

0:00:00.0 Jessica: Public Housing Agencies leasing strategies during COVID-19. Welcome to the session. Just to get a few things out of the way, before we get going, I'd like to ask you to please keep your microphones on mute. You'll see in the upper right hand corner of your screen a box with a question mark, Q&A, please feel free to use that box to ask any questions throughout the session and we'll try and answer them as we come up across that subject.

0:00:36.7 Jessica: There will be opportunities during the session to ask... We are going to be asking polling questions rather, and so we hope that you'll respond. These questions were framed in both yes/no format, so we are looking forward to learning a little bit about your agencies. And with that, we will begin.

0:01:00.6 Jessica: Next slide, please.

0:01:07.0 Jessica: As I mentioned, Helena and I are both with Quadel and during a normal leasing period, there are a number of times that PHA staff work face-to-face with applicants, landlords, and the general public. And during the session, we're gonna be talking about some of the unique challenges and strategies that the PHAs are implementing to continue leasing during the COVID pandemic.

0:01:32.2 Jessica: Next slide.

0:01:35.3 Jessica: So this slide represents a traditional HCV leasing process. You'll see that the Housing Authority has a role to play, issuing the voucher, the tenant has a role to play, finding a unit, and the owner, of course, has a role to play, working with a tenant and the Housing Authority as well.

0:01:58.5 Jessica: So traditionally, these interactions might have a lot of paper processing, hand-offs between the three partners, however, during COVID, that simple process assigning a Request for Tenancy addendum or providing the PHAs with information, it's all had to shift. So what are we doing? How are we going to receive these documents? Maybe the office is now closed. Is there a drop box, is it email?

0:02:27.6 Jessica: What seems like a very normal, even mundane, process that we do day-to-day has now had to be reviewed and approached in a different way, and that's what we're here to talk about. So how do you alter your processes, your policies and the tools that you need to continue to lease?

0:02:46.3 Jessica: Next slide.

0:02:50.9 Jessica: So we went out and talked to PHAs across the country, some were large, some were small, some were in urban areas, and some were more suburban or even bordering on the rural. We also talked to HUD field offices and their representatives. So how have agencies had to shift the operations in order to address COVID?

0:03:12.8 Jessica: While there were many, many concerns being raised at this time, they seem to fall within these three categories; ensuring social distancing, how do we protect our staff, residents and landlords while also meeting the needs to present information and exchange information? How do we do our leasing while being physically safe? How do we provide housing opportunities?

0:03:35.1 Jessica: It's not something that the HCV programs typically would worry about. Usually, our families find their own units in the private market, but now there may be fewer units available. Leasing is essentially not only to maintain... It's essential to maintain our future funding, but it's also essential now to protect the lives and health of our families and third, but not lastly, how do we make the shifts? How do we implement new solutions during COVID?

0:04:08.7 Jessica: Staff are already being constrained, so how do we make this work under the new conditions is a challenge in and of itself, how do we implement the solutions? But as I said, we talked to several PHAs, and the good news is that there are successful strategies out there, and you're not alone. Who knows what post-COVID conditions will be? But if these strategies worked, perhaps they may be worth keeping around.

0:04:36.1 Jessica: So let's start, please again, use the question bar and we will try to answer questions during the session.

0:04:49.1 Jessica: Okay, next slide.

0:04:50.7 Jessica: So ensuring social distancing. We need to protect, as I mentioned, the safety of our families during the eligibility and leasing process. We need to protect staff and visitors who may have alternate work and office arrangements and we need to protect landlords during initial inspections and HAP contracting and this is perhaps the biggest single concern that we heard from the PHAs we spoke with, was really ensuring that people will have a safe environment.

0:05:25.3 Jessica: So when we talk about how agencies created the new processes, using technology in a lot of instances, but also using policies, waivers in some instances and in others, just your regular discretionary policies. And also, how changing your process... Maybe there's no need for a waiver or a policy change, just a different business practice, so who knows.

0:05:50.9 Jessica: Again, some of these practices, you may wanna continue in your post-COVID operating environments, but without protecting staff, residents and landlords throughout the leasing process, we have to use this as a starting place.

0:06:03.8 Jessica: Next slide.

0:06:07.6 Jessica: HCV program briefings are often held in groups with families in a conference room, or sometimes we meet with them privately in an office with a case manager, but how do we continue to engage residents, staff and landlords while currently maintaining social distance? Many solutions are through the use of technology, as I mentioned, high-end portals or low-end telephones and US Postal Service.

0:06:35.8 Jessica: Many solutions that we found talking to PHAs include a combination of both the high-end technology and the low-end telephone, drop box, etcetera.

0:06:48.2 Jessica: So portals allow applicants, owners, participants to update their information and submit scanned documents directly to a housing authority. A lot of the housing authorities we spoke to using web portals found that their information integrity was more accurate because the people involved maintain their own information.

0:07:14.4 Jessica: We also talked to people who are using video conferencing. And perhaps you recall earlier during the pandemic when we all started doing our Zoom meetings, there was a lot of technical learning curve as it were, how to mute your mics, how to maintain quiet, maybe there's a dog barking in the background. So video conferencing was great, it did take a learning curve, but it is still being used out there to eliminate as many appointments in the office as possible.

