

STRATEGY: INSPECTIONS TECHNOLOGY

Utilizing technology to improve the inspections process.

Who: All PHAs regardless of size and/or location.

Cost: \$ \$\$ \$\$\$

Implementation Considerations: ● LOW ● MEDIUM ○ DIFFICULT

Inspections Technology PHA Process Improvements

PHA Process Improvement	Inspections Technology
Increase Recruitment	
Increase Retention	X
Improve Responsiveness	X
Improve Tenant-Landlord Relationship	
Improve Inspections Process	X
Minimize Bureaucracy	



WHAT THIS IS AND WHY IT WORKS: PHAs are using technology to improve the inspections process including:

- Helping both landlords and PHAs to schedule and track inspections using scheduling and notification apps and direct electronic communications. Technology can be used to alert landlords to an appointment date, offer available windows of time, and update the landlord via text or email with changes to appointment times or an inspector's expected arrival time.
- Providing inspection results quickly – sometimes in real time – to landlords through portal and inspections software applications. This may include conducting an inspection with the HQS form on a mobile device that can be submitted

to an inspection company website or a PHA portal as soon as the inspection is completed. It might also include conducting a video inspection of a location using a mobile device and interacting with a remote inspector who may request certain photos be submitted during the inspection. The adoption of new technology to facilitate inspections can require changes to PHA procedures and policies. Some of these strategies require specific equipment and some require additional costs of vendor software or third-party inspections contracts. Others may require in-house IT or other staff resources.

Incorporating strategies like these into the PHA's HCV inspection process may make the process more predictable and streamlined. This may save the landlord time, energy,

and money, which increases the landlord's satisfaction with the HCV program.

For information on additional strategies PHAs can use to improve their inspections process, see the Inspections chapter.

Related Strategies:

- [Landlord Portal](#)
 - [Education and Outreach](#)
 - [Inspections](#)
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MINIMIZE THE NUMBER OF RE-INSPECTIONS

HUD has made administrative flexibilities available to PHAs to reduce administrative burden and optimize service provisions within their HCV programs. One of these flexibilities, outlined in [PIH Notice 2013-17](#), provides PHAs with the ability to use photographs to verify corrected deficiencies to minimize physical re-inspections, saving time and money for both landlords and PHAs, while still ensuring housing safety and quality. See the reference guide for information about this administrative flexibility.

To use this flexibility, the PHA would follow PIH Notice 2013-17 and create a process to include these actions: After a unit fails inspection due to non-life-threatening deficiencies, the landlord has the correction completed. The landlord provides proof of the corrected deficiency by electronically sending a labeled photograph to the PHA. If the photo provides adequate evidence of the corrected deficiency, the PHA notifies the landlord that no re-inspection is required and saves the photo to a secure location.

Please note, there are instances when PHAs are required to conduct re-inspections. PIH Notice 2013-17 provides additional information on when a re-inspection of a unit must occur.

Implementation Considerations

To determine whether using photographs to minimize physical re-inspections would be beneficial to landlords and PHAs, PHAs should consider the following questions:

- Do the parties who would be responsible for taking the photos and approving the photos want to use this flexibility?
- Will it save the PHA and landlords time?
- Does the PHA have the staffing and computer storage or software to carry out this strategy?

PHAs should consider talking with landlords to gauge their interest in utilizing photos to verify corrected deficiencies. The landlords would need to have a way of taking photos and sending images. This may be done on a smart phone or tablet with a data plan or internet access, for example. They would also need to understand and have the technological ability to label the electronic photos in a manner that would match specific deficiencies (as outlined by the PHA), and transmit the photos via email, text, or other electronic means to the PHA. With landlord interest, the PHA can implement a session to train landlords on photo submission.

PHAs should also discuss the types of deficiencies that commonly cause units to fail inspections with inspections and PHA staff:

- Could those corrections be documented in photos?
- Would a process that uses photos to decrease re-inspection visits save time for inspectors and landlords?

If the PHA finds there are administrative or systematic barriers to using photographs, other strategies may be more useful in addressing landlord concerns with inspections (see the Inspections chapter). As noted in PIH Notice 2013-17, there are several steps PHAs must take before using photos to document inspections. PHAs should follow guidance in the notice, but PHAs must plan on how they will

store and label photos, match photos to specific deficiencies, and match photos submitted by landlords appropriately.

