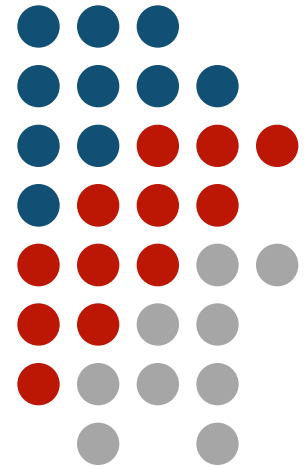


# Building Support for Affordable Communities: Summary of Research on Opinion and Messaging

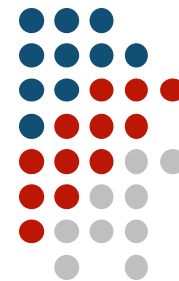
December 10, 2013

Amy Clark and Janet Viveiros  
National Housing Conference and  
Center for Housing Policy

Webinar series sponsored by



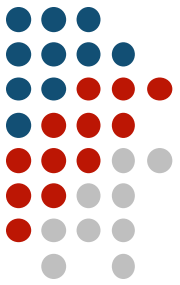
# About the National Housing Conference



**The National Housing Conference** represents a diverse membership of housing stakeholders including tenant advocates, mortgage bankers, nonprofit and for-profit home builders, property managers, policy practitioners, realtors, equity investors, and more, all of whom share a commitment to safe, decent and affordable housing for all in America. We are the nation's oldest housing advocacy organization, dedicated to the affordable housing mission since our founding in 1931. As a nonpartisan, 501(c)3 nonprofit, we bring together our broad-based membership to advocate on housing issues.

**The Center for Housing Policy** is the research division of NHC. The Center specializes in developing solutions through research, working to broaden understanding of the nation's housing challenges and to examine the impact of policies and programs developed to address these needs. Combining research and practical, real-world expertise, the Center helps to develop effective policy solutions at the national, state and local levels that increase the availability of affordable homes.

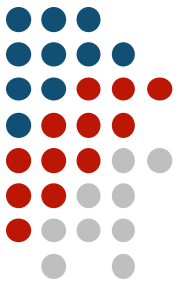




# Join us after the webinar on the Housing Communications HUB

The screenshot shows the Housing Communications HUB website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for Admin, Contact Us, Code of Conduct, and Mobile. The main header features the 'housing communications HUB' logo, with 'communications solutions for the housing community from the NATIONAL HOUSING CONFERENCE' below it. A user profile box for 'Amy' is visible, showing a profile picture, name, and links for Profile, Communities, Logout, and 1 unread message. Below the header is a blue navigation bar with links: HOME, MY PROFILE, EVENTS, RESOURCE LIBRARY, DISCUSSIONS, DIRECTORY, ABOUT, PARTICIPATE, and a search box. The main content area has a large banner with the text 'CONNECT, COLLABORATE, COMMUNICATE' and 'Join the Conversation with Your Colleagues'. It includes buttons for 'Start a discussion', 'Ask a question', and 'Share a resource'. To the left of the banner are vertical navigation options: 'WELCOME TO THE HUB', 'NEW TO THE HUB?', 'GROW YOUR TOOLKIT', and 'CONNECT'. Below the banner are three sections: 'Quick Links' with 'Join a Discussion' and 'Download & Share Resources'; 'See What's New' with 'Webinar Pre-Discussion: Building Support for Affordable...' by Janet Viveiros; and 'Explore & Connect' with 'HUB video tutorial' and 'Find a Member'.

# Review of Research on Affordable Housing Communications

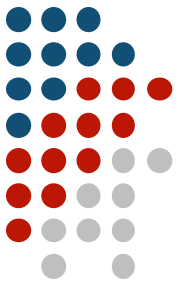


## Public Opinion Findings

- Housing cost issues have the most traction in high-cost areas
- Housing cost concerns are often passive and do not translate into political support
- Homeownership solutions are more attractive to the public than rental solutions
- Personal familiarity with housing challenges has increased

## Language & Messaging Recommendations

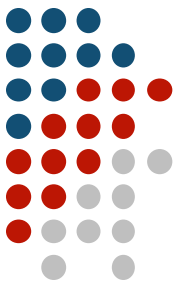
- Focus on specific beneficiaries
- Describe programs in terms that affirm the beneficiaries deserve assistance
- Make clear that the whole community benefits
- Appeal to core values such as choice, hard work, balance, fairness and opportunity



# Housing cost issues have the most traction in high-cost areas

- In a 2006 national survey, 14 percent of working families identified housing costs as the single most worrisome economic challenge, behind gasoline/energy costs (41 percent) and health care costs (19 percent).
- Segmented by housing market, 28 percent of respondents in higher-cost markets selected housing costs as the most worrisome challenge, compared with only 10 percent in lower-cost markets.

