Creating your Welcoming Landlord Network

A guide created by the All for All Coalition and Welcoming Pittsburgh, presented in partnership with Welcoming America

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The Renting to Refugees Model in Pittsburgh

Renting to Refugees in Allegheny County (“Renting to Refugees”) is a collaborative effort between Welcoming Pittsburgh, the All for All Coalition (“All for All”), the Pittsburgh Field Office of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (“HUD”), and Pittsburgh’s two refugee resettlement agencies, the JFCS Pittsburgh (“JFCS”), and AJAPO Refugee Immigrant Services (“AJAPO”). The purpose of this initiative is twofold: to foster an intimate discussion between refugee resettlement agencies and regional landlords, and to encourage engaged landlords to offer their properties to incoming refugee families - to become “welcoming landlords”. On May 28, 2021, the Renting to Refugees virtual webinar was hosted.

During the session, a panel of speakers consisting of resettlement caseworkers, Fair Housing experts, a member of the Mayor’s Cabinet, and a resettled refugee all spoke with landlords about the urgent need for housing for newly-arrived refugees in Pittsburgh and educated them on how refugee resettlement works. The panel testified to how refugees are reliable tenants and how renting to refugees can be an economically and socially valuable opportunity for landlords to pursue. During the question-and-answer portion of the webinar, the panel issued a live form for landlord attendees on the call to fill out, indicating their interest in partnering with resettlement agencies to provide housing to incoming refugees.

Now, in partnership with Welcoming America, Pittsburgh wants to share its Renting to Refugees model with you with an aim to help communities across the country prepare to welcome an anticipated increase in refugees resettling in the U.S. over the next several years.
Assembling Project Partners and Stakeholders

In Pittsburgh, supporting actors from the community, local, county, and federal government joined forces to make Renting to Refugees a reality. Once the core stakeholders were assembled, the group met on a monthly basis to refine event logistics and provide check-ins.

Timeline illustrating the conception and presentation of Renting to Refugees

→ **Key Takeaway - Leverage Cross-Sector Collaboration:** The success of Renting to Refugees in Pittsburgh depended upon how many landlords the webinar could be marketed to. By recruiting resettlement agencies, a diverse collection of community partners, and governmental agencies spanning from the local to the national level, Pittsburgh was able to tap into a large network of landlords and add legitimacy to the initiative.

What actors could potentially act as organizers and/or speakers for a Renting to Refugees initiative in your community? Consider any of the following:

Refugee resettlement agencies
Resettlement agencies are responsible for helping refugees settle in the US and ensuring all their basic necessities are met in their first months of living in a new region. As such, any Renting to Refugees initiative will revolve around the needs and capacities of participating resettlement agencies.

Local & county government agencies
Having a government partner could provide your initiative with greater legitimacy in the eyes of the landlords you are trying to partner with. It could also provide your initiative with greater reach as you try to market it to as many landlords as possible in your community. Examples could include: Civil Rights Agency, Office of Immigrant Affairs, Department of Health/Human Services.

Fair Housing organizations
Landlords have an obligation to operate under Fair Housing laws. Reinforcing a Renting to Refugees initiative with background about these obligations - especially as they pertain to refugee-sensitive protected classes, like national origin, place of birth, or ancestry - is an opportunity for landlords to better protect themselves as law-abiding housing providers. As such, consider recruiting organizations that work in these spaces, such as your local FHIP or FHAP organizations.

Regional Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Office
Your regional HUD Office will likely have contacts with many different housing providers in your area. Recruiting a member of their team to speak at a Renting to Refugees event would also lend credibility to your session. To find your regional HUD Office and a contact person, please see this sheet. Need an introduction? Email Michael Horvath (Director of Pittsburgh Field Office and Renting to Refugees panelist) at michael.a.horvath@hud.gov.

Housing Authorities
Your local housing authorities will likely have many contacts with landlords, especially those that provide low-income housing.

Community organizations
Consider the following types of organizations in your region and their connections to landlords and refugees: faith-based institutions, immigrant-serving nonprofits or services, housing-oriented organizations, community rental-relief organizations, tenants’ rights collectives, and conflict mediation organizations.
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Panelists from Pittsburgh’s Renting to Refugees Webinar. The session’s success was incumbent upon a cross-sector partnership of organizers and speakers and experienced landlord partners. Landlords that have personally partnered with a resettlement agency or have housed a refugee could be a tremendous asset to your initiative if they are willing to speak about their positive experience.

Former or current refugees
Hearing directly from a current or former refugee about their lived experiences - from the challenges to the successes - resettling in your region is an invaluable way to visualize the resettlement experience for landlords, while also building a sense of pathos. Hearing about how a resettlement agency supported this individual is critical.
Structuring your Virtual Webinar Session

Below is a run-of-show for Pittsburgh’s Renting to Refugees session, which lasted one hour and fifteen minutes. Consider it a template to customize to your capacities.

➔ Key Takeaway - Facilitate Intimate Conversation: ensuring landlords feel like their concerns are being heard is key to winning them as welcoming housing providers for new refugee families. Pittsburgh’s Renting to Refugees session prioritized honest dialogue, fostered an inclusive and accessible space to engage directly with the panel and between landlords, and encouraged landlords themselves to express their concerns.

