



Developing an Intentional Landlord Engagement Strategy

Landlord engagement is vital to the work of preventing housing instability and evictions. A landlord engagement strategy can help ensure that local landlords are aware of and make use of available programs, while also communicating important information to tenants.

This brief provides guidance to cities on how to develop an intentional landlord engagement strategy to support the success of programs such as emergency rental assistance, eviction diversion and mediation. The brief explores how cities and their partners can address five critical questions when developing their engagement strategy:

- ◆ Who are your local landlords?
- ◆ How can your city develop a relationship with local landlords?
- ◆ What resources can your city provide to landlords?
- ◆ How can your city inform landlords about programs and services available to them?
- ◆ How can your city navigate unprecedented moments with your local landlords to address housing instability effectively?

This resource was developed by the [National League of Cities](#) and the [Stanford Legal Design Lab](#) based on partnerships with the five city participants of the [Emergency Rental Assistance Technical Assistance Program](#). Additional resources for local governments implementing or refining an ERA program can be found at nlc.org/resource/emergency-rental-assistance-toolkit.

Who Are Your Local Landlords?

Landlord engagement starts with knowing who a city's landlords are and what the local rental housing landscape looks like. Using this knowledge, local governments can design programs that fit the needs of the local landlord community, along with outreach and communications strategies that effectively connect with landlords to encourage their participation.

Collect and analyze available data on local landlords

Program staff should analyze data from eviction prevention programs such as emergency rental assistance, mediation, right to counsel and eviction diversion with the goal of capturing landlord contact information. This can be supplemented with information from municipal neighborhood services teams, small business initiatives, and other programs that may possess data on local landlords.

Staff also should also review residential property information or geographic data to identify properties where the mailing addresses and property addresses are different. If the two addresses are not the same, it is likely that the property is not owner-occupied.

Develop a contact list of local landlords

From the collected data, program staff should create a contact list that contains relevant information about each landlord. This should include their name, mailing address, property address or addresses, and contact information such as e-mail address or phone number.

Create a map visualizing local rental housing units

With the contact list, program staff can map where local landlords own residential rental properties in the community. This visualization can assist the city and its partners in better understanding the local residential rental housing landscape. It will offer insights into the number and types of residential rentals in the community, who owns properties, and where the city might want to target eviction prevention outreach and services such as emergency rental assistance.



TIP: If additional housing market data are available, it can be helpful to overlay the information about local landlords and their residential rental properties with data on housing costs, vacancy rates and the demographic makeup of a neighborhood. This will provide a more robust picture of the residential rental community.

Update the landlord contact list and map regularly

After the initial data collection, analysis and mapping of local landlords, program staff should monitor and update the contact list and map on a semi-annual basis to ensure up-to-date information.

How Can Your City Develop a Relationship with Local Landlords?

Developing authentic, fruitful relationships and establishing trust with local landlords will take time, sustained investment, and intentionality on the part of the city. But the payoff is worth the effort. When cities forge strong communication and trust with the landlord community, they ensure better success and broader engagement for programs designed to support landlords and foster housing stability for tenants.

Attend landlord association meetings

Program staff of eviction prevention services should be assigned to regularly attend local landlord association meetings. At these meetings, staff will have an opportunity to learn about and respond to landlord concerns while establishing ongoing relationships and regular channels of communication. These meetings can also be a platform for raising awareness among landlords about existing programs and available supports.

Host landlord-specific roundtables or convenings

Once relationships with local landlords have been established, eviction prevention services staff should host landlord-specific roundtables or convenings. At these events, staff will have an opportunity to introduce local landlords to relevant city and community services, as well as staff contacts for those services. The convenings also are an opportunity for program staff to educate landlords about local and state housing laws, including the latest updates, along with available funding for emergency rental assistance or residential rental rehabilitation.

Create a landlord advisory board or commission

To create even deeper and more meaningful relationships with local landlords, consider establishing a landlord advisory board or commission. Whether this is a formal or informal body, it can be a dedicated space where landlords contribute feedback on ordinances, program design and funding related to eviction prevention and efforts to promote housing stability.

Hire a landlord liaison or landlord-tenant officer

Consider hiring one or more landlord liaisons to recruit, engage and sustain relationships with local landlords. This dedicated staff member can ensure that the landlord contact list remains up-to-date, and act as a resource for landlords when they are seeking non-legal advice or assistance. When the city provides a clear and consistent point of contact and a familiar face for landlords to reach out to, they may be more likely to access available emergency rental assistance, mediation programs, and supportive services instead of filing for an eviction.

What Resources Can Your City Provide to Local Landlords?

Resources and services specifically focused on supporting local landlords can be a critical part of local efforts to address housing instability and prevent evictions.

Understand the unique needs and priorities of local landlords

Prior to designing resources and services to support local landlords, program staff should engage local landlords through the strategies outlined above. Other avenues for getting a better sense of landlord priorities and concerns include: one-on-one conversations; focus groups or surveys to collect qualitative data about their needs; and outreach to regional landlord associations. Based on these activities, staff will gain an understanding of the key challenges landlords face and how various services and supports can help. Landlord perspectives also will help staff tailor incentive structures in ways that boost landlord participation in eviction prevention programs.



TIP: Prompt landlords to share their thoughts on what is and is not working with current support services and systems. Ask about the greatest challenges or concerns they face with tenants, as well as with financial institutions such as mortgage holders. Collect information on how landlords learn about city programs to inform future outreach strategies.

