PBCA Process Remodel

Minnesota Housing
Special Achievement: COVID-19 Response

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OVERVIEW

The Housing Management Officer Project Based Contract Administration (HMO PBCA) team implemented a remodel project to address management and occupancy review (MOR) requirements and how those requirements were being met. The remodel work aimed to include process improvement with supporting technology. The project was needed in order to review and update the previous paper heavy processes that were inefficient, confusing, and time consuming for both agency staff and customers. The goals were to eliminate paper forms, improve efficiencies, increase productivity, implement electronic document management, reduce errors, and develop a procedure to utilize a secure electronic system of sharing documents with our external customers. Previously an electronic version of HUD's Addendum A for tenant file review audits had been developed, but the remodel team wanted to go further to fully automate the process of completing the MOR electronically and change standard operating procedures.

Specifics of the improved efficiencies included implementing electronic procedures wherever possible and eliminating paper heavy practices and duplicative work. Process improvements coupled with technology solutions were meant to be implemented simultaneously; however, with the rapidly changing environment of COVID-19, staff was required to telecommute, which meant business practices needed to adapt to a work-from-home environment.

To keep business fully functional, and in response to the COVID-19 crisis, staff had to immediately find a way to effectively work from home full time. The four-member HMO PBCA remodel team assessed the existing elements of the remodel work and highlighted all of the items that could be converted to an electronic process. They then determined a way to immediately implement all of those electronic pieces. Each team member was assigned responsibilities such as converting forms to fillable documents, creating an electronic file storage structure, and developing a procedure guide. This focused initiative allowed the team to train staff and implement the new electronic process in the span of only three weeks. More importantly, the new processes will now become standard business practices.

INNOVATION

A thorough analysis of internal and external processes was conducted to determine which ones would be preserved, which ones would be altered, and which ones could be eliminated. New streamlined processes were developed and implemented to collect, enter, track, store and exchange data. To further improve efficiencies, new electronic based procedures were also developed for quality control and internal review. The newly developed processes greatly reduced bottlenecks that significantly slowed the process of completing monthly MOR reports.

All paper forms were converted to digitized fillable forms, which were tested to ensure functionality. Tools and procedures were then developed not only for agency forms but also for previously released fillable documents from HUD to allow compatibility with other Minnesota Housing tools and the Surface tablet, which is used onsite during the MOR. To complement this process, a digitized form filing system was developed to replace storing paper forms and documents in office filing cabinets. Internal processes were also implemented to allow staff to electronically route reports and perform peer reviews and quality control audits that ensure the quality and integrity of the reports prior to finalizing and sending to owners and management agents. Finally, the use of an online application to securely exchange digitized documents and HUD forms with owners and property managers was implemented. As a result, efficiencies were made by keeping the entire MOR process completely electronic and eliminating the

need to print and mail forms, documents, and MOR reports. Most importantly, all aspects of performing MORs can be completed electronically from any location.

RESPONSE TO AN IMPORTANT STATE HOUSING NEED
Prior to the remodel project and before the COVID-19 pandemic, the HMO PBCA team had significant obstacles when conducting their work and communicating with owners and agents. Those obstacles included:

- Duplicative work: Paper forms were used when working in the field, which meant that data needed to be transferred to electronic means when staff returned to the office.

- Access to technology: The team was waiting on agency approval to implement the many electronic forms that HUD currently makes available. COVID-19 necessitated more immediate decision-making.

- Easy, fast and reliable communication with owners: Previously, all correspondence was via U.S. mail or fax instead of utilizing email or more advanced technologies such as secure document sharing and signing.

Once the HMO PBCA team implemented a fully paperless process, they eliminated redundant work, addressed bottlenecks in work flow, utilized technology that allowed for efficient and streamlined processes, and communicated with owners and agents in real time.

ACHIEVE INTENDED RESULTS
PBCA, which is part of Minnesota Housing's multifamily division, had been anticipating updating the MOR process for approximately seven years and had expected the project to take about a year to complete. The MOR process is necessary to meet HUD Annual Contribution Contract (ACC) requirements, and due to COVID-19, updates became much more critical. The remodel has achieved its intended results by implementing streamlined processes that resulted in less reliance on paper and in-office resources, such as fax machines and U.S. mail. The revised processes provide Minnesota Housing's affordable housing partners a simple interface tool to securely send and track submitted documents. This new process assists in preserving affordable housing in Minnesota by reducing costs through the implementation of long-term and more efficient processes and procedures. Most importantly, the new processes addressed the challenges presented by the COVD-19 pandemic by allowing employees to remotely complete all aspects of the MOR that previously had to be completed in the office. These changes were developed for long-term use and will remain in place when the crisis is over.

PROGRAM BENEFITS THAT OUTWEIGH COSTS
The process remodel changes have resulted in minimal costs to Minnesota Housing because of the utilization of internal staff that developed them. The agency was able to use existing computer hardware and software programs, which was another cost saving measure. By implementing streamlined strategies that significantly reduced time and labor, Minnesota Housing will benefit from a substantial reduction in costs, which in turn will advance our mission of providing housing that is affordable throughout the state. This is accomplished by retaining revenue earned by fulfilling the requirements of HUD's ACC. In turn, this revenue is reinvested in developments and helps preserve housing that is affordable for more individuals, families, people with disabilities, and the elderly. The

benefits to the owners/agents is a more streamlined MOR process that eliminates many duplications, provides a secure data delivery system, and adopts a more encompassing use of technology.