



CALL FOR ENTRIES

ENTRY DEADLINE: APRIL 1, 2026, 11:59 PM ET

2026 AWARDS FOR PROGRAM EXCELLENCE

NCSHA's Annual Awards for Program Excellence honor member state Housing Finance Agencies for their outstanding public-purpose programs and practices. The mission of this prestigious program is to recognize exemplary HFA efforts, facilitate valuable information sharing among HFAs, identify industry best practices, and encourage innovation.

Winners will be announced and awards presented on October 5 during NCSHA's 2026 Annual Conference & Showplace in Detroit. All entries will be posted on ncsha.org/awards.

■ WHY ENTER?

- To contribute to NCSHA's body of knowledge about HFA programs and practices. All entries become part of the extensive library of resources on our website and are available to benefit all HFAs and the entire affordable housing community.
- To support our collective mission of advancing, through education and advocacy, the state HFAs' efforts to provide affordable housing to those who need it. Your entries educate and inspire your peers in agencies nationwide. And NCSHA relies on them to educate Congress, the administration, the industry, and the media about the incredible work HFAs are doing and to advocate for the federal resources to continue.
- To establish your team as innovators in the affordable housing community — and to recognize your employees' hard work.
- To benchmark your results with those of HFAs around the country.

HFAs may be invited to present on their entries during breakout sessions at the 2026 Annual Conference & Showplace.

Winning HFAs will receive recognition:

- during the Awards presentation at the Annual Conference
- on the NCSHA website
- in announcements to NCSHA's members and partners
- in a press release sent to industry media

Award recipients also will receive:

- an attractive award to display in their offices
- the opportunity to have a complimentary professional photo taken during the Annual Conference for use in promoting their achievement

2026 Entry Deadline: Wednesday, April 1, 11:59 p.m. ET

Not certain in which subcategory your entry belongs?
Contact awards@ncsha.org for assistance.

■ AWARD CATEGORIES

NCSHA is accepting entries in the following seven categories. Refer to pages 6 – 9 for subcategory definitions and judging criteria.

1. Advocacy
2. Communications
 - Annual Report
 - Integrated Campaign
 - Special Event Marketing
3. Homeownership
 - Empowering New Buyers
 - Encouraging New Construction
 - Home Improvement and Rehabilitation
4. Management Innovation
 - Human Resources
 - Internal Operations
 - Technology
5. Rental Housing
 - Encouraging New Construction and Promoting Preservation
 - Supporting Property Management and Renter Needs
6. Special Achievement
7. Special Needs Housing
 - Combatting Homelessness
 - Housing for Persons with Special Needs

■ ELIGIBILITY

- All HFA members of NCSHA are eligible to enter the Awards for Program Excellence.
- Entries may include new programs and practices or qualitative improvements to existing programs and practices in all subcategories.
- Programs or practices must have been undertaken and/or operational between April 1, 2025, and April 1, 2026.
- An HFA may submit only one entry in each subcategory.
- An HFA may not submit the same entry package in more than one subcategory.
- An HFA may not submit an entry for a program or practice that won in 2025.

Any entry that does not meet the eligibility criteria or entry deadline, or does not follow submission guidelines, will be disqualified.

■ JUDGING

Judges are chosen by NCSHA based on relevant expertise, experience, and impartiality and include former HFA executive directors and staff, as well as other senior leaders in the affordable housing community.

One HFA may be recognized per category or subcategory, as applicable. Upon the recommendation of the judges, NCSHA reserves the right to name two award recipients if the judges determine the entries are equally meritorious. Based on the recommendation of the judges, NCSHA reserves the right not to name an award recipient in a category or subcategory.

■ ENTRY DEADLINE

Each entry must be submitted as a **single PDF** via NCSHA's Awards Submission Portal by **11:59 p.m. ET on Wednesday, April 1, 2026**. You will complete an entry form within the portal prior to uploading your entry.

Upon successful upload of your entry to the Awards Submission Portal, you will receive an automated confirmation email. If you do not receive an email, please contact NCSHA at awards@ncsha.org.

As the judging will be conducted virtually, all visual aids must be submitted as part of the PDF. Please do not mail or ship visual aids to NCSHA.

■ ENTRY FEE AND PAYMENT

The entry fee is \$35 per submission.

Online Payment Instructions

Log into www.ncsha.org and click on **My Account** (upper right corner) and then **Online Store** (left side, below the NCSHA logo).

Once in the store, click on the dropdown menu **Browse store categories** and then **Merchandise**.

Scroll to and click on **2026 Awards for Program Excellence Entry Fee**. In the bottom left corner, under **Add to Cart**, in the **Quantity field**, select the number of entries you are paying for and then click **Add to Cart**.

