HFA: Alaska Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC)
Entry Name: Integrated Program Ownership
Category: Management Innovation – Internal Operations

How many of today's housing programs can you name that date back to a time when the Yellow Pages were in every home, and companies like Kodak and Sears were still corporate powerhouses? Most of these legacy programs have been peripherally modernized, but many still structurally embody the thinking of 1990s models for operations and partner engagement.

COVID tested many of the old guard housing programs through trial by fire. Some held, others buckled. But a lasting lesson emerged from that era: the strength and value of Integrated Program Ownership (IPO) across AHFC and its partners. The IPO culture of interdependence, innovation, and open communication empowered our relief programs to run circles around the legacy models.

But the crisis phase of COVID is over, so now what? Do we mothball the Covidmobile or step on the gas and say *Not Today*? Where innovation is concerned, it's a simple choice: No backsies.

Responding to a Management Opportunity - While the Iron is Hot

We brought ALL of our legacy and COVID-era housing program partners together in one room for a pandemic programs debrief. We wanted to chart a new course forward for our programs – one that continued through IPO. The pandemic programs may be history, but the integration and expansion of statewide services catalyzed during that period was not going to die on our watch.

<u>IPO Phase I</u>: *Information Gathering and Partner Engagement*

We hosted a two-day forum called **Era of Unity: Going the Distance** for our partners. The event brought together tribal partners, homeless and support service providers, external funding partners and every agency who had worked together with us on the COVID era programs. We scheduled the event to coincide with the annual Alaska Federation of Natives meeting many partners attend.

Our partners have broad perspectives on our program operations and the services they provide. These insights span technology, program direction, equitable funding and geographic and labor constraints. When building out our pandemic programs, honest real-time partner feedback drove how our service delivery model was built. The Era of Unity event was intended to create a safe space for similar dialogue to help re-wire and transmogrify our legacy housing program models.

We wanted to hear from partners, not speak at them. We deployed multiple engagement channels through QR code suggestion boxes, real-time Slido polls, old school hand raises, microphone passes, and knowledge campfire sessions that assigned random attendees to topic tables where dedicated AHFC staff were on hand to facilitate discussions **amongst partners** and take notes.

<u>IPO Phase II</u>: *Plotting the Operational Centers of Gravity*

Our partners have navigated COVID, labor shortages, seesawing federal funding and policy directives, and inflation. They have recently added AI mania to the list. Many of these partners have a CEO who is also the IT director, HR manager, program lead and front desk manager.

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One of our COVID lessons was structuring operations around partners' internal capacity and the way they work. This particular lesson was critical for agencies **and** cities. After the ERA of Unity event, AHFC set out to visit several local government leaders in their home communities and leveraged the Alaska Municipal League network to ask the same questions. The answers rhymed.

Many partners have limited bandwidth and focused missions. Several need help navigating the current IT landscape and fluid insurance environments to avoid having their operations overwhelmed by administrative factors. Public and private partners told us what their charters did and did not cover, and the activities they had capacity to support. In recent years, several partners had ventured beyond their traditional mission. In many cases, this eroded capacity and board support, and triggered disruptive leadership changes. Losing partners is not good for programs.

We cannot order new partners on Amazon. We have the ones we have, and their boards write their mission statements… not us. To effectively serve Alaskans, our programs need to empower our partners to work within their missions and their organizational capacity.

Innovation – Asking, Listening and Acting

Small teams in remote communities can now plug into our gig-like ecosystem of housing resources and serve Alaskans via programs that were once out of reach. The pandemic models proved the viability of a decentralized ecosystem with an expanded network of partners. Standalone agencies with vertically integrated functions are no longer required to participate in housing programs. As a consequence, new voices and community perspectives are emerging to strengthen our programs.

<u>IPO Phase III</u>: *Feedback to Housing Programs Ownership*
Service Programs: We delayed a new supportive housing funding round until after our Era of Unity Event so our partners had a voice in crafting the new program. We asked our providers how many had found rental units for a homeless client but could not house them b/c of inspection issues. Half raised their hand. It's impossible to describe that moment in the room. As many raised their hands to vote for 6 months of rental housing assistance versus 12 to incentivize self-sufficiency. We took this feedback and incorporated solutions to both in the new program. The application round received a record response, and we were able to deliver flexible rental assistance to 7 new communities off the road system that would work for the housing stock and providers they had!

Partner Support: Era of Unity Event attendees heard from AHFC's IT director and expressed interest in "Ask AHFC" meetings with AHFCs IT and Administrative Services departments. The program and IT team took this feedback and observations on reporting systems and did two things:

1) Created a new reporting portal for housing partners to connect with other public entities for data sharing to reduce redundant reporting and extraneous data fields. AHFC entered into a data-sharing agreement with Alaska's Health Information Exchange to make this happen.
2) Agreed to host semi-annual "Ask AHFC" calls for partners to give them a space to benefit from AHFC's infrastructure by connecting them to AHFC's IT and Insurance teams.

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Local Government Engagement: AHFC recently purchased 600+ acres of publicly owned land to catalyze new housing opportunities. Before launching the housing development rounds for any of the lands, AHFC connected with local governments via the Alaska Municipal League and visited leaders in each of their communities. Our government partners had the opportunity to provide input on how to best serve their community. These connections incalculably boosted the community support for the subsequent housing initiatives because they had a voice in the process.

