

FAIR HOUSING OF MARIN

AFFIRMATIVE MARKETING POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

a guide to developing effective affirmative marketing policies for affordable housing providers

Summary of Key Issues

Agency & Project Description

Affirmative marketing plans should be introduced by a brief description of the agency's mission and its marketing policies. Marketing plans for specific projects should include a description of the physical, financial, and ownership structures as reference points for reviewing agencies.

Affirmative Marketing Goals

While the current legal and political climate discourages the use of specific ethnic quotas, setting goals and engaging in targeted outreach is an option which is legally defensible and can be just as effective. A demographic analysis should be conducted of the ethnic distribution for the target income group within the project service area and within the housing agency's clientele to produce an accurate picture of the minority groups that could benefit from targeted outreach. Above and beyond ethnicity, the agency might want to take into consideration members of other protected categories and identifiable groups, such as homosexuals, people with disabilities, etc.

Outreach Strategies

Where there is an identified need to target a particular minority community, it is essential to first establish what kind of outreach is appropriate for that group. The timing of outreach and general publicity also needs to be taken into consideration to assure sufficient time for targeted minorities to take advantage of any assistance programs before the application deadline.

The phrasing of equal housing opportunity language is important because state and local fair housing laws or agency policies are usually more inclusive than the federal protected categories. Simply displaying the EHO logo or listing the federal categories is not sufficient.

Application Process

Clear communications, including the format of materials, can help to minimize many potential application process problems. One particular problem area is the confusion between interest lists and waiting lists. The timing of occupancy can create problems

for successful applicants who need to give notice to current landlords without incurring penalties or paying double rent.

Application Package

The application package should strike a balance between up front disclosure of relevant tenancy documents and the amount of material an applicant can digest at one point. Application forms and materials should be as simple as possible and tested before printing and distribution.

Primarily for record keeping purposes, the application and its responses should be in English. However, applicants should have access to important documents in their own language and to translation services.

Selection Criteria

In addition to the basic program requirements, application materials should clearly communicate the eligibility standards, the criteria for rejection of an application, and the appeals process.

Selection Process

Experience indicates that a random drawing is the fairest method for placing applicants on the rent-up list. Rejected applicants should be informed of the reasons and granted the opportunity to appeal.

To the greatest extent possible, successful applicants should be given the opportunity to select from available units appropriate to their needs.

Waiting List Procedures

Housing providers should clearly indicate how applicants are placed on their waiting lists. A recertification of applicants on the waiting list should be conducted at least on an annual basis and reopened lists should be filled through a process similar to the initial rent-up.

Agencies with multiple projects or programs should consider the merits of creating an integrated waiting list system. The concept of a central applicant pool serving all of the county's housing agencies could be considered as a means of simplifying the housing search process.

Applicant Support Programs

Housing providers should make some contingency for assisting minority applicants who are disadvantaged by language skills, physical or mental disability, unfamiliarity with the application process, etc., so that they can compete on a comparatively equal footing with other applicants. Assistance programs can be handled internally or through cooperating social service agencies.

Tenant Support Programs

Nonprofit housing agencies should not view the provision of housing for low-income people as their end goal, but as a stage in the process of helping tenants maintain their stability or progress towards independence. While not part of a typical affirmative marketing plan, tenant support programs are a strongly recommended option.

Marketing Staffing & Budget

The responsibilities of the designated affirmative marketing staff person and all others involved in the rent-up process should be identified. Sufficient funds should be allocated in the project budget to carry out an extensive affirmative marketing program.

Reporting Procedures

Monitoring procedures should be viewed as an aid to internal evaluation. Record keeping methods should be clear, simple, and efficient. Reporting stages would consist of: marketing plan approval, initial rent-up certification, and annual recertification.

Marketing Plan Evaluation

An evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of the affirmative marketing outreach programs should be conducted and serve as the basis for improving future affirmative marketing efforts.