

Building Public Will: Background Research and Analysis

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I. INTRODUCTION

This report is designed to create an information base for increasing public acceptance and support for affordable housing. First, the report analyzes thirteen affordable housing campaigns in localities throughout the country. Based on interviews, this research is designed to provide a better understanding of the approaches used by affordable housing campaigns. Both single-issue affordable housing campaigns and multi-issue campaigns, in which one of the issues is housing, were included in this research. Secondly, the report synthesizes the literature on polling, messaging, and public opinion geared towards gauging public will and building support for affordable housing. Finally, the report proposes a number of recommendations to consider for action in Minnesota.

The campaign analysis component of the study examines the participation, outreach strategies, and messaging of the thirteen campaigns. This analysis also looks at the special issues of race and involvement of communities of color. Overall, the findings include:

- Having the “right” people at the table was important for both single-issue and multi-issue campaigns. The “right” people included people from sectors of strategic interest, people with political clout, and people able to work well in coalitions.
- “Economic development” messages were widely used, and considered most relevant, by the single-issue affordable housing campaigns in the study.
- Multi-issue campaigns often used “quality of life” messages to unify the different interests represented within the campaign and to create a broad appeal.
- Most of those interviewed seemed to lack information on how to directly address race in campaign work. Campaigns did not explicitly address racial issues in their messaging, but wanted, and sometimes had, participation from communities of color.

The review of polling and messaging studies synthesizes information about effective messaging and the utility of polling for affordable housing advocacy. This section draws from the work of Jeff Lubell at the Center for Housing Policy and is supplemented by additional studies and information. Overall, the information in this section covers:

- Messages about affordable housing geared to the public
- Messages about affordable housing with specific appeal to legislators
- How polling can be used to tailor messages more effectively
- Existing Minnesota survey results about attitudes towards housing
- Assessments of attitudes towards housing subsequent to the onset of the foreclosure crisis

Finally, this paper sets forth a number of recommendations developed on the basis of the interviews and literature review conducted for this report. The recommendations also draw upon the national and local experience of MHP in carrying out affordable housing campaign work. Key recommendations are as follows:

- Use polls and surveys to gain a deeper understanding of the attitudes of Minnesotans towards housing and of the messages that are most effective in building support for affordable housing
- Enlist the support of business in efforts to promote affordable housing
- Back and monitor affordable housing campaigns in Minnesota
- Utilize key lessons from national and local research on effective messaging

II. METHODOLOGY

The campaign portion of the study is based on interviews with members of thirteen campaigns that address the issue of affordable housing. Seven of the campaigns in the study are considered single-issue affordable housing campaigns because they share a sole purpose of building support to increase the supply of affordable housing. The remaining six are multi-issue campaigns in which affordable housing was integrated with one or more other issues. While the issues included and the methods used to link them together vary, these campaigns all include at least some advocacy for increasing the supply of affordable housing.

Prior to conducting the interviews, an inventory of past and current affordable housing campaigns was undertaken. This inventory was developed through a review of literature maintained by the Minnesota Housing Partnership, internet searches and an electronic request for information sent to state members of the National Low Income Housing Coalition. After creating a comprehensive list of campaigns, the researchers selected a sample of single- and multi-issue campaigns based on one or more of the following criteria.

- Represented a diversity of campaigns with different types of goals, targets, and geographic scope. As a result, strategies, participants and messages also varied
- Located in states where the political and economic context is at least somewhat comparable to Minnesota
- Had tangible success or, if not successful, identified clear lessons that would be useful for future campaigns
- Offered an original model, such as community benefits agreements, that would help illuminate the dynamics of promoting housing in a multi-issue campaign
- Included non-traditional supporters or allies to achieve campaign success
- Focused on affordable housing supply, rather than narrower topics such as homelessness, consumer protections, or housing related services.

The interviews were conducted over the phone and lasted approximately 45 minutes. Detailed notes were taken during the interviews, which were supplemented by information from the campaigns' websites and/or materials shared by interviewees. The information from the interviews was placed in a structured format to allow for analysis across questions and campaign types.

The analysis of existing studies of messaging and polling about affordable housing at the conclusion of the study is based on a review and synthesis of existing studies. Of particular utility is a meta-analysis by Jeff Lubell of the Washington D.C.-based Center for Housing Policy. Other data sources supplement the Lubell report. In addition to a review of published studies, interviews with individuals involved in the campaigns sponsored by Housing California were conducted to obtain additional information on that state's polling work.

III. OVERVIEW OF THE CAMPAIGNS

Following is a summary description of the types of campaigns included in the campaign analysis portion of the study.

A. Single-issue affordable housing campaigns

The single-issue campaigns included in this research fell into three broad categories: those dedicated to securing a source of funding, those aimed at meeting a goal for housing production, and those targeted more broadly at increasing awareness of and action on affordable housing.

Campaigns to secure a source of funding

Four of the seven single-issue campaigns in the study were implemented to increase the funding for affordable housing through legislative efforts, ballot initiatives, or local ordinances. These four campaigns worked with elected officials, voters, or both to secure funding through a housing bond, property tax levy, or real estate transfer tax. The following campaigns fell into this category:

- Florida Housing Trust Fund Campaign (led to the Sadowski Affordable Housing Act)
- Housing Works, Rhode Island
- Open the Door Campaign, Louisville, KY
- Yes! For Homes Campaign, Seattle, WA

Campaigns to meet a housing production goal

Two campaigns were implemented to increase the supply of affordable housing by reaching a specific production goal. One, the Homes for New Jersey campaign, is a statewide initiative to add 10,000 units of affordable housing in 10 years. The other, Rochester First Homes, is an initiative focused on adding 875 units of affordable housing to Rochester, Minnesota and its surrounding communities. While the campaigns are similar in their focus on production, they targeted different groups to achieve their respective goals. The Homes for New Jersey campaign targeted elected officials, particularly the New Jersey Governor, and the general public. The primary audience for the First Homes initiative focused on business and civic leaders to raise funds and to garner public acceptance for the project.

