

WHAT TO  
CONSIDER



## LONG-TERM INVESTMENTS DURING COVID-19



The COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented effect on local economies due to dramatic reductions in personal income (among other factors). CARES Act funding may have helped Public Housing Agencies (PHAs) fill budget shortfalls in the short term, but many PHAs will need to analyze their financial position, including other investments, that can be considered in the long term. This document focuses on human capital, technical, and other operational investments and improvements a PHA can consider with CARES Act funding.

We will reflect back on several completed training sessions and focus on improvements and approaches that many PHAs implemented during the pandemic. The investments made added to PHAs ability to respond quickly and created long-term viability.

### Technology Improvements

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CARES Act funding has proven to be an excellent funding stream for updating outdated technology and fostering improvements that will be long-lasting. Technical improvements facilitate improved customer service for tenants and landlords and further enhance today's expanding paperless environment to change the delivery of services beyond traditional office spaces.

Based on improvements implemented by some PHAs to support operations during the pandemic, a PHA can:

- Invest in an online portal and/or enhancing a current landlord portal
- Improve webpage design to be more user-friendly
- Migrate to a virtual waitlist to make the waitlist easier to update and to check waitlist status
- Allow uploading of documents to reduce the number of office visits
- Use video conferencing to replace face-to-face meetings
- Use digital signatures to avoid scanning documents
- Create online video briefings for tenants and landlords
- Implement remote certifications via video
- Use Virtual Assistant with IVR systems for self-service
- Use email and SMS to communicate quickly to residents and landlords
- Purchase kiosks to migrate activity to the lobby and provide self-service opportunities for tenants and landlords

### Human Capital Investments

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The COVID-19 pandemic caused PHAs to work remotely in order to minimize face-to-face interactions. That challenged PHAs to keep up with direct contact customer service. In conjunction with CARES Act funding, many PHAs implemented available waivers that affected current business practices and allowed for alternative ways to provide customer service. Investing in staff and tenants to keep them better informed and effective was critical. Some examples of how to use CARES Act funding to assist PHAs with making human capital improvements are as follows:

- Educate staff and tenants on new processes
- Monitor staff response time with management reports to ensure customer service and communication leads to customer satisfaction
- Perform virtual inspections
- Hire part-time staff to manage the influx of interim certifications due to changes in household income
- Pay overtime or creating alternative work arrangements to keep up with backlogs
- Pay daycare costs during alternative work arrangements times
- Provide necessary personal protective equipment (PPE) to keep staff, tenants, and landlords safe
- Have laptops and remote access availability

## Tenant and Landlord Investments

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Social distancing is both required and needed to remain safe. In order to maintain customer satisfaction, the PHA is highly encouraged to invest in technical and process enhancements that are beneficial to both tenants and landlords, using the CARES Act funding. Here are a few investment examples:

### Tenants:

- Process interim changes quickly
- Provide security deposit assistance
- If over-housed, permit the family to stay in the unit until a suitable unit can be attained
- Send documents electronically
- Sign leases and other documents electronically
- Forego payment of first month's rent
- Coordinate services during pandemics including on-site vaccination or transportation assistance

### Landlords:

- Provide signing and continuity bonuses
- Make vacancy payments
- Pay tenant referral incentives
- Pay damage mitigation funds

## Summary

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Please refer to the HUD Exchange website <https://www.hudexchange.info/news/pha-best-practices-during-covid-19-webinar-series/> for past recorded training sessions, informational briefs, and case studies.