

Visual Storytelling

Minnesota Housing

Communications: Creative Media

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Overview

Like many Housing Finance Agencies around the country, we believe it's important to tell the story about our work and the important role of affordable housing in creating thriving communities where people of all ages and incomes can prosper. In order to better serve our stakeholders and communicate effectively, our organization has allocated more resources to storytelling.

With a dynamic new Commissioner and a new Governor who has given more support and visibility to housing and our agency, we began experimenting with new ways to share our story and engage broader audiences. Our visual stories cover all aspects of Minnesota Housing's important work. See these links to videos about how [Minnesota Housing prevents and ends homelessness](#), [addresses specific housing needs](#) and [preserves the housing we already have](#). In this submission, we'll show how other HFA's can replicate this cost-effective approach and engage, educate and inspire more people to further our mission.

Provide Benefits that Outweigh Costs – Effective Use of Resources

Minnesota Housing initially explored using more video to engage a broader audience a few years ago and did not have the capacity to create video content in house. To get started, we began the process of hiring an outside production company to complete a series of videos with the goal of expanding awareness. We navigated our way through the cumbersome state procurement process, and nearly six months after signing the contract, had a finished product from the vendor. It was clear throughout the process that a lack of understanding of Minnesota Housing hindered their ability to produce high quality, informative videos that accurately told the story we wanted to tell. In total, the series cost nearly \$20,000, with an average of almost \$4,000 per video. Not only were these video expensive, the turnaround time was much longer than expected, and it required a great deal of editing guidance from our small staff. Following this experience, the agency explored an internal solution that would allow more timely and flexible use of video to articulate the importance of our work and create deeper engagement and support.

In the summer of 2018, a vacancy on our three-person communications team presented the opportunity to restructure a job description to bring this work in house. We specifically sought candidates with both written and visual storytelling backgrounds and filled the position in September of 2018.

During the first six months, we've produced more than 25 original videos and have significantly increased our engagement on social media. Production times for each video average one week but can sometimes take as little as a day. We've produced a variety of videos that include; [testimonials](#), [conference materials](#), [commercials](#), [trip recaps](#) and [program specific content](#). In addition to hiring a communications position, we purchased high quality video camera equipment and lights for just under \$6,000. See detailed list of equipment in the replicable section below.

Achieving Measurable Goals

As a result, Minnesota Housing has increased engagement on our social media channels since October of 2018. To reach targeted audiences, we post videos on Facebook and YouTube. Below, you'll find views over the last six months. Since adding Visual Storytelling to our communications strategies, we've

had more than 15,000 views. In just seven months, we've more than doubled the views of the previous three years combined.

Reaching Targeted Audiences

The way the public interacts with our agency is evolving. We know that 26.9% of our website traffic and approximately 75% of Facebook interactions come via mobile. Therefore, it's important that we make video content that is consumable on both desktop and mobile. When presenting to mobile platforms, we understand that content must be [concise and under two minutes](#).

With a new Governor and new Commissioner, we've taken digital approaches to reaching these changing audiences across the state. Over the past three months, we've spent many hours traveling to different parts of the state, engaging in [discussions about housing that is affordable for all](#). For each visit, our new Commissioner highlighted the great work being done in each community all over Minnesota. The videos also serve as acknowledgement and recognition to our partners working in those communities. An added benefit is that our partners have been able to share this video content with their audiences and spread our reach even further.

Here are video recaps of visits our Commissioner made to the greater Minnesota communities of [Rochester](#), [St. Cloud](#) and [Mankato](#).

Strategic and responsive

Being able to show our work in communities across the state is a powerful tool to share with legislators who are hearing about housing challenges in their district. With four new members on our housing committee in the legislature, we spent the early part of the session educating them about who we are and what we do. Having the ability to use video during our presentations has helped [relay the impact we can have when the legislator buys-in](#) to our programs.

Video enhances the presentations we deliver to legislators by providing a different way to help them understand how we serve people. These are complex topics and programs, and the understanding of their impact can easily get lost in spreadsheets. The opportunity for legislators to see that our programs reach people in their districts helps them make more informed decisions about how scarce resources should be used.

In addition to working with lawmakers, Minnesota Housing has provided ongoing communications support to Minnesota's Governor Tim Walz. To assist the governor in communicating his proposed budget, Minnesota Housing created the [Upper Post Veterans Community video from a](#) shared event.

Replicable & Innovative

Visual Storytelling can be a powerful tool for any HFA. Adding internal capacity to produce video content can make what was once financially out of range a productive and important part of your ongoing communications strategy. As we've learned over the past six months, quality video content doesn't need

to be expensive. No matter the size of your budget, there are accessible tools for increasing engagement and awareness.

- **Purchase Equipment** – Although we budgeted \$10,000, we were able to purchase the following items for less than r \$6,000.
 - Panasonic DVX200 video camera
 - Rode wireless microphone
 - (3) iKan lights
 - (1) extra camera battery
 - (2) 64 GB SanDisk memory cards

This kit will last us for the next five years and cost a third of hiring an outside production company.

- **Using What You Have** – If resources are not available to buy equipment, many HFAs already have the tools at their disposal to produce content. Here is a video about a recent trip to [Mankato, Minnesota](#), shot exclusively with an iPhone and iPad. The only additional equipment we recommend purchasing is a [microphone](#). It only cost \$30 but greatly improves the sound quality of any interview.
- **P.A.R. Model** - Our storytelling team applies the P.A.R. (Problem-Action-Result) Model to shape narrative. Most videos we produce start with the *Problem*. What are the housing issues facing the individual or community? Next, we focus on the *Action*. What did the HRA do to address that issue? Finally, we finish with *Results*. Because of the actions taken to address the issue, here are the outcomes, and this is how we worked to improve the lives of the community. We believe, great stories are the ones that [focus on people working together](#) to address an issue.