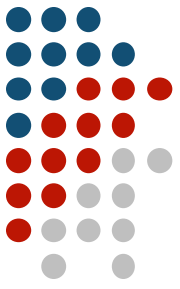
# Housing cost issues have the most traction in high-cost areas



- An annual national survey on attitudes towards homeownership found that worries about housing affordability have declined significantly between 2005, when home prices were at their peak, and 2011.
- A 2010 survey conducted by Hart determined that 82 percent of Rhode Islanders believed the state had an “affordable housing problem” despite the drop in home prices across the state.



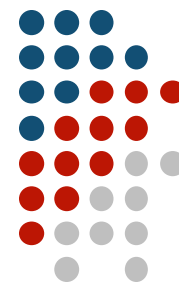
# Leveraging public opinion: Do the social math



- Use *social math* to turn abstract numbers into reality.
- Focus on the *shortage* of affordable housing, not on *cost burden*.



# Housing cost concerns are often passive and do not translate into political support

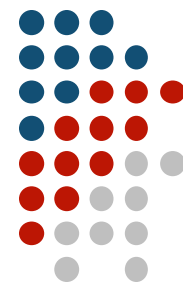


Possible reasons why:

- Opportunities for action are not clearly identified.
- Levels of support for housing affordability may not be great enough to spur people to action.
- People may support affordable housing abstractly but remain ambivalent about its impact in their community.
- A study on the views of policymakers described their sense of “little reward and substantial risk” in taking on housing affordability-related issues.

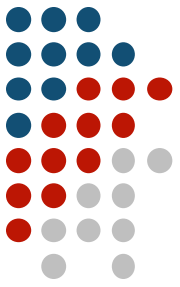


# Leveraging public opinion: Aspirations and solutions



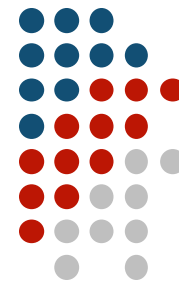
- Give people something to aspire to: a community that can be a place where everyone can live, work and play, affordably.
- Show how your community is working to get there, and how similar solutions have worked here or in other parts of the country.
- Provide cover to elected leaders and keep the business community engaged by showing how support, action lead to results.

# Homeownership solutions are particularly attractive to the public than rental solutions



- In one study, 54 percent said they were comfortable with affordable homes in their neighborhood, but that number rose to 61 percent when the units are specified as homes to buy, and dropped to 39 percent for rental units.
- In a national survey, after given information about current housing policy and the growing popularity of renting, 65 percent agreed with a statement that housing policy should focus more equally on the affordable housing needs of both homeowners and renters.

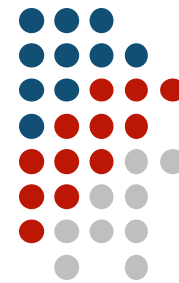
# Personal familiarity with housing challenges has increased



- In 2009, 25.8 percent of surveyed Massachusetts homeowners feared that they might not be able to afford their mortgage payments.
- In a 2012 study in Long Island, nearly 6 in 10 reported they “have at least some difficulty paying their rent or mortgage.”
- A national survey found that 35 percent of respondents felt “resentful that it [government assistance] could help borrowers who took out mortgages they weren’t certain they could pay.”



# Personal familiarity with housing challenges has increased

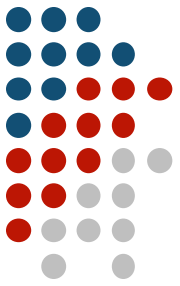


- It is unclear how this resentment affects attitudes about affordable housing initiatives, but it does suggest that it might be difficult to turn widespread personal experience with housing cost challenges into support for affordable housing initiatives.

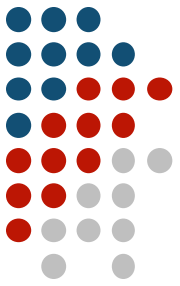


# Leveraging public opinion: The language of “us”

- Affordable housing benefits the entire community, so let's use inclusive language to talk about it.
- Collective language can lead us to systemic thinking, community solutions.
- Use personal stories, metaphor to show how people who need affordable housing have the same aspirations as those who can afford market-rate housing.



