

Participant Guide

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# Telephone Presentations

**NALP** 

NATIONAL APARTMENT  
LEASING PROFESSIONAL®

Sample



## **NALP National Apartment Leasing Professional**

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### **Acknowledgments**

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## Message to Apartment Leasing Professionals

This education program was developed by Leasing, Operations, Marketing and Training Professionals working in the multifamily housing industry across the nation.

It was developed and revised at the request of Leasing Professionals and apartment association members, like you, who told us what they need to successfully perform their job responsibilities. It was also developed at the request of your managers, supervisors, owners and employers. They asked for this program because of your importance to the industry. They recognize you as the key to leasing, renewing and serving future and current residents of your communities and buildings.

This is one of a series of eight courses of the NALP program. The other courses are:

1. Keys to Success in Leasing
2. Telephone Presentations
3. Leasing and the Internet
4. The Leasing Interview
5. Leasing Demonstration & Follow-Up
6. Rental Policies and Procedures
7. Legal Aspects
8. The Market Survey

For more information about this program or any of NAAEI's education programs, ask your instructor, contact your local apartment association, or contact NAAEI at 703/518-6141.

## Course Objectives

At the end of this course, participants will be able to:

- ▶ Implement good telephone etiquette in the workplace.
- ▶ Apply effective speaking and listening skills to telephone presentations.
- ▶ List preparations a Leasing Professional should make for a telephone presentation.
- ▶ Describe the basic objectives of a telephone contact.
- ▶ Develop a process for working with current residents.
- ▶ Handle an irate caller.

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## Telephone Skills Self-Evaluation (Please circle the appropriate answer)

### In all telephone conversations:

Do you always answer the telephone with a cheerful greeting?	Yes	No
Do you include your name and the name of your community?	Yes	No
Do you always have writing implements, note pads, and important information at your fingertips?	Yes	No
Do you give the caller your complete and undivided attention?	Yes	No
Do you project a pleasant smile through your voice?	Yes	No
Do you get the caller's name and contact information?	Yes	No
When an interruption occurs, do you give the caller an explanation before you put them on hold?	Yes	No
When asking callers to "hold" do you wait for a response before putting them on hold?	Yes	No
Do you leave the caller on hold for more than 60 seconds at a time?	Yes	No
Do you wait for the caller to hang up the receiver before you do?	Yes	No

## When speaking to a prospective resident:

Do you create a positive mental picture of your apartment community for callers so that they will want to visit and see it for themselves?	Yes	No
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Do you try to schedule a definite appointment by providing a choice of times?	Yes	No
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Do you find out how the prospective resident heard about your community?	Yes	No
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## When accepting a service request:

Do you get the resident's name, address and telephone number, as well as any other pertinent information, such as the type of repair needed?	Yes	No
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Do you try to isolate the nature and exact location of the service problem?	Yes	No
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Do you try to contact the resident if the repairs will be delayed?	Yes	No
--	-----	----

Do you thank the resident for bringing the problem to your attention?	Yes	No
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Do you let the caller know that you will follow through until the problem is solved?	Yes	No
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## Importance of the Telephone

Did you know that 9 out of 10 future residents call first, and the average telephone prospective resident is four times as likely to rent an apartment home as a walk-in prospective resident? Yet, a survey of hundreds of onsite Leasing Professional Shopping Reports by Ellis Property Management Services indicated that by far the weakest part of the average Leasing Professional's leasing presentation is telephone techniques. Our communities rely on superior telephone skills to entice future residents to visit us; therefore it is critical to develop a strong, persuasive and relationship-building telephone leasing presentation.

It is also important to be able to successfully take a resident service request over the telephone as well as to be able to diffuse an irate resident. The first step to becoming successful at using the telephone is to make certain you have the necessary tools ready.

## Preparing for a Telephone Presentation

### Telephone Tools:

1. Pens and pencils.
2. Note pads, telephone message pads, and blank guest cards.
3. A calendar for easy reference and to record scheduled appointments.
4. An up-to-date list of apartments available to lease.
5. Written directions to the community from North, South, East and West for ease in providing directions to telephone prospective residents.
6. Blank service request forms.
7. Frequently called numbers.
8. A positive attitude.

