

- Ohio Department of Development
Office of Community Development
- Supportive Housing Section

Goodbye, bulky binders! Streamlined grant process to cut time in half while ending the paper chase

IN BRIEF: Through Supportive Housing, thousands of Ohioans who are homeless get the dignity that comes from having a safe place to stay. The program provides grants to nonprofits, local governments, public housing authorities, and others. It's all positive. But the process for applying for a grant, reviewing applications, awarding and implementing grants, monitoring and evaluating them -- these key steps were cumbersome and time-consuming. So a team spent five straight days using Kaizen to analyze the process and create something significantly better.

EFFICIENCY IN ACTION: The newly designed process has 67 steps, down from 240 before, for a 72% reduction.

DOING AWAY WITH DELAYS: The number of decision points was cut by 85%, loopbacks were chopped by 79%, and handoffs were trimmed by 68%.

TWICE AS NICE: When fully in place, the new process will move along more than twice as quickly. It will cover 110-125 days, according to team projections -- compared to 261-297 days with the original process.

STATE SAVINGS: The new approach will require an estimated 15,847 fewer staff hours per grant period in the Supportive Housing section -- time that can be redirected to other work activities. The team estimates that these hours have a wage equivalent of \$475,000.

GRANTEE SAVINGS: Also when the streamlined process is in place, grantees will be able to complete all of their required steps

in 3,600 fewer hours in a given grant period -- plus they'll save about \$25,000 in reduced postage, supplies, travel, and parking.

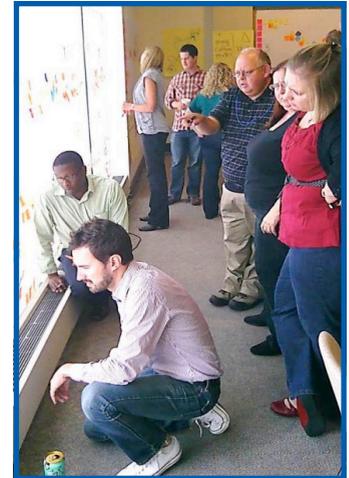
DETAILS

If you work for an organization that provides housing to people who are homeless, you want to do the work of delivering services. You don't want to spend long hours dealing with administrative hurdles, red tape, complex rules, and documents in triplicate.

At the Office of Community Development, staff understand. It's what prompted the formation of an improvement team to look at every phase of the Supportive Housing grant life cycle. It's what fueled the team's five straight days of work. And it inspired the plan that will end up cutting 173 steps from the process -- while reducing process time by 58%.

Ohio's Supportive Housing programs provide funding for emergency shelter, project-based transitional housing, tenant-based supportive housing, permanent supportive housing, homelessness prevention, rapid re-housing, and housing for persons with AIDS. Applicants for funding include nonprofit organizations, local governments, public housing authorities, and consortia of these entities. In most cases, funding is awarded for a two-year period and can be renewed contingent on satisfactory performance outcomes.

Thanks to Supportive Housing, thousands of Ohioans get the dignity that comes with having a stable place to stay. The value of the program has always been obvious. But it was also obvious that the application and review process had grown cumbersome and time-consuming.



Team members are studying their map of the current process as they search for instances of inefficiency. This is a crucial pivot point during every Kaizen event. It's when the team begins pinpointing some of the biggest opportunities for improvement.

SCORECARD - PROCESS

MEASURE	CURRENT LEVEL	NEW	CHANGE
Process Steps	240 Steps	67 Steps	72%
Decision Points	26	4	85%
Handoffs	101	32	68%
Loopbacks	14	3	79%
Process Lead Time <i>Does not include grant period</i>	261 to 297 Days	110 to 125 Days	58%

CONTINUED

Leadership at the Ohio Department of Development turned to Kaizen as its approach of choice for effecting quick and significant improvement. “Kaizen” is a Japanese word that means “to break apart or change (kai) for the better (zen).” ODOD had used Kaizen before, to great success, so it wasn’t long before a 15-person team was put together and given its charter: to review the grantee application, the review and award process, grant implementation, and performance evaluation/close-out.

The team’s first two days were eye-opening. Team members created a map of the current process, all the way from receipt of application to program evaluation. The map ended up being so big that it covered nearly an entire wall. It revealed the complexity of the current situation -- in the form of 240 steps, 101 handoffs, 26 decision points, and 14 loopbacks.

Some people would be daunted by this complexity, but the team saw an opportunity to achieve big improvement. They questioned every step in the process. They scrutinized every handoff, decision, and other potential time-waster. They discussed the situation in order to draw distinctions between which steps needed to stay -- and which steps were sticking around simply because they had become so embedded in the way of doing things.

Team member’s generated improvement ideas, using the best of these to develop three potential redesigns of the process. Then it was on to more discussion, followed by the team’s development of its key output: a transformed process that has just 67 step (a 72% reduction over the original approach), 4 decision points (85% reduction), 32 handoffs (68% reduction), and 3 loopbacks (79% reduction).

When all the improvements are in place, this new process will move along in less than half the time. According to the team’s calculations, the entire process will cover 110-125 days -- compared to 261-297 days with the original process. That’s a 58% reduction in process time. (Of course, these times don’t include the actual grant period once a grantee has received funds and is going about its work.)

The big boost to efficiency will save time and money for everyone. Among staff in the Supportive Housing section, the new process will require an estimated 15,847 fewer staff hours per grant period -- time that can be redirected to other work activities that will benefit citizens. The team estimates that these hours have a wage equivalent of \$475,000.

Grantees will save too. Team projections show that when the streamlined process is in place, grantees will be able to complete all of their required steps in 3,600 fewer hours in a given grant period -- with an estimated wage equivalent of \$84,000. That’s for all grantees, of course, and it’s based on the current number of funded organizations. Plus, grantees will save about \$25,000 on reduced postage, supplies, travel, and parking.

Several key changes will be unlocking these results. One is the development of an online application, which will liberate grantees from the labor-intensive ordeal of submitting one original and

two copies of the application in separate three-ring binders, with 10-point or greater font size, with narratives done in Word and charts and tables done with Excel, with page numbering at the bottom of each page.

For staff who are on the receiving end of these applications, there’s just as much to cheer about. With those big and bulky binders on their way out, the practice of batching applications and reviewing them in bunches will end as well. The online approach will add flow to the process, flattening what use to be spikes of work that rose up whenever large numbers of applications needed to be reviewed.



What’s more, the online application will end most of the data-entry work among Supportive Housing staff -- and the entry errors that inevitably occurred with manual data entry. Data from hard-copy charts submitted with applications had to be entered into spreadsheets. When a finger slipped and typed an incorrect number, problems could surface later on. All of this will be prevented with electronic applications.

Another key change is the consolidation of data sources. Program information has to be monitored, but doing so had become difficult because pieces of information were in different places: SharePoint, Access, Excel spreadsheets, and elsewhere. Guidelines are being reviewed to clarify what is required for monitoring. This will be followed by development of a revised monitoring tool that keeps the number of data sources to an effective minimum.

These are big changes, so it will take some time to get everything in place. The team’s timeline for implementation of many items extends into next year, with the online application becoming available in 2014.