We'll Get You Home: 2019 Annual Report

Rhode Island Housing
Communications: Annual Report

HFA Staff Contact
Mary Kate Harrington
mharrington@rihousing.com
New Decade, New Focus, New Look
As we closed out one year, ended one decade and looked toward the next, we wanted to create an annual report that encapsulated key messaging and had a sharp focus on the work we do. In recent communications efforts, we’ve developed more streamlined and less complicated text that conveys our mission to help people meet their housing needs and achieve their housing goals. Simply put, we help people find, rent, buy, keep, improve and build homes. Looking to further encapsulate and convey our role in the state, we came up with our 2019 annual report theme and title: We’ll Get You Home.

‘Home’ means different things to different people, but for us, ‘home’ is at the core of our mission. With an almost 50-year history, we are proud of our role in providing a range of housing options for Rhode Islanders and helping to define the housing landscape in our state. We wanted to celebrate the successes of 2019 while developing an annual report that provides a snapshot of our main mission areas, is easily digestible, features engaging text and compelling visuals and supports our new brand and recently launched website.

Timing is Everything
Our annual report features the highlights and stories of the previous calendar year and is traditionally released in late March or very early April to coincide with our annual legislative event and spring homebuying breakfast. As we were putting the finishing touches on the 2019 report, we had to quickly pivot to meet the demands and communications needs resulting from the COVID-19 health crisis.

When we had a moment to refocus on the release of the report, we reexamined the key messaging and data through the lens of the pandemic and the needs of Rhode Islanders. We wanted to ensure information on the kinds of programs and services we provide was clear and accessible. We reconfigured the initial design concepts and added an introductory message regarding the pandemic. Our goal with these tweaks was to convey a strong message of support and stability.

Themes
While our overall report theme is identifying and highlighting the many ways RIHousing works to get Rhode Islanders home, we also wanted to highlight the many kinds of partners and partnerships that help us achieve our mission. With a partner focus, we were able to recognize and highlight partners, create awareness of the kinds of collaborations involved in our work, and drive traffic to partner websites. Our agency tagline – Invest. Build. Believe. – inspired us to also kept three words at the forefront of our minds as we crafted our 2019 annual report: Engage, inform, educate.

At a Glance
We recognize that our customers, partners and the public are busy (especially so during these challenging times). So, this year, we streamlined and designed our annual report to allow readers to review and digest the top-level information in ten minutes or less. For those who want to dig deeper, we’ve designed it so readers can explore and better understand how housing investments and creative partnerships support the housing needs of Rhode Islanders. A quick read through provides a strong overview of our agency mission and goals, supported by data, outcomes and program specific details with one click of “Read More.”

Bold and Fresh Design
Beginning a new decade felt like a unique opportunity to try things differently. Our plan was to write, design and create differently than we ever had. We wanted to continue our shift from previous annual reports in design, content and length, moving beyond the traditional customer profiles and relying more
heavily on presenting compelling data, visuals and narrative. The freedom to try things differently allowed for a more creative mindset not limited by a forced structure (and word count) based on past reports.

The report is completely integrated into our new website vs posted as a PDF or other platforms that prevent true engagement. We felt strongly we wanted the reader to really interact with the content vs feeling like they were reading an online book. Our 2019 annual report features a new look and format that allows for bolder and more compelling infographics and visuals. Photos are saturated with color and the design fully embraces our new brand and visual identity. Shifts in messaging and tone make for more impactful narratives. Rather than writing to an established format, we let the message determine the format and design, allowing us greater freedom for creativity.

**Engagement**

Of course, we want to engage our audiences with compelling information and visuals, but we also want to track and measure reader engagement. As the report utilizes the same CMS platform as our agency website, and is built off the site, we can collect analytics to better inform future reports and incorporate into our broader agency outreach efforts. Additionally, the report is chock full of hyperlinks to more information, driving readers to program data and information, allowing us to analyze readers’ interest and behaviors.

**Roll Out**

We decided to forgo a hard copy version of the report as many of our partners and contacts are currently working remotely and would not be receiving mail at their respective offices. An added bonus is that we further reduced the costs associated with producing the annual report by saving on printing and mailing costs.