Campaigns to increase awareness of affordable housing

The Workforce Housing St. Louis campaign, a new campaign in its first year of implementation, was the only campaign in the study focused on raising awareness of affordable housing with the multi-dimensional goals of changing local policies (zoning, planning, etc.), involving businesses in employer-assisted housing, and securing additional funding for housing. The campaign is working to increase broad-based support for affordable housing by building awareness among the general public and reaching influential individuals within local governments such as mayors, planners and city administrators.

B. Multi-issue campaigns

The multi-issue campaigns selected for this research also fell into three distinct categories. Some campaigns were aimed at securing a source of funding that would apply to multiple sectors (such as housing and the environment), some were aimed at negotiating community benefits agreements, and one was designed to promote a specific regional growth strategy.

Campaigns to secure a source of funding

Two of the multi-issue campaigns, Open Doors, Open Lands in Illinois and the Vermont Housing and Conservation Fund, were implemented to increase funding for affordable housing, among other objectives. Unlike the single-issue campaigns, these two campaigns worked collaboratively with environmental groups to advocate for either a dedicated revenue source or an increase in an existing revenue source. Both campaigns linked affordable housing to land preservation through the usage of a real estate transfer tax. In Illinois, the two groups made the practical decision to conduct a joint campaign because the tax was structured so that one half of the funds would be allocated to an affordable housing trust fund and the other half to fund open lands. In Vermont, the decision to join the issues of affordable housing and conservation came about primarily because both issues were impacted severely by a precipitous rise in real estate values.

Campaigns to obtain community benefits agreements

Two of the multi-issue campaigns, the Cherokee Gates Campaign in Denver and the Milwaukee Park East Project, linked affordable housing with jobs and environmental standards through campaigns to obtain community benefits agreements. Community benefits agreements are legally binding contracts negotiated between developers and community coalitions that identify a set of community objectives that the developer agrees to provide as part of a development project.¹ Benefits address community needs and typically include living-wage jobs, affordable housing, funding for parks, space for community services, and local hiring practices. As part of the arrangement, community groups agree to support the developer when the project goes to the city council for approvals and subsidies.

Campaigns to promote a regional growth strategy

One initiative, Envision Utah, linked housing to transit and environmental issues by promoting a strategy for sustainable regional growth. Envision Utah is a public/private partnership formed to guide the development of a broadly and publicly supported Quality Growth Strategy. The partnership uses a discussion-oriented process to address and promote the benefits of regional planning.

C. Geographic scope

Both the single and multi-issue campaigns in the study covered a wide range of geographic boundaries. The two community benefits campaigns, Cherokee Gates in Denver and Milwaukee Park East, were focused on a specific parcel of land. The Open the Door campaign in Louisville and Yes! for Homes in Seattle were city-specific campaigns. Three campaigns, Rochester First Homes, Workforce Housing St. Louis, and

¹ Good Jobs First, Community Benefit Victories, www.goodjobsfirst.org

Envision Utah, used a regional approach. Five of the campaigns were statewide initiatives.

D. Target audience

The majority of the campaigns had elected officials and policy makers as their primary targets. In some campaigns, the efforts were targeted specifically to city hall or state legislators. This was typically the case for campaigns designed to secure a dedicated revenue source. Ballot campaigns typically used a two-stage approach, working first with elected officials to get on the ballot, and then shifting emphasis to generate voter support.

In other cases, the campaigns were designed to make the climate for affordable housing friendlier for elected officials and policy makers. This was the case with Envision Utah, Open the Door - Louisville and Workforce St. Louis. Rochester First Homes was the only campaign that specifically targeted the business community.

IV. ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEW DATA

The following analysis provides an in-depth comparison of campaigns included in the study across two core campaign elements: organizational representation/participation and messaging. These elements are critical to the formation, scope and focus of any policy issue initiative, and they serve as the basis to building public support for policy change. Having strong participation and messaging is especially important when a campaign addresses the dynamic and complex issue of affordable housing. For each area, the single-issue housing campaigns are compared and contrasted with those campaigns that incorporate multiple issues.

Based on analysis of the thirteen campaigns included in this research, it is not possible to make any definitive statements about the absolute effectiveness of the various approaches to campaign participation and messaging. However, looking at the range of approaches used by these campaigns is instructive. Through this analysis, it is possible to understand some of the strategic options that remain available once the choice is made to pursue affordable housing goals through a single-issue vs. a multi-issue campaign.

A. Participation, Outreach, and Non-traditional Allies

Information about the thirteen single and multi-issue campaigns in the study provides a base of understanding about the types of organizations that have participated in the different types of campaigns. In addition, key participant attributes and the role of non-traditional allies in helping achieve campaign goals are highlighted. This section finds that single-issue and multi-issue campaigns result in a different "mix" of participants, both by sector and by individual attributes. Also, when housing is included in a multi-issue campaign, it is essential to involve non-profit housing groups specifically in campaign leadership, or there is a risk that the housing issue will be "lost" to other pressing issues. Finally, as in any campaign, it is important to have participants who are effective and influential, but who can also work well with people representing different interests and constituencies.

Base of Participation

Analysis of the interviews suggests that single-issue campaigns tend to draw from a broad base of participants, whereas multi-issue campaigns tend to draw from a smaller, targeted group of leaders. In either case, the campaigns draw upon participants from multiple sectors.

The single-issue campaigns in the study garnered participation from a broad range of groups. Non-profit housing and low-income advocacy groups were key partners, and other groups that were involved included business and civic leaders, economic development organizations, education associations, faith-based organizations, health care, and housing industry stakeholders (home builders, lenders, realtors, etc.). Most of the campaigns brought in participants using grassroots efforts and peer-to-peer networking. Some campaigns used traditional grassroots outreach to recruit campaign participants, while others used a “grasstops” outreach method to build campaign leadership.

