

FAIR HOUSING: It's good business

Fair housing is not just the law -- it's also good business practice. Fair housing compliance helps ensure that you have a wide application pool for your rental housing and that all tenants are treated equitably. The guidelines below offer common-sense policies and practices for fair housing.



Establishing policies, procedure and rules

- Develop policies and procedures that are consistent with fair housing laws. Rental criteria should focus on whether an applicant will pay the rent, maintain the premises, and live in harmony with neighbors.
- Make sure that property and amenity rules apply to everyone rather than to groups of people. For example, rather than, "Children cannot ride bikes in the parking lot," the rule should state, "Riding bikes in the parking lot is not allowed."
- Establish consistent protocols for inquiries, tours of the property, and accepting applications. Examples include describing and showing amenities, completing visitor cards, explaining screening procedures, and conducting follow-up.

Marketing your unit

- Include the HUD Equal Housing Opportunity logo, slogan, or statement on all written documents and in all print, online, television and radio advertising.
- In written materials, include a notice such as, "This information is available upon request in alternate formats including large print."
- Consider translating marketing materials and forms into other languages. Learn about how to obtain the assistance of translators to facilitate communication with tenants who do not speak English as a primary language.
- Describe your rental unit accurately. There is less risk of a fair housing complaint if an ad describes the property and its desirable features (size, location, price, amenities), rather than some target audience. Feel free to market to certain protected classes by pointing out that rentals are accessible for people with disabilities or families are welcome, or by emphasizing amenities such as playgrounds.

Inquiries and tours of properties

- Describe application procedures and explain your selection criteria consistently. Use the same phrasing for all applicants. A good practice is to provide an application and written admissions criteria to anyone who asks about renting from you.
- Display a Fair Housing poster on the property or in a unit that you're showing, so it is readily apparent to everyone looking for housing.

Tenant selection

- A fair housing best practice is to accept the first qualified applicant. Date and timestamp all applications – then you know the exact order that you received them.
- Be sure not to make assumptions about an applicant – use your fact-based criteria to determine qualifications.

Denying an applicant

- If you reject an applicant or decide to charge an increased deposit or to require a cosigner, you should provide the applicant with written notice and the reason for your decision.
- If the applicant disputes information on the screening company's consumer report, provide an opportunity for reconsideration.

During tenancy

- Enforce rules consistently but ensure that you consider extenuating circumstances in situations that are disability related or that involve victims of domestic violence.
- Provide services, upgrades and maintenance to all tenants equally.

Reasonable accommodations and modifications for people with disabilities

- Ensure applicants and tenants know of your willingness to consider requests for reasonable accommodations and modifications. Include phrases like "We provide accommodations for people with disabilities upon request" in written materials such as letterhead, application forms, and newsletters.
- Establish a policy or procedure for addressing requests for reasonable accommodations or modifications.
- An accommodation is reasonable if it is related to the tenant's disability, is not an undue administrative and financial burden for the housing provider, and does not fundamentally alter the housing and services the housing provider offers. Before saying "no," call a Fair Housing Partners of Washington agency and ask for help in determining these factors.
- Have a procedure in place to protect confidential information about tenants with disabilities.
- If you have a business office, ensure it is accessible to people with disabilities.

Fair housing training and resources

- The Fair Housing Partners of Washington offer free sample policies for reasonable accommodations, service animals, harassment and retaliation, and domestic violence. Visit www.kingcounty.gov/exec/CivilRights/FH/FHresources.aspx.
- The Fair Housing Partners of Washington offer free fair housing training sessions bimonthly. The comprehensive workshops are designed to inform property owners and managers about their rights and responsibilities, and to review state and federal fair housing. Visit www.kingcounty.gov/exec/CivilRights/FH/FHWorkshops.aspx.
- Housing providers should ensure all new employees receive fair housing training as part of their orientation, and provide refresher training to all employees annually.



For more fair housing information, contact the Fair Housing Partners of Washington:

U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development – www.hud.gov, 800-877-0246, TTY 206-220-5185
Washington State Human Rights Commission – www.hum.wa.gov, 800-233-3247, TTY 800-300-7525
King County Office of Civil Rights – www.kingcounty.gov/civilrights, 206-296-7592, TTY Relay: 711
Seattle Office for Civil Rights – www.seattle.gov/civilrights, 206-684-4500, TTY 206-684-4503
Tacoma Human Rights & Human Services Dept. – www.cityoftacoma.org/humanrights,
253-591-5151, TTY 253-591-5153