



Entry Form 2017 Annual Awards for Program Excellence

Entry Deadline: Thursday, June 15, 2017, Midnight ET

Each entry must include a completed entry form. Please complete a form for each entry your HFA is submitting. The completed entry form will become the first page of your entry.

This form is a fillable PDF. Type your information into the entry form and save it as a PDF. Please do not write on or scan the entry form. **Questions: Call 202-624-7710 or email awards@ncsha.org.**

Entry Title: Enter your entry's title exactly as you wish it to be published on the NCSHA website and in the awards program.

Category:

Subcategory:

Entry Summary: A 15-word (max) summary of the program, project, or practice you are entering.

HFA:

HFA Staff Contact:

Phone:

Email:

Visual Aids:

Are you mailing to NCSHA 10 copies of any visual aids that cannot be included in your entry PDF? Yes No

Payment:

My HFA is mailing a check to NCSHA.

My HFA is emailing the credit card authorization form to awards@ncsha.org.

Minnesota Housing

**Lender Search – Connecting more than 40,000 consumers to Minnesota Housing Lenders
Partners Homeownership - Empowering New Buyers**

Minnesota Housing relies on our statewide network of participating lender partners to deliver our mortgages programs. The new online tool was launched in April of 2016 and has already received more than 40,000 visits. These visits more effectively connected interested homebuyers with our expert lender partners, helping secure 4,063 home mortgage loans for a total of more than \$625 million in 2016.

Like other Housing Finance Agencies, in order to get a Minnesota Housing loan, a borrower must work through one of our participating lenders who are located throughout the state. Until a year ago, making this connection between potential homebuyers and lenders was a cumbersome task. Consumers would need to look through an alphabetical list of hundreds of lenders to find a lender to call on our website. Our Lender Search is a new tool that connects borrowers with lenders by a geographic or lender name search, which allows a fairer distribution of our lenders so borrowers aren't seeing the same names at the top of every list. This creates more opportunity for our lenders to appear in search results and get calls or emails from borrowers, and provides borrowers with an easy-to-use format.

Prior to building our Lender Search, we had our alphabetical lender lists (including our top producing loan officers) posted to our website in PDF documents and static tables, which were not user-friendly from either an internal design and maintenance aspect or an external usability aspect.

To provide a better experience for our borrowers that would allow them to search more than 1,000 records of lenders either by address or name, we developed a Lender Search engine for our website. We wanted borrowers to be able to see a more random order of lenders based on their specific search criteria and have a quicker and easier way to connect directly with the loan officer or lender, while still providing our top producers with a premier spot in the listing due to their experience with our programs. This creates a more balanced opportunity for loan officers to get calls about Minnesota Housing loans, both top producers and other loan officers who may be working to increase their book of business with us.

Innovative, Replicable Technology Approach

Minnesota Housing developed the Lender Search tool in-house, so we did not have the costs of using an outside vendor. While ultimately we envision a central database of our lender partners to feed this search engine, we were not ready as an organization to build this with a database supporting the back end, so it is reading data from a spreadsheet that program staff maintain. Our technology developer built a .NET application that works with Google Maps to search our data. By using this simplified approach, we were able to get the search engine ready to use much sooner than if we waited for other larger systems to be in place to support it.

Data Collection Effort

The project was not just a technology lift, but also a big effort to collect data. Our loan commitment system does not require our lenders to give us their branch location information, only main office, so the data we needed for the lender search was data that we didn't already collect. We conducted outreach with lenders through email and phone to request that they tell us all the branches that offer

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Minnesota Housing loans, and then a contact person at each branch to appear on the search. We needed to be sure that if we listed a branch on our search results, the borrower who was searching could call and talk to someone who would be knowledgeable about our programs. If we couldn't get contact information for a branch, it was removed from the lender search list.

Keeping data current is always a concern with a technology project, but because this is a consumer facing tool, lenders quickly became very good about telling us if their contact information changed. Their leads and business depend on borrowers finding and calling them and we were now a significant resource for them.