Conversely, the multi-issue campaigns typically united a small set of issue groups that each brought a strategic objective to the campaign. In addition, individuals with some amount of political clout and influence were asked to join or participate in the campaign. This was particularly the case with the community benefits campaigns and the campaigns that combined housing and environmental issues to secure funding. For these campaign types, the coalition building process was very intentional and often made on an invitation-only basis. In all four multi-issue campaigns, the different issue groups worked together as a team to achieve their goals. The interview findings from these campaigns suggest that the small group of people leading the campaign ensured that the campaign stayed focused on achieving results for each of the issues represented in the campaign. This was because the participating leaders each held a special commitment to their particular area of interest (housing, the environment, etc.).

Importance of Housing Groups

Change in affordable housing policy requires active participation from at least one organization focused on housing. In nearly all of the campaigns, non-profit housing groups were actively involved in some aspect of the work – whether through leadership, facilitation, or technical assistance. This finding is especially relevant when examining the extent to which multi-issue campaigns can effectively promote affordable housing. When a multi-issue campaign includes housing along with other quality of life issues, it is important that organizations with an affordable housing mission be active in the process. In the case of the community benefit agreement campaigns and the campaigns that paired affordable housing and land conservation, the goal of increasing affordable housing opportunities was given adequate consideration relative to the other campaign issues. For example, these campaigns included a clear plan to increase the number of affordable housing units. This stands in contrast to the multi-issue work of Envision Utah. With respect to housing, non-profit housing groups do not play an active role in this campaign. The Envision Utah initiative also lacks a concrete plan of action for housing, which calls into question the positioning of the issue to achieve tangible results.

The “Right” Individuals as Key to Success

Based on the interviews for both single and multi-issue campaigns, a common theme which surfaced among campaign leaders was the importance of involving the “right” individuals. Such individuals can help a campaign gain influence over important groups for successful collaborations, and can help ensure healthy and honest group dynamics.

Several people spoke about the value of bringing *non-traditional allies* into the campaign process. Two campaigns had representatives from home builders’ associations, which had not previously been supportive of affordable housing efforts. In both cases, the home builders’ association became involved with the campaign when an individual from the association joined the campaign because of a deep personal commitment to affordable housing. Finding such individuals within business communities to draw in as supporters and partners can be particularly useful to campaigns.

For other campaigns, having the right people on board meant bringing in *individuals or organizations with connections and influence*. For the Rochester First Homes initiative, an engaged group of community business leaders led to a successful fundraising effort and a climate of acceptance for workforce housing in the community. In Vermont, non-profit housing and conservation organizations joined together to increase funding for both issues when rising real estate values began impacting housing and open space. For the non-profit housing organizations, collaborating with conservation groups brought additional access to experience and political clout, which helped both groups achieve a solution that would not have been possible had they worked separately.

Working together: pitfalls and promises

Representatives of both single and multi-issue campaigns also mentioned *the importance of trust* in building and sustaining campaign coalitions. Campaigns include a diversity of groups, many of which may have worked at cross purposes in the past. Bringing about systemic change required that the coalition members find ways to trust each other. In Florida and Vermont, both with single-issue campaigns, coalition members used very different strategies to navigate this challenge. In Florida, the campaign obtained explicit agreements from members that they would work out differences between them within the structure of the campaign; there would be no independent deal-cutting. In Vermont, trust developed over time, with the same core group of advocates working together for more than 25 years.

Several interviewees spoke of the value of working with individuals and organizations that were *aware of their own self-interest and could work well with others* with different interests. The coalition for the Cherokee-Gates Campaign in Denver sought out partners with common interests in obtaining a community benefits agreement. They recognized that any individuals joining the coalition would certainly need to have influence and a base of constituents, yet they would also need to be team players who were explicit about their self-interests. The ability to recognize self-interests and limitations was an important attribute for successfully negotiating the multiple issues in the campaign.

In addition, many people interviewed spoke of the importance of *accepting compromise* when working on a campaign. Change requires that all groups come to an agreement about a policy approach. In that process, all groups get something that they need, but no group gets everything it wants. For example, in Florida the low-income advocates needed the homebuilders to build a broader base of support for the

campaign. In the end, a compromise led to an agreement that funds would be split between community pots primarily for homeownership (a central goal of the builders) and a state pot primarily for rental (a central goal of low-income advocates).

For campaigns, influence is dependent on the strength of participation. Many respondents spoke of the value of having a *cohesive group that stayed focused* on achieving campaign goals. However, keeping people together appears to be a challenge. A number of respondents talked about the effort involved in keeping campaign members “on the same page”. Carla Oklgwe from the Yes! for Homes, Seattle campaign says she worried about keeping people “under the same tent. We need all stakeholders to sign in blood that they are on board and that they won’t go against the campaign even though they won’t get everything they want.”

B. Messaging

Analysis of the thirteen single and multi-issue campaigns in the study provides an overview of how the key messages were determined and compares the messages used in these types of campaigns. Again, it is not possible to evaluate the effectiveness of the messages selected by the campaigns studied because of the limited scope of this study. However, the study did reveal that the type of messages that are ultimately selected will depend on the breadth of the issues involved in the campaign. Single-issue housing campaigns most frequently used economic development messages, while multi-issue campaigns used broader, quality of life messages.

Process for determination of messages

In general, the interviews did not reveal substantial differences between single and multiple issue campaigns in the process used for determining messages. Campaigns from both categories used processes that ranged from informal group decision-making to more formal public opinion polling.

For over half of the campaigns, key messages were determined by members of a steering committee or another group within the campaign. Those involved in making such decisions often drew upon a combination of experience working with the issue and background research. In a few cases, a staff person with a communications background or public relations or marketing consultants aided the committee with messaging.

A more sophisticated message development process was used by the Yes! for Homes Campaign and Envision Utah, each of which used an outside firm to conduct public opinion polling. Yes! for Homes used polling to identify voter attitudes prior to the election and to test ideas and messages. The responses from the polling informed the campaign messages. In 1997, Envision Utah conducted a public opinion poll to gain a better understanding of Utah residents’ values and to identify what residents most wanted to preserve or change in the face of the state’s rapid growth. The results of this polling shaped not only the messages they used when talking about issues related to regional growth, but also the direction the organization chose to take. Envision Utah has conducted a follow-up study since this initial poll, which has shown that the values expressed by Utah residents have remained fairly stable over time.

