



Submission for the NCSHA 2009 Annual Awards for Program Excellence
For Management Innovation in Operations
TDHCA Program Development Tool

Background - When and Why Was the Innovation Undertaken?

The TDHCA Program Development Tool was created by Department staff to ensure consistency and accountability as new programs are designed. This innovation was specifically undertaken in 2009 to respond to a dramatic increase in the number of new and/or expanding programs at TDHCA as a result of disaster recovery funds, stimulus funds under HERA and ARRA, and several new programs appropriated funds by the State of Texas. Historically, most of TDHCA's programs have been long-standing federal programs with minimal changes required at the program design level. It was evident that there would be significant utility in having a standardized tool to guide program staff through the critical milestones and decisions when designing and implementing a new program.

Description of the TDHCA Program Development Tool

The TDHCA Program Development Tool is a user-friendly, interactive database that, through questions, checklists, prompts, hints and templates, ensures that program staff considers a full spectrum of considerations in restructuring an existing program or designing a new housing or community development program. Examples of several programs that began using the tool include the federal Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program, the state-funded Homeless and Housing Services Program, and the development of several new pilot and model programs funded by state Housing Trust Funds.

The Tool was created by researching, documenting, and consolidating existing internal processes, guidance from the Executive team, and best practices in program design, performance measurement, accountability and oversight. Resources included: internal divisions; external departments, such as the Texas Department of Information Resources; and federal or international resources such as the AGA Partnership for Intergovernmental Management and Accountability, the Project Management Institute (PMI) and the American Society for Quality (ASQ). Upon conclusion of the comprehensive research, the project team identified and mapped five phases: *Planning for Funding*, *Planning for Administration*, *Program Design*, *Award and Implementation*, and *Post Award and Evaluation*. The team then recommended and documented replicable steps, processes and checklist items that, when followed, will result in a well-designed program that meets legislative requirements, Department needs and that mitigates risks.

The TDHCA Program Development Tool leads program managers through each of the program initiation, design, implementation and evaluation phases, outlining a series of key questions, decisions, action items and deliverables, while providing standardized templates, sample documents, helpful hints, timeline reminders, and reports that will keep the program on track and within budget. Examples of major milestones include completion of a Funding Plan, Program Design, Award Submission, Notice of Funding, and Program Evaluation. Reporting functionality will be included.

What does the Program Development Tool Accomplish?

The Tool establishes a consistent program design process that increases operational efficiency by providing for thorough consideration of standardized factors. It was developed to strengthen agency operations and help achieve strategic objectives by helping to:

- Ensure consistency and accountability with agency programs;
- Identify and implement necessary changes to personnel, systems, policies and procedures;
- Determine that the state, federal and agency requirements and purposes are being met;
- Identify and analyze risk to mitigate prior to or during program implementation; and
- Provide reports to help manage the new program from start to finish, including status updates and program development progress.

By designing new programs using the Tool, the Department is significantly more able to minimize audit findings and maximize access to additional funds.

Why is the TDHCA Program Development Tool Meritorious?

Responds to a Management Challenge and is Replicable. Many state housing finance agencies are recent recipients of significant funds for stimulus and disaster recovery. This innovative response will create a lasting, positive impact on agency operations as a result of responding to the challenge of extensive disaster recovery and stimulus funds. Additionally, the Tool was designed to be user-friendly, yet comprehensive to encourage use, allowing managers to select applicable standards, sections and templates. This makes it a tool worth replicating.

Innovation in Internal Operations Management. Although agencies and departments may use checklists and spreadsheets as they create new programs, the TDHCA Program Development Tool is innovative because it provides uniformity and removes some of the variances in program design that occur due to varying levels of staff experience. Additionally, it provides for increased transparency and reporting on the progress of new programs and ensures uniform application of those considerations while incorporating comprehensive questions, standardized templates and checklists into a single database resource for long-term accountability, oversight and compliance.

Strengthens Agency Operations and Meets Strategic Objectives. The new Program Development Tool will strengthen agency operations and help achieve strategic objectives by creating an easy-to-use solution that helps managers effectively design, implement, and monitor new programs.

Achieves measurable results (improvements in agency operations). Features such as timeline reminders and automated reports streamline operations, increase agency accountability and allow for better transparency to the Governing Board and constituents. Standardized templates reduce time to create program plans and other necessary documents while ensuring inclusion of information and factors that may be required for long-term compliance.

Provides Benefits that Outweigh Costs and Demonstrates Effective Use of Resources. Agencies often spend valuable time creating program designs, reports, timelines and status updates. Managers who utilize the Tool will see the benefit of reduced risk and increased program success. By researching and incorporating best practices in program design and quality during the development of the Tool, TDHCA has better assured the success of new programs.