



Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation

The **NeighborWorks**[®] Journal

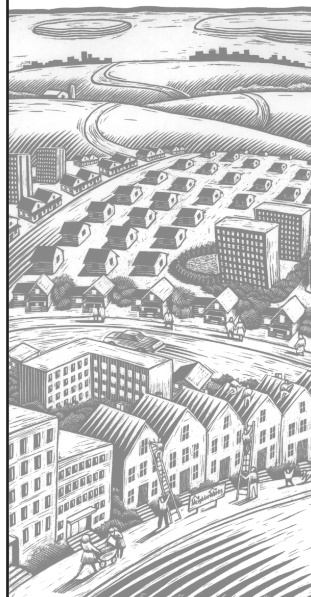


HOSTED BY THE NEIGHBORWORKS[®] MULTIFAMILY INITIATIVE

Changing Minds, Building Communities: Advancing Affordable Housing through Communications Campaigns

Co-Hosted by
Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation and
The Campaign for Affordable Housing

May 5, 2004
Minneapolis, Minnesota



a message from the



Chief Executive Officer

On May 5, 2004, Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation hosted its annual NeighborWorks® symposium on multifamily excellence in Minneapolis. This year's topic, "Changing Minds, Building Communities: Advancing Affordable Housing through Communications Campaigns," challenged 300 local and national affordable housing leaders who represented many facets of the community development industry.

What was their challenge? These leaders were asked to engage in a candid dialogue regarding the best way to communicate to policymakers – as well as to the general public – the critical affordable housing needs that exist in our country today. In addition to finding the best way to communicate this topic, they were also asked to get this target audience to "buy in" and support additional funding for affordable housing projects.

Housing advocates presented research and diverse perspectives as it related to the communication strategies used to promote the affordable housing agenda. One major point that emerged from the symposium related to word choice when speaking about affordable housing. In an effort to negate the stereotypes that "affordable housing" depicts, many agreed to resist using this term and instead promote "homes that people can afford."

Although we recognize that many obstacles remain, it was reassuring to note that successes have been achieved. Several case studies presented during the symposium attests to this fact. You may view these case studies at <http://www.nw.org/multifamily>.

Much appreciation goes to The Campaign for Affordable Housing for its untiring efforts to pull all the pieces together that made this event so successful as well as to our sponsors, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.

In addition, special thanks to the National Housing Conference and the many panel advisors whose contributions were immeasurable.

Once again, our sincere thanks to the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation that funded the research and case studies as well as the training presented on the following day of the symposium.

Congratulations to the NeighborWorks® Multifamily Initiative for another excellent and timely symposium!

Sincerely,

Kenneth D. Wade
Chief Executive Officer
Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation

The NeighborWorks® Journal
Published as *Stone Soup* 1982–1997.

The NeighborWorks® Journal is an occasional publication of the Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation. Its intent is to inform and instruct readers about successful strategies, practices, programs and procedures that emphasize a partnership approach to improving the economic and social well-being of families and communities. In addition, its intent is to highlight issues of growing concern to revitalizing communities and to inform readers about the work of the NeighborWorks® network and the Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation.

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Four years ago, the NeighborWorks® Multifamily Initiative began to explore a question fundamental to the success of affordable housing: “Are we financing our affordable rental homes to support sustained excellence in how properties are maintained, operate financially, and function socially?” The first of several day-long symposia was staged, with original white papers prepared in advance and panelists of leaders representing many different perspectives.

The day resulted in a candid exploration that was refreshingly honest. Among the findings: *replacement reserves* need to be increased; asset management fees are critical, so that the long-term *ownership* essential to property success is financially remunerated; *resident services* add value by supporting residents in their own personal asset-building as well as supporting improved property operations.

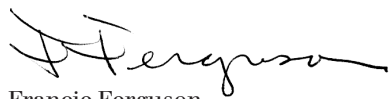
The success of that day led us to host this symposium again – each year’s topic emerging from the previous year’s discussion. In 2002 and 2005 we dug into “mixed income housing” – concluding that we can reverse concentrated poverty by creating homes that mix a wide range of incomes in many kinds of settings. However, all three years called out the issue of public opposition to affordable housing.

Clearly, it was high time to address this question of public opposition and successful communications strategies for winning support for affordable homes. 2004 was indeed the right year for this focus. The Campaign for Affordable Housing, Fannie Mae Foundation, and many state campaigns were conducting research that pointed to fresh new directions. In addition, in our previous years’ events, we’d found a growing number of developers and local communities that were discovering ways to communicate successfully and achieve remarkable breakthroughs on the location and funding of affordable homes.

Personally, I found that the presentations of this symposium inspired a paradigm shift away from repeating the arguments for affordable homes that are so compelling to me to, instead, valuing classic communications tools to understand the audience, the outcomes being sought, and the language and communications strategies that can bring about success. Exciting new tools and models are being developed across the country! Regulatory barriers can be reduced; zoning barriers can be addressed; funding streams can be won; and neighbors can accept and even welcome affordable homes.

I urge you to read and enjoy the full synopsis of the symposium, thoughtfully prepared by Steven Hornburg, principal, Emerging Community Markets. Also, please review some of the research and case studies presented at <http://www.nw.org/multifamily>.

Sincerely,



Francie Ferguson
Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation

Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation and the NeighborWorks® Network

Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation was established by an act of Congress in 1978 (P.L. 95-557). A primary objective of the Corporation is to increase the capacity of local community-based organizations to revitalize their communities, particularly by expanding and improving housing opportunities. These local organizations, known as NeighborWorks® organizations, are independent, resident-led, nonprofit partnerships that include business leaders and government officials.

NeighborWorks® is a registered service mark for the neighborhood-revitalization services and educational programs offered by Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation, Neighborhood Housing Services of America (NHS) and more than 250 community-based development organizations.

The NeighborWorks® Symposium on Multifamily Excellence

CHANGING MINDS, BUILDING COMMUNITIES
Advancing Affordable Housing through
Communications Campaigns

Sponsored by Research made possible through a grant from
Fannie Mae, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and Freddie Mac

⌘
Hosted by
NeighborWorks® Multifamily Initiative and The Campaign for Affordable Housing

⌘
Endorsed by
Mortgage Bankers Association • National Association of Home Builders
National Association of Realtors • National Housing Conference
National Low Income Housing Coalition • National Multi Housing Council

This symposium is the fourth in a series initiated by the NeighborWorks® Multifamily Initiative, bringing local and national housing leaders together from across many sub-sectors of the affordable housing sector, in a day of candid exchange on one issue key to success in strengthening communities while expanding the availability of homes affordable to all Americans.

The NeighborWorks® Multifamily Initiative thanks the following presenters, panelists, and marketing specialists for contributing their experience to this symposium.

Beverly Barnes, *Fannie Mae Foundation*

⌘

Peter Beard, *Fannie Mae Foundation*

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The Honorable Tom Roberts, *The Ohio State Senate*

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The Honorable R.T. Rybak, *Mayor, City of Minneapolis*

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Kenneth D. Wade

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Co-Hosted by the NeighborWorks® Multifamily Initiative and
The Campaign for Affordable Housing

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COVER CREDIT Photoshop illustration by Dave Plihal

Symposium Summary

Changing Minds, Building Communities Advancing Affordable Housing through Communications Campaigns

BY STEVEN HORNBERG, PRINCIPAL, EMERGING COMMUNITY MARKETS

Introduction

“Americans are caught in an image of housing that’s over 20 years old – they are really surprised when they see what affordable housing is now.”

Nancy Belden of Belden Russonello & Stewart elegantly captured the challenge of the perception gap between public opinion and the reality of affordable housing. On May 5 and 6, 2004, the Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation, in partnership with The Campaign for Affordable Housing, analyzed the challenge of closing that gap in its fourth NeighborWorks® Symposium on Multifamily Excellence.

The symposium, held in Minneapolis, was entitled “Changing Minds, Building Communities: Advancing Affordable Housing through Communications Campaigns.” The symposium brought together 500 local and national affordable housing leaders from across many organizational and institutional sectors to engage in a day of candid exchange on one issue key to strengthening communities and expanding housing opportunities. The issue? How we can better communicate publicly and through marketing campaigns to advance the development of homes all Americans can afford.

While affordable housing stories are often filled with conflict, and projects are completed against the odds, participants were energized and enthused to find that successes are happening across the country. Fifteen successful cases were used as a backdrop against which key issues were discussed and debated.

The context for these successes was demonstrated through opinion research that shows untapped opportunities for support – a kind of new “silent majority” that recognizes and is concerned about the corrosive effect affordability problems have on families and communities.

However, the affordable housing industry will only tap that support if it learns to employ professional communications tools to move its message from simply “housing” to “homes, family and community.”

From case studies, research, and the candid reactions and debate from participants, 10 key points emerged that suggest a communications strategy for the affordable housing community.

Summary of Key Points

- 1. National campaigns set the stage for local activism.** National campaigns should target changing attitudes to make efforts at the state and local level meet with more receptive public opinion.
- 2. Local campaigns should target specific decision or public policy goals.** Local campaigns require a disciplined focus on a very specific action such as funding, a policy or a project. These campaigns are not about changing minds; they are about winning.
- 3. Show that this problem can be solved.** Present the successes, and do it repeatedly. Show pictures. Use peer testimonials. Help people understand that those who make their homes in communities that are affordable are “people like us.”
- 4. Campaigns must be grounded in a clear understanding of the audience and its self-interest.** Shape a campaign’s message to the community’s self-interest, answering the question, “what’s in it for me?” Recognize that you are not trying to persuade on moral grounds; you’re selling something you eagerly want the audience to buy.
- 5. The success of all communications campaigns hinges on using the “5-M” framework.** That is, Market, Message, Messenger, Medium and Materials.
- 6. Recognize and establish strategic communications as a core business function that banks social and political capital.** Communications needs to be recognized and funded as a core business function on par with other essential functions.
- 7. Develop a new lexicon for affordable housing, cleansed of jargon and technicalities, which connects with the public.** Bottom line: use “homes that are affordable” and “rental homes” instead of “affordable housing” and “units.”

8. Embed your appeal in a broader narrative that captures people's hopes and aspirations for their community. Develop the case in the local vernacular, and show people that these homes are really an integral part of their vision and hopes for themselves and their community.

9. Embolden elected officials. Figure out how you can provide positive incentives and support for politicians at the national, state and local levels who promote housing.

10. Above all, tolerate and respect differences in opinion. Don't talk down to or insult housing opponents with names like NIMBY. Today's opponent may be tomorrow's supporter when you show them successful affordable homes.

Background: The Nature of the Challenge

A key challenge facing the affordable housing community is to gain the trust and support of policymakers and the public. While important not only to families but to the health of communities, affordable

has made progress on combating racial and ethnic discrimination, local battles over affordable housing sometimes raise issues of race and ethnicity, whether mentioned explicit or in code.

Affordable housing language has gone through many incarnations in an effort to shed the often-undeserved image of failed government programs that create more problems than they solve. Thus, "public housing" was replaced by "assisted housing," then "low-income housing" was replaced with "affordable housing." While this evolution has been driven by many factors, often it has been driven by the public's negative view of these programs and their beneficiaries.

The latest incarnation of efforts to reinvent the language seeks public concern for important members of the workforce who can't find affordable homes. The workforce housing issue has legitimately traced affordability problems up the income scale in many communities.²

Americans are caught in an image of housing that's over 20 years old – they are really surprised when they see what affordable housing is now.

housing is a code word that means something negative to many people. Fears of higher density, crowded schools, increased crime, and the impact affordable housing development might have on property values often pervade local debate and dialogue.

Some of these fears are a result of ignorance about what affordable homes are and look like. For instance, these homes can look good and fit in with the existing architectural vernacular and land use patterns of a community. More difficult to disentangle is the fear of loss of property values, which are influenced by many factors.¹ Finally, although our nation

Identifying affordability problems experienced by key service workers such as nurses, police officers and firefighters ties affordable housing to local economic health, identifies affordability as a problem for not just the poor, and appeals to the post 9/11 heightened sympathy and support for so-called "first responders."

Framing affordability problems in this way clearly identifies a legitimate problem, and at the same time highlights the essential quandary facing people who advocate for affordable homes. To gain acceptance of government support for housing, it often is necessary to preempt negative public perception by putting this

¹However, recent research does seem to suggest a more positive story about the impact of affordable housing on property values. See George Galster's review of the literature at [http://www.realtor.org/Research.nsf/files/galsterexsum2.pdf/\\$FILE/galsterexsum2.pdf](http://www.realtor.org/Research.nsf/files/galsterexsum2.pdf/$FILE/galsterexsum2.pdf).

²See, for instance, the National Housing Conference's report titled "Housing America's Working Families" at <http://www.nhc.org/nhcimages/chprpt.pdf>.

more appealing face on the need. Tactically, this may increase general support for all types of housing assistance. But to some, this approach runs the risk of continued stigmatization of the needier families who might not tug on the public heartstrings as much.

To make progress, the affordable housing community has to build positive perceptions and attitudes on many levels and with many approaches. However, this community has not, until recently, used the knowledge and tools necessary to mount a sophisticated effort to “sell” affordable housing. Broad-based campaigns have typically focused on establishing the breadth and depth of need for housing assistance. An appeal has then typically been made that relies on a moral imperative to address that need.

