selective landlords, rising rents, and disappearing affordable rentals. This guidebook is not a panacea for all of these big picture issues, but will be a help even in high-cost communities where rental housing comes at a significant price. Of course we also know that housing markets typically follow a boom and bust cycle, so the ways this guidebook is used will also change over time.

While we offer this guidebook to help you move people experiencing homelessness into existing safe and affordable housing, it is clear there is a deep and persistent supply challenge for families struggling with very low household incomes. Accessing affordable housing, then, relies upon a two-pronged approach: (1) the work described here – accessing existing housing; and (2) expanding the supply of affordable housing, especially housing stock with low barriers to entry and rents affordable to those with extremely low incomes. As you utilize the strategies around utilizing existing housing that are detailed in this guidebook, it is also important to deploy proactive supply-oriented strategies simultaneously. Advancing on both fronts will produce the best results.

While this guidebook is the first of its kind in Florida, we offer sincere thanks to those who have already worked on this topic and whose wisdom is reflected in guidance offered here. Appendix I provides a list of the work we drew upon.

If you have stories to share, or additional suggestions or questions, contact us at the Florida Housing Coalition. We are here to help you help our neighbors.

INTRODUCTION

A program working to end homelessness is one that helps each program participant move quickly into appropriate permanent housing – typically a rental unit with a standard one-year lease – and supports the tenant in ways that help maintain housing stability. By recognizing that permanent stable housing is the solution to homelessness, it is easy to see the critical importance of the landlord that rents to the tenant, thereby ending that person’s episode of homelessness.¹

This guidebook is directed to any organization that helps people who are experiencing homelessness move out of homelessness and into their own rental units. The recommendations are general enough to be used with a wide variety of housing interventions and programs, and for any demographic or subpopulation of homelessness. This guidance will help organizations offering various forms of assistance, including general housing guidance, rapid rehousing, and permanent supportive housing rental assistance or master leasing projects.

We organize the topics in the guidebook into four steps: (1) Locating: Finding affordable housing; (2) Selling: Getting landlords to work with your program; (3) Leasing: Collaborating with landlords to move program participants into rental units; and (4) Keeping: Sustaining the landlord collaboration for the long-term. In the Appendices we offer resources that will be helpful.

Step 1. Locating: Finding Affordable Housing

Whether you are operating a Rapid Rehousing program or scattered-site Permanent Supportive Housing, or focusing on providing general housing help, step one is locating rental units for your program participants.

This section offers tips about how to find affordable housing in your community. There are three general areas addressed: using a dedicated Housing Locator staff position to maximize focus on locating and securing rentals; how to locate privately owned subsidized affordable housing; and approaches to locating market rate housing that is affordable.

Using a dedicated Housing Locator

We know that the goal is to help homeless households move rapidly into their own apartment or other rental unit. However, without an intentional focus on finding those rental units, the entire process slows down and a bottleneck is formed at the beginning of the process. If units cannot be located, it will be impossible for your program to meet performance benchmarks, such as moving a household into their unit within 30 days.

¹ Throughout this guidebook, the word “landlord” is used to denote the landlord or anyone with decision-making authority over rental property, including owner, property manager, leasing agent, and/or property management company.

To speed up the housing process and meet performance benchmarks, many communities have found that it is a good investment to create a dedicated staff position to function as a Housing Locator. While this position may be called a Housing Navigator, Housing Specialist, Housing Coordinator, or some other title, the focus is on locating housing and working with landlords.

While programs may utilize the Housing Locator in a variety of ways, the Housing Locator's focus is typically on finding rental housing and working with landlords or property managers. Some specific responsibilities of the Housing Locator include the following. (Note: Appendix II offers a sample Position Description for a Housing Locator position that you may want to tailor to your own organization's needs.)

- Search daily for rental housing units with affordable rents in the community.
- Reach out to potential landlord partners, property management companies, apartment associations, and other target groups to market the housing program to potential landlords.
- Assist in creating and sharing marketing materials.
- Build and nurture relationships with landlords to increase and sustain partnerships.
- Create and regularly update a rental unit inventory database or spreadsheet to track information about housing options. (See Appendix III for sample data points.)
- Follow the process established by the organization to share information about housing options with case managers, program participants, and/or other housing programs.
- Complete housing inspections as required by funding sources (e.g., ESG Habitability Standards, or HUD CoC Housing Quality Standards).
- Complete analysis of each option's rent in terms of rent reasonableness and/or FMR as required by funding sources and program policies.
- Follow the process established by the organization to help program participants consider housing options, sign leases, and move into the unit.
- Regularly follow up with partnering landlords to ensure satisfaction with the program and organization.
- Provide collegial and professional support for the entire housing stability team, including case managers, program participants, landlords, property managers, supportive services partners, and others.

There are numerous benefits to having a dedicated Housing Locator position rather than including housing search and relationships as additional responsibilities of Case Managers or other staffers.

- First, by having a dedicated person in this position, he or she is focused almost exclusively on finding housing and working with landlords. With this intentional focus, it is more likely that these critical functions are not put on the back burner due to other pressing demands or crises.
- Second, the case managers will be empowered to focus on the areas where their expertise is the most valuable and irreplaceable. In most programs, case managers want

to – and need to – spend their time working with clients to provide or coordinate support services.

- Third, the collaborating landlords will have fewer points of contact with a given program, providing more efficient and consistent interactions.
- Fourth, results are more efficient and effective with one position taking the lead on locating housing. With a structured, planned approach to seeking housing spearheaded by the Housing Locator, more options will be found and there will be less duplication of housing search.
- Fifth, separating housing search from case management is valuable due to the different sets of skills and expertise required of each position. Generally, a good candidate for the Housing Locator position has great interpersonal skills along with expertise in sales or marketing. Of course, the individual will need to believe in the mission of your organization and the value of housing as a key to ending homelessness, but it is not necessary that he or she has human services credentials or experience.
- Finally, having a dedicated Housing Locator position sends an important signal to landlords, staff, and program participants. This approach helps reiterate the primacy of housing, and the critical importance of housing, not as an afterthought or additional burden, but rather as an essential component to ending homelessness.