0:07:52.9 Jessica: We also saw people doing web briefings, using recorded presentations in some instances and in some instances, it was great. The web briefings allowed participants to kind of go at their own speed, to start and stop and go back. Some of the web briefings were actually live and those can be difficult to manage sometimes and it's hard to answer everybody's questions during those live sessions, but it's a great practice when the groups are limited and they can mute their background noises, so you don't hear the dogs barking.

0:08:34.1 Jessica: And a lot of agencies use a combination of web briefings that were both recorded and live so that the participant could go and watch this video, have questions prepared and then attend a video conference or another online briefing session. So that combination works pretty well for some.

0:08:55.3 Jessica: It's important though that when you're using a web briefing, that you remember that it's important to provide families and the participants with printed material so that they can follow along. We have different types of learners; some are very visual, some are very auditory and using a combination was what we found with our PHAs we spoke to, a very successful way of conveying information by sending out the packages, having an online

briefing recorded that families could go through at their own pace, and were followed up with video conferencing or a live briefing where they could share their questions across the meeting.

0:09:39.7 Jessica: But let's not forget that there are people who have technology challenges, and so using a drop box is also a low-end solution to engage families to have them drop off their documents. That worked as well.

0:09:58.5 Jessica: So I have a question here. Will the HUD waivers in place will be considered for extensions beyond the current date that's due to expire? Brian, I'm sorry, I don't have an answer to that question right now. I wish I did. I think we're all kind of hoping and wondering what the future will be, but we have to wait and see what the future is in HUD. I'm sure it will keep us posted when that decision is made.

0:10:33.4 Jessica: Okay. So let's keep going, if you don't mind, to the next slide about protecting staff in the workplace. So as I mentioned, the web briefings and the video conferences are very, very helpful to reduce the number of visitors to the office. However, that doesn't always eliminate the need to have staff on-site. Perhaps they're on-site to collect documents to scan to people who are working remotely. We have a lot of families now. A lot of families, sorry... A lot of staff who might be working from home or working from other locations and it's important for that team who may be off-site to still have access to the information that they need to process a transaction, whether it's to...

0:11:23.8 Jessica: This is all about leasing, so it's processing the RFTA, we need to see those documents. So staff is available at the office to collect that information and to scan it.

Perhaps they're also at the office to address families with reasonable accommodations who can't have access to technology or use technology and what we've spoken to in terms of being with other housing authorities, is that PHAs have arranged alternate working environments, and this might be scheduling staff in teams, where Team A is working a few days of the week and Team B is working a few other days of the week.

0:12:09.0 Jessica: And what this allows is additional physical space in the office so that people can actually have more space between the workstations, for those of us who work in calls. This is giving you a little bit more physical space. Not only that, we talk to a PHA that works on two different floors, and that allowed for cleaning and sanitizing of one floor while a team worked on the second floor. It also allowed teams to continue if one person, if one member of that team was exposed and there was a need to quarantine, this ensured that the whole office did not shut down, but that we had different teams working so that there was business continuity, regardless of an exposure event.

0:13:01.3 Jessica: And finally, physical distancing also. We saw people using office space that maybe wasn't used previously for that purpose. For example, using a conference room to meet with a family to exchange information rather than meeting at your cubicle in very close quarters. So using your existing space differently was also a means to provide that physical distancing that really protected the staff in the workplace and allowed them to collaborate with others, to communicate with families in an in-person fashion while remaining safe and physically distanced.

0:13:50.0 Jessica: So the next slide is about landlords. Protecting landlords during the inspection and HAP contracting processes. Now, we spoke to a lot of PHAs and we know

that HUD allows for remote unit inspections. We found that a few of the PHAs are using this opportunity, but when using remote inspections, it's essential that you have good communication with the landlord. Some owners may see this as a burden, that they now have to assume the responsibility for the inspection. You have to provide them with the tools to conduct an inspection. Usually that involves a ruler or tape measure, a voltage monitor.

0:14:35.6 Jessica: So this was one way of providing protection for the owner and for the staff. Other PHAs found that using the HUD inspection waiver was actually very, very helpful. It assisted our families to get into housing faster, and other PHAs really used a combination of waivers and the portal to actually exchange information, rent increases, HAP contracts were all conducted electronically, but we all have portfolios of owners, some might be your smaller mom-and-pop type of organization, that may not have access to the technology or trust the technology.

0:15:23.4 Jessica: In these instances, the non-technical solution really involved using drop box, seemed to work fairly well. That and digital signatures, right? If you can do it electronically, do it electronically, but if you can't, just providing an opportunity for maybe a drop box somewhere they can pick up and deliver was very, very helpful.

0:15:53.0 Jessica: So now we're gonna ask a few questions of you, and we're really interested to know what you are doing in your environment. Do you have pre-existing technology that you're using to help you now through the leasing process or have you implemented new technology since COVID began? Are you doing something new that you would not have implemented had it not been for this COVID pandemic, or are you thinking of using new technology solutions in the future?

0:16:27.7 Jessica: Maybe that's why you're joining us today, is to find out more about what technology solutions people are using so that they can continue leasing. So if you don't mind taking an opportunity to answer these questions, let's see, you'll see them on your right side of the screen and these are all yes/no. So if you don't mind, I'm gonna mute myself for a moment and give you an opportunity to answer those questions. Thank you.

0:19:04.8 Jessica: We're gonna give everyone just another moment to complete. I see most have answered, just waiting for a few more, an opportunity to respond to these questions. Thank you.

