

Housing Help is Here – COVID-19 Assistance Outreach

Illinois Housing Development Authority
Communications: Integrated Campaign

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Introduction

The economic fallout caused by the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the fundamental role of housing in keeping families safe, stable, and healthy. It also exposed the affordability crisis that existed well before the pandemic, as well as the widening disparities in access to safe and affordable housing. As the public health crisis led to layoffs, furloughs, and decreased business revenues, the housing cost burdens many families were already experiencing became unmanageable, and many households were suddenly facing housing insecurity. To make matters worse, evidence has repeatedly shown that the economic fallout has not been shouldered equally, but instead has had a disproportionate effect on low-income families, people of color, and those least able to weather a financial hardship.

As the federal government provided resources for emergency COVID-19 relief, the Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA) and Housing Finance Agencies across the nation quickly designed and launched programs to provide timely relief for renters and homeowners impacted by the pandemic. Faced with pressure with pressure to deliver these funds quickly and equitably, IHDA knew it was critical that these programs be supported by a comprehensive and sustained marketing campaign that engaged and informed those most in need, including historically marginalized populations who may be difficult to reach.

Housing Help is Here – Program Objectives

IHDA's "Housing Help is Here" campaign launched in early 2021 with goals of educating stakeholders and the general public regarding the emergency rent and mortgage relief programs offered by the state while providing guidance and resources to drive program applications. With demand exceeding the assistance available, outreach efforts would also focus on increasing the percentage of applications received from Black and Latinx households, households in communities disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, and households residing outside of the Chicago Metropolitan Area.

Identifying Target Audiences

While everyone in Illinois was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the financial hardships had not been shouldered equally. Discovery research found that households earning less than \$30,000 per year had experienced the highest rates of job loss and the slowest recovery. Low- and moderate-income Black and Latinx households were more likely than white households to be delinquent on both housing and utility payments during the pandemic. And Hispanic households were twice as likely as white households to experience eviction or foreclosure.

Given these trends, and knowing that the need was greater than the resources IHDA could provide, the Authority's outreach campaign centered the following priority populations:

1. Renters and homeowners at immediate risk of eviction or foreclosure (i.e., those who have been unemployed for more than 90 days).
2. Renters and homeowners in communities disproportionately impacted by the health and economic effects of the pandemic (i.e., zip codes that have delinquency and unemployment rates that are higher than the state's average).
3. Historically underserved households, including Black and Latinx households, immigrant or undocumented families, and those facing language or technology barriers.

Campaign Tactics

With the priority populations identified, IHDA developed and implemented a comprehensive outreach plan across a broad range of channels and platforms, including earned media tours, paid advertising, public service announcements, social media engagement, and more. Across all of these tactics, efforts were made to streamline access to timely program information and application resources, and to provide consistent messaging and branding.

www.IllinoisHousingHelp.org

IHDA's outreach campaign is anchored by a new website – www.IllinoisHousingHelp.org. This site serves as a centralized hub of trustworthy resources where struggling renters and homeowners can find current information, answers to frequently asked questions, and connections to free emergency foreclosure and eviction prevention programs offered by the State. The site is also home to an interactive search tool allowing residents to connect with partner organizations providing free housing counseling, legal assistance and application help in their community.

Earned Media Tour

IHDA's Communications team coordinated a series of media events and tours in several designated media markets to announce program launch dates, deadlines, and other calls to action. IHDA staff leveraged the news cycle to communicate frequent program milestones, updates and success stories (e.g., applications coming soon, funds are 50% disbursed, apply today, etc.). Media relations work also included working closely with news sources throughout the state to ensure coverage of the program is informed, fair, and beneficial to the Authority whenever possible.

Paid Advertising

A six-week paid advertising campaign to drive applications for emergency mortgage assistance was launched in March 2022. Ads promoting assistance available at www.IllinoisHousingHelp.org were placed on broadcast and cable TV, radio, and digital platforms. Out of home advertising including billboards, street level posters, and bus/train station ads were also utilized in communities and locations identified during research.

Social Media

IHDA ran a paid social media campaign to reach households in targeted communities that reached an estimated 1,200 to 3,400 people daily. IHDA also pursued social outreach efforts that targeted Facebook groups that serve as resources for immigrant and undocumented communities, leveraging trusted messengers and platforms to promote the help available from the State.

