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AFFORDABLE HOUSING TEMPORARY STAFFING

When Should a Property Bring in Outside Help?



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Affordable housing properties do not usually fall behind because the onsite team does not care. They fall behind because the workload can change faster than the staffing model. One resignation, an extended leave, a portfolio takeover, a surge in annual recertifications, a difficult lease-up, or an upcoming Management and Occupancy Review can turn a manageable workload into a compliance risk in a matter of weeks.

Temporary affordable housing staffing can give an owner or management company something a permanent hiring process cannot always provide: experienced capacity now. The question is not whether outside help should replace the property's team. The better question is whether temporary support can protect the team, residents, revenue, and compliance position while management solves the underlying problem.

THE DECISION POINT: Bring in outside help before the backlog becomes the property's normal operating condition.

Why Staffing Gaps Matter More in Affordable Housing

Affordable housing occupancy work is deadline-driven and documentation-heavy. HUD's Multifamily occupancy handbook covers eligibility, waiting lists, income and rent calculations, leasing, annual and interim recertifications, and EIV requirements. When staffing capacity drops, those responsibilities do not disappear - they accumulate.

HUD's MOR process also evaluates management and occupancy practices, including tenant files and project records. A temporary staffing problem can therefore become a compliance problem when files, notices, certifications, waiting-list actions, or corrective work are not completed consistently.



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Sign #1: Annual Recertifications Are Starting to Age

A recertification backlog is one of the clearest indicators that the property needs additional capacity. The earliest warning is not 50 overdue files. It is the moment staff can no longer keep current work moving while also completing the older files.

- Annual recertifications are repeatedly reaching the final stages of the notice cycle before completion.
- Staff are spending most of the week chasing old files instead of protecting upcoming anniversary dates.
- Interviews are completed, but verifications, calculations, quality control, or final signatures remain unfinished.
- Supervisors cannot produce a reliable aging report showing exactly what is late and why.

HCA TIP: A recovery plan needs two lanes: one team protects current certifications while another works the backlog. Otherwise, today's recovery effort can create next month's backlog.

Sign #2: Vacancies Are Growing Faster Than the Team Can Lease

Vacancy problems are not always marketing problems. Sometimes applications are waiting to be processed, eligibility documents are incomplete, files are awaiting review, or one overwhelmed employee is handling the entire move-in pipeline.

Recent HUD OIG work on public housing found that staffing and contractor resource shortages were among the factors contributing to delayed unit turnover and long-term vacancies. Although public housing and HUD Multifamily operate under different frameworks, the operational lesson is relevant: insufficient capacity can directly affect occupancy performance.

- Applications sit untouched for days or weeks.
- Applicant interviews cannot be scheduled quickly enough.
- Move-in files are repeatedly returned for missing or inconsistent documentation.
- Ready units remain vacant because the compliance/occupancy side cannot finish the lease-up process.
- Waiting-list work is being postponed to handle daily emergencies.

Sign #3: A Key Occupancy or Compliance Employee Leaves

The loss of one experienced occupancy specialist can expose how much institutional knowledge was concentrated in a single person. If no one else knows the property's recertification calendar, EIV workflow, waiting-list process, software procedures, or correction history, the vacancy is more than an HR issue.



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Temporary support can stabilize the operation while management recruits a permanent employee. It can also prevent the remaining staff from absorbing an unsustainable workload and becoming the next employees to leave.

Sign #4: You Are Taking Over a Troubled Property or Portfolio

Takeovers often reveal problems that were not visible during due diligence: late recertifications, incomplete files, unresolved EIV discrepancies, inconsistent waiting lists, missing signatures, outdated policies, unprocessed interim changes, and uncorrected prior findings.

A takeover team may need additional people for 30, 60, or 90 days simply to establish control. Experienced temporary staff can inventory the workload, separate urgent compliance risks from routine cleanup, and create reliable processes for the permanent team.

Sign #5: An MOR, Audit, Monitoring Review or Due-Diligence Deadline Is Approaching

Outside support is especially valuable when the property has a fixed deadline. HUD's MOR guidance emphasizes review of tenant files and project records as part of evaluating compliance with HUD requirements and HAP contract obligations.

- Pre-auditing tenant files before the reviewer selects a sample
- Correcting documentation deficiencies
- Organizing EIV and occupancy records
- Reviewing prior findings and proof of correction
- Preparing file indexes and tracking outstanding items
- Keeping daily operations moving while permanent staff focus on review preparation

Sign #6: Your Best Employees Are Working Nights and Weekends Just to Stay Even

Overtime can solve a short spike. It is not a long-term staffing model. When experienced employees are constantly working after hours, skipping training, delaying resident follow-up, or carrying work home, management should treat that as a capacity warning.

ASK THIS QUESTION: If one more employee called out for two weeks, would the property remain compliant and operational? If the answer is no, the staffing model has no margin for disruption.



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Sign #7: Errors Are Increasing Even Though Productivity Looks High

A team can complete a large number of certifications and still create risk if quality control disappears. Speed without accuracy produces rework. Common warning signs include incorrect effective dates, inconsistent income calculations, missing verifications, EIV discrepancies without resolution, incomplete signatures, and certifications that do not match the software.

Temporary support can be used for production, quality control, or both. In some situations, the best use of an outside consultant is not processing files but reviewing the files the onsite team completes.

Sign #8: The Property Has a Major Lease-Up or Occupancy Goal

A lease-up creates a temporary workload that may not justify permanent headcount. Application processing, applicant interviews, third-party verification, eligibility review, file correction, move-in scheduling, and software entry can all peak at the same time.

Bringing in experienced temporary staff for the peak period allows the permanent property team to maintain resident service and daily operations without slowing the lease-up.