Procedural and Technology Consideration

If the PHA allows for landlord-submitted photos, the PHA must provide a process for how the landlord submits the photos and how the PHA will verify the photographic proof. This may include providing an instructional handout to landlords during the initial inspection and creating an email address for receiving pictures. Procedural changes to the HQS inspection process should be documented in the PHA's Admin Plan per 24 CFR 982.54.

It is important for the PHA to evaluate how it will store these photos or photo files. As digital files, the photos would take up computer storage space and may require an upgrade of PHA technology. Printing the photos would also require storage space and attention to ensuring that the labeling stays with the photo. Whether storing digital or physical photos, PHAs also need to ensure that photos are maintained securely and do not violate the privacy of tenants.



Tip: One PHA noted that inspectors may use a video call to confirm that minor corrections were completed.

PROVIDING QUICK RESULTS TO LANDLORDS

PHAs may use software programs or contract with third-party inspections companies to notify landlords of inspections results quickly or in real time. Both the services and the software involve inspectors conducting their inspections through a software application on a mobile device or laptop computer. In some cases, results are emailed to landlords and/or uploaded to a housing authority's computer system or landlord portal. PHAs that have this capacity via a landlord portal have noted that it

is one of the features that landlords utilize the most often.

Implementation Considerations

PHAs need to identify software or companies that can receive and upload mobile inspection results. If the software desired is not an optional module on the PHA's current software, then the PHA will want to ensure that the software it is considering for purchase can be used as a stand-alone module. PHA inspectors also need access to appropriate technology including a wireless connection to be able to upload inspection results. This may include purchasing equipment, such as cameras, smart phones, and/or tablets, as well as providing remote internet access to upload locations service to inspectors (for example, via a large data phone plan or hot spot).

SCHEDULING

Inspections scheduling poses challenges to PHAs with internal inspection staff, landlords, and third-party inspection companies. Landlords can lose time and money when they receive an inspection date without an associated time. A landlord with a different full-time job may have to take a day off to wait for the inspector. Landlords, PHAs, and inspectors can lose time and money if a scheduled inspection is cancelled at the last minute.

PHAs can improve the appointment and scheduling process through expectations and resource management (see the Inspections chapter). PHAs can also use software modules and applications to make the process more predictable and reliable, improving the experience for all involved.

Some automated inspection scheduling letters will offer the PHA the ability to set a potential window of time during which the inspector will arrive. The software may allow the letter to designate the appointment for a morning or afternoon slot as defined by the PHA.



Others provide even shorter windows. Some inspection scheduling software modules can assign appointments in half-hour to one-hour increments on the inspection scheduling letter for a given set of appointments on a given day. Of course, having such a very specific appointment time sets an expectation the inspector may not be able to meet due to traffic and any number of other factors. If a PHA chooses to set specific times, they may want to include a note in the letter stating that circumstances might cause the time to change and ensure the inspector can communicate scheduling changes to the landlord in a timely manner. Improvements PHAs can make to provide better estimates for when the inspector will be at a property can go a long way in improving PHA and landlord relationships.

It can also happen that the inspector arrives for an inspection to find no one present at the unit. A PHA can use a calendar application to create an alarm to remind PHA inspection staff to call residents or landlords in advance of an inspection. A PHA might also use software that automates scheduling reminder calls. One benefit of a reminder call application is that the software creates a contact list that offers the PHA a record of its attempted outreach.

The same software applications that create appointment letters can group these appointments by proximity to allow for some scheduling efficiency. For example, the PHA can select all inspections that are located in a certain section of town or all the inspections due in a particular building. These appointment software applications generally have the capability to interact with mobile inspections software (if that is not a built-in feature) to populate the appointments, including a map and unit contact information, onto a mobile device. The mobile inspections software does not typically offer an option to email the landlord automatically through the software. The inspector may have the ability to see contact information on the appointment notification. The PHA may decide to have the inspector text or email a landlord when the

inspector is on the way or if an inspection is delayed as a way of improving the inspections process.

Most HCV inspection software does not have the capability to create a route of the inspector's appointments through the course of a day or to optimize the routing based on current circumstances or most efficient trips. The inspector more often maps the day's schedule appointment-by-appointment using a map application. Software is available for purchase that uses artificial intelligence, which can help create optimal routes for inspectors and provide changes in real time based on traffic. The application also offers real-time updates to landlords on when inspectors will arrive; PHA management can access the application from their own devices to view statistics or inspector progress. PHAs might want to consider partnering with other PHAs to obtain better pricing for this software.

