



Entry Form 2017 Annual Awards for Program Excellence

Entry Deadline: Thursday, June 15, 2017, Midnight ET

Each entry must include a completed entry form. Please complete a form for each entry your HFA is submitting. The completed entry form will become the first page of your entry.

This form is a fillable PDF. Type your information into the entry form and save it as a PDF. Please do not write on or scan the entry form. **Questions: Call 202-624-7710 or email awards@ncsha.org.**

Entry Title: Enter your entry's title exactly as you wish it to be published on the NCSHA website and in the awards program.

Category:

Subcategory:

Entry Summary: A 15-word (max) summary of the program, project, or practice you are entering.

HFA:

HFA Staff Contact:

Phone:

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Visual Aids:

Are you mailing to NCSHA 10 copies of any visual aids that cannot be included in your entry PDF? Yes No

Payment:

My HFA is mailing a check to NCSHA.
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Tracking and Maximizing the Use of “Targeted” Vacancies for Persons with Disabilities

Background

Confronted with a significant need, the North Carolina Housing Finance Agency (NCHFA) and the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) created the Targeting Program in 2001 to provide more access to affordable housing units for persons with disabilities. This statewide initiative used the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program as the most cost-effective vehicle to expand these affordable housing opportunities.

This access was achieved by developing a requirement in our LIHTC Qualified Allocation Plan (QAP) necessitating the set-aside of a minimum of 10% of the housing units at a property as “Targeted” units for persons with disabilities, regardless of disability type. When a tenant moves out, the unit is held for 30 days for qualified referrals coming from a DHHS waiting list. DHHS ensures that the applicant is eligible for the Targeting program and connected to services, and the property screens for income and other LIHTC eligibility. If DHHS does not make a referral within the time window, the property owner is then free to rent the unit to the next LIHTC qualified applicant on the property waiting list.

The Challenge

As policy, the “Targeting” program is successful, providing safe and affordable housing for nearly 5,000 persons with disabilities. However, the complexity of the vacancy notification, referral and release process has proven to be the greatest challenge. This process is manual and cumbersome, which creates numerous problems for the site managers, for DHHS and for NCHFA and ultimately limits the access to safe and affordable housing for low-income persons with disabilities.

- While the property owners commit to program participation, most are not involved in day-to-day property operations. Property management companies are aware of the property owner’s commitment, but they are focused on property operations and IRS LIHTC compliance and rely on site managers to comply with Targeting Program procedures. The site managers are often over-worked and underpaid, have a high turnover rate and are overburdened with daily operational duties so vacancies often are not reported to DHHS timely or at all.
- DHHS cannot make a referral until they are notified of a vacancy. This notification is a manual process done via email or fax by the onsite manager and is often not completed timely or at all.
- NCHFA and DHHS have spent significant time and resources providing training for site managers on the program requirements and processes, yet vacancies are still frequently missed due to errors in or misunderstandings of this manual process and NCHFA cannot track Targeting compliance.
- DHHS has 10 Regional Housing Coordinators that over time have customized the forms and program procedures to address their individual preferences, but making it difficult for management companies working across DHHS regions.

The Solution

Several years ago, NCHFA developed the Rental Compliance Reporting System (RCRS), a robust online tool that tracks and documents unit activities in LIHTC housing (move-ins, eligibility re-certifications and move-outs). This thorough system, however, was not designed to manage vacancies, or track activities prior to the move-in, necessitating the manual and error-prone vacancy system for the Targeting program.

To solve this dilemma, NCHFA developed the **Vacancy and Referrals (V&R) Module**, an integrated electronic data system to track all vacancies, referrals and referral outcomes, as an easy-to-use, add-on module to the existing RCRS data system. The automated module replaces the manual process, facilitates the workflow of both the onsite manager and the DHHS staff, and provides robust data for monitoring and reporting. The workflow is easy and has been quickly adopted by site managers and DHHS staff across the state.

