

Comprehensiveness and balance – key attributes of a local housing strategy

While there is no one size-fits-all strategy that will work for all cities, towns, and counties, there are certain attributes of an effective local housing strategy that all jurisdictions should strive for, including **comprehensiveness** and **balance**.

Comprehensiveness

In this context, **comprehensiveness** refers to the breadth of a jurisdiction's local housing strategy. A strategy that focuses only on tools available to the local housing department, for example, is less comprehensive than one that combines the tools available to the local housing department, public housing authority, local tax authority, planning department, zoning commission, etc. Another way of measuring comprehensiveness is to consider the *types* of tools included in a local housing strategy. A strategy that focuses only on providing subsidies for dedicated affordable housing, for example, is less comprehensive than one that combines subsidies with tax incentives, zoning incentives or requirements, permitting reforms, etc.

Because the housing challenges most jurisdictions face are multifaceted and challenging, they benefit from being addressed through multiple angles and tools. Thus, as a general rule, a comprehensive strategy that accesses tools from multiple domains and agencies will be more effective than a strategy that is more narrowly focused on one particular set of tools or one particular agency. While feasibility is obviously an important consideration—and it can be challenging at times to foster the interagency collaboration needed for this approach to succeed—the more comprehensive a local housing strategy is, the stronger the potential for impact.

Balance

Balance is a related but distinct concept that affirms the importance of balancing different dimensions of housing policy to create an effective approach that meets the full range of a jurisdiction's needs.

As a general rule, local housing strategies should reflect a balance between:

- The two main ways of expanding the supply of housing units that rent or sell at affordable levels: (a) building and preserving dedicated affordable housing units and (b) increasing the overall supply of housing. We call this a [balanced approach to development](#).
- Expanding the resources available in low-income areas and communities of color

and developing affordable housing in resource-rich areas. To learn more, [read the brief](#) that discusses this trade-off as well as materials on how to [expand the availability of affordable housing in resource-rich areas](#).

- Accommodating growth and protecting residents from [displacement](#).
- [Rental housing](#) and [homeownership](#).

Housing Policy Framework

To help cities, towns, and counties develop a strategy that is both comprehensive and balanced, we have created a policy framework that features four main categories of local housing policies. We recommend that all jurisdictions adopt at least one policy within each of these four categories and that larger jurisdictions seek to adopt local housing policies that address each of the functional subcategories within the framework.

Jurisdictions that use the policy framework to organize their policy selection and refinement will naturally achieve a balanced approach by, for example, adopting policies that both create and preserve dedicated affordable housing (the first category) and expand the overall supply of housing (the second category). Similarly, the framework guides cities, towns, and counties to consider both rental housing and homeownership. The framework also helps cities, towns, and counties achieve comprehensiveness by including a broad range of policy tools administered by a wide range of public agencies.

Click on the graphic below to learn more about our policy framework.

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 \(e.g., health, education, environment\)](#)