



LINCOLN HOUSING AUTHORITY

Electronic File Management Opens The Door For More Efficient Processes

Thousands of families rely on the Lincoln Housing Authority (LHA) in Lincoln, NE, to administer roughly 3,000 Section 8 Vouchers and manage more than 1,300 rental units. Established by the City of Lincoln in 1946, and funded primarily through HUD, LHA is a quasi-governmental entity dedicated to providing affordable, safe, sanitary and decent housing to qualifying families currently undergoing financial stress. It strives to balance dignity and minimal intrusion for applicants and tenants with prudent fiscal management. LHA has consistently been designated by HUD as a high performing housing authority and is one of only 21 organizations nationwide chosen to participate in HUD's Moving to Work Program. In addition to housing, LHA provides a number of other services to constituents and works cooperatively with other social service agencies.

Because of the range of services it offers and the number of clients it serves, LHA struggled to maintain paper files. For instance, a client seeking services must produce a Social Security card, an I-94 ("green card"), proof of income and proof of residency for the past five years. When the individual arrives at an LHA office, s/he must complete a rental application and personal declaration form. Only then can that person apply for specific programs, which means more application, disclosure and release forms and possibly credit checks, landlord references, criminal background checks and more. Between active, inactive and wait-listed applicants, LHA was devoting an enormous amount of office space to paper files.

However, a much bigger challenge resulted from the fact that LHA operates at half a dozen locations around Lincoln and a number of its 85 employees work remotely. If a client walked into one of the sites and needed assistance, an employee would have to determine where that person's file was and how to get the information

they needed. In addition, files had to be readily accessible to allow housing specialists to complete required annual reviews.

With help from a consultant, LHA developed a plan in 2001 to eliminate the amount of space devoted to paper files and reduce the reliance on microfiche. The housing authority posted an RFP for a content management system that could provide integrated batch and desktop scanning, COLD/ERM and workflow. Of the eight vendors who responded, three were invited to conduct onsite demonstrations, including Hyland Software, Inc., developer of OnBase ECM (enterprise content management) software.

According to Jim Loos, system administrator at LHA, OnBase stood out because of its ease of use, flexibility to meet a variety of enterprise needs and because it could be easily customized. The purchasing committee also noted OnBase's security features, which prevent unauthorized access to sensitive documents such as medical records or criminal background checks. "We're not only worried about breaches from the outside," Loos points out. "Many of the employees here who need to access the file don't need to see that confidential information."

Centralize Multiple Document Formats With Minimal Labor

LHA's OnBase system went into full production at the end of 2002, and the first phase focused on documents generated in the Housing Department related to the rental process, including discovery and file management. When documents come in, the housing specialist working on the file generates a cover sheet with bar codes indicating the applicant's Social Security number, the document type (i.e. rental application form, personal declaration form, etc.) and effective date. The cover sheet is created using BarTender® Software from Seagull Scientific, Inc., which prompts the user to enter the required data.

AT A GLANCE

Lincoln Housing Authority (Lincoln, NE) administers 3,000 Section 8 Vouchers, manages more than 1,300 rental properties and offers a number of other client services. By implementing OnBase enterprise content management software, it has made documents securely available to a distributed workforce and significantly improved efficiency and customer service. Plans are already in place to extend those benefits to other processes and departments.

BENEFITS

- Reduced turnaround time on files by 2/3
- Improved visibility of client status and action taken on files
- Files made available to distributed workforce
- Security features limit access to confidential documents
- Minimized indexing and scanning labor with use of bar codes and auto-fill keysets
- Created a centralized file of documents whether they originated on paper or electronically
- Ease of use and administration

APPLICATION

- Housing Department
- IS

ONBASE SOFTWARE

- Document Imaging
- COLD/ERM
- CD Authoring
- EDM Services
- E-Forms
- Workflow
- Web Server
- Virtual Print Driver
- Application Enabler
- Outlook Integration

COMPLEMENTARY PRODUCT INTEGRATIONS

- Canon U.S.A. DR-5020 and DR-2080 document scanners
- Tenmast Software tenant management software
- Seagull Scientific BarTender® software

The documents and cover sheets are submitted to temporary employees hired as scanner operators. LHA's documents are scanned using one of two DR-5020 90 page-per-minute scanners from Canon U.S.A at the central office or scanned at a remote office using Canon's 20 page-per-minute DR-2080. At scan time, the data from the bar codes is automatically captured using an Adrenaline® scanner controller from Kofax Image Products, Inc. and used to index the documents for the OnBase repository. Using auto-fill keysets, remaining indexing values, such as name, address and unit number, are pulled from a flat data file generated by LHA's housing software from Tenmast Software. This eliminates the need for manual data entry. Because workers directly involved with the documents complete the primary indexing values, there is very little re-indexing and most of this is related to Social Security numbers being in the system twice. This also eliminates the need for scanner operators to have specialized training or industry knowledge.