We promoted the release of the report with an agency e-blast sent to several thousand of our contacts, prominent promotion on our website (home page and various sub-pages and pop-ups throughout) and ongoing social media posts highlighting various aspects and topics of the report.

**Outcomes**

Our new 2019 Annual Report met our goals and then some! In less than three weeks since we rolled out the new report, we’ve had over 600 webpage visits (747 page views), 466 interactions and 425 page scrolls; based on behavior mapping, readers are connecting with and engaging with our online report. Analytics show that almost 50% are reading the report on mobile devices vs PC and analytics from the Annual Report e-blast show 66% of recipients spent time reading the email and clicking on links.

Our report succeeds in providing a sense of stability for Rhode Islanders, showcasing agency innovation (in the report design itself as well as our programs), and most importantly, signaling a clear message to our state and its residents that we are here for them and our commitment has never wavered. These assurances are even more important during these complicated and challenging times.

**Why It's Deserving of an Award**

- “No” Cost: online only; utilized in-house staff and existing technologies/platform as well as photography – no outside resources used
- Significant improvements over 2018 annual report (first year we went online) in terms of layout, look, functionality
- Bold design and messaging with
Informative infographics: rich with data and additional context about programs and services
Interactive, engaging and dynamic: text, graphics, and links
Clean, well-designed look and layout; Strong reinforcement of agency brand and key messaging
Movement: data and infographics move, advance and surprise

- Supports recently launched agency website; highlighting primary mission areas: Rent a Home, Buy a Home, Keep a Home and Build a Home
- Infographics and each primary “mission area” stand on its own and can be repurposed in other efforts and platforms throughout the year
- Web platform (WordPress) is easy to use, without outside or special IT assistance and/or coding required
- New this year:
  - Agency philanthropic highlights: showing our personal commitment to the well-being of Rhode Islanders
  - Looking Ahead: positive outlook that we will continue doing what we do best: providing opening the doors to homeownership, keeping people in safe and healthy homes, and building livable and sustainable communities across our state.
  - COVID-19 introduction: reinforcing that we understand the challenges and we are committed to helping Rhode Islanders overcome the obstacles

- Platform is mobile responsive (in fact, it looks great on mobile!) and ADA compliant
- We were able to finalize the report and roll it out despite staff working remotely

Don’t believe us? Click here and see for yourselves.
The opening graphic allows you to link to the mission area most important to you and reinforces the theme of the report.

FULL IN-HOUSE PRODUCTION
DYNAMIC + ENGAGING STORYTELLING DRIVEN BY DATA
CELEBRATE + RECOGNIZE PARTNERS AND STAFF
RESPONSIVE DESIGN
2019 RIHOUSING ANNUAL REPORT

- Continue our shift from previous annual reports in design, content and length
- Present bolder, more compelling data, visuals and narrative
- Viewers engage and interact with the content - fully embrace online capacity
- Fully embrace the new brand and visual identity

THOUGHTFUL DESIGN PROCESS

BENEFIT TO FULL IN-HOUSE CAPACITY

- Utilized in-house staff and existing technologies/platform as well as photography – no outside resources used
- In-house capacity to design and generate content = quick response to changing health crisis
- Taking a moment to reflect on the impact of COVID-19 and our role in supporting Rhode Islanders
DYNAMIC AND ENGAGING CONTENT

Dynamic, interactive graphics allow us to capture information highlights and data in one place.
DATA-DRIVEN STORYTELLING

A deeper dive - Read More - pulls up rich data content and updates across programs and services within each topic area.
RECOGNIZING OUR MANY PARTNERS

- With links to their respective websites throughout
- Highlight groundbreakings and ribbon cuttings of partner organizations

CELEBRATE OUR STAFF
Recognizing and celebrating staff philanthropic efforts from throughout the year

LOOKING FORWARD
Show agency goals and upcoming projects
We're proud of our 2019 accomplishments and are committed to building upon past successes to build and preserve housing and provide stable and secure homes for Rhode Islanders. Learn more in our 2019 Annual Report. https://hubs.ly/H0rHjQJ0
Check out our 2019 Annual Report: *We’ll Get You Home.*