There are some variations on the Housing Locator position, reflecting the preferences of the housing organizations. One primary variation among Housing Locators is the point at which there is a hand-off between Housing Locator and Case Manager. In some organizations, the Housing Locator works directly with the client through the move-in process. In that scenario, the Housing Locator accompanies the program participant to visit several possible apartments, negotiate with landlords, sign the lease, and move in; after that process, then, there is a hand-off to the case manager to provide continuing support services. In other organizations, the Housing Locator does not work directly with clients but rather provides housing options to the case manager, who then facilitates the move-in process. The process can work well either way, keeping in mind that your choice will affect the operational policies and staffing structure in terms of needed staff expertise, case load distribution, supervision, financial procedures, and so on.

Another innovation to consider is creating a CoC-wide shared Housing Locator system with a shared Rental Housing Inventory database. Rather than each program or organization creating a Housing Locator staff, marketing materials, community outreach, and rental inventory database, collaborating organizations can commit to a single shared system. Such a multi-provider collaboration requires breaking down some traditional barriers, agreeing on funding and oversight, and committing to transparency and cooperation. The efficiencies and effectiveness of a well-run shared landlord liaison system are particularly valuable for smaller communities and/or programs with limited resources and strong community ties.

Locating privately owned subsidized affordable housing

Privately owned subsidized affordable housing units are in affordable housing developments that were developed using, at least in part, public funding provided specifically for the purpose of creating affordable housing. These developments may be operated by not-for-profit organizations or for-profit organizations. Regardless of who operates the units, the development has a legally binding obligation to provide affordable housing. In this context, “affordable housing” means that the rent paid by any tenant is capped at 30% of the tenant’s household income.

Such affordable housing units, however, may or may not be easily accessible to your program participants for any number of reasons. For instance, the target population may be specific to a particular demographic (e.g., elderly or developmentally disabled) or they may provide more units for a particular income category (e.g., low income as compared to extremely low income). In addition, there are likely barriers to leasing such as minimum income requirements, credit history requirements, criminal background checks, and more.

Do not despair, however. There are thousands of affordable housing units across the state and, particularly in larger communities, it is possible – though not easy – to access those units for your program participants.

Much of the current privately owned subsidized affordable housing is catalogued online at Florida Housing Search (www.floridahousingsearch.org). This online searchable database is sponsored by the Florida Housing Finance Corporation (www.floridahousing.org), which is Florida’s primary statewide funder of affordable housing. Florida Housing Search is easy to use online (with both Spanish and English language options) and there is also a workday toll-free line (1-877-428-8844) for support or for those less comfortable online as well as a TDD/TTY relay service for those with hearing impairments.

The online version of Florida Housing Search is easily searchable not only by geographic area, but also for other specifications. Among others, search options include wheelchair accessibility, zip code, rent range, number of bedrooms, landlord languages, proximity to local transit, and so on. If searching broadly for a geographic area, the website provides all the affordable housing developments in the area, whether there is a waiting list or vacancies, and much more information. For each development there is a wealth of information about the specific housing.

Searching the database for options is only the first step, of course. The next step is to visit the properties and begin to market your program, share information, and build relationships with property managers and operator. We return to this topic in the next section of the guidebook.

Locating market rate housing that is affordable

In communities across the state, there are households who are struggling in poverty but who not homeless – they are currently making it work in their own apartments or rental

housing. The vast majority of those households are not in designated “affordable housing,” but rather are in market rate housing – the same types of rental units that any prospective tenant might rent.

Locating this market rate housing for your program participants, then, takes legwork and intentional searching. There are online search options and community-based options, described below.

- **Online search aids**
 - www.gosection8.com offers a searchable database primarily, but not exclusively, directed at households with housing choice vouchers.
 - www.zillow.com includes rental search options with the ability to search by rent range in a particular geography. (See below next bullet for a special outreach effort of Zillow.)
 - With the Community Pillar project (see <http://www.zillow.com/community-pillar/>), Zillow has launched a proactive landlord recruitment effort to identify rentals that may be more open to renting to people with housing barriers. In Community Pillar, Zillow offers a platform for landlords that have committed to modifying their tenant screening process to make units available to potential tenants that have barriers to renting, including problematic credit scores, income levels, and housing histories.
 - Craig’s list and similar local options are worth checking and using with caution.
- **Property management companies** manage investment/rental properties for owners and they frequently have advance knowledge of when units will be coming available. They are also knowledgeable about neighborhoods and owner flexibility around leasing criteria. Some owners delegate extensive decision-making authority to property management companies and a Housing Locator’s biweekly visit to the property management offices can pay off in rental options. You can find property management companies locally with an internet search.
- **Word of mouth** is a dependable source of rental information. By asking current or former program participants, and their family and friends, the Housing Locator can find rental options that may not be listed online or otherwise advertised. A great source of referrals are satisfied landlords that currently participate in the program. Further, every staff person, Board member, and volunteer in your organization has networks that can be tapped to find landlords that may own smaller apartment complexes, duplexes, and so on. Landlords may be found by advertising in newsletters of faith communities, civic organizations, or workplaces.
- Similarly, simply **driving** through neighborhoods and watching for “For Rent” signs may yield unadvertised options.
- Hosting a **landlord recruitment event** is sometimes helpful. You may wish to hold your own event or you may combine your efforts with a landlord outreach event hosted by the local public housing authority or an event hosted by the local apartment association. These events are most effective when intentional effort is invested in reaching out to the landlord community, snacks are provided, and there is a testimonial offered by a landlord who is willing to share his or her great experience collaborating with your program.

In addition to the ground-level search processes outlined above, an additional approach is to create a community-wide online marketing and connection strategy to reach out to potential landlords and recruit them to provide rental options for program participants. This strategy is described further in the next section because this approach combines step one, locating housing, with step two, selling landlords on the concept of working with the program.

