Finding the Right Message: A Critical Analysis of Affordable Housing Communication Techniques as a Planning Tool

Jennifer Klein

A capstone thesis paper submitted to the Executive Director of the Urban & Regional Planning Program at Georgetown University’s School of Continuing Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Masters of Professional Studies in Urban & Regional Planning.

Faculty Advisor: Jamie Kralovec
Academic Advisor: Uwe S. Brandes

IRB: 2016-1320

© Copyright 2016 by Jennifer Klein

All Rights Reserved
ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to move the practice of affordable housing messaging into a tool that can used by advocates when embarking on a legislative strategy. The idea of whether someone is “worthy” or “unworthy” of affordable housing is a long-entrenched notion in American morals. Over the course of this thesis, five interviews concluded that combating these ideals, through messaging, is much more powerful through legislative strategies than a national messaging campaign. Furthermore, two case studies concluded that the key components of a messaging strategy for affordable housing are a consistent message, to have a message start with a value and end with a solution, and to have the message be catered towards the specific audience. Additionally, messaging campaigns will also require a champion. Through these components political will is created, and in turn, implements the proposal supported by the messaging.

KEYWORDS

Affordable Housing, Public Opinion, NIMBY, Messaging, Veterans, IZ, Inclusionary Zoning

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1) What are different messaging tactics used by policymakers to influence public opinion?
2) How does American public opinion on affordable housing influence/affect the messaging strategies of affordable housing advocates?
3) How do policy advocates for affordable housing design messaging campaigns to increase the amount of affordable housing in the United States?
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract, Keywords and Research Questions .......................................................... 1
Table of Contents ........................................................................................................ 2
Definitions .................................................................................................................. 3
Introduction ................................................................................................................ 3-4
Literature Review ....................................................................................................... 4-10
Research Methodology ............................................................................................. 10-12
Results & Analysis: Interviews .................................................................................. 12-15
Case Study Analysis 1: The Mayors Challenge to End Veterans Homelessness ...... 16-27
Case Study Analysis 2: Washington, D.C’s IZ Program ........................................ 28-35
Recommendations for Affordable Housing Messaging ............................................... 35-39
Brief Summary of Findings Based on Research Questions ...................................... 40
Areas for Further Research ....................................................................................... 40
Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 41
Appendix ..................................................................................................................... 42-62
Bibliography .............................................................................................................. 63-66
II. INTRODUCTION

DEFINITIONS

- Messaging: a targeted communication strategy meant to influence a certain audience.
- Audience: This thesis is primarily interested in the opinions of policymakers. However, when discussing how public opinion is shaped, particularly in the literature review, these are broad statistics that encompass all Americans, including policymakers.
- Affordable housing: Generally, government subsidized housing.

Interest in this research study came about from my long-standing professional and educational work in housing affordability. My curiosity in this topic is generally related in how to expand the amount of affordable housing in the United States, particularly housing for the low to very low income. Originally, I hoped to write this thesis on how to sway the opinion of those who are opposed to affordable housing to become friendlier to the idea through effective messaging. This previous summer, I began the initial research into my topic. I conducted four interviews with leaders in the field, and my overall takeaway from the project was that messaging should be linked to legislative campaigns if the goal is to create more affordable housing and/or reach people who are currently opposed to affordable housing. This is because people who are opposed to affordable housing will not be attuned to national housing campaigns if they are opposed to them, as they likely already have strong opinions about affordable housing.

This thesis will further develop that research through examining two case studies of legislative affordable housing strategies, one of one which failed, the other which
succeeded, to see how affordable housing thought leaders can best set up a messaging strategy and which tactics should be avoided.

It should be noted when reviewing this thesis that I currently work at the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, which is featured prominently in the first case study.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review explores twelve different pieces of literature, from books, journal review articles, studies from non-profits, and online articles. The literature review has been divided into three different sections, one for each of the research questions of this thesis.

1) What are different messaging tactics used by policymakers to influence public opinion?

This is a multi-million-dollar question. Students go to school to determine the answer to this question, government agencies hire consultants, and it is a finicky art- more theoretical than a tried a true science.

Dr. Frank Luntz, a famous Republican pollster, recommends eleven rules for effective messaging in his *New York Times* best-selling novel *Words That Work*:

1. Use small words;
2. Use short sentences;
3. Credibility is as important as philosophy;
4. Consistency matters;
5. Novelty: offer something new;
6. Sound and texture matter;
7. Speak aspirationally;
8. Visualize;
9. Ask a question;
10. Provide context and explain relevance;

In this thesis, consistency matters; speak aspirationally; and provide context and explain relevance were found to be the most important messaging tools.