As national housing quality has improved, the face of the problem has shifted from a very self-evident visual problem (i.e., tenement conditions, houses without indoor plumbing, etc.) to a more nuanced – but no less real – problem of affordability and the tradeoffs that must be made in a family’s budget to afford market-rate housing. The affordability problem has evolved into a less visual problem of forced tradeoffs in family budgets that still affect the well-being of many American families. This, combined with mistrust and suspicion of government programs at all levels, contributes to a difficult environment in which to galvanize public opinion and get favorable public action on funding and siting affordable homes.

To examine the evolving strategies to address this challenge, this symposium investigated what we know about public opinion and what strategies can be used to secure public and policymakers’ support for affordable housing.

Opening Address

The Honorable R. T. Rybak, mayor of Minneapolis (the host city), opened the symposium with a case study on how to pursue an affordable housing agenda in the face of public resistance. Mayor Rybak is a strong advocate for affordable homes, and Minneapolis is a city with a strong housing infrastructure. His experience shines light on the practical difficulties leaders face when considering electoral concerns and constituent pressures. He also provided some key insights on how to connect with constituents on the issue of affordable housing.

Mayor Rybak stated quite clearly that being an advocate for affordable housing is not a sound electoral strategy. It is a difficult issue to run on, especially because local siting issues are so sensitive. While praising housing advocates, Mayor Rybak also highlighted the political difficulties in addressing the concerns with this constituency:

I would have to say housing advocates, who are tremendous advocates for the work, are not frankly always the best political allies. I see a lot of heads nodding here. I don’t know exactly how to put this, but I think, with folks who are deeply committed to issues, as many are, sometimes there’s an all or nothing quality that winds up meaning that when you stand up and talk about housing, you often are the first to get bashed for not being 100 percent. Ninety-eight percent is good, but not good enough. I’ve seen that play out not only in this community, but across the country.

Recognizing that this issue will not win elections, Mayor Rybak still believes that advancing the affordable housing agenda is the right thing to do. It is important, however, to address the issues raised by opponents and find ways to get the community to understand the benefits of having affordable homes. A defining moment for Mayor Rybak’s approach on affordable housing occurred in an encounter with a constituent.

As in many other American cities, the mayor said that siting affordable housing in Minneapolis is a difficult sell. As part of the local redevelopment strategy, the city was going to put rental homes on top of a community library, and the community, in the Mayor’s words, “went nuts.” To deal with this opposition, Mayor Rybak decided to knock on doors to talk to his constituents and gauge public sentiment. He met with a young man who, with his family, was living in the first home he ever owned. He was strongly opposed to having any affordable housing in his neighborhood, citing concerns about crime and the potential impact on his property values.

Rather than taking him on directly on the affordable housing issue, Mayor Rybak tried to tap into this young homeowner (and voter’s) concerns for his community:

We stepped back from the affordable housing issue and just started talking about his neighborhood. Talked about 38th Street that he was on, and I talked about how there used to be a lot of corner stores down here. When I was a kid growing up, there were a lot more than there are now. We talked about the fact that a streetcar ran down there, and then a bus-way.

And historically, Minneapolis grew up along these streetcar lines. And every few blocks, you'd get off the streetcar. There'd be a corner store there; some housing up above the store.

Through this dialogue with a young homeowner who had typical fears and hopes, Mayor Rybak framed a community narrative about building a livable city – which, in Minneapolis, meant a return to the “streetcar city” – that, of necessity, included affordable homes.

Mayor Rybak also recognized the broader connections of housing with schools – where he sees the need to link Section 8 rental assistance with strong schools – and with jobs – seeing new employment centers like hospitals as an important source of demand for affordable housing in adjacent neighborhoods.

The mayor then leveraged these interconnections by addressing a common problem that often plagues redevelopment plans: insufficient consultation with the affected neighborhoods. He had city planners and developers take a proactive approach to engaging neighborhoods in advance to plan and envision the redevelopment, rather than present residents with fully developed plans. As a result, rather than reacting to developer plans, neighborhood residents became willing partners, with the affordable housing component having evolved organically as part of their broader vision.

Because of his experiences, Mayor Rybak suggests three key points for building local support for affordable housing:

1. Be clear with rhetoric – Housing can be a Rorschach test – an issue that can be imbued with people's fondest hopes and worst fears. So develop a code word and narrative for affordable homes that wraps it into broader concerns of the community (such as the image of “streetcar city”);

2. Engage the community – Rather than coming to neighborhoods with a specific plan, engage residents early on in a visioning process. Active engagement promotes ownership of the visions and reduces community opposition; and

3. Do the easy steps first – A good general prescription for governance, Mayor Rybak offered the old bromide that success breeds success. Tackle the easier problems first and demonstrate success to build momentum for the more difficult issues.

Following these principles, Mayor Rybak's Minneapolis has made significant progress on affordable housing. Under his administration, Minneapolis has invested \$10 million in an affordable housing trust fund and has created 3,000 homes, two-thirds of which are affordable under various program rules, and about 1,500 that are affordable to “people making \$11 per hour or less” (demonstrating the importance of clear language by avoiding the deadly “xyz percentage of AMI”).

The mayor's success suggests that the right appeal and really understanding the public's concerns can convince many people. To better understand what these concerns are, the symposium turned to a nascent but growing body of survey research that examines public attitudes towards affordable housing.

Presentation of Research: What do Americans Think About Housing?

In many ways, the affordable housing community has mirrored the mortgage market in not using opinion survey research to understand consumer and public attitudes. Taco Bell probably knows more about why customers buy their burritos than, for instance, the housing community knows about how customers shop for mortgages. Most housing research has focused on economic and demographic analysis, which ignores the psychology of how Americans think about housing and mortgages as a product. Only in recent years has a body of research emerged employing traditional market research and opinion research as an aid to product development, program design and public advocacy.

The symposium brought together researchers who are at the cutting edge of this work, providing a summary of public opinion research conducted to date on affordable housing.³ National surveys have been conducted for:

- ▶ The Fannie Mae Foundation by Peter D. Hart Research Associates and Coldwater Corp. (www.knowledgeplex.org);
- ▶ The National Association of Realtors® by Public Opinion Strategies (www.realtor.org/realtororg.nsf/pages/2004pulsesurvey?OpenDocument), conducted annually; and
- ▶ The National Low Income Housing Coalition by Laszlo & Associates and Public Opinion Strategies (www.nlihc.org/news/pollresults.pdf) also conducted regularly.

In addition, two regional surveys have been conducted for Housing Illinois by Belden Russonello & Stewart (www.chicagorehab.org/pubs/pdfs/housingilreport.pdf) and Vermont Housing Awareness Coalition by Creative Strategies & Communications (www.housingawareness.org).

These surveys collectively probe public opinion and attitudes on such issues as:

- ▶ The impact of housing affordability problems;
- ▶ Who should respond to these problems and how;
- ▶ The relevance of housing affordability problems to voting behavior;
- ▶ Perceptions about those facing housing problems;
- ▶ The relative importance of housing compared to other public policy concerns; and
- ▶ The willingness to pay for solutions.

Taken collectively, the surveys show a striking level of support for affordable homes and offer some signposts towards designing national and local approaches that engage policymakers and the public.

Gene Ulm, a partner with Public Opinion Strategies, opened by highlighting the results from the 2005 National Housing Pulse Survey.⁴ This survey of 1,000 urban and suburban adults in the top 25 American media markets clearly identified untapped support and concern over housing affordability. Over two-thirds of the respondents were concerned about housing costs in their area. An even higher percentage – four-fifths – indicated that they would support more affordable homes being made available in their communities if either it looked good and fit into their neighborhoods or if the homes were targeted to workers such as teachers, police officers and firefighters.

Ulm outlined a series of concerns shared by a majority of the respondents about the impact of high-cost housing on family life. The survey identified concerns over whether grown children can afford to live close by, increased commute times caused by having to move far from places of employment and

³See Belden, Nancy; Shashaty, Andre; and Zipperer, John: What We Know About Public Attitudes on Affordable Housing: A Review of Existing Public Opinion Research, The Campaign for Affordable Housing, May 2004 (www.tcuh.org).

⁴The survey results presented in the symposium and the survey paper were from last year's survey, conducted in August 2005. 2004 results were released about two weeks after the symposium, and the result can be accessed at the previously cited NAR link.

other quality of life concerns. Interestingly, respondents also saw a clear connection between affordable housing and local employment, with over half (56 percent) worrying that affordability problems are affecting the health of their local economy. About three-fifths of the respondents worried about being able to afford to buy a home or pay rent in their area.

With widespread concerns like these, it is not surprising that 71 percent of the respondents want government to make housing a higher priority and grade current efforts of all levels of government around a “C.” When asked about issues facing their community, only concerns about jobs and employment rated higher than housing. Concern over housing was tied with healthcare. Suggestive of

Garin’s research found a less intense level of concern than the NAR survey about housing affordability, with only about 40 percent of those polled thinking affordable housing is a big problem in their area. Housing was in fourth place behind healthcare, jobs and unemployment as a concern. But two-thirds of the respondents recognized that young adults and families earning between \$25,000 and \$40,000 risked having trouble finding affordable homes.

More than half thought it was at least somewhat of a problem for working-class families, senior citizens and families with children. Tradeoffs families have to make because of high housing costs emerged as key concerns, including not saving for retirement and education, struggles with non-housing expenses, long commutes, and unsafe or overcrowded housing

Taken collectively, the surveys show a striking level of support for affordable homes.

latent political support, two-thirds of the respondents felt that a candidate’s stance on affordable housing would be important to their voting decision.

All of these findings suggest that a new silent majority has emerged, but not been tapped, as a political base. Ulm pointed to housing affordability as an issue that has outgrown its low-income constituency as problems have climbed the income ladder. He expects it to become a wider issue in the next decade.

Next, Geoff Garin, president of Peter D. Hart Research Associates, outlined survey research – what he termed “social marketing” – conducted in 2002 for the Fannie Mae Foundation. Garin carried out a series of focus groups and quantitative surveys to learn more about American’s perceptions of affordable housing. Telephone surveys included a random national telephone survey of 808 adults. Additional in-depth sampling of about 400 adults in five states was also completed. These surveys were supplemented by 22 focus groups conducted with business and community leaders, policymakers, journalists and civically active Americans.

required for people to live near their jobs.

Despite these concerns, three-fifths of the respondents felt that something could be done to solve housing affordability problems. While recognizing that federal and state governments, as well as businesses, share some responsibility, respondents most frequently identified local government as needing to take a lead or supporting role.

Against the backdrop of these concerns, Garin offered a sobering assessment of the challenges facing the affordable housing community. The response from the focus groups suggested that this issue is the most difficult he has dealt with. Opinion leaders were deeply concerned that affordability is nowhere on the political or policy agenda. Garin presented a variety of reasons cited in focus groups as causing this lack of political resonance, including:

- Regional variations in problems and concern with housing affordability;
- A perception that housing affordability is really a jobs and income problem;

- ▶ Value judgments about the “deserving” and “undeserving” poor;
- ▶ No political reward to tackling this problem due to an invisible constituency; and finally
- ▶ Affordability problems seeming so complex that they are “too big to solve.”

Garin recommended a “solutions-based campaign” to combat these public perceptions. First, present the facts, so that people recognize that there is a problem. He recommended that the story to be told emphasize vulnerable populations, such as children, to establish a sympathetic picture. Echoing Mayor Rybak’s comments, Garin urged that the problem be presented as not just as a housing issue, but as one that is critical to family and community success. And again, he emphasized the importance of communicating that, rather than being an insoluble problem, there are practical and achievable solutions.

Nancy Belden, founding partner of Belden Russonello & Stewart, presented a synthesis of the lessons from her review of all the opinion research presented in the symposium materials, in addition to several state-level studies. Two pictures emerged from this review. Americans broadly recognize that there is a greater need for help with affordable housing. Survey findings suggest that this flows from a tradition of and cultural grounding in fairness and access to opportunity in our society. However, when the issue becomes localized, familiar fears of crime, concerns about property values and school overcrowding and other issues loom and tend to dominate people’s reaction to the issue.

Belden found a distinct understanding that low-income families especially suffer, and there is a general agreement that government should do more. However, she found no real common understanding or agreement on who should be responsible or what policies were supported. Again, Belden pointed out that when you proceed from the general to the specific, support and agreement tend to drop off. Broad statements get broad support, but when you get to specifics such as changing zoning laws, support drops off.

Given these findings, Belden suggested that a national campaign for affordable housing can help. She argued that such a campaign can set the mood, context and terms of debate on affordable housing. Presenting the issue as one of fairness, equity and access to opportunity should resonate with Americans, based on the survey research findings.

Belden found that people were surprised at how good affordable homes can look, suggesting that they were locked into a 20-year-old picture of affordable housing. She suggested visuals of successful developments and homes to counter this negative and outdated stereotype. For good measure, she also recommended highlighting the needs of high-impact subgroups, such as the elderly and children, as a way to achieve reactions that are more favorable to the campaign message.

However, the national message is background music for the local scene. Belden argued that you need positive local impact to drive support for affordable housing. Given survey research, she suggested that local campaigns focus on the economic impact of affordable housing, the possibility that affordable homes done well might enhance property values, and the general benefit of these homes to a healthy community. To counter fear with positive images, Belden suggested that campaigns directly address concerns over crime, property values and the aesthetic look and feel of communities.