0:21:10.0 Jessica: Okay, so it looks like the polling has ended and we have responses to the three questions. So the first question was, do you have pre-existing technology to help you with your leasing processes? And it looks like more of you do have pre-existing technology than do not. So that's very interesting to know that you already have something in place before the pandemic hit, which probably is something that you're very, very thankful for.

0:21:46.7 Jessica: There also seems to be quite a few agencies out there, quite a few participants on this call who've implemented new technologies since this pandemic began and perhaps you used your CARES Act funding to implement, to purchase and implement that new technology so awesome, I hope it's working well for you. And it also looks... Wow! We have a lot of yeses. It also looks like a number of you are thinking of implementing new technology. So it looks like...

0:22:22.5 Jessica: Wow! Well over... It looks like about half of you are thinking about

implementing new technology in the future, so wonderful. I hope we can provide you with some useful information through this session that will help guide you into some lessons learned from some of the housing authorities we spoke with to actually have implemented new technology during the pandemic and some of their lessons learned. We have a very interesting case study to share with you in just a moment.

0:22:55.8 Jessica: So let's move on, unless there's a question about providing for physical safety, social distancing for our families, for the landlords, for our staff. If you'd like to ask a question about the social distancing, please feel free to do so. Otherwise, we're gonna move ahead and start talking about providing housing opportunities. Okay. So this is not something, as I mentioned earlier, that we usually do as HCV program administrators. Usually, this is something that our families go out into the market and find housing opportunities with the voucher.

0:23:46.2 Jessica: But what we found is that there are a lot of the PHAs spoke to us about having fewer housing opportunities out there because of COVID, perhaps there are fewer families wanting to move. That's a very plausible reason and we also know that there are moratoriums on evictions. So we do have fewer people moving out of housing and it's becoming more important for the PHA to actually consider providing housing opportunities and assisting families. But some families have to move whether they choose to or not, perhaps they've added back family members.

0:24:31.1 Jessica: We've had a lot of stories of family members who have gone off to start out on their own, maybe because of employment situations, maybe because of the pandemic, having to come back into the household, so families wanting to move perhaps to a larger unit.

How do we give them opportunities to move during COVID?

0:24:52.3 Jessica: Next slide.

0:24:56.2 Jessica: We're gonna talk about removing barriers to enable leasing, and what we found was people are using their CARES Act funding to remove some of these barriers, things like assisting with a security deposit, that was spoken of very, very highly by several PHAs. Actually assisting with the security deposit served two purposes: It removed the barrier to housing and it also expedited the leasing process.

0:25:25.5 Jessica: Another barrier that was removed by using the CARES Act funding was paying off past utility debt. And thirdly, we found that PHAs were partnering with local service agencies who also were trying to remove those barriers past rental history issues, security deposit issues, etcetera. So we know that a lot of these social agencies may be constrained at this time because there are so many families in need. However, if you have the opportunity to explore these new relationships with them, it's highly recommended.

0:26:09.7 Jessica: We actually spoke with one housing agency, and it was a very interesting approach. They assisted with a security deposit, however, it wasn't given to the family directly, it was actually given to the landlord, and therefore, when the family moved, the agency was able to collect that security deposit back, at least that is the current hope and the model that they're using, so that they will be able to continue to help new families move and pay security deposit.

0:26:46.8 Jessica: So rather than giving it directly to the family, they were able to give it

directly to the landlords, and therefore be paid back at the time that the family moved. So that was a very interesting and innovative approach to removing barriers to housing and expediting the moving process.

0:27:09.1 Jessica: Next slide.

0:27:12.9 Jessica: We actually spoke with many housing authorities who are currently using online tools to help families find housing. Some of us have waiting areas that might have a notebook of frequently used housing opportunities and resources, however, we don't want people to come to the office in the same volume as the past and so by providing these online tools, it was very helpful. Some of them were not necessarily industry-specific. They're tools that everyone has available to them, things like Zillow or apartments.com.

0:27:56.9 Jessica: Other people use very industry-specific tools like Social Serve and GoSection8. Perhaps they even have a local database of available resources. We really didn't hear that last one very often, it was more likely using market available tools or tools that are very industry-specific.

0:28:21.6 Jessica: So another thing that we can do to help our families find housing is to look at our own policies. What can we do that would be assisting to them? And the number one reason... Number one response we found there was just simply extending your voucher search time, looking at your policies to see what you can do about voucher extensions and also looking at your portability processes. Are there things that we can do in terms of assisting families who are porting into our area, getting them engaged in finding housing? They may not have local resources. So that was very, very important.

0:29:12.4 Jessica: Another opportunity to assist families finding housing is through local landlord outreach. I don't wanna spend too, too much time on this subject because there is going to be another webinar coming up very, very soon that talks very specifically to outreach and engagement activities, but let's just say that engaging local landlords, this is a great opportunity to do so. We know that there is an eviction moratorium, however, we know that owners might be looking for tenants who are able to pay the rent, and that's what we do in the HCV program, regardless of our family's income, we pay the half, we pay in combination with the family's 30%, the contract rent.

0:30:08.0 Jessica: So this is a great opportunity to go out there and market to the owners that your rent will be paid. And so engage with those local real estate groups, the local chambers of commerce that might work with local real estate groups, and extend your landlord pool.

