

Tool: Housing Needs Assessment for Refugee Resettlement Agencies in the U.S.

This assessment tool, designed for resettlement coordinators, housing specialists, case managers, program directors, and policy analysts within refugee service providers, supports the evaluation of newcomer housing needs in the U.S. It helps service providers identify gaps in current housing provisions, recommend improvements, and consider all demographic groups and housing types in the communities they serve. This assessment outlines data collection methods such as surveys, focus groups, and analysis of existing data from government and local agencies, including resettlement and non-profit organizations.

The first section offers questions and prompts to guide a clear assessment of local housing needs. The second section provides a sample completed assessment using Minneapolis, Minnesota as an example.

To complete your assessment, you will be asked to outline the following:

Introduction:

Purpose: Evaluate the housing needs of newcomers resettled in your area

Scope: Cover all cities and towns, demographic groups, and housing types that will be included in your program.

Methodology: Include data collected via surveys, focus groups, and analysis of statistical data from government and local agencies, including resettlement agencies and non-profits.

Executive Summary:

Key Findings: Identify key challenges newcomer households face in accessing affordable housing.

Recommendations: Detail propositions to increase funding for newcomer-specific housing programs, create partnerships with local landlords and developers, and implement anti-discrimination policies.

Community Profile:

Geographic Overview: Share overview of significant newcomer population in the region by mapping current housing partners and advocates

Demographics: Provide demographic information, including the number of newcomers, their countries of origin, age distribution, household composition, income levels, and employment statistics.

Housing Stock: Provide overview of current housing stock available to newcomers.

Current Housing Locations: Profile locations where clients are currently housed. Assess whether these areas are welcoming, if there are recurring issues, and evaluate the strength of partnerships with housing providers.

Current Housing Needs:

Affordable Housing: Assess availability and need for newcomer families.

Rental Housing: Evaluate the rental housing market, including vacancy rates, rental prices, and availability specifically for newcomers.

Homeownership: Analyze barriers to renting and/or homeownership for newcomers, including credit history and access to financing.

Special Populations: Identify housing needs for vulnerable newcomer populations, such as single-parent households, unaccompanied minors, large households, and individuals with disabilities.

Future Housing Needs:

Population Projections: Provide projections for the number of newcomers expected to be resettled in the coming years and their implications for housing demand.

Economic Trends: Analyze economic trends that could impact future housing needs, such as employment opportunities and current and anticipated wage levels for newcomers.

Development Trends: Assess future development trends, including planned housing projects and changes in zoning laws that could impact newcomer housing (view local county and/or city comprehensive plans or connect with local planning office).

Housing Market Analysis

Supply and Demand

- Assess the current supply of housing units available for newcomers utilizing the city and county websites or contacting local planning office.
- Analyze the demand for housing among newcomer populations, considering factors such as population growth, employment trends, and demographic changes.

Market Gaps

- Identify specific areas or segments within the housing market where the supply of housing does not adequately meet the needs of newcomers.
- Determine the extent of the gaps by comparing the demand for housing with the available supply, considering factors such as affordability, location, and housing types.

Affordability Analysis

- Evaluate the affordability of housing options for newcomers, considering their income levels and the cost of housing in the market.
- Analyze the percentage of income spent on housing by different income groups among newcomers to assess the level of affordability and identify any cost burdens.
- Consider other factors that contribute to affordability, such as housing subsidies, rental assistance programs, and housing market trends.
- Identify all housing support programs, special services, and funding available in the community/state. Assess whether these supportive programs are accessible for clients.



Community Feedback

Surveys and Interviews: Summarize findings from surveys and interviews with newcomers and refugee service providers.

Focus Groups: Highlight key insights from focus groups with stakeholders, including newcomers, previously resettled refugees, refugee service providers, resettlement agencies, and local community members or officials.

Barriers to Housing Development

Regulatory Barriers: Identify regulatory barriers to housing development that impact newcomers, such as zoning laws, building codes, lengthy permitting processes, land use restrictions, and restrictive housing policies.

Financial Barriers: Assess financial barriers, including funding and financing challenges specific to newcomer rental housing and homeownership, such as lack of access to credit, high down payment requirements, limited availability of affordable housing loans, and insufficient government subsidies or grants.

