



2013 Annual Awards Entry Form
(Complete one for each entry.)

Entry Name PHFA Affordable Housing Story Wall

HFA Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency

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Entry form with description, check(s), and visual aids (optional) must be received by NCSHA by **Monday, July 1, 2013**.

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

HFA Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency
Entry Name PHFA Affordable Housing Story Wall

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

Introduction

Understandably, the focus of many communications professionals today is on the newer and more cutting-edge communications media available to them: tools such as social media, mobile apps, etc. While those are certainly important, the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency has benefitted recently by reexamining more traditional, but equally powerful, communications options at our disposal.

Our goal in submitting this project nomination is to encourage HFAs to not overlook some communications resources that are easily available to them and, as an added benefit, are quite affordable to employ as part of their communications strategy. In this case, we are speaking specifically about an HFA's headquarter building. All too often, people forget that our buildings provide "billboards," in essence, that we can use to display graphic materials that can powerfully tell our story to the thousands of visitors we receive every year, including our affordable housing customers. Unlike many paid media that provide a once-and-done exposure, an investment in an HFAs in-building messaging will continue to work for the agency for a decade or longer from that single effort. So it not only reaches a valued audience, but it does so at minimal expense and with considerable longevity.

The PHFA story through large-scale artwork

In this project nomination, we share our experience in the hopes that it will inspire other states to take similar action. Previously, the walls in our agency headquarters – a fairly new building -- were nearly empty. But two years ago we started filling those walls with nicely framed, enlarged photos of our rental developments and residences owned by our single-family home customers. This effort to use our building more effectively as a part of our overall communications strategy concluded in 2012 with the installation in our lobby of a 24-foot long, 7-foot tall mural that tells our PHFA story. Our entry in the Creative Media category is this new lobby story wall.

Our new story wall welcomes visitors with the PHFA story, using large-format photographs, graphic design elements and text noting significant milestones in the agency's history that have expanded affordable housing options in the state. The photos along the bottom of the mural illustrate our service to seniors, people with disabilities and a racially diverse public. The buildings pictured include older, rehabbed buildings, architectural landmarks and newly constructed homes. Pictorially, they explain the work we do and the lives we touch.

The title above the mural reads: PHFA through the years: Expanding affordable housing options for Pennsylvanians. The significant PHFA milestones notes in the eye-level text elements track such things as increases in the number of multifamily buildings funded with tax credits, the number of affordable mortgage loans financed, and the ongoing assistance provided to families in danger of foreclosure. These important achievements are displayed on design elements shaped with peaked roofs, like houses. Some include photos showing the three office buildings that have housed our agency over the years. The historical events noted in the mural were intended to tell our story while not overwhelming the visitor with volumes of text. The mural was intended to be welcoming and arouse curiosity, and experience has shown that it does.

Please see the attached photos that clearly show the large-scale and visual impact of this project.

The first two photos in the "visual aids" section of this submission show the plaques that hung on this lobby wall prior to the installation of the mural. Visitors rarely, if ever, engaged with those award plaques. The new lobby mural, on the other hand, has demonstrated its power to invite reading and

touching by our visitors. A wall that previously had no communications impact now helps our visitors better understand the value of affordable housing and our role in that mission.

Project Innovation

Some might question whether a lobby mural is, in fact, innovative. But, based on visits to many drab and nondescript state government buildings, we'd like to challenge that assumption. While the elements needed to complete a wall mural use the more traditional technologies of professional photography and large-scale appliqués, our experience has shown that many agencies fail to see their buildings, and especially their lobby areas, as creative spaces for telling their story or setting visitor expectations. Low-tech? Perhaps. But impactful? Most definitely.

Project Replication

Clearly, this is a project that is easily replicable. The cost, which we discuss later, is extremely reasonable, especially when contrasted with today's typical advertising budget.