0:30:28.3 Jessica: And finally, there are landlord incentives. Some of these are financial. We know that the CARES Act allows for many, many opportunities. But one of the ones that we thought was interesting was a non-monetary incentive and that was the use of staff as the liaison between the Housing Authority and the landlord and representing the family. So these were individuals that help negotiate the lease for the family, are there to answer landlord questions and actually just enhance the customer service available to landlords.

0:31:14.2 Jessica: Maybe they are existing landlords on the program and wanting them to remain on the program, and others are perhaps new to this program, perhaps there might be a little bit of myth busting out there that has to be done, but these landlord liaisons were outstanding examples of how to expedite service, how to market, how to network landlords

and again, there's gonna be another webinar on this subject in the very near future. Let's see, are there any new questions out there?

0:31:56.5 Jessica: Alright. Okay. So let's move on to assisting families to maintain their housing. Alright?

0:32:17.7 Jessica: Assisting families to maintain lease compliance is a great way of maintaining them in housing, and that again, is an opportunity to use your landlord liaison. So maintaining compliance means working with the families through any type of deficiencies. Maybe it is going back and using your financial resources to help with some of the payments that might be at issue.

0:32:46.7 Jessica: But also, please look at your policies and HUD waivers. There are waivers available to allow families to have an extended absence from the unit and look at your policies related to additions to the household. We know that there are many, many circumstances out there where adult members of the house may have moved out and now they wanna move back, and that could be related to the employment situations and COVID and the like. So maintaining the lease compliance is a great way of maintaining leasing rather than securing new leasing.

0:33:31.1 Jessica: Alright. Next slide.

0:33:32.1 Jessica: I'd like to introduce a case study that, we talked to the housing authority of Chester County in Pennsylvania. This was a really great organization located in the western part of the state, covering area that includes Delaware County is very close to

Chester County. They did a series of steps related to their leasing. They provided online briefings. They posted on a non-public website that required users to log in, and what that did I thought was very interesting, it allowed the PHA to monitor the engagement and the completion.

0:34:22.1 Jessica: It was really separate from a wide public briefing, and very specific, so as the family logged in, the PHA was able to capture that information and this online briefing included information for new families, for movers, and for the families who were porting in. So it served a lot of different purposes and so it offered to ensure appropriate community language offerings as well.

0:34:55.7 Jessica: So that's something that they're actually working on is that we know when you provide something online, you have to be aware of the limited English proficiency, your LEP community, and be aware that English is not the only language spoken by our families and to provide alternatives. So that's something that they are working on. They also provided a really interesting program in conjunction with a state program that allowed something called great tenant certification, and what that is, is an online curriculum for families to become great tenants. Alright.

0:35:40.8 Jessica: It's an online self-paced program consisting of eight different modules. The modules are progressive, so you don't move on to that next module until you complete the prior module and at the end, the participant would receive a completion certificate, a certificate of completion and that was something that the family could go out into the market and present to a prospective owner to show, "I've done my studying, I've done my homework, I've completed this course, I am a good tenant. Please consider me."

0:36:21.2 Jessica: And the stories that are being relayed are very, very positive, that owners are appreciative that the tenants have taken the time and the care to complete this course, and it also helps remove some of those barriers that they may have had with poor rental histories in that now they're taking this very seriously and they're very, very engaged.

0:36:46.9 Jessica: If you go to the next slide, you can see what that looks like. It's partnered with Pennsylvania Link. This is not specific just to this housing authority, but it's something that's available broadly, and that the PHA has collaborated with the state agencies to present this information.

0:37:08.2 Jessica: On the next slide, you can see the eight self-paced modules that include how to present your rental history, to look at your budget, so it talks a little bit about financing. It includes searching for housing, what you need to be ready before you move in, and what does being a great tenant mean. What are your responsibilities, both while you're in the unit, as well as leaving the unit?

0:37:45.7 Jessica: So this was actually really quite a successful tool to help families get prepared for the process of working out there with private owners, and also to present private owners with a certificate that they have done their due diligence and that they're ready to be great tenants. I think the housing authority of Chester County has done just an outstanding job preparing their families, and with that, I wanted to present another polling opportunity.

0:38:19.1 Jessica: Alright, so if you can, we are again looking at yes/no questions and answers. If you don't mind, I'd really like to know what's going on with your organization.

Have you increased search times during COVID? Has your PHA engagement with landlords increased? Oh, this was actually not a yes/no. I'm sorry. Has your PHA number of engaged landlords changed during COVID? And has your PHA implemented any landlord incentives?

0:38:58.1 Jessica: Again, it's gonna be the subject of an upcoming webinar and we'd really like to know what's going on with your agency. So I'll put myself on mute. Please use this opportunity to respond to the polling questions, as well as if you have any questions about providing housing opportunities, please feel free to use the question and answer box above. Thank you.

[pause]

0:42:56.0 Jessica: Okay. Great. Thank you guys so much for your answers. We can take a look at that. Has your voucher search time increased during COVID resoundingly? Oh yes, it has. So thank you. I'd be interested to know by how much? So we're going to try and present a new technology here, letting you raise your hands and speak to that, so if somebody wants to speak to that, I'd really like to hear, are you going beyond 120 days, are you at 90 days? What's going on with the search times out there? But a number of you have also said that...

