

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			

MFA Website Redesign: www.housingnm.org

NCSHA 2015 Annual Awards Entry

Communications: Creative Media

Overview

One of the ongoing challenges of websites is that they have a fairly limited shelf life. Like a closet that gradually gets cluttered, sites accumulate piles of outdated material that make it hard to find anything. While it's tempting to just move things around to try to accommodate and organize new items, things never seem to fit quite right after a while.

The New Mexico Mortgage Finance Authority (MFA) is a small housing finance agency with a small budget for marketing and promotional materials. Our website is the primary way we make ourselves visible to the public. It is also the principal way we communicate information to our partners and sub-grantees.

Strategic Objectives

When MFA designed its new website in 2008, it was an enormous improvement in terms of function, structure and ease of use. Organizing the site from an end user perspective rather than following the internal departmental structure made the site friendlier, and rewriting the content in a non-bureaucratic style made it more understandable. However, staff members still took multiple calls each week from people unable to find information on the website. In addition, the site was looking dated, and the consumer stories were old.

MFA began a complete overhaul of its website in January 2014 to make it fresh, vibrant and even more searchable and friendly. Every file, photo, story, form and piece of data was taken out of the "closet," and evaluated, updated and reconfigured. In addition to updating the content of the site, the goal of the redesign was to visually communicate the positive emotion of home in a way that every website visitor could relate to. We wanted to deliver the site's highly technical information in a way that was not overwhelming or intimidating. In short, we wanted people to feel "at home" and comfortable navigating the website so they would stay longer and learn more about MFA and how we could help them find quality affordable housing.

As part of MFA's strategic goal to position ourselves as the go-to organization in the state for affordable housing information, we decided to add a housing library to the website. MFA had an internal housing library in the shared directory of our network, but we realized the information it contained would be even more valuable if shared with the public and our partners. A final objective was to involve more MFA staff in the maintenance of the new website and keep the front page populated with current MFA events and activities.

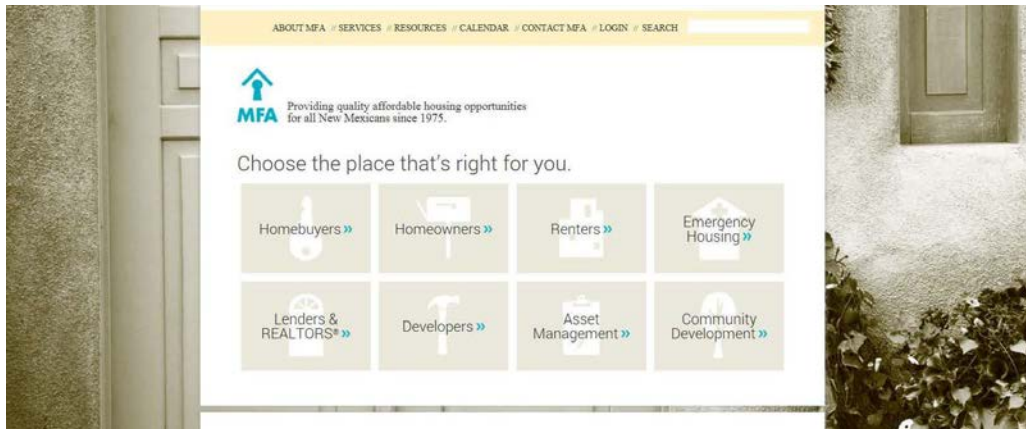
Development

One staff member from each department was designated to lead their section of the website redevelopment. There were multiple meetings with each lead, the communications manager and an IT staff member to think through what a website visitor would encounter in each section of the site. Processes were evaluated to ensure that documents were organized in a logical way, information was prioritized on the screen, and that the consumer knew where they were on the site at all times. In several cases, this brainstorming resulted in complete overhauls of the way information had been presented on the previous site.

Simultaneously, meetings occurred with the web site designers. The imagery that was selected for the site captured the comfort and security of having a quality affordable home by portraying the little things that truly make a house feel like a home. The advantage of an image of a coffee mug or a vase of flowers or an apple pie, for instance, was that the viewer could mentally create their own version of home, which make it instantly meaningful to them. And the images, unlike the consumer stories and photos, are not quickly outdated. The

pages of the website were laid over seven rotating background images, creating warmth, openness, and a less content-heavy feel.

The front page was designed with a section for MFA news items. Brief recaps and photos of events, links to new publications and other MFA news was displayed in a succinct format to keep viewers up-to-date on MFA activities and accomplishments.



MFA's website has eight sections, each with a different target audience.

The website was designed with eight primary sections. Four of the sections—Homebuyers, Homeowners, Renters, and Emergency Housing-- were oriented toward the general public and consumers and were promotional in nature. The other four sections—Lenders and REALTORS®, Developers, Asset Management and Community Development – were designed for MFA's partners and contained technical information, forms and manuals. When a viewer hovered over a button, a short description of that section's content appeared to help them quickly determine where to go.

Multiple navigation options were designed for each page so that information could be accessed through more than one path. In addition to side navigation bars, each page was created with customizable tabs at the bottom for quick access to frequently used information. There were also options on each page to add quick links as needed. A top navigation bar and a bottom bar remained constant throughout the site, and a title graphic on each page reminded the viewer what section they were in. All of the icons were large and simple, making the site's organizational structure obvious and easy to navigate.

The decision was made to change the website's content management system from Drupal to Expression Engine. Expression Engine allowed for a custom design of the entire site rather than having to work within the confines of a template format. Also, Expression Engine's content management system was much more intuitive, which made for easier editing. About 20 percent of MFA's staff received one-on-one training on how to update and maintain the website. Because the technology was so easy to master, the training sessions were only about 15 minutes long on average.

Last but not least, MFA improved upon its internal housing library and added it to the website. Our housing library now contains featured articles which are updated regularly, downloadable .pdfs of recent studies and reports such as the *State of the Nation's Housing* by the Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University, as well as links to other housing data sources. The housing library also contains state and local information including "quick facts" data and graphs for New Mexico on topics such as homeownership and foreclosure

rates, affordable housing plans developed for various communities in the state, MFA's strategic plan and HUD-required plans including the New Mexico Consolidated Plan, Action Plan, CAPER and Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice.



Benefits

Since the revamped website went live in January 2015, website traffic is up more than 9 percent. Further, viewers are 22 percent more actively involved when on the site – measured as “sessions” -- and they are visiting almost 21 percent more pages. In short, our partners and customers are comfortable searching and getting information from the site -- one of the main goals of the redesign. In addition, the average amount of time viewers are on the site has dropped. When the viewing time data is combined with staff reports of fewer calls from confused website viewers, there is strong evidence that people are finding what they need on the site quickly. And since viewers are looking through more of the site, it is functioning as a promotional tool. Below are Google Analytics comparing the old website activity to the new:

	Mar-May 2014	Mar-May 2015	Change
Users	14,605	15,958	9.3 Percent Increase
Sessions	27,748	33,970	22.4 Percent Increase
Page Views	98,505	118,863	20.6 Percent Increase
Session Duration	4:04	3:30	13.9 Percent Decrease

About 20 percent of MFA staff regularly update and help manage the website. Staff members report that they easily add and organize content and photos. Front page stories are changed regularly. The result is that the website is much more up-to-date than in the past, and new items provide ongoing interest in the site.

Efficient Use of Resources

The total cost of the website redesign was just under \$40,000. MFA's external design firm managed the project and acted as the liaison with the developer, which reduced MFA staff time on the project. This relatively small investment continues to pay off by saving staff time directing people through the website and by promoting MFA's programs and services.