LHS Institute

The Local Housing Solutions Institute is an intensive program of seminars, strategic consultation, and team-building designed to help cities and counties refine and strengthen their housing strategies to meet their own affordability and other housing challenges. Leading the institute will be staff from Abt Associates and the NYU Furman Center – the co-conveners of the National Community of Practice on Local Housing Policy and the co-creators of LocalHousingSolutions.org. The first Institute was held in September 2019, with plans for additional cohorts in future years as funds permit.

Click here to read highlights from the first Institute.

Announced in April 2019, the Institute’s competitive application process generated over 20 proposals from cities and counties across the country. After a careful review process, the NYU Furman Center and Abt Associates announced the selection of Atlanta, Minneapolis, Philadelphia, and San Antonio as the inaugural LHS Institute cohort. Each of these cities has demonstrated their commitment to local housing policy and each bring distinct approaches and challenges to the table. Read summaries of the selected cities’ housing plans below.

Atlanta: The One Atlanta Housing Affordability Action Plan seeks to create or preserve 20,000 affordable homes by 2026 and increase overall supply. Between 2000 and 2017, Atlanta’s median rent increase by over 70%, while median income grew by just 48%. As housing costs have grown, more Atlantans have been forced to spend a greater percentage of their income on housing costs. In 2016, more than half of Atlantans were considered housing-cost burdened. The plan includes working with public, private and philanthropic sources to invest $1 billions to produce and preserve affordable housing.

Minneapolis: Minneapolis is growing faster than it has since 1950. The Metropolitan Council estimates that between 2010 and 2016 the city added over 12,000 housing units and more than 37,000 residents. As a result, housing units that were once
affordable no longer are, and less housing is available for low-income residents of Minneapolis. Based on feedback, the City Council has adopted the goals of eliminating disparities, providing more affordable housing, and increasing residents and jobs that all can equitably benefit from as staff develops the Comprehensive Plan.

**Philadelphia:** Philadelphia’s population has grown by more than 63,000 people since 2000 and is expected to grow by an additional 25,000 households over the next 10 years. In order for Philadelphia to continue to move toward a balanced and equitable housing market, attention must be paid across all the income spectrum. The Housing for Equity Action Plan addresses the need to continue to create upper-income, middle-income, and affordable housing units.

**San Antonio:** Between 2005 and 2016, the median price of a home in San Antonio rose from $120,000 to $180,000. Over the same time period, area median income (AMI) increased from $40,100 to $49,300. In 2016, one-third of all San Antonio households were spending more than 30% of their income on housing. The Housing Policy Task Force worked with a diverse group of stakeholders, focusing on opportunity, systems, and sustainability to increase housing opportunities for all.

We learned many valuable lessons during our week at West Creek Ranch, and we wanted to share these insights for the window they offer into the program’s exciting future.

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**5 Insights from the Local Housing Solutions Institute**

1. **Build Strong Personal Relationships throughout Local Governments**

   While all of the LHSI attendees had innovative policy ideas, many have struggled to push these ideas through the implementation process. Through our conversations, it became clear that increased coordination and coalition-building is necessary to help overcome these frustrating barriers.

   Building relationships among agencies that also have responsibility over affordable housing policies enhances trust and helps to bolster confidence that no one isn’t alone in their respective missions. Such relationships help cities develop trusted local partners with whom they could collaborate, even if they don’t share identical goals.
2. Engage Outside Stakeholders

While there is no single right approach, local officials must decide who should participate in developing and implementing a city’s housing strategy, how often they should meet, who should lead, and what strategies and tools that leader has to ensure coordination and accountability. Here, having a basic understanding of organizational models is a great place to start.

Local officials also need to be strategic in engaging the local housing ecosystem beyond the public sector. Never underestimate the capacity of local nonprofits as well as small, for-profit developers, local businesses, healthcare providers and insurers, community colleges, and school systems – among others.

3. Connect with “Sister Cities.”

It’s easy to forget that other cities face many of the same problems as yours does. Ask questions and engage in discussions on shared issues and challenges with your counterparts in similar cities. Not only will these connections serve as a source of comfort as you work through your affordable housing plans, but such deep
engagement will further facilitate productive brainstorming and problem solving between your localities.

4. **Communicate Policy Goals Strategically**

Our time at the LHSI made it clear that many localities could benefit from communications training to help them better understand how to effectively communicate with stakeholders whose support is needed to advance new policies. For example, many of the LHSI teams face highly challenging local and state political environments with many competing priorities. The bonds that the groups formed while at West Creek are allowing them to work together to build a broader coalition, weave a shared narrative around the need for affordable housing in their cities, and ultimately advocate more effectively.
5. Make Time for Long-term Problem Solving

Sometimes the simple act of creating uninterrupted time to brainstorm local housing solutions is all it takes to begin the process of making meaningful change. LHSI participants told us that they truly appreciated the uninterrupted space that they had to discuss critical, longer-term challenges that they never have time to discuss at home. For example, one team made substantial progress in working out details of a pilot team while another developed a detailed set of processes for roles, responsibilities, and decision-making among the different agencies that should help them more effectively collaborate in the future.