

# Regional Press Campaign

## **Minnesota Housing**

Communications: Special Event Marketing

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## Regional Press Campaign

Last year marked a significant milestone in Minnesota's commitment to addressing the pressing issue of affordable housing, with the state legislature allocating a historic \$1.3 billion towards this cause. In December 2023, Minnesota deployed the first rounds of that funding with a substantial [\\$348 million investment across 4700 affordable](#) housing projects statewide, marking a crucial step forward.

Recognizing the challenges many Greater Minnesota communities face in understanding the complexity of affordable housing in their regions, urgent action was needed. To help engage and educate communities, plus dispel the misconception that affordable housing is solely an urban concern, Minnesota Housing initiated a comprehensive public awareness campaign. Going beyond our customary metropolitan funding announcements, the campaign prioritized statewide earned media.

To this end, Minnesota Housing orchestrated press events tailored to each region of the state, engaging local media outlets directly with messaging formulated to address the priorities of the regional audiences. Despite the big distance and scheduling challenges, meeting media in their home communities is essential.

Therefore, we spearheaded four virtual, interactive press conferences and one in-person conference with Minnesota's Lieutenant Governor. Overall, the costs were minimal, and the process is easily replicable. We're excited to share how this project can be replicated for your state.

## Tools for replication and earned media outcomes and reaching target audiences

To launch Minnesota Housing's funding announcement, the Communications team started by coordinating the statewide regional media campaign, targeting audiences in Greater Minnesota. The regional media tours consisted of two parts: 1) three virtual press events via Microsoft Teams and 2) one in-person event held in Duluth, Minnesota.

Prior to each virtual event, the Team sorted the organization's media contact list into seven corresponding regions. Then the team sent out region-specific media advisories, including relevant housing-related data and inviting media to speak directly with the Minnesota Housing Commissioner.

This opportunity provided the perfect incentive for news organizations with smaller community audiences that traditionally would not cover Minnesota Housing events due to a lack of localized information.

Next, the team compiled a slideshow presentation to be shared at each regional press conference. This involved assessing more in-depth statewide data, cataloging it by regional relevance and building it into a meaningful slide deck. The goal of this presentation was to utilize data and examples to build an impactful, approachable narrative with examples of past and present projects.

The presentation demonstrated to local media the impact of Minnesota Housing projects in their community. Each project served as potential examples that news media could highlight, film or photograph for additional content.

During the 15-minute press conference and presentation, the Minnesota Housing Commissioner was able to walk reporters through this information, our proposed narrative and answer individual questions.

As a result, the Communications team saw increased news hits with impactful, information-rich coverage. Often, the content framed current projects with a positive angle and highlighted the need for more housing projects in the area.

Please see the attached documents for samples of the presentation, data and message narrative.

#### **Examples of Greater Minnesota Coverage**

[Mankato](#) | [Fargo Morehead](#) | [N.E. Minnesota](#) | [S.E. Minnesota](#) | [N.W. Minnesota and Tribal](#) | [Central Minnesota](#)

The final step in Minnesota Housing's funding announcement media campaign was an onsite visit. The Communications Team coordinated a visit to one of the non-metro communities receiving a large portion of the 2023 funding, Duluth.

Duluth is located in northwestern Minnesota and is a part of Greater Minnesota. Headlining the visit was Minnesota's Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan. Lt. Gov. Flanagan has strong connections to Greater Minnesota and understands the unique community priorities.

To further highlight the program's successes, the event was hosted at a former project site, a supportive housing complex. Lt. Gov. Flanagan led a spirited roundtable discussion with the Minnesota Housing Commissioner, a local service provider/developer and resident with lived experience.

Speaking to a room with more than a dozen reporters, which were all representing local outlets, the round-table group held a dynamic conversation that emphasized the impact Minnesota Housing's programming can have on people and communities struggling to afford housing. This format allowed the team to accomplish multiple communication needs, including sharing relevant information about the funding announcement, communicating the underlying narrative, and uplifting the voices of individuals with lived experience.

Additionally, the Communications team later received feedback reporters appreciated this format. It allowed them to easily meet the demands of their work, gathering the information needed for full stories with multiple perspectives in less than an hour.

#### **Examples of Duluth Coverage**

[WDIO](#) | [Northern News](#) | [Duluth News Tribune](#)

## **Measurable results**

- Earned media in all seven Minnesota regions
  - Unique, localized coverage in each region, including multiple formats. (TV, Print, Weekly magazine, radio, etc.)
- Increased web traffic
  - Roughly 18,000 views for week of 12/14-12/21.
  - That was a 28.5% increase in website visits compared to the 12 weeks leading up to the campaign.
  - Additionally, 12,000 unique visitors for that week, a 25% increase.

- Increased social media activity
  - Despite the Communications Team being short-staffed, the agency's social media saw a 20% bump in engagement.

## Costs

One of the reasons we were most excited to share is that this can be replicated in your state for minimal cost. Many of the functions existed already within daily job duties, and our team is only three people.

The biggest cost associated with it was travel expenses. Staff travel and meal expenses should be accounted for, which were mileage for 300 miles round trip and lunch costs.

## Offering benefits that surpass expenses

One of the reasons Minnesota Housing is particularly enthusiastic about this campaign is the affordability. Most of the required functions and duties were already a part of our small three person team's responsibilities and work scope.