To see these messaging tactics in action, one can look at how nonprofit FrameWorks “reframes” an issue:

FrameWorks helps to spread “new” messages to people, such as changing people’s perceptions of human services.

2) How does American public opinion on affordable housing influence/affect the messaging strategies of affordable housing advocates?

It is critical to understand the connection between public opinion and affordable housing, as this helps to focus the messages created. A wide variety of studies have been

---

conducted on the topic, and several generalizations can be made regarding public perceptions and opinions on affordable housing.

For one, most Americans agree that housing is not affordable for most citizens, and they are in support of affordable housing being created in general. This has been verified in a survey conducted in June 2016. However, these opinions often will quickly change when the terms in a study start becoming more specific, or when the affordable housing would be built in a survey respondent’s community. For example, according to surveys conducted in 2013 by the ReThink initiative, 63% of those surveyed did not support public housing in their neighborhoods and 52% did not want to live near a public housing unit. This difference in people’s behavior versus their initial survey responses may be that people may answer initial surveys in the way that they find to be socially acceptable, or that “when faced with the proposition of living near affordable housing, community needs and egalitarian values are trumped by the negative perceptions respondents have about the people who may reside in such housing.”

Indeed, much of the opposition to affordable housing rests in citizens’ perceptions of the people who will be moving into the housing more so than the housing itself. For the most part, it seems as though these citizens, in their minds, are concerned about their communities and feel as though the people who would move into affordable housing

---

would negatively impact those communities.\textsuperscript{5} However, “widespread speculation exists in the field that NIMBY concerns regarding property values, crime, and school crowding are simply publically professed concerns that serve to disguise privately held prejudice.”\textsuperscript{6} Furthermore, once people are moved into their affordable units, members of the communities infrequently have complaints about them, and in fact, are largely positive about their new neighbors.\textsuperscript{7} This is not particularly useful for planning purposes, however, because planners will be going into communities BEFORE affordable housing will be going into the communities, not afterwards, so it is much more likely that these planners will be witnessing staunch opposition from current residents.

People that are opposed to affordable housing may perceive those that are moving into affordable housing to be taking advantage of the system. Much of this stems from ingrained stereotyping against the poor and against minorities, and discerning between who is deemed to be “worthy” of government benefits and who is not. For example, Anne Schneider and Helen Ingram explain that “[t]he personal messages for the positively viewed, powerful segments of society are that they are good, intelligent people. When they receive benefits from government, it is not a special favor or because of their need but because they are contributing to public welfare.”\textsuperscript{8} This idea of the “unworthy” or “undeserving” poor is one of the most important concepts to be understood regarding public opinion of affordable housing, and its evolution can be found as early as New England Puritan settlements. The “worthy” poor were those whose poverty was not their

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{6} J. Rosie Tighe “Public Opinion and Affordable Housing: A Review of the Literature, page 10.
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid.
\end{footnotesize}
own fault, such as the disabled and orphans, and the “unworthy” poor were those such as drunks and addicts. Only the worthy poor received help from the community. However, Jenna Lee Tighe explains that

[even at this early point in the nation’s history, non-White residents and immigrants were lumped in with the unworthy poor, regardless of their background, potential for community contribution, or personal character (Vale 2000). Therefore, while discriminating between the worthy and unworthy poor reflected American society’s firm belief in self-reliance, independence and hard work, it also firmly placed minorities in the “unworthy” category regardless of their work ethic or capacity for self-sufficiency (Marcuse 1978; Vale 2000).]

Thus, the classification of one’s worthiness for assistance has been linked to race and immigration status since our early history.

3) **How do policy advocates for affordable housing design messaging campaigns to increase the amount of affordable housing in the United States?**

Most authors agree that it is important to focus more on the positive outcomes that can be generated from affordable housing being built than on the housing itself, and in fact, if possible, to avoid all language that makes people think about affordable housing.

For instance, a randomized study was conducted in an affluent, mostly white suburb outside of Minneapolis in 2002. Half of residents were chosen at random to receive a form of question using the term “affordable housing” and the other half was given the term “lifecycle housing.” The wording made a significant difference. White, non-Hispanic residents favored lifecycle housing by 21.4% but had rejected affordable housing at 9.2%.

---

J. Rosie Tighe “Public Opinion and Affordable Housing: A Review of the Literature.”
Certain messages have been proven to work with Americans regarding affordable housing, usually with a broad message such as “Every Person Deserves A Safe Place to Call Home.” These messages, and others like it, have a universal value. According to the National Housing Council, who created a Messaging and Framing Toolkit with Neighborhood Partnerships and the Housing Alliance, “using values statements is a tool we use to help people answer the question, why does this matter to me? When we use values in communicating about our work, we help tell a story about why our issue matters to people.”