Social Barriers: Consider social barriers, such as community opposition, discrimination against newcomers, NIMBYism (Not In My Backyard), cultural misunderstandings, and lack of support services for integrating newcomers into local communities.

Recommendations

Policy Recommendations: Advocate for specific policy changes to local governmental agencies to address the identified housing needs of newcomers.

Program Recommendations: Suggest programs and initiatives to improve housing affordability, accessibility, and availability for newcomers, such as:

- **Affordable Housing Development:** Implement programs that provide funding and incentives for the development of affordable housing units specifically for newcomers. This can include tax credits, low-interest loans, and grants for developers who build affordable housing.
- **Rental Assistance Programs:** Expand rental assistance programs to help newcomers cover the cost of rent. This could include housing vouchers, subsidies, and emergency rental assistance funds to prevent homelessness.
- **Homeownership Support:** Create initiatives to support homeownership among newcomers, such as down payment assistance, affordable mortgage options, and financial literacy programs to help newcomers navigate the home-buying process.
- **Transitional Housing:** Establish transitional housing programs that provide temporary housing for newcomers as they acclimate and find permanent housing solutions. These programs can offer supportive services such as job training, language classes, and case management.
- **Housing Counseling Services:** Offer housing counseling services to newcomers to help them understand their housing options, rights, and responsibilities. This can include workshops on tenant rights, budgeting, and credit building.
- **Partnership with Landlords:** Develop partnerships with local landlords to create a network of rental properties that are welcoming to newcomers. Offer incentives to landlords who



participate in the program, such as guarantees against property damage or rental income loss.

- **Anti-Discrimination Initiatives:** Implement programs that educate both newcomers and the community about housing rights and anti-discrimination laws. Provide legal assistance to newcomers facing discrimination in the housing market.
- **Community Integration Programs:** Foster community integration by developing programs that encourage interaction and understanding between newcomers and existing residents. This can include community events, cultural exchange programs, and neighborhood support groups

Partnership Opportunities: Identify potential partnerships with government agencies, non-profits, and private developers to create housing solutions for newcomers.

Implementation Plan

Action Steps: Outline actionable steps to implement the recommendations.

- Conducting needs assessments and feasibility studies.
- Securing funding and resources.
- Developing and launching pilot programs.
- Creating outreach and communication strategies.
- Establishing monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

Timeline: Provide a detailed timeline for implementing the recommendations. This should include:

- **Short-term (within 6 months):** Initial planning, stakeholder engagement, and pilot program launches.
- **Medium-term (6-18 months):** Full-scale implementation, ongoing monitoring, and adjustments based on feedback.
- **Long-term (18+ months):** Program expansion, sustainability planning, and comprehensive evaluations. Please note that timelines may vary based on funding availability, regulatory approvals, and other unforeseen factors.

Responsible Parties: Identify the parties responsible for each action step.

- Internal staff roles such as project managers, program coordinators, and data analysts.
- External partners such as government agencies, non-profit organizations, and private developers.
- Community stakeholders including landlords, local businesses, and advocacy groups.

Resources Needed: Specify the resources required for implementation, such as:

- Funding sources (grants, loans, donations).
- Human resources (staff, volunteers, consultants).
- Materials and equipment (office space, technology, outreach materials).

Risk Management: Develop a risk management plan to address potential challenges, such as:

- Identifying potential obstacles (funding shortfalls, regulatory hurdles).
- Creating contingency plans.
- Establishing clear communication channels for quick issue resolution.



Monitoring and Evaluation: Define a process for monitoring progress and evaluating outcomes, including:

- Setting measurable goals and objectives.
- Using data collection tools (surveys, focus groups, reports).
- Regularly reviewing progress and making necessary adjustments

Barriers to Housing Development

Data Sources: List sources used in assessment.

Survey Instruments: Include copies of any surveys or questionnaires used.

Additional Analysis: Provide any additional analysis or data that supports the findings and recommendations.

Completed Example: Housing Needs Assessment for Newcomers in Minneapolis

Introduction

Purpose: The purpose of this assessment is to evaluate the housing needs of newcomers resettled in Minneapolis, identify gaps in current housing provisions, and provide recommendations for improving housing solutions.

