

**2014 Entry Form**  
(Complete one for each entry.)

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

Entry Name \_\_\_\_\_

HFA \_\_\_\_\_

Submission Contact \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Qualified Entries must be received by **Tuesday, July 1, 2014.**

For more information about Qualified Entries, [click here to access the 2014 Entry Rules.](#)

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

HFA \_\_\_\_\_

Entry Name \_\_\_\_\_

Communications	Homeownership	Rental Housing	Special Needs Housing
<input type="checkbox"/> Annual Report <input type="checkbox"/> Promotional Materials and Newsletters <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Creative Media</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Empowering New Buyers <input type="checkbox"/> Home Improvement and Rehabilitation <input type="checkbox"/> Encouraging New Production	<input type="checkbox"/> Multifamily Management <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation and Rehabilitation <input type="checkbox"/> Encouraging New Production	<input type="checkbox"/> Combating Homelessness <input type="checkbox"/> Housing for Persons with Special Needs
Legislative Advocacy	Management Innovation	Special Achievement	Are you providing visual aids?
<input type="checkbox"/> State Advocacy <input type="checkbox"/> Federal Advocacy	<input type="checkbox"/> Financial <input type="checkbox"/> Human Resources <input type="checkbox"/> Operations <input type="checkbox"/> Technology	<input type="checkbox"/> Special Achievement	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>YES</b> <input type="checkbox"/> NO

The mission statement of the New York City Housing Development Corporation (HDC) is to seek to increase the supply of multi-family housing, stimulate economic growth and revitalize neighborhoods by financing the creation and preservation of affordable housing for low, moderate and middle income New Yorkers. HDC plays a major role in providing the initial financing for these affordable housing units, but the ongoing viability of each development depends on a stable base of tenants.

Even in New York City where the demand for affordable housing is large, a common concern among Developers and Managing Agents is that they will not be able to find enough of a viable pool of applicants from their initial advertising to fill their buildings. Without enough applicants the rent-up process can be delayed and cause financial harm to a new development. Common concerns among potential applicants include confusion about how to get an application, where to send their application once it is completed, and how they can find out about other new housing opportunities in general.

On July 31, 2013, the Housing Connect website was launched. NYC Housing Connect is an online housing portal ([www.nyc.gov/housingconnect](http://www.nyc.gov/housingconnect)) where new developments are advertised and where registered users are able to submit their housing application with just the click of a mouse. The Housing Connect system is able to produce a randomized log of all applicants to a particular development. The Housing Connect system alleviates the concerns of both Developers/Managing Agents and of applicants. The Housing Connect system utilizes the internet to advertise new life-changing opportunities to the widest possible audience and is able to reach more viable applicants that meet the requirements for these housing programs. It has revolutionized the application process and has had outstanding results.

## **BACKGROUND**

Prior to launch of the Housing Connect system, the application and lottery process was antiquated. When a new development was ready to advertise, advertisements would be placed in the media. To obtain an application, a potential applicant would have to contact the managing agent by mail. The agent would then send a blank application to the interested party. Some developers would also set up basic project-specific websites. If the development had a website, the applicant could download and print the application. All applications were completed by hand and mailed to a Post Office Box setup by the agent to receive all of the applications. After the application period expired, the agent and a representative of HDC would go to the post office and retrieve the applications. The applications were then brought back to the agent’s office. If they did not have the space in their office, a place where the lottery could be held had to be rented. The applications were then mixed together and opened at random (hence the term “lottery”) until all applications were entered by hand into a logsheet. This process often took multiple days. In between days, the unopened applications were stored in a locked box (to which HDC controlled the key) to prevent possible tampering. Extra temporary staff may have been used to handle large responses. After all applications were entered by hand, many agents would later re-enter this same information into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet so that they could better process the received applications. Once complete, the agent would then begin contacting applicants to schedule interviews for those who appeared to be eligible based on their applications.

