



Community Health Center Association of Connecticut Finds Significant Value in the Process, Not Just in the Result

THE CHALLENGE

“It seemed like everything we talked about doing, HCREA already had a specific protocol developed through their years of experience. There was never a question about how to analyze anything. As non-real estate professionals, we had to recognize our own limitations. That’s why we invested in an expert to save us time and money in the end. HCREA eliminated any kind of heartache that goes with making the wrong decision because we trusted that they wouldn’t allow us to make the wrong decision.”

*Evelyn Barnum, J.D.
Chief Executive Officer
Community Health Center
Association of Connecticut*

The Community Health Center Association of Connecticut (CHCACT) is a not-for-profit service organization which supports the clinical and administrative operations of its member community health centers, which provide health care to the underserved and uninsured. CHCACT works closely with policy makers, elected officials and residents to help deliver high quality health services and programs available through Connecticut’s federally qualified community health centers. CHCACT has 13 member centers and many operate satellite offices in addition to their main locations. There are currently more than 80 different sites throughout the state which receive over a million medical, dental and social service visits each year by people from all over Connecticut. CHCACT provides training and other resources – including advocacy, program administration and technical assistance – to each center.

CHCACT had moved their administrative offices many times over the years and in 2011, was headquartered in Newington, CT. As the organization was only months away from the end of the latest in a series of five-year leases, the Board of Directors was conflicted about how to proceed. Decisions needed to be made on a number of issues concerning a move to 5,000 – 6,000 square feet of administrative office space including location, type of space, configuration needs and whether to buy or lease. One of the members of the Board had previously worked with HCREA in building a community health care center and brought the healthcare real estate professionals in to help.

THE SOLUTION

HCREA first implemented a strategy to develop site selection criteria. “HCREA helped us define our needs in a very methodical way. We learned it’s a lot different when you do this scientifically rather than simply creating a wish list,” says Evelyn A. Barnum, J.D., Chief Executive Officer of CHCACT. Criteria included determining a location that was convenient to the members of the Board, who are the directors of community health centers from all over the state, as well as not being too far from the state legislators in Hartford. CHCACT was also wrestling with buying versus leasing.

Having HCREA by our side made searching for space a much more structured and deliberate process,” Barnum says. “If you are not an architect or a real estate professional, you can waste a lot of time. Our staff time is valuable. I equated HCREA’s involvement as a dollar savings because it was time we were able to devote to our core book of business. I don’t want us off on another mission, detracting from member service.” Since CHCACT didn’t have that many unique needs, they were open to many space possibilities. “But that did not necessarily make our search any easier,” says Barnum. “We became more conscious of our needs when we had an expert asking specific questions on our behalf. We would not have been as comprehensive in our consideration if we didn’t have them there.

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With HCREA guiding them, the group considered six different spaces in several rounds of searching, including two buildings that CHCACT thought would be good options but that their expert advisors dismissed because zoning regulations and property lines would have prohibited future expansion. The team also helped CHCACT analyze the space they were currently occupying. Barnum says HCREA showed her staff how their current configuration was too chopped up for effective collaboration, a layout consideration they then added to the list of must-haves in a new space. “HCREA’s methodology was comprehensive and eye-opening. It was so valuable to have people that well informed on our side to make sure we were taking all the right factors into consideration,” Barnum says.

THE RESULTS

“It seemed like everything we talked about doing, HCREA already had a specific protocol developed through their years of experience. There was never a question about how to analyze anything,” Barnum says. “As non-real estate professionals, we had to recognize our own limitations. That’s why we invested in an expert to save us time and money in the end. HCREA eliminated any kind of heartache that goes with making the wrong decision because we trusted that they wouldn’t allow us to make the wrong decision.”

After nearly a year of HCREA’s consultancy, CHCACT’s decision was to lease temporary space while they focused their search on a property to buy. In December 2012 they moved into temporary space in Wethersfield, CT which meets all their current needs. “Getting to this point was such an accomplishment as we had to build consensus with our Board that we were going to buy,” she says. The HCREA team guided the Board through the entire process, identifying the key variables and providing the information they needed to make the right decision for their organization. “It was so valuable to have HCREA present their findings and facilitate the discussion as they were clearly the authority,” Barnum says. “We felt that the HCREA team really listened to our Board of Directors.

CHCACT used HCREA’s process to clarify a confused and complicated issue which resulted in consensus and a clear path for moving forward. “We now have both clarity on our objectives and clarity from our Board,” Barnum says. “There is significant value in that. The process itself is valuable.”