Rob Shepardson, co-founder of Shepardson, Stern + Kaminsky, wrapped up this session by examining what it will take to mount a successful advertising campaign for affordable housing. Shepardson outlined five key points:

1. **Be creative** – No one is tuned into the issue of affordable housing, so a successful campaign will have to break through and shake off public inertia on the topic. Creativity in the approach is essential to tap into the reservoir of concern about affordability.
2. **Keep it simple** – While the problem and the solutions are complex, boil the issue down to its simple essence to engage Americans.
3. **Find the deep emotional truth** – Approach the issue with a human face, one that evokes sympathy and concern.

4. **Set up the issue** – A campaign’s message should not leave anything to conjecture. Recommend specific steps and actions the audience can take to address the concern raised (e.g., call 800-..., vote for).

5. **“By any means necessary”** – The advertising message should clearly point out that there are solutions; that the situation (i.e., unaffordable housing) is not a given.

Armed with key findings and strategic insights offered by opinion research on affordable housing, the symposium then turned to the various campaign efforts underway to build support for affordable housing.

Presentatuion of Research and Updates on National Communications Campaigns: How to Win Friends and Influence Decisions

A major part of our national culture centers on advertising for commercial products. Major networks, still the core of our increasingly fragmented cable offerings, are still essentially free, relying on commercials that bombard us with messages designed to influence our opinion and persuade us to buy the sponsor’s product. Advertising revenue comprises a major portion of most print media’s revenue stream. A major debate during consideration of the recently enacted campaign finance reform legislation centered on the option of requiring broadcast networks to provide free airtime for political commercials. Why this would be considered comes into focus when the spiraling costs of political commercials are recognized as the main driver of the cost of getting elected.

housing advocates have long assumed that once anyone understands the magnitude of need and the justness of the cause, they would surely support affordable housing. But when facing a skeptical and jaded public that is constantly bombarded by sophisticated efforts to imprint commercial messages, such an appeal frequently doesn’t connect or resonate. When commercials recognize and play on that skepticism by using pathological liars like Joe Isuzu³ to try to sell their products, how can affordable housing messages compete?

Some causes have broken through with their messages and created widely recognized cultural icons. Think of the famous commercial on littering, featuring a Native American, hearkening back to an unspoiled America, tearfully paddling down an increasingly littered and polluted river. Smokey Bear once made even city kids who may never see the woods feel responsible for preventing forest fires. In sum, a coherent affordable housing message could – but is nowhere near ready to – penetrate the public’s consciousness like “don’t litter” and “only you can prevent forest fires.”

Thanks to some recent national initiatives, however, this is changing. Symposium participants next heard from ongoing and new national campaigns using modern communications techniques to promote affordable housing.

Campaign for Affordable Housing

Andre Shashaty, the interim executive director of The Campaign for Affordable Housing and publisher of Affordable Housing Finance, presented the Campaign’s purpose and program. . . . Shashaty feels the Campaign’s mission is really about telling the truth. When people think affordable housing, they typically picture a Cabrini Green, Chicago’s notorious housing project; whereas the truth is that affordable housing can be and is a community asset. Time and time again, projects have been developed over significant community opposition based on stereotypes and misunderstandings, only to have opponents become supporters when they see the community benefit.

The Campaign will develop tools and information to support state and local campaigns, as well as to help developers and nonprofits secure approval for their project. “Toolkit activities” to assist state and regional efforts include:

- ▶ Sponsoring public opinion research to benchmark public attitudes and concerns about affordable housing and to test messages;
- ▶ Acting as a clearinghouse for campaign materials, best practices and examples of good housing policy;
- ▶ Developing a media relations toolkit for nonprofits and developers trying to secure project approval;

³Joe Isuzu was a character in a car commercial who represented the archetypal sleazy salesperson who would tell customers anything to get them to buy their product. His character obviously connected with a jaded public, suspicious of any attempts to persuade, and is still a cultural icon.

- ▶ Promoting affordable housing to elected leaders and candidates for national office (for example, housing tours hosted at the party conventions this summer); and
- ▶ Identifying and diffusing successful models for communications, many of which were featured in the symposium breakout sessions.

While still in its formative stages, the Campaign has received a wide range of support from the housing industry. More resources will have to be raised in the future to support a national advertising campaign. By doing these activities, the Campaign hopes to extend the life of many local campaigns to keep the focus on the issues and counter ongoing opposition to affordable housing.

Fannie Mae Foundation

Beverly Barnes, senior vice president of communications for the Fannie Mae Foundation then described the Foundation's efforts and plans. The Foundation conducted an extensive examination of findings from public opinion survey research, focus groups, an examination of housing need and similar public affairs campaigns. Armed with this knowledge, the Foundation settled on a public education campaign focusing on American working families and their housing needs. "While you hear about the housing boom, about low interest rates, about record high homeownership rate, the plight of working families is not given sufficient voice," said Barnes.

The Foundation plans to conduct a research-based, solutions-oriented campaign that moves beyond encouraging awareness to one that promotes action. The Foundation will focus its efforts on overcoming the problems of a lack of good information about the problem and the solutions. One of the key elements adopted by the Foundation from other public affairs campaigns is focus. Barnes said that the Foundation has decided to focus on households making between \$20,000 to \$40,000 per year, or \$11 to \$19 per hour. Many of these families, both working and retired, spend in excess of 50 percent of their income for housing costs. The Foundation's research, presented by Geoff Garin earlier in the symposium, clearly indicates that this is a sympathetic population to the public, and that elected leaders will go to bat for them.

The Foundation's key audience segments are influential citizens, community leaders and policymakers. Barnes wants to move them to action. She sees a sequential approach, starting with influential citizens and community leaders who are already interested, then moving on to the policymakers. The Foundation also adopted a targeted geographic focus, concentrating on the state and local levels. Illinois, Pennsylvania and North Carolina will be the first states the Foundation will work in, with additional states added as they develop the program further. Eventually, the Foundation envisions adding a national component.

In their work in the first three states, the Foundation will communicate both the need and solutions. To counter misconceptions about affordable housing, they will emphasize good design and construction, as well as show how housing promotes better communities. The Foundation will conduct academic studies in three states to benchmark need and suggest solutions. The next phase of public opinion research, already underway, will be done in these three states to identify what sells and what motivates the key audience segments to act.

Nationally, the Foundation will eventually engage national leaders and organizations in a broader campaign. Working with the Campaign, the Foundation will also conduct outreach to the presidential campaigns. In closing, Barnes suggested that timing, tactics and unity have positioned the Foundation and the affordable housing community to be particularly effective.

National Low Income Housing Coalition

Sheila Crowley, president of the National Low Income Housing Coalition, presented the view of a Washington insider who is daily on the front lines of policy battles. She posed the fundamental challenge as how to get leaders to care as much as housing advocates do and how to get them to adequately fund solutions to the housing need.

For perspective on the challenge, Crowley compared healthcare, an issue that is ever-present in national campaigns, to housing, which has been completely off the political and policy screen. She decided to compare housing need, typically measured by household, to the need for health insurance, measured by individual. While it is well known that

44 million people have no health insurance, a repeatedly cited statistic, far more people – 90 million – have a housing problem.

The Coalition conducts a regular public opinion poll, most recently completed in April 2004. The poll is nationally representative and targets likely voters. This most recent poll found that 79 percent of those surveyed were concerned that low-income families (defined as either fixed-income or low-wage earners) cannot afford to rent or own in their communities. While women polled as caring more than men and the poorer were more concerned than the upper income groups, the lowest level of agreement was 74 percent. Politically, both parties had significant majorities agreeing with the statement. Perhaps most significantly, 81 percent of the respondents in swing states share this concern.

As are many advocates for domestic policy, the Coalition is playing defense on a daily basis, seeking to protect funds for housing assistance programs. One question on the poll asked how people felt about cutting the housing voucher program. Three out of four respondents were opposed to cutting the voucher program, a robust finding, according to Crowley, across all demographic and economic cuts.

While funding a new program is always a challenge, Crowley said the Coalition has also been playing offense. The Coalition has been at the center of a campaign to create a national housing trust fund. Its goal for the trust fund is to significantly increase federal funding for production, rehabilitation and preservation of affordable homes for extremely low-income households. This campaign seeks sufficient funding to support 1.5 million affordable homes over the next 10 years.

The campaign has used a public relations firm to test various messages leading to the adoption of the slogan “the National Housing Trust Fund. We can afford to do this. We can’t afford not to.” This message is regularly displayed on various printed materials used for lobbying efforts on Capitol Hill. The Coalition also engages in public advocacy as part of its work with the campaign, helping to craft and sell the trust fund legislation, as well as tracking support. Finally, the Coalition has organized grassroots contact to link the field to their elected representatives when national staff visits senate and

house offices in Washington, D.C. To further demonstrate grass roots support, the campaign has over 5,000 endorsements from state and local interests, and is shooting for 6,000.

The Coalition is also engaged in turning the people who receive housing assistance into voters. It is a well-known fact that low-income housing often is not a very attractive issue for elected officials. It is also known that the poor and renters tend to vote less than other groups. Recognizing the corrosive effect low voter turnout has on support for housing programs, the Coalition created the Voter Registration Education Mobilization. This initiative works with Coalition members and other community-based organizations to get the people they work with in the community registered, educated and out to vote.

Keynote Address

Lunchtime offered participants an opportunity to reflect on the lessons learned in the morning and see how those lessons played out when addressed in one of the highest-cost areas in the country: Silicon Valley, California. The luncheon speaker, Carl Guardino, president and CEO of the Silicon Valley Manufacturing Group (SVMG), provided an inspiring example of translating need into action.

Spearheaded in 1977 by David Packard, co-founder of the Hewlett-Packard Corporation, SVMG involves principal officers and senior managers of member companies in a cooperative effort with local, regional, state and federal government officials to address major public policy issues affecting the economic health and quality of life in Silicon Valley. SVMG addresses five core issues: affordable housing, comprehensive transportation, reliable energy, quality education and a sustainable environment.

Guardino, who has headed SVMG for eight years, has been on the vanguard of corporate citizenship with his work in the Silicon Valley area. As part of his stewardship of SVMG, Guardino meets with the 190 CEOs of the member companies, a list that reads like a directory of leading-edge companies in the hi-tech sector. For six years running, Guardino found that about half of these corporate officials raised housing as their first or second concern. This is not surprising, given a median home price of \$564,000 in the area. Only eight percent of the population could afford to buy even a resale home.

Guardino had defined affordability problem of monumental proportions. He rapidly realized, however, that the support of his members and the problem definition were the easy parts. Local opposition to “affordable housing” and California’s anti-tax environment presented serious political roadblocks to collective action.

The real barrier to progress lay in politics, Guardino quickly realized. SVMG designed a three-pronged strategy that addressed many of the issues raised in the morning sessions. This strategy could serve as a model for affordable housing activism. He sought to “empower grassroots, engage grasstops and embolden elected officials.”

“Empowering Grassroots.”

Political activism often begins with people and organizations – the so-called “grassroots” – with a direct, localized interest in an issue. SVMG reached out to the communities that had a stake in housing, including developers, advocates, builders and other key community leaders. With these community partners, SVMG founded and staffed the Housing Action Coalition (HAC), a broad-based, grassroots advocacy network.

With this strong coalition, SVMG created a powerful voice to counter local opposition and to direct for approval of new housing developments. Since 1995, HAC and SVMG have endorsed 130 developments, resulting in approximately 33,000 homes. Of those developments, located in 19 cities, 19 have been approved; 21 are in the approval process; eight were not approved; and 82 have been built. In 2003, the HAC endorsed 13 developments that will result in the construction of 2,319 homes. In June 2003, HAC celebrated its 10-year anniversary.

“Engaging Grasstops.”

Political activism typically requires the support of key community leaders who have a broad base. Grassroots mobilization provides a show of strength through volume and persistence, while grasstops have access to and can mobilize strategic resources and assets (i.e., funding, political capital, etc.) in support of broader public policy objectives. SVMG, therefore, gathered 70 CEO-level participants from business, finance, elected and appointed political leadership, advocacy and charitable organizations, developers and universities. This collaborative effort was called the Housing Leadership Council (HLC), and it immediately began to tackle demand and supply-side solutions to affordable housing problems.

One of the key problems for affordable housing is finding a sustainable source of flexible financing that can leverage market-rate investment and lending. The HLC’s hallmark contribution to meeting this challenge has been the starting of a countywide Housing Trust Fund. The HLC has established the framework for the Trust, setting an initial funding goal of \$20 million over a 24-month cycle. In addition, the HLC:

- ▶ Created the criteria by which the funds would be distributed (with balanced allocations for first-time homebuyer's assistance, gap financing for affordable home construction and homeless shelter programs);
- ▶ Set targets for the number of homes that such a program could expect to create in each category;
- ▶ Established how the funds would be administered;
- ▶ Identified potential funding sources, including foundations, government agencies, corporations and individuals;
- ▶ Raised the Trust's initial funding; and
- ▶ Is currently examining the potential for a long-term, permanent funding source.

Mayor Rybak suggested earlier in the day that affordable housing advocates sometimes hurt politicians' reelection efforts by demanding absolute fealty and brooking no compromise. Guardino recognizes that, to advance affordable housing, particularly at the local level, you have to build up elected officials. Any experienced local official facing a decision on a controversial housing development can testify that opponents can make you pay at the ballot box. To provide a counterweight to such negative pressure, Guardino suggested instituting a "Backbone Award" to recognize elected officials who make positive decisions about affordable housing.

