

2009 NCSHA Award Nomination – Ohio Housing Finance Agency

Homeownership – *Empowering New Buyers*

Creating Successful Homeowners Through Homebuyer Education

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Homebuyer education is the foundation of sustainable homeownership for thousands of Ohio borrowers. The Ohio Housing Finance Agency (OHFA) has developed a comprehensive educational program to provide borrowers with the tools necessary to be successful homeowners. OHFA's homebuyer education program encourages borrowers to log on to the Agency Web site and get the knowledge they need to work through the homebuying process with confidence.

Buyers using OHFA's Down Payment Assistance Grant or the Homebuyer Tax Credit Advantage programs must participate in a homebuyer education program to be approved for this financial assistance. In Ohio, borrowers have two education options from which to choose: a Web-based streamlined version available at www.ohiohome.org or courses at approved local housing counseling agencies offered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Buyers who choose to attend sessions through HUD-approved counseling agencies meet in person with counselors to discuss the stages of the homebuying process and the rights and responsibilities they will have as a homeowner.

Using the online version available on the Agency's Web site, borrowers simply study OHFA's comprehensive Homebuyer Guide to learn about the steps involved in purchasing a home and helpful tips to succeed as a homeowner. By attending one of these courses, borrowers can learn about the homebuying process and how to:

- elect a lender and real estate agent that can best meet their needs
- develop a monthly budget that will help determine how much they can truly afford for a monthly mortgage payment
- understand the important terms for closing and loan documents

After reading the guide, borrowers complete a 25-question test and a budget form that are forwarded to a participating housing counselor for review. The test and budget are designed to help the counselor identify areas that are unfamiliar or confusing to the potential homebuyer and provide the basis for a one-hour telephone counseling session to address any questions the borrower may have about homeownership. Borrowers who successfully complete the program receive a certificate that is submitted to OHFA with the completed loan package.

As one of a few housing finance agencies requiring homebuyer education for down payment assistance, this cost effective program offered by OHFA simplifies the process for borrowers by allowing portions of the program to be completed online. Borrowers can complete the requirement in the comfort of their own home.

If a borrower is unable to access the Web-based training, OHFA will provide them with a hard copy of the guide, test and budget form to be completed and faxed to the Agency. OHFA will forward the information to a counselor for review and the counselor will schedule the telephone consultation with the borrower.

2009 NCSHA Award Nomination – Ohio Housing Finance Agency
Homeownership – Empowering New Buyers
Creating Successful Homeowners Through Homebuyer Education – Page 2

OHFA's Homebuyer Education program is also available in Spanish, reaching a key targeted audience of first-time homebuyers and providing useful information to assist our Spanish-speaking customers throughout the homebuying process.

In early 2009, OHFA began preparations for the educational program by updating and redesigning the Homebuyer Guide. The Offices of Homeownership, Communications and Marketing and Information Technology worked together to develop and implement materials in an online system. The Agency's partnerships with a network of housing counselors across the state made the initiative successful, relying on their expertise to work one-on-one with potential buyers.

Nearly 300 potential buyers have participated in OHFA's homebuyer education program, giving them the keys to successful homeownership. Education is one way we open the doors to an affordable place to call home for Ohio families.