

# Using Podcasts to Educate Housing Consumers

**Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency**  
Communications: Integrated Campaign

**HFA Staff Contact**

Scott Elliott

[selliott@phfa.org](mailto:selliott@phfa.org)

A few years ago, the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency conducted a series of focus groups. The feedback we gained from those focus groups has been helpful for guiding our communications efforts.

We learned two main things. First, we learned our customers are frustrated by a lack of trustworthy educational content to help them with their personal money management and with homebuying. Both are areas where the public needs expert guidance, but too often that advice is tainted by commercial interests. The information commonly is biased toward products provided by particular companies.

Second, we were delighted to learn the PHFA brand is highly trusted by the people who come to know us. Repeatedly, they told us they recognize and appreciate that our goal truly is to help them to succeed, even if it doesn't financially benefit PHFA directly. During its 48 years of operation, PHFA has built a stellar reputation for being truthful and forthright with its customers.

#### Podcasting fits our updated communications strategy

So how do we use these important insights? One strategy is that we have started three podcast programs. One show, called "Close to Home," covers a wide variety of topics helpful to homebuyers. The second, called "Master Your Money," provides basic education about personal financial management. The third program, "PHFA Update," was created to cover important housing-related topics that didn't fit neatly into either of the other two programs but would add value for consumers.

We feel podcasting is a terrific fit for PHFA because it allows us to share our in-house expertise on topics that will create better educated housing consumers. Counseling research has demonstrated time and again that well informed consumers make smarter housing choices and, as a result, more often will avoid eviction or foreclosure issues. Our customers have told us they are eager for this information and that they trust us. Podcasting allows us to meet their needs while also serving our housing mission.

#### Our three podcast series

The Close to Home series has now posted ten podcasts on a variety of topics helpful for homebuyers. The show's homebuying expert is Coleen Baumert, PHFA's director of homeownership. She has worked in the housing field for more than 15 years. Only two people on the Apple podcasts site have rated this program to date, but both gave it a perfect score of five.

The Master Your Money series has posted 13 podcasts so far. These programs introduce listeners to the subject of personal money management and cover concepts like maximizing your earnings and making your money work for you. The topic expert for that program is Holly Zugay, PHFA's financial education officer. Zugay has nearly 21 years of experience in the financial education field, including her current work providing financial education for former inmates and for incarcerated veterans soon to reenter society. In 2018, Zugay was selected by the Association for Financial Counseling and Planning Education as its Financial Educator of the Year.

The PHFA Update podcast was created to cover other housing topics outside the subjects of homebuying and money management. For example, the first show in this series is about the agency's foreclosure prevention program, known as HEMAP, and provides guidance for people about how to apply for assistance if they are falling behind on their mortgage. Two programs have been posted as part of this podcast.

In total, PHFA has posted 25 podcasts since this communications initiative began late in 2018. New programs were temporarily delayed early in March 2020 when agency staff began working from home. But in the last month production has resumed even though we are working remotely. By moving from face-to-face, taped conversations to recorded telephone interviews, the show's producer is able once again to create new programs.

### Simple production, easy to distribute

We are fortunate to have a communications employee who has a radio station background. Renae Hyson has worked at several local radio stations, plus she is certified in audio engineering. Given her background, she is a good fit to be the program producer and host. She had not produced podcasts before. So in 2018 she began educating herself through seminars and self-led study. The biggest hurdle was learning how to distribute the podcasts once they were completed. Within a few months, Renae had all our initial podcasts launched on Libsyn, a podcast hosting service, which distributes the shows to digital music services like Spotify and iTunes for easy public access.

All three podcasts are conveniently available from a podcasting webpage built by our webmaster. They can be accessed by clicking on the podcasting icon, located right under our logo in the upper-left corner of our homepage at [www.PHFA.org](http://www.PHFA.org). These podcasts have the added benefit of attracting visitors to our website and exposing them to all our housing programs and services.

We would admit that, at first, podcasting seemed intimidating. But that was just because it was new to us. Within two-to-three months we had our first podcasts posted, and by early this year we were adding about two programs a month, which will grow our podcast library by 24 new episodes annually. Over time, we will build a tremendous archive of homebuying and personal finance material of great value to our customers and the general public. Based on our experience, any HFA's communications staff should be able to get into podcasting with some basic introductory education and relatively minor costs.

### Podcasting is extremely affordable

Speaking of the cost, here are our main expenses so far. A Zoom audio recorder can be purchased used on eBay for \$100-\$200. We use Adobe Audition software on the Creative Cloud for editing the shows, and that license is available for \$20.99/month. Our monthly subscription to distribute our completed shows through Libsyn is just \$20/month/podcast, so in our case \$60. Our subject matter experts are already on staff, and recording each program only takes about 30 minutes of their time for each episode. Editing each program, with revisions, takes 90 minutes and we continue to get faster. Researching and scripting an outline for each show takes about two hours. The shows' album covers were created in-house by our graphic designer. Our podcasting webpage was produced by our webmaster. So you can see, the cost and time commitment to get into podcasting is minimal – which is a good reason why this is an attractive option for HFAs.