Scope: This assessment covers the entire city of Minneapolis, focusing on all demographic groups of refugees and housing types.

Methodology: Data was collected through a combination of surveys, focus groups, and analysis of existing statistical data from government and local agencies, including resettlement agencies and non-profit organizations.

Executive Summary

Key Findings: Newcomer households in Minneapolis face significant challenges in accessing affordable and suitable housing, such as high rental costs, discrimination, and lack of available housing stock.

Recommendations: Increase funding for refugee-specific housing programs, create partnerships with local landlords and housing developers, and implement anti-discrimination policies to protect newcomers.

Community Profile

Geographic Overview: Minneapolis is a major resettlement city in the Midwest, known for its strong community support networks.

Demographics: Minneapolis has a newcomer population of approximately 15,000, with major groups coming from Somalia, Myanmar, and Iraq. The median age of the refugee population is 28 years, with an average household size of 4.5 individuals. The median household income for refugees is \$25,000, and the unemployment rate is 12%.



Housing Stock: The housing stock available to newcomers consists of 40% single-family homes, 50% multi-family units, and 10% other types of housing. Many homes are over 40 years old and in need of repair.

Current Housing Needs

Affordable Housing: An additional 1,500 affordable housing units are needed to meet the demand from newcomer families.

Rental Housing: The vacancy rate for rental housing is 2%, and the average rent is \$1,000 per month, making it unaffordable for many newcomer households.

Homeownership: The homeownership rate among newcomer is only 10%, with barriers including lack of credit history and difficulties in securing financing.

Special Populations: Single-parent households and individuals with disabilities face significant challenges in finding accessible and affordable housing options.

Future Housing Needs

Population Projections: The newcomer population in Minneapolis is expected to grow by 20% over the next five years, increasing the demand for housing by 3,000 units.

Economic Trends: Employment opportunities for newcomers are expected to improve with local economic growth, but wage levels remain low, impacting housing affordability.

Development Trends: Several large housing developments are planned, but these are primarily aimed at middle-income residents.

Housing Market Analysis

Supply and Demand: The supply of affordable housing is not keeping up with demand, leading to increased prices and competition for available units.

Market Gaps: There is a significant gap in affordable rental units and homes for first-time buyers among refugee populations.

Affordability Analysis: 60% of newcomer households are cost-burdened, spending more than 30% of their income on housing.

Community Feedback

Surveys and Interviews: Newcomers expressed concerns about rising housing costs, overcrowding, and the quality of available housing.

Focus Groups: Stakeholders highlighted the need for more varied housing types and better support for low-income and special needs populations.

Barriers to Housing Development

Regulatory Barriers: Zoning laws restrict high-density developments in many parts of the city, limiting affordable housing options.

Financial Barriers: High construction costs and limited funding for affordable housing projects are significant challenges.



Social Barriers: Community opposition and discrimination against refugees are major social barriers to housing development.

Recommendations

Advocate for Local Policy Recommendations: Advocate for reforming of zoning laws to allow for higher-density developments, provide tax incentives for affordable housing projects, rental caps, and implement anti-discrimination policies to protect newcomers.

Program Recommendations: Establish a housing trust fund for refugees, create a rental assistance program, and expand support services for newcomers, including housing counseling and financial literacy programs.

Partnership Opportunities: Partner with non-profit organizations, private developers, and local landlords to create mixed-income housing developments and provide housing vouchers specifically for newcomers.

Implementation Plan

Timeline:

- Year 1: Launch newcomer rental assistance program.
- Year 2-3: Secure funding and begin new affordable housing projects for newcomers.

Action Steps:

- Follow up on land-use and zoning laws within the next 12-24 months with local planning agencies and affordable housing organizations.
- Secure additional funding for newcomer-specific housing programs over the next two years.
- Launch a rental assistance program within 6 months.