Overall, SVMG's experience presents a compelling case for what can be done under extreme circumstances. While Silicon Valley both benefits from and is burdened by the area's unique economic circumstances, Guardino's leadership and successes

The challenge is to create the right political incentives and support for elected leaders to care enough about affordable housing to move the agenda.

In its first year, the Trust Fund helped, or is in the process of helping, 837 first-time homebuyers. As of October 2005, the Trust made \$5.58 million in first-time homebuyer loans, leveraging an additional \$249 million in home sales. The Trust has also made 11 loans to affordable home developers who are building 768 new rental homes. This \$5.58 million investment has leveraged \$194 million in outside development funds. In addition, the Trust has made 15 loans totaling \$5.57 million to organizations serving people who are homeless, near homeless or who have other special needs. The loans will create 497 new homes and leverage \$80.5 million.

on behalf of affordable housing stood out as an inspiring model to symposium participants.

“Emboldening Elected Officials.”

Clearly, a larger number of elected officials who share an abiding concern for affordable housing would advance the cause. Unfortunately, the combination of electoral pressures and no lack of worthy causes make politicians like Mayor Rybak a rare commodity. Thus, the challenge is to create the right political incentives and support for elected leaders to care enough about affordable housing to move the agenda.

Concurrent Sessions: Building Successful Campaigns

Despite the considerable communications challenges facing the affordable housing community, Carl Guardino's experience with SVMG demonstrated that success is possible. Success – defined as gaining public acceptance and approval of affordable housing projects, policies and finance – can be found in a number of jurisdictions around the country.

The afternoon's concurrent sessions focused on 15 case studies demonstrating five different categories of success:

- ▶ Gaining neighborhood support for affordable housing development in a middle-income community;
- ▶ Gaining neighborhood support for affordable housing development in an upper-middle-income community;
- ▶ Winning a public vote for a state or local housing trust fund;
- ▶ Winning elected officials' votes for housing policy or land use planning; and
- ▶ Sustaining general public support through a statewide campaign.

Gaining Support for Affordable Housing Development in a Middle-Income Community

This session, moderated by Kenneth D. Wade, chief executive officer of the Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation, assessed the experience of three affordable housing developers in Austin, Texas (Foundation Communities); Minneapolis (Central Community Housing Trust); and Oldsmar, Florida (The Wilson Company). All three cases highlighted the importance – and limits – of communications with neighborhoods and elected officials. Two out of three (Austin and Minneapolis) demonstrated the successful use of marketing and educational techniques to win over opposition to projects, while the third case (Oldsmar) showed a path to success when outreach failed to turn the tide.

Paula Mendoza, president of Possible Missions, provided a framework for key marketing techniques from her work with former HUD Secretary and San Antonio Mayor Henry Cisneros and his company, American City Vista. Mendoza highlighted the overall importance of relationship building with the community and elected officials, as well as key institutions and businesses in the targeted area. She pointed out that the developer must establish a trusting relationship based on sincerity and commitment, so that the community knows you are vested in their future. Mendoza established a number of key steps, including:

- ▶ Working closely with community organizations, local area churches, business owners, and school districts to educate them about what affordable housing really is and the benefits that it can bring to homeowners and communities;
- ▶ Making and delivering on promises that tangibly benefit the community to demonstrate your commitment;
- ▶ Staying connected with the relationships you establish in the community, even after the project is complete, to create a positive image for the developer; and
- ▶ Leaving something of historical value to your community, so that next time you want to build you will be remembered and welcomed.

Austin Case Study: Proactive Communications are the Key

Niyanta Spelman, a member of the Austin Planning Commission, spoke from her experience with a 160-unit affordable housing project, developed by Foundation Communities in a moderate-income community on the west side of Austin. Spelman laid out key considerations that can persuade a commissioner to support a project. Her points emphasized the importance of a developer taking a proactive approach to understanding the site-specific and community context of a project, discerning and responding to the desires of local residents, and

educating public decision makers who may not understand affordable housing.

In Austin, Foundation Communities, a nonprofit developer, used many of the techniques recommended by Spelman in its pursuit of approval for the west Austin project. Earlier projects had been met with community resistance, and Foundation Communities recognized that residents rightfully care about property values. Some community resistance can be good for affordable housing developers who do their job well, as it suggests a concerned, discerning and engaged public.

Therefore, before any funding was applied for, Foundation Communities approached the community through an extensive outreach campaign. They felt that, by involving the community as a partner before lining up funding or governmental approvals, the key

According to Alan Arthur, president of the trust, local concerns and opposition need not be only a negative sentiment. “It’s a sign that people care about their community,” he said. The trust built on this understanding in its conversion of the vacant nursing home. It soon became clear that the neighborhood’s resistance, articulated as a concern about more rental housing, hid the real problem, which was the desire to have wealthier people move into the community.

Working with the community over a year-and-a-half, often on a one-on-one basis, the trust was able to convert people’s perception of affordable housing as a liability into an understanding of its potential benefit to the community. It used a major educational campaign with tailored materials and presentations that were clear and easy to understand. They also told the truth while seeking to avoid code words such as “affordable” and “low income” that sparked negative

Local concerns and opposition need not be only a negative sentiment. “It’s a sign that people care about their community.”

neighborhood group would feel less threatened. Foundation Communities Executive Director Walter Moreau argued:

People can see our track record and trust that we will be true to our word about quality, construction, design and ongoing property management. The developers who don’t have that kind of track record are the ones who try to sneak by people.

Minneapolis Case Study: Building Relationships, Building Housing

James Graham, an urban planner, next presented the case in Minneapolis where the Central Community Housing Trust, a key partner of Mayor Rybak’s administration, sought to convert an historic but vacant nursing home facility into affordable rental homes. Graham’s experience taught him to involve neighborhood residents in the planning process so that they have a sense of ownership. Engaging people in problem solving and visioning exercises, rather than presenting them with a fait accompli for approval, builds trust with the community and lessens resistance.

reactions. Instead, Arthur focused on real income numbers when referring to who could live in the development, arguing, “We couldn’t invent enough words to stay ahead of folks who want to oppose us.”

Ultimately, the trust’s success in securing approval of the project centered on forming personal relationships outside of the necessary public meetings. Arthur described this process as akin to skills needed for a successful marriage. “It’s all about good communications, looking for common goals, not lying, and thinking about the other person, not just yourself,” he said. Arthur concluded that the affordable housing industry simply has not allocated enough resources to education, public relations, and marketing, a theme echoed by symposium participants throughout the day.

Oldsmar Case Study: It’s Not Just a Good Thing to Do — It’s the Law

David Tilki, a former city councilperson in Oldsmar, Florida, talked about how the Oldsmar case study showed the limits of the communication and outreach strategy. Tilki’s experience highlighted the need for

what Guardino termed “emboldening elected officials.”

The Wilson Company, a developer of affordable housing, learned that when no messages get through to overcome resistance, the law can be an ally. In early 2001, Wilson bought land from the Catholic Church in Oldsmar, a town of 12,000 people near Tampa. The zoning was appropriate, but when the community found out that Wilson planned to build affordable housing on the site, opposition quickly organized and created a wall of resistance.

Despite Wilson’s efforts to meet with and educate the community, the company’s outreach attempts were boycotted. The few residents favorably disposed to the project were afraid to speak publicly about their support for fear of retaliation and retribution.

Despite legal counsel indicating they were on shaky ground because of the existing zoning, a majority on the city council consistently voted to block the project and filed a number of lawsuits designed to delay the process. After spending millions of dollars in permits, legal fees, and staff time, Wilson decided to sue the city and individual council members for damages due to the loss of state bond financing and for blocking racially integrated affordable housing.

Faced with the financial pressure of the lawsuit, the council ultimately voted to allow the development to go forward. Even then, vandalism occurred during construction, and Councilperson Tilki, the most vocal supporter of the project, lost key political committee positions and decided not to run for office again in the face of community backlash.

While the grand opening and subsequent operation of the project generated begrudging community acceptance, the Oldsmar experience showed that, in some communities, clear communication simply will not overcome community resistance. While potentially a scorched-earth approach, litigation under anti-discrimination statutes can force communities to come to grips with the underlying racism sometimes inherent in opposition. However, the Oldsmar experience leaves some hope that even with extreme opposition, well-built and -managed projects can change minds.

Gaining Support for Affordable Housing Development in an Upper-Income Community

This session, moderated by Doug Bibby, president of the National Multi Housing Council, looked at three case studies in Marin County, California (Marin Consortium for Workforce Housing); Maple Grove, Minnesota (CommonBond Communities); and Seattle (A Regional Coalition for Housing). As was the case with middle-income communities, the importance of developing relationships in advance and involving the community through education and examples again came through.

For a marketing overview to frame these three examples, Debra Stein, president of GCA Strategies Inc., presented an interesting structure for community messages on affordable housing. Stein discussed how mainstream cultural values can create an inappropriately negative view of affordable housing. Citing the Protestant work ethic and its belief that individual responsibility and hard work will always produce economic success, Stein described how this philosophy can lead some to conclude that the poor are to blame for their own needy condition and, therefore, undeserving of social support.

Stein noted that while affordable housing advocates tend to embrace a goal of equality of outcomes when basic needs are at stake, conservative members of the public often think equal opportunity is enough: If an individual can’t take advantage of those available opportunities, society doesn’t “owe” a needy individual unfair benefits. Stein also discussed the timeless conflict between social responsibility (looking out for other people) versus individualism (looking out for oneself), and how these different philosophies drive attitudes and actions related to affordable housing.

Stein detailed the most persuasive messages that can be used to minimize anti-housing attitudes and to reinforce pro-housing beliefs. First of all, citizens must believe that residents of affordable housing are “normal people,” or people “just like you.” As special needs populations sometimes raise additional concerns, she emphasized how a property management framework can reassure citizens that the special needs population will be guided to engage in pro-social conduct.

Stein emphasized how important it is to persuade neighbors that an affordable housing project will be well-designed and well-maintained. She suggested educational outreach such as site visits to comparable projects, and establishing clear standards for ongoing maintenance.

Citizens are often worried that the promises an affordable housing developer makes won't be fulfilled, which is why it's important to have built-in enforcement mechanisms for all commitments. Stein proposed working with the community to develop a "Good Neighbor Agreement," or consultation mechanisms, such as a community advisory board, to give the community a voice in ongoing supervision and enforcement of the developer's commitment to fitting in with the community.

Citizens' fear that affordable housing in the neighborhood will hurt their own property values is a strong anti-housing belief that must be dispelled, but Stein stressed that expert studies aren't the best way to address property value concerns. Citizens are less likely to worry that a project will hurt their own property values when the affordable housing project is a good project, with normal residents, good design and maintenance, and good enforcement of promises.

Marin County Case Study: Creating Support for Workforce Housing

The Marin Consortium for Workforce Housing provided an illustration of Stein's recommendation to overcome the "individual failings" perception of affordable housing residents. Roger Grossman, publisher of the *Marin Independent Journal*, presented Marin County's experience.

Skyrocketing home prices and rents began to concern Marin County business leaders in the early 1990s, leading ultimately to the creation of the consortium. In 1996, the consortium launched a comprehensive campaign for affordable housing, choosing to project key community workers as the face of need. Police officers, teachers, firefighters, and paramedics were all featured in the campaign as people affected by spiraling housing costs, taking the bite out of the perception that people needed affordable housing because of personal failings. In addition, a key theme of the campaign played on people's fears and hopes regarding medical care, their children's education, fire protection, and public safety by framing the question

as "Will they be here to help you?"

The consortium spread this very effective message through a multi-pronged campaign. Print ads, bus billboards, public service announcements, press releases, brochures, and fliers all promoted the collective interest in affordable workforce housing. A speakers' bureau was established to reach out to key government officials, civic organizations, and the business community. The consortium also sponsored educational events to highlight the problem and offered counseling and assistance to those seeking workforce housing. Finally, video and PowerPoint presentations were developed to communicate the message.

The overriding theme in this highly effective campaign was the use of sophisticated marketing techniques to educate the community about who was suffering from the housing crisis. The appeal to self-interest and the implicit message that affordable housing beneficiaries are "deserving" presented a very compelling portrait that can rally and motivate a community around the issue of affordable housing.

Maple Grove Case Study: Finding Supportive Leaders in a Community

CommonBond, Minnesota's largest nonprofit affordable housing provider, demonstrated through their approach the value of a simple, concise message that appeals to collective responsibility. Gary Sauer, president of the Tiller Corporation, presented CommonBond's experience. Perhaps the most important lesson revealed was the critical importance of individual relationships to being invited into, rather than intruding on, a community.

Formed by the Catholic Archdiocese in 1971, CommonBond found that opposition to affordable housing developments reflects concerns about class, crime, race, and property values. Deb Sakry Lande, CommonBond's marketing and communications manager, argued, "None of these concerns have merit when affordable housing is done right, but since they do have merit in the public's mind, we have to know how to respond." CommonBond countered these four concerns by arguing that affordable housing benefits are social, economic and environmental. CommonBond also emphasized the building of strong allies in positions of power to gain an invitation into a community.

This approach was on full display in 1997, when CommonBond acquired land for development in Maple Grove, a wealthy suburb about 15 miles from Minneapolis. Previous experience led them to expect community opposition, so organization staff cultivated a relationship with a member of the city planning commission. Leveraging that relationship, CommonBond was able to engage the members of the city council, planning commission and key municipal staff in a tour of an affordable housing development in a similarly wealthy community nearby. Armed with this experience, the city leaders were able to see

Seattle area, demonstrated how to take the pulse of a community by demonstrating a respect for neighborhood residents' opinions that is sometimes lacking in the highly technical world of land use planning and affordable housing development. Ava Frisinger, mayor of Issaquah, Washington, presented the experience of ARCH in the greater Seattle area.

