



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

Entry Name  Pennsylvania Housing Availability & Affordability Report

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** Pennsylvania Housing Availability & Affordability Report

Communications	Homeownership	Legislative Advocacy	Management Innovation
<input type="checkbox"/> Annual Report <input type="checkbox"/> Promotional Materials and Newsletters <input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Special Achievement	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES Via mail. <input type="checkbox"/> NO

**Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency  
Pennsylvania Housing Availability & Affordability Report**

PHFA's 2012 "Pennsylvania Housing Availability and Affordability Report" was initiated after staff saw a similar report shared by HFA employees from Montana during an NCSHA annual conference a few years ago. Recognizing that we had the geographical information systems (GIS) and data expertise in-house to research a similar report, we asked how we could improve upon Montana's document while also producing a housing report tailored to the specific needs of our own state. We were pleased to find that this initial report could be produced in less than seven months and at minimal cost to the agency.

That's not to say the project was easy. There were some challenges in properly working with the data to ensure our findings would be accurate and replicable – hence, the value of having a GIS expert on staff. However, our experience confirms that states as different as Montana and Pennsylvania are able to achieve the production of professional reports that not only present critical housing data in an easily understood format but that also enhance our reputations as housing experts in our respective states.

Our 89-page housing availability and affordability report provides multiple periods of valuable rental and homeownership data for Pennsylvania and all 67 counties. Each county is provided its own data page, and all county pages follow the same outline, to ensure consistency and promote comparisons county-by-county. The data provided on each county page include:

- A breakdown of household income levels
- A listing of key housing characteristics, like the homeownership rate and the age of the housing stock
- Housing affordability data related to both renting and homeownership
- Housing affordability data compared across four different occupations to make the data "real"
- The trend for new residential building permits
- Pertinent, relevant data concerning the percentage of senior residents in the population and the number of natural gas wells drilled, since both have housing availability and affordability implications

In addition to the county data pages, one page of statewide data is included to offer an overall view of housing in Pennsylvania. Maps were also produced from the data making it easy to compare housing availability and affordability between all counties in a single view. Finally, because we knew that some readers, such as journalists, would appreciate a synopsis of housing trends revealed by the data, a four-page executive summary with footnotes was used to introduce the report.

#### Innovation

We are not the first state to produce a report like this one. As noted above, we are aware of one other state – Montana – that previously published a similar report. The main advantage to be gained from PHFA's report is the confirmation that such a document can be produced fairly easily and at minimal expense, provided an HFA has access to a GIS/data expert.

The strong interest shown by our state legislators, local government leaders and county housing authorities in this report demonstrates, too, that the resulting information will be received by an appreciative audience. The only caveat would be that producing such a document sets up the expectation that updated reports will be produced on a regular basis so that readers can follow housing trends. However, as the state's housing agency, this is seen as a positive outcome from our perspective since it establishes PHFA as the go-to source for credible and authoritative data about the state's

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housing stock. In that regard, our housing availability and affordability report is an excellent marketing tool, in addition to being a valued source of housing research.

Responds to an important state need

Pennsylvania is a large state, with more than 12.7 million residents. It's also a state where the housing market is in considerable flux, with aging housing stock in many urban areas and extreme demand for housing in the northern tier related to natural gas drilling. Yet no recent report on housing availability and affordability was available, to the best of our knowledge, which is why this report fills such an important need.

Our state legislature requests a housing report from PHFA on a regular basis. This new report addresses that requirement. But even without this legislative mandate, we would still have produced this report because it provides a valuable snapshot of our housing resources and trends. This information is important for PHFA staff as we allocate resources, and it will be helpful for housing authorities across the state, as well. Affordable housing advocates already are using the report to lobby members of the General Assembly and in city councils to make the case for greater investment in affordable housing.

Achieves intended results

Our goal in producing this initial housing availability and affordability report was to uncover and clearly present important housing data to help guide the state's decision makers on matters of housing policy. We are convinced this report has achieved that result.

Internally, our staff has, for years, relied on U.S. Census Bureau data to help guide our internal decision making on the allocation of tax credits, for instance. The benefit of this report is that it anticipates staff needs and presents information useful to the agency, as we must constantly evaluate housing demand on a statewide basis. This report is now readily used by PHFA staff as a vital reference tool.

Printed copies of the report were provided to all 253 of our state legislators. We did get responses from several of those legislators, especially ones sitting on key committees that affect housing policy, and they expressed their appreciation for the report. Additionally, housing authorities around the state were informed about the report and their ability to access the report online. The report was also presented during an educational session at the 2013 Commonwealth Housing Forum. That presentation was well attended by housing professionals who all received a copy of the report. Our feedback from these groups is that they have found the information to be helpful, and they have expressed their desire that we continue to produce this report on a regular basis to help them stay abreast of changing housing trends.

Development of this report has produced such good outcomes that we are committed to now produce it on a regular basis, every three-to-five years.

Provides benefits that outweigh costs

The cost to produce this report was minimal and underscores how simple it should be for any HFA to develop a similar document. The majority of the data came from the U.S. Census Bureau, which is of high quality and is freely accessible. The report was produced entirely by two staff people: our GIS technician and our communications director. The GIS technician did the bulk of the work, determining what data would be most useful and organizing it into a clear and concise presentation. The communications director designed the cover and wrote the executive summary.

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The leading role played by the GIS technician should indicate to other HFAs just how valuable it is to have such a person on staff. In addition to this report, our GIS technician produces other documents we use throughout the year to demonstrate to state and local leaders the value of PHFA's programs to our state's residents. On the housing availability and affordability report, our GIS expert actually was the lead, choosing the data and designing the page presentations to best document the state of housing in Pennsylvania. Because his work was so central to the production of the final report, it really was the primary cost associated with the report's development.

Our GIS technician worked on this report part-time over a period of about five months as he could make time available in his daily work schedule. Production of this report did not detract from his other regular duties. Because this was the first such report we produced, it definitely took more time to develop. Using the 2012 report as a template moving forward, we should be able to produce our next report in much less time.

We did print 1,000 reports at a cost of approximately \$1,500. We did this because we decided that policymakers would be more likely to read it as a printed document versus a digital file. However, the final report could just as easily have been posted only on the Web with no printed versions created, and it would still have been of value. In fact, most public inquiries are directed to our online posting of the report, and printed copies are only mailed when Web access becomes an issue. (Our digital file of the report is available on our website at: [http://www.phfa.org/hsgresources/Housing\\_Study/phaar.aspx](http://www.phfa.org/hsgresources/Housing_Study/phaar.aspx).) Feedback from readers indicates our housing report is in wide circulation among housing professionals in Pennsylvania. We are also aware that data from the report has been cited in at least one online media publication in the state.

The bottom line is that our hard costs were minimal on this project. As a result, a report like ours could easily be replicated by other states, assuming they have in-house GIS and data-research expertise.

In conclusion, the Pennsylvania Housing Availability and Affordability Report has been well received in its first year, proving to be well worth the time and effort expended. The report is innovative, responds to an important state need, is achieving its intended results and is providing benefits that outweigh its costs. We welcome user feedback as we continue our plans to strengthen the report's contents in future editions.