## **HOUSING CONNECT SYSTEM**

The Housing Connect system has brought the application and lottery process into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is faster, more secure, and more efficient than the previous application and lottery process. It has streamlined a process that can be confusing and intimidating for applicants and time-consuming for developers and managing agents. HDC worked alongside the New York City Department of Housing Preservation & Development (HPD) in the construction of the Housing Connect system, with technical

support and ongoing server maintenance by The New York City Department of Internet Technology & Telecommunications (DOITT). By leveraging the internal expertise of these agencies' existing staff (with some budgeted consulting fees at start-up), costs were contained and managed within agency budget constraints. With continuing DOITT support, both HDC and HPD use the system to advertise new developments, to securely store the names and information of those who apply, and to efficiently monitor the rent-up of new housing developments.

When the user enters the Housing Connect website, a pop-up appears that informs new users where to click to set-up an account and informs returning users of how they can log in. New users can fill out a household profile that will be used to complete an application. While completing their profile, users will be prompted if they do not fill out the required sections and are reminded that all household information should be listed. This information is stored in the Housing Connect database. If any of this information changes, the user can update their household information. Users can also search current affordable housing opportunities to look for developments that they may be interested in applying to. If a user wants to apply, they click the APPLY button next to the project they are interested in and their application is logged. Users can use the same household information to apply to multiple developments at the same time. They do not need to complete a different application for each development. A first-time user can go from registration to submitting an application in mere minutes. Returning registered users can apply even quicker, provided that their profile information has not changed.

When a new development is ready to advertise, the advertisement is uploaded to the Housing Connect website. An email blast is sent to all registered users notifying them of this new housing opportunity. If interested, registered users only need to log in and click apply. Developments are still advertised in the media and paper applications are still available. These paper applications are mailed to a Post Office box and are combined with the online applications under HDC supervision prior to the generation of the randomized log. Once the log is generated, it is sent to the managing agent in Excel format so they can begin to process the applicants. Paper applications are still accepted because some applicants may not have access to a computer or they might not be comfortable submitting an application online. As detailed later in this report, the overwhelming majority of applications received since the inception of Housing Connect have been submitted online. Due to the low number of paper applications, agents can complete the paper entry in much less time than for previous paper lotteries.

In their profile, users are asked to specify how they would like to be contacted (via mail or via e-mail) by the agent in the future. By choosing their preferred method, communication between the applicant and managing agent has greatly improved.

The Housing Connect system is replicable and can be adapted to fit the needs of other agencies. Profiles and application data are stored on secure servers. Knowledge of website editing, Excel and internet code language is essentially all that is needed.

## **RESULTS**

The goals for the Housing Connect system were to provide a centralized location where interested applicants could find a list of HDC and HPD developments; to increase the pool of potential tenants for Developers and Managing Agents; and to simplify and modernize the application process for applicants while still ensuring (and in fact increasing) the continued integrity and security of the process. The Housing Connect system has succeeded in achieving these goals beyond our wildest expectations. The impact this system has had on the number of applications received is unprecedented. More applicants are aware of the affordable housing opportunities across New York City and are applying in

record numbers. This compliments the goals of affirmatively furthering fair housing by ensuring that the internet's vast outreach (including to those who may have been less likely to know about and apply for any given project) is utilized to promote all our affordable housing programs to all who are in need.

The Housing Connect system provides benefits that outweigh the costs and demonstrates an effective use of resources. The computer randomization of applications has contributed to increased confidence on the part of applicants that their place on the log is truly impartial. The ability of applicants to view their log numbers for each project that they have applied to allows them to more accurately assess whether they will be called in for an interview. The built-in security features of the website ensure that personal information is not jeopardized. There is less opportunity for possible application tampering.

Lastly, the ability of the public to apply for affordable housing online has greatly increased the pool of applicants to these developments, as detailed below. Based on those who register and apply, the population of New York City can be better served. From this information, we can extract household data (size, income) which will better inform us of the type of affordable housing needed and what models of new construction to finance in the future.

#### **Housing Connect Statistics:**

- 278,779 – The number of people who have registered to use the Housing Connect system to date.
- 1.5 million - The number of times the Housing Connect website has been visited in the first six months of 2014.

