Act

Identify policy tools to meet local needs

HOUSING POLICY FRAMEWORK

I. Create and preserve dedicated affordable housing units
II. Promote affordability by reducing barriers to new supply
III. Help households access and afford private-market homes
IV. Protect against displacement and poor housing conditions

Complementary policies in other domains (e.g., health, education, environment)

There is much that local governments can do to address their housing challenges. But with dozens of local housing policies to consider it can be difficult to know where to start and how to structure an effective local housing strategy.

To simplify the identification of promising policies for a strong local housing strategy, we have developed a framework that categorizes the many local housing policies in our Housing Policy Library into four functional areas. To ensure a balanced housing strategy, we recommend that every city, town, or county adopt at least one policy that advances each of these four key functions.

Expand the categories below for more information on each of the four functional categories.

I. Create and preserve dedicated affordable housing units

This category includes all of the policies cities, towns, and counties adopt to create and preserve a supply of dedicated affordable housing units that come with legal restrictions ensuring they remain affordable to low- or moderate-income households. The policies in this category range from (a) incentives and requirements for the inclusion of affordable units in new development to (b) policies that generate revenue for affordable housing and (c) subsidies to facilitate the creation and preservation of affordable developments.

See policies in this category.
II. Promote affordability by reducing barriers to new supply

The policies in this category promote affordability by making it easier for the private sector to increase the overall supply of housing to meet demand. While the rents and home prices of units created through these policies are not legally restricted to affordable levels, the creation of these new units promotes affordability by helping to satisfy the demand of higher-income households who would otherwise compete for (and bid up the price of) housing occupied by middle-income households; this in turn helps reduce the likelihood that middle-income households compete for (and bid up the price of) housing occupied by moderate- and low-income households. The barriers that these policies address – such as restrictive zoning and unpredictable and lengthy entitlement processes – are among the main reasons why housing costs have increased faster than incomes in many of the nation’s urban areas.

See policies in this category.

III. Help households access and afford private-market homes

While there are good reasons to support the development of dedicated affordable housing units, there are also good reasons to focus on helping households access and afford the costs of housing they locate on the private market. Cost is one reason, as tenant-based rental assistance is often less expensive than project-based rental assistance. Choice is another, as tenant-based rental assistance gives households a wider choice of housing options. To ensure that all households have fair access to the housing units they can afford, this category includes efforts to enforce the fair housing laws. This category also includes closing cost assistance and other programs that help homebuyers overcome obstacles to homeownership.

See policies in this category.

IV. Protect against displacement and poor housing conditions

This category includes policies that focus on helping renters and homeowners remain stably housed in the face of such challenges as rising rents, job loss, health crises, gentrification, and mortgage defaults. Housing stability is an important goal of housing policy, contributing to peace of mind and a stability of settings that enable children, older adults and others to thrive. Providing affordable housing is one way to boost stability, but not the only way. Other important approaches include financial and legal assistance to help residents avoid eviction, legal standards that protect households from displacement, and programs to help homeowners avoid foreclosure. This category also includes efforts to enhance housing quality and prevent the loss of
existing units to deterioration, such as code enforcement, rehabilitation assistance, and special programs focused on maintaining the ongoing viability and quality of small multifamily housing.

See policies in this category.

**Complementary policies**

In addition to housing policy tools, we recommend that cities, towns, and counties consider ways to link housing policies with complementary policies in the areas of health, education, transportation and the environment to address important societal concerns. For more information, visit the Bridge section of the website.