Enhancing Community Relations for H-2A Housing

A presentation for NCAE
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The H-2A program doesn’t just supply a workforce; it changes communities
H-2A employers don’t just bring people to the US to work. They bring them to the US to live.

It’s not just a matter of logistics, it’s a matter of real people living real lives.
Washington Growers League has 16 years experience in farmworker and H-2A housing.

WGL develops owns and operates farmworker housing, most of which is now used for the H-2A program, but also for domestic migrants.
WGL Seasonal Farmworker Housing

- Sage Bluff Seasonal Farmworker Housing in Malaga, WA – 270 beds

- Brender Creek Seasonal Farmworker Housing in Cashmere, WA – 200 beds

- Mattawa Slope Seasonal Farmworker Housing in Mattawa, WA – 538 beds in August 2019

- Cherry harvest Rent-a-tent program – 220 14’x24’ 6-person tents approximately 80,000 bed-nights in 2018.
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Cherry Harvest Rent-a-Tent
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Mattawa Slope Seasonal Farmworker Housing
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EARLY development – before site prep

- Community meetings - go with an architects rendering of project with landscaping

- City and county planners - meet with city council

- Meet with law enforcement and Fire Departments to describe project

- Meet with neighbors to talk about how to live next to each other - try to address concerns
Community Issues with Farm Worker Housing in General

- Fear that residents will require more police and fire services
- Fear of “the other” (people of a different culture and race)
- Fear of single males away from home hassling women and children
- Fear of crime from foreign men
- Fear of change in nature of the community (% of population)
Establish Key Relationships - Early

- Establish a working relationship between housing management and law enforcement
- Sponsor tours of the facility for police
- Let police use facility for training
- Work cooperatively with police on drug incidents and suspected drug vending by outside sources
- Work cooperatively with law enforcement on incidents of suspected prostitution
Establish Key Relationships-Early

- Offer fire department tours of facilities and let them use facility for training
- Give fire department access anytime
Become a Facilitator for Services

- Create relationship with local community health clinics

- Offer on-site health fairs and screenings to residents

- Have local literacy organizations to hold reading and English classes on-site
Become a Facilitator for Services

- Allow local community groups to offer services on-site:
  - Churches
  - Migrant aid groups
Become a Community Asset

- Offer facility for community group use during low seasons
- Many rural communities don’t have large facilities
  - Promotora training
  - High school Mariachi competition
  - Use of H-2A housing facility by homeless during of season
Become a Community Asset

- Contribute to community events and causes with donations and participation of property management team
Provide Residents with Activities

- Provide residents with additional transportation opportunities, van and bus services, bicycles
- Television
- Wi-Fi
- Basketball, Volleyball, Soccer, etc
- Outdoor grills
Protect Your Residents

- Provide residents with information on their rights and opportunities in local commercial transactions. Intervene if necessary.
- Provide nearby merchants with information on H-2A residents ID (Passports as ID)
- Establish a relationship with nearby merchants so that in the event of problems or concerns they can contact housing management first rather than law enforcement
Protect Your Residents

- Opportunists prey on an isolated, mostly male population away from home, with money.

- Protect residents from aggressive sales, drug dealers, prostitutes, scammers.
H-2A Housing has Unique Issues

- Residents have limited transportation
- Impact within walking distance
- Lots of single men
- Lack of investment in the community by H-2A housing residents
- Lack of family contacts in the area
Location Defines the Issues

- Rural vs. town

- On farm vs. rural community

- In town:
  - Displacement of existing low income rental housing
  - Fear of cities already facing affordable housing shortages
Engage Residents with the Community

- H-2A workers are focused on work, but they are curious about the US
- Seeing and exploring the community
Here to work – and Live

- H-2A employers don’t just bring people to the US to work. They bring them to the US to live.

- It’s not just a matter of logistics, it’s a matter of real people living real lives.

- The H-2A program doesn’t just supply a workforce; it changes communities, and we can make those changes positive.