WORKING WITH LANDLORDS IN HOUSING FIRST/ RAPID REHOUSING

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Training Objectives

- To gain an understanding of the elements and mechanics of developing an effective marketing plan for landlord outreach and recruitment

- To learn how to search for and find housing for your clients

- To learn methods for developing relationships with property owners and managers

- To gain knowledge of different strategies that can be used to address the housing barriers of your clients

- To learn methods and tips to keep landlords happy once your clients have been housed
Some Historical Perspective

- **Mid-1990s:** Only 20% of homeless families reported receiving help finding housing.
  
  Source: National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients, 1999, Urban Institute

- **Early 1990s:** Homeless families spent an average of 37 hours per week trying to access basic necessities from various service providers.
  
Individual Barriers to Housing

- Credit History
- Income Source/Employment History
- Household Size/Composition
- No Rental History
- Lack of Move-In Funds
- Credit Check Fees
- Non-English Speaking
- Criminal History
- Poor Landlord References
- Discrimination
- Eviction History
Housing search has become a specialization within the homeless services field. Increasing access for homeless persons to existing rental stock is essential to ending homelessness, because we cannot build our way out of the problem.
How Do Landlords Think?

Rental housing is a dollars and cents business. Landlords and management companies are in the business of reducing risk and maximizing return on investment.
Accordingly, rapid rehousing providers need to adopt a business oriented or market driven approach to recruiting and engaging property owners and management companies.
What are Owners’ Wants & Concerns

- Four most common...
  - Rent paid on time
  - Someone to call
  - Property damage
  - Nuisance
In many ways, you are “selling a product” in the open market. You have to convince property owners that your “product” will meet their needs and address their concerns.
Marketing Programs to Landlords & Management Companies
Marketing The Program

Marketing the program is one of the best tools to use in developing a pool of landlords and management companies who are willing to rent directly to your clients.
Developing “Selling Points”

- Does the program pre-screen tenants?
- Do families receive tenant education?
- What type of case management support does the program offer? By whom and how is it offered?
- What is the program’s or agency’s history of success (i.e., accomplishments)?
Developing “Selling Points”

- What support will be offered to partnering landlords and management companies?
- Does the program differ from Section 8? If so, how?
- If Section 8, how does your program address common landlord concerns and needs?
“Selling Points” (Cont’d)

- What financial support exists for families who run into trouble?
- What sort of productive activities will families get involved in, or are already doing? (jobs, school, etc.)
- Will the program co-sign leases or master lease?
- How can the program help landlords to reduce costs, including fees to advertise vacancies?
MARKETING MATERIALS

- Agency brochures
- Program brochures
- One-page informational handouts or fact sheets
- Letters explaining the program or agency
- Business cards
MARKETING MATERIALS

- PowerPoint presentations
- Community newsletters
- Client success stories
- Media coverage of agency or program
MARKETING MATERIALS

- Testimonial letters from other landlords who have partnered with the program and benefitted from the experience

- Program videos and PSAs
  - Example: Project CATCH in Boise, Idaho (Video and PSA available at: www.cityofboise.org/CATCH/Videos/page33212.aspx)
Mechanics of Landlord Outreach
OUTREACH TO WHOM?

- Mom and pop landlords
- Large private landlords
- Property management companies
- Nonprofit housing developers
- Etc.
LANDLORD OUTREACH: WHERE & HOW?

- Cold Calls
- Community Searches
- Networking
- Community Presentations
- Warm Hits (existing contacts)
Cold Calls: “Fingertip” Listings

- Websites
- Newspapers
- Yellow Pages
- Local Housing Authorities
Internet Listings

- To begin with:
  - www.craigslist.org
  - www.apartments.com
  - www.pennysaverusa.com
  - http://housing.lacounty.gov
Other Potential Internet Listings: “follow the money”

- HUD, Rental Help – listings by state (to locate local federally subsidized units)
  - http://portal.hud.gov/portal/page/portal/HUD/topics/rental_assistance/local

- To locate LIHTC properties (NOTE: may not be affordable to many of your clients)
  - http://lihtc.huduser.org/
“Follow the Money” (Cont’d)

- Local Housing Departments

- State Departments of Housing & Community Development - Finance Low and Very Low Income Properties

- State Housing Finance or Tax Credit Agencies
“Follow the Money” (Cont’d)

- **Neighborhood Stabilization Program**
  - NSP Awardees, as announced by HUD
    - 25% of NSP funds have to benefit households at or below 50% of AMI (though not necessarily renters)
Newspapers & Yellow Pages

- Newspapers (National vs local, community papers; etc.)
  - By law subsidized vacancies have to be advertised
  - Community papers better source for landlords willing to do Section 8 and/or other subsidies
  - All have websites

- Yellow pages
  - Listings of property management companies
Local Housing Authorities

PHAs maintain lists of property owners willing to accept Section 8. It’s likely that some, if not many, of these owners would be open to renting to homeless households without Section 8.
Community Searches: “Pound the Pavement”

- “For rent” signs
- Buildings under construction
- Real estate offices or agents
  - often have listings of rental housing, and agents may own or have investors who invest in rental properties
Community Searches: “All Hands On Deck”

“Non-housing” staff should also assist with housing search in simple yet effective ways.