For event space and related support, the agency was able to work with existing community partners and connections at zero cost. In return, those partners were appreciative of being noted in media coverage.

Additionally, as a gesture of gratitude and goodwill, Minnesota Housing strongly recommends compensating individuals with firsthand experience for sharing their housing journey. Minnesota Housing typically pays these community members \$100 per event.

## Additional resources

Minnesota Housing staff often refers to Minnesota's Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan as our best spokesperson for affordable housing due to her personal connection to the work. Lt. Gov. Flanagan grew up in Minnesota's Section 8 housing. Not only is she passionate about that piece of her narrative, but she's eager to share it with Minnesotans.

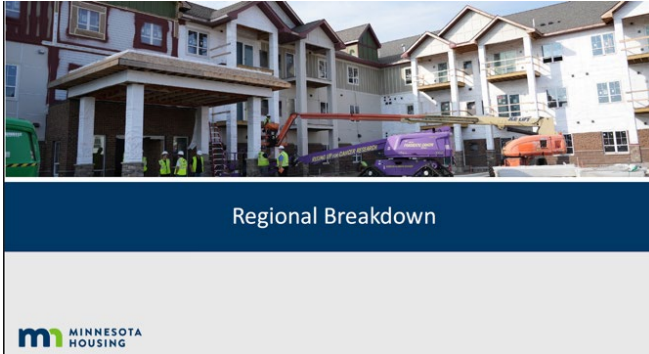
By having her at the table, Minnesota Housing is able to showcase the common good these programs generate in Minnesota. Additionally, Lt. Gov. Flanagan's participation in Minnesota Housing media events means her large list of media contacts are automatically engaged as well.

For added perspective, please see Lt. Gov. Flanagan's reflections on her involvement in the campaign:

"In Minnesota, we are committed to providing everyone with affordable and accessible housing options, but this only happens if we meet Minnesotans where they are at. From translating housing resources to multiple languages to traveling the state to spread the word about new resources and funding, Minnesota Housing has gone above and beyond to ensure our impact is widespread and effective. We believe safe and stable housing is the catalyst to success at the individual and statewide level, so we will continue to travel the state, meet Minnesotans, and provide every community with the resources they need to thrive," said Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan.

# Supplemental Materials

## Powerpoint Slides



### 2023 Project Selections - Statewide

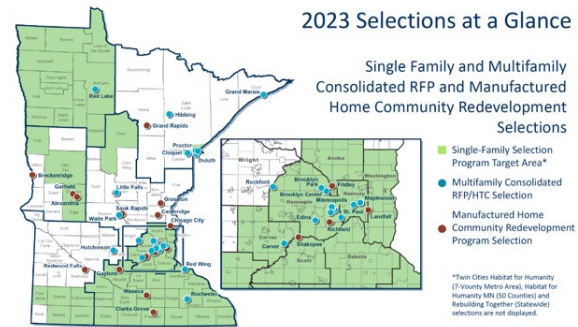
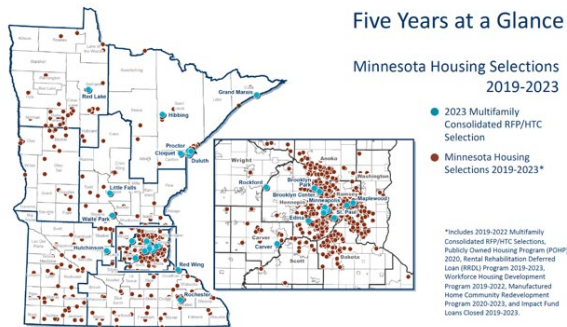
**Overall**  
125 projects | 4,720 units | \$348.2 million

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**Manufactured Housing**  
19 projects | 1,920 lots | \$21.5 million

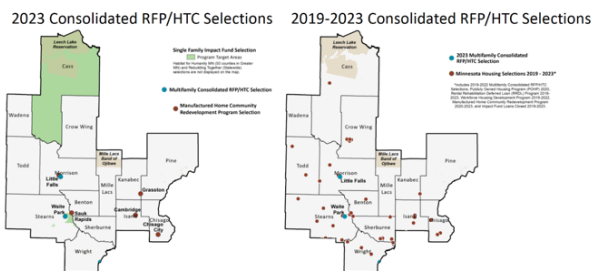
**Homeownership**  
78 projects | 1,314 units | \$120.8 million

**Rental Housing**  
28 projects | 1,486 units | \$205.8 million



### Central Minnesota at a Glance

### Central Minnesota Selected Projects



- Manufactured Home Communities**
  - Croix Estates (178 lots), Chisago City
  - Fischer's Garden (82 lots), Sauk Rapids
  - Pine Village (233 lots), Cambridge
  - Riverside Seniors Community (20 lots), Grasston
  - Suburban Manufactured Home Park (83 lots), Little Falls
- Apartments (Multifamily)**
  - The Views on 7th (45 units, new construction), Central MN Housing Partnership, \$10.9 million, Little Falls
  - Vue Pointe Apartments (48 units, new construction), TTT Housing, \$12.2 million, Waite Park
- Single-Family Homes**
  - Central Minnesota Habitat for Humanity (6 units), Cities of St Cloud and Cold Spring
  - Habitat for Humanity of Minnesota, Inc. (8 units), Cass County

**Duluth Regional Press Event at Birchwood Apartment Duluth (Dec. 18)**