Training and Webinars

A series of webinars for state legislators, local elected officials, community organizations, Illinois residents and other stakeholder groups were held and recordings were made available on www.IllinoisHousingHelp.org. Offered in English and Spanish, these informational sessions walked participants through program eligibility, documents needed to apply, and the application process.

Outreach Toolkits

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An outreach toolkit including multilingual program flyers, palm cards posters, brochures, and social media graphics were designed and made available for download on IllinoisHousingHelp.org/toolkit. Materials were also printed and distributed to program partners and stakeholders upon request.

Client Testimonials

As program funds were disbursed to renters and homeowners, IHDA actively solicited feedback from assisted households via online forms. IHDA staff followed up on these leads and select stories were produced into video testimonials that were shared with elected officials and on social media to market and celebrate the success of these emergency assistance programs.

Leveraging Partnerships

Throughout this outreach campaign, IHDA relied heavily on partnerships with community-based organizations to reach underserved communities and neighborhoods with high rates of COVID-19. These organizations provided key support for outreach and application intake, leveraging their ability to reach vulnerable groups and overcome language barriers.

In addition, with the launch of the state's emergency rental assistance programs, there was an immediate connection between IHDA and non-subsidized landlords, which is not a group the Authority has traditionally communicated with. Communications staff increased IHDA's outreach efforts to landlords, assisted them through the application processes, and accepted feedback for changes to streamline future rounds of rental assistance.

Finally, state and local elected officials were invaluable in leveraging external contacts and networks. Local officials are often trusted messengers in the communities they serve, and IHDA made deliberate efforts to keep elected officials informed and engaged as programs were developed, launched and administered.

Results

These marketing efforts have been successful and had measurable results in both the number and type of applications IHDA has received for emergency rent and mortgage assistance. In the most recent application round of the state's Rental Payment Program, IHDA received over 101,000 unique applications for assistance. Of those assisted, 63 percent of households served identified as American Indian, Asian, Black, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander and more than 13 percent identified as Hispanic/Latinx, an increase of more than 12 percent over the share the year before. In addition, 63 percent of assisted households were extremely low-income, while nearly half of all assisted households had been unemployed for more than 90 days. Finally, more than 17 percent of approved applications were from households outside of the Chicago Metro Area; for context, approximately 23 percent of all renter households in Illinois live in these areas. While the application period for IHDA's Homeowner Assistance Fund is currently in progress, the preliminary data also reflects the impact of these outreach efforts.

IHDA and other HFAs often have limited budgets for marketing and outreach. However, many of these tactics are low cost and leverage existing tools and platforms already in use by HFAs across the country. And when they are implemented as part of an informed, coordinated and comprehensive strategy, they can produce results that far outweigh any costs.

IllinoisHousingHelp.org Landing Page

The screenshot shows the Illinois Housing Development Authority website. At the top right, there is a language selector for "Español" and a blue "Apply Now" button. Below these are navigation links for "Mortgage Assistance", "Rental Assistance", "Resources", and "FAQs". The main content area features a large photograph of a diverse family (a man, a woman, and a baby) smiling. To the right of the photo, the text reads "Housing Help Is Here!" followed by a paragraph: "The Illinois Homeowner Assistance Fund is now open and rental assistance is available from the Department of Human Services." Below this is another paragraph: "See below for information on the rent, mortgage, utility, and legal assistance programs currently available." A blue banner at the bottom of the page contains the text: "The State of Illinois is providing emergency housing assistance to help renters and homeowners maintain stable, affordable housing during the COVID-19 pandemic." A small "Privacy Terms" icon is visible in the bottom right corner of the banner.

How to Apply Tutorial Video

This is a YouTube video thumbnail for the "Illinois Rental Payment Program (ILRPP2) - How to Apply" video. The thumbnail has a blue background with the text "HOW TO APPLY" in large white letters. Below the text is a white play button icon. At the bottom left, it says "Watch on YouTube". On the right side, there is a smaller version of the Illinois Rental Payment Program logo, which consists of a blue house icon with a white window, above the text "ILLINOIS RENTAL PAYMENT PROGRAM".

