

## **Idaho Housing and Finance Association–Workforce Housing Tool Kit**

### **Entry Description: Special Achievement**

As the lead entity in Idaho for housing policy development and coordination among various housing stakeholders, Idaho Housing and Finance Association recognized a growing need to reach out to communities statewide and educate them about workforce housing and provide them with innovative and necessary tools and resources needed to address this important issue.

#### **Responding to an important statewide need:**

Idaho is unique in many ways, but four distinct factors drove the need to create a statewide specific workforce housing toolkit:

1. Limited government capacity. Idaho is among the nation’s most rural states, with a sparse population spread over a large land area. Most of our local governments lack the administrative and planning capacity to tackle complex development policies without technical support and guidance.
2. Record growth. Idaho has experienced remarkable growth and change since 2000. Speculative investment, local economic transitions, and limited regulation have resulted in an unprecedented housing cost gap for working families, along with enormous pressure on local infrastructure, services, and new workforce demands.
3. Recruitment and retention crisis. Many business owners, particularly in resort or destination communities, are struggling to find dependable or qualified workers due to widening housing cost gaps.
4. Limited state resources. Idaho lawmakers have not addressed funding of the state’s Affordable Housing Trust Fund.

In looking at these factors, IHFA identified an important opportunity to develop and create a workforce housing tool kit that would present a clear and concise description of workforce housing and the various tools, processes, and financing options that are available in developing workforce housing. The tool kit titled “*Workforce Housing in Idaho – Simple Steps for Stronger Communities,*” would become an invaluable resource about work force housing in Idaho that could be used by local government officials, business leaders, and developers who expressed concerns about the lack of workforce housing and who are seeking practical solutions and partnerships to meet their community’s housing needs.

Many of the strategies and tools outlined in the workforce housing tool kit have been identified as successful solutions for workforce housing in several Idaho communities where housing needs assessment studies have already been performed. The tool kit is specifically designed so that a community can select and tailor the tools that would best fit the needs of their community and offers them easy-to-follow process recommendations describing how they can best implement the various strategies and tools. In addition, the tool kit provides key resources and contact information for local partners who are available to assist communities through the process of implementing workforce housing strategies.

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**Components of the workforce housing tool kit:**

The main components of the workforce housing tool kit incorporate a variety of strategies and tools for cities, counties, and developers, including:

**Strategies and tools for cities and counties:**

- Identify/expand workforce housing sites
- Reevaluate and update zoning policies
- Implement local policies and ordinances
- Cultivate new resources
- Put financing tools to work
- Educate and invest in your community’s homeowners
- Protect existing housing stock and affordability
- Housing need assessments
- Process recommendations: how best to implement your strategies

**Strategies and tools for developers:**

- Project financing
- Workforce housing preservation
- Public property transfers and donations
- Private land donations
- Employer assistance and charitable donations
- Buyer financing and assistance programs
- Project development

**Achieving results:**

IHFA is using the tool kit as a catalyst to reach out to Idaho’s policymakers and housing stakeholders and educate them about the benefits of creating workforce housing in their communities and the positive impact this could have on their cities. The Association routinely communicates with local government officials, business leaders, and developers who express concerns about the lack of workforce housing and are seeking practical solutions and partnerships. The workforce housing tool kit is an additional resource tool that the association now has available to refer to during discussions with various housing stakeholders to help them ‘connect the dots’ between workforce housing and sustainable economic and community development, wealth creation, and communities that are safer and more resilient.

The association has distributed approximately 1,500 kits to local officials, community and business leaders, and housing stakeholders. In addition, the association has received numerous requests from stakeholders around the state and outside of the state who are interested in learning more about workforce housing and the strategies that IHFA has outlined in the tool kit. IHFA has also been asked to speak on several panels discussing its expertise in the area of workforce housing and provide tool kits as resource material to panel attendees.

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**Providing benefits that outweigh costs:**

The kit cost approximately \$17,000 to develop and produce. However, it is difficult to put a price tag on a vital resource and educational tool that provides help to communities who are looking for ways to address their workforce housing needs. The workforce housing tool kit offers communities' invaluable tools and resources to help them maximize their workforce housing efforts and ensure that families and individuals in their communities will have an affordable place to live.

IHFA's vision for the tool kit is to continue its important partnerships with communities and regions statewide to help them identify and address workforce housing needs and encourage housing stakeholders to implement the strategies outlined in the workforce housing tool kit. Working together we will strengthen and demonstrate our collective investment in our communities to help ensure that Idaho's workforce has an affordable place to call home. IHFA's workforce housing efforts will perpetually benefit Idaho's working families, communities, commerce, and industry statewide for years to come.