Develop resources for local landlords with their input

Once staff has an idea of the needs and priorities of local landlords, they can solidify these insights into helpful and effective programs, resources and services. Keep landlords involved in providing feedback as the city and partners launch new or redesigned initiatives, including adjustments to the ERA process or application, mortgage assistance programs, trainings, and more. Use focus groups and other activities to vet programs and program adjustments, troubleshoot barriers and potentially recruit early adopters for available programs and services. Staff can also engage landlords to get feedback on outreach strategies and communications materials tailored to the landlord audience.

Create a feedback loop to evaluate programs and services provided to landlords.

To ensure programs and services for local landlords are effective, it is important to establish a feedback loop by which local landlords feel comfortable offering regular input about what is working and what is not with the programs or services available to them.



TIP: Local landlords are not a homogeneous group. Ensure that input from all local landlords is considered in the design and implementation of programs and resources for landlords. In particular, ensure that non-dominant landlord voices are heard. This group may be different for each city but can include landlords who are women; Black, Indigenous and People of Color; and those who own a smaller number of rental units.

How Can Your City Inform Local Landlords About Programs and Services Available to Them?

Providing information to local landlords effectively requires a multifaceted approach.

Design outreach and program materials to be easily understood

Outreach materials targeted to local landlords, both paper-based and digital, should convey what programs or supports are available, how to apply, and where to go for more information. Avoid providing too much information that could overwhelm the intended audience. Messaging and materials seeking to engage tenants often will not be appropriate or effective for a landlord audience.

Program materials such as applications should be easy to understand and complete. Materials should also center a range of user experiences and reflect a racial and gender equity lens. Develop accompanying resources, such as a clear list of required documents or a breakdown of legal requirements for participating landlords, to ease the application process.

Create a one-stop shop for governmental and community-based assistance to landlords

Information about available programs and services for local landlords should be easily accessible both online and in-person at a physical location. Consider creating an in-person, one-stop shop where landlords can find information about programs and services that can support their tenants and their business. Align with other government service providers and community-based organizations to create a robust referral process that connects landlords to services and information and to build awareness about the range of support available.

Access to information from the in-person, one-stop shop should also be made available on the city's website in a user-friendly format that guides local landlords through a step-by-step process for resolving tenant-related issues, securing emergency rental assistance for tenants, or accessing resources to assist landlords with their business.

Develop a comprehensive landlord training

Local and state laws related to landlord-tenant relationships and residential rental properties are constantly evolving. As a result, some landlords may not be familiar with the most recent landlord-tenant laws, housing regulations, or programs and services available.

Consider creating a comprehensive landlord training that familiarizes local landlords with local and state laws, the nuts and bolts of how to be a landlord, code enforcement, city services, the eviction process, and eviction prevention services such as emergency rental assistance or eviction diversion. The training and related materials can be offered both in-person and virtually. The goal is to help landlords develop a baseline understanding of key issues and available services. Training also can help the city capture contact and property information about local landlords, and facilitate landlord connections with a city liaison focused on their needs.

Distribute information to landlords on a consistent basis

Because the landscape for rental housing is constantly changing, it is important to distribute up-to-date information to landlords consistently. Using the city's landlord contact list, consider developing and distributing a bimonthly newsletter, in digital and paper-based format, or a postcard to inform landlords of upcoming events, programs, services, news, and changes to local and state laws.



TIP: Evaluate which local landlords are accessing programs and services and which local landlords are not. Based on these ongoing evaluations, program staff will be able to refine communication and outreach strategies to ensure all local landlords — including small landlords and those who are women or Black, Indigenous and People of Color — are informed and have access to all available resources.

How Can Your City Navigate Unprecedented Moments with Your Local Landlords to Address Housing Instability Effectively?

Lessons learned from COVID-19 can offer a blueprint for cities faced with other crises in the future.

Develop an engagement strategy to foster housing stability during both emergency and non-emergency times

Compile best practices and key considerations that have worked in your community for landlord engagement before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The compiled list of best practices and key considerations can help guide how program staff engage with local landlords when a public health emergency or a natural disaster occurs in your community in the future.

Be nimble and work with local landlords to address the moment through policy solutions

Prior to piloting programs and services during extraordinary moments, deploy a short survey using the landlord contact list to gauge the needs and priorities of the city's local landlords. Based on the survey, program staff and policymakers will have an idea of how best to support local landlords with targeted programs and services. Do not assume that a one-size-fits-all approach will work, or will be an effective intervention during all potential crises.

Suggested Resources

Cities should reference the following resources while developing and implementing a landlord engagement strategy.

[Strategies to Increase Participation in Eviction Prevention & Eviction Diversion Programs](#)

(National League of Cities)

This blog provides recommendations to city policymakers and staff for growing engagement with landlords and tenants with the aim of increasing participation in eviction prevention and eviction diversion programs.

[Incentives for Landlords to Rent to Lower Income Households](#)

(Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania)

This guide provides recommendations for increasing partnerships and providing incentives for landlords to rent to lower-income households.

[Understanding Who Owns Rental Stock Can Ensure Tenants and Small Landlords Get the Support They Need](#)

(Urban Institute)

This blog describes steps city staff and policymakers can take to better target rental assistance and eviction prevention programs by improving residential rental data collection and transparency.

[Eviction Prevention: A Guide for Local Governments](#)

(National League of Cities and the Stanford Legal Design Lab)

This publication guides local governments through a step-by-step process and menu of program offerings to develop effective interventions that are responsive to community needs.