

Working Together to Bring Rhode Islanders Home

Rhode Island Housing

Communications: Annual Report

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Summary

In 2023, RIHousing celebrated its 50th anniversary. We spent the year highlighting the collaborative efforts and dedicated teams involved in fulfilling our mission of providing more homes for Rhode Islanders. As a large, multi-faceted organization with numerous Departments and housing responsibilities for the State of Rhode Island and its residents, our Annual Report distills a busy year down into its key programs, efforts, and financials for our audiences. Recognizing a chance for innovation, and knowing our work throughout the year made critical strides in our effort to combat the state's housing crisis, RIHousing produced the report in a nimble, accessible new format to share our information, with a focus on real people telling their own stories. Ultimately, this new format brought our work and impact to life in a way we've never done before.

Objective

As one of the few publications we put out each year, RIHousing's Annual Report is a chance for us to grab the attention of our audiences and offer agency updates, highlights, and achievements. With 2023 marking the 50th anniversary of our organization, and with a Strategic Plan goal of increasing efforts in brand awareness and public engagement, we took the opportunity to reimagine our Annual Report. Given our many roles as a Housing Finance Agency, mortgage lender, program administrator, development and community partner, and more, we recognized that Rhode Islanders – and our audiences across the board – may only see one small piece of our agency's work. Keeping in mind that modern attentions have shifted from data-heavy documents to shorter, quicker methods of consuming information, we decided to focus our 2023 Annual Report on the most important part of our work: the people we serve.

This intentional decision resulted in our 2023 Annual Report: **Working together to bring Rhode Islanders home**. Embedded on our website and easy to navigate, the digital Report is a quick 10 pages of agency numbers, program summaries, and real stories from our staff, partners, and program participants.

In our brainstorming process for the Report, RIHousing recognized video as the newest and most accessible way to get our intended information out. In today's world, where audiences are bombarded with countless messages and advertisements, we landed on having short, simple interview-style, well-produced and wholly-authentic videos at the center of our Report.

Striking the right balance between data and consumer impact stories is often difficult. Too much data and text and your message is lost. On the other hand, stand-alone video without wrap around context and important information is not always communicated clearly. **Working together to bring Rhode Islanders home** offers a snapshot of a given agency department or program, told by those who know it best: the department directors, the program managers and staff, and the participants who have benefited—whether that be through FSS or our Down Payment Assistance programs. This Annual Report allows the audience to see and hear about the personal successes of the people we serve.

Engage Our Audiences

RIHousing's 2023 Annual Report is made up of seven categories over its 10 pages. Though we are a large organization with many moving parts, the Report's throughline is its title: Working together to bring Rhode Islanders home. Our partnerships range from developers to lenders to elected officials to community groups; we serve all Rhode Islanders, from all backgrounds, and are working to ensure our staff represents the landscape of our state. We wanted our Annual Report viewers to understand that

though they may work or interact with just one specific part of RIHousing, our agency is a place of cohesion and collaboration where each area of work touches another. Wherever you are in your housing journey, RIHousing is a partner in your next step.

Our 2023 Annual Report covers areas of interest for all of our stakeholders and allows them to quickly and easily learn more about other aspects of our organization, providing a well-rounded look at the many crucial pieces that make up RIHousing and the ways we're impacting Rhode Island communities and individuals.

Here's a breakdown of our 2023 Annual Report:

- **2023: Year In Review:** With a kickoff message from our Executive Director, our Board Chairman, and the Governor of Rhode Island, the beginning pages of the Report welcome viewers with a brief summary of our 2023 work and highlight the major data points for the year, including homeownership, rental assistance, and development impact.
- **COVID-19: Road to Recovery:** In this section we summarize the wrap up of two of our COVID-specific programs, including final numbers of total assistance provided and how many people we helped.
- **Homeownership:** The first of our story-driven pages, in addition to touching on our 2023 homeownership stats, this page outlines the incredibly impactful Rhode Island Statewide Down Payment Assistance Program, which provided \$17,500 grants to first-time homebuyers across the state. The video here focuses on Juan Cruz Jr and his family, who were able to purchase a home using the grant; Juan and his wife Emelin tell us about getting themselves and their two children out of perpetual renting and into a home that can stay in their family for generations.
- **Development:** Highlighting the historic investment of State Fiscal Recovery Funds (SFRF) and how we're leveraging federal, state, and agency dollars, this part of the Report covers the new and preserved housing we invested in throughout 2023. Photos catch the excitement of the groundbreaking and ribbon cuttings we attended.
 - **Riverside Square, East Providence:** Receiving the spotlight in this section, Mayor Bob DaSilva of East Providence and CEO Jennifer Hawkins of one of our vital development partners, ONE Neighborhood Builders, go into detail about the Residences at Riverside Square, a new 16-unit affordable housing development right along the picturesque East Bay Bike Path. Three of the units are reserved for youth aging out of foster care, in partnership with East Providence-based Foster Forward RI. Mayor DaSilva and Ms. Hawkins each assert the importance of this development, which took a blighted property and turned it into affordable homes, and how crucial the relationship between RIHousing and our partners is to expanding the inventory of housing in Rhode Island, especially between us and our development partners.
- **Leased Housing:** RIHousing serves as the Public Housing Authority for 19 communities across the state, administering a number of different federal vouchers and offering affordable housing rental assistance. This part of our 2023 Report provides data on our rental assistance programs – we served over 17,000 households in 2023 through Project Based Section 8 and Housing Choice Voucher programs.
 - **Family Self-Sufficiency:** One of our most impactful programs, the RIHousing FSS Program had 169 participants enrolled in 2023. Our video features an RIHousing FSS program employee – who themselves graduated from an FSS program -- and a recent FSS grad,

