

My View: a newsletter
Washington State Housing Finance Commission
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My View: a newsletter published by
the Washington State Housing Finance Commission
<http://www.wshfc.org/newsletter/>
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***My View* Objectives**

The Washington State Housing Finance Commission's *My View* newsletter plays a unique role in our organization's communications program. The majority of our efforts focus on the real-life stories of people in Washington State who need affordable housing and related services. *My View* is a complementary piece. It focuses on the efforts of the committed people in the affordable housing community who make the solutions happen.

While the human need for housing is simple and fundamental, affordable housing solutions involve complex public-private sector partnerships that require significant legislative and financial expertise. This complex network includes legislators, advocates, concerned citizens, nonprofits, and housing authorities, as well as builders, realtors, and bankers. It's a coalition of unlikely bedfellows, but it takes all of them to make things work.

With more than 30 years of experience, the Commission's executive director, Kim Herman, wanted to provide a platform from which all of these voices could be heard. A newsletter that would provide real-world information and insights into the process and challenges of creating affordable housing—an inside perspective for partners and colleagues—both here in Washington State and across the country.

Launched in the fall of 2004, each issue of the newsletter addresses a timely topic or initiative. The newsletter draws on our knowledge and relationships to identify people who are the key players, representing different constituencies and perspectives. In-depth interviews allow the subjects to explain in their own words how they've accomplished their successes, what further challenges they see ahead, the coalitions they've built, and the legislative support they're enlisting.

Our newsletter has built a strong bond with its readership—more than 3500 professionals and volunteers across the nation. We've frequently heard from readers that our publications have provided the most thorough coverage of a topic that they've read. We field numerous requests to copy and distribute each issue. Most importantly, subscribers tell us they're implementing strategies they've read about in the newsletter in their own affordable housing efforts, in communities from Wenatchee, Washington to Charleston, West Virginia.

***My View* Success Criteria and Results**

Here's why we think our publication deserves a Program Excellence Award:

It's innovative. *My View* provides a unique, insider's perspective into the people,

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programs, events and trends that are influencing affordable housing and community development.

Traditionally, organizational newsletters look internally. Their audience is usually direct stakeholders, so they talk about their own activities and successes.

Our publication addresses a broader audience and carries a different mandate. It focuses on events and points of view *outside* the Commission. It presents multiple perspectives and then takes a stand, based on the information gathered. Readers can compare different strategies and our conclusions, and decide on their own what applies to their community. *My View's* innovative approach helps support the Commission's mission in a very direct way. As you'll see from the examples below, bringing specific housing challenges and issues to the attention of professionals and advocates helps to further solutions—and supports the work of the Commission in building partnerships to further our social and economic objectives.

It's replicable. We take a journalistic approach to key topics. Although the Director's vision is unique, this kind of communication vehicle can easily be implemented by any organization intent on reaching out to a more diverse level of influencers and advocates among its constituencies. For example, the director of the Washington Community Reinvestment Association told us she used *My View* as a model for the electronic version of her newsletter.

***My View* helps the Commission achieve its strategic objectives.** Ultimately, our greatest resource is our partnership with colleagues in the affordable housing community. Included as part of this application is our most recent issue: *The Washington State Coalition for the Homeless: 25 years of Heroic Efforts and Significant Milestones*. In May, at the close of their 20th annual conference, the leadership of the Washington State Coalition for the Homeless honored their 25th anniversary year by sponsoring a Celebration Panel of people who have a unique perspective on their history. Eloquent and thoughtful, these 10 panelists gave us an incredible oral recounting of the Coalition's founding and the great strides its membership has made since that time. This newsletter can't possibly include all the successes, or acknowledge all the people who have participated, but it's an attempt to capture the historical legacy, as told on that Celebration Panel.

We reach our targeted audiences. Since launching this publication in October 2004, our articles have been quoted in newspapers, web blogs, and in the published communications of other agencies. Most gratifying is the consistent level of unsolicited feedback we receive from subscribers. Many readers tell us that they download the newsletter from the Internet, print it out and allocate the time to read it from "cover to cover." Other subscribers make a point of printing out and gathering each issue in a folder to use as a reference.

Many readers' responses represent a genuine dialogue with readers across the country who are applying strategies they've read about in our newsletter.

Here are a few specific examples:

From a self-help housing developer in eastern Washington State whose agency was profiled in My View, after receiving funding renewal for a federal program: "Thanks so much for all your support on this Kim! Your newsletter article was very helpful, with Congressional staff members particularly

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impressed.”

A District Director for U.S. Senator Patty Murray told us: “Your newsletter is the best that we receive and we receive dozens. It helps us learn about affordable housing and what’s going on in the other districts.”

Jay Reich, former Bond Counsel to the Commission, now Deputy Chief of Staff to Secretary of Commerce, Gary Locke, “This is another terrific example of amplifying your own message by highlighting the work of others. It is a winning formula that affirms your and the Commission’s leadership role in housing. Well done.”

Michael Mirra, Executive Director, Tacoma Housing Authority- “ I read the article you wrote about the Coalition for the Homeless for the July Issue. Very nice work! You were gracious to do that.”

Mary Jo Harvey, Resource Director, Habitat for Humanity, Spokane- “What a really great article on the Homeless Coalition! You keep doing fantastic things!”

Examples like these confirms that we’re on the right track.

My View provides benefits that outweigh costs—and use resources effectively.

Our costs per issue are \$8,000, including interviews, writing, production, and distribution. That’s approximately \$2.28 per reader—though that figure doesn’t take into account copies that are forwarded to new readers and reproduced for widespread circulation by organizations and advocates by request. A typical issue will include seven to twelve interviews, and comprise 10-16 pages when printed. It encompasses a balanced range of points of view on topical issues, attractive design, and candid, compelling photographs taken by the Commission’s communications manager. We think our high-impact coverage, which reaches key partners, leaders, and influencers, more than justifies the cost per subscriber.

By helping to build and support our community at large, this publication makes a strong contribution to our mission.

Thank you for your consideration.

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