Step 2. Selling: Getting Landlords to Work with your Program

Generally, owners/landlords have one primary goal with rental properties: they want to make a profit on their investment. Underlying that goal are three primary objectives that affect the tenant selection process: (1) maximizing the rents to be collected, in full and on time; (2) minimizing future expenditures for repairs of damages to units; and (3) minimizing complaints from neighboring tenants.

Selling the landlord on your program, rather than a particular program participant or type of participant, is also more effective. Compare the following approaches. One approach is: “John is a homeless Veteran with PTSD who was just released from detox and we don’t want to put him back on the streets because he is very ill – will you help us get him into one of your apartments?” Compare to a second approach: “Our program provides deposits and rent assistance payments to the landlord. We also provide support services to program participants to help them be good tenants. Also, you can call us anytime if you have a concern.” In the second scenario, you have at least opened the door to a more substantive conversation about financial payments, tenant stability, and your support of both the landlord and the tenant.

It is better not to use terms like “client,” “consumer,” or “patient” when talking about program participants. That language evokes an “other” category that may cause the landlord to be more skeptical about renting to program participants or, if they do become tenants, the landlord may not treat them with the same respect as other tenants. It is better to talk about “families in our program” or “the Veteran,” etc.

Selling the landlord on your program, then, is often a matter of helping the landlord understand how the components of your program will help him or her address those profit-centered objectives. A marketing and outreach effort that focuses on the economics of working with your program will be the most effective. It is icing on the cake if an individual landlord or property manager also wants to help your program participants and/or is in step with the “why” in your mission.

Below we provide some suggestions for program design and services designed to appeal to landlords’ concerns about financial risk and tenant behavior. The focus is on the added value that your program offers landlords as they manage property and finances.

General Recommendations

As discussed in Step 1, have a dedicated Housing Locator focused on building relationships with landlords. As in many endeavors, a trusting relationship is a key component to success, and a good Housing Locator can be the reason a landlord agrees to collaborate.

In these times, many have come to expect creative and effective promotional materials for any endeavor. It is easy to create materials that focus on benefits to landlords if they collaborate with your program. It is very important to provide positive business-oriented images in your marketing materials; do not fall back on stereotypical photos of men sitting on sidewalks or sleeping in tents. Rather, use images that send the message that you understand

the landlord's business and that you can help them reduce vacancies, maintain their property, collect rents, and reduce turnover.

We also recommend creating an online platform for landlords to understand better your program and the benefits you can provide to partner landlords. For examples of this approach, case studies are offered below.

The Value of Support Services

Landlords are often reluctant to rent to households experiencing homelessness due to the landlords' concerns that the homeless households may exhibit behaviors that will not be acceptable to the landlord or other tenants. At the point of recruiting landlords to work with your program, it is not effective to try to convince them that their fears are exaggerated. Rather, take their concerns seriously and affirm their interest in maintaining the value of the property and the welfare of tenants. Once you show that you understand their concerns, you can address those concerns by selling the value of the support services that your program offers.

For example, a landlord will be more likely to rent to someone with very low income if they are aware that your program offers employment assistance, benefits assistance, and assistance securing other income such as child support or income tax refunds. If you can also show related past success, your sales pitch will be stronger. In this example, you could easily use Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) to provide statistics related to "income at entry" and "income at exit," and similar data points to demonstrate to the landlord that your program makes a difference.

Landlords often have tenants that are problematic, regardless of tenants' histories. When the landlord talks with you, visions of past "problem tenants" will be at the forefront of their memories. You can affirm that very real experience and then remind the landlord that for the typical that the landlord cannot deal with personally, the landlord's only options are to begin legal eviction processes or call law enforcement. For the tenants in your program, on the other hand, if the landlord has a problem, he or she is able to call your staff to intervene and help solve the problem, avoiding costly eviction processes and/or the unpleasant event of law enforcement on the property. Having someone to call in the event of a problem can be of great value to the landlord. Even if the landlord never calls you for support, just knowing you are there is of value.

It is very helpful to offer the landlord a 24/7 hotline number with rapid response to intervene in a crisis or respond to a serious concern at any time. Experience shows that a hotline number is used very rarely by landlords during evenings, holidays, and weekends; nevertheless, landlords appreciate and value the security offered by such a line. Further, and most importantly, the housing stability and safety of the tenant are less likely to be in danger due to tension between the landlord and tenant and/or law enforcement involvement.

Of course, a promise is only good if it is kept. If you offer the hotline it will be necessary to staff the number and be able to respond appropriately. It may be more efficient to staff the

hotline by collaborating with other trusted community housing programs to share the responsibility and triage the calls. In a shared crisis response system it is critically important that there is consistency of approach, response, and messaging. The tenant and the landlord should have the same valuable experience regardless of which collaborative partner is on duty to respond to calls.

The Value of Financial Assistance

Investors in rental property are primarily focused on protecting their investment and making some return on that investment. In the case of “mom and pop” landlords, that rental property may be their retirement plan or the inheritance for the children. They will value anything you can do to reduce the financial risk of them renting to your program participants.

Up-front financial assistance

Funds permitting, offer double security deposits as well as first and last month’s rent. The more financial security and up-front cash you can offer the landlord, the less risk he or she is assuming by renting to your program participant.

If you have flexible funding, you may also be able to offer some limited assistance to help the landlord bring the property up to standards required for your program compliance (e.g., habitability standards or housing quality standards). For instance, you may be able to purchase a kitchen fire extinguisher and smoke alarms. You could also help childproof the unit to guard against accidents. This strategy is not only a direct financial benefit to the landlord, it signals to them that you are invested in maintaining the property value and the relationship with the landlord.

Follow-up financial assistance

Assure the landlord that the rent assistance, if any, paid by your organization will be paid on time. Cash flow is critical to landlords and the resources they expend trying to collect rents is a frustrating burden. Your check should be the first one on the desk on the first of every month. It is also important that the landlord understand fully the extent to which your organization is committing to rent payments and responsibility that the tenant has to make payments. Do not oversell your commitment! If the landlord mistakenly believes that your organization is a guarantor on the tenant’s lease, this could lead to litigation or, at the very least, an unhappy landlord that may be vocal in the community.

