

Breaking the Stigma: New Jersey's Faces of Affordable Housing

New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency
Communications: Integrated Campaign

HFA Staff Contact

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Summary: To combat unfair and incorrect stigmas around affordable housing, NJHMFA initiated a comprehensive strategy last year to showcase exemplary Agency-funded developments throughout the state and emphasize the broad range of people who benefit from the construction of affordable housing.

Entry Description:

Objective:

NJHMFA-financed affordable homes benefit people of all backgrounds: nurses, first responders, recent graduates, teachers, police officers, service workers, people with disabilities, and more. In its 40 years of operation, NJHMFA has financed 70,000 apartments, 66,000 of which are affordable to low- and moderate-income residents, which account for approximately nine percent of all rental units occupied by low-to-moderate income families in the state, and approximately six percent of all multifamily rental units in the state.

All New Jerseyans benefit from increasing the supply of affordable homes regardless of whether they live in them, as NJHMFA's investments have helped to revitalize and stabilize communities, ensure equitable access to schools and other amenities, and drive billions of dollars in economic activity. Many low- and moderate-income New Jerseyans are not even aware of what assistance exists and whether they are eligible, an information gap which NJHMFA seeks to correct.

Nevertheless, negative stereotypes and unfair stigmas continue to surround affordable housing and its residents around the nation, and New Jersey is no exception. As a result of these misguided perceptions, many individuals associate affordable housing with crime, and substandard housing. "Faces of Affordable Housing" originated from discussions within NJHMFA on how best to correct these perceptions by showcasing the Agency's production of safe, high-quality, and affordable housing.

Strategy:

The "Faces of Affordable Housing" initiative is an integrated campaign, designed to advertise the many faces of affordable housing in New Jersey through a variety of methods to reach as large and diverse an audience as possible. NJHMFA set up a long-term social media campaign, showcasing on Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook the many faces of affordable housing through weekly posts. Under the hashtag #TheFacesofAffordableHousing, NJHMFA's elegantly designed graphics emphasize that affordable housing is for teachers, families, parents, nurses, first responders, and neighbors, the campaign turns affordable housing from an abstract concept to a concrete benefit. Throughout 2023, NJHMFA's pinned post on Twitter simply reminded visitors to the page that "Affordable housing is for YOU," encouraging New Jerseyans to check which programs they may be eligible for through the NJHMFA website.

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Through advertising the many faces of affordable housing to the general public, by a variety of means, this campaign aims to change the view of affordable housing and get more people in the door of their new home. This benefits communities, our economy and the lives of individuals and families.

Key to the success of this campaign has been a highlighting of specific NJHMFA-financed projects across the state, showing affordable housing comes in all shapes and sizes. The Agency has showcased housing developments in Keansburg, Newark, Woodbridge, Atlantic City, Glassboro, Wanaque and more. This includes award-winning projects like Hahne and Co. in Newark, which won the Urban Land Institute's Jack Kemp Excellence in Affordable and Workforce Housing Award in 2017. By highlighting specific projects, the Faces of Affordable Housing campaign emphasizes how NJHMFA projects go beyond benefitting their residents, and in fact benefit their whole communities.

Evaluation:

The Agency has used several strategies to track the campaign's success, including social media engagement, the number of applications to our programs during the campaign, visitors to the NJHMFA website. Across all three platforms, engagement with Faces of Affordable Housing has so far exceeded tens of thousands of engagements since the launch of the campaign in January 2023. Using targeted boosting on a select few posts allowed NJHMFA to further increase engagement beyond initial trends.

The Faces of Affordable Housing campaign has proven to be a remarkably cost-effective means of spreading awareness, as the costs involved are quite minimal. The only notable expense involved was the purchase of a Hootsuite account for coordinating messaging and social media and the cost of boosting several posts, estimated at \$1,000.

Implications from this success are vast. Across the country, negative stereotypes about affordable housing unfortunately persist. This stigma is detached from the work that housing finance agencies engage in every day to create housing projects with state-of-the-art amenities which blend into the neighborhood. NJHMFA's Faces of Affordable Housing provides an easily replicable blueprint for other agencies seeking to highlight the type of residents they serve and the type of communities they develop.

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Visual aids:



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