



RECOMMENDATIONS AND TIPS FOR EVICTION PREVENTION

Although property managers oversee leases, policy violations and evictions, resident services coordinators can play a vital role in ensuring positive relationships between managers and tenants. Indeed, by communicating regularly with both groups and establishing formal procedures, resident services coordinators are able to help prevent evictions, lease violations and other potential problems between tenants and managers. The eviction process in many communities can cost property owners tens of thousands of dollars. Avoiding an eviction is a win-win situation for both tenants and managers.

Communication between Property Management, Resident Services Coordinators and Tenants

Before a resident can be evicted from a community, the property manager must send the tenant a notice. Eviction notices are almost always the result of one of two things—nonpayment of rent or violation of lease policies. Often, resident services coordinators are unaware of residents facing potential eviction. By the time they are aware, the situation leaves too little time for effective intervention that could help prevent the eviction. Thus, it is important that resident services staff and property management staff strengthen communication with respect to evictions, nonpayment and policy violations. This communication should be part of a formal process and could take one of several forms.

- When a notice is sent to the resident, resident services staff receive a carbon copy of the notice, allowing them to approach the resident to see what assistance or mitigation is needed to avoid eviction.
- The resident services coordinator could create a flyer of information describing what a resident can do when faced with eviction, such as where to find rental assistance and how to appeal property management decisions. This information could be included with the late payment and eviction notice sent out by property management.

The most important component of this strategy is communication between resident services coordinators, property managers and even maintenance staff, who can pinpoint a possible policy violation, allowing a resident services coordinator to intervene before it is too late. Another important component of this strategy is compiling data and tracking tenants with a history of problems. Included in this manual is an explanation of a spreadsheet tool for eviction prevention, which shows when notices were sent to residents, why these notices were sent and what the outcomes of the notices were (e.g., eviction, intervention, resolution).

Intervening to Avoid Evictions

Whenever a potential problem that could result in eviction is spotted by staff from any department on the property, it is the job of a resident services coordinator to work with the tenant to ensure s/he can maintain residency and participation in the services program. Depending on the nature of the problem, this will involve helping locate financial assistance for rental payments or remedying a behavior that violates property rules.

Nonpayment

Whether a resident cannot pay rent because of a job loss, medical emergency, family tragedy or something else, the resident services coordinator's knowledge of benefit and subsidy programs will be crucial in the eviction prevention process. In many localities, public and private agencies provide temporary rental assistance until the resident is again able to pay rent, either through returning to work or through receiving a permanent subsidy.

To help mitigate the risk of evictions due to temporary financial crises, resident services coordinators should:

1. Research all temporary assistance agencies in the area.
2. Make a list of these agencies that includes and fully describes the type of assistance available.
3. Maintain a contact list of all government-benefit and subsidy agencies with names of individuals within each agency.
4. Establish partnerships with agencies with the most potential to assist tenants with emergency financial assistance.
5. Regularly verify the information on the contact lists to ensure available assistance in the event of a crisis situation.

Many agencies offer different types of assistance for different populations (e.g., individuals, families with children, single-parent households, etc.). As a result, it is important that your list of programs detail the target population and other restrictions or details for the assistance offered by each agency.

Policy violations

Leases provide detailed information on resident responsibilities with regard to disturbances, property liability and proper use of the property. Although a lease is a contract between the resident and the property management staff, residents rarely give the fine print the careful attention it deserves. In other words, tenants do not take the time to become acquainted with the information until they have been notified that they are in violation of a previously unknown policy. Thus, the first step in preventing lease violations is a review of the various stipulations as part of the orientation process with new residents.

Depending upon the severity of the infraction, the resident may be able to resolve the issue with property management. The more severe the violation, however, the less forgiving the property management staff will be in negotiating with the tenant. In such cases, resident services coordinators can be of significant help to residents.

Working with residents on policy violations requires resident services coordinators to know and understand the lease agreement. To acquaint themselves with the specific policies of their property, resident services coordinators should obtain a copy of the standard lease and familiarize themselves with the provisions. A training of all resident services coordinators by the property management staff could help as well. Once the resident services coordinators understand what is expected of residents, they can develop tools to ensure that residents also understand property management's expectations.

To facilitate this effort, resident services coordinators should:

- Obtain a list of common violations from the property management staff.
- Develop "Did you know..." documents. Develop a document that explains a particular violation, the consequence for committing the violation and possible prevention tips. Place copies of the document in mailboxes and common areas around the property. Be certain to include contact information should residents have a question.
- Convene community meetings. Resident meetings are a good mechanism for communicating important issues. Organized and concerned residents are less likely to commit violations.
- Include violation prevention tips with tenant communications. If property management staff provides regular communication to tenants either through rent statements or newsletters, develop violation prevention tips to be included.

These are just a few recommendations to get the process started. Resident services coordinators should keep in mind that a partnership and strong communication policies with the property management staff is crucial to the success of eviction prevention efforts. Be certain to keep property management staff well informed and invite their feedback when developing a program.