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<th>Introduction (15 minutes)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Welcome the audience</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Talk to those attending about the purpose of the event (fostering dialogue, facilitating partnership, etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Explain how the session will be structured and how it will operate</td>
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<td>• Introduce the speakers</td>
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<th>Speaker Presentations (35 minutes)</th>
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<td>• Have speakers deliver presentations</td>
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<tr>
<th>Question and Answers &amp; Landlord Sign-up (25 minutes)</th>
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<td>• Give audience members an opportunity to ask questions directed at the speakers</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Either during or after the Q&amp;A, via the Zoom chat, share with landlords a link to the online form where they can sign up to be a contact of refugee resettlement agencies</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Share information on how follow-up will take place with those landlords who have signed up</td>
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<td>• Deliver concluding remarks and thank all involved for participating in the session</td>
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Developing Content for your Virtual Webinar Session
The following is a content structure based on Pittsburgh’s Renting to Refugee session as well as suggested speakers for each section.

1. **Refugees & Resettlement** [suggested speaker: resettlement caseworker]
   - What is a refugee?
   - Regional overview of refugee resettlement
     - Key resettlement players
     - Demographic snapshot of refugee communities
   - National overview of refugee resettlement
     - “Presidential Determinations” and resettlement caps
     - Current themes and trends in resettlement
     - Tie into regional resettlement needs for housing
   - Resettlement process in action
     - In what ways does your regional resettlement interact with refugee arrivals (e.g. greeting them at the airport, applying for documentation, signing up for school, setting up their homes, etc.)

A slide from Pittsburgh’s Renting to Refugees session that illustrated the various ways resettlement agencies interact with new refugee arrivals and their families
2. **The Reliability of Refugee Tenants** [suggested speaker: caseworker]
   - In what ways does your regional resettlement agency help ensure refugees are reliable tenants?
     - Examples could include:
       - Agency is a trusted and reliable third-party - *How many families have been assisted by your agency?*
       - Facilitates language barriers
       - Guarantees *x* months of paid rent and/or security deposit/utilities/etc.
       - Ensure long-term refugee self-sufficiency (e.g. family support, job counseling, etc.)
       - Help refugee clients navigate financial support during crises
   - Restate the thorough vetting process of refugees

An infographic explaining the thorough vetting process refugees are subjected to. This fact was one of the most important talking points that speakers from Pittsburgh’s Renting to Refugees session discussed to ensure the reliability of refugee tenants.
3. **Fair Housing and Legal Concerns** [suggested speaker: government official]
   - Dispel myths about illegality of renting to refugees
   - Reinforce landlords’ commitment to affirmatively furthering Fair Housing by explaining how renting to refugees intersects with certain Fair Housing laws (e.g. national origin, ancestry, place of birth, etc.)
     - Does your city or region have additional housing protections for refugees that landlords should know about?

4. **Personal Story** [suggested speaker: former/current refugee and/or landlord]
   - **If a former/current refugee:**
     - Personal story of coming to America
     - Support from resettlement agencies
     - What you are up to today
   - **If a former/current partner landlord:**
     - Positive experience renting to a refugee
     - How a challenge was overcome with the help of the resettlement agency

5. **The “Renting to Refugees” Opportunity** [suggested speaker: moderator]
   - Restate the impetus for your session
     - e.g. “We rely on community members like you who are open to giving a home to people looking for a new start in this country - the resettlement program offers the potential for a mutually beneficial partnership between area landlords and refugee resettlement agencies”
   - Restate why renting to refugees is such a valuable opportunity
     - e.g. economic benefits, reliability of tenants, third-party support from resettlement agencies, contributing to the community, etc.
   - What does your regional resettlement agency look for in a prospective property?
     - e.g. along public transportation, rental limits, bedroom count, bypassing certain background check provisions, ability to pick up keys and set up home before a family’s arrival, etc.
Building a Landlord Audience

Once you have established the logistics and content of your Renting to Refugees event, you will need to market it to as many landlords as possible. The following is a list of suggested steps towards maximizing your outreach:

1. Set up the event on Zoom
   Schedule a Zoom call for the chosen date and time of your virtual session and create a Zoom registration page for landlords to sign up to attend the event.

2. Produce marketing materials
   In order to market your event, you will need basic materials which convey to the public the purpose of your Renting to Refugees initiative and the value it presents to landlords. Your posters can also be used in emails for your contacts to share.

Poster created for Pittsburgh's Renting to Refugee session on Canva
3. **Create a Facebook Event page**
   Your Facebook Event page can be a landing pad for your initiative. Include the Zoom registration link, a banner, and a description of the event.

4. **Spread the word via networks**
   The primary way in which Renting to Refugees in Allegheny County reached its audience was through allies helping to spread the word. The organizing partners of Renting to Refugees reached out to contacts they had in the community who were themselves connected to landlords throughout the city and county. These contacts received digital flyers promoting the Renting to Refugees and were asked to encourage landlords they knew to attend the event.

