

Resources on building public support for affordable housing

Public support is critical to the success of any effort to create and preserve affordable housing. A strong and vocal group of supporters can generate momentum for the passage of legislation to create a housing trust fund, organize a constituency to approve a bond issue that provides needed resources, or effectively counter opposition to the development of mixed-income and low-income housing. And yet, while [a significant majority of Americans believe that housing affordability remains a problem](#), many cities, towns, and counties have difficulty building support for affordable housing initiatives and developments.

This section provides links to key resources currently available to local decision makers interested in building support for affordable housing, including:

- [Tactical guides](#) – Tactical guides typically describe concrete, actionable steps for managing opposition and building public support for affordable housing policies and programs, such as invite community members to the discussion before decisions are made, and create a review mechanism to help address fears. Messaging guides are subsets of tactical guides that focus specifically on how to craft a message of support for affordable housing that is likely to be successful. These materials are generally informed by polls and focus groups, as well as real-world results of outreach efforts. They provide guidance on how to tell a story or frame a message so that it will resonate with the desired constituency.
- [Public opinion and messaging research](#) – Research has found that there is general support for affordable housing, particularly when it is framed as providing opportunities for people to get ahead. But the support is passive and, when the general concept of affordable housing becomes a specific development at a particular location, support is often overcome by fear and protectionist reactions. These materials provide insights that supporters and developers of affordable housing can reference to plan ahead and develop strategies to manage opposition through planning, communications, and relationship building.
- [Informational resources](#) – Informational resources provide facts that can be used to dispel misperceptions and to help make the case for affordable housing—from data sheets illustrating the need for affordable housing in a city, town, or a county to reports that link housing to important outcomes, such as health, education, and community and economic development. Informational resources may be written for an academic audience (e.g. peer-reviewed journal articles) or “translated” into user-friendly formats such as infographics.

- [Campaigns](#) – Campaigns play an important role in helping to build public support for affordable housing. Campaigns are ongoing initiatives, generally managed by an advocacy group or membership organization, which local communities or organizations can sign on to and participate in at various levels of engagement. Campaigns typically provide pre-packaged activities, messages, and informational resources, as well as some level of staff support for participating communities or organizations. Some campaigns have a very specific focus on a particular policy or issue area, while others have a more general goal of supporting housing affordability.

Each of these resource types contributes in a different way to efforts to counter opposition and build support for affordable housing. For example, local community leaders can refer to tactical guides for direction on how to structure community outreach around a proposed development, and consult informational resources for the research evidence that will allow them to respond to concerns in an informed way. Messaging guides and public opinion research help local leaders translate facts and figures from informational resources into compelling stories that generate attention and effectively make their case.

See the [PLAN](#) section of the website for more information on how to broaden the constituency for affordable housing, including guidance on [Engaging the community in the development of a local housing strategy](#) and [Promoting interagency collaboration in the development of a local housing strategy](#).

Tactical guides

Ault, Mindy. [Building Support for Affordable Housing: Perspectives from the Field](#). October 2015. National Housing Conference.

Provides seven strategies for countering community opposition to help developers and advocates with the community engagement process to build public support for affordable housing developments

Housing Trust Fund Project. [Campaigns](#). Center for Community Change.

Series of web-based guides walk readers through the steps of initiating and running a campaign in support of an affordable housing trust fund. Topics covered include [Building a coalition](#) and [Making your case](#), among others.

Non-Profit Housing Association of Northern California. [“How To” Guides for Advocacy and Public Education](#). 2009.

Practical guides cover a series of topics, such as how to speak in public about

affordable housing, how to host public meetings, and how to host tours of affordable housing.

Messaging guides

Belden Russonello & Stewart. [Message Guide for Using the Results of Valuing Housing: Public Perceptions of Affordable Housing in the Chicago Region](#). April 2003. Housing Illinois Campaign.

Message guide based on survey and focus group research conducted for the Housing Illinois Campaign

Byrd, Janet and Alison McIntosh. [Framing and Messaging Toolkit](#). 2015. National Housing Conference.

Detailed advocacy toolkit with 11 techniques that have been tested through polling, focus groups, and in legislative sessions and focus on effectively communicating with public officials and the general public

Manuel, Tiffany and Nat Kendall-Taylor. [“You Don’t Have to Live Here.” Why Housing Messages are Backfiring and 10 Things We Can Do About It](#). October 2016. Enterprise Community Partners and FrameWorks Institute.

Reviews six common pitfalls that undermine affordable housing messaging campaigns, and provides tips on how to avoid them using real-world examples.

Overcoming NIMBYism

Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania. [Addressing Community Opposition to Affordable Housing Development – A Fair Housing Toolkit](#). 2004.

Toolkit with a mix of project-specific and policy level strategies to address community opposition

North Carolina Housing Coalition. [Housing Carolina Resource Manual](#).

Extensive housing communications manual with research on public opinions about affordable housing and guidance on building a year-round communications campaign and overcoming the challenges of NIMBYism

Obrinsky, Mark and Debra Stein. 2007. [Overcoming Opposition to Multifamily Rental Housing](#). National Multi-Housing Council.

Toolkit for developers describing common arguments against affordable

housing and evidence to refute the arguments; also offers tactics/strategies to mobilize support for specific multifamily projects

Public opinion and messaging research

Public opinion research

Belden, Nancy, Andre Shashaty, and John Zipperer. [What We Know About Public Attitudes on Affordable Housing: A Review of Existing Public Opinion Research](#). May 2004. The Campaign for Affordable Housing.