Sign #9: HOTMA or Another Major Compliance Change Is Stretching the Team

Major regulatory changes create two workloads at once: staff must continue processing current files while learning and implementing new requirements. Outside compliance support can help with policy review, file testing, training reinforcement, quality control, and temporary production capacity during the transition.

What Temporary Affordable Housing Staff Can Actually Do

Operational Need	Temporary Support Can Assist With
Recertification backlog	Annuals, interims, interviews, verification follow-up, calculations, corrections and software processing
Vacancy / lease-up	Application processing, applicant interviews, eligibility files, move-ins and waiting-list support
Compliance overload	File audits, quality control, EIV review, corrective work and layered-program support
MOR preparation	Pre-audits, correction tracking, document organization and readiness support
Staff vacancy	Temporary occupancy, leasing or compliance coverage while a permanent hire is recruited



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Portfolio takeover	File inventory, backlog triage, workflow stabilization and short-term onsite support
Remote capacity need	File review, certifications, verification follow-up and compliance production when appropriate

Temporary Staffing Should Not Mean 'Send Us a Warm Body'

Affordable housing is specialized. A general leasing professional may be excellent with residents but still require significant training before processing HUD or LIHTC files. The value of outside staffing is highest when the person deployed understands the program, can work within the client's software and procedures, and knows when to escalate a compliance question instead of guessing.

- ☐ Program experience relevant to the property - HUD, LIHTC, HOME, RAD, PBV, public housing, or layered programs as applicable
- ☐ Experience with the work being assigned - leasing, recertifications, EIV, file audits, MOR preparation, or compliance review
- ☐ Ability to work within the client's software and documentation standards
- ☐ Clear productivity and quality expectations
- ☐ Defined supervisory and escalation channels
- ☐ Strong handling of resident and personally identifiable information

Remote or Onsite? Choose Based on the Bottleneck

Not every staffing problem requires travel. Remote support can be highly effective when the bottleneck is file review, certification processing, verification follow-up, quality control, or other work that can be performed securely offsite. Onsite staffing is often more useful when the assignment requires resident interviews, applicant traffic, physical file cleanup, property-specific coordination, or a concentrated takeover effort.

BEST MODEL: Use the least disruptive staffing model that solves the actual bottleneck. Many recovery projects work best with a hybrid of onsite resident-facing support and remote compliance production.

When Outside Help Is Probably Not the Answer

Temporary staffing is a tool, not a cure for every operational problem. If leadership has no defined workflow, no one can approve completed work, system access cannot be provided, or the property refuses to correct the process that created the backlog, adding people may only make the disorder move faster.

Before deployment, management should define the scope, establish access, identify decision-makers, and agree on how completed work will be reviewed and accepted.



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The Cost Question: Compare Temporary Help to the Cost of Delay

Owners often compare temporary staffing only to the hourly wage of a permanent employee. That misses the real decision. The relevant comparison includes vacancy loss, overtime, recruiting time, delayed certifications, rework, compliance exposure, management distraction, and the possibility of losing strong employees because they are carrying an impossible workload.

Temporary staffing is most valuable when it shortens the duration of an operational problem. The objective is not to keep outside consultants forever. It is to stabilize the property, complete the defined work, and hand a manageable operation back to the permanent team.

HCA's Outside-Help Decision Checklist

- ☐ Are recertifications or move-in files becoming late?
- ☐ Are vacancies increasing because applicant or compliance processing is too slow?
- ☐ Did the property recently lose a key occupancy or compliance employee?
- ☐ Is a takeover, lease-up, MOR, audit, or monitoring review creating a temporary surge?
- ☐ Are experienced employees working unsustainable overtime?
- ☐ Are file errors increasing because quality control has been sacrificed for production?
- ☐ Is the team struggling to implement a major compliance change while maintaining normal operations?
- ☐ Would an additional 1-3 experienced people for several weeks materially reduce the risk?
- ☐ Can management clearly define the work, system access, priorities, and approval process?
- ☐ Is there a plan to prevent the same backlog from returning after temporary support leaves?

How to Make a Temporary Staffing Engagement Successful

- Start with a written backlog or workload inventory.
- Define measurable priorities instead of saying 'help us catch up.'
- Separate production work from quality-control responsibility.
- Provide software, file, policy, and communication access on day one.
- Assign one client-side decision-maker who can resolve questions quickly.
- Track completed work, pending items, resident contacts, and corrections daily.
- Hold short progress meetings focused on barriers and numbers.
- Require a clean handoff: status report, unresolved-item list, and recommendations before the engagement ends.



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Final Takeaway

The right time to bring in temporary affordable housing staff is not when the property is already in crisis. It is when management can see that current capacity will not meet the next set of deadlines without sacrificing quality, occupancy, resident service, or compliance.

Outside support should create breathing room and measurable progress. Used strategically, temporary staffing can help a property protect current work, eliminate backlogs, prepare for reviews, accelerate lease-ups, and support permanent employees through periods of unusually high demand.

How Housing Consultants of America Can Help

Housing Consultants of America provides temporary affordable housing occupancy, leasing, and compliance support for owners, management companies, housing authorities, nonprofits, and affordable housing organizations. HCA supports HUD and LIHTC properties with recertifications, move-ins, applicant processing, file audits, backlog recovery, MOR preparation, third-party compliance, and short-term staffing support. Assignments can be structured around the property's specific workload, program requirements, deadlines, and operational needs.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Jenna Ghisolfo is President of Housing Consultants of America, supporting affordable housing organizations with compliance, temporary staffing, training, file review, recertification recovery, and operational solutions.

Selected Industry References

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