NCSHA

Improving Public Accessibility and Agency Operations with Issue Management

North Carolina Housing Finance Agency

Management Innovation: Technology

HFA Staff Contact

Tim Carroll

twcarroll@nchfa.com

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Contact Tim Carroll | twcarroll@nchfa.com | 919-981-5376

Innovation: "Need Meets Vision"

Initial Known Needs:

1. Community Living Complaints: Achieving outstanding stewardship of housing finance resources for families participating in Transitions to Community Living Initiative (TCLI) programs requires timely and fair resolution of complaints that arise between Agency partners and tenants receiving rent subsidies. Oversight and resolution of these complaints requires collaboration between the Agency, the NC Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) and tenants.

As a result of this identified need, the Agency's IT roadmap included a highly prioritized project to manage these complaints by improving communication channels, oversight, work assignment, documentation, tracking and reporting capabilities for community living stakeholders and program participants.

2. ITIL Compliant IT Service Desk: A project to upgrade our IT Service desk to be Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) compliant was on the IT roadmap. ITIL is a framework of best practices for delivering IT services. ITIL's systematic approach to IT service management can help businesses manage risk, strengthen customer relations, establish cost-effective practices and build a stable IT environment that allows for growth, scale and change.

The Vision:

IT leadership was actively shaping a vision to improve overall Agency performance, public access to Agency resources, public interactions, communication, operational processes, transparency and accountability by applying issue management tools, capabilities and best practices to a wide variety of Agency groups and supporting systems.

A **key concept** to the success of the solution was defining an issue as the focal point and characterizing it as a generic work item (i.e., complaint, inquiry, ticket, request, etc.) to organize, manage and process work directly related to customer value.

IT's vision required that the solution could be leveraged as an enterprise platform across the Agency and would address all known and discoverable issue types and needs. The platform should support:

- Email intake ticket creation and auto routing
- Customizable alerts, notifications, workflow, fields and forms for a variety of issues
- Information segmentation of a group's tickets and data into separate helpdesks
- Robust collaboration and outlook integration (i.e., all related emails exchanged by resolution participants are documented automatically within the ticket)
- API integration to the Agency's internally developed line of business systems and portals

IT leadership met the need for TCLI complaint management and an ITIL compliant IT helpdesk upgrade by creating a spring board that could meet the broader IT vision and extend affordable issue management to any Agency group's operation whether internal or public facing, now or in the future.

Unexpected Need: The COVID-19 global pandemic emphasized a need for expanded operational tools and systems to support the Agency's mission during a time of increased public need for public interactions, program administration and internal support.

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Replicable Model

The Agency needed a cloud-based solution that would enable quick standup of multiple customized helpdesks for any Agency group in a flexible, timely and affordable manner.

Each helpdesk would be part of a common system that leveraged technology and capabilities such as collaboration, documentation, tracking, monitoring, alert notifications and reporting while supporting unique needs and segmentation of information, expertise, operational processes and staffing.

To be replicable and scalable, the solution would support the configuration of new helpdesks and required customizations quickly for all identified, discoverable and future unknown line of business or supporting Agency groups and to integrate easily with existing and new processes and software tools.

Management Challenge or Opportunity

In support of the broader IT leadership vision and the opportunity identified by TCLI program management, the Agency conducted high-level Agency-wide requirements workshops and found that many groups expressed similar needs and were enthusiastic that issue management capabilities would improve processes, work tracking and distribution, oversight, communication, documentation and reporting.

Disparate solutions existed that ranged from use of local and shared file drives, paper filing, SharePoint, voicemail and personal email folders. However, none of these were organized around solving specific issues and delivering optimal solutions directly related to customer value. Each group had similar generic needs but had a diverse set of stakeholders, customers (external and internal), operational processes and software systems. Each group had concerns and expressed shortcomings about the ability to manage and process information and work effectively.