Reaching Target Audiences

We have thousands of visitors come through our doors every year, many of whom are highly influential and a fair number of whom know little about PHFA. Some of our visitors are our home mortgage customers who prefer to deliver their monthly loan payments in person. Another sizable group of visitors comes to our headquarters for our monthly Board meetings. Those are people who we would expect to be familiar with our affordable housing mission. However, not to be overlooked is the fact that some of these Board meeting visitors include state and local government leaders with a keen interest in PHFA programs – people we definitely want to reach with our messaging.

A key advantage gained from our building comes from the fact that we make our meeting area available to other groups in the Harrisburg area. This brings people into our building who have little or no knowledge about the work we do. Our lobby mural is a great resource for communicating with them. Additionally, in recent years we have been taking events we used to hold in area hotels and we now schedule them in our building. This has been done intentionally – not only as a cost-saving move but also to draw more visitors into our building. A perfect example is our annual awards event for our best performing lending partners. That event draws in banking representatives from around the state, and they always comment on how much they appreciate seeing where we work. Our lobby becomes the perfect entryway to welcome these guests and familiarize them with the affordable housing work performed by the agency.

Achieving Measurable Results

While we haven't formally surveyed our visitors to collect their comments on our new lobby mural, the feedback from our receptionist confirms that the investment in the new story wall was money well spent. She had told the communications staff that prior to the mural's installation our guests would generally just sit in the lobby and wait for their building escort. But she confirms that since the mural was put in place most visitors now spend their time walking down the entry ramp reading (and touching) the 3-D timeline elements and looking at the mural photos. Time previously spent simply sitting is now spent engaged in learning about PHFA in a way that – because of its size – is simply more engaging than the brochures also available in our lobby.

Providing Benefits that Outweigh Costs

The return on investment for this project has been excellent and is worth emphasizing. The cost for the design of our 168-square foot story wall and its installation was \$14,400. Once a design proposal was selected, our communications staff picked the photos and researched the text to be used in the mural. So there was no hard cost associated with that effort. Our building engineer worked with the installation team to properly prep the wall so it was ready for the durable 3-M photo appliques to be applied, again saving costs. The installation took less than a half-day to complete.

Initially, we had some concerns about the longevity of the mural, especially since it invites touching by visitors. But after roughly 10 months in place, and thousands of visitors, the mural shows no signs of wear at all. We expect the mural to have a life span of a decade or more. Fortunately, the opposing wall of our lobby offers space where we can continue the PHFA story in the future, if desired.

An unexpected benefit from our lobby mural has been the education of our staff on our mission and our agency's accomplishments. It's not unusual during the lunch hour, for example, to find a staff member in the lobby reading about PHFA's history. Various employees have shared how much they appreciate having this story wall easily accessible to them. So, not only are we educating our visitors, but we are educating our staff, too, and boosting their morale in the process.

Effective Use of Resources

While it is true that this project only reaches thousands of visitors annually, and not millions like our statewide advertising campaigns, it should also be noted that the cost of this project, as noted above, was quite reasonable. The commitment from staff involved only one person to find suitable photos and research the agency's history for significant events that would best tell the PHFA story. A tangential benefit of this project was that it challenged us to capture and record important PHFA milestones for our records. With many long-time agency employees retiring during the next five years, it was important that we record this history now before some of it could be lost. Clearly, this is a communications project easily within the capabilities of even the smallest state HFA.

Achieving Strategic Objectives

Our public is telling us that they increasingly want to see us do more with less. Our story wall is the sort of communications effort that responds to that mandate. Unlike earned media, our physical building is a resource totally within our control. It is a blank form that we can mold and shape as we think best to tell our story. All too often the potential messaging available through an organization's headquarters building is overlooked and not fully captured. This project demonstrates that with minimal cost and a relatively small time commitment, large-scale, engaging messaging inside our buildings can produce a powerful impact. It doesn't replace the other messaging we still need to do. But it is a tool readily available that can tell the HFA story in a compelling and impactful way.

VISUAL AIDS



PHFA lobby prior to story wall installation



The 168 square foot story wall after installation

More photos showing story wall elements



More photos showing story wall elements



More photos showing story wall elements



A final photo showing the powerful presence of the large-scale story wall in the PHFA lobby

