

Engaging Our Community

The Era of Unity event, hosted by Alaska Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC) in 2025, was the culmination of many small changes over the last few years, and a refusal to return to the status quo. Instead, AHFC is moving towards a future where partners are engaged and involved in the shaping of our programs. Hosted in Anchorage, AHFC brought together tribal partners, homeless and support service providers, external funders, and every agency who had worked with us on the COVID-era programs to share lessons, discuss the future, and ask the question: “Do our current programs meet the need, or should we be doing something different?”

Alaska is a giant state sprinkled with small, tight-knit communities, from the rainforest region’s Ketchikan to the subarctic Bethel. Though separated by roughly 1,000 air miles requiring connecting flights, partners from both communities were in attendance at the Era of Unity. Other partners drove an hour or more into Anchorage, and some could run home at lunch. While all are Alaskan, partners are in such disparate and spread-out locations as to almost be operating in different states. This event was an opportunity to bring these agencies together, not only to shine a light on the great work they do, but to empower them to tell the funders of their programs what works, what doesn’t, and what they need to be successful.

“It’s hard to see things when you are too close. Take a step back and look.” – Bob Ross

Era of Unity: Going the Distance

Before staring in *The Joy of Painting*, Bob Ross was inspired to begin painting while living in Alaska. His wisdom seems obvious, but is often overlooked. As technology advances and the world changes at an ever-increasing pace, introspection can seem a luxury, when in reality, it is essential to AHFC in meeting its mission of providing Alaskans access to safe, quality, affordable housing. The objective of the Era of Unity event was to bring our partners together, elevate them, and hear their stories. Nothing overly complicated, expensive, or difficult to replicate. AHFC brought providers together and asked how they thought the future should look. Most importantly, AHFC committed to following through on what we learned.

Bringing Our Partners Together

A significant portion of Alaska’s communities are not on a road system. Rural agencies may never interact with their urban counterparts due to distance and limited technology. The pandemic forced that to change with alacrity. AHFC’s Stabilization program, a COVID-era homeless housing program, held monthly check-ins with over 20 partners from all over the state. AHFC facilitated reliable and regular cross-community communication. Suddenly, Juneau was discussing strategies for addressing homelessness with communities in the Arctic Circle a thousand miles away. These are not giant organizations but small, community-based nonprofits reliant on grants and donations to do crucial work. AHFC saw how beneficial these discussions were. That became the catalyst

for bringing partners from across the state to Anchorage for an in-person convening. AHFC covered the costs of the venue, catering, and offered travel scholarships for providers who normally wouldn't have the budget.

- Over 70 attendees representing 35 agencies across 13 communities participated;
- Five funders joined to spread awareness of resources, how to access funding streams, and discuss the time involved in pursuing dollars to house Alaskans;
- Strategic breakout discussions grouped different community partners together to trade expertise, discuss measurable outcomes, and identify opportunities to improve service.

Hearing Their Stories

The first item on the agenda was a panel discussion made up of four partners from the communities of Ketchikan, Cordova, Anchorage, and Bethel. They spoke about the housing situation in each community, their unique challenges, and program success stories. The Anchorage partner discussed nuances associated with assisting victims of domestic violence, and the difficulty that can pose when trying to collect data for funder reporting. Of particular note, the partner from Bethel discussed the devastation of Typhoon Halong, which displaced more than a thousand people in the area. Homes and entire communities were swept away in the flooding, putting even more strain on already tight housing resources.

- AHFC's Communications team shared a Digital Coffee Table book highlighting partners' work over the last few years with individual impact stories;
- Facilitated discussions where partners recounted stories to small groups of their peers which were then shared when the everyone came back together;
- Funders opened the floor to hear directly from attendees about how they could better serve them, so they could better serve Alaskans.

Constructive Feedback

One of the primary goals while engaging with partners was to receive real, honest feedback. An objective assessment can be difficult to obtain from partners reliant on grant funding, yet knowing if programs, in their current form, still make sense is critical to success. While some nonprofits can be very vocal, many of the smaller agencies, especially those without multiple funding sources, may be reluctant to provide constructive feedback. To ameliorate this, anonymous real-time surveys and polls ran throughout the conference in addition to a virtual "Idea Box" where attendees could add thoughts or questions as they occurred.

- Positive feedback included specific call-outs for the transformative nature of COVID-era program flexibility;
- Less positive was the need for more shelters, concerns about lack of flexible program funds post-COVID, not enough transitional housing options, concerns over faith-based programs,

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inspections forcing people to remain unhoused, issues with varying reporting deadlines, confusing audit timing, and how different funders have unique data collection and reporting requirements but money for data management isn't always available;

- Questions to funders about how smaller agencies can be more self-supported, lists for funding opportunities, IT-related questions, pooling insurance for better rates.

Follow-up and Follow-through

Since the Era of Unity, changes have been implemented in direct response to providers. The overwhelmingly positive response to the Stabilization program structure led AHFC to allocate \$1.5M in state funding for a smaller version specific to rural Alaskan communities called the Next Gen Stabilization (NGS) program. Allowable activities and reporting were heavily shaped by partner feedback. Seven distinct communities off the road system were awarded NGS, including new partners.

One constant from the smaller providers was a lack of capacity, specifically IT. For NGS, a simple data collection system was created to allow partners to track clients and expenses. This eliminates the need for reporting and allows agencies to focus on helping Alaskans. Additionally, AHFC will be hosting upcoming office hours for partners to join virtually and pose questions to the IT team on best practices, data security, and other general technology issues. This initiative will expand to the Administrative Services department to answer insurance questions and the like. Small agencies in rural Alaska may have a single person responsible for what AHFC has departments to accomplish. Office hours will facilitate sharing the collective expertise of these departments.