## Projecting Your Professional Image

The telephone is a vital link for the apartment community at large bringing residents, applicants, vendors and others into their offices. Leasing Professionals must project a professional image while using the telephone. To project a professional image, they should:

- ▶ Smile and be enthusiastic. A prospect can hear you smile over the telephone.
- ▶ Speak clearly, and at a pace appropriate to your caller.
- ▶ Do not place your fingers or hand over the mouthpiece while you are speaking.
- ▶ Keep your personal calls to a minimum.
- ▶ Be sincere and courteous to your callers.

### Telephone Etiquette:

1. Answer the call promptly, after the second ring but before the completion of the third ring.
2. Add warmth to your response by smiling when greeting the caller and being courteous. Do not be too busy to be nice. Be friendly BEFORE you know who it is.
3. Keep the greeting clean and simple. Long greetings tend to confuse callers.
4. Identify yourself, both when answering the phone, and during the conversation.
5. Stop what you are doing and give the caller your undivided attention. In other words, "Learn to say goodbye before you say hello."
6. Rushing threatens customers. One-word answers make you sound cold and unfriendly. Slow down and take control of the conversation.
7. Do not carry on additional conversations with others in the office while you are on the telephone.
8. Do not handle the call while trying to process paperwork, etc. Remember "People before Paperwork." Paper can wait, people should not. Pay immediate attention to the customer.



9. Do not eat, drink or chew gum while on the telephone.
10. Put people on hold only after asking them if they mind holding and waiting for their response.
11. Do not leave the caller on hold for longer than thirty seconds. If you must put the caller on hold, check back frequently with them to make certain they can still hold and that they understand the cause for the delay. If you absolutely must call back, give the caller a time frame in which you will call.
12. Always say “thank you.” And, if the prospect thanks you, say “you’re welcome”, not “uh huh” or “it’s ok.”
13. Wait for the caller to hang up before you hang up the telephone.
14. Do not use industry jargon or slang. The caller may not understand or misunderstand. Don’t use “1.1” or “2.2D”.

## Improve Your Speaking Skills

- ▶ **Communication is a two way street**—talking and listening. In this exchange, both parties must make sure they are being understood.
- ▶ **Never assume** the other party understands you just because they do not ask questions.
- ▶ **“Think before you speak.”** They need to be quick thinking—sometimes to keep a caller’s attention. But this needs to be balanced against the possibility of saying something that you should not.
- ▶ **Vocabulary** is important. A successful Leasing Professional uses correct English and avoids slang.
- ▶ **Speaking** slowly and using less complex words are two ways to communicate more effectively with people who have limited English skills.
- ▶ **Voice inflection** is important. The tone used over the phone should be professional but upbeat. It should convey interest and enthusiasm.

## Voice Inflection

During communication, only 7% of the meaning is derived from the actual spoken words. The rest is derived from non-verbal communication. Clearly, inflection is an extremely important part of telephone communication.

## Empathic Listening

Let's learn a little more about Empathic Listening and how it builds outstanding communication in all aspects of operating the property

Perhaps as important as speaking is listening. Successful Leasing Professionals need to be good listeners if they are to do well with the wide variety of people who make telephone inquiries about apartment communities.

### Empathic: ACTIVITY

### Top 10 Ways to Improve Listening

With the instructor, complete the following sentences.

1. Work \_\_\_\_\_
2. Pay \_\_\_\_\_
3. Make \_\_\_\_\_
4. Be \_\_\_\_\_

5. Listen \_\_\_\_\_

6. Concentrate \_\_\_\_\_

7. Ask \_\_\_\_\_

8. Do not \_\_\_\_\_

9. Concentrate \_\_\_\_\_

10. Jot \_\_\_\_\_

Sample



## Reasons Why People Use the Telephone to Shop for an Apartment

Research tells us that telephone prospects call an average of nine communities. Why do they invest so much time on the telephone? Nationally recognized industry speaker Bill Nye identifies these typical types of callers:

