

6. Identify "resident leaders" with bi-lingual skills to help deal with the social issues that can arise when diverse peoples are living together. CommonBond has been successful with "United Neighbors" who convey emergency procedures (fire drills, electrical failures, tornados) in their native languages. These resident leaders may even agree to do audio tapes for your residents (an inexpensive and potentially life-saving tool). Remember that many recent immigrants come from "oral societies" where the culture's history and morals are handed down not on paper, but by word of mouth. So oral instruction is likely to be better accepted and retained.

7. Provide ongoing cultural training for your staff (and you go, too!). This can be done through formal classes, or by meeting with community groups to learn more about the people to whom you have had the opportunity to rent.

The homogenous apartment community will eventually be a relic of the past. Landlords will find more and more diversity among the people who reside with them. Getting to know and understand your residents (landlords do this any way with residents who are just like them!) will help toward diffusing misunderstandings that might give rise to fair housing complaints.

This "Fair Housing Focus" article has been co-authored by Nadeen Green, Senior Counsel with For Rent Magazine® and Scott Beckman, Director of CommonBond Communities in Minnesota. The information contained in this article is not to be considered legal advice, and the authors and their organizations strongly recommend that you consult with your own counsel as to any fair housing questions or problems you may have.

Integrate Screening with other Systems to Improve Your Operations

By Mike Lapsley, President and CEO of RentGrow, Inc

There was a time when property websites, resident screening systems, property management software, and other multifamily technologies functioned as distinct, disconnected units. Today, systems integration allows these systems to seamlessly transfer applicant data between one another, simplifying the overall property management workload. For example:

Applicant information can flow between the screening system and the property management system.

Around-the-clock applications and screening can be conducted by integrating the screening system with on-line property listings and portals.

Data can be transferred from the screening system into various electronic forms

Integrated systems allow property management companies to choose their favorite system for each aspect of running their business and then tie them together. The benefits to the management company include:

Less manual data entry, resulting in reduced likelihood of data entry errors.

Time savings in the leasing office and greater staff productivity.

Greater integrity of applicant data across multiple properties, offices, and systems.

Integration capability is often dependent on the product versions you are using, so contact your various technology providers for more details.

The MITS Initiative: An Industry-wide Collaboration

One big factor in allowing a smooth integration process is the growing practice of the MITS Initiative, or the Multifamily Information and Transactions Standards. It is a great example of the multifamily industry working together. MITS is a non-profit initiative within the apartment industry to facilitate common data standards and technology practices. MITS is funded and sponsored by a broad group of industry firms, is supported by NMHC, and is a national outreach partner for NAA.

When multifamily technology companies collaborate, the industry benefits because management companies can choose and seamlessly integrate the "best of breed" companies in each industry category. Take the time to find out what multifamily systems you're able to integrate with in order to improve your operations.

For more information about MITS, go to <http://www.mitsproject.com/>. Mike Lapsley is president and CEO of RentGrow, Inc., the resident screening experts (www.rentgrow.com). He can be reached at lapsley@rentgrow.com. RentGrow, Inc., 307 Waverley Oaks Road, Suite 301 Waltham, MA 02452, p: 781-332-3345, f: 781-574-4416 Voted "Top Resident Screening System" in the Multi-Housing News Technology Choice Awards, Selected "Preferred Resident Screening Vendor" by Buyers Access, join the conversation at www.residentscreeningblog.com