Research also shows that sometimes, advocates of affordable housing would do best to not overwhelm the opposition with crises stories about those who is most in need of affordable housing, as this only serves to overwhelm them and feel as though the problem is unsolvable. In this case, the message should be more aspirational and solution oriented, rather than focused on problems.

Some messages will need to be catered for the audience. For example, earlier messaging strategies in the homeless community - and some still through programs such as Habitat for Humanity - focused on stories of “sweat equity”- stories where a formerly drug addicted homeless man was able to overcome his issues through hard work, perseverance and faith. More recently, however, homeless advocates have been pursuing messaging on Housing First, which is a move in the opposite direction of the “sweat equity” proponents. Housing First is a proven model where people who are experiencing

---

12 Ibid.
homelessness are provided permanent housing with no barrier to entry. It is proven to significantly reduce usage of services and institutions, and improve health and social outcomes. One of the most important messaging techniques of Housing First, and other affordable housing strategies, is that it is in the collective benefit of the community to put it in place.\textsuperscript{14} For instance, it may be cheaper overall for the community to input the strategy or to put the affordable housing in the area, it may create a more inclusive community, it may create more jobs, etc. However, advocates for Habitat believe that sweat equity builds character and shows that a person truly wants a home, which is a different value for their organization.

IV. METHODOLOGY

A. INTERVIEWS

Interviews with several leading figures in the field of affordable housing were interviewed in order to gain knowledge on the topic. The following people were interviewed:

- Barbara Poppe, Executive Director- Barbara Poppe & Associates
- Shelia Crowley, former Executive Director- National Low Income Housing Coalition
- Nan Roman, President and CEO- National Alliance to End Homelessness
- Mary Rouleau, Executive Director- The Alliance for Housing Solutions
- Paul Brophy, Principal - Brophy & Reilly LLC

The following questions were posed to interviewees:

1.) How, and why, has affordable housing been messaged in the past? How is currently being messaged?

2.) Should housing advocates be more focused on overcoming NIMBYism or on building sympathy? Or can they do both?

3.) How relevant do you think that messaging is to the success and future of expanding affordable housing? If not, what would you suggest is important?

4.) How are messaging and policy related?

5.) Does a successful housing messaging strategy need to have a national message?

6.) What do you think has been the most successful affordable housing messaging campaign, and why? How can that be redone?

7.) Who are the different actors involved in messaging campaigns? How do they all play a role in altering perceptions?

It should also be noted that often the interviews did not follow a standard question and answer format, and often the conversations led to other conversations. For my actual methodology, I then reviewed the interviews to find commonalities in the answers to my questions. Several of these interviews have been transcribed and are available in their full form in the appendix of this thesis.

**B. CASE STUDIES**

Two case studies were conducted, The Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness and Washington, D.C.’s Inclusionary Zoning Program. The exact methodology for each case study differed, but involved mostly secondary research and some primary research. There is a chart of how the messaging flowed in each case study, whether it was a success or not. The Mayors Challenge is an example of a
successful messaging campaign, and the IZ program is a failed example.

In the Mayor’s Challenge case study, there is also a GIS generated map.

V. RESULTS & ANALYSIS: INTERVIEWS

- The affordable housing field has had many different messages throughout its history, and still does today, with few successful messages.
  - Shelia Crowley: “This is a topic that a lot of people spend a lot of time thinking and worrying about and about which there is certainly no consensus on what the right message is. In the affordable housing world, there is a cacophony of messages as opposed to “A” message.”
  - Nan Roman: “I think there have been many efforts to use different messaging or to recast affordable housing in a light that is more pleasing, or acceptable or relevant to people. There has been messaging about the impact of housing on equity and diversity; about workers and workforce housing; and about neighborhood revitalization, community development, community renewal and place-based strategies. There have been messages around the housing needs of different populations, and progress in areas where legal rights to housing were established, such as fair housing and housing for people with disabilities. But I think it has been really difficult, through all of these approaches. I am not sure anything has been really successful in changing the way people see affordable housing. Often people who oppose affordable housing see it as something that is going to affect their property values.”

- There is a dichotomy between Americans and their views on affordable housing, and it is a clash that seems to be widening more and more.
  - Barb Poppe: “For some people, the moral issue is that everyone deserves the right to the housing, and they think it would be immoral that we would have people in the United States that wouldn’t have a place to stay and that’s their moral issue. There’s other people where the moral issue is that people should pay their own way, pick themselves up by the boot straps, government should do nothing for them, and for them, pull yourself up by the boot straps is a valid moral argument. And so in America part of our challenge is the argument between the two viewpoints and we’re increasingly polarized.”