Messages Selected: Single vs. Multi-Issue Campaigns:

Overall, single and multi-issue campaigns tended to select different kinds of messages about affordable housing. Single-issue campaigns were much more apt to use economic development messages than multi-issue campaigns. Multi-issue campaigns, on the other hand, had to use creative means to connect housing with the other campaign issues. Ultimately, they usually selected messages that served as an appeal to quality of life for area residents.

1. Single-issue campaigns

For the single-issue housing campaigns, the messages that were used fell into three categories: linkages to economic development, such as the economy or workforce housing, linkages to social justice, and linkages to pledges by government entities for housing production. However, the messages that were used most frequently tied affordable housing to economic development.

- Affordable housing as an economic development issue

Positioning affordable housing as an economic development tool was the most common strategy used in single-issue campaigns. The messages used to support this position usually addressed the need for workforce housing or highlighted the relationship between jobs and housing. For two campaigns, the Florida Housing Trust Fund and Workforce Housing St. Louis, the messages of workforce housing shortages were chosen because they were thought to resonate particularly well with audiences, with large employers having recently left those communities.

People became more interested in workforce housing message after IBM left Boca Raton because [businesses] could not recruit and retain employees due to housing problems. – Jamie Ross, 1000 Friends of Florida

Housing is an economic development issue. It is not social work issue. Wal-mart pulled out of one of our communities because they couldn't attract workers. – Nikki Weinstein, FOCUS St. Louis

Many of the campaigns linked affordable housing to specific types of workers, such as hourly wage workers, firefighters, police officers and teachers. This type of message linked the need for affordable housing with familiar neighborhood faces. This suggests that identifying who is in need of affordable housing was seen by the campaigns as an important component in building support for workforce housing. A good example of this kind of message came from Workforce Housing St. Louis:

We need the people who need workforce housing. [on poster with a firefighter, nursing assistant, teacher and cook]

Two of the campaigns used messages that positioned workforce housing as an asset to families and communities, specifically because it is good for the local economy.

In order to have a healthy, strong business economy, we need to house our workforce. This is going to be a community asset. This will strengthen neighborhoods and schools. – primary message of Rochester First Homes

Workforce housing is good for business, good for neighborhoods and good for families. –primary message of Workforce Housing St. Louis

Overall, comments from respondents about the use of workforce and economic development messages suggest that such messages resonate well with key audiences. Several people interviewed talked about the relevance of workforce housing issues, especially for business stakeholders.

The economic development message made it easier to talk with people. Everyone can connect with the economic message in some way. – Cathy Hinko, Metropolitan Housing Coalition, Kentucky

- *Affordable housing as a social justice issue*

Three campaigns used messages that positioned the need for affordable housing as a social justice issue. However, respondents indicated that its effectiveness was sometimes called into question. Indeed, some of the campaigns that used social justice-based messages acknowledged either that it was not recommended by communications consultants or that it was not effective for all audiences. For example, the Yes! for Homes Campaign in Seattle, social justice messages about homelessness resonated with voters during opinion polling in the mid-1990's but not in 2002. However, social justice messages were not without utility in certain situations.

The communications people told us that the compassion story wouldn't work - positioning the support of affordable housing as the right thing to do, the helping hand approach - but it tested well and so we used it and it worked pretty well.
– Brenda Clements, Statewide Housing Action Coalition, Rhode Island

- *Linkages to government pledges*

Several of the campaigns used messaging that linked advocacy efforts to housing production or the campaign goals of public officials. The Homes For New Jersey campaign found that the messages that worked best were those related to the Governor's pledge to build 100,000 units of affordable housing. Using such messages in the media was effective in getting the Governor to take action. Similarly, the Florida Housing Trust Fund used messaging to link trust fund projects to the state legislature's 2010 housing goal, which had been adopted in 1990. At that time, the Florida legislature proclaimed that by the year 2010, Florida will ensure that decent and affordable housing is available for all its residents.

2. Multi-issue campaigns

The multi-issue campaigns in the study frequently positioned housing as a quality of life issue. For these types of campaigns, messages that positioned affordable housing to economic development were less common.

- *Community benefits agreements messaging*

The two community benefits agreement campaigns in Denver and Milwaukee used messages that linked the availability of housing to notions of a strong community. The Cherokee Gates campaign posited housing as the "carrot" for creating a strong and well-knit community for a diversity of residents.

A strong and diverse community must provide safe and accessible housing opportunities for residents of all incomes. - Cherokee Gates Campaign

Using a similar tack, the Milwaukee Park East Project presented the threat of community destabilization as the “stick” for failing to attend to housing.

Milwaukee is facing serious unemployment and housing problems, which, if unresolved, will have negative repercussions for the city's overall stability. Over the last four years, the number of families with critical housing needs has increased by 60%. - from the literature of the Milwaukee Park East Project

- *Housing and environment messaging*

Two campaigns linked housing and the environment through a collaborative legislative funding campaign. The Vermont Housing and Conservation Fund connected the issues of affordable housing and open lands by using an overarching message of community enhancement. This broader message allowed them to position the two issues together as instrumental to the state's quality of life.

The projects funded by the trust fund develop and enhance the community. We need affordable housing and the preservation of agricultural and recreational land opportunities to have a high quality of life. - Erhard Mahnke, Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition

The Open Doors, Open Land campaign in Illinois was not as successful in developing messages that positioned housing and the environment together. The catchy campaign name, “Open Doors, Open Land”, enabled the campaign to discuss housing and environmental needs together in writing. However, campaign members found it difficult to deliver a unified message in oral communications. This was particularly the case when advocates were lobbying on behalf of the issues. Campaign members found that the nature of lobbying and the compartmentalizing of issues in different legislative committees made it difficult to advocate for both issues as a package.