   Refer to the list of organizations in “Assembling Project Partners and Stakeholders” for inspiration - **What partners can you reach out to in your community to help spread word of your initiative?**
Creating a landlord sign-up form

The ultimate purpose of this initiative is to recruit landlords as partners for refugee resettlement agencies. We accomplish this by having them sign up through an online form.

Click here to view a template for the landlord sign-up form modeled off of Pittsburgh’s Renting to Refugees initiative. Once you open this document, you can begin creating your own through the “Make a copy” function accessed through your options from the top right corner of the screen (Figure A).

You can work off this template, but you should organize your own sign-up form to match the needs of the resettlement agencies you're working with. They're the best experts on what information they need to determine the suitability of a property for their refugee clients. If you want to learn more about how to create and design Google Forms, you can consult this webpage or search for other guides online.

You have the freedom to design your own sign-up form. However, we would like to share with you some tips on content you should consider including in your sign-up form.

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1 Please do not edit the form directly so that the template remains available for others to utilise.
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Contact information:
Your form should ask questions necessary to capture key information for identifying and communicating with a landlord - such as their name, phone number, and/or email.

Property information:
Your form should also contain questions to collect relevant information about their properties: rent, location, number of bedrooms, etc. This will be necessary for refugee resettlement agency workers to quickly connect landlords to refugees based on the characteristics of housing provided by the former and the needs of the latter.

Many landlords have numerous properties. To streamline information gathering, ask landlords to describe their properties in general - in doing so, a resettlement caseworker can use the information you provide to quickly assess whether a landlord has any viable properties to place their clients in.

Thank you message:
Consider including a message set to appear after each landlord completes the sign-up form (Figure B). This message can serve several purposes: confirming they have completed the form, thanking them for filling it out, and also relaying to them what they can expect to happen next.

Figure B
In order to edit your message for people who complete the form at the end, you should click on the settings icon at the top right corner of the screen (Figure C).

From there, click on “Presentation” in the settings window that pops up and write your message in the “Confirmation Message” space at the bottom (Figure D).
Structuring the form:
Looking at the template sign-up form, you can see that the second question asks landlords if they would or would not like to become a contact of resettlement agencies for renting to refugees.

If the landlord says yes to this question, they are led to a section which asks them for their contact details, and then to questions about their properties. If the landlord says no to this question, they are led to a different section asking why they said no.

Pittsburgh’s Renting to Refugees form offered this option so that landlords during the session could offer feedback, even if they weren’t interested in partnering with resettlement agencies in the end. This way, the initiative organizers could use their comments to improve their pitch to landlords in the future.

The template form is automatically set up to branch to the Yes section or No section depending on the answer given to the yes or no question. However, if you wish to make things less complicated, you can simply delete this question and also delete the “No” section of your template form.

If you want to learn about how branching logic works in Google Forms, you can read more about it here.

Two final things to consider
Finally, keep two principles in mind when designing your form:

1. **Brevity**: keeping the form as short as possible will make completing it less tedious for a landlord. This increases the chances of each landlord finishing it as requested.

2. **Clarity**: making the form as easily understandable as possible will ensure that landlords understand what information you’re looking for.
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Signing up Landlords and Storing Response Information

Delivering the sign-up form to landlords during the event
As mentioned above, one way you can sign up landlords is to share a sign-up form with them towards the end of the virtual webinar. This way, you can quickly capitalize on any interest generated during the session. After the speakers share their pitch, share the sign-up form with the audience so they can sign up while you still have them in the room with you!

Delivering the sign-up form to landlords after the event
You can also send a link to the sign-up form in a follow-up email to those who participated in the virtual webinar or registered for it. This helps to ensure that those who were interested but couldn't attend and those who attended but weren't ready to commit during the session have a second chance to sign up.

It would be especially beneficial if you include an information packet and link to view a recording of the webinar in this email. This way, landlords who haven't yet become partners of the initiative still have access to key information to review from the session.

Follow-up packet sent to all registered attendees to Pittsburgh’s Renting to Refugees Session – it can be found here
You can see the information packet shared with landlords by Pittsburgh’s Renting to Refugees initiative here. Something to observe is how it summarizes key information presented during the session and provides additional information landlords may find useful.

**Saving and organizing landlord information**

With Google Forms, you can create a spreadsheet which is linked to your landlord sign-up form that automatically updates every time a new landlord response is submitted. Feel free to click here to see a webpage with instructions on creating a Google Form-linked spreadsheet.

This spreadsheet can then be shared with your refugee resettlement partners so that the landlord contact information on it is accessible to them at any time.

**Final considerations**

This document details how Pittsburgh expanded its welcoming landlord network - but every community, city, and region has its own unique capacities, strengths, and needs. Pursue different ways of structuring and delivering your message to landlords. Expand your outreach for partnerships or marketing to other types of organizations which were not mentioned in this packet. Tailor your project towards the community you work with in order to maximize your chances of success.

We wish you the best of luck as you prepare your own Renting to Refugees initiatives. Please feel free to write welcomingpgh@pittsburghpa.gov with your questions, suggestions, or concerns.