

NCSHA 2016 Annual Awards Entry Form

(Complete one form for each entry)

Deadline: Wednesday, June 15, 2016

Visit ncsha.org/awards to view the Annual Awards Call for Entries.

Instructions: Type entry information into the form and save it as a PDF. Do not write on or scan the form. If you have any questions contact awards@ncsha.org or 202-624-7710.

Fill out the entry name *exactly* as you want it listed in the program.

Entry Name: _____

HFA: _____

Submission Contact: (Must be HFA Staff Member) _____ **Email:** _____

Please provide a 15-word (maximum) description of your nomination to appear on the NCSHA website.

Use this header on the upper right corner of each page:

HFA: _____

Entry Name: _____

Select the appropriate subcategory of your entry and indicate if you are providing visual aids.

Communications	Homeownership	Legislative Advocacy	Management Innovation
Annual Report	Empowering New Buyers	Federal Advocacy	Financial
Creative Media	Encouraging New Production	State Advocacy	Human Resources
Promotional Materials and Newsletters	Home Improvement and Rehabilitation		Operations
			Technology
Rental Housing	Special Needs Housing	Special Achievement	Are you providing visual aids?
Encouraging New Production	Combating Homelessness	Special Achievement	Yes
Multifamily Management	Housing for Persons with Special Needs		No
Preservation and Rehabilitation			

MassHousing
Management Innovation – Human Resources
Tell Us What You Think – MassHousing’s Employee Survey

During fiscal years 2012 and 2013, MassHousing experienced record-breaking lending years for both rental and homeownership, which meant that more Massachusetts residents received affordable mortgages and more affordable rental units were produced or preserved. While MassHousing was proud of its accomplishments, senior management realized that there was room for improvement as it considered how to maximize the Agency’s impact in the face of a shifting landscape for affordable housing finance.

MassHousing undertook a strategic planning process in early 2013 to take stock of the changing business environment in order to determine how best to adapt and innovate to meet the underserved housing needs of Massachusetts residents. The result was a five-year Strategic Plan, accepted by MassHousing’s Board in June of 2014, that outlined MassHousing’s commitments to residents, to its customers, and to innovations that will help the Agency adapt to the ever changing environment in the housing and finance arena with a goal of improving performance over the long term.

Major efforts went into contacting stakeholders, partners, and financial and housing market experts as part of the information gathering component of the strategic plan. In all, more than 200 people were interviewed to understand their views relative to MassHousing’s policies and programs and to get their thoughts on how MassHousing can be as effective as possible in meeting the affordable housing challenges of the Commonwealth.

The feedback received during the stakeholder outreach process was both positive and negative – but all of it was important. These views of MassHousing would shape the Agency’s goal setting going forward. But it became clear that one group had clearly been left out of the strategic planning process – and that was MassHousing’s employees. In retrospect – it seems clear that the Agency’s strategic planning exercise would not be complete without considering the opinions of Agency staff.

Aware broadly of some areas of concern among employees, a long serving member of the MassHousing Board of Directors recommended that the Agency also conduct a survey of the Agency staff, similar in scope to the one conducted for the strategic plan with MassHousing’s outside business partners. The objective of the survey was to solicit the concerns of employees and then work collaboratively with them to effect real change among the workforce at MassHousing – change in which they could be invested – change that would make them feel heard.

A Request for Proposals was issued in October of 2014 and awarded to Dr. Bruce Katcher from Discovery Surveys, Inc. of Wellfleet, Massachusetts, a firm that specializes in employee surveys. Using this outside firm ensured that the survey was conducted in an unbiased, professional, and completely confidential manner.

In addition to aligning the organization with the strategic plan, additional objectives of the employee survey would be to provide insights about leadership, management, and communication; to assess the level of employee engagement; and to solicit ideas for how to make MassHousing an even better place to work.

This effort began with small focus group meetings made up of Agency employees to help the consultant better understand the organization and develop the most helpful questions for the survey. The resulting survey included 75 rating items and asked for ratings for the 12 topic areas for Agency employees: their jobs, work organization and quality, communication, teamwork, internal customer service, their

supervisors, performance management, pay and benefits, the senior management team, the Board of Directors, training and development and organization image. The survey was released to Agency employees in May 2015 – the first time something like this had been done in the Agency’s history. There was a very strong response from Agency staff with 290 out of 329 employees – an incredible 89% of the Agency responding to the survey! Interestingly, Discovery Surveys has found that during the last 20 years of conducting employee surveys, the average response rate is more typically 73%. The Agency seemed to be off to a good start.

Discovery Surveys then aggregated their findings and compiled them into a detailed report that was released to Agency staff. Overall, employees expressed a strong belief in the mission of the Agency, and indicated that they understood well how their jobs relate to that mission. They felt they maintain good relationships with their supervisors and had generally positive views about the benefits, flexibility and work life balance that working at MassHousing provides. However, there were areas that stood out as in need of improvement – specifically in the areas of intra-agency communication and cooperation among staff. Employees made it clear they wanted more support from both senior management and the Board of Directors, and wanted the Agency to find ways to invest in employees and find new ways to engage them.