0:43:41.4 Jessica: Well actually, we have a lot of no answers to the next question but that's probably because I phrased it incorrectly. But again, if you've seen a change in your landlord engagement, whether it's increased or decreased, I'd really like to hear more about that. I think this is actually a very difficult time, but one that presents itself with unique opportunities to reach landlords and tell them about our program and our ability to help pay the rent. And then finally, it looks like most of the agencies responding here today have not

implemented landlord incentives.

0:44:25.2 Jessica: So that I find very, very interesting. And again, we're gonna have another webinar on the subject, so maybe those of you who have... Would want to hear about what types have been implemented, and those of you who have not implemented landlord incentives, may wanna participate in that session just to hear what's going on out there, and maybe a little bit more about what's worked and what hasn't worked.

0:44:54.2 Jessica: So if you use your hand up function, we will be able to unmute you and you can maybe relay your personal experience with voucher search times or engaging landlords or even about implementing landlord incentives before we go on to our last area, which will be, how did agencies implement new technologies while also being under COVID?

0:45:27.1 Jessica: So any questions or anyone want to make a comment?

0:45:44.7 Jessica: And I am so sorry, I'm not able to help you unmute. So I believe that Michelle has her hand up. Michelle, do you wanna unmute or can we unmute Michelle so that she can ask a question or make a comment? Michelle, I think we unmuted you, so do you wanna try to...

0:46:17.5 Michelle: Hello, hi.

0:46:18.3 Jessica: Oh good, there you are. Hi.

0:46:20.5 Michelle: My question actually pertains to the Chester, Pennsylvania, whether their curriculum would be available to other housing authorities?

0:46:29.0 Jessica: You know, that's very interesting, and I believe if you go on to the website, you'll see the Pennsylvania Link, and you might be able to reach out to the Housing Authority. I know I tried it out as a dummy user, and I thought it was incredibly interesting, lovely organization to work with so I do recommend giving them a shout out and see how they can...

0:46:53.9 Michelle: Then I'll try that.

0:46:54.7 Jessica: This was not their tool, this was a tool that was developed through Pennsylvania Link that they implemented on their site. So it was a great partnership.

0:47:05.2 Michelle: Thank you.

0:47:06.1 Jessica: Sure, pleasure.

0:47:08.3 Speaker 3: Jessica, I just wanted to bring to your attention there's a couple of other questions in the Q&A block if you wanna try to answer them as they're coming in.

0:47:17.4 Jessica: Oh, thank you. Thank you. Okay, as I mentioned, one of the questions is about Chester and they, again, did not develop this tool, it was developed through a state program that they partnered with, so I'm sure that they wouldn't mind sharing their information with you.

0:47:36.7 Jessica: Let's see. The next question is from Tanya Mitchel Weston. In small rural areas, particularly those with an aging population, to incentivize landlords with limited housing opportunities, we attempted monetary incentives, referral bonuses, extra money for additional units and received no participation. Oh my goodness! That's really surprising. I'm so sorry, Tanya. Has anyone reached out to them to see... I wonder why not. That's interesting though, with financial incentives in a rural area, you would think that a monetary incentive would really be beneficial.

0:48:19.8 Jessica: I'm wondering if there are other incentives that are non-monetary that would be more meaningful, or what in particular is it that they do not want to participate or that there are other avenues of participation that have surpassed yours? I just don't know, but that's really interesting to hear. As I mentioned earlier, I spoke with a lot of PHAs out there. Not many in rural areas. So we've unmuted you, Tanya, would you like to offer the team a little bit more information about what's going on?

0:49:01.3 Tanya: Can you hear me?

0:49:02.9 Jessica: Yeah, I can hear...

0:49:04.2 Tanya: Yes, the issue is that with the moratorium, there's no turnover in units and so with the low turnover in units, they are feeling kind of trapped with the people that they have because they can't evict the people that they have.

0:49:21.4 Jessica: Gotcha, I absolutely got you. So it's not really that they don't want to

participate, it's just...

0:49:28.0 Tanya: A lot of them are planning on leaving the program as soon as the moratorium is up because they're kind of set up with an exec is automatic payment, and it's very [0:49:39.0] ____ as long as everyone has a client. But the moratorium along with the changes to HPF coming up and all the other compliances that they have to adhere to, we're looking at it [0:49:53.0] ____ and we are very, very small, we have a very small program and so who's going [0:49:57.4] ____.

0:50:02.2 Jessica: That's interesting that it's more about lease compliance and eviction that they're stuck, right? So I'm wondering if those leasing incentives can be the maintaining compliance incentives. You know what I'm saying? Like, where are those compliance issues? 'Cause that's devastating, to a small program, that could be very devastating. I'm so, so sorry to hear that, and I don't know if you've used landlords' liaisons to kind of reach out and try and do some problem-solving but I'm terribly sad to hear that.

0:50:42.4 Tanya: We do have the staff person that serves as a liaison, and some of the landlords are in the program, they're comfortable staying where they are. But then there are some who are just... They're just sitting. And again, it's an agent's operation so some of them on the top, landlords have a house here and a house here, they're the ones who are feeling it more than the company.

0:51:07.8 Jessica: And I totally understand. I worked at a very large agency for many, many years, over a decade, and the smaller mom and pops, they don't necessarily want to utilize technology as readily and so utilizing them is a challenge, it really is, and so it becomes a

matter of, what other things can we do? If it's not financial, can we incentivize the families to maintain lease compliance, can we resolve any of these lease compliance issues? I just don't know. But that's really interesting. Thank you so much for sharing that.