Although the ability to support future unknown helpdesks was a primary requirement for the Agency, a number of other groups were identified and targeted along with TCLI that could potentially benefit from issue management system capabilities. Requirements for each group were developed over a 10-month period, bringing one helpdesk online at a time. Based on our key project concept that an issue is a focal point that drives work activity and relates directly to delivering customer value, we found numerous types of issues including (see addendums for full breakdown of issue types):

- Program and partner complaints (TCLI and Rental Asset Management)
- Www.nchfa.com public 'Contact Us' inquiries (routed to any Agency group for follow-up and resolution)
- Requests for public records
- IT helpdesk, change management tracking
- Press office and public relations requests and issues
- Government relations inquiries, requests from legislative offices and staff
- Legal complaints (complaints from external parties addressed to the Agency that are addressed by both our program and legal staff)
- Policy requests

Measurable Results

Beyond improvement in our operational processes, we are now able to collect and analyze business intelligence data. Over the phases of the one-year project, more helpdesks have been added. Now we can see that, Agency wide, we have processed nearly 2,000 issues and an increase in total number of issues created and being processed during implementation phases of the project. Now that implementation is complete, we expect our ability to drill down and analyze our issue data by group, staff, severity, service level agreement (SLA – a.k.a. 'promise to resolve') and many other parameters will provide on-going insight into opportunities for improvement across the Agency.

Benefits that Outweigh Costs

The ability to leverage and apply consistent issue management capabilities in support of any Agency group, specific to their needs, and in a flexible and customizable way is an ongoing benefit above and beyond TCLI process improvements. We expect to see a positive future return on investment as the data repository continues to mature and new challenges and organizational change impacts the Agency. We were able to replace our IT ticket tracking system with a fully ITIL capable service desk. Our solution, now in place, can easily be configured and applied to any existing or new group or program by identifying the nature of the top level 'issues' that drive work activities.

For example, during implementation we had an urgent need to support a new forbearance program for COVID-19 relief efforts and a new group of Agency staff members that would be working on those issues. Within hours, IT was able to support that group with their own helpdesk, email address and all the capabilities that our system provides.

Demonstrates Effective Use of Resources

Based on our requirements and a need to better understand issue management best practices, we began to evaluate products. There is a plethora of products available and based on reviews and recommendations the Agency selected many products to evaluate. Ultimately, we selected FreshService, a division of FreshWorks. It met all of our requirements, demonstrated ease of use, robust functionality and offered generous technical support. There is an online chat always answered within minutes. Chats are converted to tickets automatically if first-tier support is not able to resolve the issue immediately. Other advantages include the removal of on-premise infrastructure and support, out-of-the-box readiness and its applicability to multiple facets of Agency operations so that technical resources are applied to one system while each helpdesk leverages their expertise and their custom needs for data and workflow.

With this process, the Agency was able to meet strategic objectives set forth for this solution. On time and within our budget, our IT team created a replicable, adaptable process for receiving and resolving issues Agency wide and we have succeeded in improving both internal and external customer service and communications.

Addendum – Breakdown of Agency 'Issue' Types and 'Helpdesks'

Business Group	'Issue'	Helpdesk
TCLI Community Living	Program complaints from tenants or partners	Helpdesk established to facilitate timely processing and effective oversight of tenant and partner complaints in collaboration with NCDHHS and program partners. Utilized API for integration with custom in-house software systems used by partners, the Agency and NCDHHS.
www.nchfa.com Contact Us	Public inquiries from citizens and organizations	Helpdesk established as an extension of the front desk that supports direct public interactions. These can relate to any public service aspect of the Agency and any internal business group. Agents can respond directly to the requester. A web 'contact us' form provides instant submission of a ticket. Resolution of these inquiries can quickly be distributed (i.e., 'routed') to any business group within the Agency as well as monitored for SLA compliance.
Public Records	Public records request	Helpdesk established to support processing of public requests for Agency data. NC Law mandates that data and records should be produced in a timely fashion. Data/records returned to requestor are uploaded and stored on the request.
Public Relations	Inquiries from public and internal Agency requests for marketing services	Public relations group is responsible for responding to media requests, public requests and successful implementation of all public outreach efforts on behalf of the Agency.
Government Relations	Requests from NC legislative officials, offices or staff	Established to support processing of requests and reporting of such requests by government officials.
Multi-Family	Tenancy complaints	Tenant and property complaints related to the administration of multi-family housing development and programs.
Human Resources	Staff changes for on-boarding, name change, job changes, etc.	Staff transitions helpdesk established to process staffing tickets and automatically relate them directly to IT supporting (i.e., 'child') tickets
Office Services	Facilities management	Issues related to facility issues reported by Agency staff.