ARCH entered the fray with a clear understanding that a respectful approach to soliciting neighbors' opinions definitely would increase the odds of success. According to Art Sullivan, executive director of ARCH,

Perhaps the most important lesson revealed was the critical importance of individual relationships to being invited into, rather than intruding on, a community.

firsthand that their fears were unfounded. Thus, CommonBond was able to “embolden,” as Guardino recommended, the elected officials against community fears.

In public debate, vocal opposition still surfaced from residents, but carefully cultivated proponents carried CommonBond's three messages. A council member expressed her fears about her son's likely inability to live near her due to high housing prices (a social issue). The head of the local merchants' association argued that businesses would fail without affordable housing for the service workers (an economic issue). Finally, city leaders realized the smart growth benefits of developing at a higher density in the city, both promoting efficient use of existing city infrastructure and protecting open space in the outer reaches of the city (an environmental issue).

Thus, CommonBond demonstrated the worth of a simple, consistent message (in this case, blending community self-interest with an appeal to collective responsibility) and the value of strategically cultivating key relationships in advance of entering a community.

Seattle Case Study: Speaking in Residents' Terms

A Regional Coalition for Housing (ARCH), a coalition of 15 suburban cities that promotes housing in the

“You can't go into a discussion thinking of residents as NIMBYs, because it's a way of putting someone down, of saying they're wrong.” ARCH took a more respectful approach to citizen concerns by engaging in a series of focus groups with a wide range of people. Rather than present its solutions, the organization approached these consultations by saying, “We think housing is an issue, do you agree?”

In a wealthy suburban area, ARCH found a surprising level of understanding that there was a problem. Neighborhood residents' awareness and sensitivity to the issue were more on people's minds than commonly assumed. By doing these consultations at the beginning of the process, rather than having the typical public hearing toward the end of the process, ARCH and its members were able to design housing solutions with residents' values in mind.

Suggestive of Stein's earlier description of the public's belief in equality of opportunity, not outcomes, ARCH found that the focus group participants had a strong preference for loans, not grants. Loans – even if deferred, forgivable and/or subsidized – had more cachet as an “opportunity with responsibility” rather than a “cost-free giveaway.”

ARCH incorporated focus group preferences into a campaign to promote new forms of homeownership in its member communities. For instance, ARCH took

the design preferences of neighborhood residents for standard-sized lots that felt like single-family neighborhoods, but doubled the unit density with variations, such as cottages and duplexes, that still looked like single-family homes. ARCH realized the value of its investment in advance when this plan received a warm welcome at a community meeting. The residents were far more receptive, particularly when they understood that the plan flowed from the input of the focus groups. As Sullivan observed:

It's all about setting up a process that involves listening to the community. You can always take residents' comments and repackage them to help them understand that affordable housing doesn't go against what they want for their community.

Winning a Public Vote for a State or Local Housing Trust Fund

This session, moderated by Shekar Narasimhan, president of The Campaign for Affordable Housing, looked at three case studies: Los Angeles (Housing LA); the state of Ohio (Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio); and Seattle-King County (Housing Development Consortium). All three cases used nuanced communications strategies to connect with

the action. Therefore, the focus should be on changing their actions – in this case, a public vote.

Changing beliefs is hard, but changing actions is not so hard, she said. Velazquez suggested that actions are changed by communications campaigns that help people tune into your solution by showing that it is in their self-interest. In addition, as advertising executives and political strategists attest, people must see a message repeatedly to have it stick. Velazquez argued that advocates for and developers of affordable homes have not figured out how to communicate solutions in ways that appeal to self-interest.

Velazquez underlined the critical importance of words in shading the public's perception and reaction to an issue. She underscored that the term "affordable housing" is laden with negative associations. "Our keynote speaker said 'rental homes'. It's a huge difference," she said. "Everyone has to stop saying affordable housing. Carl Guardino didn't mess up once. HOMES, never HOUSING!" In a public vote, voters do not know what "housing units" are and do not like how it sounds, Velazquez said. They want to know about and support homes in neighborhoods, with schools and playgrounds.

Actions are changed by communications campaigns that help people tune into your solution by showing that it is in their self-interest.

political decision makers, framing the question in a way that played to strengths and avoided potentially divisive or weak aspects of affordable housing and its finance.

Venus Velazquez of Pyramid Communications outlined a framework for developing a successful communications campaign, arguing that the goal is not to change minds. "If you start there, you're going to lose. You're not trying to change minds – you're trying to change actions," she said. Harkening back to earlier presentations of opinion research, Velazquez suggested that the data show that many people understand the need and that affordable housing is a solution. They are with you on the belief, but not with

Velazquez went on to say that the first challenge for any campaign is to define a clear and simple goal. She pointed out that all three case studies presented had a clear goal from the outset. Then, a campaign needs to develop a strategic communications plan focusing on the "five M's": market, message, messenger, medium and materials.

A public vote may involve many different audiences, and polling may help narrow and differentiate the markets. She recommended identifying three audiences: those on your side; those who should be on your side based on self-interest, not moral grounds; and those who oppose you. Targeting an elected official adds a different layer of complexity since the

campaign needs an understanding of his or her audiences as well as the legislator's predilections.

After defining the audiences, Velazquez suggested deciding what you want from each audience. This drives how to tailor nuanced messages to each audience segment. Since most people do not think about affordable housing the way developers and advocates do, she stressed not making the mistake of assuming that what motivates a housing advocate to action will motivate all people.

Once a message is defined, she said, the messenger needs to be picked with care. Velazquez found that the best messenger is usually someone who looks like the target audience, especially when a public vote is the

present the campaign's key messages in nontechnical language geared to the target audience. There are many options for materials, and she recommended using as many as possible to make the message stick with the audience. She cautioned that any materials developed need to be on-message and fully integrated with the campaign's message.

Ohio Case Study: Housing Campaign Wins Dedicated Funds for Ohio's Housing Trust Fund

Senator Tom Roberts of Ohio presented the success of the Ohio Coalition on Homelessness in Ohio. Senator Roberts' long involvement in housing issues demonstrated the value of having a key advocate in the halls of power. He traced the history of Ohio's trust

“Our keynote speaker said ‘rental homes’. It’s a huge difference. Everyone has to stop saying affordable housing. HOMES, never HOUSING!”

goal. She recommended using sentimental favorites such as children and seniors. Velazquez also identified pets generally and dogs specifically as very popular with the public and suggested ways to use them in campaigns. Third-party validators from other community sectors are critical to showing broader support, she said. Here again, polling can help identify effective messengers.

To best communicate your message, select the medium that is most suited to your message and that most effectively reaches your audience, she said. If likely supporters mostly rely on the local newspaper, then ads in print media may be more effective than talk radio. Conversely, if your solid opposition is the predominant audience for local talk radio, radio spots are probably not the best investment. Earned print media⁶ is critical, as elected officials and their staff pay a lot of attention to op-eds, editorials, and letters to the editor. However, with sufficient resources, paid media can reach a far broader audience that may not be swayed by earned coverage.

Finally, Velazquez noted that good materials need to

fund back to his early years as a state elected official. Through the creation of a select committee on housing, the senator was able to document the lack of decent and safe housing around the state. Through this process, he developed momentum for creating a housing trust fund. Requiring passage of a constitutional amendment, enabling legislation was finally enacted in 1992.

For a decade, the trust fund was sustained by regular biennial appropriations. But as the new millennium's budget shortfalls created more uncertainty over state support, advocates began a search for more sustainable funding from a dedicated revenue source. Formed in 1994, the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio (COHHIO) took the lead. It immediately recognized the need to demonstrate the success of the trust fund's investment.

Committing \$125,000 to the campaign, the coalition hired professional media and grassroots-organizing consultants, including one seasoned lobbyist trusted by many of the foes who historically opposed affordable housing legislation. COHHIO began an

⁶ News coverage generated by media interest in a story or a point of view, in contrast with buying advertising space or commercial spots.

extensive grass-tops strategy, targeting business and political leaders and developers in key legislative districts. As part of its effort to gain partners and set the context in which a dedicated revenue source was considered, the campaign compiled extensive data documenting people assisted, the broad geographic spread of benefits, and the extent of private financing leveraged by trust fund dollars. Legislators were given tours of successful affordable housing. The net result of this outreach yielded 900 grass-top partners who could validate the need and approach with elected officials.

COHHIO's approach to the media also merited attention. The campaign eschewed paid media and focused on securing local editorial board endorsements across the state. In addition, the coalition prepared op-ed articles for use by grass-top partners. Finally, the coalition actively pitched stories that showed the human face of successful affordable housing that already existed in Ohio communities.

An initial press briefing at the statehouse explained the need for the program without rolling out the proposed solution. This approach piqued press interest in following the proposal through the process. More importantly, only partially unveiling the issue allowed the justification to permeate the public's perception without raising early opposition to the specifics of the proposed solution.

Although opposition did arise to the proposed dedicated funding source – an increase in recordation fees – the coalition was able to either co-opt or overcome opponents' arguments in the state legislature. In June 2005, legislation passed that created a new dedicated revenue source for housing from increased recordation fees. Effective August 1, 2005, one year after COHHIO kicked off its campaign, the Ohio Housing Trust Fund can now count on \$50 million in new annual revenue.

Seattle-King County Case Study: Consortium Tackles Housing Needs

George Howland Jr., political editor of the *Seattle Weekly*, presented the case of the Housing Development Consortium (HDC), a Seattle-King County trade association that began in 1988 with a base of nonprofit developers and gradually expanded to include more than 70 members from industry and government. HDC's housing campaign presents an

example of a mature and sophisticated campaign in a supportive community.

HDC has been involved in four successful ballot campaigns that generated significant resources for affordable housing in Seattle. Each ballot focused on a different population to be helped – seniors, homeless persons, working families with children and, most recently in 2002, families earning below 50 percent of area median income. With a string of successes like this, HDC found each campaign a little easier, as they are now pitching renewal of a successful program and not a new and untested approach.

A year in advance of the 2002 ballot, HDC launched an ambitious public relations campaign to gain media coverage of the housing problem and solutions. HDC worked heavily on earned media by building individual relationships with reporters and pitching high quality stories about affordable housing. Howland delineated effective techniques for getting free media, emphasizing a few maxims about the newspaper business:

- “Policy talk” doesn't work – avoid overly technical pitches;
- Newspapers like tension and conflict – good news is not news; and
- Hook the reporter on your story by figuring out their angle.

The last point was perhaps the most important for advocates who feel they have a story. Most newspapers do not have a housing beat. They have a lifestyle or a business beat. Pitching for earned media requires that you package affordable housing in a broader or different narrative to hook a reporter into writing it, based on his specific beat. Howland gave an example where, after a meeting with his editorial board on the ballot initiative, an HDC campaign staffer noted that while young voters were probably with the initiative, there was concern that they would not turn out in an off-year election. This insight resulted in *The Weekly*, Seattle's alternative newspaper, writing a story headlined “Hey, Slacker—Go Vote for the Housing Levy!”

HDC also pursued nontraditional allies for the campaign. Such allies brought new resources to the

table and attracted a broader and influential new constituency for HDC's affordable housing efforts. For the ballot initiative, HDC was able to partner with the Master Builders of King and Snohomish Counties and the Seattle-King County Association of Realtors. These groups paid for the production and airing of television spots that were aired on KOMO, the local ABC affiliate. The ads were educational, aimed at promoting public awareness of housing as a good investment, and were not specifically targeted at the ballot initiative.

In 2003, the success of this campaign led to a new partner – the Washington State Housing Finance Commission. HDC worked with its partners to develop a new set of commercials on the theme “Housing Our Community – Working Together to Build a Better Quality of Life,” clearly a good example of Velazquez' admonition to appeal to self-interest. HDC worked with KIRO, the local CBS affiliate, which helped with production, aired the spots, and even created a Web campaign on the KIRO site.

With the passage of the ballot initiative in 2002 – its fourth successful campaign – HDC showed how to leverage an already strong base of support. The consortium is expanding its ongoing campaign by developing a clear and recognizable message, as well as a strategy for promoting affordable housing.

Los Angeles Case Study: Winning a Housing Trust Fund

Allan Kingston, president and CEO of Century Housing Corporation, presented the experience of the Los Angeles campaign to win a housing trust fund for the city. The example he presented highlights the importance of a sustained effort and taking advantage of political transition. It is also an organizing model that demonstrates the benefits of involving key supporters early in a campaign.

Housing LA's campaign efforts began in 1998 with an examination of the trust fund concept and development of a broad-based coalition. The key issue decided by the campaign was that it should take advantage of unique timing. California term limits meant that the mayor and half of the city council would turn over after the 2001 election. Housing LA decided to focus on candidates in the election and target enactment of a trust fund in the first six months of a new administration.

A key tactical decision was also made to simply specify the dollar amount – \$100 million – and not the funding source. As with Ohio's delayed mention of the specific funding source, not addressing where the money would come from prevented early opposition.