The scanner operators also are responsible for scanning existing documents, with a goal of converting the entire backfile. These documents are divided into document types prior to scanning and then indexed through a bar-coded coversheet that has a keyword of Pre2003. Additional keyword data is pulled from the flat file generated by Tenmast Software.

However, LHA's system includes far more than scanned documents. The housing authority relies heavily on the OnBase Virtual Print Driver, which allows documents in practically any printable format to be automatically sent to the OnBase repository. For instance, criminal background checks and credit checks are often obtained electronically. Using the Virtual Print Driver, an employee can select the print option, but designate OnBase as the destination as opposed to a physical printer. An OnBase dialog box prompts the user to enter a Social Security number and auto-fill keysets gather the necessary indexing information from the Tenmast Software flat file. Getting these documents into the system from a physical copy once required nearly 24 hours, but they are now available within minutes.

By using the OnBase Outlook® Integration module, users also can import e-mails and/or

their attachments directly into the OnBase repository. LHA also uses the EDM Services module, which allows documents from desktop applications to be dragged and dropped into the OnBase repository.

The OnBase system also allows LHA to maintain better communication throughout the process by using E-Forms and "sticky note" functionality. Employees in the Housing, Tenant Services and Family Self-Sufficiency departments have specific E-Forms that are used to add notes to a client file. In addition, anyone working the case can append a note or comment to a document without altering the original.

Initially, LHA boxed and warehoused the paper documents after scanning, but the integrity of its backup and recovery system has prompted the organization to begin destroying them. LHA maintains an exact duplicate of its primary document imaging server to be used in the event of an emergency. It also creates multiple CD backups using the OnBase CD Authoring module and stores at least one copy offsite. Database and index files are backed up using software from VERITAS Software Corporation.

Though LHA plans to drive further efficiencies through OnBase Workflow in the future, it currently uses that capability to track IS requests. Employees complete electronic forms outlining their needs and requests are routed to the appropriate employee, who can use Workflow to document what action was taken.

Files Processed In 1/3 Of The Time

In the first year of operation, LHA's OnBase repository reached 1.25 million documents spanning 50 different types. Employees at any location can easily access documents through a retrieval interface that is customized for LHA or through a custom query screen that simply prompts the user to enter a Social Security number.

Customer service has improved significantly since OnBase was implemented. The time required to process a file has been reduced from an average of 30 days to around 10. Compiling electronic files also aids the process of annual reviews of client information and makes it easier to assure that state and federal

regulations are being followed. "Once that communication was in place, our secondary goal was to start eliminating paper and get our office space back," comments Loos.

Despite the functionality and size of LHA's mission-critical OnBase system, its stability lowers the total cost of ownership. "We don't have to touch the system every day," says Loos. "So we haven't had to dedicate a system administrator solely to OnBase."

Building On Initial Success

The modular architecture of OnBase allowed LHA to complete its implementation in phases. Already in development, the second phase of LHA's implementation includes plans to add workflows in existing projects to automate and streamline processes. LHA recently began using the OnBase Application Enabler module to integrate its Tenmast tenant management software with the OnBase repository. Employees currently use Tenmast to track all transactional data about a person and household. Since being image-enabled with the point-and-click configurable module, Tenmast screens include fields from which users can retrieve supporting documents with a double click.

The benefits of ECM also will be extended to three additional departments at LHA. The Business Department will be implementing the OnBase COLD/ERM module to capture and index mainframe reports. This will make them available and searchable for users. The Business Department also plans to use OnBase for payables and receivables processes.

In the Maintenance Department, OnBase will be used to track work orders as well as to image and retrieve important documents. The HR Department will be using OnBase to process applications, time cards and leave requests.

Loos says that the biggest benefit of OnBase is measured by time and efficiency gained from having client files universally available to employees who need them. "We would regularly get an urgent e-mail from someone in the office asking if anyone knew where a specific file was," recalls Loos. "There is no way to place a value on having that information available immediately from every office. It was our number one goal and OnBase definitely fulfilled it for us."



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