0:51:45.5 Tanya: You're welcome.

0:51:46.9 Jessica: Jennifer Martinez, the Yonkers Housing Authority has the Section 8 campaign. Jennifer... Can we unmute Jennifer so she can maybe tell us a little bit more about the Yonkers Housing Authority.

0:52:01.5 Jennifer: Hi, good afternoon everyone.

0:52:04.6 Jessica: Hi Jennifer, what's going on in Yonkers.

0:52:07.6 Jennifer: So our, Executive Director in the upper management team had a great initiative to Section 8 campaign and it's not finalized yet but what we're doing is identifying a landlord and families who are highly satisfied with the program and we go out there and ask them questions about their experience with the program and how they feel the program benefits them as a landlord, and them as participants.

0:52:38.7 Jennifer: In particular, the participants were very excited to know about this and very happy to share their own experience. I have a perfect quote from somebody that I met yesterday, who told me that Section 8 came into her family's life when they least expected but when they most needed it. This was a family in an emergency situation with no heat and no gas but anyways, the families are very happy to share with us their experience, and they

both feel that by sharing their own experience, they're gonna help other families to be able to find housing.

0:53:18.5 Jennifer: Like you mentioned earlier, to remove the myth of what a Section 8 family looks like. What a Section 8 family is going to do to your apartment, it's actually treated as an ode. Some of the things we are doing in our Section 8 campaign, we also had implemented the drop boxes for dropping documents, we're also implementing something that it is RENTCafe. One of the software systems that we use where our residents were able to complete the intake eligibility and their recertification online and making uploaded documentations online.

0:53:58.3 Jennifer: We have quite a number of different things going on to be able to provide in continuity and continue to be able provide the services to our participants.

0:54:10.4 Jessica: Oh Jennifer, I love the combination of technology and non-technology, sharing the family stories with landlords, you have to have a heart. We've all been through tough times to hear that you have the potential to impact a family's life by providing this housing opportunity is insanely powerful. I'm actually just kind of emotional about that because that's one of the reasons that we all get into this, right?

0:54:43.0 Jessica: So I think that's incredibly exciting. It costs nothing. This is just a great opportunity and I will absolutely share that experience because it's a way of reaching people who care and hopefully, we find a lot of them in our communities, and also, by the way, I've used the RENTCafe products and products like that from other vendors and I think that is a great way to, again exchange information in a way that's safe.

0:55:20.8 Jessica: So our next subject is actually about implementing technology solutions during COVID. I hope to present you some information that's gonna be useful for you in the rolling out of your online participant portal. I think it's really, really interesting.

0:55:41.9 Jessica: Let's see. Oh no, you're welcome. Thank you so much for sharing that. I hope that touched others as much as it touched me. That's a great, great story to tell.

0:55:56.3 Jessica: Alright, so let's go forward with the challenge that we're having to implement solutions while we're in the middle of this crazy time, this challenging period of COVID and then hopefully, we can hear more from the participants who are in this session right now about how it's happened at your PHAs as well. Oh. I'm sorry, before we go on, I just wanted to mention... Tanya, thank you so much. Part of the Renter's Curriculum can be found at the Self Determination Project of Pennsylvania, and that site, I'm going to say it, hopefully slowly, so that it's recorded and you can come back and get this recording, but it's the <https://www.sdhp.org/training-topics/> and so thank you for sharing that, Tanya.

0:57:17.3 Jessica: They have what's called a PREP, a Prepared Renters Education Program and that sounds very similar to what the Housing Authority of Chester County has done, and I'm hoping that the results were the same for them as well. Thank you.

0:57:32.4 Jessica: Okay, so now we're gonna talk about some of the new challenges to leasing process during COVID, and these include, how do you implement alternative policies and procedures? That's not technology, that's human, our day-to-day business process and our policies, implementing HUD available waivers, implementing the technology solutions

and ensuring that there's access to technology, and when there's not either an access or an ability to use the technologies, we were talking about some of the families that might have restrictions there, how do we provide accommodations to those families?

0:58:18.5 Jessica: So, as you know, HUD has implemented several opportunities for waivers.

0:58:26.2 Jessica: Next slide.

0:58:26.9 Jessica: And I'm not gonna spend too much time on this slide. Oh, for some reason my slides are mis-numbered. Okay, sorry about that. So the first thing I'm gonna say is that it's really important before we go into implementing potentially costly technology, that we look at some of our immediate opportunities, to look at policies and procedures to determine if there's any untapped flexibility that we have.

0:58:57.5 Jessica: We spoke earlier about the potential for extending voucher terms. There are opportunities to use Owner Self-Certifications for deficiencies in HQS. So there's a lot of discretionary policy that's available to the PHAs and a great starting point is, what can we do with our own policies that would remove some of these constraints that we're having during COVID? When you do so, it's really important to look at other areas of the program. It's interesting to see that your letters, your software system of housing management software that are tied to those policies, you have to look and see what the impact is. Things like extending a voucher term may have an impact to your housing software so please go back and look and make sure that when you touch one thing, it doesn't negatively impact the other things.

0:59:56.2 Jessica: And then consider if these are changes that you want just for the short-term to get us through this pandemic, and as I mentioned earlier, you might find that our short-term solutions are things that we want to keep around long-term.