When AHFC set out to put on the Era of Unity, there were several objectives in mind:

- Expand and improve program reach to new communities;
- Bring partners together to share stories and highlight what they have accomplished;
- Offer AHFC resources to the partners that would benefit from them;
- Receive honest, actionable feedback or criticism from the people doing the work.

All of these objectives, and more were achieved. A new program launched with expanded services to new communities with new partners. Agencies that had created networks of landlords willing to rent to AHFC assisted individuals shared notes with others who struggled to find housing for clients. All the different programs and work being done around the state was pieced together and presented to attendees who usually only see their sliver of all the positive impact they have. AHFC is acting on direct feedback through new programs and future events. As a large, statewide funder it can be easy to get wrapped up in bureaucracy and spreadsheets, losing sight of the individual humans at the heart of what we do but without our partners in the communities doing the work, these programs and the hope they provide would not exist. It seems obvious that they should have a say in how best to provide for their Alaskan neighbors in need.

ERA OF UNITY: GOING THE DISTANCE



OBJECTIVES

Expand and improve program reach to new communities
Bring partners together to share stories
Offer AHFC resources to the partners
Receive honest, actionable feedback or criticism



MESSAGE

Do our current programs meet the need, or should we be doing something different?



ACTION

Turn feedback into action. Implement changes, begin new initiatives, update programs.



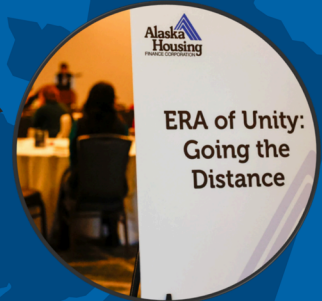
AUDIENCE

Alaska Housing Finance Corporation's Homeless Services Providers, Stabilization Partners, and grant funders



ENGAGE

Empower partners to speak about their communities and programs. Highlight the impact of their efforts. Use surveys, polls, and an "Idea Box" to gather honest feedback. Follow-up and Follow-through.



ERA of Unity: Going the Distance

**Over 70 Attendees
Representing 35 Agencies
Across 13 Communities
Including Five Funders**

ERA of Unity: Going the Distance

Thank you for joining Alaska Housing Finance Corporation and Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority for our BHAP, SNHG, and Stabilization event!

Strengthening statewide partnerships that serve our neighbors
Sharing stories and lessons learned to improve service delivery

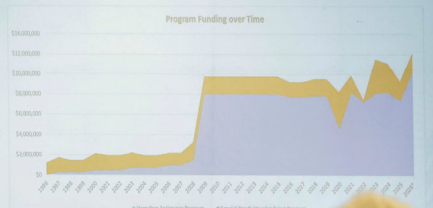
Facilitating networking with peers from across the state

Sharing our collaborative impact

Developing shared goals for lasting innovations

Hearing directly from funders

AHFC and AMHTA: Joint Program Funding Levels





Key Takeaways

Over 30 “Idea Box” responses to help facilitate direct conversations and ideas

AHFC ran a series of polls on Day 1:

- The majority of respondents have worked at their current agencies for over **ten** years
- Over 70% of respondents have lived in their community for over **ten** years
- 50% of respondents identified permanent housing as the highest community need
- Respondents submit, on average, 30 funding applications per year

Recap Day One

Our Programs in Action

Myrna Chaney, Nicole Songer, Nakissha Bialy, and Heidi Hill representing Ketchikan, Cordova, Bethel, and Anchorage discussed how they saw their respective community’s housing situation and the role their agency plays. Housing is tight in all communities but especially Bethel, made worse by Typhoon Halong.

Dialogue With Funders

Daniel Delfino (AHFC), Kelda Barstad (Trust), Tasha Pineda (Rasmuson), and Megan Cacciola (Alaska Community Foundation) spoke about the overall funding landscape, the availability of resources, and the shape of the funding their organizations provide.

Knowledge Campfire

Attendees broke out into smaller, “campfire” groups focused on building strength in program participants and looking for long-term stability after the immediate crisis was addressed. Group discussions identified meaningful and measurable outcomes for building client resilience and stability.

Gone Phishing: Managing Sensitive Data and Fraud Prevention

The Gone Phishing panel focused on data security and panelists shared real stories of fraud attempts during pandemic-era housing programs. This panel provided attendees with an overview of best practices to protect your data, provided training opportunities to learn about common fraud schemes, and resulted in establishing the 'Ask AHFC' Office Hour for IT related topics

Recap Day Two

♦ Putting Partnerships in Perspective

- ♦ Introduction and speakers from AHFC including Bryan Butcher, Stacy Barnes, and Daniel Delfino
- ♦ The Rent Relief program helped 60,000 households consisting of 20,000 Alaskans
- ♦ Measures put in place to verify income was able to stop \$40 million from going out the door to bad actors; This allowed the Stabilization and Last Frontier Housing Initiative programs to happen

♦ Going the Distance

- ♦ Facilitated Discussions allowed smaller groups to discuss their experiences and opportunities for continued partnerships
- ♦ Coming together with the larger group, those experiences and opportunities were shared



Next Steps

- Quarterly “Ask AHFC” Office Hours
- New Funding Opportunities: Basic Homeless Assistance Programs and Next Generation Stabilization Program. Federal opportunities will be announced in the future

Forward Together

Opportunities for Collaboration



ASK AHFC

We asked; you answered. AHFC will be hosting quarterly Office Hours starting Wednesday, DATE. The first Ask AHFC will include a Q+A from AHFC's IT Director, Tom Remaklus.



AHFC would love to hear from our partners. Please respond to this [survey](#) about next steps.

Next Generation Stabilization Program

AHFC is pleased to announce new funding opportunities to move forward together.

Please see more information at our [website](#). Applications due December 15th, 2025.