In this Fiscal Year Period (Date-Date):

- Attend four meetings with the Business, Inspections, Housing & Zoning Committee and propose amendments to Zoning Code X on the grounds of x,y,z
- Apply to ten grant opportunities, collaborating with local grant writing/development team to secure additional funding for newcomer-specific housing programs over the next two years.
- Research rent assistance programs, identify gaps, and propose a rent assistance program that bridges the gaps in assistance for newcomers.
 - Meet with local rent assistance organizations.
 - Collaborate with stakeholders invested in rental assistance programs in the area (Mayor's office, HUD CoC, x, y, z)
 - Draft a program proposal and budget, with local grant writing/development team, that can be pitched to interested donors.
 - Pilot program, collect data and narratives throughout the pilot, and use that information to expand pilot in the next fiscal year.

Responsible Parties:

- City Planning Department
- Housing and Community Development Agency
- Local Resettlement Agencies and Non-Profit Organizations



Appendices

Summary Table: Housing Needs Assessment for Newcomers in Minneapolis

This table provides a concise overview of the key findings and recommendations from the housing needs assessment for refugee resettlement in Minneapolis (all illustrative data and findings).

Category	Key Findings	Recommendations
Affordable Housing	Need for 1,500 additional affordable units.	Increase funding for affordable housing programs, establish housing trust fund for newcomers.
Rental Housing	Vacancy rate at 2%, average rent \$1,000/month, unaffordable for many newcomers.	Create rental assistance program, partner with local landlords for affordable rental agreements.
Homeownership	Homeownership rate among newcomers at 10%, barriers include credit and financing.	Develop homeownership assistance programs, offer financial literacy and credit-building workshops with local affordable housing organizations.
Special Populations	Significant challenges for single-parent households and individuals with disabilities.	Increase support services, ensure availability of accessible housing units, provide targeted assistance programs with wrap around services for set period (e.g. till the newcomer has achieved long term housing stability).
Population Projections	Refugee population expected to grow by 20% over the next 5 years.	Plan for an additional 3,000 housing units to accommodate growth, prioritize affordable housing.
Economic Trends	Low wage levels impact housing affordability despite potential employment growth.	Advocate for fair wages, provide employment support and training programs for newcomers.
Development Trends	Planned developments primarily for middle-income residents.	Encourage mixed-income developments, reform zoning laws to allow higher-density affordable housing with local governmental planning agencies
Regulatory Barriers	Zoning laws restrict high-density developments.	Reform zoning laws to facilitate affordable housing projects in collaboration with local governmental planning agencies
Financial Barriers	High construction costs, limited funding.	Provide tax incentives for developers, secure additional funding sources with local governmental planning agencies for support
Social Barriers	Community opposition and discrimination.	Implement anti-discrimination policies, promote community integration initiatives with local fair housing agency



Blank Template: Housing Needs Assessment

Using these section guidelines and definitions, provide information specific to your organization's context, client base, and needs

Introduction

Purpose:

Scope:

Methodology:

Executive Summary

Key Findings:

Recommendations:

Community Profile

Geographic Overview:

Demographics:

Housing Stock:

Current Housing Needs

Affordable Housing:

Rental Housing:

Homeownership:

Special Populations:



Future Housing Needs

Population Projections:

Economic Trends:

Development Trends:

Housing Market Analysis

Supply and Demand:

Market Gaps:

Affordability Analysis:

Community Feedback

Surveys and Interviews:

Focus Groups:

Barriers to Housing Development

Regulatory Barriers:

Financial Barriers:

Social Barriers:



Recommendations

Policy Recommendations:

Program Recommendations:

- Affordable Housing Development:
- Rental Assistance Programs:
- Homeownership Support:
- Transitional Housing:
- Housing Counseling Services:
- Partnership with Landlords:
- Anti-Discrimination Initiatives:
- Community Integration Programs:

Partnership Opportunities:



Implementation Plan

Action Steps:

Timeline:

- Short-term (within 6 months):
- Medium-term (6-18 months):
- Long-term (18+ months):

Responsible Parties:

Resources Needed:

- Funding sources:
- Human resources:
- Materials and equipment:

Risk Management:

Monitoring and Evaluation:

Appendices

Data Sources:

Survey Instruments:

Additional Analysis:

The IRC received competitive funding through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Grant #90RB0053. The project is 100% financed by federal funds. The contents of this document are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.