Creating a Risk Mitigation Fund is an excellent strategy to convince a landlord to take a perceived risk. This fund mitigates the landlord’s risk by buffering the landlord from possible future losses. A Risk Mitigation Fund is a pool of funds that can be drawn upon to minimize the financial loss of a landlord in the event that damage to a rental unit, or in some cases other events, exceeds the amount of the security deposit. A Risk Mitigation Fund is often a community fund created by partnering housing organizations and/or the Continuum of Care lead agency, to share the risk.

The details of your local Risk Mitigation Fund should be reviewed with the landlord and an agreement signed so that commitments are well understood. The landlord should understand the conditions under which a claim can be made, the extent of coverage, the claims process, and so on. The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) compiled details of Risk Mitigation Fund approaches in four communities; that resource can be found here: https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Risk_mitigation_funds_quick_guide.pdf and <https://www.usich.gov/tools-for-action/engaging-landlords-risk-mitigation-funds-community-profiles>. As the USICH examples indicate, Risk Mitigation Funds are drawn upon fairly rarely; the primary benefit of the Fund may be to assuage the fears of the landlord.

Case Studies

As suggested in Step 1 and described further above, one approach to recruit landlords and get them to work with your program is to create a recruitment campaign that combines recruiting and sales with linking the landlords to provider organizations. Below are three case studies that demonstrate the variety and breadth of landlord collaboration projects. We offer a summary of each program, along with links to the programs. By accessing the program websites you can find sample forms, examples of wording and partnerships, and policies and procedures.

Case Study: Open Doors Atlanta



An initiative that has been succeeding since 2012 is Open Doors Atlanta. (See <http://www.opendoorsatl.org/>.) This unique effort is supported by a collaboration between the Atlanta Real Estate Collaborative, Enterprise Community Partners, and Project Community Connections, Inc. Over the past four years, Open Doors has helped house over 3000 individuals in the Metro Atlanta area. Those who are re-housed are households working with partnering local non-profit organizations working to end homelessness.

An innovative component of Open Doors is the extensive involvement of the real estate community. The Atlanta Real Estate Collaborative (AREC, see <http://arec.org/>), is a group of real estate professionals dedicated to working to end homelessness by recruiting landlord partners, helping to facilitate placements, and providing advocacy, development, and real estate advisory services. The involvement of the real estate community is a key component of the success of Open Doors. Open Doors, through relationships established by AREC board members, has helped recruit 80 apartment communities to work with the program.

Open Doors Atlanta uses technology extensively in the implementation of the program. A visit to <http://www.opendoorsatl.org/properties/> reveals a map of Metro Atlanta with pins for each of the apartment locations. By clicking on the pin, the details of each apartment complex are

revealed. Further, this is an easily accessible listing of all the participating apartment complexes that provides information on vacancy rate, rents for varying unit sizes, and more. All the units rent for less than the fair market value (FMR) of rental units in the area.

The nonprofit organizations that partner with Open Doors are responsible for determining the eligibility of the homeless households, helping with move-in, and providing after-housing support services. The program participants may be assisted through Rapid Rehousing programs, housing vouchers (e.g., VASH), and permanent supportive housing rental assistance or leasing programs. The referrals and housing placement process are consistent and structured through the collaborative.

Case Study: Landlord Liaison Project in King County, Washington

LANDLORD LIAISON PROJECT

The Landlord Liaison Project serves the Seattle, Washington area. (See <http://www.landlordliaisonproject.org/>.) Developed by the Committee to End Homelessness in King County (now called All Home), the program is managed by the area YWCA. The Project is funded by the City of Seattle, King County and the United Way of King County.

The Landlord Liaison Project has helped more than 3,000 households, comprising more than 7,000 individuals, move into rental housing since its inception in 2009. The Project documents a 95% housing stability rate for participating tenants after one year of occupancy.

Like the communities in the other case studies, the Landlord Liaison Project (LLP) actively recruits landlords to partner with their program and makes connections between the partner landlords and local homeless-serving organizations. As part of the landlord recruitment process, the LLP outlines the benefits to landlords offered by the project, as follows.

- Fill vacant rental units with tenants who are motivated to succeed and supported by social service agencies.
- Access to a 24-hour hotline and a rapid response from service agencies to concerns with LLP tenants.
- Financial assistance if tenant breaks lease prematurely, falls behind in rent, or causes damage not covered by security deposit.
- Free trainings and other helpful resources.

The Landlord Liaison Project is more than a landlord recruitment project – participating agencies are not on their own either. The Project offers expanded services to participating agencies, offering training, housing search assistance, and more, as shown below.

- Help from LLP in housing search and placement for clients, with listings from partner landlords who use revised screening criteria to accept tenants with higher barriers to permanent housing.
- Financial assistance for clients to help cover costs associated with moving and ensure their transition into permanent housing is smooth and sustainable.
- Mediation support from LLP in response to concerns or issues between tenants and landlords.
- Ongoing training opportunities for agency and program staff members on topics related to homelessness, housing, advocacy, and partnerships.

Case Study: S.M.A.R.T. Landlord program in Palm Beach County

A brand new “S.M.A.R.T.” initiative was recently launched by Palm Beach County (see <http://www.pbcgov.com/communityservices/programs/humanservices/>). The goal is to recruit landlords to make rental units available to program participants of human services organizations throughout the county. At the time of publication, this nascent initiative had just begun so the outcomes have yet to be realized. However, the program is a good illustration of one community leader – in this case Palm Beach County – taking responsibility for proactively recruiting landlords for a number of organizations. As in the other two case studies, the ongoing success of the initiative will depend on ongoing leadership, landlord involvement, and collaborations among organizations.

The initials “S.M.A.R.T.” outline the benefits of working with the program.