- ▶ **Time Saving Caller.** This caller uses the telephone to save himself the time of driving from community to community. This person wanting to save time might consider a bad phone call a bad use of their time. They want a quick response to their question, “how much are your apartments?” Yet as a Leasing Professional you are taught to try to engage the caller in conversation about the apartment, the property, his needs, etc. Consider the response, “I can tell that price is important to you, so do you mind if I discuss our features as well as our prices?” In this manner, you are answering the caller’s questions, but beginning to build a relationship and still control the call.
- ▶ **I Don’t Trust You Caller.** This caller is trying to avoid feeling the pressure to buy. Visiting the property and being shown throughout the community gives this prospect a sense of obligation, which they may want to avoid. At this point, start adding your qualifying questions slowly as he or she asks their questions. Gradually you will be able to complete your qualifying and ask the prospect to make an appointment to visit the community.
- ▶ **Geographical Caller.** This caller lives far away, making it impossible to come and visit the community. Your relationship is built on total trust as you become the caller’s eyes and ears about the apartment, the community, perhaps even the town. This caller needs the truth about location, commuting time and neighborhoods. The best way to earn that trust is to display knowledge about their current location. As a professional it is important to know where your traffic is coming from, where capitals, rivers, colleges, etc. are located for situations like this.

## Note About Disabled Callers

Leasing Professionals may receive telephone calls from individuals using a TDD or TTY connection. These are services that allow a caller who is voice, sight or hearing impaired to keyboard their portion of the conversation. A “relay operator” converts the text message into conversational English and then communicates to the person who was called.

Here are a couple of tips from the voice relay operators for your professional handling of this type of call:

- ▶ The operator will convert the typed text into conversation, but will type verbatim your responses.
- ▶ There is more time involved in waiting for the typing to occur and the response to be registered—so BE PATIENT!
- ▶ If the caller is using American Sign Language (ASL) to key, the operator may need even more time to translate.
- ▶ The operator should be seen as an extension of the prospect. Relay operators tell us that it is important that the Leasing Professional speak to them as if speaking directly to the prospect—do not use phrases such as “Tell her...” In reality, you are speaking with the prospect. Remember the relay operator is typing your response verbatim.

The caller is as much a potential resident as anyone else with whom you speak—perhaps more so if you are patient and take the time to make a professional, caring presentation.

## Objectives of Telephone Contact

Recall that your three-way objective for the leasing telephone call is to pass along information about your community, gather qualifying information from the prospect and set an appointment for a personal visit to your community. These objectives are generally met through questions such as:

**Who?** Identify yourself and ask the prospective resident's name. You want to establish rapport with the caller so remember to use their name once or twice during the conversation. Be careful not to overuse it.

Determine who will be living in the apartment home. Establish whether the number of residents will be in accordance with your community's policies. Ask if they will be bringing any pets with them. If so, qualify their pets based on the number of pets, the breed, and the size requirements established by your community.

**What?** Your objective is to determine the needs of the prospective resident and paint a word picture of the apartment community emphasizing the needs they have already indicated .

Through general conversation, using the Guest Card or telephone script as a guide, determine what the prospect is looking for in their new home:

- What features are important to them?
- What size apartment do they need and what size do they occupy now?
- What is their price range or monthly budget for rent?
- What community features are important to them?
- How did they learn about our community?

You should be completing the Guest Card as you discuss these items with them so that you can find the perfect apartment for THEIR needs. We sometimes refer to their needs as their “hot buttons”. These are the items on which we need to focus during our presentation of features and benefits.

**When?** Determine the date the prospective resident wants to move. It may be an exact date or it may be a rough estimate. Even if the caller does not need an apartment for several months, encourage an appointment to look at your models. Your objective is to determine which apartments might meet the caller's needs.

**Where?** Find out where the prospective resident is moving from so you can help with directions if they are from out of town. It is also useful to ask where the prospective resident will be working. You may have other residents who work there. Transportation may be an issue. Your objective is to be of service in the broader sense rather than just leasing an apartment. The caller should recognize this and appreciate your help.

