applicant.access

APPLICANT ACCESS AT THE HOUSING AUTHORITY OF HOPKINSVILLE

The Challenge

The Housing Authority of Hopkinsville (HAH), located in Hopkinsville, KY is a small to midsized agency with 484 Section 8 vouchers and 459 Public Housing units. Hopkinsville struggles with efficiently managing their waiting list. Historically, Hopkinsville's waiting lists have cycled between being open and closed in 6 month intervals. The frequent need to collect new applications has proven to be quite problematic for the agency at times.

HAH ran into several difficulties while accepting only paper applications. Originally applicants were allowed to apply on a walk in basis one day a week during one of two three hour windows (one in the morning and the other in the afternoon). In an effort to allow applicants more flexibly, the agency started accepting applications all day every day. While the extended application time created more convenience and flexibility to applicants, it also created more incomplete applications that the Hopkinsville staff had to battle. In an effort to reduce the number of incomplete applications by allocating more time to review each application, HAH once again limited the acceptance of new applications to one day per week. Assuming the application received was complete and needed no further revisions (which often *wasn't* the case), it generally took an HAH staff member 2-3 minutes to hand key the 3 page pre application into Tenmast's Applicant List module.

After tweaking their application process numerous times, HAH turned to Tenmast for help in 2008 when both waiting lists reopened. **For three years Applicant Access has helped Hopkinsville accept hundreds of applications more efficiently while offering a higher level of customer service and convenience to their applicants**. Since their adoption of Applicant Access, HAH has opened and closed their lists several times, most recently closing them in March of 2010, and reopening them in late 2010.

KEY RESULTS

- Previous process limited applicants and their ability to apply

- Applicant Access allows applicants to apply at the most suitable time for them

- **More convenient** for not only the applicant but the housing authority as well

Tenmast Software – Applicant Access Case Study

The role of Applicant Access

After a successful implementation of Applicant Access, HAH decided to allow applicants to continue applying via paper applications. Occupancy Specialist Rebecca Hilliard reported that HAH received 621 applications over the course of 2009 and 2010, which was great considering that the lists were closed for significant periods of time. Just as HAH had anticipated, over 400 of the applications were submitted online. Since the adoption of Applicant Access, Hilliard states that "**2/3 of our applications are received from the web application**."

While the vast majority of clients fill out their application remotely via Applicant Access, some applicants still wish to visit the office to apply. Many come to drop off a paper application, while others fill out applications upon arrival, but best of all, applicants also have the ability to use an HAH provided kiosk to fill out the application online. On average HAH will host 5 to 10 applicants per week in office, while an average of 30 applicants apply online. This has allowed HAH to decrease applicant foot traffic in their office by over 70%. In addition to the tremendous amount of time saved by staff from being able to directly import applications into the Applicant List module, staff has also eliminated over 2/3 of their time normally spent assisting applicants in the office. This has proved critical allowing staff to focus on other high priority tasks.

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Undoubtedly Applicant Access has made the application process better for both applicants and HAH. The majority of applicants now prefer to apply online as opposed to travelling to the office. HAH knew that the importing of applications was going to be great for their office efficiency, but they didn't realize that it would be this popular to the extent that it is amongst applicants. Hilliard believes that the best feature of Applicant Access and the reason for the application's success is the user friendly interface that applicants work through to apply. Best of all, the back end user interface for staff use makes it very simple to import applications from the web and apply them to the appropriate waiting lists.

Online Applications are available using our Applicant Access program. The applicant can be basic or detailed to meet the needs of your agency. Waiting lists can be turned on/off as needed.

Hilliard is also quick to point out that Applicant Access is helpful in many other ways as well. Accessibility for applicants has steadily increased since the adoption of Applicant Access. In addition to remote access via applicant's homes many HAH partners within Hopkinsville do a great job of promoting the online application. "Local organizations are aware of the online application and they make it available in their offices since applicants are frequently there more so than they are here," Hilliard explains. The local Social Service office, Salvation Army, spousal abuse program, school system and mental health programs all allow applicants to apply at their offices and they also assist applicants if they need help completing the application. Hilliard claims that building awareness for the online application was very simple and it has turned into "a great tool for other agencies to assist families in need." The agency has also found that the online application provides comfort to those applicants who need to apply immediately. "If it is an urgent situation, they feel better that they can apply wherever they are immediately online," Hilliard cites.

In addition to reducing paper applications (which require manual data entry) and foot traffic in the office, since implementing Applicant Access Hilliard claims that HAH has seen an increase in overall applications taken by over 20%. Hilliard believes the increase in applications may be attributed to the programs new found "expanded reach." The online application allows applicants to apply at anytime and anywhere there is a computer with internet access. Applicants who may have had to work during the

agency's previous application window can now apply whenever it is convenient for them. The applicant on the outskirts of town or out on the opposite end of the county doesn't have to waste a trip to the office to fill out an application; they can easily apply from the comfort of their home or their workplace in many cases. While the online application has expanded the reach of the application to applicants, Applicant Access has also increased the capabilities and efficiency of HAH. The agency can easily handle an increase in applications because they don't have to 'hand-key' all of the data into the software system. Staff members simply download new applications when it is convenient for them, and, after a quick review to make sure the information submitted is valid, they click one button and the application is applied to all applicable waiting lists.

Hilliard believes Applicant Access is perfect for Housing Authorities because, "The application process can continue 24/7. If someone isn't at the agency it doesn't matter, you can still apply." When the Housing Authority closes it doesn't mean that they cannot accept any new applications. The accessibility of the program allows people to apply for housing wherever and whenever it is convenient for them. They're not tied down to the typical "office hours only" mentality, Applicant Access gives them that freedom. Hilliard also relishes the fact that the online application has , "made our items available to wider range of people while reducing time and money." When looking back on the decision to purchase Applicant Access, Hilliard admits that "It has exceeded our expectations." They were able to achieve their goals of reducing foot traffic within the office, increase the efficiency of their application process, and provide more access to their application for their clients. Applicant Access has become so successful that Rebecca claims that they only use their paper application as their "very last resort."

For more information on Applicant Access or to see an online demonstration, please contact Scott Browder, sbrowder@tenmast.com or call 877.359.5492 ext. 362.

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