who both speak to the benefit of being part of the program. This video encapsulates how we're in Rhode Island communities providing assistance and support, making an impact -- not just on individuals but on whole families. The FSS graduate, Jessica Nin, has taken what she learned during her time in the program, plus the funds accrued during the five years, and has built a better home and business for herself. A success story like Ms. Nin's, told in her own words and voice, captures more than a write-up of the same information ever could for our audience.

- **Loan Servicing:** With excellent S&P and Moody's bond ratings (AA+, Aa1), RIHousing's financial portfolio remained strong through 2023. The financial strength of our agency allows us to provide programs and assistance to Rhode Islanders. It is the backbone of our agency and why we are able to do all of the things we do. We service loans in Rhode Island and Maine and advise homeowners through our HelpCenter, providing exceptional customer service and loan servicing to customers and crucial counseling to homeowners facing difficulties. We pride ourselves on our agency strength and customer service, as explained by both our CFO and Assistant Deputy Director of Loan Servicing in the page's embedded video. Another benefit of video, the sentiments shared in this vignette regarding our financials and loan servicing would not come across as clearly and succinctly in written form.
- **RIHousing:** The final section of our Report is about our extraordinary people. Though RIHousing is made up of numerous teams, divisions, and departments, every employee shares the common goal of working together to bring more Rhode Islanders home. The included video features multiple employees discussing their experiences working at RIHousing, what we do, and why they love coming to work every day. As a multi-year winner of one of Rhode Island's "Best Places to Work," it's our people who make the lasting impacts on our communities.

Benefits that Outweigh and Outlast the Costs

The writing, design and marketing of our 2023 Annual Report were handled in-house. The cost of producing our six high-quality videos was approximately \$17,000, but the versatility of this Report and what it's provided us will continue to supply additional content across digital platforms, over a number of years. The videos we've included, real stories and experiences told by real people, are accessible and meaningful to our viewers in a way clicking through pages of text wouldn't be.

Ongoing Results

Our Annual Report, by nature of being a brief, doesn't convey everything we worked on and achieved in 2023, but it's a step forward for our agency and how we share information, data and highlights. The FSS video alone as spurred ideas for a new marketing campaign and events to engage future FSS participants, current participants, and FSS graduates.

The 2023 Annual Report was released on April 23, 2024, and quickly gained nearly 200 views and widespread attention. We're getting the word out about it via emails, newsletters, e-blasts, our website, and social media; utilizing these short vignettes is an easy entry point to lead people into the full Report. As the leading housing resource in Rhode Island, we aim to continue to innovate and engage with our audiences in ways that will make the most impact.

Attachments

[View our 2023 Annual Report: Working together to bring Rhode Islanders home.](#)



“Owning a home is the greatest investment you can possibly do for your family.”

Step into the home of **Juan Cruz Jr and wife Emelin**, who used the \$17,500 Statewide DPA grant to buy a house for themselves and their two sons, getting them out of perpetual renting and into a home that can stay in the family for generations.



“I was grateful that I was able to use the money from the FSS Program to build my business.”

Meet **Jessica Nin**, a recent FSS graduate who used the tools she received from the program, including her escrow account, to tackle her life goals and learn more about the RIHousing FSS Program from RIHousing staff.

“We’ve built on the financial strength of the past and really have ensured that for the future [RIHousing] is going to be able to provide the products and the programs that our customers need.”



Hear from RIHousing CFO **Kara Lachapelle** and Assistant Deputy Director of Loan Servicing **Leslie McKnight**, who both work every day with their teams to bring the best loan programs and services to our customers.



“This historic allocation of money has really allowed developers... to ramp up our production pipeline.”

Head into East Providence to hear from **East Providence Mayor Bob DaSilva** and **ONE Neighborhood Builders President and CEO Jennifer Hawkins**, who are both invested in the new Riverside Square apartments opening in the heart of Riverside for one great, common reason: community building.