**Why?** If the opportunity presents itself, determine why the caller is moving. It may be a job change or simply the need for more space. Your objective is to understand the specific needs of the prospective resident so you can be of greater service. Be careful that your request for this type of information is not perceived as snooping. Many times a residence change is the result of some unpleasantness and you do not want to upset the caller who is moving because of something negative.



**How much?** Establish the prospective resident's rental budget, for obvious reasons. You may already have obtained this information with an earlier question. Generally, the price question comes up early in the leasing telephone conversation.

Your objective at this point is to determine if the prospective resident meets the basic selection criteria of your community and if your community has an apartment that meets their needs. Do we have a potential match? If you don't have a match, refer them to another community at your company or to a different community that you know will meet their needs.

**An appointment?** By now you will know if the prospective resident qualifies for your apartment community and you should sense the degree of interest. Your next step is to schedule a definite appointment for the caller to visit your apartment community. You may want to break the question into small sections. Be sure to get a telephone number for follow up. Here is an example of how to obtain an appointment with a prospective resident:

- ▶ Leasing Professional: "When is a good time for you to come and take a look?"
- ▶ Prospective Resident: "This weekend."
- ▶ Leasing Professional: "Would Saturday or Sunday be more convenient for you?"
- ▶ Prospective Resident: "Saturday would be best."
- ▶ Leasing Professional: "Would you prefer morning or afternoon?"
- ▶ Prospective Resident: "Afternoon."
- ▶ Leasing Professional: "Is two o'clock or 3:30 more convenient for you?"
- ▶ Prospective Resident: "3:30 would be fine."
- ▶ Leasing Professional: "May I have your telephone number just in case we miss connections?"

## Consider this telephone script and how it fulfills the objectives of the telephone contact:

- ▶ Leasing Professional: “Thank you for calling \_\_\_\_\_.”
- Prospective Resident: “Do you have any one bedroom apartments?”
- ▶ Leasing Professional: “Yes we do! My name is Mary and you are...? Do you mind if I ask you a few questions so I can better assist you in selecting a new apartment home?”
  - ▶ Are you looking for **yourself** or someone else?
  - ▶ **How soon** will you be needing your new apartment home?
  - ▶ **How many** will be occupying your apartment home?
  - ▶ **How did you hear** about us? (based on the source, build rapport.)
  - ▶ Do you have any **pets**? (explain your pet policy here if necessary)
  - ▶ What are the **three most important features** you're looking for in you new home?
  - ▶ **Why** are you moving?
  - ▶ (If the prospect asks for the price) What **price range** fits your budget? (In real life, this will probably be the first question. Respond by saying, “I'll be happy to give you that information, do you mind if I ask you a few questions so I can give you the price for the apartment home that best meets your needs?)
  - ▶ **We do have** a great \_\_\_\_\_ bedroom apartment home that will be available at that time. (Describe some of the **benefits** of the apartment home based on what this particular prospect may appreciate. Do not just offer a list of features.)
  - ▶ I'd love to show it to you, and give you a tour of our community. Would it be **convenient for you to come by** \_\_\_\_\_ or would \_\_\_\_\_ be better? (Offer two options; If neither is acceptable—“When would be convenient for you?”)
  - ▶ May I give you **directions** to our community?

- ▶ Do you have **Internet access**? (if yes) I'd like to **e-mail you a link** to our Website, where we have more information about our community. (if no) Could I have an address where I could mail you our floor plans?
- ▶ Thank you so much for calling. I look forward to seeing you. May I have a **phone number** as a contact in case we miss connections?
- ▶ Thanks again and I look forward to seeing you (restate the appointment)

There are also other things to keep in mind about the initial telephone conversation:

1. Make sure you guide the conversation.
2. As you respond to questions, make sure you ask some of your own so that you are learning information important to you.
3. Talk about a specific apartment rather than recite a range of floor plans or locations. It makes your conversation much more personal.
4. Elaborate on the benefits of this apartment before quoting rental rates. (People do not care about features. They are interested in how it will benefit them.)
5. Speak positively about the rates and the unique community features that are included in this price. Build the value of your apartment and your community.
6. Always remain pleasant even if you cannot schedule an appointment.
7. Leave prospective residents with a positive feeling. You never know when they may call again or refer a friend. Your kindness will go a long way!

