

Remote Virtual Inspection: An Adaptive Success

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Management Innovation: Technology

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The Louisiana Housing Corporation is responsible for conducting many UPCS-V and HQS inspections each year. Traditionally, LHC team members travel across the state to conduct these inspections in-person. When COVID-19 led to a nationwide shutdown in March 2020, this practice became impossible as all in-person operations came to a sudden halt.

In an effort to adapt to the unprecedented pandemic shutdown and overcome the challenges of quarantining and social distancing, a core team of leaders at the Louisiana Housing Corporation came together to formulate a plan for moving forward.

As a team, they discussed viable options for how to continue operations while ensuring safety for all and without a loss in efficiency. Ideas began to quickly develop, and within a short period of time, LHC was able to effectively implement a virtual process for home inspections by proxy.

With the virtual inspection process, a proxy, whether it be a tenant, landlord, property manager or maintenance person, serves as the eyes and ears for the certified LHC inspector of record, who would be virtually present for the inspection via smartphone or tablet. This allowed for the inspection process to continue, with no in-person contact and guaranteed safety for all parties. This was especially necessary for the elderly population LHC serves due to the higher risk from COVID-19 transmission amongst this group.

The Virtual Process

To begin the process, the LHC team coordinates with the proxy an appointment time for the inspection. Then, prior to the inspection, the respective LHC team member leading the inspection sends relevant forms for the proxy to review and complete prior to the inspection date. For example, for the UPCS-V inspections, the inspector would send over a questionnaire to assess background information for the unit such as the presence of a smoke detector and gas appliances, the number of rooms and windows, and possible deterioration or infestation. Additionally, a pre-inspection checklist is sent over to all proxies to ensure an efficient and seamless inspection process. These forms were created to prep the proxy prior to inspection so all parties would know the intent and expectation, as it is acknowledged that the inspection proxy has little preliminary understanding about the process.

Throughout the entire pre-inspection process, LHC works to ensure that the proxy not only follows the appropriate steps, but also has a sound understanding of the purpose and objective. The proxy signature is required on all necessary forms prior to inspection to ensure document review. This also gives credibility to the integrity of the inspection process.

For the inspection, the qualified LHC inspector has the software pulled up and virtually present the entire time through video to see everything that is occurring in real time. Through video, the inspector is able to instruct and educate the proxy on where to go throughout the unit and what to look for. The

inspection begins outside, where the inspector introduces the process and talks through the steps, following the same protocols as if there in person. Upon completion of the inspection, specific forms are filled out by the inspector and processed accordingly, dependent on what kind of inspection took place. No aspects of the inspection process haven been lost through the remote virtual method.

Taking Initiative

When March 2020 brought the shutdown, it was a time of panic and unease. LHC, like many organizations, found themselves in a position unable to carry out normal operations, and their team realized quickly that they would need to take initiative, as work could not falter. Once LHC received the waiver from the US. Department of Housing and Urban Development confirming the ability to incorporate remote video inspections into daily practices, they had already laid the groundwork and were able to immediately begin working in a new, compliant work environment.

LHC was already using electronic tablet software for their inspections, so they were able to effectively incorporate existing resources into their adaptive and responsive method for home inspections. With the established objective of continuing routine inspections without halting operations, the virtual home inspection process established by LHC proved effective, and even led to greater efficiency within agency operations.

Proven Success: Measurable Results and Improved Efficiency

In third quarter of 2019, the LHC inspection team performed 320 in-person unit inspections. In third quarter of 2020, amidst new regulations and challenges, LHC's innovative response led to the group performing 972 remote virtual inspections. In the same quarter between 2019 and 2020, the agency saw a 303.75% increase in unit inspections using a totally new and adaptive method.

Further, while in the past, agency inspectors would have to sometimes spend an entire day traveling to and from inspection sites, now through virtual work, travel time is completely cut out of the equation, allowing for LHC team members to spend those hours dedicated to getting work done, doing more inspections, and increasing business efficiency. With this, the inspection team also achieved monumental savings for the agency as travel was not necessary for inspections. Over one quarter, a three-month period, the inspection team was able to save \$11,650.33 on fuel. Further, the transition to virtual remote work allowed for the seasoned LHC inspectors who may have previously been averse to change embrace the new innovative methods for how LHC conducted their work. This resulted in a fundamental growth for team operations and willingness to accept positive change in the workplace.

In addition to increased work productivity, LHC also experienced a notable amount of positive customer feedback for their virtual remote inspection work. LHC serves a variety of types of residencies, including assisted living facilities. Customers were relieved to find that they were able to conduct their inspection virtually, not having to worry about social distancing or potential exposure. With this, customers were

happy to serve as proxy inspectors to guarantee safety for all and appreciated the seamless nature of the new process.

To date, over a year into the pandemic, the LHC team has been able to increase efficiency and maintain business operations, and they have been able to do so without a single team member contracting the coronavirus. So, while performance not only went on, it improved, and everyone on the team remained safe and healthy.

Shared Lessons Learned and Best Practices

LHC was recently contacted by HUD regarding best practices, lessons learned and widespread process integration in agencies throughout the United States for their impressive remote virtual inspection methodology. LHC's process is easily replicable, and the LHC team is already connecting with other agencies across the country through our NCSHA network to share lessons learned and help others adopt the process that has allowed for LHC to increase efficiency in a safe and effective manner. One of the most notable best practices from the remote virtual inspection is the established pre-inspection process. The process includes a thorough questionnaire and checklist for inspection proxies to walk the proxy through the entirely foreign process to make sure that they know what to expect and how to prepare for the inspection. This pre-inspection further contributes to the effectiveness of the entire virtual method.

With an increase in number of inspections by over 300% in an assured safe environment, the Louisiana Housing Corporation considers its COVID-19 response to be a very successful one. This process for conducting inspections is already being implemented throughout the country in other areas, and LHC continues to share best practices and lessons learned for continued adoption of remote virtual inspection.

Visual Aids

Photos of the LHC inspection team conducting remote virtual inspections.

