

**Communications – Annual Report**  
**MassHousing 2011 Annual Report: *Celebrating a Milestone, Saving Money***

MassHousing's 2011 Annual Report had a number of ambitious goals: to celebrate the Agency's 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary; to highlight a very strong lending year (the second-best ever); to highlight the people MassHousing serves and the partners it works with; to convey statistics and accomplishments in a visually appealing way; to produce the report cost-effectively and in-house; and finally, to publish the report electronically, in addition to a print version.

**The 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary**

In order to convey the passage of time and to mark the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary, a unique, eye-catching cover was created that is comprised of the covers of the Agency's 44 previous annual reports. This allowed MassHousing to efficiently convey the passage of time and the Agency's longevity without the need for elaborate timelines or archival photography. The cover has an emotional component to it – a vintage feel – like a favorite college shirt that you are even more proud to have 30 or even 40 years later. The messages from the Governor and Lieutenant Governor and the Chairman and Executive Director talk about the history of the Agency and the sizeable impact it has had over four-and-a-half-decades, without dwelling on the topic excessively.

**Highlighting a strong lending year**

The Agency Highlights and the congratulatory note from the Governor and Lt. Governor communicate the very strong lending year. A greater impact is felt through the use of bold, red and white graphics on pages 8, 9, 12 and 13 that give the reader the important information about how many loans were made and the impact of that lending. In previous years, such information had been presented in bullet points, but the bold graphics and fonts and large numbers are far more compelling.

**Highlighting customers and partners**

MassHousing finances housing, but it is the people who live in the housing who are the real story. Similarly, MassHousing's business partners are real people with compelling stories of their own. A successful report must illustrate the human side of the business. For instance, MassHousing's 2011 report presents compelling portraits of:

- Karen Jenkins, a first-time homebuyer who teaches art to prisoners in jail
- A non-profit organization made up of clergy from different religions
- A tenacious and diverse tenant group that spearheaded a rehabilitation of their apartment community which turned into the largest "green energy retrofit" in the country

The report is also careful to show construction work in action, an important visual message in an age where too many are still out of work.

Even the photos of the Agency's Board members are designed to convey intention and deliberation. The members were photographed at a Board meeting as opposed to individual head-and-shoulder shots or a static image of the group.

### **Conveying information in new and fresh ways**

An annual report must provide raw data and information, but there are no rules that require that it be dull. Inspired by the growing use of "infographics" in the design world, MassHousing presents the utilitarian numbers in a bold fashion, with chunky, blocky fonts; oversized numbers; red geometric shapes on a white field along with a smattering of flow charts and pie graphs that show the dynamic, interactive nature of the Agency's business. In today's electronic, graphic-intensive world, it was decided to engage fully in the battle for the readers limited attention span. The old bullet points were banished in favor of something far more stimulating.

### **Producing the report in a cost-effective way**

The report was written and designed in-house by MassHousing's own Corporate Communications staff. Wherever possible, photos were used that had been taken by staff, and supplemented where necessary with a professional photographer. The report's size, smaller than a traditional report, was meant to convey a sense of frugality and, more practically, to keep printing costs low.

### **Publishing the report electronically, as well as in print**

MassHousing still believes that an annual report is worthy of being printed. It is often the only record that withstands the test of time and does not get shipped to the archives. With the explosion of electronic media, there is also the likelihood that an online report will be viewed and forgotten almost immediately. Nonetheless, MassHousing believes that an electronic version of the report can reach additional readers, especially those whose attention spans are very limited. The Agency therefore published the report using a free online publishing tool called "Youblisher." This tool allows the reader to view the book on a screen as it would look lying on a desk, and to click the pages to turn them. The free software provides a very satisfying page-turning sound effect. The report can be viewed here: <http://www.youblisher.com/p/272395-MassHousing-s-2011-Annual-Report/>

An online survey sampling annual report readers revealed that 63% of respondents read the printed version and an additional 12% read both the printed and online versions. This supports going the extra mile to create a printed report.

### ***Innovation***

The report's "cover of covers" which illustrates 45 years of Agency history is unique, as are the bold infographics used to convey utilitarian data.

***Replicability***

The report was created using traditional methods accessible to any HFA: in-house writers and researchers, staff photographers, professional photographers and Quark™ graphic design software. The “Youblisher” software is available at no cost.

***Reaching targeted audiences***

The printed report was mailed to stakeholders, business partners and government officials. One hundred percent of the recipients have some connection to the Agency. Links to the electronic version were sent directly to other stakeholders via Twitter, FaceBook, LinkedIn and the monthly newsletter. In all instances recipients have elected to receive Agency communications by following on Twitter, liking MassHousing on FaceBook, joining the LinkedIn network or subscribing to the Agency’s newsletter.

***Measurable results***

The report was mailed to 1,100 recipients. Additionally, the report was viewed online 93 times via the link provided on Twitter and Facebook, and another 142 viewers clicked the link in MassHousing’s monthly electronic newsletter.

***Benefits that outweigh costs***

The report provides an opportunity to mark a significant milestone and to communicate important information about performance. The total cost for printing, mailing and photography for 2,500 reports was \$6,684, or just \$2.67 per book. The importance of communicating the strength of the Agency and its success in completing its mission far outweighs the modest costs.

***Effective use of resources***

The writing and design were completed in-house by existing staff. No writing, editing or design consultants were required. Wherever possible, existing photography was used, along with photos taken by staff, thus alleviating the need for extensive use of a professional photographer. The small size of the book and the relatively small number of pages helped keep printing costs low.

***Achieve strategic objectives***

All objectives were met: Commemorating the 45<sup>th</sup> year of Agency operations, highlighting a very strong lending year, profiling consumers and partners, conveying information in new and interesting ways through eye-catching visuals, keeping costs down and publishing both a print and electronic version of the report.