We believe podcasting is an innovative approach for educating the general public about housing-related issues while growing the PHFA brand. We did not survey all HFAs, but our quick scan of HFA websites showed that only two or three were starting to explore podcasting. Yet, if you talk with any Millennial, you will learn that a large number of them access podcasts for entertainment and learning about new topics. This is a space where HFAs should have a presence. Younger generations are less inclined to read brochures and even webpages. Repeated surveys show they prefer audio and video sources. Podcasting fits the needs of younger consumers. As time passes, older consumers are learning the advantages of podcasting, too, since programs can be enjoyed while listeners are on the go.

### The response from the public and our partners

We have now been posting podcasts for about 14 months, if you don't count the three month hiatus caused by COVID-19. We have partnered with our statewide counseling agencies and the Pennsylvania Association of Realtors to market these educational podcasts to the public. We have issued two press releases promoting the podcasts. We have also run two advertising campaigns on Facebook, Zillow and other digital platforms. (This year's promotions were cut short due to COVID-19 but will resume this summer. It seemed wasteful to market the podcasts while we temporarily weren't adding new shows.)

Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency  
Using Podcasts to Educate Housing Consumers  
Communications: Integrated Campaign

Our most recent data, shown below, illustrate how well we are growing the audience for our two main podcasts. Most valuable, we believe, will be the word of mouth advertising we gain from people who enjoy the podcasts. With this in mind, we are promoting the programs regularly on our Facebook and Twitter channels to raise awareness and create a buzz about these shows.

**AUDIENCE STATISTICS FOR OUR TWO MAIN PODCASTS**

Close To Home						
Title	Released	Apr	May	Jun	All-Time	
Where Do I Start?	06/12/20	0	0	36	36	
Types of Mortgages - Part 2	02/27/20	20	13	9	94	
Types of Mortgages - Part 1	02/27/20	7	6	6	54	
Home Inspections	11/04/19	4	0	3	118	
Home Repair - PHFA Loan Programs Can Help	09/06/19	1	3	1	122	
Hiring A Contractor	09/06/19	2	1	6	77	
More Homebuyer Counseling	06/10/19	3	3	3	159	
What are closing costs?	12/04/18	3	6	3	335	
Home buyer counseling options	10/15/18	8	3	2	222	
Am I ready to buy a house?	10/15/18	7	5	2	385	
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>					<b>1,602</b>	

\* The grand total is larger than the totals for each month because not all months are shown since the start of the program.

Master Your Money Podcast						
Title	Released	Apr	May	Jun	All-Time	
Protect Your Potential - Part 5	06/11/20	0	0	20	20	
Protect Your Potential - Part 4	06/11/20	0	0	19	19	
Protect Your Potential - Part 3	05/14/20	0	24	8	32	
Protect Your Potential - Part 2	05/01/20	0	34	5	39	
Protect Your Potential - Part 1	03/04/20	20	11	7	70	
Making Your Money Work For You - Part 2	12/06/19	10	6	4	92	
Making Your Money Work For You - Part 1	11/25/19	6	9	2	77	
Checking Taxes 2019	09/16/19	2	5	4	66	
Spending Sensibly	09/11/19	3	6	4	59	
Maximizing Your Earnings	06/06/19	4	6	2	89	
Investing in Yourself	03/15/19	2	12	6	110	
The Framework - Part 2	03/15/19	2	9	7	87	
The Framework - Part 1	03/15/19	1	9	10	104	
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>					<b>864</b>	

\* The grand total is larger than the totals for each month because not all months are shown since the start of the program.

The response from our housing counseling agencies is especially encouraging. When we shared our press releases with them, many asked if they could link to our podcasting library from their agency websites. They recognize what a tremendous trove of information these podcasts will become as we add more programs each year. One counselor wrote to us unprompted to comment, “Really enjoyed the Master Your Money podcasts. Found it amazing how much you could cover in less than 10 minutes. Great synopsis of [money management] topics.” The enthusiastic promotion by counselors will extend our marketing of these podcasts to even more consumers and to an excellent target market.

So, we have discussed how these podcasts help consumers, and how they meet their need for accurate information on subjects pertinent to their lives. But how do they help our agency? Well, for the past few years, the PHFA communications staff has made content marketing a priority for our website. By adding consumer-friendly content to our site, our goal is help our visitors and also to grow awareness of our PHFA brand. Podcasting fits perfectly into our integrated communications strategy. By growing this library of educational materials presented in layman’s language in a popular listening format, we are building an archive of content that will attract more consumers to our website and expose them to PHFA’s housing programs. We couldn’t ask for a better addition to our content marketing plan.

Moving forward, podcasting will help to increase our brand awareness. Providing consumers with accurate and unbiased information that enhances their quality of life reflects well on the agency and ties in effectively with our housing mission. PHFA already has a stellar public reputation, and our podcasting initiative will further advance this aspect of our strong brand identity.

In conclusion

Podcasting is low cost, involves simple implementation, has a fast ramp-up, is consumer-oriented, is a terrific marketing fit, and is vital part of our overall communications strategy. Our multidimensional podcasting campaign is educating consumers while expanding our brand awareness. For these reasons and more, podcasting has been a terrific addition for PHFA, and we think it could benefit other HFAs, as well.