## Did You Know?

A 2004 Telephone Performance Analysis report by CallSource, an industry provider of distance learning, call measurement, tracking and monitoring technology and performance management solutions, reported disappointing results in how industry professionals are handling telephone traffic. Several problem areas include:

- ▶ **Name:** only 46% of Leasing Professionals asked callers for their names.
- ▶ **Price:** 67% of callers were simply told the price without any mention of apartment or community features.
- ▶ **Moving:** only 6% of callers were asked why they were moving.
- ▶ **Specific needs:** just 18% of Leasing Professionals asked the caller about their specific needs and preferences.
- ▶ **Benefits:** only 3% of professionals spoke about the benefits of the community amenities while 4% spoke about benefits of the apartment homes.
- ▶ Only 45% qualified the advertising source.
- ▶ Only 17% directed the prospect to visit the community's Web site.

Do not let this happen to you! You can see that your attention to a professional and sincere telephone leasing presentation will beat the odds and make you stand out in the crowd! Do not become a statistic of poor telephone performance!

## Initial Leasing Questions

Of all the questions that are asked of Leasing Professionals on the telephone, the initial question is probably the most important, as it sets the tone for the remainder of the conversation. Successful Leasing Professionals know that you should not give pricing information the first time you are asked, but should instead, begin a dialogue with the prospective resident that begins the relationship leasing process.

What are the most common “initial questions” you receive at your community?

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What is your typical response to these questions?

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## What is the Appropriate Response to the Initial Question?

All of these questions should be answered in the same way: with a **positive, upbeat response** that assures the caller his/her question will be answered, followed by a question.

Example:

**Caller:** How much are your two bedrooms?

**Leasing Professional:** I can help you with that. When do you need to move into our community?

Notice how the Leasing Professional answered the prospective resident's question, but followed up with a question of his or her own. This technique, referred to as Q/A/Q for Question/Answer/Question, is highly effective as it helps to gain additional information from the prospective resident, thereby helping to build the relationship.

This method accomplishes several things at once:

1. It deflects the price issue momentarily. Try to gather more information for your "value building" presentation.
2. It places the Leasing Professional in control of the call (by offering to help and by asking a question).
3. It helps qualify the caller by asking when they need their apartment home.
4. It begins the closing process with use of the "Assumptive Close". This closing technique assumes that the caller will be moving into the community, thus the question is worded, "When do you need to move into our community?"

## What's Wrong with this Telephone Call?

Providing the price when asked initially by the caller does nothing to build the relationship. Take a look at the following call scenario:

**Leasing Professional:** “Good morning. Macie Manor Apartments. Thank you for calling. This is Jenna.”

**Prospective Resident:** “Do you have any one bedroom apartments available?”

**Leasing Professional:** “Yes we do.”

**Prospective Resident:** “How much are they?”

**Leasing Professional:** “They start at \$425.”

**Prospective Resident:** “Okay. What are your office hours?”

**Leasing Professional:** “Nine to five, Monday through Saturday.”

**Prospective Resident:** “Okay. Thank you.”

CLICK (The Leasing Professional hangs up the telephone.)

**Prospective Resident:** “Wait a second..I’ve got one more question!...Hello?”

CLICK (The prospective resident hangs up the telephone.)

- ▶ How many objectives were satisfied?
- ▶ What did the Leasing Professional learn about the caller's needs in the conversation?
- ▶ How could the Leasing Professional have made this call more successful?
- ▶ How often have they (participants) acted in the same fashion as the Leasing Professional in the example?

Remember, the key is to begin to build a relationship with the prospect!

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## Scenario #1

**Prospect:** "I was just over at Happy Hills Apartments across the street and they have a great lap pool, tennis courts, a huge fitness center and a business center. The apartment I saw had built-in bookshelves, three ceiling fans and new appliances. Can you beat that?" (In this situation consider that you have less of an amenity package)

- ▶ How often will you actually use the pool, tennis courts, etc?
- ▶ Did I mention there's a Community Center just one block from here that you are welcome to use?
- ▶ We are really committed to serving our residents. Did you ask about their service?





