

Communicating Rental Vacancies
Post-Disaster
Kentucky Housing Corporation
Special Achievement

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Entry Title: Communicating Rental Vacancies Post-Disaster
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Communicating Rental Vacancies Post-Disaster

In December 2021, much of Western Kentucky was ravaged by a tornado and heavy storms, leaving many people homeless with nowhere to turn. As the state housing finance agency, Kentucky Housing Corporation (KHC) was immediately called by the state and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to assist those displaced and to help in the relief efforts. Though KHC does not provide temporary housing for disaster victims, it had a wide network of landlords and service providers who could offer permanent, safe, affordable housing units for those in need.

KHC sprung into action, helping assemble a comprehensive list to place those who were homeless in safe, permanent units so they could begin rebuilding their lives.

At the start of the pandemic, KHC created a [webpage](#) with resources for Kentuckians in need, including links to housing, utility and financial assistance; information about federal programs for renters and homeowners struggling to pay their housing costs; information about COVID resources in Kentucky; and a link to KHC's Community Resource Guide, which is broken down by county.

On that page, KHC listed information related to the Western Kentucky disaster relief effort, including how to sign up for federal aid, fliers from FEMA and guidance for our partners. It also added [a form](#) for landlords and partners throughout the state to list their available units. The form allowed landlords to detail their available units – if the vacancy was an apartment, condo or home; the location; number of bedrooms; and special features including senior living communities or handicap-accessible units. The landlord could go in and update their listing as more units became available or as they filled the units.

Immediately, hundreds of landlords and agencies responded. Including their units on the list was mutually beneficial. Not only were they helping those in need, they were filling their vacancies, earning them money. At one point, the list included more than 600 vacancies.

Using the information submitted, KHC created an [interactive map](#) listing of all of the submissions. Anyone searching could narrow the list based on state, county, number of bedrooms and find the location on a map and the contact information for each vacancy.

KHC also turned the information into a [mobile-friendly table](#) for those on the ground working with disaster victims with limited access to the internet. They too could easily search housing vacancies based on what an individual or family needed and find the contact information easily. Lastly, KHC offered a [downloadable printed listing of units](#).

At first, KHC updated the list almost daily and now has slowed to updating the list weekly so those searching can find the most up-to-date database of permanent, affordable housing vacancies.

Innovation

While KHC's headquarters is in Central Kentucky, the person leading this disaster relief effort lives in Western Kentucky. He saw the devastation and need for quick action. He also was connected to the

people in the area who could offer long-term solutions for the people displaced and who could promote the list.

He suggested creating the multipronged approach to cater to the people most likely to search the list – service providers who would need a comprehensive, printed list; those displaced who were living in temporary housing and who may not have access to a computer or reliable internet and needed a quick reference searchable by county or unit size; those at a library or on a computer who could do a more expansive search of the list and who may want to see where the various vacancies fell on a map.

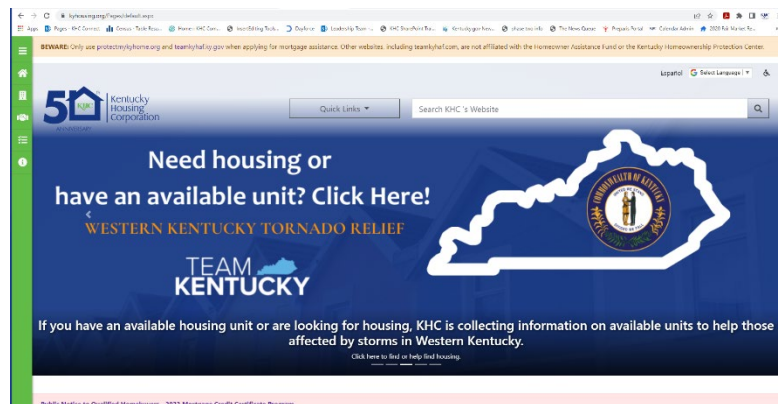
The effort was particularly innovative because it was truly interactive and current. It put the information directly into the hands of the people who needed it most and made it easy for them to connect to the housing they needed.

Replicable

The effort is easily replicable for any state housing finance agency, because it called on existing resources – the network of housing partners KHC interacts with every day and the software KHC uses to map and analyze its impact throughout the state.

Using Microsoft Forms, which is part of KHC’s Microsoft subscription, KHC created the form for landlords to enter their vacancies and update their listings. KHC advertised the list on the governor’s list of resources and did a few media interviews with Western Kentucky [radio](#) and [television stations](#) as well as had [several newspaper stories run](#) about the list.

On its own website, KHC created a website slider (*pictured at right*) that linked directly to the resources page. On social media, KHC continually advertised the list, encouraging landlords to sign up and those in need or who knew someone in need to search the interactive list.



In both [special messages](#) and in the weekly e-newsletters, KHC included information about the lists and instructions for how to help. Those e-newsletters reach lending partners, real estate agents, Community Action Agencies, Project-Based Contract Administration landlords, homeless service providers, specialized program providers, single family and multifamily development organizations, staff and media organizations.

KHC’s Corporate Planning and Accountability department then took the information from the form and, using its Tableau subscription – which creates visualizations and interactive maps of data – input the information into two dashboards to create the two versions of the interactive list.



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Measurable Results

The measurable results are evident as the list of vacancies dwindles. At first, the list had well over 600 units available in Indiana, Kentucky and Tennessee. It currently only has 509 in Kentucky, 12 in Indiana and 23 in Tennessee. That means that people are finding permanent homes rather than relying on temporary shelters provided by FEMA.

KHC will participate in housing fairs in May and June directed at those displaced by the tornado and storms to further connect Western Kentuckians in need with safe, permanent affordable housing.