- Affordable housing messaging has many different kinds of messengers.
  - Shelia Crowley: “[T]he world of people who attempt to influence policy around housing is quite diverse. It includes the mortgage industry, and the home building industry, and the real estate industry, and a lot of for-profit multifamily developers, as well as the whole non-profit world, the whole world of public housing authorities, and the owners of section 8
properties, and it includes advocates and people who provide assistance to the homeless. So it is a wide array of viewpoints."

- Nan Roman: “The building industry, housing finance industry, tenant groups, neighborhood groups, planners, business industry, realtors, and home builders are important actors. Sometimes other groups – like education or health care groups -- get involved because they realize that housing is a necessary platform for them to achieve their goals.”

- Many messages in support of affordable housing have argued that it is good for the community.
  - Barb Poppe: “Sometimes (affordable housing has) been messaged as part of –kind of like, it’s a platform for success and improvement for the community. You look at some of the messages that Enterprise Community Partners did, it was housing was a tool for community development and community improvement and a way for people to improve their lives.”
  - Barb Poppe: “I think the most recent iteration of messaging has been about housing helps achieve other outcomes. So, housing is a vaccine that helps protect children from poor health outcomes, or housing is a way that we can improve educational outcomes. If you look at the National Housing Conference, they’re doing a lot of messaging around housing as a platform to achieve greater, or other broad goals, whereas earlier messages was that it was a tool to revitalize neighborhoods.”
  - Paul Brophy: “If you assume that most Americans find low income housing to be unappealing, than the strategies tend to be more about the people that need to housed like veterans. It may be more about kids, it may be more about bad health outcomes. The housing becomes not the front and center issue. So if you want better housing for people- housing becomes more of the means, not the ends.”

- Whether a national messaging strategy or local messaging is used depends on what is trying to be accomplished.
  - Barb Poppe: “(You should use a national message) [i]f that’s what your purpose is. If your purpose is that you want to get your project started, that’s what your purpose is. I think if you look at Make Room, it’s a national campaign, that has messages- it uses some economic messages. You can also make a business case and that resonates with some people.”
  - Shelia Crowley: “I think (which messaging strategy is used) depends a lot on what you’re trying to accomplish. If you are simply trying to do a public education campaign, then a national message is good…If you are trying to get something done through a local government, then a national message is less effective than figuring out what the local message should be.”

- The most successful messaging “campaigns” in recent history are the National Housing Trust Fund, implementation of the Low Income Housing
Tax Credit, and recent efforts in Seattle of a housing levy. The notion of homeownership was also mentioned.

*The Seattle Housing Levy is a 35-year-old voter approved initiative to produce and preserve affordable housing in the city. It costs $122/year on average for resident, and has funded 12,500 affordable homes.*

*The Low Income Housing Tax Credit works by offering a dollar-for dollar federal tax credit to an investor in the development of a low-income housing property.*

*The National Housing Trust Fund is a fund committed to produce and preserve housing for very low-income people.*

- Shelia Crowley: “Well, I’m biased, but I think our campaign to get the National Housing Trust Fund passed was quite successful.”
- Barb Poppe: “We did get the HOME program… There was also the campaign to get the Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program started. And then recently, probably the most successful campaign is the National Low Income Housing Coalition’s United for Home Campaign, which started the Housing Trust Fund. If you look at states, there are some states which have started housing trust funds…More recently, Seattle has passed some housing levys.”
- Nan Roman: “... I guess home ownership was a successful affordable messaging campaign. People feel strongly about it and prior to the recession there was also this enormous feeling -- based on data really and also just on the incredible degree to which the cost of housing was escalating -- that housing was the way to accumulate assets, wealth. That was the message -- not only was it the American Dream, which is a pretty good message, but also in the 90s and early 2000s, that it was the way for people to escape poverty. If poor people could just buy a house, it would appreciate tremendously and they would accrue assets. Of course, in the end that didn’t turn out so well – at least in the short run. ... Whatever you might think about that housing over there, you think people should have decent housing, they should have safe housing, and they should have housing they can afford. That’s a message that has stuck.”

- **Good messaging needs to be backed by data.**
  - Barb Poppe: “I think with messaging, the most important thing is the polling. Because messages are about what works at this time and place. Messages that worked ten years ago are not going to be the current- I would definitely look at what they found in their polling.”