## Scenario #2

**Prospect:** “You just quoted me a price that seems sort of high. You’re the third place I’ve called today and there are some pretty good deals out there. Don’t you have some kind of a special?” (In this situation consider that you have a competitive program but not the biggest special.)

## Key Elements of a Successful Leasing Presentation

The successful Leasing Professional realizes that **the leasing presentation begins the moment the telephone is answered**. The prospective resident begins to develop feelings about the Leasing Professional and the apartment community and begins to measure these feelings against emotional needs and wants. Remember, “People buy from people they like.”

There are three elements of an effective leasing presentation. They are highly useful in helping Leasing Professionals organize their telephone presentations. The three categories are:

1. **Persuade:** Make the caller feel important, that they are genuinely liked. How can you persuade callers to feel important when they call your community?

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2. **Inform:** Know your product and provide strong reasons for living at your community. How can you convey strong reasons for living at your apartment community?

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3. **Enthuse:** Convey enthusiasm and belief in your community. Remain prospect-oriented at all times. How can you convey enthusiasm and belief while remaining prospect-oriented?

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Remember **PIE**: **P**ersuade, **I**nform, **E**nthuse.

## Closing Begins with the Telephone

Of all of the sources of traffic into the apartment community, the telephone contact is considered the hardest to close. The prospective resident saw or heard advertisements and is now phoning for additional information.

While it is still somewhat unusual for a Leasing Professional to lease an apartment over the phone, in some high demand markets this is becoming far more commonplace. Additionally, the explosive use of the Internet allows prospective residents to be much better informed before they ever pick up the telephone.

The successful Leasing Professional:

1. Establishes a relationship over the telephone with a prospective resident.
2. Gathers information that can be used to satisfy the needs and wants of the prospective resident.
3. Describes the community in words or phrases that help the prospective resident envision the community as well as their future apartment home.
4. Looks for opportunities to “close” the telephone conversation with an appointment.

The face-to-face activities (described in later programs) provide additional closing opportunities. But the Leasing Professional who leaves a caller with a poor impression may not be able to create the trusting relationship so important to adding new residents to their community.



## Other Aspects of the Telephone

### Tracking Weekly Traffic

A successful Leasing Professional keeps careful records of all traffic, studying these records from time to time to see what can be learned from them. All successful Leasing Professionals keep weekly traffic logs. This helps them identify the most productive sources of traffic and suggest possible follow up activities.

Most apartment community management companies and/or owners have their own format that they will require the Leasing Professional to complete on a daily basis. This is an essential tool, not only for your own professional success but for the success of your community as well.

As a successful Leasing Professional, you should make it your responsibility to know everywhere that your apartment community is currently advertising. This way, you will be better equipped to properly track the leasing traffic that calls, e-mails, faxes or comes into your apartment community.

Remember that the prospect may need guidance through this process. The easiest response from the prospect is that they were just “driving by”. The Leasing Professional needs to follow that statement with an inquiry about what caught their eye or why they turned in to the driveway.

## Taking Requests for Service

One of the most important functions of a Leasing Professional is to provide service to residents. Requests for service should not be viewed as complaints and should be welcomed for the opportunities they provide.

A request for service provides the Leasing Professional with the opportunity to remind the resident that services are provided as long as they live in the apartment community. This helps improve resident satisfaction and, therefore, resident retention.

Providing service demonstrates a caring attitude on the part of management.

Providing good service corrects a defect before it does further damage or wastes time and money. It is especially important that calls about water intrusion and leaking are handled quickly since mold can occur within 24-48 hours.

There are three steps to successfully responding to requests for service from residents. They are:

- ▶ Identifying caller needs.
- ▶ Resolving Problems.
- ▶ Conducting Follow-up.

## Identifying Caller Needs

When a resident calls with a problem in an apartment, it is necessary for the Leasing Professional to learn the exact nature of the problem. This may be difficult to do because the resident may know only that something is not working or that something smells unusual.