From the Shopping Cart, click **Check Out**, enter your credit card information, and click **Confirm Order**. To pay by check, select **Pay by Check**, click **Confirm Order**, print your receipt, and mail it with payment to NCSHA. Make checks payable to *NCSHA*.

Entry fees should be paid by the April 1, 2026, entry deadline.

If you need to make a payment after April 1, please contact awards@ncsha.org or call 202-624-8469.

Webinar: Tips on Preparing Your Entries
Thursday, February 26 | 2:00 – 3:00 pm ET

[Register here.](#)

Do you have questions about entering the Awards for Program Excellence? Are you interested in tips on how to prepare an effective entry? Join us on February 24!

■ SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND RULES

Submit all entries in the portal by 11:59 p.m. ET on Wednesday, April 1, 2026.

Once in the portal, you may save your submission(s) and return later to work on incomplete submissions, edit submitted entries, or submit additional entries until the April 1 deadline.

Submitting an Entry

Step 1. Create a new account or log into your existing account: Go to <https://my.reviewr.com/s2/site/NCSHA2026Excellence> to create a new account or to log into the account you created for the 2025 Awards program. (Forgot your password? You can reset it directly from the portal.)

Step 2. Follow the Submission Process: Once you have created your account, complete the online entry form, pressing **Save and Advance** at the end of each section.

A. HFA CONTACT INFORMATION

Provide the name, email, and phone number of the person at your HFA whom NCSHA should contact with any questions about this entry. The contact must be an HFA employee.

B. ENTRY TITLE/CATEGORY/SUMMARY

Entry Title: Enter the title of your entry exactly as you wish it to be published on the NCSHA website and in the Annual Conference app.

Category and Subcategory: Select the category, and subcategory if applicable, you are entering **AND** indicate if your entry is a **new** program or practice or a **qualitative improvement to an existing** program or practice.

Entry Summary: Provide a 500-character with spaces (maximum) summary of the program or practice you are entering; **this summary will be posted on NCSHA's website to describe your entry to readers.** REQUIRED: If the entry is an established program that has been improved upon, describe the improvement(s) and include measurable results resulting from the improvement(s).

C. ENTRY FILE UPLOAD

Upload each entry as a **single PDF** that includes a **three-page (maximum) description** of your HFA's program or practice plus additional pages containing any **supporting visual aids** (optional). (Maximum file size of the PDF: 5,000 KB)

Entry Description: Explain how your HFA's program or practice fulfills each of the category's judging criteria. Follow this format when developing your entry description:

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| Length | Not to exceed three single-spaced, typed pages with one-inch margins; text only* |
| Font | Minimum 11-point font size |
| Header | The header on each page of the entry description must include the following information: <ol style="list-style-type: none">i. HFA Nameii. Entry Titleiii. Entry Category and Subcategory (if applicable) |

**Images/graphics that support your narrative are highly encouraged. However, because of the three-page limit for the entry description, we recommend including them in a Visual Aids section behind the entry description.*

Visual Aids: Photos, publications, weblinks, etc. are encouraged but not required. Some subcategories lend themselves to visual aids (e.g., Communications: Annual Report), while others may not.

Place any visual aids **behind** your three-page entry description rather than in the narrative itself in the PDF; visual aids cannot be uploaded as separate PDFs.

Note: Entries, including visual aids, become the property of NCSHA and will not be returned.

D. PAYMENT

Indicate whether your HFA is paying online or mailing a check to NCSHA.

Step 3. Receive a Confirmation: After you press **Submit**, you should be directed to a confirmation screen and receive an email confirming successful submission of your entry. *If you do not receive this confirmation, contact awards@ncsha.org.*

Submitting Additional Entries

To submit another entry, press the **Submit Another Entry** button on the confirmation screen (followed by **Back to Listings** and **Add Another Submission**) or in the left-hand navigation of your account screen.

Editing Your Entries

To edit your submitted entries:

1. Log into the Awards Submission Portal using the same credentials used to submit your entry.
2. Click **My Submissions** in the left-hand navigation.
3. Find the entry you wish to edit and click **View**.
4. Click the second blue **Edit** button on the right side of the page.
5. Scroll through and make your revisions.
6. Click **Save & Logout** or **Submit** to save your revisions.

■ CATEGORY AND SUBCATEGORY DEFINITIONS | JUDGING CRITERIA

New — as well as qualitative improvements to existing — programs and practices are eligible for entry in all categories.

Advocacy Category

Recognizes an HFA for its leadership role in advocating for and advancing policy change — including legislative, regulatory, or spending — at the state or federal level.

Judging Criteria

Entries in the Advocacy category will be judged on the degree to which they:

- Are innovative
- Are replicable
- Advance the overall mission of the agency
- Demonstrate leadership
- Address housing challenges
- Anticipate, identify, and prioritize legislative issues and their potential ramifications
- Demonstrate coalition building
- Forge effective relationships with state or federal policy makers
- Achieve strategic objectives
- Reach target audiences
- Benefit lower-income households

Communications Category

1. Annual Report

Recognizes an HFA for an annual report that most effectively communicates the agency's mission and impact in their state.