With a clear focus and set timing, Housing LA ran a disciplined campaign using more traditional political campaign tactics. Voting guides were prepared. Candidates were surveyed, participated in forums, and were asked to take a “housing tour.” Contrary to some earlier case studies, Housing LA highlighted both successful affordable housing and distressed communities. Visiting the distressed communities “impacted [the candidates] more than the affordable housing” did, said Jan Breidenbach, executive director of Housing LA. Presenting the visual evidence reinforced the campaign's central message of housing need.

By the end of the campaign, every candidate for council and mayor had gone on record in support of the trust fund proposal. The new mayor mentioned housing in his inaugural address. The context of political support was cemented by the campaign. Housing LA then needed to convert this support into legislation. Weekly lobbying visits from key constituents were organized to remind the newly elected city council members of their commitment to the trust fund. While attempts were made to keep the city's process closed, a mini-campaign of press conferences, rallies and marches forced the mayor's planning process for the trust fund out in the open. Ultimately, the mayor adopted a more inclusive stance and finally proposed a \$100 million trust fund.

Winning Elected Officials' Votes for Housing Policy or Land Planning

Peter Beard of the Fannie Mae Foundation moderated this session, which looked at three case studies requiring elected officials' consideration of housing policies or land use planning that supported housing. The three case studies highlighted experience in Charlotte, North Carolina (City of Charlotte's Neighborhood Development Department), Dallas (Foundation for Community Empowerment), and New York (Housing First!). All three case studies demonstrated how community concern over affordability problems can be translated into an agenda item for elected officials. All three cases produced long-term, systemic change in city policies, not just approval of a particular project.

Tom Horner, principal of Himle Horner Inc., presented basic principles of interacting with elected officials. He provided an excellent framework for guiding a local issue campaign designed to promote policies favorable to affordable housing.

As did other marketing specialists, Horner emphasized the importance of researching and defining your audience. Don't assume you know the

symposium sentiment that "affordable housing as social justice does not move audiences." He suggested emphasizing choice over mandates, individuals versus classes, reform versus new programs, and a hand up instead of welfare.

Horner recommended talking about successes so that policymakers can walk away with a clear picture of how their constituents benefit from homes that are

Involve other stakeholders in your answer to the problem, as government cannot be the entire solution.

most effective messages or the most important audiences. While other specialists' relevant audience was a broader community, Horner focused right in on the governing body you are trying to influence. He cautioned, though, that the audience is not "the legislature" or "the council." Rather, in a variant on the old political maxim "count your votes," Horner divided the audience into three targets, and defined what should be researched regarding each:

- ▶ Advocates – How do you help them aid your cause? (Recall Guardino's directive to "embolden officials.")
- ▶ Opponents – Don't try to convince, but keep their opposition contained.
- ▶ Fence Sitters – The most important target audience. How do you get their vote?

This is classic vote counting, part of what legislative leadership does on a daily basis. With that information, Horner said, you try to hold on to the votes you have, keep in check the votes you don't have, and win the votes you need. Horner framed the challenge as identifying the opinion leaders on the governing body, and designing your campaign to "influence the influencers."

Horner argued that, while access in the halls of power is still important, issues are increasingly won or lost on the ground, where the elected officials are counting their own votes. This means that you need to engage the key constituencies of the policymaker you are trying to influence. Horner echoed an oft-expressed

affordable, not a nightmare scenario of overwhelming need that can't be denied.

Finally, Horner recommended giving people an opportunity to get involved, and creating a sense of urgency about their voice making a difference. Involve other stakeholders in your answer to the problem, he said, as government cannot be the entire solution.

Charlotte Case Study: Setting a Citywide Agenda

Pat Mumford, a city council member from Charlotte, provided an example of every housing advocate's dream: an elected leader with a business background (in banking) who was committed to affordable housing, and who had the benefit of an environment where business, political and community leaders were all on board with the issue. Mumford recognized the importance of a strong housing market from the business perspective, and came to the process not having to view every decision through the lens of reelection.

Mumford suggested that Charlotte's form of government (council/manager versus a strong mayor), with its emphasis on professional management, provided a more conducive setting for affordable housing. In addition, Mumford cited the leadership of the current mayor, Patrick McCrory, who is active in housing issues on the national scene through his involvement with the U.S. Conference of Mayors' housing committee.

The need for more affordable housing was first

identified by the city, with Charlotte's Neighborhood Development Department raising the issue at a 1998 city council retreat. This discussion launched a multi-year process coordinated by Charlotte. The first step was to convene a 25-member Housing Strategy Stakeholders group to develop an overall strategy. This group developed a five-pronged strategy, adopted by the city council, which covered reform of the city's regulations and existing housing policies, increased leverage of existing housing subsidy programs, and greater education and marketing to the community.

Affordable housing is not just a problem for the poor, but is also a problem for key community members such as firefighters, police officers, and teachers.

With a strategic plan in place, the city appointed another 25-member group (the Affordable Housing Strategy Implementation Team), which developed 11 specific recommendations to promote affordable housing solutions. The city council ultimately adopted five of these recommendations, notably including a fair-share geographic formula to prevent over concentration, establishing a housing trust fund, and focusing on transit-oriented development along the city's new light-rail transit lines. These recommendations established a consistent policy framework for development, instead of a case-by-case negotiation, and were won in part by setting standards for the ratio of rental units per manager.

Mumford attested to the importance of two factors in the success of the stakeholder groups. A conscious effort was made to have a broad base of membership, and specifically to include representatives from groups that might oppose city spending on housing. Involving potential opponents in this process ensured that the strategies and recommended policies would be reasonable and widely supported. Use of an independent and respected researcher increased community acceptance. Grounding the strategies and recommendations in credible research on housing need enhanced their marketability.

Mumford identified important themes in message content that also built broader support for the

adoption of the group's recommendations. The research developed a key narrative that affordable housing was not just a problem for the poor, but was also a problem for key community members such as firefighters, police officers, and teachers. Another important issue unearthed by the research was the concern that grown children couldn't live near their parents in Charlotte, a concern echoed in the national opinion surveys presented earlier in the symposium. Finally, the ongoing work of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Housing Partnership provided decision

makers and potential opponents with local examples of how affordable housing looks good and is exceptionally well managed in Charlotte.

All these factors produced success in Charlotte. In addition to the city's adoption of a fair-share formula, establishment of a trust fund, and an emphasis on transit-oriented development, voters approved a \$20 million affordable housing bond issue by a wide margin.

Dallas Case Study: Streamlining the Process for Developers

Steve Brown, president of Carl Franklin Homes, outlined an alternative approach to capturing local elected leaders' attention on housing issues. For years, Dallas developers had worked through a deeply discounted inventory left from the implosion of the savings and loan industry. Private developers formed the Foundation for Community Empowerment to revitalize the southern sector of Dallas, a struggling and underdeveloped set of communities comprising 49 percent of the city's geography but only 16 percent of its tax base. While both developers and nonprofits wanted affordable housing in south Dallas, the city's bureaucracy made the process complicated, lengthy and expensive.

Foundation leaders met with city officials for over a year, but these meetings went nowhere, according to

Brown. Promises were made to look into issues, but no progress was demonstrated. Recognizing that the direct approach was not working, foundation leaders, along with community allies, piqued the interest of the *Dallas Morning News*. Articles chronicling Dallas' housing problems and the fruitless efforts of the foundation to engage the city spurred Mayor Kirk to meet with foundation leaders. The election of Mayor Laura Miller, who took office in February 2002, led to the appointment of a Mayor's Task Force on Affordable Housing, a group charged with developing recommendations for the new administration.

The consulting firm McKinsey & Co. donated an estimated \$700,000 worth of work to prepare a report that outlined 55 recommendations for the task force. These centered on regulatory and process reform to make development easier. Proposals included speeding up the turnaround time for making lots available for development, better coordinating reviews, and reforming requirements and standards for utility hookups, street width and alleys. Promptly adopted by the city council in 2002, these changes were overseen by an implementation committee. The committee's progress report, released in early 2004, claimed "sweeping changes in practice and attitude in the city government."

This turnaround in attitude over just a few years was particularly striking, considering that Mayor Miller had been opposed to affordable housing policies when she was a council member. As she said at a January 2003 housing summit, she knew little about the issue and "didn't get it. Now, I get it." Her change of heart is attributed to two influences. She recognized a self-interest in what emerged to be a politically popular issue. In addition, the McKinsey report aggressively promoted the economic benefits from the development of affordable housing on unused land in Dallas.

A three-part economic boost to property tax receipts, jobs, and business formation made pro-development policies quite attractive to local leaders. Foundation officials also suggested that the mayor's participation in the U.S. Conference of Mayors resulted in peer pressure, as she was confronted with Dallas' poor performance compared to other cities. As of March 2003, 5,700 affordable homes were under construction in the southern sector of Dallas.

Dallas' experience highlighted a topic only lightly touched on in the symposium, but one that has a major contribution to make in affordable housing: reducing regulatory barriers. Any efficiency in regulatory requirements and approvals that squeezes out costs while still protecting health, safety and quality of life stretches the affordable housing dollar that much further, particularly in light of cash-strapped finances at all levels of government. And while the city's previously lackadaisical or even adversarial attitude may have been easy pickings, foundation leaders deftly played on local newspapers' general affinity for conflict by marketing the city's inaction juxtaposed against the city's clear need. By publicly outing the issue, the foundation succeeded in engaging the city's leadership to turn the tide.

New York City Case Study: Housing First!

Roland Lewis, executive director of Habitat for Humanity New York City, presented the case of Housing First!, a New York City coalition of housing advocates. While New York City provides an exceptional housing and political context for obvious reasons, the coalition's experience highlights political and media entrepreneurialism that can elevate housing on the political agenda.

As was the case in the Los Angeles case study, New York City's new term limit law presented housing advocates with the perfect storm. In the 2001 election, the mayor and more than 60 percent of the city's 51 city council members were set to turn over. Joe Weisbord, staff director of Housing First!, seized this opportunity to form and head up this organization. Housing First! brought together all the groups conceivably interested in housing, in effect creating a one-stop shop for the continuum of housing concerns and interests, from developers of high-end homes to advocates for the homeless.

Housing First! brokered a consensus policy agenda to drive the coalition's public education campaign. Working through dozens of groups, the coalition developed a very specific, 10-year, \$10 billion initiative to preserve and produce 185,700 affordable homes. Building on the credibility brought by its extensive membership base, Housing First! created housing as a campaign issue and established the coalition as the gatekeeper and political validators for campaigning candidates. Weisbord said the coalition "helped candidates see the political upside to carrying

this message. It [was] a real issue with the voters, particularly as increasing numbers of middle-income people realize they can't afford housing in the city anymore." Through their work with the candidates, the coalition established a "good housekeeping seal of approval" for candidates and their housing platforms, building support for their 10-year plan.

Housing First! created a three-part message to carry its platform with candidates and in local media. First, not

press releases and cultivation of personal relationships with the media leveraged the coalition's reputation as a "go to" source on any housing story.

Again reflecting the extreme amount of background noise in New York City civic life, Housing First! established its audience as the mayor, the city council, and candidates for those offices. Targeting those audiences with discipline and persistence, the coalition relied on direct contact with those officials to

The communications challenge that faced Housing Illinois was about changing people's minds about affordable housing. "We need a compelling message that will break down misunderstandings and misleading stereotypes."

surprisingly in New York City, affordable housing is an issue that strikes quite far up the income ladder. With such a broad continuum of housing need, cutting across tenure, housing type, and population, the coalition succeeded in taking housing out of the "poverty box." The coalition used the language of choice and opportunity, reflecting the new political lexicon characterizing acceptable government intervention.

The very name – Housing First! – was a conscious messaging strategy. Rather than arguing that affordability was a more important concern than other social issues, the coalition positioned housing at the core of successful outcomes across a broad spectrum of issues such as educational attainment, crime reduction, and workforce success. Finally, the coalition identified the affordable housing crisis as a solvable problem. All that was needed was political will and resources.

Paid advertising in New York City is prohibitively expensive, and too much competition makes it difficult to get a message across. Therefore, Housing First! pursued an earned media strategy by seeking to dominate local media in discussions of housing issues. The coalition established a reputation of being a credible source of information, as well as a forthright advocate, without being ideological. Aggressive use of

push its housing agenda. With media coverage echoing its agenda and covering its concerns, the coalition leveraged a high degree of impact on a very limited budget.

For instance, by August of the 2001 election year, the coalition raised housing to the number two issue in political polls, second only to education. After 9/11, New York City's mayor, Michael Bloomberg, seized on housing as a metaphor for rebuilding New York City. After significant delay, when activists seemed cut out of the administration's deliberations on a housing plan, HousingFirst! successfully kept pressure on the mayor to release a housing plan by the end of his first year in office. The mayor finally did release a housing policy with \$20 million in new money to support 65,000 units.

HousingFirst! is an example of the power of unifying stakeholders. Building on this unity, the coalition designed a highly targeted and disciplined campaign. From its span of members, the coalition created a forum to brand housing as an issue in the political arena. Organizing members has placed limits on budget, time, and the organization's mandate limits that Lewis argued have hobbled the organization. But this example still demonstrated that a lean organization can be effective with a very disciplined and targeted campaign.

Sustaining General Public Support Through a Statewide Campaign

This session, moderated by Chip Halbach, executive director of the Minnesota Housing Partnership, looked at three case studies of how advocates sustained general public support while seeking to change state-level policies and funding. The three case studies highlighted experiences in Chicago (HousingIllinois), Minnesota (HousingMinnesota), and Vermont (Vermont Housing Awareness Campaign). All three case studies demonstrate a more general approach to marketing affordable housing, seeking to raise a level of awareness on a metropolitan or statewide area. These examples don't seek support on a specific project or policy proposal. Rather, the campaigns seek to change the political context of affordable housing by elevating it as a concern among the electorate, creating a more favorable environment for specific proposals and funding.

