



Entry Form 2018 Annual Awards for Program Excellence

Entry Deadline: Friday, June 15, 2018, 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.

Telling personal stories, but emphasizing community benefits

Early last summer, we were excited about the theme and customer stories we had picked for our 2017 annual report, and we were poised to dive into the project. Then one member of our team participated in a webinar that changed everything. We were back to square one.

The webinar shared findings from the report “You Don’t Have to Live Here: Why Housing Messages Are Backfiring and 10 Things We Can Do About It,” produced by the FrameWorks Institute. What we learned was that the way we traditionally handled the messaging in our annual report probably was not producing the result we intended, especially with audiences opposed to our affordable housing mission. We had to quickly absorb the insights from this new research and adjust our messaging to fit the changing environment in which we all work. We were now behind schedule and feeling somewhat overwhelmed. But we knew if we produced our report the way we traditionally did, we probably would be doing as much harm as good with our actions. That simply wasn’t acceptable.

Many state HFA’s, like PHFA, as well as NCSHA, like to use personal stories from our customers to illustrate how affordable housing changes lives. But what we had learned was that those stories may actually be hardening some segments of the public against our agencies and our mission. We know that, even with the adjustments we’ve made, our 2017 annual report doesn’t perfectly fix our messaging to take advantage of the insights from the “You Don’t Have to Live Here” report. But we think we made some positive changes to our messaging, and we’ll build on this progress moving forward. We’d like to use our NCSHA annual report submission this year to alert other HFA’s to this critical research so that they can use it, too, to improve all their public communications.

Some key insights from the “You Don’t Have to Live Here” report

This report helped us to understand how some segments of the population see housing issues as matters of personal choice or bad personal decisions by others. They are reluctant to have their tax dollars help others with housing when they see the problems as something others could have avoided, or could still avoid by simply moving to less expensive parts of the country. Even though many HFA’s don’t use public dollars, the perception is that people’s taxes are being used to fix the mistakes of others, or provide better housing for some while others, who haven’t received assistance, had to work for years to find better housing on their own. This leads to resentment and solidifies class and racial divisions.

Without going into the research that informed this report, some of the important recommendations it contains include:

- Tell a story of us, rather than a story of them
- Avoid over-relying on the terms “housing” or “affordable housing”
- Bring the connection between housing and other issues into sharper focus
- Widen the public’s view of who is responsible for taking action and resolving outcomes

Our team took to heart the perspective shared in this research and set about changing the messaging approach in our annual report.

A synopsis of changes we made

Starting with the title and cover photo for our report, our emphasis shifted more to how PHFA helps communities remain vibrant and growing, spotlighting how this benefits everyone. Our message from the governor and our executive director were reworked to stress how all the state's residents benefit when communities have a range of housing options for people at all income levels. See specifically the fifth paragraph in the governor's message on page 2. Brian Hudson's message is focused entirely on our agency's impact in communities and is bolstered by the statewide maps we added on page 5.

When laying out our report each year, we inevitably end up with 2-3 empty pages, just because of the way the stories fall in the layout. In years past, we've used those pages to highlight multifamily buildings we've transformed, or we've shown employees and explained how they help people with housing. This year, we used these pages to show the impact of PHFA in communities in eastern, central and western Pennsylvania. You can find those on pages 7, 14 and 34.

The year 2017 marked the 45th year of PHFA's existence. We used the text on page 9 to educate readers to the fact that the agency receives no public tax dollars most years and to help them understand how PHFA is not like most state agencies with which they are familiar. Additionally, the section on pages 10 through 13 helps explain the agency's housing programs in simple terms the average person can understand. The emphasis is on sharing how PHFA helps Pennsylvanians statewide, so its work can be appreciated for all the good it brings to big and small communities, not just the individuals who are assisted directly.

We did still include individual stories in this year's report. We believe the research findings in the "You Don't Have to Live Here" report don't prohibit the use of first-hand accounts. But they suggest ways these testimonials should be used to effectively reach a broader audience. For instance, Greg Adzima is a new homebuyer whose story was chosen in part because he is a veteran (page 16). We believe the public is consistently supportive of help provided to vets. Likewise, we thought Betty Jean Wagner's housing counseling story (page 20) would also be well received because she helped to build her house through Habitat for Humanity. Her ownership of a home would not be seen as a handout because she and her family invested some sweat equity to make it happen. Dolphus Teart's story (page 22), we felt, would appeal to a broad audience because saving his family's home from foreclosure has helped them to assist more than 15,000 families also struggling with a child who has autism; so the community has benefitted.