Analysis of public opinion research conducted from the late 1990s through 2003 on attitudes towards affordable housing

Center for Community Change. [Public Opinion Research](#).

Collected survey research and major findings based on experience providing technical assistance to housing trust fund campaigns

Duke, Joanna. 2010. [Exploring Homeowner Opposition to Public Housing Developments](#). 2010. The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare: 37(1), pp. 49-74.

Examines the beliefs and attitudes of homeowners in two communities where public housing development is planned

Horner, Thomas. [Affordable Housing Research and Recommendations](#). July 2009. Himle Horner.

Key strategic recommendations for building support for affordable housing proposals in Minnesota, informed by results from a random-sample phone survey, focus groups, interviews, and evaluation of news coverage

[Public Opinion on Opportunity and the American Dream, Homeownership, and Housing](#). 2011. The Opportunity Agenda.

Synthesis of existing public opinion surveys and studies on economic opportunity and homeownership, including the roles of homeownership and housing in creating opportunity

Tighe, J. Rosie. [Public Opinion and Affordable Housing: A Review of the Literature](#). 2010. Journal of Planning Literature; 25(1): pp. 3-17.

Review of the research literature on attitudes toward affordable housing and factors that shape attitudes

Messaging research

Housing Trust Fund Project. [The Impact of Research Evidence as an Advocacy Tool in Housing Trust Fund Campaigns: Lessons Learned from Three Case Studies](#). February 2013. Center for Community Change.

Draws key findings for the effectiveness of research evidence in advocacy and messaging from three campaigns in support of housing trust funds

Montgomery County Department of Park and Planning. [Nationwide Survey of Successful Affordable Housing Information Campaigns](#). 2003. Strategic Planning Division.

Survey of different types of marketing used by housing information campaigns around the country

Rios, Michael, Brandon Louie and Elizabeth Godkin. [Changing the Narrative of Affordable Housing](#). 2016. UC Davis Center for Regional Change.

Describes a study undertaken to explore the opposition to and need for affordable housing. Based on their research, the authors recommend campaign messages and strategies.

Viveiros, Janet and Rebecca Cohen. [Building Support for Affordable Homeowners and Rental Choices: A Summary of Research Findings on Public Opinion and Messaging on Affordable Housing](#). August 2013. Center for Housing Policy.

Provides an overview on research about how to effectively communicate housing policies through language and messaging strategies

Survey findings

[How Housing Matters: Key Findings From a Nationwide Survey Among Adults](#). 2016. Hart Research Associates.

Key findings from a national poll on perceptions of housing and affordable housing, personal experience with housing affordability challenges, and the future of economic mobility

[Ipsos Poll Conducted for Enterprise Community Partners](#). May 2016. Ipsos Public Affairs.

Data from a national poll on personal experience with housing affordability challenges and views on affordable housing

Informational resources

Housing and other social outcomes

[Housing intersections research](#). National Housing Conference.

Series of briefs synthesize research illustrate the various ways that housing serves as a platform for positive social outcomes

[How Housing Matters website](#). MacArthur Foundation and Urban Institute.

Comprehensive website provides resources on the relationship between housing and other domains, including annotated reports, articles, profiles, and weekly news articles

See also, resources on this website on the relationship between [Housing and Education](#) and [Housing and Health](#).

Impact of affordable housing developments

California Planning Roundtable and California Department of Housing & Community Development. [Myths and Facts About Affordable & High Density Housing](#).

Addresses common misperceptions around affordable and high density housing and provides research to refute community opposition

Center for Housing Policy. [Don't Put it Here! Does Affordable Housing Cause Nearby Property Values to Decline?](#)

Reviews evidence of the impact of affordable housing on property values and could be used to refute community opposition

DeGenova, Alexandra; Brendan Goodwin, Shannon Moriarty, Jeremy Robitaille. [On the Ground: 40B Developments Before and After](#). 2009. Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning, Tufts University.

Research on actual impact of affordable housing projects compared to predictions about the impact made before construction

Nakajima, Eric; Kathleen Modzelewski, Allison Dale. [The Fiscal Impact of Mixed-Income Housing Developments on Massachusetts Municipalities](#). 2007. UMASS Donahue Institute.

Analyzes the burden on municipal budgets of mixed-income homeownership

developments in Massachusetts; finds that the eight housing developments did not have any measurable negative impact on public services in their municipalities

Sullivan, Wendy. [The Impact of Affordable Workforce Housing on Community Demographics, Economies, and Housing Prices and Options, Case Study: The Town of Breckenridge, Colorado](#). 2014.

Examines the impact that targeted workforce housing development had on community demographics, the local economy, and housing affordability in Breckenridge, CO

Housing affordability

[Out of Reach](#). National Low Income Housing Coalition.

Annually-updated report illustrates the hourly wage required to rent a two-bedroom apartment in states and communities across the country

Campaigns

[HOME Matters America](#) (Neighborworks)

Includes a video library with expert talks, speeches, and PSAs; resource library for member organizations; and portal to connect community members with local service opportunities

[Make Room Campaign](#) (Enterprise Community Partners)

Advocacy communications campaign/housing information campaign; provides explainers/fact sheets about affordable housing, public investment, and related issues; links to news articles; and renter profiles and fundraising events

[Opportunity 360](#) (Enterprise Community Partners)

Collection of resources, including cross-sector data and community engagement and measurement tools, designed to facilitate a comprehensive approach to understanding community challenges, including through community engagement and partnerships

[ReThink](#) (HAI with PHADA, NAHRO, CLPHA)

Advocacy communications campaign to improve awareness of public housing includes tenant profile videos related to how public housing helps families,

communities, education, and stability