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Housing Management Review

Focus Group Notes
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Number of participants: 20

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Question 1: What do the employees in the Housing Department do well?

- Review, interpret, administer, and enforce HUD regulations and policy
- Adapt to County changes (reorganizations, space moves, County changes to rules and policies)
- Provide excellent customer service
- Provide high quality service despite budget decreases (from Fed Government)
- Maintain quality social skills in the workplace ("cube etiquette")
- Cross-training/sharing information between HCD and Housing Authority (HA)
- People work well independently
- Managing caseload – despite staff shortages
- In spite of budget cuts, server customers well (back each other up)
- Fiscal – manage to balance budget and keep operations moving smoothly with minimal management input (both HA and HCD)
- In spite of less staff are able to complete all work
- Spend money effectively (receive HUD approval of appropriations)
- Flexible and adaptable with all changes that fact the department
- Creation of Ad Hoc committees to address a variety of issues
- Agreeable staff
- Manage large caseload in short timeframe
- Customer service
- Information distribution (to clients)
- Repair and rehabilitate housing with limited funding
- Do job with limited manpower

Question 2: What could the Housing Department Improve?

- Re-evaluate job description/duties/salary (due to changes to jobs over the years)
- Improve communication within the Housing Department (all levels) – between divisions within the Housing Dept)
- Have Human Resources assignment within the Department – to more easily resolve salary and benefit and other HR issues
 - o Disciplinary actions need more review and assistance (complex)
 - o Worker's compensation issues need assistance
 - o Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is needed for HA employees
- Closer partnership with Legal Department (County Counsel)
 - o Response time from County Counsel on HA issues not fast enough
- Merge Housing Authority with County with parity
- De-regionalization /consolidation of offices (priority)
- Consolidate fiscal department to include collections
 - o HCD and HA currently separate
 - o Access to revenue services staff? (not currently using)

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- Office location (central location; should be a single move vs. several – concern over the possibility of multiple moves)
- Increase revenue
- Update computer system
- Identify cost effective savings (could give up cell phones as a way to save money since employees have their own phones)
- Image/Expectations
- Develop and implement consistent procedures
- Educate public about the department and its programs
- Marketing of programs
- Relationships with tenants
- Gossip mill
- Speed with which things done – multiple approval requirements slow things down
- Emphasize closeness to public transportation with move
- Number of employees (increase)
- Communication – top down and throughout department
- Communication between offices and between HA and HCD
- Working relations, communications, and planning with other jurisdictions and agencies (cities; County departments)
- Use of technology

Question 3: What systems could be improved?

- Re-certification Process (HA)
 - o Inspection/eligibility (review the process for possible change)
- Collections – O/P
- Computers – Windows based vs. DOS
 - o Document imaging
 - o Updating software and hardware
 - o Case management software
 - o BSG vs. ISD
- Communication
 - o Internal – regional offices
 - o HA vs. HCD
 - o Program operation and finance
 - o Staff inclusion (buy-in) – how to get more staff participation
- Computer system (MLS) – HA
 - o Doesn't meet all needs of staff, especially finance
- Dissemination of information from top-down
 - o Not enough communication (staff often not in the loop; need rumor control)
- Financial system doesn't link with County system (MLS- IFAS)
- No plan for staff promotional opportunities
 - o Need better plan or system; defined path
 - o Maintaining status quo leads to morale issues
 - o Housing Authority staff are not County employees and HCD staff are
- Need for classification study
 - o HUD requires classification study; not being done
 - o No evaluation system is set-up

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- Internal Human Resources procedures and dedicated staff
 - o Don't know who to talk to when problems arise
- Consistency in procedures
 - o Currently differs among regions and managers
 - o Independent work behavior is good, but when taken to an extreme causes problems
- Integration – separate employees and systems causes problems
- Computer system/software
 - o MLS; dated
- Functionality of phone system (issues with transfers, redial...)
- Website information
 - o Online form and application availability
- Communications; dissemination of information
 - o Even worse at regional offices (HA) in terms of information received
- Marketing of services (including within the County)

Question 4: What training opportunities should be provided?

