

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			

Washington State Web-Based Annual Reporting System

The Washington State Web-Based Annual Reporting System, or WBARS, is a comprehensive and innovative annual reporting, monitoring and asset management system shared by multiple public funders in Washington state.

WBARS allows more than 2,000 property managers and owners to easily meet reporting requirements, while giving funders a powerful oversight tool at a fraction of the time and resources previously invested.



Strategic Objective

After many years of working closely together, housing funders in Washington state believed a coordinated, web-based reporting system was the logical next step to meet the needs of clients and funders in today's electronic world.

Our objectives were to create a system that would reduce paperwork, improve accuracy of reports, meet the contractual needs of all participating funders, make our reviews easier through automatic calculations, and provide a “carrot” to owners and managers that would make them excited about using the system. We succeeded on all objectives.

Currently, more than 1,700 properties with more than 90,000 units are successfully using the system.

Background

Beginning in 1999, representatives of the largest statewide affordable-housing funders have met every other month as a Monitoring Coordination Task Force (MCT). The MCT group has spent years sharing resources, staff, and expertise to streamline and prevent duplication of effort, share information and maximize oversight leverage.

Formal and informal agreements allow the members to share reports, on-site inspections, asset-management oversight, and ownership and management transfer information, and to jointly invest in property funding and project workouts.

Meanwhile, the Commission has maintained crucial ties with property managers through board membership and participation with our state's affordable-housing management associations. Buy-in from these groups has been key to our success.

Groundwork for a New System

Building on these earlier discussions, the Commission and the Washington State Department of Commerce began working on a jointly-funded web-based system that would automate various funders' joint Excel annual reporting forms to a more usable and automated system.

From the beginning, the goal was to create a system that would benefit all joint funders, property management staff, and owners as well. Scoping included a series of separate meetings at various levels, from program and IT staff to property managers. Showing property managers that the system would benefit them would be key to gaining their support.

Two WSHFC and two Commerce staff met with a contractor in a series of design meetings, with major design decisions approved jointly by WSHFC and Commerce and day-to-day decisions made by WSHFC. Other funders were kept up to date on major decisions and developments. Having one primary staff person at WSHFC who was able to make all final decisions was another key to our success. WBARS was released to owners and managers in June 2009 and fully implemented within a year.

Key Features

In addition to the Commission and the Department of Commerce, the funders who currently track their properties in WBARS are: the cities of Seattle, Tacoma, Spokane and Bellingham; King and Snohomish counties; USDA Rural Development; and the regional HUD office. Each enters contractual requirements by property. In addition, national vendors currently uploading information include BostonPost (MRI), Yardi, E-site, and Real Page.

The Commission and the Department of Commerce evenly share the costs of annual maintenance, enhancing functionality, and periodic system/performance improvements as the database and our number of users grow. The initial cost to scope and build WBARS (up to the point of production) was approximately \$800,000. Since 2009, the system's yearly maintenance costs average about \$200,000.

The public funders conduct joint annual-report training sessions for owners and managers. WSHFC also participates in AHMA and ARHC trainings and annual conferences. Conducting joint trainings requires instructors from each agency to thoroughly understand how their requirements overlap or supplement those of their partner agencies.

WBARS contains four comprehensive annual reports:

- Table 1 – Rent roll with max and actual incomes, rents, subsidies, utilities, set-aside limits and WSHFC special-needs categories. Includes three sets of Income/Rent Limits for Tax Credits, HOME and Section 8.
- Tables 2 and 3 – Aggregated demographics – including race, ethnicity, and disability status; HOME report info and other funder special-needs categories.
- Table 4 – Property income, expenses, reserves, and performance indicators such as Unit Turnover Rate, Occupancy Rate, DSCR, NOI and Cash Flow.

Benefits

For property managers:

First of all, paperwork is eliminated. Previous Excel reports ranged from 10 to 20 pages each (per property) —and any project with more than one funder had to send separate reports to each funder. Now, property managers can enter all data just once and be assured all their funders will have access to the data. Those owners/management companies with their own property management software systems can upload Table 1 data to WBARS. WBARS enhances asset management activities by allowing

owners and managers to see, at any time, whether they are in compliance with any and all funders in the system. It also allows them track asset management-related performance measures across their entire portfolio. Finally, the system meets the most restrictive income/rent requirements of each funder and solves questions on overlap of similar requirements.

For funders:

WBARS has greatly improved the accuracy and ease of reporting. It offers a myriad of report functions to satisfy the needs of each funder. In addition, valuable asset-management property information, such as property income, expenses, reserves, debt service and other performance indicators, can easily be called up, speeding up financial reviews. The Commission, for example, can easily compile information needed to report annually to HUD by electronically uploading to HUD's system. Staff can also quickly complete administrative reviews of basic compliance on income and rent set-asides, so they can focus on other, more important audit functions.

Funders can also more easily coordinate their efforts, as WBARS greatly reduced what had been countless phone calls and emails to verify and compare information. Finally, WBARS keeps thousands of property contacts (over 670 organizations with 2,000 contacts) up to date by allowing users to update their own emails, phone and staff members. Formerly, this was a monumental task for funders that required many hours.

For decision makers:

Finally, WBARS has proved its value as a data source about affordable housing in Washington State. In 2014, WBARS data provided the foundation for a comprehensive statewide housing needs study. It also contributed valuable insights to an assessment of the state's affordable-housing portfolio commissioned by the Commission and state Department of Commerce. With WBARS data, funders are able to provide more accurate data and insights on housing needs in Washington state to all our stakeholders, including policy influencers and state/federal legislators.

Next Steps and Replication

The WBARS model, or elements thereof, could be replicated in any state where funders want to streamline reporting, share information, and assist owners and managers. Several states have contacted us with interest in replication.

Meanwhile, we continue to receive expressions of interest from funders in Washington state who are interested in harnessing WBARS to fulfill their reporting requirements and data needs.