

COVID-19 Response: Call Center

New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency

Management Innovation: Internal Operations

HFA Staff Contact

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In 2020, New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency, along with many of our sister agencies, faced urgent and unprecedented needs in our community. Amid the devastating COVID-19 pandemic, NJHMFA worked to quickly design and implement a program to provide needed dollars and support into New Jersey communities.

NJHMFA administered the New Jersey Small Landlord Emergency Grant Program to assist small rental property owners and their tenants during this crisis. The grant supported vulnerable landlords and renters by reimbursing small landlords for missed/reduced rent payments. The first application phase launched on August 19, 2020 and ran through August 26, 2020. The second phase, allowing for expanded qualifying criteria, was open for applications from September 28, 2020 through October 13, 2020.

During both 2020 application phases of the Small Landlord Emergency Grant program, a robust infrastructure was created to support Landlords prior to and throughout the application process. Knowing that applicants may have initial questions about the process, the documents required to be eligible, and how to apply for the program, NJHMFA created a call center specifically for the Small Landlord Emergency Grant program with 20 staff members ultimately addressing in excess of 15,000 calls.

All design, development, and staffing of the call center was handled internally by NJHMFA staff providing specified, part-time coverage in addition to their standard workload. To track, organize, and best service potential applicants, NJHMFA staff created a SharePoint system. This permitted call center staff to understand and access past inquiries by callers, even if they hadn't previously spoken with the caller. Knowing that call centers play a pivotal role in consumer's emotional state, especially during such an impactful and multifaceted moment in time, the NJHMFA team focused on organizing calls in SharePoint to track trends in real time and direct inquiries requiring follow up to the most appropriate staff members or translators for 11 languages.

This agile approach to developing a call center within a brief timeframe meant focusing on key components, which included: remote communications setup with ATT, centralizing all information using SharePoint, and have a clear system for time-sensitive follow-up and reporting.

Since staff was working from home, the call center was created with an ATT virtual system and all data was entered in one system, Organized by topic, and produced daily and weekly reports for analyzing by programmatic staff. At a glance, decisions could be made to better serve the community in need.

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The screenshot displays the 'Sleg Call Tracker' intranet page. The page header includes the NJHMFA logo and navigation links. The main content area is divided into several sections:

- Form Section:** Contains fields for 'Caller Name (* Required)', 'Caller Phone # (* Required)', 'Caller*', 'Call Type*', 'County', 'Zip Code', 'Status (* Required)' (with radio buttons for 'Resolved' and 'Followup Required'), and text areas for 'Describe the question(s) posed by the caller (* Required)' and 'Describe how the question(s) was resolved (* Required)'. A blue oval labeled 'DATA ENTRY' is overlaid on this section.
- SLEG Documents:** A list of documents including 'SLEG_Reports', 'ATT Office@IndUser_Creation', 'Call Center SCHEDULE_Oct_1e...', 'O_H Desktop App_setup', 'SLEG Resource Manual_Call Center', 'SLEG TWO_Resource Manual_Call Center', and 'TRAINING SLIDES'. A blue oval labeled 'CALL CENTER SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION' is overlaid on this section.
- Excel - SLEG Calls Type:** A table showing call statistics. A blue oval labeled 'REAL TIME REPORTING' is overlaid on this section.
- Emergency Calls Tracker:** A table listing individual calls with columns for 'Edit', 'CenterName', 'CallType', 'County', 'Status', 'Zipcodes', 'Created', 'Created By', and 'Manager Name'. A blue oval labeled 'DATA LIST' is overlaid on this section.

At the bottom of the image, a green banner contains the text 'HOUSING & MORTGAGE FINANCE AGENCY'.

Innovative: The rapid inhouse design, development, and organization of the call center through use of SharePoint and ATT showed innovation and agility. The system was centralized in such a way that all calls addressed, tracked and monitored to ensure clients' needs were met. The design also streamlined the data in an efficient and digestible way to not only allow for analysis but response.

Replicable: The system developed is easily replicable, both for future agency within our state, as well as being easily replicable for other HFAs.

Responds to A Management Challenge or Opportunity: Having your team respond to a crisis through their work while they themselves are also living through a global pandemic is a challenging "ask". The NJHMFA team rose to the occasion and did so in the absolute best interest of those we serve. Although the team worked remotely, the structure and organization of the call center allowed for streamlined

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caller access and follow-up as well as real-time analytics to inform and adjust offering to best meet caller's needs.

Achieves Measurable Improvements in Agency Operations: Measurable Improvements in agency operations include a now turnkey, streamlined system for crisis response and program funding communications. The system is agile, efficient and easily allows for modifications customized towards individual program needs.

In addition to the SharePoint tracking and reporting created inhouse, data was also used from the ATT system which provided analytics for all calls, both ingoing and outgoing. Merging these data sets together and sharing them in a central location, allowed for management and program stakeholders to understand potential data loss, call volume patterns, and staff performance. At a glance, decisions could be made to better serve the community in need. Please see page 1 of the weekly progressive report below.

SLEG #2 Call Center Report Cover Page				SLEG incoming calls per hour													
Please use the tabs at the bottom of the Spreadsheet to see the daily stats in more detail																	
Week Ending Friday 10-2-2020																	
	Tracked Calls	Answered Call	Follow up calls	8am	9am	10am	11am	12pm	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm	6pm	7pm		
Monday 9_28	145	154	27	5	9	16	10	19	21	18	23	19	19	X	X		
Tuesday 9_29	214	238	32	11	29	41	34	22	22	23	22	20	14	X	X		
Wednesday 9_30	154	166	42	10	25	26	18	22	21	13	14	10	7	X	X		
Thursday 10_1	160	175	56	12	26	22	19	25	19	26	13	7	5	X	X		
Friday 10_2	124	131	32	4	11	16	18	16	13	17	19	13	4	X	X		
	797	864	189	Totals													

Provide Benefits That Outweigh Costs: The benefits of an organized, skilled and empathic call center during a crisis is immeasurable. Costs were controlled by utilizing internal staff for the design, development and call center staffing. Overtime, the reporting feature permitted a shifting of staff resources to timeframes in which call volume was highest.

Demonstrate Effective Use of Resources: All design, development and staffing of the call center was handled internally by NJHMFA staff, primarily making use of resources we already had. Within three weeks, NJHMFA staff created a SharePoint system to service and track high call volume. Our existing highly skilled team members were then trained specifically on pandemic response. NJHMFA created a "Resource Manual" for our staff to reference while manning calls. This included helpful phone numbers or web links for the caller to use as well as important facts on the program and deadline dates etc.

Achieve Strategic Objectives: The objective of the Small Landlord Emergency Grant Call Center was to rapidly create a centralized system to best communicate with and support Landlords, and ultimately their tenants as well, in applying for funding in response to a health and financial crisis. This was achieved though the strategic design, development and staffing outlined above. Through this strategic action, the call center was positioned to best serve and impart critical information to community members.