Stanislaus Regional Housing Authority
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TO: Board of Commissioners, Stanislaus Regional Housing Authority

FROM: Eric Arguello, Director of Information Technology

DATE: July 27, 2020

SUBJECT: Information/Discussion Item: New Agency Wide Phone System

Summary

The Agency's current phone system has many limitations in the current workplace environment due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. These limitations are hindering efficiency in the ever evolving remote and onsite workplace. Staff's ability to communicate with clients and each other has come across certain roadblocks that need to be addressed. In an effort to provide the highest level of service to the Agency's clients and staff, a new phone system has been vetted and is being implemented in the month(s) of August and September.

Current Phone System Solution Limitations

Below is a high-level overview of the most difficult issues with regard to the existing phone system:

- Staff cannot use their phones remotely as the existing system is a traditional landline supported system or POTS (plain old telephone service).

- Staff are only able to listen to new voice messages but must use agency assigned cellular telephones in order to return or place calls to clients. This is confusing as calls are made to one number but then returned from a different number. The cellular phones are not being used to receive voice messages in order to maintain some form of a centralized messaging system located at 1701 Robertson Rd.

- The current system does not support Electronic Faxing. As a result, and to avoid paper transactions and the inefficiency of waiting for scanned Faxes the agency has setup temporary eFAX accounts to allow for work flow to continue.

- The current phone system does not allow for use at remote management office sites with onsite staff such as Conant Place, Las Palmas, Town Center at Village One.

- The current system does not allow for internal communication (chat functionality) across multiple platforms

- Staff cannot dial internal extensions

New Phone System Solution

The new phone system resolves the issues/limitations of the existing system and also provides new functionality that was not previously available to Agency staff.

Below is a high-level overview of the new system and features:

- The use of software-based phones is the primary means of communication which will allow for staff to use their desk phone number or DID (direct inward dial) for all calls moving forward.

    - These phones are supported on multiple platforms including PCs, Laptops, both Apple and Android Mobile phones and tablets as long as they have a connection to the internet.

- Visual voicemail is available via the software phone, voicemail to email as well as voicemail to text is also available.

- Electronic Faxing is supported and included in the new solution allowing for all agency fax numbers to be converted to electronic emails which can be received by specific departments or individual staff depending on privacy purpose of the line.

- With the implementation of the internet and software based phones, staff at remote sites can be included to participate in call hunt or blast groups meaning multiple staff members from different locations can receive calls to the Agency's main phone number, Maintenance phone numbers, and any other numbers that require multiple staff members to answer.

- Interoffice communication will be available Agency wide as well via chat. The new system provides a means of communication when staff are on the line or unable to take a phone call at the moment. The chat feature displays presence/availability for this method of communication.

- Staff who have never had a 4 digit extension can be assigned one which will make transferring of calls, voicemails, and messages possible.

- Phone masking will be configured making all calls via the soft-phones to appear as an Agency phone number no matter the device being used.

- The new system provides a much greater and in-depth review of call analytics. Custom reporting will be configured for routine review.

Procurement

The phone system, features, security, and service will be provided by RingCentral. The procurement channel for this system will leverage NASPO Government Contracts which include all 50 states. For the state of California and purposes of this procurement, NASPO has replaced MSC/WSCA pricing. The pricing for the new system is competitive with similar solutions and due to the fixed pricing, costs are reduced compared to private Business or Enterprise by over 33%.

The cost for the system is $23,153.76 per year. The agreement renews annually which does not obligate the Agency past 12 months. The pricing is locked in via the NASPO Contract for 60 months once the 1st agreement is in place.

Other factors for choosing the RingCentral system are the 99.999% available uptime in the Service Level Agreement, Quality of Service (QoS) end-to-end visibility which makes it possible to quickly troubleshoot and navigate call quality issues, and security. Voice messages and messaging are encrypted at rest, voice call traffic is encrypted as well ensuring the highest levels of privacy on calls.