The better the Leasing Professional knows their community and its components, the easier it will be to understand potential problems. Be sure to get complete details from the resident reporting the problem or requesting service. This will help your maintenance staff determine the tools to bring and will assist in scheduling. Know what issues are given emergency status.

Information that should be obtained from the resident generally includes the following:

- ▶ Resident's name
- ▶ Apartment number
- ▶ Telephone number at work, at home and their cell phone
- ▶ The day's date and the time of the call
- ▶ Permission to enter the apartment
- ▶ Whether or not the resident has a pet
- ▶ Code to the intrusion alarm if the resident has an alarm system
- ▶ Specific nature of the problem
- ▶ Specific location of the problem

It will help to have a "Service Request" form handy so all necessary details are noted. This also allows the Leasing Professional to review all the information with the caller before deciding what steps to take to solve the problem. Make sure you thank the resident for calling this to your attention. Let them know that they have done you a favor.

Caution: When handling a service request, do not fall into the trap of promising a solution or quick attention unless you are certain your service staff can deliver. False promises can be a large source of friction between residents and management.

## Resolving Problems

Gathering all of the relevant information about the problem will help make solving it much easier. Sometimes you can help residents solve their own problems with regards to minor problems in the apartment home.

Consider the following scenarios:

**Scenario #1:** A resident reports a problem with an air conditioner.

Ask:

- ▶ Is the thermostat set in the cooling mode?
- ▶ Is the fan blowing?
- ▶ Does the fan run continuously?
- ▶ Is the fan set on “automatic” or “on”?
- ▶ Are the windows open?

You may suggest (or offer to do it for them) that the resident check the circuit breakers to see if they are tripped or turn off the unit to prevent freezing. Be sure to thank the resident for calling the matter to your attention.

How will this technique help you? Your teammates? Your residents?

**Scenario #2:** A resident calls about an overflowing toilet.

Calls about an overflowing toilet should bring this response from you:

- ▶ Describe to the resident what the cut off valve looks like and its location behind the toilet.
- ▶ Ask the resident to turn this valve all the way to the right, which will stop water from flowing through the pipes into the toilet.
- ▶ Thank the resident for calling the problem to your attention and for helping to stop it from becoming worse.

How will this technique help you? Your teammates? Your residents?

Requests to fix broken windows, lighting, exterior doors, or lock problems should be handled immediately by the service team. You may be liable for any damage or possible criminal act that occurs after the problem has been reported.

Additionally, any major repairs should be handled solely by your service team. You should not attempt to do this yourself. Your job is to effect solutions to minor problems. Ask your management company or community owner how they would like you to troubleshoot service requests.

If you and the resident are not able to solve the problem, let the resident know that you will be contacting the service team. Avoid saying 'Someone will be out to make repairs immediately' because the resident will expect 'immediately' and not as soon as possible.

Explain that you will submit their request to the maintenance department, which will schedule the service. If it is an emergency situation such as flooding in a building, you should advise the service department immediately. In the case of fire or criminal activity, contact the proper authorities immediately. Ask your management company or owner what constitutes an emergency at your community.

## Conducting Follow-Up

The effective Leasing Professional always follows up a request for service with a telephone call to the resident to make sure the resident is satisfied.

It is an equally sound idea to follow up another time if the Leasing Professional sees the resident on the grounds. Such attention reminds the resident that their problems are important and the apartment staff is there for service requests.

## Handling Irate Callers

List the most frequent causes of telephone calls from irate residents at your community:

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On average, the most frequent causes of irate calls are:

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While there is no good reason for tolerating an abusive caller, there are many good reasons to empathize with a resident's situation in life. Treat the irate caller with dignity and the Leasing Professional will be rewarded at some later date with a "Thanks!" or "I'm sorry" or some similar acknowledgment that the caller was indeed having a bad day.