- Support – Landlords support the community by offering affordable housing options.
- Marketing – No need to advertise vacancies as the county has a list of available tenants.
- Assistance – Every tenant has a case manager that oversees the landlord/tenant relationship.
- Rent – Landlords receive timely rent payments from the organization placing the tenant.
- Tenant – Always have a tenant in your unit to reduce vacancies.



Step 3. Leasing: Collaborating with Landlords to Move Program Participants into Rental Units

Once the landlord has agreed to work with your program, it is time to begin the steps necessary to consider the particular unit(s) being made available by the landlord, and then help a program participant into a unit. There are numerous steps in this process, which will depend on your funding requirements, the coordinated entry process in your community, consumer choice, and more. The recommendations provided below can easily be tailored to meet the needs of your local community and process.

The landlord should understand fully the process, timelines, and paperwork involved in facilitating a move-in by a program participant. It is helpful to provide the landlord with a summary that describes the process so there is less risk of misunderstanding. Funding sources may require compliance with rent limits, housing inspections, and so on. When a landlord agrees to work with your program, he or she should have an understanding of, for instance, how long it will take to get approvals, that the utilities must be on in the landlord's name to allow for a housing inspection, and other requirements of the program. It is in everyone's best interests, including the landlord's, to make the application and move-in process as quick and streamlined as possible. A landlord that must hold an open unit for a month while paperwork is processed will not be a happy landlord partner.

The Unit

Depending on your program's funding source(s), there are likely to be limits on the amount of rent that is allowable. While rent limits are primarily an internal grant compliance issue, there are occasions when the landlord will need to be involved. For instance, if the quoted rent for a particular unit is slightly over the allowable rent limit (e.g., \$925 versus \$915), the Housing Locator should attempt to negotiate the rent down to meet the rent limit and ensure grant compliance. If the program has other incentives to offer the landlord in return for the slightly lowered rent, that can be part of the negotiation as well.

Inspections of the specific unit are required by some but not all funding sources; and for those that do require housing inspections, the standards differ. The Housing Locator or other appropriate staffer must ensure that the unit to be rented complies with the requirements of the particular funding source tapped. If the unit has slight deficiencies that can be resolved with minimal financial investment, you may be able to offer to cure those deficiencies as an added incentive to the landlord. For the cost of a fire extinguisher you can gain the trust of the landlord.

The Tenant

There are many factors to consider when matching program participants to housing options – family size, distance to work or school, access to services, neighborhood amenities, and so on. When you are recruiting a new landlord into your program there is one additional factor to consider – the relative severity of housing barriers of the prospective tenant households. If you have a new landlord and several households that are queued up for

placement, it is often better to place those with higher housing barriers with the more seasoned landlord partners and place the household with lower housing barriers with the new landlord. This strategy makes it slightly more likely that the landlord will have a first successful placement from your program and will in turn make more units available. This approach is not always possible, of course, and will depend on the coordinated entry system and how many housing options are in your inventory. Of course, you should not delay housing for a program participant due to such a strategy – every household deserves to be housed as quickly as possible.

Your staff person may want to coach the program participant as he or she completes the application process required by the landlord and gather supporting documentation as needed. Neither the program participant nor your staff should yield to any pressure by the landlord to share the program participant's homeless history, disabilities, or health information. As noted previously, the landlord should trust the organization to provide appropriate services. Of course, written permission should be obtained from the program participant to allow your organization to communicate on an as-needed basis to facilitate the program participant's move-in and housing stability.

It is appropriate for the staff person, the program participant, and the landlord or property manager to meet together to tour the unit, review the terms of the lease, and finalize the paperwork. It is extremely important to review the actual lease and ask the landlord for clarifications as needed. The lease should be a standard lease that the landlord uses for all tenants.

It is sometimes helpful to use a form such as the "Know Your Lease" we provide in the Appendix, to remind the program participant of his or her responsibilities as a good tenant. Sharing this form with the landlord is a good way to increase the landlord's confidence that you are keeping your promises to help the program participant be a good tenant.

You may also want to use a form like the Cost Sharing Plan in the Appendix that provides a written summary of how much the organization plans to pay and how much is the tenant's responsibility. If the organization is paying only the deposit and first month's rent, for instance, this form guards against the landlord expecting ongoing rent assistance from the organization. It should be noted that such a form would not restrict your team from determining that more assistance might be offered in the future to maintain housing stability, based on the needs of the tenant. Rather, this form sets minimum levels of assistance that should be met to manage landlord expectations. It is especially important to manage the landlord's expectations if you have worked with that same landlord previously and provided differing types or levels of financial assistance. It should be clear to the landlord that assistance will vary across program participants based on the households' needs and the funding sources.

Fair Housing and Landlord-Tenant Law

As you work with landlords, you should have a working knowledge of fair housing requirements and landlord-tenant law so you can engage comfortably around those issues. We

strongly encourage you to engage your local nonprofit legal services organization to provide trainings for your housing and case management staff to include topics such as fair housing and landlord-tenant law. In addition to gaining a basic understanding of these issues, it is important for your staff to be able to recognize situations where the help of a licensed attorney is required. For housing and case management staff to be good advocates, they must understand where their own expertise is useful but also understand the limitations of their expertise. In cases where there are serious landlord-tenant disputes, having a legally-trained mediator involved will provide the best outcome for your program participant. Collaborating with your local legal services or legal aid organization will help ensure that you are standing on solid legal ground as you work with landlords and program participants.

Within the framework described above, you should be in a position to respond to certain of landlords' concerns about, or misunderstand of, fair housing laws. Your clients may have problematic credit histories, past evictions, criminal records, extremely low or no income, and so on – characteristics that would typically prevent landlords from considering them given standard tenant screening procedures. Your program, therefore, will need to convince the landlord to relax their standard tenant screening procedures to rent to your program participants. The landlord may in turn be concerned that relaxing the standard screening to benefit your clients is a fair housing violation. The landlord may claim that he or she must treat everyone "the same" to comply with fair housing.

