

NCSHA 2015 Annual Awards Entry Form

(Complete one form for each entry)

Deadline: Wednesday, June 10, 2015

Visit ncsha.org/awards to view the Annual Awards Call for Entries.

Instructions: Type entry information into the form and save it as a PDF. Do not write on or scan the form. If you have any questions contact Matt Cunningham at mcunningham@ncsha.org or 202-624-5424.

Fill out the entry name *exactly* as you want it listed in the program.

Entry Name: _____

HFA: _____

Submission Contact: (Must be HFA Staff Member) _____ **Email:** _____

Please provide a 15-word (maximum) description of your nomination to appear on the NCSHA website.

Use this header on the upper right corner of each page:

HFA: _____

Entry Name: _____

Select the appropriate subcategory of your entry and indicate if you are providing visual aids.

| Communications | Homeownership | Legislative Advocacy | Management Innovation |
|---------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Annual Report | Empowering New Buyers | Federal Advocacy | Financial |
| Creative Media | Encouraging New Production | State Advocacy | Human Resources |
| Promotional Materials and Newsletters | Home Improvement and Rehabilitation | | Operations |
| | | | Technology |
| Rental Housing | Special Needs Housing | Special Achievement | Are you providing visual aids? |
| Encouraging New Production | Combating Homelessness | Special Achievement | Yes |
| Multifamily Management | Housing for Persons with Special Needs | | No |
| Preservation and Rehabilitation | | | |

MassHousing
Rental Housing – Multifamily Management
The Listening Tour – “Connecting with our Partners”

Background

In August 2012, the Asset Management Department (AMD) at MassHousing was in a state of flux. It consisted of three sub-groups, representing different parts of the Agency’s rental housing portfolio, which did not have a uniform set of policies and procedures. Over time, MassHousing heard from its business partners – owners and management companies – about these inconsistencies and what was considered to be a lack of attention paid to the needs of these partners. The Asset Management Department was concerned that there was a perception among some that the Department was inefficient and inconsistent. In considering this problem, it became clear that there was also a communication crisis between Asset Management Staff and the Agency’s external partners. Both seemed to be doing a great deal of talking – but the talking didn’t amount to real interactive communication. It was clear that some changes were needed and it had to start at the most basic level – with MassHousing not just hearing the concerns raised by its partners – but actually listening to them.

Thus was born the idea for a portfolio wide, “Listening Tour”. In order to develop this idea and ensure that it had achievable goals – the Asset Management Department formed an Advisory Committee and invited members of six property management company executives to participate. The Advisory Committee was presented with the idea of a “Listening Tour” and asked to help determine how best to approach site and regional managers during this tour so that they would feel encouraged to provide the Agency with candid and honest feedback. The Advisory Committee helped MassHousing to formulate its approach, to craft an agenda, and to define the audience. The Advisory Committee also encouraged MassHousing to find a way to be open to taking in the feedback from the site and regional staff about what it was like to work with MassHousing’s Asset Management Department.

In this way, the overall goal of the “Listening Tours” was to obtain feedback from MassHousing’s business partners on the effectiveness of the policies, procedures and work practices of MassHousing’s Asset Management Department with a willingness to listen to all of the feedback that was offered – what staff called “the good, the bad, and the ugly.”

The more specific goals were:

- to learn what is working, what is not working, and what can be improved upon from the perspective of the site managers and regional managers who have direct contact with the Agency’s asset managers on a regular basis;
- to host the “Listening Tours” in five different regions of the Commonwealth rather than asking the participants to travel into MassHousing’s offices in downtown Boston as had often been the case with meetings in the past;
- to reflect on and internalize the comments MassHousing received at each “Listening Tour” and synthesize them into some overarching themes;
- to report back to MassHousing’s partners about what the Agency heard them saying and in turn to identify the specific actions the Agency has taken and will take in order to address the concerns and comments that were offered;
- to find ways to reduce the burden on management agents and owners by streamlining the way MassHousing does its business.

MassHousing determined that key to demonstrating that the Agency was truly "listening" to the issues raised by its partners – was to go back out for a second round of meetings before too much time had passed.