However, the most important theme in the interviews was the following:

---

The most successful messages have been linked to legislative campaigns.

- Shelia Crowley: “Messages are part of a campaign I guess. So the message isn’t in and of itself the end, it’s part of the campaign, and the campaign should have an achievable and measureable end.”
- Barb Poppe: “I mean, there have definitely been legislative victories.”
- Mary Rouleau: “You have to attach [a message] to something. I mean, if you have the luxury of time and unlimited funds, hell yeah, go ahead and talk. Messaging by itself without some level of communication and engagement is not going to be that effective. Usually it needs to be some outcome.
- Mary Rouleau: “I’ve never seen anything remotely like a national campaign, because we don’t have a national housing policy. Most of the stuff is super hyper local, and there have been some ballot initiatives there.”
- Shelia Crowley: “[P]ublic education campaigns that are good are expensive and short lived. There are a handful of them that people can point to, like the very iconic image of the Native American with the tear, that kind of stuff.”

Legislative campaigns are more successful in the end results of their messaging than national messaging campaigns because they are necessarily outcome driven. It is far more difficult to measure the end results of national messaging campaigns.

The following case studies will examine the messaging in two affordable housing legislative campaigns.
VI. CASE STUDY ANALYSIS 1: THE MAYORS CHALLENGE TO END VETERAN HOMELESSNESS (SUCCESSFUL MESSAGING)

- Background

Often, when people think of homelessness, they think of veterans. In 2010, when drafting *Opening Doors*, the federal government’s strategy towards ending homelessness, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness made ending veteran homelessness by 2015 one of the goals of the agency. At the time that the document was presented to President Obama and Congress in 2010, there were 76,329 veterans experiencing homelessness, both sheltered and unsheltered.\(^{16}\)

The Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness began in 2014 following a U.S. Conference of Mayors conversation regarding ending veteran homelessness. Several mayors suggested a friendly competition between the mayors around achieving the goal of ending veteran homelessness. The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs were already heavily involved in the work to end veterans’ homelessness with national partners such as the National Alliance to End Homelessness. Following this conversation, there was a kick-off event attended by the First Lady on June 11, 2014, where First Lady Michelle Obama officially announced the start of the Mayors Challenge Campaign.\(^{17}\)


\(^{17}\) Klein, Jennifer, interview with Beverly Ebersold, personal interview, on the phone: Washington, DC-Jennifer Klein, Beverly Ebersold- Detroit, Michigan, October 7, 2016.
Messages

The messages regarding the Mayors Challenge Campaign, and the overall desire to meet the goal to end veterans’ homelessness by 2015, are always at heart the same. The message is clear: that mayors have the resources to end veterans’ homelessness, and can do so by ensuring that there are more affordable units for veterans through partnering with landlords, ensuring that landlords are making HUD-VASH voucher units available, and that evidence-based practices such as Housing First are utilized. By turning the idea that people who are homeless are “un-deserving” of help on its head, this messaging has focused on the fact that veterans have served our country and it is a duty to help them. The veterans aspect is both a value and undermines the idea that because they are homeless they are somehow undeserving of help.

However, note that the exact language of the message can and should be altered for the specific audience. Some of the messaging is much more aspirational in nature. Some of the messaging focuses on the fact that there are resources available to solve the problem, that it is more expensive to leave homeless people languishing on the streets, and that there are tried and true solutions such as Housing First.

Here are several examples of this messaging.

“You all have the power to open doors for Vets, and give them the stability they deserve, and help our country solve an issue that has been swept under the rug for far too long,” – First Lady Michelle Obama in video PSA to landlords, 11/05/2015

“Just like it is our country’s duty to bring back all of our men and women from the battlefield, we’ve also got a duty to make sure that every single Veteran has a place to call home when they get here, and for the rest of their lives.” First Lady Michelle Obama on June 11, 2014 at the launch of the Mayor’s Challenge

“We’ve made historic investments to get housing vouchers into the hands of Veterans and treat them with the dignity they deserve,” says HUD Secretary Julián Castro. “But there are a number of communities where housing is too scarce or affordable
that having a voucher just isn’t enough. In those cases, we need landlords to be part of the solution by stepping up and accepting those vouchers.”

“In order to build on our progress making sure that those who have served our nation have a place they can call home, we need the increased support of landlords and property managers,” says **VA Secretary Robert McDonald**. “We know that when given the opportunity, Veterans have the skills and abilities to make excellent tenants.”

