

Unique challenge, innovative solution

Idaho is the fourteenth most expansive state in the nation and the seventh least-densely populated. There isn't a major freeway linking the two largest metropolitan areas — Boise in the south and Coeur d'Alene in the north — which can limit travel and make it expensive. Given these geographic challenges, it is difficult, and at times unrealistic, to offer quality training to owners and agents of low-income housing programs in rural areas. The Idaho Housing and Finance Association (IHFA) developed a program that uses live webcasts to provide training, which greatly reduces costs and the loss of staff time because of travel.

How it works

Our association was searching for innovative ways to mitigate our geographic challenges while maintaining the quality of training offered to our customers. To this end, and in partnership with the Idaho AHMA chapter, the Association created innovative live webcast training capabilities.

Training is conducted from our association's headquarters in Boise and attendees are given the option to either attend in person or via live webcast. The association enlisted the services of Fiberpipe, a local company that specializes in affordable live streaming, to produce and distribute the training. A webcast is less expensive than what it would cost one employee to travel to conduct a day of training in an outlying region of the state. The webcasts mimic a television program. They contain a combination of live shots of the speaker and audience, PowerPoint slides, pre-recorded video clips, and graphics. Remote attendees have the option of emailing questions. These questions are posted on a screen in the conference room and answered by the trainer in real time.

Response to the Webcasts

The first webcast, about applicant/tenant interview techniques, garnered 50 live attendees in Boise and 155 other viewers from 22 states. Since then, the Association has conducted additional webcast training with an equally enthusiastic response from our customers. While other states and companies have been able to offer webinar formats (live shots of PowerPoints or other presentation materials and communications via conference call). Our Association is the first to be able to offer live webcast shots of the trainer and audience and other presentation materials. This process enhances the training experience for the Web viewer by offering the feeling of being in a classroom.

Benefits

Training is available to those in the most rural parts of the state without the cost of travel and loss of time at properties. This method of training has been offered to participants of the Low Income Housing Tax Credit program, the HOME program, and the project-based Section 8 owners and agents. This capability will also help the Association provide training to other customers, such as lenders, REALTORS®, first-time homebuyers and Human Resources. This

innovative approach can be utilized by anyone seeking low-cost training and outreach to any customers located in remote areas.

Improvements to Operations

The Compliance Department has been able to achieve measurable savings in travel and staff time and the owners and agents have seen similar savings. Communication also has been improved because we have the capability to discuss changes as soon as they occur, which has improved compliance standards throughout the state. These improvements are apparent in the audit and review of files in 2012. There has been a decline in the number of findings that have been assessed in the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit and HOME programs this year.

Feedback from Customers

The response from our customers has been overwhelmingly positive and supports the Association's efforts to continue this method of training. Some of the comments we have received:

"A job well done. I thought the presentation was good. The recorded interviews were a good idea and the interaction with the "live" audience went very smoothly. Concise information presented in a short time frame is just a great format that saves us time and money. So, looking forward to more and thank you all for this training!" - Marla

"It was a great way to receive training and not have to make the drive!" - Ashley

"I liked how professional it looked with the questions, the names of the speakers being at the bottom of the screen, different views of the speakers etc." - Megan

"They all did a great job interacting with me by email and answering any questions I had." - Vanessa

Summary

The new training method has achieved a major strategic objective of the Association by continuing to foster the philosophy that the Compliance Department is not just charged with enforcement of the regulations, but with educating the owners and agents to support our shared goal of providing decent, safe and affordable housing to low-income families throughout the state.

Visual Aid

http://youtu.be/pUC9cAD_QsM