1:00:12.1 Jessica: One of the other recommendations that we have is when you're looking at changing those policies, your staff, who are involved in the day-to-day activities, they know these touch points. They know them intimately. They work with them daily. So as you're looking at these policies and procedures, be sure to touch base with the online staff, because their knowledge is unsurpassed, it really is.

1:00:40.1 Jessica: So looking at policies and procedures, consider them and consider all of the touch points that might be impacted, including your letters, your forms, your systems of record and how it may impact your family. 'Cause that's what we're really after, is to benefit not only the agency, but also our families and the owners in the program.

1:01:04.2 Jessica: Next slide is using HUD available waivers and alternative policies. I'm not gonna spend too much time on this. HUD has done a number of presentations, but these are the PIH notices that are available that talk to what is available for use. They are 2020-05, 2020-13, and again, that was updated in July, 2020-20, you can say that three times fast. That was in August, and at the end of the year, we had 2020-33.

1:01:44.3 Jessica: Next slide.

1:01:47.0 Jessica: So here's the word about implementing those HUD waivers and

alternatives. If you have not implemented something, it does not prohibit you from implementing it now. You can start and stop these waivers, provided that you give everyone notice. So just because you haven't yet, it doesn't mean that they are not available to you to implement at any time. They are time-limited for most of them so it's important that you realize that when you do decide to implement them, that you maintain written documentation of when they were applied, the effective dates, and you wanna provide notice to as many residents, owners as possible.

1:02:33.4 Jessica: What I've seen from talking to our PHAs is that most of them will put them on the web, most of them will post it on the door as well, just in case somebody comes to the office, and actually leaving a recorded message on your phone systems to let people know that things have changed. If they don't know it's changed, they're gonna get very, very frustrated. Why isn't this happening the way it's happened for years and years? Well, things are different now, right?

1:03:03.8 Jessica: But we have to communicate that to the families, to the owners, and even to the walk-in population who are used to walking in and asking where they are on the waiting list. That's probably no longer advisable or happening right now, but just walking into a door that's locked is going to cause a great deal of frustration. If they know why, it's actually very, very helpful.

1:03:27.6 Jessica: So just be sure that you notify everybody, and please, watch the period of availability, because they are not indefinite. We don't know when it's going to end. HUD will keep us posted when that determination will be due. We know they're most likely going to end. Given the date on the notice, they may be extended, we don't know for certain until

HUD tells us. Okay.

1:03:56.6 Jessica: So for most of those waivers, the period of availability has been extended to June 30th of 2021. Alright. Just wanting to backtrack and make sure I say that most of them have been extended to June 30th. Okay.

1:04:16.2 Jessica: So, next slide is implementing technology solutions, like those resident portals, they're wonderful, but they need a lot of planning in order to implement them correctly. So HUD provided PHAs with additional funding through the CARES Act. And the technology is critical in what we looked at earlier. It's in the use of portals, electronic signatures. But PHAs have to be aware of the challenges to implementing technology solutions during COVID.

1:04:53.9 Jessica: Implementing technology is, in general, not a fast solution. It can take a very long time to specify a product, procure it, configure it, test it, roll it out to your families, to your staff, to the public. So planning becomes really critical. So consider the following; what are your available resources to do an implementation? The PHA's most crucial resource is its staff, including operational staff as your subject matter experts.

1:05:33.9 Jessica: They understand the detailed processes and the linkages to other areas in the program. As I mentioned earlier, you don't wanna touch one part of the program and realize it's had an impact somewhere else, and your staff really are the resources who know this. They understand the detail processes and linkages, but they may not see the big picture that management has in terms of what the management wants to see the technology do and to service. So please be aware of that.

1:06:06.5 Jessica: It's important to prioritize your needs, to know what the immediate urgency of issues is, and address them by priority, and to phase in the functionality according to the priority. Remember, not everybody has access to technology and even with the best technology solutions out there, you need to provide accommodation to those who either don't have access, or you'll have to provide access, or accommodations, where access may not be the issue, but ability to use the technology. So that all has to be part of your planning process.

1:06:51.9 Jessica: When you talk about implementation, again, it's really important that you use your subject matter experts to configure and test the solution that you're trying to implement thoroughly and right now, our resources are very constrained. Many of them may not be working at the office. Maybe they're working remotely, as we talked about earlier, alternative work arrangements.

1:07:18.9 Jessica: When you're rolling out this new technology, we're also challenged to make sure that we're rolling it out in a way that has support for the functionality that you're trying to put forward. Maybe you don't want to implement a full-blown system but just part of a system. For example, in a resident portal, maybe the most important thing right now is the ability to upload documents and to sign them electronically, or maybe it's to have that video conferencing.

1:07:57.0 Jessica: So pick and choose what needs to be rolled out and phase it accordingly. Because your resources are limited, this might actually be the faster way. Even though it seems like it might take longer because it's phased, if it's phased properly and it's functional at each phase, it may expedite the overall implementation. And so when you're rolling it out,

consider your internal rollout to your staff, to your management, versus your external rollout which might mean to other agencies, to your families, or landlord.

1:08:30.9 Jessica: And as you roll it out, think about who's going to be training them how to use this. Are you going to have web videos, YouTube videos, how-to? COVID has taught me one thing, thank goodness for YouTube, where I can learn how to do almost anything. So think about that in terms of how you're going to be training and supporting the end users of this new technology. We can't call them into the office and have training. That's why we're doing tutorials and webinars similar to what we're doing right now, right?