You can assure landlords that – while there are many specific regulations and case law on fair housing – fair housing is at its core about not discriminating against a legally protected class (race, ethnicity, etc.). Any tenant screening process, then, should be used consistently and in an appropriate way to legitimately protect the landlord's investment.

Under current law, it is permissible for landlords to use relaxed screening criteria in favor of your program participants because your clients have additional assistance beyond the typical tenant. Considering the case management, financial assistance, and other benefits offered by your organization, it is not a fair housing violation for the landlord to use different screening procedures for your program participants as compared to other prospective tenants.

Also of note is that in April 2016, the United States Office of General Counsel issued Guidance entitled "Application of Fair Housing Act Standard to the Use of Criminal Records by Providers of Housing and Real Estate-Related Transactions" (see https://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/documents/huddoc?id=HUD_OGCGuidAppFHStandCR.pdf). The guidance is based in part on a U.S. Supreme Court decision (http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/14pdf/13-1371_m64o.pdf) that upheld the legitimacy of "disparate impact" claims under the Fair Housing Act.

The April 2016 Guidance indicates that a landlord's policies and screening criteria around arrests and criminal records should not be overly broad, but rather must be tailored to meet a specific legitimate interest of the landlord. For instance, landlords should not screen out prospective tenants based exclusively on an arrest record, in the absence of convictions.

Further, the landlord should not have a blanket policy excluding everyone with a criminal conviction; rather, the landlord must consider the nature and severity of the offense, as well as the length of time since the offense. As an example, it may be legitimate for a landlord to screen out a prospective tenant who was convicted of felony arson within the past two years, but it is probably not legitimate for a landlord to screen out an applicant whose only record was a conviction for shoplifting ten years ago. In terms of drug offenses, a landlord may legitimately bar someone who has a recent conviction for the manufacture or sale of drugs, but not for mere possession.

For more information regarding the April 2016 Guidance on the Fair Housing Act and use of criminal records, we recommend you begin with the summary prepared by the Legal Affairs Department of the National of Realtors, which provides a good review of the issues addressed in the April 2016 Guidance as well as a “Do’s and Don’ts” summary (<http://www.realtor.org/sites/default/files/policies/2016/2016-04-07-hud-guidance-criminal-history-policies.pdf>). Again, talking with your local legal services provider will assist as you consider how to use these new guidelines in your discussions with landlords.

Step 4. Keeping: Sustaining the Landlord Collaboration for the Long-Run

The most important factor in sustaining long-term landlord collaborations is to keep your promises by operating an excellent program – be responsive to landlord and tenant concerns, check in with the tenant frequently, provide needed support services to the tenant, make payments on time, answer the landlord hotline, and so on. The landlord-organization relationship is built on trust, which in turn depends on integrity.

Handling Tough Situations

If you operate a stellar program, landlords will continue to want to work with you and your program participants. A full discussion about the qualities of a successful program is beyond the scope of this guidebook; there are, however, two situations to discuss here as they relate specifically to working with landlords and are particularly problematic.

First, there will be rare occasions when the best approach to dealing with an intractable problem will be to facilitate a move-out of a tenant prior to avoid an eviction. Evictions should be avoided if at all possible – an eviction is costly to the landlord, damages the tenant’s ability to rent again, and lowers your program outcomes. For these reasons it is important to have a process by which you can move a tenant out of one apartment and re-house the household in an apartment with a different landlord. Then, as quickly as possible, find another tenant for the landlord that had the problem.

Second, sometimes a tenant moves out without advising the landlord or the program. The situation is made worse if the tenant leaves behind extensive damage to the unit. These situations are rare, thankfully, but must be addressed as proactively and positively as possible. With a Risk Mitigation Fund (discussed earlier) or other flexible funding, your program can minimize the landlord’s losses due to damages. Further, you should find a way to pay any rent that is past due and, if possible, one additional month’s rent to pay for the unit while repairs are being made. Finally, attempt to place another household in that unit as soon as possible.

Recognizing Landlord Partners

Landlord partners are amazing. They help move tens of thousands of people out of homelessness every year and we should recognize their role, especially in tight rental markets.

Holding an annual landlord appreciation event is a good way to recognize landlord partners. Awards can be given for “Top New Landlord Partner,” “Most Units Rented,” “Best Referral Partner,” and “King/Queen Overall.” You can make awards either at your own event or you can highlight your partners at an event held by the local Chamber of Commerce, Apartment Association, or Realtors.

Offering ongoing appreciation is equally important, especially for the property managers and leasing agents that work behind the scenes. Regular thank you cards, cookies, and verbal thanks let them know you truly do appreciate them.

APPENDIX I. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Below are a variety of resources for your reference. The first – Community Solutions’ toolkit – includes access to numerous forms and documents gathered from numerous organizations. You may find those templates helpful as you design your own documents.

Organization	Document or Tool	Link to Online Resource
Community Solutions	Engaging Landlords: Community Solutions Landlord Toolkit	https://cmtysolutions.org/landlord-toolkit
Florida Bar Association	Rights and Duties of Tenants and Landlords in Florida	https://www.floridabar.org/tfb/TFBConsum.nsf/0a92a6dc28e76ae58525700a005d0d53/e21a25a8c288bed98525740800537588!OpenDocument
Florida Housing Coalition	Working with Landlords to Provide Housing Options [PPT]	http://www.flhousing.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Working-with-Landlords.pdf
National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH)	Rapid Re-Housing Core Component: Housing Identification [webinar]	http://www.endhomelessness.org/library/entry/webinar-recording-rapid-re-housing-core-component-housing-identification
NAEH (conference presentations)	Selling Your Program: Landlord Engagement and Rental Assistance Strategies	http://www.endhomelessness.org/library/entry/4.8-selling-your-program-landlord-engagement-and-rental-assistance-strategi
NAEH	Housing Search, Location and Landlords Module	http://www.endhomelessness.org/library/entry/housing-search-location-and-landlords-module
NAEH	Leveraging Landlord Relationships: Creating Housing Solutions [PPT]	http://www.endhomelessness.org/page/-/files/February%20Conference%20Pres%20Keely%20McCave.pdf
NAEH	Strategies in Engaging Landlords [PPT]	http://www.endhomelessness.org/page/-/files/Engaging%20with%20Landlords.pdf
Open Doors Atlanta	Case study of landlord collaboration project	http://www.opendoorsatl.org/
U.S. Dep’t of Housing & Urban Development (HUD)	Landlord Outreach and Recruitment Resources	https://www.hudexchange.info/index.cfm/resources/housingsearchtool/?housingsearchtoolaction=public:main.landlord-outreach-and-recruitment-resources