Valerie Denney, president of Valerie Denney Communications, presented the eight critical planning issues she said every marketing or communications plan must address. These essentially track and reinforce the earlier "5Ms" strategy presented by Velazquez, while insightfully amplifying some points.

Denney broke her framework down into the following topics: goals, research, audience, strategy, message, materials/vehicles, cost and evaluation. In using this framework to assess the case studies and statewide campaigns in general, she made the following observations:

- ▶ **Goals** – If the goal is generalized greater awareness, how do you plan to cash in on that increased awareness? Do you have the funds to sustain the investment for the time it will take to sway public opinion?
- ▶ **Research** – Specifically, marketing research helps establish an audience's frame of reference and enables the development of appropriate nuanced messages and tactics.
- ▶ **Audience** – Identify audience targets, dividing the world into audiences that are "for," "on the fence," and "against." Create a sense of urgency for your issue. Tell your audiences what you want them to do. In particular, neutralize the "against" vote and motivate the "fence sitters."
- ▶ **Strategy** – Denney emphasized communications plans that are accompanied by sustained on-the-ground organizing.
- ▶ **Message** – Constructing the message to appeal to the audience's self-interest was again emphasized.
- ▶ **Materials/Vehicles** – Denney reinforced the recommendation of choosing messengers that look like your audience.
- ▶ **Cost** – Research and advertising were identified as the most expensive costs in the campaign, particularly given the repeated hits required for a message intended to persuade.
- ▶ **Evaluation** – True evaluation measures change in public opinion or awareness that is clearly caused by a campaign's efforts. This approach is prohibitively expensive, and Denney suggested using output and outcome measures – simply tracking the level of activities and assuming that they have an impact.

Vermont Case Study: Targeting Local Leadership

Cynthia Gubb placed the interests of her employer, Chittenden Bank, squarely in the camp of Vermont's affordable housing campaign, arguing that affordable homes help communities grow and prosper. Very simply, healthy communities are good for business, which is why Chittenden Bank helped to fund a coalition of 43 organizations spanning housing and environmental activists, state agencies, employers, and banks. The Vermont Housing Awareness Campaign honed in on the rapid rise in housing prices and rents in the state over the previous eight years. In contrast to this rapid increase, incomes stagnated, leaving three-fifths of Vermont workers employed in jobs with income insufficient to afford the fair-market rent for a basic two-bedroom apartment.

The coalition started with the basic research necessary to understand what people in Vermont thought about housing, commissioning an opinion poll in January 2002. The poll assessed what people knew and thought about housing need, the kind of housing they would be willing to accept in their community, and the effect of different campaign messages. While the poll unearthed a belief that the state had housing problems, people did not understand that it existed in their communities.

With a better understanding of the problem, four-fifths supported more housing and strongly supported more state funding. Three messages resonated, including housing need, economic benefits of affordable housing and a concern that housing not encourage sprawl or use farmland. Developing messages around these themes, the campaign avoided the use of “affordable housing,” instead talking about “housing that average Vermonters can afford.”

The coalition defined its audience as leaders at the local level, targeting town officials, local planning bodies, civic leaders, and the media. They further refined the target audience to those local leaders in towns with housing projects already in the pipeline. Armed with the poll findings and recognizing local authority over housing decisions, the coalition wanted to create a favorable climate for affordable housing by influencing the thinking of local opinion leaders and decision makers.

The coalition produced a wide range of materials to support the campaign. Brochures, PowerPoint presentations, annual reports, videos, posters, and radio and newspaper ads all used the theme “Housing Is the Foundation of Vermont’s Communities.” The materials put a sympathetic human face on the need, using, for instance, a single mother having problems finding housing she could afford. The campaign also made use of political leaders, including ads featuring the state’s two U.S. Senators and then-Governor Howard Dean.

The coalition’s efforts also produced earned media. In 2002, the press simply did not cover the issue of affordable housing. By building personal relationships with reporters, the coalition changed coverage to the point where every major state media outlet reported on both the ongoing campaign and the state of housing need.

Illinois Case Study: Finding the “Yes, in My Back Yards” (YIMBYs)

Jonathan Njus, housing coordinator in the Office for Peace and Justice with the Archdiocese of Chicago, spoke to the concerns that drove the interest and involvement of the archdiocese in affordable housing. The Catholic Church considers housing to be a basic human right, Njus said. In addition, the lack of affordable housing and gentrification were changing the face of their dioceses, forcing their members to

double up or move farther away. The archdiocese therefore found common cause with a variety of organizations concerned with housing in the Chicago metropolitan region, concerns leading to the formation in 2002 of a 30-member coalition dubbed Housing Illinois.

Although a minimum wage worker would have to work 140 hours a week to afford an average two-bedroom apartment, Housing Illinois found a troubling lack of public awareness about this issue. Chicago’s history with government housing programs left a legacy of projects that still serve as poster children – nationally, not just in Chicago –for the public’s worst fears about what affordable housing looks like and the problems experienced by its residents. Thus, the communications challenge that faced Housing Illinois was about changing people’s minds about affordable housing. “We need a compelling message that will break down misunderstandings and misleading stereotypes,” said Kevin Jackson, executive director of the Chicago Rehab Network, the organization staffing Housing Illinois.

The campaign formulated a multistage communication strategy, starting with research on public awareness and attitudes toward affordable housing in the Chicago area. Housing Illinois hired a Washington, D.C.-based public opinion polling firm, which conducted 10 focus groups and surveyed 1,000 residents in the metropolitan area. Their report, *“Valuing Housing: Public Perceptions of Affordable Housing in the Chicago Region,”* found that a majority of Chicagoans recognized and were troubled by the housing problems of low- and moderate-income families. Eight in 10 felt that it was important to have more housing options. Surprisingly, many said they would support affordable housing in their neighborhood on the condition that it was well-designed and maintained.

The message that resonated most in the poll was housing assistance as a hand up, not welfare, reflecting Stein’s description (see earlier discussion) of an individualistic value system. Eight out of 10 felt that this was an issue of fairness and opportunity. Two benefits stood out as the strongest reason to support housing: the desirability of diversity and the importance to the well-being of children. With a significant constituency for action (25 percent), the

researchers recommended that Housing Illinois focus its efforts on convincing the 40 percent of respondents who were identified as fence sitters.

Housing Illinois is currently working on a multi-media communications campaign, having hired a professional firm to develop a variety of print and visual materials to support its efforts. The campaign incorporates a complementary strategy to reinforce the advertising campaign – training Housing Illinois members to use the research findings to educate the public and build relationships with local leaders. The goal of this second phase of the campaign is to build a political environment supportive of policies and programs that develop and preserve housing opportunity throughout the Chicago area.

Minnesota Case Study: Campaign Pledges “Home for All”

Emmet Carson, president and CEO of the Minneapolis Foundation, outlined an example of how a civic-minded funder can move a housing agenda. The foundation had experienced success in moving

campaign. The foundation perceived most housing advocates as inexperienced in public relations and in shaping public opinion, and was firm in wanting people to recognize affordable housing as the “right thing to do.”

The successful applicant was the Minnesota Housing Partnership, whose HousingMinnesota proposal led to a \$250,000 award enabling it to work with a professional advertising agency. The new organization sought to develop a 10-year plan to improve housing conditions for Minnesotans. Over time, this group has grown into a large coalition of more than 50 partners. The coalition’s diversity reflected the balkanized world of housing and community development groups, with a wide range of constituencies (e.g., rural, urban, the homeless) and approaches (e.g., housing advocates and developers). To create a coherent and unified agenda, HousingMinnesota had many “currents and streams of thinking to reconcile,” according to Chip Habach, moderator of this session and executive director of the Minnesota Housing Partnership.

A majority of Chicagoans recognized and were troubled by the housing problems of low- and moderate-income families.

opinion with other public education campaigns. With an existing interest in education, the foundation recognized that housing instability was an important factor in student attendance. Fully one-quarter of the city’s children attended two or more schools per year. This connection offered the foundation a perspective not understood by some housing advocates and legislators.

In 1999, the foundation challenged the housing community to reshape their message and incorporate this broader view by issuing a request for proposals for a public education campaign. A key requirement (and a challenging one for the housing community) was that the funding would be awarded to a coalition, not just one nonprofit. Given the foundation’s previous success with public campaigns, the applicants also had to identify up front the public relations experts who would help design the

With a goal of “Homes for All by 2012,” the campaign aimed to unite diverse constituencies around promoting the full range of housing opportunity in the state. A wide variety of campaign materials highlighted a sentimental, deserving and popular face of housing need, featuring key members of the local workforce – teachers, firefighters, health-care attendants, etc. – who could not afford to live where they work.

HousingMinnesota also followed Guardino’s political prescriptions by engaging the grassroots and grassstops of seven key community sectors – labor, business, education, faith communities, housing advocates, local government, and people in need of affordable housing. Momentum was built that culminated in a very successful conference, held in 2002, which brought together 1,500 people from these diverse constituencies to work on affordable housing issues.

This new community of interest is collaborating on the third phase of the campaign, gathering information and organizing the community to support legislative initiatives that promote affordable housing for low-income families.

The campaign has successfully engaged prominent state leaders in HousingMinnesota's governance and, as a result, into the affordable housing conversation. The past five Minnesota governors have supported the campaign, and even co-convened the 2002 conference. The advertising campaign also produced a favorable media response, with the initial press conference launching the campaign being picked up by 24 media outlets.

HousingMinnesota is currently reengineering its message to reflect harder economic times and a changing political environment. But its example demonstrates how an outside funder can correctly identify and act on the importance of affordable housing to a broader set of community outcomes. In addition, the foundation demonstrated how an enlightened funder could force collaboration across the often fractious and competing interests in the affordable housing community.

Symposium Conclusions

Closing Plenary

Much was learned from an afternoon of delving into examples of successful campaigns in a range of communities and for a variety of goals. Marketing professionals illuminated numerous successful techniques and effective communications practices that could be replicated by others. The closing plenary session brought together what was learned from all of the afternoon breakouts and sought to distill the knowledge from these sessions.

Kenneth D. Wade, executive director of the Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation, presented the key results, examining how to gain support for affordable housing in middle-income communities. Wade identified a key theme that cut across a variety of the symposium's discussions, arguing the need to have a presence early and often in the community. Too often, Wade said, housing developers do not do the background research that would identify the community's goals and aspirations, and the issues that resonate as a concern worthy of support. Elected officials and planning commissioners are not cultivated with educational outreach far enough in advance of a project or policy's formal consideration. Also, more work needs to be done to prepare and hone a campaign's message so that it connects in the local vernacular and is not too technical.

Wade also identified a critical point: third-party validators are essential to establishing broader community self-interest in affordable housing. Too often, the battle lines seem to be drawn between opponents and advocates who each have a direct stake in a project. Third-party validators demonstrate broader appeal of an issue, and – rightly or wrongly – are perceived as more trustworthy compared to a developer or a nonprofit advocate.

Wade cited one example in which a highly visible opponent of a prior project (in fact, the project was “in their back yard”) testified in support of a new project. That person's experience with the project led to public testimony that helped turn the day. The key point was to go beyond the usual suspects, and get other key community leaders, who did not have a direct interest in the project or policy, to show their support.

Wade recommended building a long-term relationship with the community. Don't just parachute in for the project and then go off the screen, he said. Successful campaigns are an ongoing affair, and the affordable housing community needs to be honest, sincere, and in the community for the long haul. He noted that accumulating social and political capital is a process that requires an ongoing strategy to build trust with the public and elected officials.

Doug Bibby, president of the National Multi Housing Council, highlighted the key lessons from the session, focusing on upper-middle-income communities. Bibby's suggestions amplified the extensive community outreach and relationship building implied by Wade's summary. Bibby focused right away on constructive engagement with neighborhood groups. Don't speak down to or disparage the neighborhood groups, he advised. Arguing from the moral high ground and brooking no compromise is a sure way to fan the flames of opposition. As Mayor Rybak noted, such approaches don't win you friends among politicians who might care about affordable housing but live in a world of competing demands and compromise.

Instead, Bibby said, engage the neighborhood groups early. Establish the need, and build from there. Have them help build a vision of their overall community, and introduce affordable housing in the broader context of a healthy neighborhood. Impersonal surveys and research about the benefits of affordable housing don't persuade. People believe their peers. He suggested organizing tours of successful properties and bringing in neighbors of similar communities who can attest to the value brought to their neighborhood. Bibby also reemphasized the need to size up your audience and find out what messages appeal to them. Address the common fears directly, he said. Build processes and mechanisms that ensure ongoing neighborhood voice in the operation of the project and assure enforcement of appropriate maintenance and operational standards. Manage your project to be a good neighbor.

Finally, create the background context that frames the

public dialogue and debate on the policy or project. Work the local newspaper's editorial board so that they support the issue. Bring their biggest advertiser to the meeting, he suggested. Supply television stations with public service announcements they can use as filler for slow periods. Have high-quality messages based on a clear understanding of your local audience.