“The partnerships we are building with landlords today will help us honor our commitment to Veterans and all people experiencing homelessness more quickly and effectively.” – **Matthew Doherty, Executive Director of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness**

“Housing First, a best practice, must become our common practice. We must reinforce intervention strategies what work and funnel federal resources to those strategies. Local partnerships must execute these resources in the most efficient manner. Homeless veterans—all homeless Americans—must not remain our invisible citizens. What they need are permanent places to live, jobs, education, and quality health care.

The United States has always been a nation of doers and dreamers. We’re committed to this goal. I know you are committed to this goal. So let’s continue to work together to end homelessness, once and for all.” 18-**Shaun Donovan, (former) US Secretary of Housing and Urban Developer and Eric Shinseki, (former) US Secretary of Veterans Affairs in “Homelessness is a Public Health Issue”**

“Today, I’m honored to stand with the Mayors of Niagara Falls, Lockport and Tonawanda to report that homelessness among Veterans in our community has effectively ended. Thanks to a strong collaboration between government agencies, our community’s service and housing professionals who assist veterans and our many other partners, Buffalo has demonstrated that ending veteran homelessness is achievable. I congratulate everyone involved who worked tirelessly to give our veterans a dignified home, setting an example for communities across the nation.” 19 - **Mayor of the City of Buffalo, NY Byron Brown, October 20, 2016**

In addition to these similar lines of messaging, the USICH website uses messaging to specifically call out mayors on their landing page for the Mayors Challenge:

---


“As a mayor, you are on the front line of efforts to prevent and end homelessness. You possess the unique ability to lead your community toward effective and lasting solutions.

Your leadership is needed, now more than ever, to inspire greater collaboration among community partners, to ensure the use of evidence-informed practices, and to strategically leverage assets that will reduce homelessness in your community.”

It should be noted that a federal level, a great deal of work is put into ensuring that policymakers are “on-message”- that everyone is saying the same thing. This strategy worked quite well in the Mayors Challenge, as once this one message was outlined, it was quickly embraced by mayors and by communities working to solve homelessness. Additionally, Beverly Ebersold, Director of National Initiatives at USICH stated that

I think it was the White House, and FLOTUS’s engagement that helped create political engagement among the mayors. I think that the issue at hand is a bipartisan issue. Therefore, when the White House calls on political leaders, they accepted the challenge. It was very instrumental in helping to organize this challenge. When the White House organized this, it also allowed federal partner champions around this work. Secretary Shinseki around this time was at the VA and he made a concerted effort that we will end veteran homelessness and we will do this. So we also had a champion in a federal cabinet secretary position at VA, a champion in the HUD cabinet position, at USICH, whose responsible for coordinating the federal agencies, and even though both cabinet secretaries have moved onto different things, the new secretaries that have moved in, because this was a White House effort to continue that messaging and keep a strong hold to push on this.

Indeed, the Mayors Challenge is extremely successful in that, through effective messaging, it created the political will at all levels of government to reach the goal of ending homelessness by 2015.

---

21 Klein, Jennifer, interview with Beverly Ebersold, personal interview, on the phone: Washington, DC- Jennifer Klein, Beverly Ebersold- Detroit, Michigan, October 7, 2016. See full interview on page 42.
Stakeholders (Messengers/Intended Audience)

Exhibit A: Flow of Messaging to Stakeholders in the Mayor’s Challenge Campaign

Exhibit A demonstrates the flow of public messaging between the different stakeholders involved in the Mayors Challenge campaign.

First Lady/Cabinet Members
- First Lady/Cabinet Members to Mayors
  - Example- First Lady Michelle Obama’s remarks at the launch of the Mayor’s Challenge on June 11, 2014
- First Lady/Cabinet Members to the Field\(^{(22)}\)
  - First Lady/Cabinet Members to Landlords
    - Example- First Lady Michelle Obama’s PSA to landlords, November 5, 2015

Mayors
- Mayors to the Field

\(^{(22)}\) The Field meaning Continuum of Cares, local government, health care providers, etc.
Mayors to Landlords
  - Example: PSAs from Mayors requesting landlords participate in landlord engagement programs

USICH/VA/HUD
  - USICH/VA/HUD to Landlords

What Happened

The Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness is considered to be a huge success by the Obama Administration and the affordable housing field. Over 880 leaders signed on to the Mayors Challenge, including eight governors. As of November 8, 2016, 31 communities and two states have effectively ended veteran homelessness. The map below details these communities.

---

Exhibit B: The Mayors Challenge to End Homelessness Communities as of November 8, 2016

Most communities, but not all of them, who have ended veteran homelessness are signed on to the Mayors Challenge. It is useful to understand what it means to “effectively end” veteran homelessness, as this defines success. The U.S. Interagency
Council on Homelessness has created a guide for communities who are working towards the goal of ending veteran homelessness, called the Criteria and Benchmarks For Achieving the Goal of Ending Veteran Homelessness.