HUD	Landlord Engagement & Recruitment: Additional Resources	http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/documents/huddoc?id=Landlord-Resource.pdf
HUD	Fair Housing Act	http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program/offices/fair_housing_equal_opp/FHLaws/yourrights
HUD	Office of General Counsel Guidance on Application of Fair Housing Act Standards to the Use of Criminal Records	https://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/documents/huddoc?id=HUD_OGCGuidAppFHASandCR.pdf
Landlord Liaison Project	Case study of landlord collaboration project	http://www.landlordliaisonproject.org/
S.M.A.R.T. Initiative - Palm Beach County	Case study of landlord collaboration project	http://www.pbcgov.com/communityservices/programs/humanservices/
United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH)	Engaging Landlords: Private Landlords Partnering to End Homelessness	https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Landlord-Engagement_FINAL.pdf
USICH	Using Incentives to Engage Landlords: Risk Mitigation Funds	https://www.usich.gov/news/using-incentives-to-engage-landlords-risk-mitigation-funds
United States Department of Veteran Affairs	Ending Veteran Homelessness: How Landlords Can Help	http://www.va.gov/homeless/docs/landlords_factsheet.pdf

APPENDIX II. SAMPLE: HOUSING LOCATOR POSITION DESCRIPTION

SAMPLE: HOUSING LOCATOR POSITION DESCRIPTION

Overview

The Housing Locator is an essential team member in the organization's programs that assist individuals and families to move out of homelessness and into permanent housing. The Housing Locator works closely with prospective landlords, partner landlords, program participants, case managers, and program directors. The Housing Locator is often the "face" of our organization to the landlord community and is a key player in creating housing options for program participants. The success of program participants and our programs depend on the Housing Locator.

Responsibilities²

- Search daily online and all available resources for affordable rental housing options.
- Follow up with landlords to recruit them to become landlord partners in the programs.
- Develop a marketing plan to include promotional materials, leave-behinds, and other written materials for landlords.
- Market the program to prospective landlord partners by visiting their properties, making presentations to associations and groups, holding landlord recruitment events, and so on.
- For rental units accessible to program participants, complete rent reasonableness checklists, housing inspections, and similar requirements depending on funding source.
- Create, maintain, and regularly update the housing options inventory with detailed information to assist in matching program participants with housing options that are suitable.
- Create and update appropriate forms for use in the housing process including, but not limited to, the "Know your Lease" form, rent sharing agreements, housing move-in checklists, etc.
- Working with case managers, match program participants' needs and choices with housing options.
- Working with case managers, provide mediation and advocacy with landlords as needed to resolve concerns or problems to help the program participant maintain stable housing.
- Create and maintain consistent communication channels with all parties involved in a particular housing situation, including the landlord, tenant, case manager, legal services partner, and other collaborating partners.

² The specific requirements will depend on the role the Housing Locator plays in the program. In this example, the Housing Locator's primary roles are related to housing identification and inventorying housing options to match with participant needs. In some programs, the Housing Locator might also assess the program participant's housing barriers, rather than the case manager doing the assessment, as is assumed in this sample. Similarly, in some programs, the Housing Locator works with program participant until he or she moves into the unit, and then there is a "hand off" to the case manager; while in other programs, the Housing Locator never works directly with the program participant.

- Serve as an ongoing liaison between landlords and program participants, as well as between participants and neighbors.
- Understand the basics of landlord-tenant law, rental contracts, and fair housing requirements, to assist landlords, program participants, and case managers.
- Maintain complete and accurate files on landlords, housing options, housing placements, correspondence, critical incident reports, and other files as required.
- Transport program participants as necessary.
- Collect and report program data including, but not limited to, HMIS reporting, grant compliance, and other data required by program directors and/or funders.
- Provide immediate updates regarding housing openings, housing placements, and potential housing options, as needed by team members.
- Complete required monthly and annual report forms.
- Assume other responsibilities as assigned.

Requirements for the Position

- Commitment to the mission and values of the organization.
- Understanding of, and commitment to, the Housing First philosophy.
- Understanding of, and commitment to, strengths-based services.
- Education: Bachelor Degree in Communications, Marketing, or Human Services preferred.
- Experience: At least two years' experience in human services, property management or leasing, public relations, or similar field.
- Excellent communication skills, particularly listening, verbal communication, mediation, and writing skills.
- Demonstrated organizational skills with ability to meet a demanding workload and work with a diverse set of stakeholders.
- Detail oriented to complete requirements of files, housing options inventory, data tracking, and contract compliance.
- Creative thinker/adaptive personality.
- Understanding of basic landlord-tenant responsibilities.
- Fluency in the English language is required. Spanish speaking ability is an added asset, but is not required.
- Experience with computer and knowledge of Microsoft Office.
- Valid driver's license and dependable automobile.
- Sensitivity to cultural and socioeconomic characteristics of population served.
- The ability to work collaboratively with other personnel and/or service providers or professionals.
- Must be able to drive and work at a computer for extended periods of time. Must be sufficiently mobile to conduct housing inspections.

APPENDIX III: SAMPLE: HOUSING OPTIONS INVENTORY SPREADSHEET DATA POINTS

A database or spreadsheet can be used to create a living Housing Options Inventory. Below are suggested data elements to capture for each option.