- *Additional comments on multi-issue messaging*

Based on interview results, it is not possible to give a single, definitive explanation as to why the messages chosen by single-issue campaigns were so different from those chosen by multi-issue campaigns. However, the types of messaging used for housing in multi-issue campaigns seemed, in large part, to depend upon the issues with which housing was linked. For any particular linkage with another issue, finding a message that effectively links the two, and also speaks to the public, presents an extra set of challenges. For this reason, it is plausible that the broader “quality of life” messages used frequently by multi-issue campaigns were seen as a better choice than the “economic development” messages that characterized so many of the single-issue campaigns.

3. Timing and Flexibility

Campaigns are conducted in a changing environment which requires flexibility and attention, especially with respect to message development. Respondents frequently spoke of the need to change messaging strategies after finding that a particular message no longer resonated with key audiences. For example, when the Seattle Yes! For Homes campaign discovered through polling that in 2002 homelessness had become

less important to voters, the campaign then re-focused its messaging on the interest of building cohesive, diverse communities.

C. The Role of Race

During the interview process, respondents were also asked specific questions about the role of race in the campaign. In particular, they were asked about 1) the extent to which communities of color were involved in the campaign and 2) whether each campaign had considered racial issues when developing messages. Following is a summary of the responses given by interviewees. However, it is important to keep in mind that the interviews were based on only a small sample of primarily white campaign participants.

- Most campaigns are aware of racial issues but have not figured out a way to explicitly address racial issues in their campaigns.
- Race was frequently addressed indirectly through the use of diverse images in campaign materials to dispel stereotypes about affordable housing.
- Many of those interviewed stated that race did not come up as a significant issue in their campaign.
- Many respondents expressed a desire to be more effective in bringing communities of color into the campaign process.

One campaign, Rochester First Homes, was proactive and effective in addressing race in the campaign.

Leadership of the campaign was the classic white male business establishment. Race came up often and was explicitly addressed in the public messages. Rochester was becoming more diverse. The message from community leaders was that diversity and change is good. Business leaders speaking up about diversity made resistance unsavory. – Warren Hanson, Greater Minnesota Housing Fund

By and large, affordable housing campaign leaders appeared to avoid race as an issue, out of concern that it would lead to polarization in their campaigns. At the same time, they did not feel that they had satisfactorily recruited organizations and people promoting the interests of communities of color as key campaign partners.

D. Interview Analysis Conclusion

Overall, the interviews conducted for this research are useful for gaining a better understanding of the approaches taken by housing campaigns around the country. Comparing and contrasting these approaches provides insight into the available range of options for garnering participation and developing messaging. Housing advocates may choose to address housing through a single-issue campaign, or may join forces with other interests in a multi-issue campaign. A decision to include more than one issue does create the promise of wider participation from different sectors, but also creates a set of challenges, such as finding ways to keep a coalition intact. Messaging tends to be approached differently also, depending on the type of campaign selected. While the interview data is useful, reviewing other existing literature on polling and messaging serves as a useful supplement to this research. This literature review is presented in the next portion of the study.

V. ASSESSMENT OF POLLING AND MESSAGING STUDIES

This section reviews the polling and messaging research on affordable housing. Such research can be extremely useful to campaigns faced with the task of convincing both the public and elected officials to support policy changes. The analysis in this section uses the recent work of Jeff Lubell, Center on Housing Policy, based in Washington D.C., as a starting point. The findings from the studies included in Lubell's research provide important information about polling and messaging for affordable housing, including the leanings of government officials. This work is supplemented by a review of a handful of additional studies not included in Lubell's research. These additional sources include 1) a report from a 2004 affordable housing messaging symposium that emphasizes evoking positive images of affordable housing and dispelling negative ones 2) a Twin Cities-specific survey and 3) focus group analysis by Himle Horner, both of which provide a perspective local to Minnesota and 4) a brief look at the recent work of Housing California in light of the changing market and attitudes that accompany the foreclosure crisis.

A. Lubell's work

In "Literature Review of Communications-Related Affordable Housing Research," an unpublished 2008 paper shared with MHP, Lubell reviewed 13 studies related to affordable housing communications. Lubell divided his analysis into two parts. First, he analyzed six public opinion studies that explored how respondents view affordable housing and the people who live in it. Next he reviewed seven research reports about language and messaging with an emphasis on public reaction to housing-specific terms and ideas.

Lubell drew seven conclusions from his review, which are listed below:

Public Opinion Findings:

1. Although most Americans recognize that there is a housing affordability problem and express some level of concern about it, housing cost issues tend to have the most traction in high-cost areas and among respondents who work in the housing industry.
2. Concern about housing affordability appears to be passive and does not necessarily translate to support for specific local housing policies and initiatives, although the reasons for this disconnect are unclear.
3. Survey respondents tend to be more comfortable with solutions related to homeownership.

Language and Messaging Recommendations:

4. Tailoring the message to describe a specific population likely to have problems with high housing costs helps respondents to recognize that there may be a housing affordability problem in their area.
5. The messages most likely to build support for affordable homes describe program beneficiaries with terms that affirm that they deserve assistance, such as "working families." At the same time, respondents expressed a preference for "inclusive" policies that cover a broad range of incomes.

6. Successful campaigns emphasize the community-wide benefits of affordable housing while providing reassurance that negative community outcomes will be avoided.
7. Use of a consumer-oriented framework that leads with an appeal to market-based values can help to broaden the constituency for affordable homes.

B. Survey of Government Officials

One of the reports included in Lubell's assessment is a 2006 survey of state and local government leaders sponsored by Homes for Working Families. Surveys of government leaders are typically more instructive to advocacy strategies focused on legislation, as opposed to those leading to ballot initiatives. This report shows that government leaders in high-cost areas were much more sensitive to the housing issue than those in low-cost areas (73% of high-cost leaders vs. 25% of low-cost leaders view housing to be "a very big problem"). Low-cost area officials were also more willing to endorse programs for households with annual incomes less than \$50,000; the survey author believed that specifying incomes of up to \$50,000 lessened support of officials in the high-cost areas, where higher-income families were also burdened with housing costs.

In other respects, high and low-cost area elected officials did not differ as much. They agreed that the most motivating messages emphasized the quality and maintenance of affordable homes and that such housing would attract families that make their community "safe and strong."