Venus Velazquez of Pyramid Communications provocatively challenged the premise of the symposium by forcefully arguing that "It's not about changing peoples' minds; it's about winning!" To her, actions are changed by appeals to self-interest. Answer the question "what's in it for me?" and you are halfway to success, she said. Velazquez also posited an oft-repeated directive of the symposium: establish your audiences and their interests, and tailor your message to what connects with their self-interest.

Velazquez also supported the power of language to shape perception, recalling Guardino's use of "homes," not "housing." Use 'homes that are affordable' instead of 'affordable housing,' and you instantly change the subliminal picture conveyed from Cabrini Green to a place at the center of all our hopes and aspirations," she said. She challenged the industry to talk like "real people" instead of hiding behind technical jargon and mind-numbing statistics.

In discussing the session on housing and land use policy, Peter Beard, senior vice president for policy and information of the Fannie Mae Foundation, emphasized consistency in implementation. Policies are not self-executing, he said, and advocates must battle a natural tendency of governing bodies to make exceptions to the rule if significant opposition arises. Beard emphasized "interest-based negotiation," echoing the earlier call to avoid attacking opponents of affordable housing with the stereotyping label of NIMBY.

Beard expressed concern that, while coalitions are great, the challenge is to not lose the low end of the income scale. Coalitions cannot sacrifice the housing needs of those suffering the most from affordability problems, he said. Beard argued that we need a way to talk about successes at a broader level than the project, since policies often are enacted at the county- or statewide levels. Systemic impact beyond just the single successful project must be demonstrated because policymakers must think in those terms, he

said. Geographic balance is also important, particularly given the rural domination of many state houses. A nuanced message that incorporates rural concerns is often missing.

Chip Halbach of the Minnesota Housing Partnership zeroed in on the important connection with business interests in his report on the statewide campaign session. Using the example of a ski lift company in Vermont that could not find workers, Halbach suggested examining recruiting problems of businesses as a catalyst for supporting affordable housing measures. Religious organizations also represent an excellent third-party validator, with affordable housing often resonating with their mission of service.

Nic Retsinas of Harvard University's Joint Center for Housing Studies drew the plenary session to a close by offering his "7+1 effective and ineffective habits of housing communications."

1. The symposium established the need to be proactive in engaging the community, whereas before, many thought you had to "do it in the dead of night," a very significant change.
2. Regardless of research findings, affordable housing has negatives because some people – what Tony Downs of the Brookings Institution referred to as the "constituency for higher home prices" – refuse to believe that house values will not be negatively affected by nearby affordable housing.
3. Not all messages work, and it is probably time to recognize that self-righteousness does not work.
4. That said, there have been successful campaigns, as demonstrated by the case studies featured at the symposium.
5. Recognize that affordable housing development is a business line; therefore, managing reputational risk is essential – have a plan for the negatives.
6. Relationships matter – find the right people to be your advocates, validators, messengers, and sympathetic characters for the face of affordable housing. Most importantly, find the peers of opponents who can testify to positive experience.

7. Repeat, repeat and repeat again! Communications and messages have to be constant activities, where you push the good news out and, as Retsinas suggested, “confuse them with reality.”

+1. Race is still an issue, and one that has befuddled the country for decades. The symposium did not address race in any significant way, and keeping it under the radar screen will not solve the problem.

Concluding Overview and Lessons Learned

The symposium presented a snapshot of an industry beginning to recognize the value of using well-established marketing and communications techniques. While no one minimized the challenges and obstacles facing affordable housing, opinion research demonstrates an untapped potential of public support for housing. The National Association of Realtors’ survey in particular suggests the emergence of a new “silent majority” for homes that are affordable, driven perhaps by the ascendance of affordability problems up the income ladder.

These findings stand in stark contrast to the generally negative assessment of how public opinion stacks up on specific propositions and real projects. Some participants argued that history is against us. On the need for affordability, Jeff Horwitt, consultant to the Fannie Mae Foundation, argued that, based on opinion and focus group research conducted for the foundation, Americans are mean-spirited if they think someone is different from them. This hearkens back to Stein’s bifurcated values of individual opportunity versus collective community responsibility.

During a strategy session held the day after the symposium, a number of participants echoed Retsinas’ concern about race being the elephant in the room, arguing that people with money don’t want diversity in their neighborhoods. Race and income are code words, and some people want to move away from people they perceive to have problems.

Mayor Rybak’s encounter with his young constituent and his concerns with crime paints a portrait of a homeowner worried about the value of his home – the major asset of most Americans – and concerned about quality of life. Yet of critical importance is that Mayor Rybak found a way to address the voter’s concern, by matching it with a more powerful image of community vitality.

These concerns and perceptions create a barrier to the solutions that are the bread and butter of the housing industry. But as we learned from professional marketers, we must not automatically impugn the motives or intelligence of opponents by accusing them of NIMBY sentiments or racism. While the latter sentiment is still unfortunately a reality in our society (and illegal under enforceable statutes, as proven by the Oldsmar, Florida, case study), opposition to housing developments can be grounded in legitimate concerns that often may be addressed through education and principled negotiation. Stigmatizing and labeling opponents only serves to harden their opposition, while to borrow an old Cold War term, constructive engagement and a respectful appeal to self-interest invite opponents and “undecideds” into the process.

Discussing how to address these negative perceptions also highlighted a healthy tension in the affordable housing community. Symposium participants spent considerable time examining communications lessons about constructing a message that resonates with the public. Many specialists recommended defusing negative perceptions by painting the affordability problem as one that “people just like me” suffer. Such appeals subliminally or explicitly make the link that, “there, but for the grace of God, go I.” The history of naming and framing national housing programs – most recently, the emergence of a concern for workforce housing – often reflect a conscious effort to portray the problem as being experienced by a more deserving, less threatening population.

As a political communications tactic, excising the negatives can be a two-edged sword. While the approach may broaden appeal, those suffering more extreme need may be left out of the solution. A textbook example is the low-income housing tax credit program. The program sold well initially in reaction to significant problems in other programs that served the poorest of the poor. The tax credit program has evolved into the premier low-income rental production program in the country, popular across party lines, interest groups and advocates, and the industry. But because of how the program’s finances are constructed – part of its appeal – it is very difficult, if not impossible, to serve the poorest of the poor, whose need is still most directly met by public housing and the Section 8 Housing Voucher program.

Thus, advocates face a Solomon-like choice: If we frame the affordability problem in a manner more sympathetic and less threatening to the general public as a way to leverage more resources, do we risk leaving behind the people most in need? This approach engenders a feeling of moral indignation among some advocates who feel this continues an unjust stigmatization of the poor, denying them a just outcome. Other strategists feel strongly that this approach is the only way to build support for affordable housing in the face of entrenched negative attitudes. And surprisingly, while this debate wages on, specific support for housing the homeless is showing up in the White House, in various state houses, in the Seattle bond issue, and Silicon Valley's housing trust. Perhaps, again, it signifies that how we deliver the message is important – and not that the topic is “untouchable.”

Happily, the symposium suggests we can cut the Gordian knot. Again, recent opinion research has unearthed an unexpectedly strong vein of recognition of the problem and support for solutions among the general public. Many in the affordable housing community are wary about embracing these findings, understandable in light of their history and experience. But these findings reinforce the notion introduced by communications specialists at the symposium that there is an accessible self-interest among communities that can be reached with the right message and the right language.

Perhaps more heartening is the experience of such communities as Seattle, where the more difficult housing needs were the explicit object of public ballot initiatives, and all succeeded. For instance, the most recent public vote explicitly endorsed helping families with incomes below 50 percent of area median income, suggesting that some communities do not have to dance around the question of who is being helped.

Implications for Communications Campaigns

Sorting through the rich and extensive proceedings of the symposium, clear lessons emerge that constitute the top-10 list for successful communications that result in support for affordable housing.

1. National campaigns set the stage for local activism. National campaigns should lay down cover fire for activists at the state and local level. In summarizing key messages, Shekar Narasimhan, board president of The Campaign for Affordable Housing, emphasized the need to “soften up the audience.” National campaigns need to portray success, establish the link between affordable homes and healthy communities, and establish a more sympathetic portrait of housing need. In short, these campaigns are about changing people's minds. And, as Retsinas pointed out, this message bears repeating.⁷

2. Local campaigns should target specific decisions or public policy goals. Local campaigns are seeking action on funding, a policy or a project. The campaigns need to be targeted, disciplined, and focused on the specific outcome being sought – not broader campaigns to create new affordable housing advocates. As Velazquez put it, these campaigns are not about changing minds; they are about winning.

3. Show that this problem can be solved. People tune out or get frustrated if a problem appears unsolvable. Present the successes, and, as noted in the first lesson, do it repeatedly. Many people are surprised when they see what affordable housing looks like now, and may be locked on to outdated mental pictures of problems of the past. If funding is not commensurate with the need, avoid creating a sense of hopelessness by presenting the vast gap. Personalize the impact of the solutions by showing the sympathetic human face of families who have been helped.

4. Campaigns must be grounded in a clear understanding of the audience and its self-interest. Shape your campaign's message by answering the question, “what's in it for me?” Recognize that you are not trying to persuade on moral grounds; you're selling something you want the audience to buy. Educate yourself on what is attractive to the media, and what they need. As Howland's slacker example so cleverly demonstrated, tailor your pitch to the beat of the reporter you are pitching.

5. Staging successful communications campaigns should be developed in the “5M” framework. The

⁷ For instance, in a recent *Atlantic* article (*The Atlantic*, July/August 2004, p. 86) on political advertising, Joshua Green pointed out that “media consultants measure the amount of voter exposure to ads in something called ‘gross rating points.’ One hundred gross ratings points means that on average 100 percent of the people watching television will have seen an ad once.” Repeated exposure is required for people to pick up a message. While 20 years ago, a standard ‘buy’ for a campaign was 400 gross rating points, Green cites a media professional's experience that the current rule of thumb is 1,000 points per week, and more in the heat of the campaign. With the onslaught of advertising, people have obviously developed higher thresholds necessary to ‘get it,’ reinforcing the need to repeat the message.

key elements of a successful campaign:

- a. **Market** – Research your audience to understand how it is segmented and whom you want to reach.
- b. **Message** – Define a clear, concise and compelling message that appeals to the audience’s values.
- c. **Messenger** – Pick messengers who resemble the target audience, or who are sentimental favorites. Third-party validators are particularly helpful to establish credibility.
- d. **Medium** – Pick a medium suited to your message and your target audience.
- e. **Materials** – Exploit all the options (i.e., brochures, commercials, Web sites, etc.), but make sure they conform to the first four “Ms.”

6. Recognize and establish strategic communications as a core business function that banks social and political capital. While not welcome in a world of constrained resources, communications need to be recognized and funded as a core business function on a par with other essential functions. Build personal relationships and show a sustained commitment to your community. This builds the social and political capital for the times when a specific campaign is needed to achieve a particular goal.

7. Develop a new lexicon for affordable housing that connects with the public’s bottom line: use “homes that are affordable” instead of “affordable units.” In his luncheon speech, Guardino demonstrated the simple but powerful impact that language can have. Development, finance and government programs for housing are all extremely complex endeavors and, not surprisingly, a very technical, jargon-filled vocabulary has emerged that is impenetrable to the public, and often to policymakers. Furthermore, it often conveys a depersonalized, institutionalized picture instead of evoking warm identification.

8. Embed your affordable housing appeal in a broader narrative that captures people’s hopes and aspirations for their community. For most people, a home symbolizes the attributes of their neighborhood, their quality of life. Mayor Rybak developed his narrative about the need for affordable housing

around the return to the streetcar city. Develop a case in your local vernacular, and show people that your housing is really an integral part of their vision and hopes for their community.

9. “Embolden elected officials.” Provide positive incentives for politicians at the national, state and local levels to support housing. Borrow a page from Guardino’s Silicon Valley strategy, and institute a “Backbone Award” for local officials. Show politicians the potential of the new silent majority for affordable housing that was identified in opinion research polls.

10. Above all, tolerate and respect differences in opinion. Don’t talk down to or insult your opponents. Respect them as people and recognize that not everyone will see things the same way you do. In fact, some opposition comes from values that housing advocates should applaud and support: well-maintained properties, a culture of hard work and good study habits for school children, etc. So remember, today’s opponent may be tomorrow’s convert when you get to show them the real affordable housing story and **win your campaign!**

THE NEIGHBORWORKS® MULTIFAMILY INITIATIVE

Launched in 1999, the NeighborWorks® Multifamily Initiative is the collaborative portfolio management program for NeighborWorks® organizations whose primary mission is development, ownership or management of affordable multifamily housing. Currently, 68 NeighborWorks® organizations, operating in 33 states and Puerto Rico, belong to the Multifamily Initiative. Together, they own more than 35,000 affordable housing units.

2004-2008 FIVE-YEAR GOALS

- Develop or preserve 15,000 units.
- Invest \$1 billion in development and preservation.
- Asset manage so that 90 percent of Multifamily Initiative members have “positively performing portfolios.”
- Serve 15,000 residents through services which support increased family and community assets.
- 3,500 residents are involved in leadership at the property, organization or community level.
- Provide broad-based access to lessons of the Initiative.

As a capital partner, the Multifamily Initiative has formed the Neighborhood Capital Corporation (NCC). NCC speeds access to capital designed to enable the preservation and development of affordable multifamily housing. NCC provides predevelopment loans of up to \$150,000 and interim development loans. Initially capitalized by Neighborhood Reinvestment, the NCC is now building its capital base through both direct investment and through agreements with lenders who would like to participate in this type of lending. ■

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