Upon the survey’s release, senior management set an ambitious 60 day goal to develop a concrete action plan with both short- and long-term goals. Five focus areas were created, each led by two “Co-Champions,” who were tasked with soliciting honest and direct comments from staff on the following topics: Communication, Pay and Benefits, Performance Management, Operational Efficiency and Diversity. Each focus team held sessions for staff to delve deeper into those areas of concern. Every staff person could attend as many sessions as they were interested in. All comments made during the sessions, and those that were sent electronically to the Co-Champions, were carefully transcribed and then distributed Agency-wide as topics for further discussion.

The feedback from staff was that they finally felt that they had a forum to be heard. The Co-Champions of each team identified the survey questions relating to their subject area and based directly on the issues raised by employees, attempted to develop a specific series of recommendations that the groups could support and which they would submit to the Senior Management Team. Over the course of the next several months, each of the teams held an extensive series of meetings with Agency employees. The recommendations that grew out of these discussions were directly responsive to the concerns that staff had raised – as they were based solely on staff input.

The content of meetings for the **Communications** team revolved around four broad areas of communication: interdivisional communication; intradivisional communication; overall agency communication; and, morale.

The **Pay and Benefits** Co-Champions created five subcommittees made up of Agency staff members from all levels to address with the following topics: Deferred Compensation, Health Care, Tuition Assistance and Training, Other Benefits, Compensation, and Retirement. The subcommittees met over the course of several months to review the issues and develop recommendations to address the concerns raised by staff. Each subcommittee drafted a report on their topic and presented findings and recommendations to staff.

The **Performance Management** team was tasked with finding ways to enhance and improve the Agency’s system of staff review so that employees could give and receive feedback on individual and Agency performance.

Many of the concerns relating to **Operational Efficiency** focused primarily on outdated or cumbersome IT policies, procedures and systems; and the **Diversity** team focused on increasing opportunities and awareness of race, gender, sexual orientation and class demographics, both internally and externally.

There have been many positive changes as a result of the Employee Survey to date. To improve communications, quarterly all-staff and divisional meetings have been scheduled to keep staff aware of the more global issues and new directions for the Agency. A new, informal bi-weekly newsletter called “News and Notes” has been created by the Communications Department. This E-mail newsletter is more informal and conversational in its tone. It aims to keep Agency staff updated on program announcement and press events but also on more lighthearted announcements about staff milestones and activities. Events such as groundbreakings and ribbon cuttings at MassHousing-financed developments are also announced and staff members are invited to attend in order to help staff remain integrated in the results of the work they do. Additional tickets are also being purchased, when possible, for Boston area housing events so more staff may attend. MassHousing “bus tours” have also been resurrected to allow staff to visit sites in MassHousing’s portfolio to establish more of a concrete connection to the work they do every day. And, suggestion boxes have been placed on each floor for anonymous staff comments. Comments and concerns are addressed in the Agency newsletter or on MassHousing’s internal website.

With regard to the Pay and Benefits Committee, recommendations are being considered for increases to Agency benefits. In addition, work-life recommendations are presently being reviewed to allow standardization of flexible work schedules and telecommuting. Back-up daycare options and availability will also be increased to give working parents more opportunities to balance their work and home life. A formal Compensation Philosophy has been recommended along with the idea for a new system of review for merit salary increases. Recommendations have also been made to keep Agency staff informed of retirement benefits, including access to a pension calculator and an annual comprehensive summary of employee retirement benefits which will all help to address the retirement planning for MassHousing employees.

The overall usability and effectiveness of all software applications are being reviewed and an IT Steering Committee, which is representative of a cross-section of employees with technological knowledge and business acumen, has been reestablished. Developing and implementing a strategy for a paperless office and an intra-agency communication/collaboration tool (instant messaging, online meetings, online sharing) are underway.

The Co-Champions of the Diversity team held nine 90+ minute discussions with over 100 staff members to discuss a wide range of diversity and inclusion topics. Recommendations include strategic diversity and inclusion training for all employees; the creation of continuous conversation modules to offer ongoing opportunities for diversity and inclusion conversations to go forward; and the creation of a series of diversity surveys to be administered over the next five years to measure the effectiveness and implementation of the recommended changes.

Overall, the employee survey has served to energize the employees at MassHousing. Staff report that they feel more comfortable communicating their views of how MassHousing is doing – and where there are areas that need improvement. MassHousing continues its work to incentivize, motivate and improve the morale and performance of employees. The Employee Survey was just what staff and management needed to start that dialogue and it holds great potential to keep these important conversations going well into the next fiscal year and beyond.