Listening Tours Provide Valuable Feedback

For the inaugural "Listening Tours" held in November and December 2013, more than 85 representatives from 29 management companies attended one of the five regional "Listening Tours". Several of the same themes came up at each location:

- Property and regional managers reported that they hoped that their relationship with MassHousing could evolve into more of a partnership, which they believed would help all parties involved do their jobs better.
- Participants felt encouraged by MassHousing's willingness to host its "Listening Tours" out in the field and to meet with them to solicit their thoughts and opinions. They reported that they had not had the experience in the past of MassHousing asking for their opinion in key issues.
- Attendees were pleased to hear that an internal training program for staff at MassHousing would be developed to help with issues of consistency in implementing policies and procedures across the portfolio.
- Rental partners welcomed the opportunity to receive training from MassHousing on all of the major policies and procedures to help them understand where to focus their attention.
- All of the participants expressed an interest in future "Listening Tours" or regional meetings hosted by Asset Management staff to keep the lines of open with MassHousing.

Asset Management Department - Action Steps

As a result of the first round of "Listening Tours", the Asset Management Department created 26 internal initiatives to effectuate change and improvement in its customer service. The following is a list of those that are completed or in process at the present time:

- MassHousing contracted with a third party to conduct a survey of Management Companies following the "Listening Tours" to ensure that the Agency received the most honest feedback possible. By allowing a third party to conduct the survey – and providing for anonymity in a company's response – the Agency felt that its business partners would feel most comfortable being completely honest.
- The Agency has designed and tested an abbreviated Asset Management Review (AMR) that will save time for property managers and owners and responds very specifically to complaints raised by the Agency's business partners with respect to its annual review of properties.
- MassHousing has created a new Audit Review Process that focuses on reconciliation of debt service and escrows and other line items germane to the property's operations.
- The Agency has completely reorganized the Asset Management Department to be more efficient by making sure the right staff is placed in the right group.

- MassHousing has committed to a review of all of the Agency's internal policies and procedures that affect decisions made to ensure that they are consistent and necessary and that staff be trained for consistency in decision making across the portfolio.
- MassHousing will also begin working in July 2014 on an internal staff training program relative to the Agency's policies, procedures, and processes with specific training included on asset management skills in an effort to increase the broader skill set for all Asset Management staff.

Listening Tours – Rounds Two and Three

On June 11, 2014, MassHousing completed its second round of "Listening Tours" and reviewed the main themes that were drawn from the first round of "Listening Tours". The action steps established by the Asset Management Department were also discussed to demonstrate that the Agency had truly listened to them and that the Agency is working on improvements across the board in all of its processes.

During the second part of these "Listening Tours" MassHousing provided a demonstration of the new Abbreviated AMR which was well received with much positive feedback for the improved process and document. Kevin Bynoe, Regional Manager of United Housing Management of Boston said, "I applaud MassHousing on the recent implementation of the "Listening Tour". The "Listening Tour" is an open exchange of ideas which provides business entities with two way communication on the present services offered as well as the opportunity to provide direct feedback regarding programs and services which are planned for the future." Kristin Pine, with Peabody Properties said, "My questions were addressed in a very honest and professional manner with much clarification. Walking out of the "Listening Tour" I felt that MassHousing is looking to partner with management companies to help better our affordable housing communities."

Beginning in April of 2015, the third round of "Listening Tours" began. The goal remains the same – to really hear the comments and concerns of site staff and respond to them. Having the "Listening Tour" for a third round has been useful because it really demonstrates to management companies that MassHousing is interested in keeping a dialogue with them open in a consistent and predictable way.

Interestingly, the "Listening Tour" also had an impact within MassHousing. There were other staff within the Rental Management Division who were inspired by the Listening Tours and have since created their own feedback loop. Subsidy Administration now offers "Subsidy Roundtables" to management companies if requested and staff in that department also meets with senior staff of the management company one on one. The Asset Management Department was encouraged that the model it has established is one that can be replicated in many different ways and that other staff are seeing its effectiveness in building partnerships.

Given its tremendous success, this is not the end of the "Listening Tours". One of the most important lessons learned by this effort is that above all else – MassHousing must continue to keep its lines of communication open with the Agency's business partners. This will most certainly include "Listening Tours" in the field twice during the year. MassHousing believes its new asset management tag line says it well: *"In Rental Management, our asset is YOU!"*