

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			

In the media, at the Capitol and in communities across the state, housing was a hot topic in Minnesota in 2014. Minnesota Housing was a major part of those conversations throughout the year, supporting more than \$750 million in housing investments, growing our lender relationships alongside the housing market growth, and obtaining a record \$100 million investment from the Governor and legislature.

When we thought about the reasons for such a record breaking year, three words came to mind: **Innovation, collaboration and impact**. As housing needs change and grow, we are staying innovative and flexible, updating our products and processes to best serve our customers. We work side by side with partners to ensure our resources are delivered efficiently and effectively. And because of this level of innovation and collaboration with great partners, we positively impacted 59,129 households in 2014.

Innovation, collaboration and impact are simple words that tell the story of a remarkable year, and are woven throughout the numbers and narratives in our 2014 annual report.

Our Audiences

As housing becomes a more prominent issue statewide, it is even more crucial for us to make our messages clear and concise. The annual report is a great place to start, as it's one of the first pieces we use to introduce the **public and potential partners** to the important work we do. From the basics of our mission and priorities to a deeper dive into our yearly outcomes, the report provides easily digestible information that is visually appealing but still substantive. For example, our Multifamily team attends many events and conferences each year. When they meet a developer who has never worked with us before, the annual report is often the first piece they hand out. That developer can get a sense of who we are and what we do, and even see success stories that feature his or her peers. After that, our staff can easily transition to more in-depth information with additional collateral, including our guide of program offerings.

Our policy team also uses the annual report regularly with **legislators and other government officials**. It provides both the success stories that politicians like to share with their constituents, as well as the important data and outcomes from the year that show our results. Our team consistently goes back to certain tables and graphs in the program assessment because of how they visually demonstrate the need for affordable housing and our impact, and the way that they resonate with legislators.

Finally, the content in the annual report is perfect for repurposing for **media requests and social media posts**. Having high quality success stories and data on hand makes answering press inquiries simpler and keeps us on message. A photo, quote or snippet of information makes for a quick and robust social media post. This year, we pulled a piece from nearly every success story in our report and used them on social media, then referred visitors back to the full report for more detail.

Our Goals

We set three main goals as we developed our 2014 annual report:

1. Be clear and concise.
2. Share our impact.

3. Showcase the full housing continuum.

Be clear and concise. Based on a statewide initiative by our Governor, we have taken on the task over the past year of using plain language in all external communications. Our staff are trained and beginning to implement these techniques in everything from emails to program manuals. It's been exciting to see people transition from fearful of the change to plain language champions, and to see our customer service improving every day.

For the annual report – our largest external communications piece of the year – we considered our audience personas (everyone from government officials to nonprofit employees to first-time homebuyers) and their level of knowledge about our work. Understanding our audiences and their busy schedules, we also analyzed what is “nice to know” information versus what is “need to know.”

We didn't dumb down our content to make it fit our plain language initiative. Instead, we took a thoughtful look at how to respect our readers' time by using these tactics:

- Cutting jargon and government speak
- Keeping sentences to one or two thoughts
- Using formatting to highlight important thoughts
- Using headlines to summarize content
- Using personal pronouns and active voice
- Using graphics, lists and tables as appropriate

The outcome was an easy to digest, straightforward report with a more personal tone - that doesn't take hours to read.

Share our impact. In planning the layout and structure of the annual report, we wanted to provide a balance of qualitative and quantitative outcomes. If you're just looking at the report at a glance, we highlighted numbers and quotes that quickly and easily tell a story of impact and success. The “By the Numbers” spread hits on the big picture stats for the year, including households served, dollars spent, etc. The multifamily and single family housing spreads also provide higher level data in an easy to digest format.

If you want to spend more time with the report, the program assessment showcases detailed data and the stories give a fuller picture of how investments in affordable housing affect real people and communities. No matter how long our reader is looking at our annual report, we want them to understand both the quantity and quality of our affordable housing investments and how it impacts people around the state.

Showcase the full housing continuum. Over the past year, we've spent a lot of time talking about the housing continuum – the idea that affordable housing spans a wide range of people, needs and properties. We wanted to showcase that range through the stories of people and places that evoke each type of housing opportunity.

On the multifamily housing side, it was important to show that rental housing is not one size fits all. We have financing opportunities available for everything from those who need supportive services to stay housed and stable, to families in areas of economic growth that need workforce housing.

For single family, we highlighted community development, homeownership and home improvement programs. Our community development program serves low- and moderate-income homebuyers, but also notes that community collaboration is key to making that program possible. Homeownership and home improvement programs also serve a variety of income levels and types of families. We wanted to make the stories relatable to all readers, helping them see themselves or someone they know in the range of people we serve.

Our Use of Resources and Partnerships

We often try to get “twofer” out of our marketing pieces and use them across multiple platforms and audiences. Our 2014 annual report is even more than a “twofer.” We used it to guide our storytelling and branding and we reused imagery and stories in multiple venues throughout the year, giving us a lot of bang for our buck. To keep the publication even more cost effective, we also didn’t mail out copies and offered it online as a PDF and interactive publication to reduce the number of printed copies. Even the plain language initiative helped our cost effectiveness, as the pared down language kept our page count low!

Additionally, we used internal staff for this project from start to finish. It’s a great example of collaboration across many departments and areas of expertise, from research (providing the data and program assessment) to communications (interviews, writing and design) to business divisions (providing contacts, stories and outcomes). Each team brought a unique take on our work and our audiences, and that combination created a strong final product.

Our Results

Innovation. Collaboration. Impact. has been much more than just an annual report. It has truly driven our collateral and led us to refine our messaging and style. Throughout the year, we distribute the report to stakeholders, partners and government leaders at events around the state and through our website. It’s been an easy-to-use resource that provides everything from quick talking points for prospective partners to in-depth outcomes for data-driven stakeholders. It allows us to explain our history of strong outcomes for Minnesotans through a combination of qualitative and quantitative storytelling.



INNOVATION. COLLABORATION. IMPACT.

**2014 Minnesota Housing
Annual Report and Program Assessment**

Visual Aid to Follow