1. Primary contact
 - a. Name
 - b. Contact title (landlord, owner, property manager, etc.)
 - c. Email address
 - d. First phone number
 - e. Second phone number
 - f. Mailing address (not necessarily property address)
 - g. Notes (e.g., Army Veteran, Housing Choice Voucher Landlord)
 - h. W-9 on file, if not incorporated (yes/no)
2. On-site contact if different
 - a. Name
 - b. Contact title (landlord, owner, property manager, etc.)
 - c. Email address
 - d. First phone number
 - e. Second phone number
 - f. Notes
3. Property
 - a. Name of property, if any
 - b. Address of property (note: keeping street, city, zip, and neighborhood in separate data points allows you to search by those data points)
 - i. Street address
 - ii. City
 - iii. Zip code
 - iv. Neighborhood designation of property, if any
 - c. Lease length options (e.g., 12 months, 7 months)
4. Units
 - a. Size of unit (e.g., studio, 1BR, 2BR)
 - b. Rent for each size unit
 - c. Pre-move-in or move-in requirements for each size unit
 - i. Application fee
 - ii. Background check fee
 - iii. Security deposit
 - iv. Pet deposit
 - v. Last month's rent
 - vi. Other costs
 - vii. Reference letters
 - d. Available #units for each size unit (updated regularly)

APPENDIX IV. SAMPLE: “KNOW YOUR LEASE” FORM FOR PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

KNOW YOUR LEASE

Tenant Name: _____

Address: _____

<p>It is important that you understand the terms of your lease. Your lease is a binding legal agreement. This document serves as a quick reference guide to your lease. Ask your case worker if you have any questions at all about your lease.</p> <p>We are here to help you follow your lease and maintain your housing</p>	
<p>PAYING FOR MY APARTMENT</p>	
<p>How much rent do I pay each month?</p>	<p>[insert agreed-upon rent share and refer to cost sharing plan]</p> <p>Example:</p> <p>For January and February, you pay no rent because the agency pays the full \$XX.</p> <p>For March and April, you pay half the rent (\$XX), and the agency pays the other half.</p> <p>Beginning in May, you must pay the entire \$XX and the agency will not pay anything.</p>
<p>When is my rent due each month?</p>	<p>1st of each month</p>
<p>Where do I send my rent payment?</p>	<p>[insert address or provide instructions]</p>
<p>How much is the damage/security deposit?</p>	<p>\$XX (paid by the agency)</p>
<p>If the rent is late, is there a late fee? How much is the late fee?</p>	<p>Yes, \$XX after the Xth day of the month plus \$X daily until paid</p>
<p>When does the landlord start charging a late fee?</p>	<p>Xth day of the month</p>

If my check bounces, does that mean it's a late payment?	Yes, and you will have to pay an additional \$XX due to your bounced check
When does the landlord start eviction if the rent is not paid?	The X th day of the month.
What utilities do I have to pay?	Example: Electric but not water
What else do I have to pay?	Example: Cable for television and/or internet if you want those services. Laundry room is in main building and you must pay to operate machines.
RULES FOR MY APARTMENT	
What are the rules about noise?	Example: You, your guests, and/or your family must not disturb the comfort, safety or enjoyment of the other residents of the property. You are responsible for the behavior of your guests.
What pets are allowed? (kind of pet, number of pets, size of pets)	Pets are not allowed. OR Example: Cats and small dogs are allowed.
Are there rules about how I have to do my housecleaning? Do I have to do any yard work?	Example: General housecleaning inside and outside of the home. You are not required to do yard work.
What happens if something breaks or someone damages my apartment? What should I do?	Call the property manager at xxx-xxx-xxxx.
Can the landlord come into my apartment anytime he wants to?	Example: Yes, upon 24-hour oral or written notice to tenant, for the purpose of inspections or agreed upon repairs or alterations.

What are the rules about someone living with me? How long can someone visit me (if they aren't living with me)?	Example: Only the persons whose names are on the lease. You cannot have visitors who stay more than three days. You cannot have visitors who disturb neighbors.
What happens if there is a police call to my apartment or someone in my family is arrested?	Example: Call your case worker immediately at xxx-xxx-xxxx.
What happens if someone in my apartment uses illegal drugs?	Example: Call the proper authorities and your case worker immediately.
How long is my lease? What happens if I want to move before my lease is up?	Example: Your lease is a 12 month contract that expires on xx/xx/xx. If you want to move before your lease is up, tell your case worker immediately.
What happens when my lease expires?	Example: You may have the option to renew your lease. You should contact your landlord at least XX days before your lease is up and let him/her know that you want to renew.
If I move out before my lease expires, how soon do I have to tell my landlord?	Example: You should give a XX-day written notice. You must work with your case worker to discuss options.
What do I have to do to get my damage deposit back?	Taking care of the property not to exceed normal wear and tear.

Staff Member _____	Date _____	Tenant Signature _____	Date _____
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Contact numbers:

Landlord or property manager: XXX-XX-XXXX

Case worker during regular hours: XXX-XX-XXXX

Case worker for crises during other hours: XXX-XX-XXXX

Emergency police, fire, or ambulance: 911

APPENDIX V. SAMPLE: COST SHARING PLAN FOR LANDLORDS AND PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

COST SHARING PLAN

Program Participant Name(s): _____

Landlord or Property Manager (to whom check will be issued):

Phone: _____ Alternate phone: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Rental Property Address and Apt. #: _____

Move-In Costs	Expected to be Paid by Agency	Expected to be Paid by Tenant
Application fees (if required)		
First month's rent		
Security deposit		
Last month's rent		
Other fees (pet deposit, reservation fees, background check fees)		
Total Move-in Costs		

Monthly rent	Expected to be Paid by Agency	Expected to be Paid by Tenant
Month 1		
Month 2		
. . . [insert additional months]		
Month 12		

Note: This is not a legal contract. It is intended only to provide a nonbinding expected plan for payments for all parties: the landlord, organization, and tenant.

Acknowledgements

Prospective landlord: _____ Date: _____

Organization representative: _____ Date: _____

Prospective Tenant: _____ Date: _____