For example, these staff could note vacancies or new buildings under construction on their way into work, and inform their colleagues who are responsible for landlord outreach.
Networking

- Apartment Owner or Rental Housing Associations
- Nonprofit housing conferences
- Board members
- Donors – reach potential landlords through organizational appeals or newsletters
Networking

- Friends and relatives
- Fellow members of social, civic, and religious organizations or clubs (e.g., Rotary, Masons, Kiwanis)
- Your real estate agent
- Local chamber of commerce
- Informal opportunities: Always Be Thinking Housing!
Community Presentations

- Faith-based communities – churches, synagogues, etc. often own property or have members who are owners
  - Outreach to pastors, rabbis, etc. or to social action committees or similar groups operating within faith communities
- Local businesses
Community Events:  
Host Landlord Info Sessions

- Program orientations for prospective landlords
  - Breakfasts or luncheons at your program’s office are a good draw
  - Provide informational packets and program overview
  - Testimonials from participating property owners as well as families/clients are helpful
  - Participating landlords and property managers can also answer any questions that potential landlords may have
  - Have a sign-in sheet for follow-up after the event
Warm Hits

- Owners/management companies already participating in your program
- Word of mouth (landlords know other landlords – ask for referrals)
- Owners with history of philanthropy, personal experience/knowledge
Strategies for Overcoming Housing Barriers
Common Housing Barriers

- The “anti-Section 8” landlord
- Poor credit
- Multiple evictions
- Teenage children, especially boys
- Criminal record
- Those with very limited resources and/or eligibility for certain types of financial assistance
Strategies for Overcoming Barriers

- Explain how prospective tenant has taken responsibility for past mistakes and can demonstrate positive steps taken to resolve those issues.

- Explain why because of supportive services past rent history will not necessarily predict future rental behavior.
Lease addendums

- E.g., Tabor Community Services in Lancaster, PA
  - States client’s commitment to participate in Protective Payees Services program
  - States client’s commitment to case management for one full year
Strategies for Overcoming Barriers (Cont’d)

- Get a letter from your probation officer stating that you are complying with the terms of your probation

- Providing letters on family’s behalf to explain damaging information or speak to family’s progress/current efforts

- Be creative and stress the positives of the family – use report cards, sports awards, etc.
Strategies for Overcoming Barriers (Cont’d)

- Present evidence that shows family’s behavior or rental outcome (e.g., eviction) was in self-defense or the result of domestic violence.

- Request a reasonable accommodation, if appropriate, for families with disabled members – i.e., poor credit, criminal history, evictions, etc. are due to the disability.

  - Definition – a change in rule, policy, or practice to allow a person with a disability equal access to and enjoyment of a rental unit.
Strategies for Overcoming Barriers (Cont’d)

- Learn why landlords have reservations (e.g., about Section 8) by attending workshops at their conferences (e.g., Apartment Owner’s Assoc.)

- Certificates of rehabilitation
  - Example: King County Washington Certificate of Rehabilitation Pilot Project
Strategies for Overcoming Barriers (Cont’d)

- Payment agreements for rental and/or utility arrears

- Poor credit is not necessarily due to not paying rent on time in past – demonstrate history of on-time payments (rent ledger or letter from former landlord; cancelled checks or money orders)
Strategies for Overcoming Barriers (Cont’d)

- Provide documentation from accounts in good standing (e.g., medical co-pays or premiums, car insurance payments, phone bills, storage facilities, shelter program fees, etc.)

- Offer (or stipulate) protective payee services
  - E.g., Tabor Community Services (Shelter to Independent Living Program) in Lancaster, PA
Strategies for Overcoming Barriers (Cont’d)

- Tenant education programs with official certificates and/or letters of recommendation to landlords
  - Example: Oregon Second Chance Renter Rehabilitation Program http://www.renterrehab.org/
  - Example: United Way of King County Ready to Rent Program
Strategies for Overcoming Barriers (Cont’d)

- Master leasing or co-leasing
  - Example: Massachusetts Dept. of Transitional Assistance
- Shared housing – but be careful with matching roommates!
- Negotiating rents, deposits (don’t assume it can’t be done, particularly now during a recession)
Strategies (Cont’d): Financial Incentives

- Additional deposits
- Quarterly payments or 3 months rent up front
- Wear and tear guarantees
  - Example: City of Portland, Fresh Start Program
- Eviction guarantees
  - Example: Rapid Exit Program Hennepin County, Minnesota
Making the "Pitch" to Landlords
MAKING THE PITCH

- What to say and how to say it (how to sell your “product”)
- How to get to the “right person”
- When to bring clients
- Guidelines for follow-up
To keep in mind when doing landlord outreach...