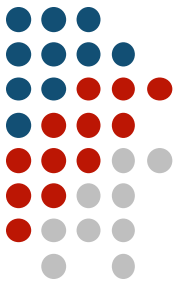
# Focus on Specific Beneficiaries



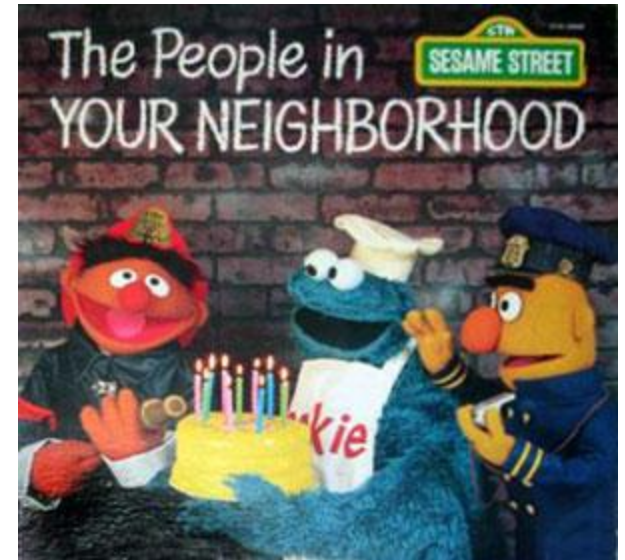
- People are more likely to recognize a shortage of affordable homes when the target population is described using an income range (“households *earning \$25,000 to \$40,000*”) or a qualifier (“young families *just starting out*”).



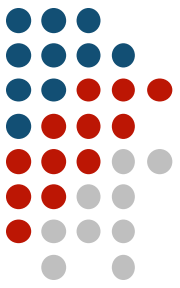
# Messages that work: Local and regional narratives



- Be explicit about the wages earned by community workers, the housing those wages affords.
- Leverage local memory of a more affordable era.
- Tell a story of what your community could be like with more affordable housing.



# Describe programs with terms that affirm that the beneficiaries deserve assistance

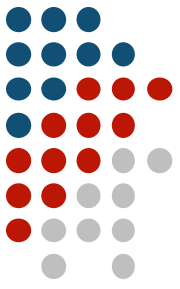


- Messages that are most effective in building support for affordable housing use terms like “working families” to make the case that beneficiaries have earned the right to assistance.



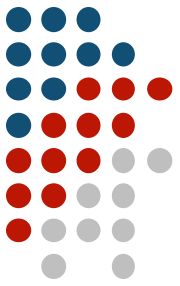


# Messages that work: Values



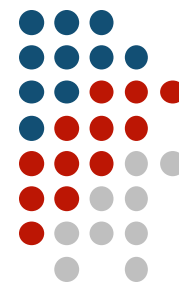
- The “Opportunity Frame:” Equality, community and human dignity as cornerstones of opportunity.  
(<http://toolkit.opportunityagenda.org/>)
- Values-based, inclusive language gives your audience the opportunity to be their best selves.

# Make it clear that the whole community benefits



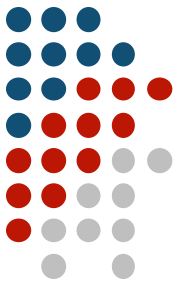
- In a 2009 survey in Massachusetts, almost two-thirds of the respondents reported that the lack of affordable housing harmed “the local economy” and over 70 percent agreed that high housing costs prevent young families and the elderly from living in their community.
- A 2004 survey in Long Island found that a majority of residents believed affordable housing would negatively affect traffic congestion, school quality and property values, and generally attract the “wrong kind of people.”

# Appeal to core values such as choice, hard work, balance, fairness, and opportunity



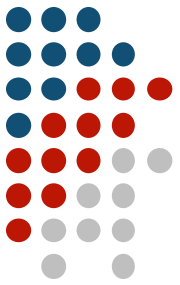
- In discussions about gentrification, focus groups agreed that people should not be forced to leave their communities due to rising housing costs, affirming opportunity as a commonly shared value.
- Most people view housing as a consumer issue, rather than a social issue. Some researchers suggest framing the message to appeal to market-based values, such as **choice, hard work, and balance.**

# Messages that work: Public structures



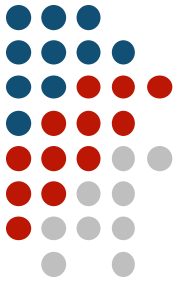
- Many housing solutions require a strong role for government.
- Collective narratives, stereotypes about government are getting in the way of a government role which can help us solve the problems in our communities.
- Framing government as a “public structure” bridges ideologies, creates space for effective advocacy.

[\(http://www.publicworks.org/\)](http://www.publicworks.org/)



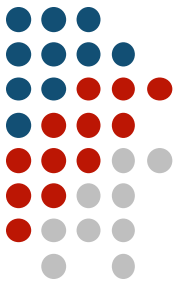
Your introduction to the

# **HOUSING COMMUNICATIONS HUB**



# Questions?

# Thank You!



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