hacsb

Housing Authority of the County of Santa Barbara

Markets
PHA
Affordable Housing

Portfolio
1,328 residential units, including affordable housing and public housing
3,500+ housing choice vouchers

Client Since
2009

Highlighted Product
RentCafe PHA

The Benefits
HACSB purged outdated wait lists and accepted new applicants electronically all without extensive paperwork or staff hours using RentCafe PHA.

About Housing Authority, County of Santa Barbara
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>
> Bob Havlicek, Executive Director

The Company
The Housing Authority of the County of Santa Barbara (HACSB) owns and manages 1,328 residential units as well as over 3,500 vouchers for low income households through rent subsidy programs or by occupancy in its housing developments. Operating in a region widely known for limited affordable housing availability, HACSB also provides a variety of support services to residents.

The Challenge
Processing thousands of household applicants quickly
Demand for public housing assistance far outweighs the available supply in nearly every community nationwide, but the challenges are especially great in California. The opportunity to join an agency's waiting list for housing assistance can create a frenzy of activity. When HACSB opened its waiting list to new names in March 2018, thousands of households took advantage of the chance to secure an affordable place to live.

The Solution
RentCafe PHA
RentCafe PHA replaces lengthy applicant meetings, expensive file storage, difficult-to-read forms and handwritten notes with a paperless application process. RentCafe PHA, along with RentCafe Affordable Housing, support HUD 50058, 50059, Public Housing, Housing Choice Vouchers, HOME, Rural Development Section 515 and Low Income Housing Tax Credit subsidies.

The Story
A new approach to waitlisting based on technology
HACSB needed to accommodate pent-up demand and used technology to avoid the potential pitfalls and administrative bottlenecks associated with outdated, paper-based processes. The first step in HACSB's process of accepting new names to its waiting list was purging the existing list of households no longer seeking assistance. Over the years, households may move from the area, have a change in income, or find housing on their own. HACSB sought an efficient way to reach those households previously on the waiting list and make the required edits to the waiting list before accepting new names.

"Because it had been so long since we opened the list, and we hadn't selected anyone from it in more than two years, there was a lot of old information," said Juan Garcia,

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information systems administrator for HACSB.

HACSB used a unique feature of RentCafe PHA called Save My Spot to purge its waiting list. Save My Spot makes it possible for public housing agencies to easily communicate with everyone on their waiting list and give them the chance to update contact information, restate their desire to remain on the list, or request to be removed.

With Save My Spot, households with an email address on file are asked to verify their information through a quick, online process. Waitlisted households without an email address are mailed a form with a pre-printed barcode. The form asks the applicant to update their status and contact information and mail back the completed form. Once the form is returned, the public housing agency scans the barcode and creates an electronic record in RentCafe PHA.

Save My Spot saves public housing agencies the cost of postage, paper and staff hours on data entry. "We purged nearly 40% of the names on our outdated waiting list with Save My Spot in a matter of days. Going through that process before opening the list to new names was a great first step, and it was much more efficient than mailing everyone on the list a form to fill out," said Bob Havlicek, executive director of HACSB.

Working with fresh data
Once the list was cleaned up, HACSB opened it up to new applicants. The response to HACSB's waitlist opening exceeded expectations, prompting HACSB to keep the list open for two extra weeks.

"During a three-week period, we added 7,965 new names to our waiting list. We got more than 1,200 on the first day, and names poured in throughout the week. Extending the opening period was very necessary," said Beverly Negrete, quality control manager for HACSB.

RentCafe PHA technology made it simple to apply online. "We created a short video with step-by-step instructions in English and Spanish, and then posted it to YouTube. That was an effective way to show people just how easy it is to use RentCafe PHA, and something that wouldn't really be feasible if we were using paper application forms. With a video, they can watch the steps and see exactly how it's done," said Garcia.

That preemptive work paid off for HACSB as the agency received relatively few phone calls asking for help completing the online process. "Most of the calls we got were easy to handle, such as how to find a username or reset a password," said Negrete.

Processing a windfall of data
HACSB was able to handle the steep influx of applicants with relative ease compared with

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past efforts. "It is so much faster to process an electronic application compared with paper forms. Our staff could complete the initial review of an electronic application in a minute. That was not the case with the paper applications we received," said Negrete.

Housing Authority, County of Santa Barbara has also implemented Yardi Voyager Affordable Housing, Yardi Voyager PHA, ScreeningWorks Pro, Yardi Maintenance, Yardi Maintenance Mobile, Yardi Inspection, Yardi Inspection Mobile, Yardi Fixed Assets, Yardi Inventory Control, CHECKscan, Yardi Job Cost