

**2008 NCSHA Award Nomination – Ohio Housing Finance Agency  
Rental Housing – Multifamily Management  
Ask an Expert**

*Douglas Garver, Executive Director*

*Brian Carnahan, Director of Program Compliance*

---

Rental property managers have a responsibility to protect the tax credits entrusted to them by the owners. They rely on the extensive knowledge of experts at the Ohio Housing Finance Agency (OHFA) to help them remain in compliance. This results in the availability of quality, affordable rental housing for the thousands of Ohioans who call these properties home.

“Ask an Expert” was developed to provide a quicker, more direct line of communication between OHFA’s compliance experts and property managers. The information helps managers maintain compliance and allows the project to continue receiving funding. The online tool provides one central location where property managers can submit questions by email for OHFA’s knowledgeable Program Compliance staff to answer.

The idea for “Ask an Expert” arose from discussions with OHFA customers who found the Agency to be a valuable resource but needed a faster way to gain necessary information. Work began at once to develop a useful tool that would reduce response time and increase the dialogue between the Agency and its partners.

Collaboration was essential to the success of this tool. In addition to working with external partners, OHFA’s Program Compliance and Information Technology offices were responsible for determining the appropriate implementation of the tool. Keeping in mind that it needed to be easy to use and provide information in a timely manner, it was decided that an online portal to an email would be the most efficient way of communicating. To use the tool, customers click on the “Ask an Expert” button and submit their question through an email message. Once received, the question is delivered to the appropriate OHFA staff member for an accurate and quick response.

Within a few months of launching “Ask an Expert,” staff members found they were receiving similar questions from multiple managers. Staff members developed a Frequently Asked Questions section so that property managers could research what had already been asked before submitting their questions. The questions and answers were compiled into 16 categories such as Available Unit Rule, Income and Assets and Rural Development and Tax Credits to make searching easier. Many managers have commented that this has saved them time by finding the information that meets their needs without having to send a question to OHFA.

Customers can now gain quick access to the information necessary to retain critical funding. They have an opportunity to ask the questions that help protect their tax credit standing and maintain other funding sources. This has a direct impact on the thousands of families that rely on the availability of rental units for housing.

**2008 NCSHA Award Nomination – Ohio Housing Finance Agency**  
**Rental Housing – Multifamily Management**  
**Ask an Expert – page 2**

---

The online tool required no additional financial resources to develop outside of the initial staff time to discuss and implement the tool. Ongoing staff time to maintain the Frequently Asked Questions is minimal and considered to be part of the job descriptions of existing staff.

The “Ask an Expert” tool has fostered partnerships between OHFA and property managers by providing a fast, easy way for questions to be asked and answered. Since the launch in June 2007, more than 75 questions have been submitted through the tool. Many times the answers that are sent to customers generate subsequent questions that are submitted directly to staff members.

OHFA is pleased to be able to provide the necessary services to multifamily rental property managers that increases the availability of safe, quality affordable housing options for Ohioans.