



Entry Form 2017 Annual Awards for Program Excellence

Entry Deadline: Thursday, June 15, 2017, Midnight ET

Each entry must include a completed entry form. Please complete a form for each entry your HFA is submitting. The completed entry form will become the first page of your entry.

This form is a fillable PDF. Type your information into the entry form and save it as a PDF. Please do not write on or scan the entry form. **Questions: Call 202-624-7710 or email awards@ncsha.org.**

Entry Title: Enter your entry's title exactly as you wish it to be published on the NCSHA website and in the awards program.

Category:

Subcategory:

Entry Summary: A 15-word (max) summary of the program, project, or practice you are entering.

HFA:

HFA Staff Contact:

Phone:

Email:

Visual Aids:

Are you mailing to NCSHA 10 copies of any visual aids that cannot be included in your entry PDF? Yes No

Payment:

My HFA is mailing a check to NCSHA.
My HFA is emailing the credit card authorization form to awards@ncsha.org.

Every year, it's always interesting to see the HFA annual report entries because they are all so varied. In Pennsylvania, we appreciate the opportunity to view the work of others, and we learn from the best ideas we see applied elsewhere. Our annual report entry for 2017 offers a number of strong design, photographic and written features. We will discuss those features, and then also point out how we reuse elements from our annual report so that, by year's end, we have extended the marketing benefit of our annual report to inspire and produce a number of other valuable promotional products.

Our audience

In Pennsylvania, the general public is *an* audience for our annual report but is definitely not the sole audience for our report. We use our annual report as a tool to educate local, state and federal government officials and to engage and motivate our business partners across Pennsylvania. By writing our report for a general public audience, we ensure it can be easily understood by anyone, regardless of their level of knowledge about housing finance agencies.

Our core assumption

The core assumption we make in producing our report is that the average reader will not spend significant time engaged with the document. People today are often in a rush, torn between multiple daily work and family obligations. The best we can do is to help them absorb some key snippets of information that will both educate them and produce a favorable impression of our housing mission. The writing and layout of our report is intended for consumers who will take away small nuggets of information, not read the report cover-to-cover.

Our execution

Let's start with the writing. All the information presented uses simple language. Industry jargon is eliminated. Housing concepts are explained for the layman to understand. Sentences and paragraphs are kept short. In fact, we write our stories in a way that the subheads, pull quotes, and photo captions will convey most of the message because, realistically, that might be our best chance of reaching readers who skim the report. Take, for example, our customer testimonials. The text is broken into bite-size chunks that explain: when the story took place, who was involved, where it took place, the key event that occurred, and the outcome. Photos and map graphics included with each story help carry the message. We hope that readers will take longer to absorb our stories, but in the event they don't, our goal is to still get our main messages across by using those elements that can be shared at a glance.

A new section in our report this year that we think is key for busy readers is the article titled "What does a housing finance agency do?" We cannot assume that most readers will know this information. In fact, we would argue that the vast majority of readers have no idea about the mission of HFAs and the important needs we serve. We took great care to write this section in simple and clear language that any audience can quickly grasp. We also kept paragraphs short and used subheads extensively to share our message.

Likewise, our financial section is light on data and heavy on info-graphics. Providing two summary spreadsheets provides high-level financial details for those who are interested. But report highlights at the bottom of the page supply financial summaries that can be absorbed in quick passing.

Next, the photography. We hire a professional photographer who spends two weeks traveling across Pennsylvania taking pictures of our customers to support their stories. He also takes photos of our multifamily properties that we can use within the report. A day of this time is scheduled to take pictures of our staff and executive director, as well. The end result is a deep pool of photos that we use to tell our story visually. Pictures reinforce the written story, and the photos are also intended to stand on their own for those readers who are too busy to read the report in depth.

Finally, but no less critical, is the layout and design. At PHFA, we try to produce as much of the annual report internally as we can. We take that approach because we believe our passion for housing issues will best shape the written message and the report flow. Plus, our internal involvement helps hold down costs. However, we have had the most success by bidding out the graphic design of the report. PHFA still has a strong voice in shaping the design. But the graphic design is so labor intensive over a period of two months that we have found it's best for us to rely on a top-notch design house for that work.

The agency provides the graphic designers with the page-by-page flow of the report, and we deliver the photography and text for the designers to use. But then we step back and let the designers have their creative input. They share our assumption that we will only have a few minutes with each reader to get our message across, and that strongly shapes their design approach. This explains our heavy use of infographics and our emphasis on white space throughout the report. Our design firm also comes up with the visual elements that reinforce the report's theme and unify the entire piece.

