

HFA NAME: NJHMFA

Entry Title: Year-Long Integrated Campaign for Annual Conference

Category: Communications

Subtitle: Special Event Marketing

Entry Summary:

The Governor's Conference on Housing and Economic Development (GHC) is New Jersey's premier forum for housing and economic development, anchoring a year-long marketing campaign highlighting emerging opportunities, challenges, and policy priorities for industry stakeholders. Held each fall and funded through registration fees, the conference offers training, networking, and discussions on major issues while fostering dialogue between policy makers, industry leaders, advocates, and participants.

Conference Planning and Efficient Use of Interagency Resources

The GHC planning committee consists of the four New Jersey state agencies with purview over the state's housing and community development programs: Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency (NJHMFA), Department of Community Affairs (NJDC), Economic Development Authority (NJEDA), and Redevelopment Authority (NJRA). Marketing and Communications staff from these agencies meet weekly to coordinate and implement multi-channel marketing strategies that promote the conference and maximize shared state resources.

Planning for the annual fall conference begins immediately after the prior year's event with an evaluation and feedback process designed to improve the next conference experience. Attendees, speakers, exhibitors, and sponsors receive follow-up emails thanking them for their participation and requesting feedback through targeted surveys. The surveys solicit input on panel discussions, forums, speakers, topics, and the overall conference experience, ensuring that stakeholder feedback is incorporated into future programming. When available, "Save the Date" information for the following year's conference is used to encourage early participation for the following year.

Over the following months, the planning committee engages with the industry stakeholders to gather ideas for the upcoming conference. This outreach culminates in a "call for sessions," inviting recommendations for session topics, speakers, and themes. Submissions are reviewed alongside survey feedback and internal recommendations to develop the final conference agenda. The announcement of sessions and speakers signals emerging priorities and key policy developments that the participating state agencies believe are most important for the housing and economic development community to know and understand.

For example, in 2024 New Jersey significantly revised its Fair Housing Act laws, requiring substantial updates to the state's affordable housing regulations the following year. In response, the conference introduced a new session track dedicated to these changes, providing practitioners with early guidance and implementation training ahead of the 2026 statutory deadlines. By highlighting this topic through targeted programming and promotion, the conference ensured that a broad range of stakeholders were informed and prepared for the upcoming regulatory changes.

Integrated Marketing Campaign and Communication Channels

The integrated marketing campaign demonstrates strong interagency collaboration and sustained stakeholder engagement. Over the past eight years, the campaign has evolved into a year-long communication strategy that maintains an ongoing dialogue with industry participants. Despite

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challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic and economic disruptions, conference participation has increased by approximately 50 percent during this period.

Innovative

To engage stakeholders, the planning committee employs a range of outreach and communication strategies, including digital outreach such as social media, Constant Contact campaigns, direct communication, press releases, advertisements, and strategic partnerships. As panel topics, speakers, presenters, sponsors, and exhibitors are announced throughout the planning process, participants begin to see signals of the policy priorities and emerging issues that state leaders consider most important.

These communications culminate in a two-day, in-person conference that reinforces the information shared throughout the year. Immediately following the conference, the feedback process begins again, creating a continuous cycle of engagement that informs the next year's event.

The GHC's key innovation is the integration of marketing and programming into a year-long two-way conversation with the housing and economic development community. Rather than treating the conference as a standalone event or the marketing as means of solely trying to generate interest in a single event, the planning committee uses both the marketing campaign and event to reinforce messaging on emerging policy priorities and industry challenges months in advance.

A wide range of communication channels support this strategy. Through print, the plan comprises postcards for event distribution, magazine ads, press releases to news outlets, and free conference attendance for news media. On the digital front, it includes social media posts, a social media toolkit for partners, email campaigns, website content, video interviews, and bespoke graphics for sponsors and exhibitors to share on their digital platforms. See figures A4 and A5 for more information about what the digital outreach looks like. The plan also features in-person site visits via bus tours at conferences and a shared cloud drive for inter-agency collaboration. Radio ads further amplify the reach, and media members can attend the conference at no cost.

Is Replicable

Even if other states don't have an annual conference or jointly managed forums, the innovation of integrating an in-person event into its marketing efforts and using the marketing efforts to convey information about what an agency finds important is a predominately a mentality change. This means it can be applied to any number of events, forums, or engagements that agencies run or participate in.

To highlight the importance of the in-person event to this integrated campaign, the Covid-19 impacted years of 2020 and 2021 saw severed reduced participation. In 2020, the event was canceled and in 2021, it was held virtually, which saw a precipitous drop in overall participation. However, once the in-person portion was added back to the integrated communication came, attendance returned to the pre-Covid levels and then immediately returned its growth trajectories, thereafter. See Figure A1.