Beta Launch for Customer Feedback

Prior to launching on the website, we hosted a beta launch with our lender partners before the tool was launched publicly so they could preview the tool and validate and/or update their contact information. This was a great opportunity for them to give feedback, which strengthened our relationship with them. After this beta launch, we brought in consumer usability testers, which prompted us to make consumer friendly changes for both borrowers and lenders so that both would be satisfied with how the new tool functioned. After the initial launch, we received very positive feedback. Only a few lenders expressed that they were not happy with the new Lender Search, primarily those who often appeared at the top of the static lists because their names were higher on the alphabet. However, they did acknowledge this new system was fairer to other lenders and it did not appear to hurt their production. One of our goals was to feature lenders who weren't at the top of the static list more frequently so that their production could have a chance to increase. Several lender partners have reported receiving more calls than they did with our static lists.

Improved Customer Service

Another benefit is that we are now able to provide users with the option to call or email the branch, whereas before we did not have email addresses for branch listings. Many consumers prefer sending an email rather than calling, so this offers both options to meet more consumers' needs. Lenders appreciate this because they can often relay more information through an email response and do not have to play phone tag.

The tool has been very useful for internal Help Desk staff that assist callers looking for a Minnesota Housing lender. Previously, the Help Desk would have to take the time to load the PDF, ask the caller about cities they were interested in finding a lender, and then read back, sometimes, dozens of lender names and phone numbers to the caller. With the new lender search, we are seeing much more refined search results that can be targeted both geographically and by company, and the information is easier to relay to callers. We are also much more confident that the data is correct. In the past, the PDF was only updated every 3-6 months which could result in inaccurate referrals for callers. We are also finding an increase in lenders and loan officers contacting Minnesota Housing when they notice inaccurate information or have updates to report, resulting in more accurate listings.

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Enhanced Demand for Top Producing Loan Officer Program and More Engaged Lenders

An unintended benefit we've seen is that we have seen an increase in lenders noticing and inquiring about our Top Producing Loan Officer program and how to become one. This allows them to receive a special designation on their search listing, in addition to being at the top of the results.

When comparing our top producers after we launched the search, we had:

- 27 new loan officers on the list for the first time or designated as such in a new region
- Increase in percentage of loan officers from Greater Minnesota gaining Top Producer designation (from 39% to 45%)
- Decrease in the amount of loans that were "unclaimed" (ie no loans officer specified) (from 11% down to only 8% unclaimed)

We also had four major lenders work with our Business Development Representatives to learn how to get their loan officers set up in the system who were previously not interested in the 'extra steps' it would take. They are now claiming more of their loans and we expect to see some new top producers this year. We've also seen a resurgence of loan officers with some of our larger lenders like Wells Fargo and US Bank who weren't producing much with us in recent years, but who now contact us to update their information.

Measuring Success

In the past, with our lender lists on our website, we were able to see how many page views we had for the "Find A Lender" page, but we couldn't see more than that. With the dynamic tool, we now have great analytics so we can see how many times the search has been used for a geographic/radius search, and how many times people searched by name of lender. Since it launched, we have had more than 40,000 searches, and this does not include the searches done by our own staff.

Achieving Objectives

One year after launching our Lender Search, we conducted an evaluation of the tool to see what is working and gather feedback from customers on what can improve. We did usability testing with consumers and learned that they find the tool very easy to use and all testers found enough results they would be comfortable calling or emailing to ask about a Minnesota Housing loan, which is the ultimate goal.

By all accounts, the new tool has been a great success. It has integrated well with our digital advertising strategy and has driven a tremendous amount of traffic to our lenders, increasing customer service, engagement and production.

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Attachment A: Lender Search Tool – Offering intuitive options for consumers who can search by location or by name and can also make choices about what they want to do (buy, refinance or improve).

Lenders: Update your contact information

Search

☒ **By Location**

Lenders within of:

Enter an address, city and state, or zip.

☐ **By Name**

Find a lender or loan officer containing:

☒ **Buy my first home**
☐ **Buy a new home (not my first)**
☐ **Refinance**
☐ **Make home improvements**
☐ **All**

Search

Find a Lender

Minnesota Housing works with a statewide network of lenders to provide homeownership and home improvement loans. Top Producing Loan Officers are experts in our mortgage loan programs.

See All Top
Producers

See All Lenders

Search

☒ **By Location**

Lenders within of:

Enter an address, city and state, or zip.