The five criteria are as follows:

1. The community has identified all veterans experiencing homelessness
2. The community provides shelter immediately to any veteran experiencing unsheltered homelessness who wants it
3. The community only provides service-intensive transitional housing in limited instances
4. The community has capacity to assist veterans to swiftly move into permanent housing
5. The community has resources, plans, and system capacity in place should any veteran become homeless or be at risk of homelessness in the future.

The four benchmarks are:

1. Chronic homelessness among veterans has been ended
2. Veterans have quick access to permanent housing
3. The community has sufficient permanent housing capacity
4. The community is committed to housing first and provides service-intensive transitional housing to veterans experiencing homelessness only in limited instances.

Using the criteria and benchmarks, USICH, HUD, and VA determine if a community has reached the goal of ending veteran homelessness.

Upon further examination of Exhibit B, there is a clear lack of Mayors Challenge participants in what are the more Republican leaning states in the country. While this is certainly a bipartisan challenge, there are more Democrats signed on the challenge than Republicans. It stands to reason that, even though this is something that all people care

25 Ibid.
about- veterans- some Republican mayors would not want to get involved with a liberal political effort. The Republican mayors who have gotten involved in the challenge rarely, if ever, have made public statements about the efforts. Instead local people on the ground have done so. This was the case in Mobile, Alabama, where Eric Jefferson, the CEO of Housing First and the Homeless Coalition, publically announced that the city had reached “functionally zero” for homeless veterans. Nonetheless, creating a bipartisan movement is no easy feat, even if there are more Democrats involved in the movement than Republicans.

In August 2016, President Barack Obama announced that veteran homelessness had declined nearly 50% since 2010, when Opening Doors, the federal government’s strategy on ending homelessness was first written. As discussed in the beginning of this case study, veteran homelessness was at 76,329 in 2010. According to Beverly Ebersold, Director of National Initiatives at the U.S. Interagency on Homelessness, the Mayors Challenge was a significant part of why veteran homelessness dropped in half in six years. She stated that “[w]e were able to garner the political will and leadership into communities”26 as a result of the Mayors Challenge.

It is also noteworthy that the Mayors Challenge has received criticism from outsiders. One New York Times op-ed article, published on August 5, 2016, summarizes well some of this criticism. The article, “Broken Promises to Homeless Vets,” acknowledged that the original goal of ending veteran homelessness was in 2014, and that it “has succeeded in only two states, Virginia and Connecticut, and a number of localities”27 and suggests

---

that it is far too early to be boasting on any successes yet. While it is true that the goal date was extended a year, and true that veteran homelessness has not yet been achieved in 100% of the country, this analysis is remarkably shortsighted. While 100% success has not yet been achieved, the progress towards the goal is substantial.

- **Broader Analysis**

  Since The Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness has been such a success, the core component messaging strategies that were imperative to its achievement can be used towards other affordable housing campaigns in the future. This is by no means a strategy that must be implemented in full in order for a campaign to succeed.

**Exhibit C: Core Components of Messaging Strategies in the Mayor’s Challenge Campaign**

- Well Known Champion(s)
- Lead with a Value, Then Offer a Solution (catered toward the specific audience)
- Consistent Message

- Political Will

  o Well Known Champion(s)
The addition of well-known champions in the challenge who supported it and ensured the message was being pushed ensured that the campaign had backers.

- **Lead with a Value, Then Offer a Solution (catered toward the specific audience)**
  
  - The main message itself being pushed is that veterans should be not be languishing on the streets and that it is our duty to ensure that they do not, as they have served our country. That is the value. The solution is that we have the resources, through HUD-VASH and utilizing best practices such as Housing First.

- **Consistent Messaging**
  
  - Messaging has been consistent throughout the challenge. As there is one message, it is not confusing for people to follow.

- **Political Will**
  
  - As veterans are a bi-partisan issue, the challenge has had bi-partisan support and thus political will. Political will in this case was created by the strong value message and supported by the messaging from the First Lady.

An example for a future campaign using these strategies would be for the Secretary of Health and Human Services to act as a champion against the opioid epidemic, using one message about how those who are addicted are suffering from a
disease (which is the value) and the solution, at least for those who are homeless, can still be Housing First. Political will can be created by showing homelessness and addiction are public health crises.

