

Project Closeout Report

Submitted to Project Oversight on 03/11/2022

GENERAL INFORMATION

Project Name: ND Rent Help Application Portal

Agency Name: Department of Human Services

Project Sponsor: Jessica Thomasson

Project Manager: Jim Bauer

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Congress approved funding for emergency rent assistance in both the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriation (CRRSA) and American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) COVID relief packages. North Dakota was allocated \$200 million via CRRSA and \$152 million via ARPA to be distributed via a statewide Rental Assistance program; there are no North Dakota local jurisdiction awards in the Act. The program will provide rent payments to housing providers on behalf of low income and moderate households, including payment of rent arrears and future rent. The State has contracted with Deloitte Consulting LLP to implement a renter portal, a housing provider portal, a case management portal, and workflow that can support community-based application counselors who will work directly with renters to complete applications, and facilitate necessary integrations with State and other third-party systems needed for applicant documentation, payment management, eligibility review, and general program reporting.

SCHEDULE AND COST METRICS

	Project Start Date	Baseline End Date	Baseline Budget	Funding Source	Actual Finish Date	Schedule Variance	Actual Cost	Cost Variance
Original Baseline	3/23/2021	2/1/2022	\$6,000,000	Federal	3/11/2022	12.4%	\$2,755,904.96	54%
Final Baseline		3/11/2022	\$6,000,000	Federal	3/11/2022	6%	\$2,755,904.96	54%

Notes:

The reason for the cost variance was some additional unanticipated scope items that were identified during the course of the project. The reason for the budget variance is that the project budget included the full contract amount rather than just the implementation and year one of maintenance.

MAJOR SCOPE CHANGES

Changes made to the original scope during the course of the project are noted.

- **Data Migration:** Scope at a high level includes (1) Migration of Rent Application data from legacy system not to exceed 5700 applications (2) Applicant Login/Status/Reporting functionality and (3) Data Validation/QA services.
- **Program Integrity and Fraud Deterrence:** Scope includes the delivery of software, processes, services, and analytics tools needed to defer fraud, waste and abuse.
- **Supplemental Staffing:** Additional Deloitte staffing needed to assist with backlog in the contact center to improve timeliness of response.

OBJECTIVES

Business Objective	Measurement Description	Met/ Not Met	Measurement Outcome
<p>ND renters are less likely to experience housing instability that progress to housing crisis (i.e., eviction) because of the rental assistance and stability supports made available by ND Rent Help</p>	<p>Increase in number of renters who engage with a housing facilitator to develop a plan for housing stability, as measured monthly by the number of referrals that are documented in the ND Rent Help system to ND Rent Help housing facilitators within 60 days of deploying the system. Goal is for 75% of identified referrals to successfully connect within 60 days of initial referral. Secondary goal is for 50% of referral connections made to continue past 120 days.</p>	<p>Met</p>	<p>Through February 2022, more than 750 Housing Facilitator referrals have been made. Contact is typically established within 7 days. 100% of referrals make contact within 60 days.</p> <p>Of Note: due to the higher than anticipated volume of applications from households experiencing homelessness, almost all housing facilitator referrals have been to people experiencing immediate or imminent housing crisis.</p>
<p>ND housing providers are able to avoid court action in the case of nonpayment due to greater adoption of eviction prevention practices.</p>	<p>Increase in number of housing providers who participate in emergency rental assistance program as measured monthly by the number of housing providers who activate accounts in the system, and by the number of housing units they are responsible for managing. Measurement to begin within 60 days of deploying the system. Goal is measured by number of housing providers enrolling by geography served, and by the number of renter applications whose approval is delayed due to lack of engagement by the housing provider.</p>	<p>Met</p>	<p>North Dakota Rent Help (NDRH) has seen continued increase in both housing and utility providers setting up accounts in the system and submitting applications to initiate applications on behalf of renters and matching applications to existing renters. Since system Go Live, the number of housing providers participating in NDRH has increased by 46% (from 1,313 to 1,923) and the number of utility providers increase by 49% (71 to 103).</p> <p>As there is no centralized database of property managers / multi-family property owners in ND, we are not able to calculate the total percent of all housing providers who participate in ND Rent Help (i.e., we do not know the total number of potential providers.</p>

KEY LESSONS LEARNED AND SUCCESS STORIES

Key Lessons Learned and Success Stories

Lesson Learned: Testing for payment process. Testing of Phase 2 (worker-interface) was not thoroughly tested in payment processing, which contributed to a slow start in actual payment processing. The team essentially had to test the functionality in small batches in a live production environment. More time needs to be spent testing which includes test case creation and execution prior to the release.

Lesson Learned: Testing of the implementation of automated notices. The team did not perform adequate testing of the automated notice element of the platform prior to go live. This resulted in erroneous notice triggers which increased confusion for users of the system. Having adequate resources within the business unit to fully test on short notice, developing test cases that can appropriately capture the complexity of the cases the program will see in the production environment, and having a test environment robust enough to allow for testing of all essential platform elements can help mitigate issues that later become defects.

Success Story: High Volume to Contact Center and Timeliness of Response. Due in large part to the change management barriers experienced by our system users (renters, housing and utility providers, community partners), 6-8 weeks post implementation, the NDRH contact center was overwhelmed and unable to provide timely response to people who needed help. The state and Deloitte negotiated an amendment to provide resources that could augment the state's contact center (while new state staff was being onboarded to bolster capacity). The team monitored performance metrics and within days of bringing on the additional resources, responsiveness returned to target levels.

Success Story: Program penetration by county. NDRH was designed to help maximize the opportunity for all North Dakotans to access emergency rental assistance. The development of a mobile-friendly self-contained online portal, coupled with a network of in-community partners, has helped the state achieve that goal. As of January 2022, more than 800 applications have come from households experiencing homelessness, from more than 30 ND counties.

Success Story: Homeless households' pathway. In August 2021 (days before project kickoff), the federal funding agency announced a program flexibility that would allow jurisdictions to provide robust stability services to households experiencing homelessness. A special pathway was promptly devised through the entire portal to address this new opportunity. The result was exactly what the state needed, which was a viable path for homeless households to access emergency rent assistance and housing facilitation services that would help them find housing.