☐ **By Name**

Find a lender or loan officer containing:




☒ **Buy my first home**
☐ **Buy a new home (not my first)**
☐ **Refinance**
☐ **Make home improvements**
☐ **All**

Search

Reset Search




Search Results

78 Lenders Display Rows Sort by Distance

Lender	Contact	Services
 Rachel Streiff Fairway Independent Mortgage Corporation NMLS #1022891 Platinum Level Top Producing Lender	952.808.0042 TeamRachel@fairwaymc.com 13401 County Road 5 Burnsville, MN 55337 9.0 miles Map it	Buy First Home Buy New Home Refinance
 Darcy McDonald MidCountry Mortgage NMLS #209020 Platinum Level Top Producing Lender	952.997.5619 darcy.mcdonald@midcountrymortgage.com 14994 Glazier Ave Apple Valley, MN 55124 6.3 miles Map it	Buy First Home Buy New Home Refinance Home Improvement Loans
 Paul Houdek Marketplace Home Mortgage NMLS #485457 Gold Level Top Producing Lender	651.775.7105 phoudek@marketplacehome.com 14300 Nicollet Court, Ste 300 Burnsville, MN 55306 8.4 miles	Buy First Home Buy New Home Refinance

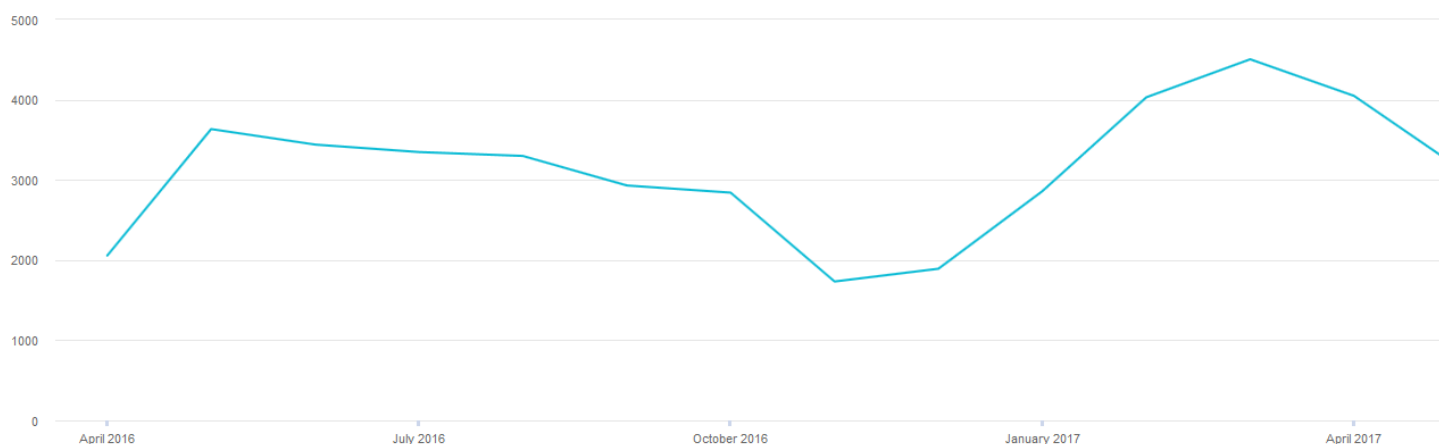
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Lender	Contact	Services
 Brad Vold Lake Area Mortgage NMLS #881628 Silver Level Top Producing Lender	651.209.2900 bvold@lakeareamtg.com 1030 West County Road E, Suite 200 Shoreview, MN 55126 Map it	Buy First Home Buy New Home Refinance
 Lake Region Bank NMLS #522440 Gold Level Top Producing Lender	320.235.5900 reddept@lakeregion.com 1690 S 1st St Willmar, MN 56201 Map it	Home Improvement Loans
 United Community Bank NMLS #421829 Gold Level Top Producing Lender	218.334.5501 tessaf@ucbankmn.com 122 West Main Frazee, MN 56544 Map it	Home Improvement Loans

Attachment B: Measuring success

This graph shows number of hits the web page that hosts the lender search received in the last year. There were nearly 32,000 visits to the search tool through the “search by location” option and more than 9,000 visits in which consumers searched for a lender by name.



Category	Action	Label	Events % of total	Visits with events
Find a Lender	Submit	Search By Location	31,976 73.0 %	17,983
Find a Lender	Submit	Search By Name	9,088 20.8 %	4,192