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Achieve measurable results

The conference's growth over 30 years is, itself, a measurable result. However, the explosive growth since 2017 can be attributed to this integrated marketing strategy. For example, the 2025 attendance is 50 percent higher than when this strategy began taking hold in 2017. In fact, the 2025 conference reached significant highs among most participant metrics: 113 speakers, 49 exhibitors, and 37 sponsors.

In addition to growth among all metrics in quantity, the GHC's has seen national companies like Zillow and Netflix participate in recent years as they build their New Jersey footprints. It also regularly sees participants from policymakers like then-Governors Phil Murphy (see Figure A2) and Chris Christie, then-Lt. Governors Sheila Oliver and Tahesha Way, then-Attorney General Matt Platkin and a host of sitting state legislators.

Achieve strategic objectives

The campaign and its associated in-person event features a comprehensive educational program, and networking opportunities designed to encourage meaningful interactions, collaborative efforts, and community engagement. But most importantly, the topics and issues to be discussed are signaled for more than half the half year. This allows for the four state agencies to convey information about what is expected to be a major topic or item of discussion and to ensure that participants have been primed to think about the topics before the largest annual convergence of housing and community development policymakers and stakeholders in New Jersey occurs. In turn, this sets the stage for collaborative solutions to be developed and stress-tested. See Figure A3 for an example of what the in-person portion of this looks like.

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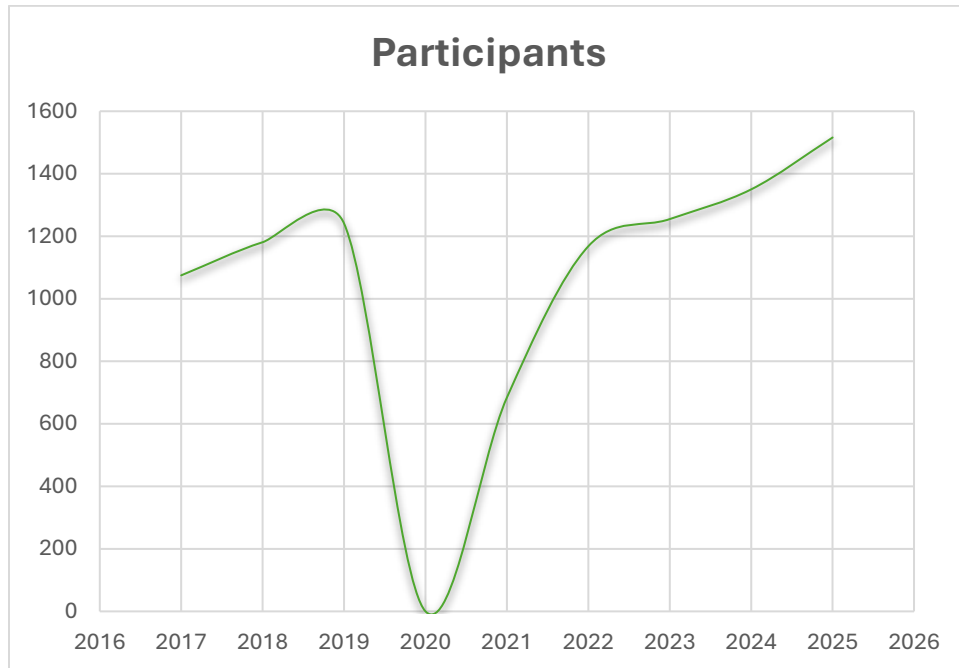
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APPENDIX

Figure A1



(An overview of the conference's official registration numbers since 2017. GHC 2020 was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2021 conference was 100 percent virtually.)

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Figure A2



(Then-Governor of New Jersey, Phil Murphy, gives the keynote address in 2025.)

Figure A3



(In a standing-room-only crowd, attendees listened to a session on a policy and legislative updates.)

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Figure A4



(Above is the Social Media Toolkit distributed to exhibitors, speakers, and sponsors with the intention that they share it on their social media platforms.)

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Figure A5

Earn professional credits at the Governor's Conference on Housing and Economic Development!

The conference is quickly approaching and we have some exciting news! We are offering continuing education credits for select sessions.

Credits offered:

- **NAHMA MEMBERS:** NAHMA (National Affordable Housing Management Association) members may earn 1.25 continuing education credits for select sessions.
- **CLE CREDITS:** Either 1.2 or 1.5 CLE (Continuing Legal Education) credits will be offered for select sessions through the New Jersey Redevelopment Authority's Redevelopment Training Institute (NJRA-TI), an approved provider through the Supreme Court of New Jersey.
- **PROFESSIONAL PLANNERS:** Earn 1.25 AICP (American Institute of Certified Planners) Certification Maintenance credits for select sessions.
- **NJ Real Estate Continuing Education Credits:** (Real Estate CE Pending for select sessions)

We look forward to seeing you in Atlantic City at Harrah's Resort September 16 and 17 for the 2025 Governor's Conference on Housing and Economic Development!

Click here to see our sessions and to register!

(An illustration of the continuing educations credits offered at the conference.)