There is a set of recommended procedures for dealing with irate phone calls from residents. They are as follows:

- ▶ Remain calm; do not let the caller's emotional state change your professionalism.
- ▶ Use the caller's name once or twice during the conversation.
- ▶ Listen to everything the caller says without interruption.
- ▶ Identify the problems; make sure you understand the specific concern.
- ▶ Probe for additional information; you need as much information as you can obtain to affect a solution.
- ▶ Apologize for any inconvenience, real or imagined; it doesn't hurt to let the resident know that the Leasing Professional truly regrets the situation.
- ▶ Keep the voice low; do not let it escalate if the conversation gets more heated.
- ▶ Reassure the caller that everything possible will be done to solve the problem.
- ▶ Follow up to make sure the resident is satisfied with the results.
- ▶ Take thorough notes throughout the conversation.

Then you should solve the problem or find someone who can. In the situations where you cannot effect a solution, the supervisor should be informed and asked to contact the resident.

## Fair Housing Implications

All Leasing Professionals are required by law to provide equal professional services without regard to a resident/ prospective resident's race, color, religion, sex, disability, familial status, or national origin.

The Fair Housing statutes affect such telephone presentation behaviors as:

- ▶ Arranging appointments;
- ▶ Making callbacks;
- ▶ Acts of courtesy;
- ▶ Personal information required;
- ▶ Availability of properties presented;
- ▶ Location of properties presented; and
- ▶ Follow-up procedures.

Are these activities being performed without regard to the class of prospect or resident? Are appointments made promptly for all callers? If callbacks are made on 100% of completed service requests, it is unlikely there could be discrimination charged. If callbacks are performed only on a sampling or partial basis, is that sampling determined in a non-discriminatory manner? Do you extend the same acts of courtesy to all customers?

It is important that accurate records be kept for all properties and all prospective residents. All records should be kept for at least five years.

Leasing Professionals must know how to restrict their questions to matters relevant to processing each applicant, being sure to uniformly ask the same questions to all applicants in similar situations, and avoiding questions regarding whether prospective residents are within a protected group. Be careful to avoid linguistic profiling. Linguistic profiling is a form of racial profiling that is based not on how a person looks, but rather on how they sound – their voices, their pronunciation, and their grammar. Research has suggested that people are able to correctly identify with about an 80 percent accuracy the race of a person from hearing them say “hello” or hearing them count from one to twenty. An accent or difficulty with English should only invoke more care with the telephone presentation.

Similarly, if a Leasing Professional is asked by a prospect or resident to identify in any manner a member or members of a protected class, he or she should politely indicate that no such measurement or tracking occurs.

Questions such as “Do you have a lot of children living at the property?” or “Do you have a lot of [race] living in the area?” are typical examples. Re-emphasize that all individuals who meet or have met the property screening criteria are welcome to live at the property and do in fact live at the property. Even if the person asking is a member of the same or another protected class, it is still illegal and wrong to identify protected class members.

## Summary

While apartment communities may spend thousands of dollars per year in advertising costs, the most important marketing tool any apartment community has is their telephone and you, the Leasing Professional who takes the call. Your voice inflection, your product knowledge, your skill in setting appointments and selling the community are all critical elements in bringing qualified prospective residents to your apartment community.

Equally important are your skills in providing residents with top-notch customer service when taking a request for service or answering a simple question. Compliance with the Federal Fair Housing Act is also crucial to not only your community's individual success, but to the success of the apartment industry.

Remember that the telephone is not an interruption of your work—it is your work!

## Exam

The NALP exam is comprehensive and delivered online. The NALP Exam is 100 questions and timed for 1 hour and 30 minutes. All participants must enroll in the designation program to be eligible to sit for the exam. To enroll in the NALP course, go to the NAA Web site at:

[www.naahq.org/education](http://www.naahq.org/education)

You will need an Eligibility Code in order to sit for the exam. Eligibility Codes are unique to each participant and are the key to unlocking the exam. Your Eligibility Code will be given to you by your instructor or Sponsoring Organization.

The passing point for the comprehensive exam is 70 or above.

You must work individually on the exam. No books are allowed to be used as a reference.

For more detailed information on the exam and to download the Candidate Handbook, please visit the NAA Web site:

[www.naahq.org/education/designationprograms/Pages/OnlineExams](http://www.naahq.org/education/designationprograms/Pages/OnlineExams)