While most elected officials agree that more money is the most important requirement for increasing the availability of affordable homes in their area (50% of leaders identified this as a need), another significant need is information about best practices and successes (26% identified this need). In addition, when asked about the data of greatest interest to elected officials, many felt that information showing that affordable housing would not hurt nearby property values was of most interest (40% response).

While government officials stated that it was difficult to build consensus around housing policy issues, they identified five housing needs for which consensus building is most possible:

- Meeting the need for more homes for working families
- Building upon the importance of homeownership as part of any housing policy
- Utilizing mixed-income development as a component of urban renewal
- Providing more affordable homes for seniors
- Providing housing assistance to public servants, such as teachers and firefighters²

C. Simplified, Organized Images

There have been a number of forums on the subject of how to present information about affordable housing in the most compelling manner. One of the best of these, "Changing Minds, Building Communities," a 2004 symposium in Minneapolis hosted by NeighborWorks and the Campaign for Affordable Housing, generated a variety of strategies for persuasive presentation of affordable housing. Presentations at the

² "State and Local Leaders' Views of Home Affordability," Public Opinion Strategies, 2006. The last area listed, assisting public servants, tends to evoke more sympathy from government officials than the public at large based on studies by Belden et. al. and Hart.

symposium included analyses of the lessons learned from communications efforts by a variety of affordable housing initiatives, ranging from information campaigns to zoning change battles. These lessons were best summarized by a statement by Peter Hart and Associates polling firm:

As people think about affordable housing, they are often so overwhelmed by the complexity of the issue that they are unable to make sense of it, which inhibits their ability to commit. A key challenge... is to help organize people's thinking, and this means telling a clear story that evokes positive images and outcomes while addressing fundamental questions and concerns.

The positive images to be evoked should speak of high quality, appropriately scaled affordable housing. Other positive images can be those of new homebuyers using sweat equity to build their future homes, of children achieving stability in their lives through stable housing, or of people providing key services to their community (e.g. nurses' aides).

The public's typical questions and concerns about affordable housing also need to be addressed. Such concerns include the density of the housing, the quality of property management, any impact on neighboring property values and crime, and the track record of the developer.

In general, the housing issue being communicated needs to be conveyed as a solvable problem. This truism, however, is much more important for action efforts (e.g. passing legislation, or changing zoning) than campaigns oriented solely at building public sympathy.

Several pollsters have commented on the effective use of the term "affordable housing." The work of Belden et. al., which is included in Lubell's research, finds that the term is useful, but that without direction, people's individual pre-conceived perceptions, many negative, will surface when they hear this term. With an unfamiliar audience, "affordable housing" and alternative expressions, such as "workforce housing," should be defined in a positive way (e.g. well-built) by the communicator. Similarly, the conclusion of the Changing Minds symposium is that these terms should be used in conjunction with images or additional information to clarify what is meant.

In general, however, it is important to avoid jargon. Therefore, where it is not overly cumbersome, more descriptive expressions such as "homes affordable to families earning \$50,000 per year," should replace simple phrases like "affordable housing."

D. Twin Cities Survey

The best Minnesota-specific public opinion data addressing housing is the Metro Residents Survey, completed annually by the Metropolitan Council. This survey gauges metropolitan resident attitudes concerning the Council itself, the quality of life in the Twin Cities, and issues facing the region.

The 2007 survey, conducted in the fourth quarter of this past year, showed transportation and crime as the issues of most concern, by far, to residents of the region. With the 2007 survey, housing ranked immediately behind the economy and taxes, with 11% of respondents placing it in the top three. Housing, as an issue of metropolitan concern,

peaked in the 2001 survey when 31% of respondents placed it among the top three problems facing the region.

**Top Three Problems Facing the Region,
Metropolitan Residents Survey, 2007**

Issue	Percent
1. Transportation	65%
2. Crime	54%
3. Social Issues	19%
4. Growth	19%
5. Education	16%
6. Taxes	12%
7. Economy	12%
8. Housing	11%
9. Government	8%
10. Environment	8%
11. Health Care	4%
12. Energy	1%

The Metropolitan Council survey also breaks out the importance of issues by type of community. For 2007, 17% of Minneapolis and St. Paul respondents placed housing as a top-three concern. Respondents in other communities were less concerned about housing. Housing was deemed a top three concern by 8% of respondents in developing suburbs, 10% in developing communities, and 10% in rural areas.

E. Minnesota Focus Groups

In 2003 for the HousingMinnesota campaign, the Twin Cities-based public relations firm Himle Horner carried out a series of six focus groups, two each in the Twin Cities, Rochester, and St. Cloud. The purpose of this research was to assess the attitudes of Minnesotans toward affordable housing during a period of deficit budgets and a tight economy.

Many of the same findings reported by Lubell held true for the Minnesotan focus group participants, according to the Himle Horner report. Minnesotans saw housing need in general as a mid-level concern, but showed more interest in housing when discussions focused on very local issues or problems that their family members faced. Local faith groups were seen as the most credible housing advocates. Himle Horner also reported that when businesses got engaged in housing, community members would come to see the issue as a “serious” concern. Government-led solutions were not well received, especially because taxes were deemed high already, and there was some distrust of government use of funds.

Perhaps more so than reported in national surveys, Minnesotans see housing primarily as an individual responsibility, which should not be an entitlement based on notions of “want”. Expectations in terms of housing quality among those described as needing help with housing costs were sometimes considered too high by focus group participants. In response, Himle Horner recommended focusing advocacy efforts on recruiting people trusted by decision makers who already support housing advocacy, rather than trying to persuade the public at large. They also recommended focusing the messaging on the benefit to the community at large and making the housing problem appear manageable.

F. Post-Foreclosure Crisis Attitudes

There is less information available about housing attitudes since the arrival of the mortgage foreclosure crisis starting in 2007, which has ostensibly changed the landscape of opinion about housing. One organization, the advocacy nonprofit Housing California, has made available to MHP reports assessing prospective support for a legislative housing initiative. Housing California hired consultants to conduct polls and host focus groups as part of a campaign to secure a funding source for the statewide housing trust fund. This work provides a useful perspective on messaging during a period in which housing issues have received a great deal of public attention.