The goal of the section titled "PHFA by the numbers" (pages 26 – 31) was to impress readers with just how many people in Pennsylvania benefit from the agency's housing programs. So, yes, individuals do receive housing assistance, but the end result is to lift up entire communities. Maps showing the reach of our housing programs also reinforced the good done by PHFA in towns and cities across the commonwealth.

In conclusion, we believe we have taken some smart and important steps to adjust the messaging in our annual report. Certainly there is more we can do, and we will take what we learned from this year's experience to help us refine the tone and content of next year's report. We believe the findings in "You

Don't Have to Live Here" are important, and we think all state HFAs should be made aware of that report.

Additional special qualities of our annual report

Every state HFA uses its annual report in different ways to promote its mission. In Pennsylvania, while we do share our report with the public, it is mainly used as a tool to help educate state and local government officials about the value provided by PHFA programs. Approximately 2,300 reports were shared with government leaders and our business partners across Pennsylvania. An additional 500 reports are distributed to the public through a variety of venues. I am told by our government affairs team and our Development Division that the report is extremely helpful in their outreach to legislators, municipal officials, developers and lenders.

Our production approach for the report is to keep as much of the creative process in-house as possible because we feel staff best understands our housing issues, and we want our passion for housing to come through in the final product. We use vendors to provide expertise that we do not have in our agency, such as professional photography (including aerial drone photography), graphic design, high-quality printing, and fulfillment. The challenge is to have PHFA lead the creative process and all the writing, but to include the terrific ideas we gain from our outside experts. The end product comes after much back-and-forth by the whole creative team that unquestionably raises the quality of the final piece. Our total cost for producing the annual report is \$42,000 and includes the services noted above (some of which involve statewide travel), plus postage costs.

To gain the most benefit from this expense, elements from our annual report are used all year long in other PHFA communications materials and displays. So photos and customer testimonials from the publication are repurposed for use in pull-up banners, homepage stories, brochures and our annual legislative report (please see attached visual aids). By planning ahead, we ensure our annual report provides communications elements that will benefit the agency for the whole year that follows.

In conclusion

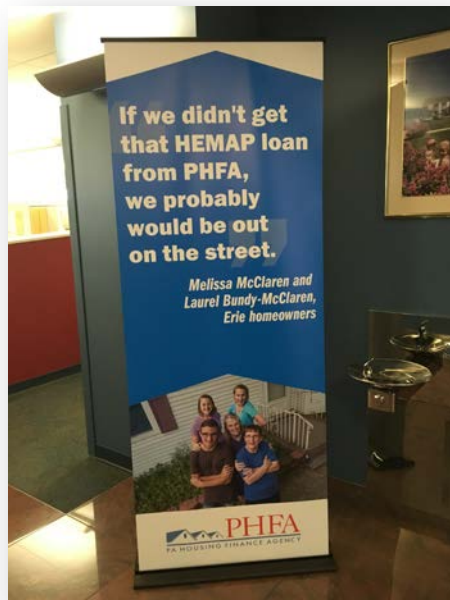
We believe that our 2017 annual report's biggest enhancement is in our messaging, which was greatly affected by the findings in the research by the FrameWorks Institute. That is our main area of innovation this year. Our goal through this submission is to inform other HFAs about this game-changing report. By discussing this research, we should be able to help each other improve the contents and impact of our annual reports and all our other marketing materials.

We are pleased with the "look and feel" of our finished product this year. We think it is well written, visually interesting, and provides a valuable educational and promotional tool for our agency. It reflects, we believe, a productive model for balancing creative input by both PHFA staff and communications experts from outside the agency – at a reasonable cost when one considers how much of its contents are reused in other communications materials.

PHFA continues to be successful in meeting our housing mission. The strategic approach we bring to elements like our 2017 annual report are part of the reason we are able to make ongoing progress and meet our programmatic goals.

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**



**Visual Aid: Annual PHFA Congressional Report
That Reuses Annual Report Photography and Text**

