

VISUAL HOMES CASE STUDY

Dallas Housing Authority

Organization: The Housing Authority of the City of Dallas, Texas

The Housing Authority of the City of Dallas, Texas (DHA) provides housing for nearly 60,000 people through public housing developments and Housing Choice Voucher programs. With a budget greater than \$200 million USD, DHA leverages both public and private sector resources to manage, develop and renovate residential rental property, making it one of the largest providers of affordable housing in Dallas. With 10,000 individuals on the public housing waiting list and more than 18,000 people on the housing choice voucher program (formerly Section 8) waiting list, DHA has received a \$20 million HOPE VI grant as part of a \$60 million commitment to revive a community by building new affordable housing according to a Master Plan developed by Antonio DiMambro, a renowned urban planner from Boston.

Project: Fast-track Solution Implementation Representing an Industry Record

VisualHOMES®, a leading North American software solutions vendor for agencies managing low-income housing, has set a new record in the housing industry for its fast delivery and launch of the VisualHOMES suite for the Dallas Housing Authority (DHA), implementing its solution in six months from start to go-live. VisualHOMES, a Windows-based housing management platform with extensive workflow management, automation, user guidance, and powerful reporting, leads the industry in ease-of-use. DHA is one of the nation's longest-running public housing administrations, with over 500 apartment complexes and 22,000 units managed.

"DHA provided us a high level of professional collaboration in this engagement," said Mr. Raj Bhaskar, chief executive officer of VisualHOMES, giving a nod to the agency's information services group for its support. The VisualHOMES platform provides a level of stability and features that help speed delivery. Combined with the company's commitment to quality data migration, its installation, configuration, testing and training were completed within six months, starting in January 2008, and going live in July 2008.

Mr. Bhaskar said, "DHA presented us with the usual set of challenges, among them being bring their legacy data into some kind of reasonable condition. Their old system didn't give them the data integrity they needed for consistent entry and reliable reporting. You can't just convert data and expect everything to work like magic. We took a hard look at what the data and systems should be and did hands-on conversion and cleaning."

VisualHOMES worked closely with DHA to establish and track the project plan, which stayed on schedule throughout the implementation. Mr. Bhaskar said, "We held weekly meetings with DHA, and helped them organize their teams internally to get the input we needed while letting them continue with their daily operations."

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Continued on following page...

Avoiding disruptions is key to meeting deadlines, but it also creates a happier user community and project team. “Even though a software platform transition is a huge change, we work hard to minimize our impact on a client’s human resources,” said Mr. Bhaskar. In fact, DHA staff were able to take their long-planned vacations during our implementation process.”

The engagement ended with extensive training provided by VisualHOMES. Multiple trainers were tasked to prepare staff for successful operation of their new system. All trainers with VisualHOMES are former housing agency staff, giving the company the ability to train clients to high levels of both competence and confidence. “When a trainer knows your daily challenges, we can teach better and you can learn better,” said Mr. Bhaskar.

VisualHOMES’ project and customer experience strategy supports platform adoption well before formal training. To do this, the company installed a “sand box” version of its software in the first month of the contract with DHA to let staff use the software with sample data. “The sand box let DHA play safely with VisualHOMES,” said Mr. Bhaskar. “Familiarity, we’ve learned, breeds engagement.”

Staff excitement showed up in user feedback. Mr. Bhaskar continued, “We got comments in the first month about the new efficiencies. Users found the better reporting to be critical. There’s more automation, so there are fewer steps. People got invested in the new features, the new things they can do, as well as the old things they don’t have to do any more.”

Mr. Troy Broussard, the interim chief executive officer and president of the Dallas Housing Authority, said, “We want to continue being ahead of the curve here in Dallas. We have tens of thousands of units under management and hundreds of managers and staff on our housing software. It’s important that we have more than a solution. We need a platform to support our growth and to improve management and measurability. VisualHOMES gives us that.”

The VisualHOMES installation included its integrated document imaging system that lets users scan and barcode documents, eliminating piles of paper and manual file searches. Help is also a few keystrokes away. “A major issue with any new software is what we call ‘sudden amnesia at go-live’ – people temporarily forget how to do something. That’s why our sandbox, our training and our online help are so important. People no longer have to wonder how to use a feature or find a paper document,” said Mr. Bhaskar. “The result is saved time, reduced motion, and more effective staff.”

Mr. Broussard, the interim chief executive officer and president of DHA, said, “When VisualHOMES appeared as a finalist for this contract, we were struck as much by their approach to solving the management and community issues facing DHA as we were by their technology platform. They are serious when they say they are committed to building communities. So are we, with our community partnerships.” DHA’s Greenleaf Village is a national model for public/private partnerships. The agency also regularly partners with the YMCA, Head Start, Parkland Memorial Hospital and the Dallas Police Department.

Mr. Broussard said, “We did our part getting this system online in the six-month time frame. VisualHOMES never held us up. In fact, they were always responsive to even our most extraordinary requests, and they kept the project on track. With their core team here and their support teams around the country, VisualHOMES always made us feel well-served.”

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Continued on following page...

Mr. Bhaskar concluded, "The Dallas Housing Authority has as their motto that they are the best-run housing authority in the country. Setting an implementation record with them supports the idea that DHA, with VisualHOMES, is truly a leader. We're proud of that."

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About VisualHOMES®

VisualHOMES is the leader in public housing software solutions, providing the most proven and complete software solution for public housing, Section 8 and financial accounting management in the industry. Public housing and redevelopment authorities, Departments of housing and community development, non-profits and related agencies of all sizes have been successfully using VisualHOMES' Windows-based solutions in real world, mission-critical operations across the continent for nearly a decade. The company's unmatched experience and commitment to responsive service have made it the leading national provider of public housing software solutions.