2. Integrated Campaign

Recognizes an HFA for a comprehensive, multi-channel campaign that takes place over an extended period of time to promote a specific message, program, or project. The campaign will include a combination of tactics and channels (e.g., print, digital, social, multimedia).

3. Special Event Marketing

Recognizes an HFA for a campaign designed to promote an agency event, including but not limited to a conference, community engagement activity, anniversary, groundbreaking, or dedication.

Judging Criteria

Entries in the Communications category will be judged on the degree to which they:

- Are innovative
- Are replicable
- Engage targeted audiences
- Achieve measurable results
- Provide benefits that outweigh costs
- Demonstrate effective use of resources
- Achieve strategic objectives

Homeownership Category

1. Empowering New Buyers

Recognizes an HFA for a new or enhanced program that best provides homeownership financing to HFA targeted customers.

2. Encouraging New Construction

Recognizes an HFA for a new or enhanced program that best encourages the new construction of affordable ownership housing.

3. Home Improvement and Rehabilitation

Recognizes an HFA for a new or enhanced program that best provides home improvement and rehabilitation financing to HFA targeted customers.

Judging Criteria

Entries in the Homeownership category will be judged on the degree to which they:

- Are innovative
- Are replicable
- Respond to an important state housing need
- Use data, research, and analysis to demonstrate measurable benefits to HFA targeted customers and underserved markets
- Have a proven track record of success in the marketplace
- Provide benefits that outweigh costs
- Demonstrate effective use of resources
- Effectively employ partnerships
- Achieve strategic objectives

Management Innovation Category

1. Human Resources

Recognizes an HFA for outstanding innovation in human resources management to strengthen agency operations and achieve strategic objectives.

2. Internal Operations

Recognizes an HFA for outstanding innovation in internal operations management to strengthen agency operations and achieve strategic objectives.

3. Technology

Recognizes an HFA for outstanding innovation in the use of technology to strengthen agency operations and achieve strategic objectives.

Judging Criteria

Entries in the Management Innovation category will be judged on the degree to which they:

- Are innovative
- Are replicable
- Respond to a management challenge or opportunity
- Achieve measurable improvements in agency operations
- Provide benefits that outweigh costs
- Demonstrate effective use of resources
- Achieve strategic objectives

Rental Housing Category

1. Encouraging New Construction and Promoting Preservation

Recognizes an HFA for a program that best supports the new construction or preservation of affordable rental housing.

2. Supporting Property Management and Renter Needs

Recognizes an HFA for outstanding innovation in asset management, compliance monitoring practices, or renter-focused initiatives in affordable rental housing.

Note: Individual housing developments are not eligible for submission.

Judging Criteria

Entries in the Rental Housing category will be judged on the degree to which they:

- Are innovative
- Are replicable
- Respond to an important state housing need
- Demonstrate measurable benefits to HFA targeted customers
- Have a proven track record of success in the marketplace
- Provide benefits that outweigh costs
- Demonstrate effective use of resources
- Effectively employ partnerships
- Achieve strategic objectives

Special Achievement Category

Recognizes an HFA for a program or practice that responds in an outstanding manner to an important state need; has a significant impact on a population, geographic area, or economy; and cuts across traditional program lines.

Note: Individual housing developments are not eligible for an award.

Judging Criteria

Entries in the Special Achievement category will be judged on the degree to which they:

- Are innovative
- Respond to an important state need
- Achieve intended results
- Provide benefits that outweigh costs

Special Needs Housing Category

1. Combatting Homelessness

Recognizes an HFA for a new or enhanced program that best provides affordable housing and services for individuals or families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

2. Housing for Persons with Special Needs

Recognizes an HFA for a new or enhanced program that best provides affordable housing and services for persons with special needs.

Note: Individual housing developments are not eligible for submission.

Judging Criteria

Entries in the Special Needs Housing category will be judged on the degree to which they:

- Are innovative
- Are replicable
- Respond to an important state housing need
- Demonstrate measurable benefits to HFA targeted customers
- Have a proven track record of success in the marketplace
- Provide benefits that outweigh costs
- Demonstrate effective use of resources
- Effectively employ partnerships
- Achieve strategic objectives

Entry Preparation Checklist

- Review the category and subcategory definitions to determine which you want to enter.
- Review the judging criteria for each category you are entering and write your entry description to respond to those criteria.
- Prepare your entry following the directions under “Submission Guidelines and Rules” in this Call for Entries.
- Submit your entry by **11:59 p.m. ET on April 1, 2026**, via NCSHA's [Awards Submission Portal](#).
- Process your entry fee by April 1, 2026.