

HFA365

District of Columbia Housing Finance Agency
Management Innovation: Technology

HFA Staff Contact

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DCHFA INNOVATES

DCHFA in partnership with its Office-365 Consultant - Centricity Technology Partners, a Washington, D.C. based Minority & Women owned firm, utilized a four-step approach to a Cloud-First strategy for IT services that replicates industry best practices for quality management and digital transformation to replace DCHFA's on-premises IT (server) infrastructure.

REPLICABILITY

This process followed by DCHFA is easily replicable. First the agency conducted an IT Assessment using the Zachman Framework for enterprise architecture. We chose the Zachman Framework because it allowed our end users to identify IT service delivery gaps from a business perspective instead of an IT perspective. From those discussions, we learned our end users wanted to move away from current stove-pipe/isolated processes to an environment of information sharing and collaboration. The end users also identified technology roadblocks that made it harder for them to share information across the Agency and with their external partners. The end users also identified technology roadblocks that made it harder for them to share information across the Agency and with their external partners.

Many HFA's may still be relying on outdated server exchanges to manage their internal and external communications. Because HFA's share some of the same funding sources, many of the challenges DCHFA encountered during this transition – and how they were dealt with – could serve as a model for other HFA's considering this transition. Prior to finalizing the Scope of Work, DCHFA and its consultants also met with and had very productive discussions with several HFA's to gain a broader perspective on how each was managing its own IT infrastructure.

DCHFA began its O365 transition process in January 2020. The constraints of being isolated as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic were somewhat mitigated by the fact that a small contingent of DCHFA staff had participated in a "trial version" of O365 the prior year. Given the relatively small size of DCHFA (Less than 50 employees) -This test group provided both the consultants and DCHFA with an excellent baseline and helped us to prioritize objectives based on some of the more frequent pain-points experienced by our test group, which included the Office of the General Counsel (OGC), Procurement and Administration staff. Once staff settled into the larger transition of working remotely, using zoom, etc., the O365 transition process improved over time. To date – over 80 percent of the email addresses have been transitioned and most of the shared drives, except those utilized by external stakeholders have also been transitioned.

IMPROVING WORKPLACE CHALLENGES

Tailoring the agency's existing governance processes formed the basis for the second step. All of DCHFA's senior leaders prioritized the pain points, validated their alignment with the Strategic Plan, and approved moving forward to the third step.

The agency had been experiencing an increase in the number of system outages it was experiencing. Resolution of this issue was made part of DCHFA's strategic plan as part of its IT Modernization Plan. The agency-wide benefits of implementing this plan were discussed at senior management retreat in 2019 where it was determined that the COO would be responsible for the development & implementation of the plan. An RFP was issued to facilitate the hiring of an IT Consultant, who assisted DCHFA in drafting, reviewed & approved by DCHFA's CEO with a start date of January 2020.

MEASURABLE IMPROVEMENTS

To measure operational improvements, DCHFA worked closely with its O365 consultant to produce a high-level (i.e., non-technical) cloud migration plan with multiple phases for moving IT services to the cloud. The high-level cloud migration plan included operations (i.e., line of business applications like Emphasys and Prolink) and traditional on-premises IT services (e.g., email, file storage, and print). The high-level migration plan allowed senior leadership to determine the feasibility of moving forward with a Cloud-First strategy

BENEFITS

The last step was the technical migration of IT services to the cloud. This four-step approach shifted the mindset of IT from a cost center to a profit center. For example, this methodology enabled our end users to identify digital signature and cloud printing as new IT services to be delivered. So the benefits did outweigh the costs but also shifted them.

Utilization of Microsoft Teams has done a lot to maintain a sense of e'spirit de corps among DCHFA staff, as well as, working with many of its external stakeholders. Given the loss of many of the touch-points we took for granted pre-pandemic (like seeing each other's faces) were somewhat restored as a result of the use of the Teams applications. We are currently in the process of working on some of the cultural enhancements of using O365 such as more expeditious file sharing using OneDrive, as well as, improving information-sharing and business processing with our other cloud-based stakeholders to reduce turnaround times on completing transactions, auditing, etc.

EFFECTIVE USE OF RESOURCES

Because this four-step approach is technology agnostic, we anticipate implementing these four steps in the future as new technologies and business priorities emerge.

ACHIEVING OBJECTIVES

We are pleased with our results thus far in transitioning to O365. DCHFA staff struggled with antiquated server-based information technology which should have been replaced almost a decade ago. The timing of this conversion was perfect. The agency would have operated much less efficiently had we not begun to make this transition during the pandemic. OGC, Finance and Procurement have been very pleased with their O365 experience. Given the external facing nature of our multifamily & single-family business lines, there have been a few additional unanticipated challenges, but we are making excellent progress in those areas as well. O365 has also forced certain to learn new skills and approaches to solving (IT) problems as a result of the elimination of the help-desk concept. We anticipate our O365 implementation to be totally complete by the end of the fiscal year.

DCHFA Operations Team responsible for successfully implementing Office 365



Keami Estep, Senior Manager of Procurement and Corporate Resources



Monte Stanford, Chief Operating Officer



James Bowers, Director of Technology



Firm that served as a consultant for Office 365 migration



DCHFA staff attending ProLink conference for training & development



DCHFA staff attending Emphasys conference for training & development