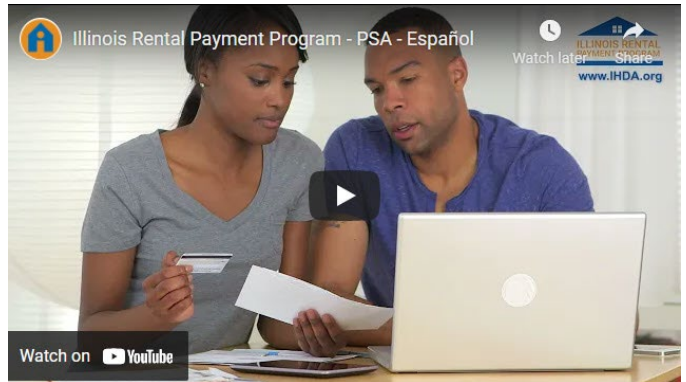
This is a YouTube video thumbnail for the "Illinois Rental Payment Program (ILRPP2) - Cómo Presentar una Solicitud" video. The thumbnail has a blue background with the text "CÓMO PRESENTAR UNA SOLICITUD" in large white letters. Below the text is a white play button icon. At the bottom left, it says "Watch on YouTube". On the right side, there is a smaller version of the Illinois Rental Payment Program logo, which consists of a blue house icon with a white window, above the text "ILLINOIS RENTAL PAYMENT PROGRAM".

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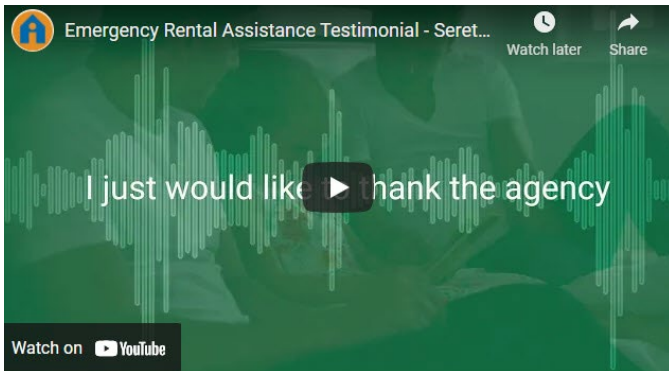
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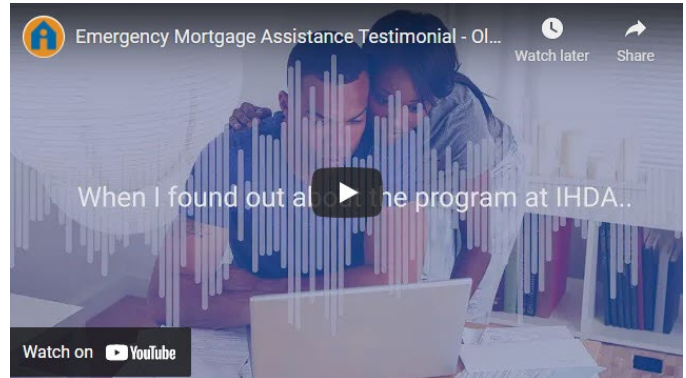
Campaign PSA



Resident Testimonials



Resident Testimonials Continued



Campaign Collateral

Click On The Materials To Download And Share With Your Network!



Flyer

Use this easy-to-distribute flyer to spread awareness of emergency housing assistance, and to make people aware of the necessary

[Read More](#)



Palm Card

Use this handy palm card for at-a-glance benefits of the ILHAF program to develop grassroots awareness of emergency housing

[Read More](#)



Poster

Download and distribute this poster to place on bulletin boards or distribute to local businesses, community organizations and

[Read More](#)



Trifold

Download this in-depth trifold to print professionally and distribute strategically. Available in English and Spanish.

[Read More](#)

Campaign Collateral Continued

Social Media Posts To Share

Choose from the following social post graphics and sample captions to share with your followers!

Please tag us when you are using the handles below.

Facebook: @IllinoisHousingDevelopmentAuthority

Instagram: @ilhousing

Twitter: @ilhousing

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