- Do not be afraid of rejection
- Be persistent
- Make things happen, don’t wait for them to happen
- Keep a positive attitude
- Build relationships
- Expect success
Group Exercise
Exercise Questions

- What housing barriers does this family possess?
- What are the family’s housing options, given the resources your agency possesses and those it can access from elsewhere?
- How should you target the housing search, given the family’s situation (geography, neighborhood type, etc.)?
- What “selling points” or marketing angles does this family and your agency/program have?
- What new advocacy tools or landlord incentives/protections you’ve heard today could be used to assist the family?
Keeping Landlords Happy
Maintaining Good Relationships

- Follow-up with property owner or agent
  - Call regularly, get feedback on rental situation
  - Don’t just check in when things are going downhill
- Keep your commitments
  - Respond within the timeframes promised
  - Intervene/mediate when appropriate
Maintaining Good Relationships

- Operate with integrity and honesty
  - Deal directly and honestly with property owners to address problems or concerns
- Respond in a timely manner to landlord requests for assistance
- Ensure committed home visits and case management occurs (follow through on those “selling points”)
Maintaining Good Relationships

- Keep open lines of communication, and create program tools and protocols to facilitate dialogue
  - For example, institute an “early warning” system with landlords
  - Sample communication tool: Hennepin County landlord-tenant-case manager communication agreement
- Think of the landlord as a sort of “client” whose needs and goals need to be met
Maintaining Relationships: Addressing Problems

- More frequent home visits and phone contact
- Reevaluate and adjust case plans
- Linkages with community-based resources and services, including rent-to-prevent eviction, detox, DV counseling, etc.
- Landlord-tenant mediation
Maintaining Good Relationships

- Keep in mind: sometimes relocating a client is best for all parties involved

- Relocation in this way can be a win-win: client doesn’t have eviction on their record and landlord or management company may be willing to provide housing opportunities for other clients
Maintaining Good Relationships

- Consider hosting annual meetings with participating landlords to get feedback.
- Or, send evaluation forms at the end of 6 months or 12 months in housing.
- Send e-mail or snail mail newsletters to landlords keeping them up to date on program happenings, results, staffing, etc.
Maintaining Good Relationships

- Go the EXTRA MILE
  - Host owner appreciation events such as a breakfast; present plaques or certificates
  - Send thank you cards from staff and clients
  - Get to know something personal about the landlord i.e. birthday, favorite sports team and offer cards, souvenirs etc.
  - Recognize “landlord of the year” in agency newsletters and other ways
  - Be willing to “do favors” (e.g., to connect other tenants to services)
ALWAYS REMEMBER: Landlords are like elephants...they don’t forget the good or the bad!
Practice Tips & Lessons Learned
Practice Tips

- Check the property status of prospective rental units/buildings due to the foreclosure crisis

- If tenant’s residence is at risk of, or involved in, foreclosure: Renters in Foreclosure Toolkit
  - http://www.nlihc.org/template/page.cfm?id=227
Practice Tips

- Establish a confidentiality policy for the agency, which states what information is given out and how

- Obtain releases of information from clients for landlords and management companies

- Check up front geographic boundaries of specific streets and vacant rentals when housing assistance (e.g., HPRP, Section 8) is geographically restricted
Practice Tips

- For families in federally subsidized housing, or applying for such housing, inform yourselves of VAWA protections for domestic violence survivors

- NHLP has a good practice manual and toolkit for California advocates, but some information is also applicable to other states
Tips for Initial Meetings with Landlords

A housing interview is just like a job interview…key questions to cover (Don’t take anything for granted!):

- What should you (ie, family) wear?
- How should you present yourself and your story?
Tips for Initial Meetings with Landlords

- Who will control the kids?
- Have we thoroughly prepared in order to avoid surprises?
Lessons Learned

- Be cautious about clustering multiple families (clients) in a single building
- Non-monetary incentives work with landlords
- 1:50 Houser: Family ratio is sufficient for agencies with case managers and housing specialists
Lessons Learned (Cont’d)

- Teamwork between housing specialists and case managers is key to success
- DO NOT make promises you cannot keep
- Understand the needs and wants of landlords
Lessons Learned (Cont’d)

- Document, Document, Document all communications with landlords

- Myth: landlords do not want to rent to homeless families or agencies serving them
Lessons Learned (Cont’d)

- Landlords’ relaxing screening criteria (e.g., overlooking an eviction) for your clients but not for the general public is not a violation of federal or state fair housing laws, which only cover protected classes (race, gender, creed, etc.)

- Proof is in the pudding: landlords call us when they have vacancies.