

2007 NAHRO AWARDS

AGENCY AWARDS OF MERIT IN HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

ADMINISTRATIVE INNOVATION

Integrated Voice Response System

1. SUMMARY OF PROGRAM:

Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) and public housing (PH) applicants along with vendors request information via phones which requires speaking to Fort Worth Housing Authority (FWHA) staff. Staff was tied up with a significant number of phone calls. FWHA has developed a solution to provide clients with information without actually speaking to staff. The solution is to provide the information 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to clients through the use of three (3) stand alone phone numbers which tie into an Integrated Voice Response (IVR) system provided through FWHA's phone system.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAM:

The problem the agency faced was that clientele needed information via phone which required them to speak to an FWHA staff member. This meant that staff was getting inundated with phone calls and clientele was only able to receive information during business hours. A majority of the information requested was HCV and PH applicants wanting to know their position on the wait list, vendors needing to know when their last check payments were processed as well as the amount of the payment, and HCV landlords and clients wanting to know if a particular unit passed inspection. This large amount of calls was hindering the productivity of agency staff. The challenge was to accurately provide a way for clientele to access the information requested 24 hours a day, 7 days a week without actually speaking to a staff member. A solution was found by providing clientele access to an Integrated Voice Response system. The services provided by the IVR are three-fold. First we provide clientele with the option to call three (3) different phone numbers. Each phone number serves a different purpose. The first number provided is for clientele seeking their position on the PH and/or HCV wait list. When the number is called the IVR auto attendant asks the client to provide a social security number. After the computer verifies a correct SSN, it then provides the client with his/her position on the wait list. The second number provided is for all vendors to call and find out when the last payment was made to them as well as the amount of the payment. When the vendor makes a call to the designated number, the IVR asks them for their tax id number.

The system then verifies the number and provides the vendor with the requested information. The third phone number provides information to landlords and clientele after a HCV inspection has been performed providing them with the results of the inspection. When this number is called, the IVR asks the caller for the client number. After verifying the information, it reads the address for the inspection that took place for that specific client. It then provides him/her with a pass or fail status of the inspection. After the client is provided with the status, the IVR asks the caller if he/she would like to leave a message for the inspector that performed the inspection. If they answer yes to the question, the caller is forwarded to the correct inspector's voice mail box to leave a message.

The IVR system was implemented in June, 2006. Implementation of this technology took approximately 6 months from start to finish. It involved the purchase of a phone system that was made specifically to handle an IVR system. Specialized programming is provided by the phone manufacturing company and custom programming is provided by FWHA MIS staff. The database required to run the IVR is updated and maintained daily by MIS staff in order to provide up to date accurate information

3. THE RESULTS/SUCCESS OF THE PROGRAM:

The IVR system has met its objective by providing multiple services to FWHA clientele by making the most requested information available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and allowing FWHA staff members to be more productive in order to better serve its clientele. This system is now a permanent part of the services provided the FWHA. The IVR system provides information for approximately 5,000 inspections, 1,500 vendor payments, and 3,300 clients of the wait list, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. This solution can be replicated by other housing agencies in a couple of different ways. First, there is a need to have a phone system that can support the IVR application programming. Then, software and system programming must be purchased.

4. THE COST/FINANCING OF THE PROGRAM:

The average cost for an IVR system is \$15,000.00 to \$30,000.00 in hardware and programming fees depending on the different services provided to the agency clientele. The value of the IVR system can be measured in the amount of staff hours gained as a result of not answering phone calls and the gained time working with clientele in the office.

5. INNOVATION:

Innovation is demonstrated by the ability of clientele to gather information about wait list status, payments, and inspections 24 hours a day, 7 days a

week without actually needing to speak to staff. The uniqueness of our program is that a phone number is provided for each category of information requested. This allows clientele to access exactly what they are inquiring about without the need to listen to additional menus or automated attendant prompts, thus allowing them to gather information quickly.