1:09:05.8 Jessica: So it's all very, very important considerations when you're implementing technology to think about these things and really have a plan in place. And so I'd like to present next, a case study, again, from our friends at the housing authorities, Chester County, Pennsylvania, where they did, I think an exemplary task of implementing new technology during COVID and so as I mentioned, the Housing Authority is Chester County.

1:09:39.0 Jessica: Before COVID hit, they had updated a great deal of their technology. They had updated their housing software management so when the COVID hit, they were able to procure laptops and hotspots and allow their staff to work remotely because they had this online housing management system, but they were faced with some new challenges. They knew they had to keep part of the office open to allow appointment-only, minimal appointment at the office for families who could not use the technology as reasonable accommodations to pick up documents that were delivered into drop box and scan them, so staff could work with their program remotely but they had limited staff resources.

1:10:35.0 Jessica: Staff was already constrained. And so they knew they had to implement this technology with fewer resources. They had a desire to streamline leasing, and they had already kind of seen a vision of their upgraded technology, and they wanted to continue down that path of using technology to streamline processes. They wanted to provide resources for clients with limited access to technology, and they wanted to provide technology that could go forward post-COVID into their business continuity plan. They actually had a business continuity plan that took them both into operations during COVID as well as back to what would be post-COVID operations. So that was kind of the issues that they were presented with.

1:11:30.6 Jessica: Next slide.

1:11:34.1 Jessica: So they implemented a kiosk that they have in the lobby, and this kiosk allows for a great deal of flexibility, and there are many, many products out there on the market, but this kiosk had some certain COVID functionality that was very appealing to the Housing Authority. It actually checked the temperature of staff and visitors when you come up to the kiosk, it measured the scans for the temperature. It also acted as a traditional...

1:12:17.1 Jessica: I'm sorry. It also had a mask reminder. You're not wearing a mask. It could tell if the individual was wearing a mask or not. It provided facial recognition that allowed staff to unlock security doors with facial recognition as well. Its functionality included video-chatting. It has the ability to integrate with the housing software, their new technology for housing management software, and it also allowed, interestingly enough, for an integration with a document scanning and emailing system.

1:12:58.7 Jessica: So the thought was that this has so many functionalities that could really be useful, they decided to do a prioritization. So next slide... And what they really said of all of this great functionality, our immediate need is to help protect the staff and visitors from the spread of COVID. So if they come into the office, that scanning became the priority. They also... And by the way, they use their CARES Act funding for financing this project. They did this in a period of two months. I think their goal was to do it faster, but again, limited resources, and the configuration took a little bit longer than expected. But still the technology implementation within two months is quite ambitious, and they phased out the functionality rather than looking at all the potential uses of this kiosk, they realized that they would need to phase its roll out, and they chose to roll it out to their internal users first, and then to monitor the outcome, to allow the staff to become familiar and to limit the support.

1:14:24.7 Jessica: So the staff became the support for the product. So this was just very, very successful implementation, the staff has really become familiar and accepted the tool and can support it and is actually looking forward to additional rollout of future functionalities.

1:14:53.4 Jessica: So again, this case study of the Housing Authority of Chester County shows that they used the CARES Act funding as a resource, they used their subject matter expert, their staff, and this was done by one staff member, by the way, to start the configuration and implementation, and they were able to roll out a limited functionality, but they were able to support that, and it bought them some buy-in from the users that I think will help them in the future rollouts. The next step will be... Right now they're using it only for internal staff, and the next step is using it for visitors. And actually they have... I'm sorry. They have rolled it out to visitors as well. So again, this is a housing authority, during a crisis, implementing a solution in a very smart way.

1:15:51.3 Jessica: Okay, so, I just wanted to give this an opportunity for you to ask any questions or comments about implementing technology solutions or any type of solutions during COVID. It can be very challenging, but hopefully we've conveyed to you approaches and tips that might make this a little bit easier as you take it back to your housing authority. So with that, I'm gonna open up for questions.

[pause]

1:16:36.6 Jessica: I have a few questions here, and I'm so sorry if I'm saying your name wrong, Maricel. I hope that's how you say it. "What are examples of incentives to landlords in HCBP and HOME TBRA programs?" I'm gonna defer on that question, if it's okay, because our next training is really going to cover this in much more depth, so if you'll just stay tuned, we will try and provide more information for you on that, and yes, this information is targeted towards the Section 8 vouchers, Amber, but hopefully, some of the information that's been presented is information that you can use with your public housing or other programs, low-income tax credits. Implementing solutions is difficult regardless of the housing program that you administer, but I'm hoping that some of the information is universal.

[pause]

1:17:47.3 Jessica: Alright. Well, if there are no questions, or if anybody wants to provide a comment, please do so. Raise your hand and we'll call on you. In the meantime, you can send your technical assistance service questions to hudcctrainings@iem.com. Alright. Please

include in the body of your email your name, your PHA that you're working with, the training topic and specific issues, as well as a way for us to get back to you, an email or a phone number, if you don't mind.

1:18:38.1 Jessica: Alright, well, thank you, everybody. Thank you for sharing part of your day with us, and please stay tuned to the next webinar coming soon regarding landlord incentives and outreach. I think you'll find it very, very interesting. Thank you.