Demonstrate Effective Use of Resources: The Joy of Housing

Even in the age of AI, the value from meeting partners across a table is unmatched. We brought our partners together and went to them to triage shared housing challenges and collectively formed the best solution vectors. We treated partners like shareholders, not vendors. It just makes sense. They work harder and help build better programs, they deliver more solutions than expected, and they spread energetic awareness / good words about the programs they help create. Our programs need a presence and voice in all of Alaska. It helps when those voices have enthusiasm.

Replicable

As new funding streams and initiatives emerge or old ones are re-evaluated, we have the power to (re)shape how our housing programs operate and who they serve. The IPO engagement model is slower than 100% autonomy. But partner voices can elevate program designs, their output and external support in ways that no agency can do in isolation. The dialogue, however, is a two-way street, and their engagement and passion disappears (fast) if they are shut-out or ignored.

Cost of the Benefits Delivered

Time – Engaging with the ERA of Unity partners and local governments delayed the rollout the associated housing initiatives by approximately 3 months, with respect to each initiative.
Money – The Era of Unity Event and travel costs for AHFC and its partners were less than $50k.

Achieve Strategic Objectives and Measurable Improvements in Agency Operations

Our IPO engagement transformed the lessons from our pandemic programs into new homeless and supportive housing solutions for seven small communities off the road system with a new program utilizing state funding that addressed several pain-points uncovered through the dialogue.

Our IPO engagement led to a new client record portal being created by AHFC's IT department that connects support service program records across agencies to eliminate redundant reports. And AHFC's staff agreed to participate in semi-annual "Ask AHFC" calls with our smaller nonprofits.

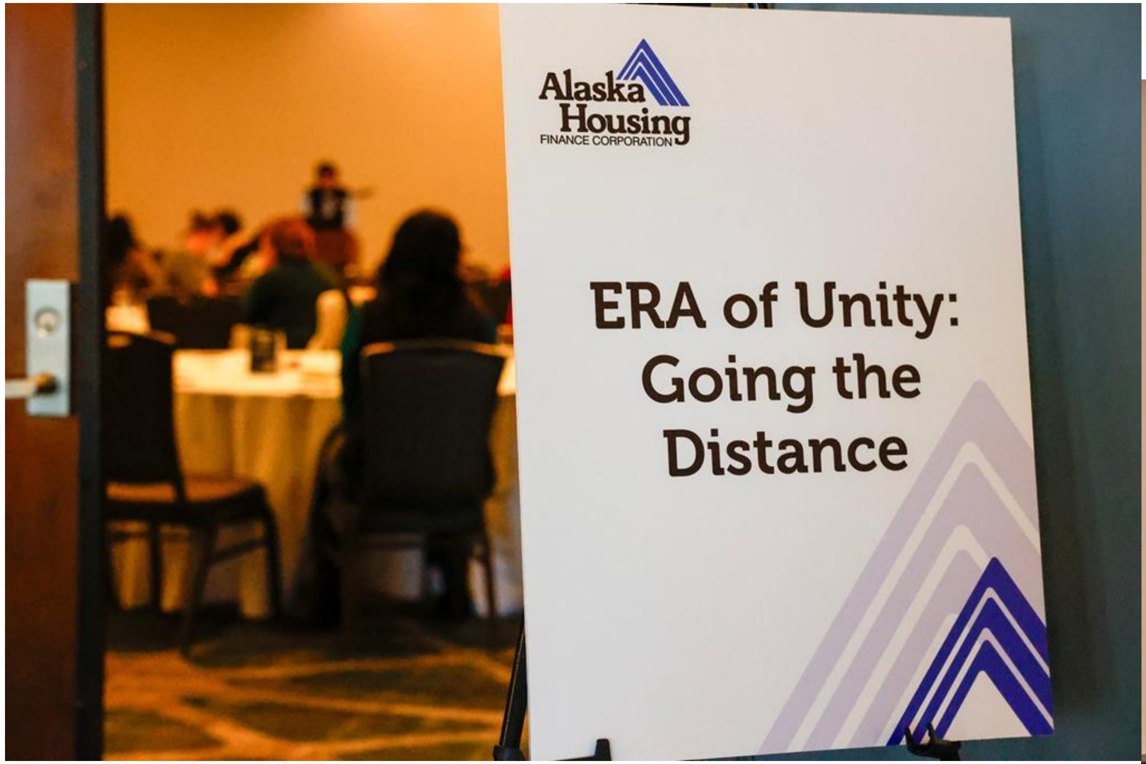
Our IPO engagement with local government helped us form the housing incentives for 600+ acres of newly acquired lands to prioritize their community's needs over spreadsheets. Having voice in the process boosted their engagement, and that has been invaluable for the initiative's awareness.

Our goal was to strengthen program development, operations and housing outcomes through IPO. Not partners as employees or vendors, but as valued and supported program owners. It worked!

Integrated Program Ownership

Visual Aids

Era of Unity – Covid Programs Debrief
October, 2025



Era of Unity
Knowledge Campfire

Era of Unity –
Fraud Prevention Panel with AHFC's IT Department

AHFC Visit to Fairbanks – November 2025
Meet with City and Borough Mayors for Public Lands to Housing Catalyst Initiative