



*The Florida Association of Homes and Services for the Aging
Innovation Exchange*

Submission

Name and Title of Submitter:	William R. Holmes, Director Housing Admn. & Development
Facility/Organization Name:	Housing Administration & Development Catholic Charities Diocese of Palm Beach
Address:	P. O. Box 109650 Palm Beach Gardens, FL 33410
Phone:	561-775-9571
FAX:	561-625-5906
E-mail:	rholmes@diocesepb.org OR rholmesccpb@bellsouth.net
Date of Submission:	May 19, 2008
Title of Innovation:	HUD Property Software / TRACS Solutions
Topic for Submission:	Compliance with HUD tenant record requirements and Florida laws regarding the housing of criminal/background histories on-site in the HUD tenant files in addition to Disaster Preparedness.
Audience:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Affordable Housing (HUD, tax credit, etc.) <input type="checkbox"/> Assisted Living Facilities <input type="checkbox"/> Home & Community Based Services <input type="checkbox"/> Nursing Homes <input type="checkbox"/> Retirement Communities (CCRC or fee for Service) <input type="checkbox"/> All of the Above

Description of Innovation: Florida unfortunately is a target for natural disasters, such as hurricanes, and other weather related catastrophic events during the year. Further, Florida law regarding the storage of criminal histories/background checks required for our HUD subsidized properties in the same tenant file where HUD required documentation and verifications are kept is subject to scrutiny if not a basis for legal action. These two issues were the impetus for designing and implementing an “off-site” solution to protect our data as well as the right to privacy we are obligated to provide our tenants.

In July of 2008, The Office of Housing Administration & Development began working with Yardi Systems as well as with NTT Communications to plan and implement application and tenant file data in a safe, secure and remote location where our entire tenant information can be readily accessed yet secure.

The solution design is simple to outline, yet takes some patience and dedication on the part of the

property or Managing Agent to implement. While the cost of this particular solution may not be feasible for a single, smaller property, we have found that with over 300 units, the cost is manageable and the results cost effective. The opportunity to add several hundred more units with only the annual subscription fee of the HUD Real Estate software, reduces even more as the storage capacity of off-site server leasing is more than sufficient to handle hundreds of units. When compared to the end result of a natural disaster, which in high probability would destroy site computer records and increasing threats to personal privacy, it becomes a solution well worth consideration.

Our tenant data processing and storage criteria were defined as follows:

1. The ability to access our HUD real estate/compliance software from each property as well as the offices of the Office of Housing / Managing Agent.
2. Security. Assurance that interception, hacking into files and security were addresses.
3. Need to have all systems located off-site, out of state preferably, to protect against data loss in the event of a hurricane or other natural disaster.
4. Easy access through high speed internet to application software 24/7.
5. Regular back-ups of both application and tenant data files.
6. Ability of our accounting department to pull accounts receivable and other financial data as relates to each site from the administrative offices of the Managing Agent.
7. Reliable service providers with competent technical support.
8. Capability submit TRACS when the dial-up service is discontinued and high speed transmissions are implemented by HUD Secure Systems.

Our first step was to identify a HUD Real Estate application we were comfortable with that provided integrated modules for HUD compliance, accounts receivable, waiting list management and tenant background screening. We selected the Yardi Systems / Classic application for this option.

Second, and most important, was to find a hosting source that could meet or exceed the legal requirements protecting tenant data and at the same time allowing us to comply with the state laws which apply to the type data we collect and maintain. NTT Communications, with an office in Boca Raton, Florida and a server farm located in Langley, Virginia was selected to a secure server capable of expansion should it become necessary. Our criteria for a hosting solution included a provider who could provide terminal services, remote access from any internet capable computer with an aggressive firewall solution to prevent unauthorized access to our data. Further, we needed the capability to temporarily pull files back down monthly to our administrative offices for dial-up transmission to TRACS but which also was capable of making these transmissions from the remote location when TRACS updates their systems to accept this type of data transfer. During the interim period of TRACS upgrades, the task of using file transfer protocol (FTP) to pull only TRACS data down for submission had to be simple, allowing this task to be done quickly. Currently this process can be done in 15 minutes or less. Once TRACS upgrades their transmission capability, each site manager can once again do this on their site, but the Housing Administration offices can still monitor compliance with the submission dates, error results from TRACS and other issues without requiring each individual site to notify us of these issues.

We recognized initially that most HUD application software vendors offer remote hosting as an “add-on” capability with their package. However, in the interest of establishing a defined line of separation between the application software provider and the secure hosting, we chose to use two different vendors.

The total amount of time to set-up this world class solution was approximately 30 days. We had minor issues with printer configuration at the sites (we had old printers which we upgraded) and a short learning curve in regard to management of our dedicated server. Yardi walked us through the remote installation of their application from our office to the server. NTT Communications helped us configure the firewall and implementation of a secure system.

The end result is as follows:

1. Each individual site utilizes two completely separate secure login operations from their internet connected computers. The first is a password protected and encrypted connection to the actual server located in Virginia. The second is yet another password protected login to the HUD management application. The server can be configured to require monthly password changes (as Secure Systems now requires for entry into their system), or at the discretion of the site administrator should they deem necessary. A master list of passwords is kept under lock and key in the Housing Administration offices.
2. Housing Administration / Managing Agent offices access the server/application using the same encrypted password process as the sites, thus having access to each properties complete file record. Our central office further can transfer the TRACS data down each month for dial-up transmission until TRACS completes it's upgrade.
3. We meet all legal requirements for the separation of data as well as requirements under the Privacy Act as required and monitored by HUD.

The benefits include:

1. The ability to continue the certification, re-certification and voucher submission process from ANY high speed internet connected computer. Thus if a site is completely destroyed with the business office losing equipment and/or records, they are safe and easily accessed.
2. Hundreds of reports and the retrieval of past records are stored, backed up and can be accessed and printed if necessary to recreate tenant records.
3. A high standard of "compliance monitoring" from the Managing Agent.
4. As an added benefit, we installed remote access to each sites computer from the Housing Administration offices which allows us to actually "see" what the site user is doing on their respective computers and offer technical assistance for property owned computers. This reduces the need to send IT staff to the sites as we can actually view, and if necessary take control, of the remote computer and walk the staff through any problems they are having. The remote access is 256 bit encrypted and does not by-pass the secure connection the site must go through to access files.

The overall end result of this innovation is remarkable. While the initial planning and implementation took some time and involved extensive training and support, we now are comfortable that we can quickly train new employees to enjoy the many benefits this business solution offers.

Our experience in what we believe is a world class innovation can easily be replicated in our industry provided the potential end user takes the time to properly design and outline their requirements, then present these to prospective software vendors / application provider to determine their ability to make this work.

William R. Holmes, CMH, COS, SHS, CMM
Director Housing Administration & Development
Catholic Charities Diocese of Palm Beach / Managing Agent

Budget: Cost of current HUD Real Estate management software plus approximately \$1,000.00/month for offsite secure server solution which is approximately \$3.00 per unit per month.