Legal Complaints	Legal issues	Helpdesk established to support the processing, monitoring and resolution of any Agency issue or complaint that is escalated from within the Agency to the legal department.
Policy and Research	Requests for reports and analytical data reports	Helpdesk to support processing of Agency requests in support of Agency staff needs for presentation or informational purposes.
IT Operations	ITIL service desk requests and incidents	Support for the distribution, assignment and SLAs for all Agency IT needs; ticket tracking system.
IT Security	IT security incidents	Integrated with Outlook, tickets are reported by Agency staff directly from a suspicious email, converted to a ticket and routed to specialized IT security team.
IT Software Development	Software incident reports and enhancement or reporting requests	Support and enhancements submitted for Agency line-of-business systems user community for fixes and changes. Integrated with Trello so that 'cards' are connected directly to a reported incident.
Electronic Document Management (EDRM)	SharePoint issues, requests for SharePoint sites, document storage requests	Support EDRM team that manages all SharePoint access and content as well as document storage and retrieval.
Website and Intranet News Changes	Issues and requests to develop current web content	Established to support webmaster group who manage content on Agency website and intranet.

Ticket Volume:

Addendum: Sample Dashboard

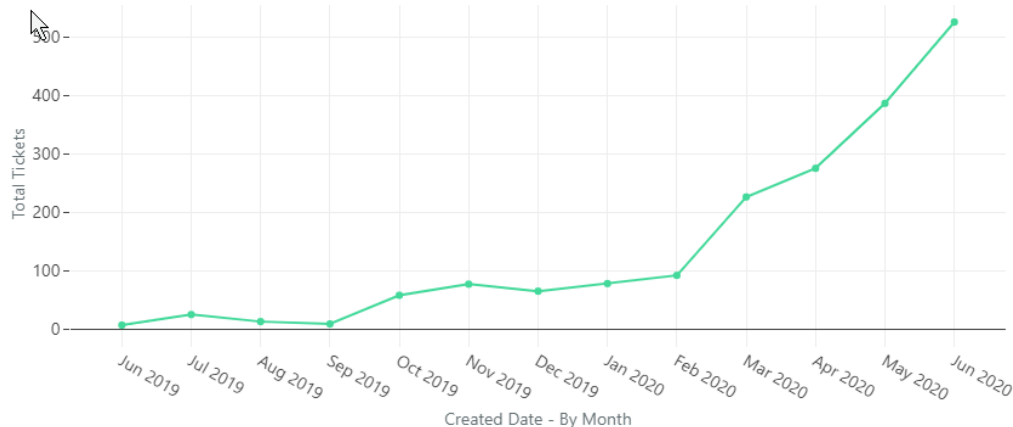Demonstrating global view into all 'helpdesks' and 'issues.'

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TCLI Tickets by LME/MCO — Show All

312 Tickets

- Cardinal I... (100)
- Partners B... (60)
- Sandhills ... (42)
- Eastpointe (37)
- Vaya Healt... (26)

All SHLP Forbearance Incidents by Status

12 Tickets

- Closed (12)

All Agency Complaints Tickets by Agent

3 Tickets

- Claudia Yo... (3)

All Policy and Research by Status — Show All

30 Tickets

- Open (1)
- Resolved (2)
- Pending (2)
- Closed (6)
- In-Progr... (18)

All Finance Systems Tickets by Status

We can't fry the donuts as we don't have enough data

All Office Services Tickets by Status

2 Tickets

- Closed (1)
- Resolve... (1)