Ohio Housing Finance Agency
Securing the Future of Homebuyer Assistance in Ohio
Communications: Integrated Campaign

Securing the Future of Homebuyer Assistance in Ohio

Over the last three years, the housing market in Ohio, and throughout the nation, has been competitive with potential homebuyers facing higher interest rates and limited housing inventory. These conditions created an economic environment for the use of the Ohio Housing Finance Agency's homebuyer assistance programs to grow, and they did. In state fiscal year 2024 (July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024), the Agency ended the year with a gross loan reservation volume of more than $1.3 billion. And, as state fiscal year 2025 (July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025) began, OHFA continued to see significant reservation amounts month over month. July 2024 started off with a bang - $176 million in loan reservations and for the next 12 months reservations never fell below $100 million. November 2024 had the highest amount of reservations with $171 million.

While increased volumes meant the Agency was fulfilling its mission to increase homeownership in Ohio, it also meant the Agency needed to take a look at its long-term ability to provide down payment assistance (DPA) for Ohioans. The DPA program, "Your Choice: Down Payment Assistance" provided Ohioans with the option of either 2.5% or 5% of the purchase price to help with a down payment or closing costs. Over the years, and especially in the last two years, the 5% DPA was the agency's most popular homebuyer program.

In the spring of 2025, the OHFA Board made the difficult decision to reduce the amount of DPA the Agency would provide Ohioans. The new DPA rates would be 3% for conventional loans and 3.5% for government loans (FHA, VA, USDA). The changes would go into effect at the start of the next state fiscal year, July 1, 2025. This is when the Office of Public Affairs and the Office of Single Family Housing developed an integrated marketing plan to educate the public and agency stakeholders on the changes to the program.

Engage Target Audiences

When the decision was made to reduce the amount of DPA OHFA would offer, the Offices of Single Family Housing and Public Affairs outlined the Agency's target audiences and determined key messages for the program updates. The team identified the target audiences as OHFA's mortgage lending partners, real estate professionals, housing advocates, government partners, housing counseling agencies, OHFA staff, and the public. A communication outline, which included a timeline of events, was created focusing the campaign on the two-month period before the changes would be implemented.

OHFA started its outreach with meetings with the Ohio Mortgage Bankers and Ohio Association of Realtor to educate them on the DPA changes. This engagement mitigated the opportunity for confusion among these partners as the association leadership had the information to answer their members questions and provide them with the resources they need to better understand the changes. From there, OHFA hosted webinars for its various partners (mortgage professionals, housing advocates, real estate professionals, etc.) to explain the program changes and answer any questions they had. After the webinar a flyer and FAQ were created, which provided an overview of the changes and answered key questions about them. Both of these items were posted to the OHFA website. OHFA also engaged the Ohio Mortgage Bankers Association and Ohio Association of Realtors to promote the webinars.

To educate the public, OHFA created a series of social media posts, updated its websites, and sent out a news release. These tools were drafted with the public in mind, clearly explaining the changes and highlighting the date they would go into effect. OHFA also encouraged its partners to share this information through their newsletters and social media. The Ohio Realtors and Ohio Department of Commerce also had OHFA's executive director on their podcasts to discuss the DPA changs.

Effective Use of Resources

OHFA maximized its internal expertise and resources as well as its customer facing platforms to communicate the DPA changes not only to its partners but also to the public. Through updates to the websites (ohiohome.org and myohiohome.org), social media posts, partner marketing kits, and a bulletin in the lender portal platform, OHFA provided consistent messaging and reminders about the changes to the DPA program and when they would go into effect. The monetary costs in promoting the updates to the DPA programs were minimal.

Benefits Outweigh Costs

Changing the amount of DPA OHFA offers Ohioans not only ensures the longevity of the program but also the Agency's ability to provide assistance year round. These changes also reduce the impact a higher volume has on the bond revenue and maintain and conserve liquidity to fund the OHFA contribution to each bond deal. This provides financial stability and helps maintain the Agency's strong bond rating.

OHFA mitigated the public relations costs of these changes by communicating early and often about the reduction in the DPA amounts to its key audiences. Through social media, email reminders, meetings with partners, and a post in lender portal, OHFA maintained consistent communication up to and after the changes went into effect. Transparent communication about the changes in the DPA program built additional trust with OHFA's lending partners and homeownership stakeholders. Early outreach to OHFA's mortgage lending partners also allowed them adequate time to update internal systems and program documents.

Achieve Measurable Results

While the housing market remains competitive and OHFA's loan reservations remain strong, the roll out of the DPA program updates garnered positive results. More than 230 lenders and/or real estate professionals attended our first webinar, with more than 350 attending the second. The webinar recording was posted on the Agency's YouTube page and a link was sent to lenders and stakeholders so they may view the recording, if they were unable to attend the live webinar. The recording received 245 views. The news release announcing the changes to the DPA was sent to more than 4,614 individuals and had an open rate of 37.4%. It also received more than 1,097 views on the Agency's website and was the basis for an article in Crain's Cleveland Business and a story on WCBE radio. Executive Director Bill Beagle also participated in the Ohio Department of Commerce's "Protecting What Matters" podcast in June 2025 to promote Homeownership month and announce the DPA changes.

OHFA also posted a bulletin in the lender portal and sent the flyer announcing the changes to more than 400 individuals with its daily rate sheet. Four direct marketing emails were sent to announce the changes to the Agency's lender and real estate professionals list, each had an open rate of more than 35%.

Social media outreach about the changes started July 1st with subsequent posts happening each week throughout the month.

Achieve Strategic Objectives

OHFA's state fiscal year 2024-2025 Annual Plan outlines goals which guide the Agency's work. For Single Family Housing the goal for 2024-2025 was to "connect Ohioans with limited or fixed incomes to the resources and opportunities needed to achieve and maintain the dream of homeownership." The Agency also continued to "educate the public on OHFA's programs and promote awareness of how the Agency works to better the lives of Ohioans by making housing affordable and accessible."

The "Your Choice! Down Payment Assistance", saw 3,662 loans financed with DPA in state fiscal year 2024 and 5,000 loans financed in state fiscal year 2025. Changing the amount of DPA the Agency provides potential homebuyers maintained the longevity of the program, and the integrated marketing plan to announce the changes provided transparency to the public and OHFA stakeholders. Both of which positively impact the Agency's reputation as leading in Ohio's housing community.

Innovation

OHFA's approach to updating the DPA program was focused on executing clear and consistent messaging early and often to its target audiences. Our innovation rests in how we applied this strategy. OHFA leveraged the relationships it developed with trade associations on other housing policies to help educate the real estate professionals and mortgage lenders on the DPA changes. Providing the trade associations with the rationale for the changes as well as the key talking points strengthened our outreach by creating third party validation. The Office of Single Family Housing received favorable feedback from the lending partners regarding the changes, even though the DPA amounts were reduced.

Replication

The communications and marketing strategies for program changes can be easily replicated. It requires collaboration between an agency's communications and marketing team and the program offices to develop the key messages to support the changes, understanding of the potential challenges and pushback from partners, and collaboration on identifying the key stakeholders and target audiences. For OHFA, the Office of Public Affairs and the Office of Single Family Housing worked together to develop the content for social media, email messages, and marketing flyers with input and approval from executive leadership.

Tools necessary to replicate the integrated communications and marketing plan would include: an email distribution system (Constant Contact), creative design program (Canva or InDesign), and web design. It also would require clear and consistent messaging created through strong collaboration among executive leadership and various program offices..