The components and processes of this new system are:

- **Vacancy**—To simplify the onsite tracking of Targeted units and to eliminate the guesswork of when to notify DHHS of a vacancy, all vacancies are now reported. When a vacancy occurs at a property, the site manager immediately enters the information into the V&R Module. DHHS will get a notice that a vacancy has been listed and will quickly review the vacancy and make a referral. If DHHS has no referrals for the property or if the property has already filled their Targeting Program quota, the vacancy is immediately released back to the site manager to fill from the property's general wait-list. This reduces the lag time for filling a vacancy helping the properties reduce rent loss due to unit turnover. Reporting every vacancy also helps DHHS fully utilize the Targeted units and reduces the training, program knowledge and tracking required by the site managers.
- **Referral**—The DHHS Housing Coordinator reviews the vacancy at the property and matches a program participant on the DHHS waiting list to that vacancy which creates a record in the V&R Module for this referral. The DHHS Letter of Referral and other documents are uploaded into the V&R Module and are visible to both the DHHS Housing Coordinator and the property site manager. This eliminates the manual process and related problems of sending referral letters and supporting documentation via email, fax or US Mail.
- **Application Process**—The referred individual will then visit the property and submit an application. The site manager is expecting the visit and updates the referral record when an application is made, records the outcome of the application, and if denied, captures the reason. The site manager records reasonable accommodation requests and uploads all related documents into the system. When a referral results in a tenancy, the site manager records the move-in event. The referral and the vacancy are then closed. At each step in the process, DHHS is notified of the outcome. If the person referred does not contact the property, the site manager notifies the Housing Coordinator through the V&R system ensuring that no one gets lost in the process.
- **Data Transparency**—The V&R Module streamlines the communication between DHHS and the properties by providing both with access to the property summary page. The summary page lists the property's active vacancies and referrals and a listing of units currently occupied by program tenants. This facilitates data reconciliation and rapidly shows the source of any discrepancies.

The Benefits of this new Vacancy and Referral Module are many:

Efficiency

- Real time information about all LIHTC housing vacancies across the state is always available including for disaster response.
- Information is not "lost" in individual email or fax accounts. All information is now in the system.
- There is now a uniform and automated process for notifying DHHS of vacancies for all properties across the state.

North Carolina Housing Finance Agency
Vacancies and Referrals (V&R) Module
Management Innovation: Technology

- DHHS now has an overview of all properties with vacancies in one place on one screen instead of the previously used spreadsheets created and maintained separately by DHHS staff across the state. The V&R Module shows either statewide and regional vacancies, giving the DHHS supervisor insight into the current workload. A supervisor or co-worker can easily manage the vacancies and referrals on behalf of another staff member when there are extended absences or staff turnover.
- Property Management Companies have access to all program vacancies across all their properties.
- The module accommodates periodic realignment of DHHS Regions. The application administrator simply assigns each county in the state to the specified region.
- Vacancy, referral and move-in data from the V&R module can be used to manage the growth of the Targeting programs.

Compliance

- All vacancies are reported and can be compared to RCRS move-out data by NCHFA and DHHS staff, assuring that properties make all units available as program rules require.
- DHHS staff can now quickly determine if a referral can be made to fill a vacancy.

Transparency and communication

- The V&R Module is the system of record for vacancies reported and referral outcomes. DHHS, management companies and NCHFA staff all access the same data using the same application views. Data discrepancies are easily identified and can be corrected. There is one version of the truth.
- Since all information is recorded in the V&R Module and available to all parties involved, the process no longer relies on email and fax.

Reporting

- All data is recorded in a single system and provides detailed information about the volume of vacancies reported, volume of referrals and outcome of referrals across the state.
- All referrals are recorded, regardless of their outcomes. The disposition of an unsuccessful referral is documented for reporting.
- Application rates, referral rates, approvals, denials, and reason for denial are all recorded in one system, providing real-time usage, compliance rates, and trends.

The Outcome

What began as an idea for improving the vacancy and referral process ended as a modernized system readily embraced by all parties. There is no longer a disjointed process that relies on emails, phone calls and faxes, but instead there is now a web portal with search, workflow, worklist, and workspace features that has greatly enhanced communication and accountability. This has made vacancy notifications, matching participants to units, referring tenants and filling units much faster and more efficient. Supporting documents are now electronic and are stored in a central secure repository accessible by all parties. Targeting program compliance has significantly increased.

While this new system provides the reporting data needed to ensure program compliance, it has had the significant benefit of enabling a much greater level of service delivered that ensures maximum access to affordable housing for persons with disabilities, an outcome that exemplifies the NCHFA mission to create affordable housing opportunities for those whose needs are unmet by the market.