- Program regulations (HUD) – job and program specific requirements
- Communication – oral and written
- Customer service
- Performance evaluations (supervisor training)
- Computer systems
- 504 compliance (Fair Housing)
- OSHA (especially for maintenance staff)
- Department cross-training
- New employee training, especially HA (should be within 1st year, not happening due to distance issues)
 - o Conferences and out-of-state training as needed
- Interviewing skills
- Negotiations skills
- Dealing with conflict and angry people
- Conflict resolution
- Medication training
- Training to stay current and upwardly mobile (management and staff)
- HA employees are not County employees so cannot attend County training (or can only attend with special permission – requires additional approvals)
- Need to streamline tuition reimbursement program
- Need for IFAS training
- Staying current with IRS guidelines
- Cross-training (upward mobility)
 - o In order to fill needed positions (where appropriate, i.e., fiscal side)
 - o Cross-fertilization between the new management and long time staff; need to learn from existing staff
- “Official” training
 - o Varies for new people; not consistent
 - o Need training on what the job entails and what expectations exist
- Refresher courses
 - o Interpretation of regulations
 - o Inspections

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- Changing regulations
- Nan McKay training (firm specializing in HUD training)
- Training on other County systems (assessor; public works; GIS)
- Dealing with difficult people
- HCD staff needs more training in technical areas including building codes, green buildings regulations

Question 5: What do we hear form our customers about what they like? Don't like? How could we improve our services to them?

Customers like:

- Speaking to a person
- Having 1 contact (inspections & eligibility) – case manager structure
- Quick response
- That we make an improvement in their lives
- Having affordable housing available to them
- Having one appointment (inspections/eligibility)
- Having housing opportunities available at time of call
- That we play the role of mediator
- Regionalization
- Standardized forms/reporting
- Direct deposit
- Getting answers over the phone
- Not paying rent
- Efficiency of reimbursement (HCD)
- Timely payment to vendors/contractors
- Location/accessibility; decentralizations (SSF)
- That we're here to help
- Regions/spread out

Customers don't like:

- To wait for returned calls
- Voicemail/having to leave messages
- Government control/intrusion (terms & conditions)
 - HSD – homeowners
 - HA – government regulations
- Paying rent; HUD's process to determine income
- Rent reduction (landlords)
- Tighter control on regulations
- Enforcement of subside standards (and payment subsidy reductions)
- Long wait list
- Monitoring that continues years after entry into a program
- Consolidated location
- Voice mail
- Sharing all information required by HUD
- Rules
- Getting different answers (conflicting)
- Not getting their way
- No returned call

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- Changing case managers
- When projects take a long time (lots of requirements to work through)
- Paperwork
- Manual systems

Customer Service Improvement Options:

- How we communicate regulations
- Life intrusion with tact
- Re-enforce importance of quick response
- Conduct orientation for future clients (expectations; requirements)
- Conduct refresher/update "orientation" (Q&A)
- Distribute a quarterly newsletter
- Improve website (needs tech support)
- Reduced caseloads
- More accurate information
- Better use of the internet
- Streamline/simplify information (more focused)
- Provide "just in time" information (in pieces) rather than bombarding with information overload
- Provide accessible location (convenient)
- Ensure staff familiarity with all services (including referrals) to better inform and assist clients
- Provide a service referral resource
- More information on web or through a phone bank (better use of technology)

Question 6: What other suggestions do you have for the Review Team to consider?

- Organization structure
- HR function
- Collections
- Legal (County Counsel support and response time)
- County merger/integration
 - o County policies
- Consider unique factors of department (i.e, federally funded; regulation requirements)
- Budget constraints; limited sources of revenue (HUD)
- Review use of website
 - o Ease of use
 - o Outdated
 - o Lack of information
- Be aware that management is new/unfamiliar with all systems
- More/better appreciation for what staff does (need acknowledgement)
- "Left doesn't know what right does"
 - o Reciprocal/all levels
- Low motivation/morale
 - o Especially HA (shorthanded, more top-down, "suffer in silence", not vocal)
- Housing Authority would like a review of what they do – dissect caseload
 - o Little things can "bite you in the butt"
- Communication
- Management style in the Housing Authority makes people feel like they are not important ("step-child" syndrome)