A March, 2008 poll of voters conducted by Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin & Associates found that in California:

- Respondents are most convinced by messages linking housing to the stability and success of children.
- Other convincing messages include the role of government in protecting the most vulnerable people, and the importance of increasing housing opportunities for reducing traffic congestion or avoiding the doubling up of families.
- A detailed analysis of the poll also suggests that the most convincing messages across all voters also held the most sway over "swing voters" on housing issues.
- Less convincing were messages describing the leverage of public investment in housing and housing as a means to stimulate the economy.
- While the messages that move voters the most focus on vulnerable populations, the consultant recommends that the housing issue be framed 1) as an issue that affects people of all income levels and 2) as a mechanism to stabilize the state's housing market.
- They caution, however, against using messages that appeal exclusively to voter self-interest or that emphasize particular funding mechanisms. Finally, they advise against using arguments about the economic benefits of housing investments without providing supporting details.

The Minnesota firm Action Media also advised Housing California on messaging based on a series of focus groups that the firm hosted across California. From its research, Action Media identified the key values that should be supported by housing messaging as: *choice, economic freedom, balance & stability, prosperity, children & family, and opportunity*.³ In the Action Media model for change, these values should be expressed through campaign messages that respond to the dysfunctional housing market by encouraging greater housing variety and increasing the supply of affordable homes.

Action Media advises that because nearly every Californian has been impacted by lack of housing choice and the state's poor economy, messages need to be inclusive. They suggest that messages that will help state residents make the housing-economy connection should use specific examples to show that increasing the supply of affordable homes can stimulate the economy. Action Media suggests that California housing advocates develop a campaign that emphasizes stabilizing the housing market

³ While these are the values identified by Action Media, it should be noted that in Lubell's paper Belden et. al., identify *fairness, opportunity, community self-interest, and responsibility to others* as the values most closely related to housing. Peter Hart and Associates found *fairness, "Family Do Well," the "American Dream" and "Everyone Deserves a Chance"* to be the values most connected to housing.

and increasing the number of homes that are affordable as part of the solution to current economic problems facing the state.

This California-specific information is valuable for its timeliness after the onset of the foreclosure crisis and the parallel to Minnesota with respect to an economic downturn and a state budget deficit. However, further analysis should be undertaken to assess the extent to which the conclusions can be generalized to Minnesota with its very different housing market and population demographics. For example, the recommendation that the role of government in meeting the housing needs of vulnerable populations should be emphasized may not apply well in Minnesota, given the Himle Horner findings about distrust of government. California results should therefore be interpreted with caution.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were developed on the basis of the interviews of campaigns across the country, review of various studies on public attitude about affordable housing, and the national and local experience of MHP with affordable housing campaigns.

The likelihood of success of any initiative to increase public will for affordable housing depends on progress made in each of the four areas of the recommendations. These four areas are: understanding changing public attitudes in the state; enlisting the support of business; supporting and learning from local advocacy; and fostering public awareness of the value of affordable housing.

A. Understand Minnesota Attitudes on Housing through Polls and Surveys

To keep abreast of the public's attitude towards affordable housing in Minnesota, the following recommendations should be considered:

- Use the Metropolitan Council residents' survey to track the public pulse on the housing issue in the seven-county metropolitan area. Conducted annually, the major value of the Council's survey is its ability to assess the public's perception of housing as a priority issue against other social concerns. Another benefit is the availability of historic data to draw upon, since this survey has reported on the top three social concerns of the public since 1986.
- Conduct a similar/companion poll to obtain the same type of information statewide. Support a poll of Greater Minnesota residents on the question of top three concerns. This would be an important addition, as experience has shown that messages appropriate to the metropolitan area do not always translate well to Greater Minnesota and vice versa.
- To better understand the public connection between housing and quality of life, survey elected leaders on this connection through their trade association, or survey the public through pre-existing polling. The Minnesota League of Cities would likely help with surveys of elected officials, and the Twin Cities Compass survey could be a vehicle for at least metro attitudes on housing as a quality of life issue.

Polling Approach

The California Housing Issues Survey provides a good model for a polling approach that gets at public understanding of housing in connection with quality of life and other community priorities. This survey employs a technique to enable the pollster to determine which messages are of most value in moving voters towards support of affordable housing. The consultants to Housing California constructed the poll in a manner that enables them to determine the level of movement in support of affordable housing investment gained between the start and conclusion of an interview. They learned which categories of people (by political persuasion, age, gender, etc.) change their position on the housing investment issue, and the messages that were most effective with the position changers.

B. Enlist the Support of Business

Probably the most important advocate to be cultivated for affordable housing is the business community. In both Minnesota and nationally, the business community is considered to be very influential with elected officials and the public when it comes to affordable housing. It is therefore important that the direct interest of the business community be clearly identified, and that supportive voices of this community on housing issues be amplified. Strategies for gaining the involvement of the business community should be considered.

Two approaches to help businesses understand their self interest in affordable housing are:

- Survey existing affordable housing residents to identify the companies for whom the residents work. Compile this information in a manner that demonstrates to leading businesses that they already directly benefit from investments in affordable housing.
- Request HR directors to survey lower paid employees within their organizations to ascertain the level of housing burden faced by the employees. Such surveys can show businesses that they have a significant stake in creating and preserving affordable housing.

Prominent businesses and business leaders to help promote housing initiatives among their colleagues should be identified. Certainly the Itasca Project will be a vehicle for accomplishing this goal. Blue Cross Blue Shield is an example of a likely ally, as this organization has identified stable affordable housing as one of five primary determinants of health. Blue Cross Blue Shield is the type of company that might be willing to conduct an in-house survey to assess the housing conditions of employees.