Making the most from our investment

In 2017, our annual report cost \$36,000 for the photography, design, printing, and fulfillment/mailing. But what is key to note – and our main takeaway to share with other HFAs – is how we get the most from that expense by the creative reuse of our annual report elements. For instance:

- All of our main PHFA brochures now use original photography, not stock art. Those pictures come from our annual report. For example, on our brochures webpage at www.phfa.org/brochures/, this can be seen in the following print titles:
 - ✓ Help with Housing: Programs Overview
 - ✓ Housing Counseling and Education
 - ✓ Programs for Homebuyers
 - ✓ Homeowners' Emergency Mortgage Assistance Program, and
 - ✓ Multifamily Rental Housing Programs
- Promotional banners displayed throughout our building use photos and pull quotes from our annual report. (See attached visual aid that follows.)
- A video produced for our statewide housing conference reuses the stories and still photos from our annual report. Please see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nNtTCCXyY64>
- Stories and photos from the annual report are added to our homepage every year. Please see the "Customer Stories" on the front page of our website at www.PHFA.org.
- Our lobby mural includes photos from past annual reports. (See attached visual aid.)

So, at the end of the day, the investment we make in our annual report certainly pays immediate, and subsequent, dividends by providing content that can be applied in our other promotional initiatives. We are proud of our annual report that has proven so effective for us by:

Being Innovative: We believe the report is designed in a way so it can be absorbed quickly by readers who are in a hurry, as most are today. Additionally, we heavily reuse elements from each year's annual report, which works to actually spread the investment in our annual report across other marketing efforts. We think this is a responsible use of PHFA's funding.

Being Replicable: The real benefit of the NCSHA awards competition is the ability for states to learn from each other. We believe the two main points noted above are both easily replicable by other HFAs, and we are pleased to share them for everyone's benefit.

Reaching Target Audiences: Through direct mail, distribution during community events, and in response to public requests, our annual report is shared with our target audiences. Most importantly, it is written and designed in a way that ensures its message will be understood by someone with absolutely no background in affordable housing.

Achieving Measurable Results: While we do not do a formal survey of annual report recipients to gauge its impact, the value of the report is obvious when we share it with our primary audiences. Legislators tell us the report helps them to better understand the impact of PHFA programs. Business partners respond with inquiries about more active participation in agency programs. Investors frequently request copies for their research. Additionally, citizens tell our call center their interest in PHFA programs was stimulated by the publication.

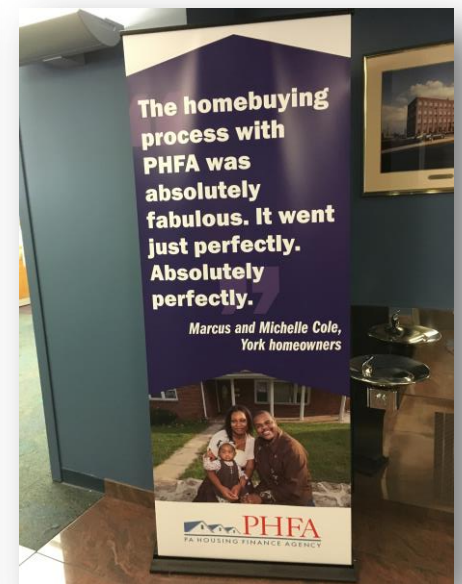
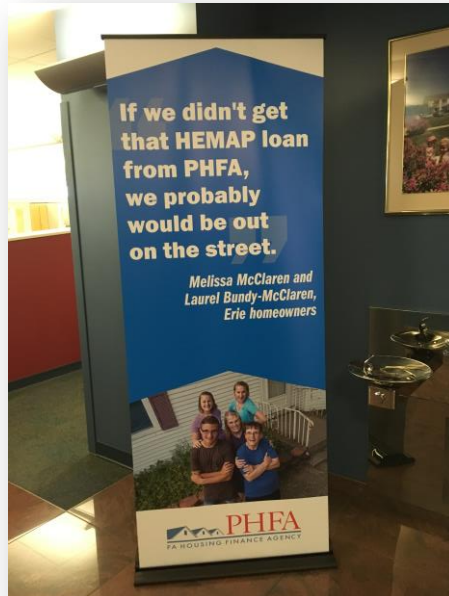
Providing Benefits that Outweigh Costs: This is a primary strength of our annual report. As noted above, our creative reuse of annual report elements helps us make the most of our annual report investment, which already is quite reasonable.

Demonstrating Effective Use of Resources: Our annual report is not only an effective communications tool in its own right, but our creative reuse of annual report stories and photography throughout the year makes this project a productive and effective tool for our agency. We certainly get a terrific return on this investment based on its success as a communications tool and based on the reuse of annual report elements in many of our other marketing materials.

Achieving Strategic Objectives: From our perspective, this is the most important of all the judging criteria: Did the communications product achieve the desired result? Our annual report is intended to educate key decision makers, motivate our business partners, attract and reassure investors, and introduce the general public to the statewide housing programs available to them. Based on the number of requests we get for the annual report and the enthusiastic response it receives, we are convinced it achieves its desired objectives.

Paper copies of PHFA's 2017 annual report are being provided as a visual aid.

**Visual Aid: Samples of Promotional Banners Displayed in PHFA's Main Office
Reusing Annual Report Text and Photography**



**Visual Aid: Agency Timeline on Display in the PHFA Building Lobby
That Reuses Annual Report Photography and Text**

