

New Mexico Mortgage Finance Authority
Apartment Search
Management Innovation: Technology Innovation - 11
August 1, 2003
Executive Summary

Description of Innovation

During 2002, MFA, the City of Albuquerque, the McCune Foundation and the Albuquerque Mental Health Housing Coalition entered into a partnership to develop and implement a new web site called Apartment Search. Apartment Search, located on MFA's web page, is a site developed to help the citizens of New Mexico in their search for affordable rental housing. The site provides a central clearinghouse for information, at no cost to the users. Information provided pertains to affordable rental housing, including apartments and homes, location, type of units, available vacancies, waiting lists, and handicapped accessible units. The site allows consumers to search for affordable housing by city, unit size, rent amount, subsidy type, and more.

Marketing and Training

MFA marketed Apartment Search by mailing brochures to all of the Bernalillo County and Albuquerque Housing Services Section 8 voucher landlords. Presentations have been made to the new Section 8 landlords at Bernalillo County Housing, to local neighborhood associations, and to the Apartment Association of New Mexico. Information about the site was sent out by broadcast fax to all of the apartment managers on properties with MFA involvement, as well as to all of the members of the Apartment Association. Also, letters and brochures have been sent to the agencies throughout the state that handle Section 8 vouchers. Additional presentations were made to the staff at St. Martin's Hospitality Center, Transitional Living Services, the University Of New Mexico Psychiatric Center, the Veterans Administration Medical Center and Health Care For The Homeless, and the Albuquerque Homeless Advocacy Coalition, which has over seventy member agencies. MFA has done cross marketing with Aspen Behavioral Health, which is Region Five's Regional Care Coordinator for the Dept of Health, Behavioral Health Services Division Providers, and the Lutheran Office of Governmental Ministries.

Need or Opportunity Addressed

Prior to the launch of MFA's Apartment Search New Mexico had no centralized system available to locate decent and affordable rental housing. Smaller lists were maintained independently with information that quickly became outdated. Apartment Search has effectively addressed the need for a central clearinghouse of affordable rental housing in the state of New Mexico.

Obstacles Overcome Using innovative techniques or technology

Two primary goals were established during the development Apartment Search. The system had to be easy to use for those searching for an apartment and data in the system had to be easily updated by property owners. The search capability can be used in basic or advanced modes and is very intuitive. Property owners have access to their properties and units using a secure logon. The system automatically set vacancies to zero each month. Property owners can quickly update vacancy information or make additions and changes as needed. Forgotten passwords can be reset using a challenge phrase with no intervention required administratively.

Benefits

Apartment Search benefits the consumer who, for the first time, has a tool to search statewide for affordable rental housing using a system whose inventory is comprehensive and up to date. Apartment Search also benefits property owners who desire to market their properties statewide at no cost.

Measurable improvements

Tasks such as finding an apartment, performing relocation research, or just getting the word out about available rental units required significant effort prior to Apartment Search. These tasks can now be accomplished in minutes. Apartment Search now brings prospective renters and property owners with available units together quickly and efficiently.

Degree to which innovation is cost-effective or revenue-producing

The system was built for \$16,000 in 3 months. Ongoing maintenance is minimal due to the use of technology and techniques mentioned above.

Achievement of strategic agency objectives

Apartment Search directly addresses one of MFA's strategic goals to expand affordable housing opportunities for those underserved by traditional markets.

Degree to which innovation is operational and its' benefits measurable

The system has been fully operational since August of 2002 and can be found at www.housingnm.org. Feedback from consumers, service professionals, and property owners has been extremely favorable with usage increasing monthly.