#### **Impact on HDC Housing Lotteries:**

- 2013 – 3 of HDC's 13 new construction projects were advertised using Housing Connect.
  - Prior to Housing Connect: For the 10 projects that predated Housing Connect, 73,622 applications were received. This is an average of 7,362 applications per project.
  - Housing Connect: For the 3 projects that used Housing Connect, 95,927 applications were received. This is an average of 31,976 applications per project.
- 2014 – Housing Connect used for all projects advertised by HDC. Four lotteries have been completed to date with 153,979 total applications received for an average of 38,495 applications per project.
- Since inception, the seven completed HDC lotteries that used the Housing Connect system have received 249,906 applications for an average of 35,701 per project. Of the 249,906 applications, 239,264 (95.7%) were received online. Only 10,642 paper applications (4.3%) were received by mail.
- The highest number of applications received using the Housing Connect system for a completed HDC lottery is 42,909. There is a new development currently in-progress that has already received over 50,000 applications for only 105 advertised units; which will make it the largest response in HDC history. For comparison, the highest number of applications received for an HDC development prior to Housing Connect was 16,263 applications.
- The lowest number of applications received for an HDC development that used the Housing Connect system was 26,753. This demonstrates that even the lowest response to a project using Housing Connect far exceeds the greatest response to any project that predated the system.

[www.nyc.gov/housingconnect.com](http://www.nyc.gov/housingconnect.com)

The screenshot displays the NYC Housing Connect website interface. At the top left is the logo for NYC Housing Connect, featuring a blue house icon and the text "NYC HOUSING CONNECT" with the tagline "Find and apply for affordable housing". To the right of the logo, the text "Welcome, Guest" and a "Sign In" link are visible. Below this, there are navigation links for "SEARCH", "ABOUT", and "FAQ".

The main content area is split into two sections. On the left, there is a large image of a multi-story brick and tan apartment building, identified as Crossroad Plaza III. Below the image, the text reads "CROSSROAD PLAZA III 535 UNION AVENUE MOTT HAVEN, BRONX".

On the right, there is a blue sidebar with the following content:

- WELCOME TO NYC HOUSING CONNECT!**
- On this site you can:**
  - Search & Select Affordable Housing
  - Enter and Update your Household Information
  - Apply for Housing
- It's easy to apply for affordable housing!**
- To get started, [click here](#) to create an account
- WHAT TO EXPECT**
- AFTER YOU APPLY: RESOURCES**

The screenshot shows the NYC Housing Connect website. At the top left is the logo with the text "NYC HOUSING CONNECT" and the tagline "Find and apply for affordable housing". At the top right, there is a user greeting "Welcome, Guest" with a "Sign In" link, and navigation links for "SEARCH", "ABOUT", and "FAQ".

The main content area is divided into two sections:

- Sign In:** A section with the heading "Sign In" and a sub-heading "To apply for housing, you must sign in to your NYC Housing Connect account. If you do not have an account, click on Create Account button found below to get started." It contains two input fields for "Email Address: \*" and "Password: \*", a "Remember me" checkbox, a "Forgot Password" link, and a red "Sign In" button.
- Create New Account:** A section with the heading "Create New Account" and a sub-heading "If you already have an account, please sign in to NYC Housing Connect above; otherwise you can create a new account by clicking on the Create Account below." It features a red "Create Account" button.

On the right side, there is a blue sidebar with the following content:

- WELCOME TO NYC HOUSING CONNECT!**
- On this site you can:**
  - Search & Select Affordable Housing
  - Enter and Update your Household Information
  - Apply for Housing
- It's easy to apply for affordable housing!**
- To get started, [click here](#) to create an account
- WHAT TO EXPECT**
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**NYC HOUSING CONNECT**  
*Find and apply for affordable housing*

Welcome, Guest [Sign In](#)

[SEARCH](#) [ABOUT](#) [FAQ](#)

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### Create Account

Complete the requested information below, review the legal agreement and click Register.  
Required information is indicated by a red asterisk (\*).

#### Account Information

Email Address(Account Name): \*  A valid Email Address must be used as your **NYC Housing Connect** Account Name. A password will be emailed to the specified email address.  
Re-Enter Email Address: \*

#### Your Name

First Name: \*   
Last Name: \*

#### Security Questions

Question 1: \*    
Answer 1:   
Question 2: \*    
Answer 2:   
Question 3: \*    
Answer 3:

#### Legal Disclaimer

Privacy Statement: [The information you provide through NYC Housing Connect is subject to the NYC.gov privacy policy.](#)  
\*  Agree  Disagree