C. Support and Learn from Minnesota's Local and State Housing Campaigns

In its study of creating a greater impetus for affordable housing, Fannie Mae Foundation suggests creating cycles of advocacy which can be replicated in numerous localities. As these cycles gain momentum, they can build toward more significant state and national policy changes. The cycles start with *research* to make the case for viable housing policy change; then *advocate for policy change*; and then *educate the public on the issue and the policy success*. This role of local housing advocacy should be noted, and the following approaches considered:

- Conduct annual surveys of housing campaigns and zoning efforts: Consider conducting annual housing advocacy assessments building off the questions MHP utilized in this research to track housing campaigns and zoning efforts occurring in Minnesota.
- Support local housing advocacy: In addition to funding, data and communications resources are quite helpful to advocates. Local advocates benefit by access to materials that build upon housing messaging research in Minnesota and elsewhere. Both preparation and dissemination of such materials can be useful. Support the Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity's work to encourage its immense constituency to engage in housing advocacy, particularly in suburban communities. In national polls and the Minnesota survey, Habitat is the most trusted and recognized housing organization, and is also well-connected to both small and large businesses.
- Support state advocacy: In terms of impact on communities and peoples' lives, success at the state legislature is paramount. Advocacy at the state capitol should be robust, and should be fueled by local advocacy. Recruit influential business and other community leaders to play a role in state policy advocacy.
- Recognize policy leaders: Provide public recognition to elected officials who sponsor significant housing legislation. Affordable housing is viewed as an issue of high political risk and little reward. Officials that do take that risk need and deserve support.

The emphasis here on state and local advocacy is not meant to diminish the importance of national housing advocacy. The work of NAHRO, Minnesota Housing and the MnFHAC partners (Coalition for the Homeless, HOME Line, MCCD, HPP, Minnesota Tenants Alliance and MHP), all work in concert with the National Low Income Housing Coalition and other national housing advocates to encourage Minnesota's Congressional delegation to understand the importance of a strong federal housing role and ample funding of federal housing programs. The level of federal resources that now exist and is needed for housing in Minnesota far exceeds the level of resources available from public and private sources in Minnesota.

D. Foster Public Awareness of the Value of Affordable Housing

The research findings in this report lead to the following list of conclusions for affordable housing campaigns in general:

- Housing is currently not a top tier concern for most people, but it is possible to advocate effectively for housing. Therefore, it is important to link housing to the top concerns of the public, and to articulate viable, understandable solutions.
- Be inclusive in identifying the benefit of addressing housing needs for the entire state rather than solely for a specific group (such as poor people). However, campaigns must specifically identify the beneficiaries for any individual policy proposal.
- Use positive, inspiring stories, appealing to the values of the audience. Stories should be brought to the audience in creative ways.
- Care should be taken to demonstrate a united community effort, even though faith community, business involvement, and governments may have different motivations.

- Usage of terms like “affordable housing,” “workforce housing,” and “life-cycle housing” requires special attention. When such terms are used for an unfamiliar audience, appropriate context, positive images, or additional information must accompany the terms to clarify what is meant. Where not overly cumbersome, more complete expressions such as “homes affordable to people earning \$30,000 per year” should be used.

Naturally, messages that are compelling change over time, and it is important to monitor changes in public opinion. For national attitudinal research related to housing look to the Center on Housing Policy. The center is positioning itself to take up the work of the Campaign for Affordable Housing, the compiler of housing communications efforts and publisher of “What we Know About Public Attitudes on Affordable Housing.”

To create a receptive political climate for local and state housing advocacy in Minnesota the following should be considered:

- The most effective mechanism for getting messages to the public is through the media. Invest in media work: one way do this is to support the work of a talented media professional who would consult with housing agencies statewide on promoting affordable housing. Consider additional strategies to draw media attention to the issue of housing.
- The term “affordable housing” could be a fundamental building block for a housing communications effort. “Minnesota Affordable Housing” could be developed as the brand name for what is good about the affordable housing created here, and to differentiate that housing from the undercapitalized, poorly managed housing occupied by many low income people. The image of such housing serves as a barrier to creating public support for new housing investment. The affordable housing produced through the programs of Minnesota Housing is well capitalized, appropriately regulated, and increasingly green. *The first step would be to consult with public relations specialists to learn more about the cost and value of branding the state’s quality affordable housing product.*
- Link a public will initiative with upcoming affordable housing events and activities in order to bring positive, housing messages to various constituencies. To maximize the linkage between a public will initiative and local activities there should be shared planning and continuing information-exchange. Below are examples of events or activities that should be linked to a public will initiative.
 - Twin Cities LISC has engaged Action Media to advise CDCs on messaging related to community development and housing. LISC will tie this effort into the planned community development expo scheduled for the end of this calendar year.
 - For 2010 MHP will organize the third of the large-scale “Homes for All” conferences, which draw diverse groups interested in housing.
 - ULI and advocacy organizations such as MICAH are engaged in various activities to connect with local community leaders and help them foster public acceptance of affordable housing in metro communities.

VII. CONCLUSION

By drawing from the experiences and analysis described in this report, Minnesota can benefit from decades of trial and error in housing advocacy. By incorporating the lessons learned from these experiences into public will initiatives, advocates can be even more effective in helping Minnesotans create a united effort to ensure that all Minnesotans can attain affordable homes.

The Pew Research Center released its poll of American values last year, a poll completed every three to five years. This most recent poll revealed broad concern about social inequity in the country. It also revealed a significant increase in the number of Americans who hold the government responsible for guaranteeing that every citizen has enough to eat and a place to sleep. Now, 69% of the public is in agreement with this idea, a level that has not been equaled since 1991. A public will initiative at this time would be well situated to build on growing concern for the plight of poor people, and the increased public support for the role of government in meeting housing needs.

The current foreclosure crisis has also led many Americans to believe that the current housing market has failed. This situation creates an opportunity for those who care about affordable housing to make the case that housing is more than a tool for speculation, or that home equity is more than a personal ATM. With help, people can be motivated to call upon their governments and other public and private institutions to help housing markets recover for the benefit of the entire community. Again, the time seems ripe for bringing a public will initiative to fruition.

Through a public will initiative, it will be possible to strengthen communities and improve the health and economic and educational opportunities for lower income Minnesotans. A strong effort in Minnesota will be watched nationally, and the entire country stands to gain from such an undertaking.