- **After Thoughts**

As this thesis is being written, a major transition is occurring in our political system, which may greatly alter the future of the Mayors Challenge Campaign. The major champions of the challenge, including First Lady Michelle Obama and the Secretaries of HUD and VA will be transitioning and replaced by people whose stances on homelessness are either unknown or potentially completely abhorrent. The future of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness is unknown at this time. While all of this is very unfortunate, it certainly stands to show how important champions are towards messaging.
VII. CASE STUDY 2: WASHINGTON, D.C.’S INCLUSIONARY ZONING PROGRAM (FAILED MESSAGING)

- **Background**

Washington, D.C. currently faces a daunting affordable housing crisis. On April 12, 2013, the waiting list for public housing and Section 8 vouchers in the District permanently closed. DC has been ranked at the top of various lists as being one of the most unaffordable places to live in the United States. One program that has created thousands of units of affordable housing throughout the country is Inclusionary Zoning (IZ). IZ allows for the production of affordable housing by either mandating or creating voluntary incentives for developers to designate a percentage of affordable units in residential construction for income-qualified individuals. What is deemed to be affordable and specific income qualifications vary by each program.

The IZ program in the District requires new condominium or rental properties over ten units or existing properties expanding by fifty percent or more to devote eight to ten percent of units produced to low-to-moderate income District residents (DC job holders who do not have residency will also be considered for the units). “Low-to-moderate” is defined as fifty to eighty percent of the Washington, DC Metropolitan Area Median Income for 2015, which is $109,200 for a family of four. In exchange, the developer receives twenty percent bonus density for the project, which assists to offset the cost of the IZ units.

- **Stakeholders (Messengers/Intended Audience)**
• **What Happened?**

The District’s IZ program became effective March 14, 2007 with the Inclusionary Zoning Implementation Act of 2006. IZ thus commenced immediately before the housing market crash and the 2007-2009 recession. As a result of these economically catastrophic events, former Mayor Adrian Fenty delayed IZ’s implementation until 2009. Therefore, not only did the recession negatively affect IZ due to stalled construction, but as a result of the delayed implementation of the program, “most of the buildings that [had been] recently constructed received their permits before IZ took effect, and only two IZ units”²⁸ had been built by 2012. The first IZ unit in DC sold on July 10, 2013- over six

---

30 years after the program was first implemented. At the time, fourteen units had been rented.29 This was out of a total of three completed condo units and twenty-one completed rental units.30 According to the Inclusionary Zoning 2013 Report, three units have been sold out of nine completed condo units, and all twenty-one rental units had been leased as of the end of the 2013 calendar year.31 However, it is exceedingly difficult to track exactly how many units have been produced and how many have sold, as the DHCD reports appear to contradict themselves, and no reports have been produced since 2013.

While nationwide IZ has become known as a reliable affordable housing program, the DC IZ program is not currently living up to its stated message- “to create mixed income neighborhoods; produce affordable housing for a diverse labor force; seek equitable growth of new residents; and increase homeownership opportunities for low and moderate income levels.”32 As of December 2013, out of thirty IZ units constructed, only two had been produced at fifty percent AMI.33 This obvious absence of affordable units is in part due to the current policy of defining “affordability” by zoning categories that

33 “Inclusionary Zoning 2013 Annual Report.”
differentiate between high-rise and low-rise construction. While a high-rise development requires eight percent of affordable units to be set-aside for homeowners or renters at eighty percent AMI, a low-rise development requires fifty to eighty percent affordability and a mandatory set aside of ten percent affordable units. \(^{34}\) While this policy may have been well intentioned, as high-rise buildings are more expensive to build, it also “gives developers an incentive to seek high-rise designation for projects that could qualify as low-rise construction.”\(^ {35}\) Additionally, the current program income eligibility requirements, particularly at eighty percent AMI, are quite high.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household Size</th>
<th>Units at 50% AMI</th>
<th>Units at 80% AMI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>$38,220</td>
<td>$61,152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>$43,680</td>
<td>$69,888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>$49,140</td>
<td>$78,624</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>$54,600</td>
<td>$87,360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>$60,060</td>
<td>$96,096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>$65,520</td>
<td>$104,832</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Furthermore, the current need for affordable housing at or below fifty percent AMI is critical. From 2009-2011, about three-fourths of renters and homeowners making under thirty percent AMI paid over half of their income on housing; and three-fourths of renters and two-thirds of homeowners making under fifty percent AMI paid over thirty percent of their income on housing. \(^ {36}\) The amount of affordable units in the capital also sharply

---


decreased by more than fifty percent from 2000-2010.\textsuperscript{37} During this same period, while witnessing rising housing costs, the bottom forty percent of District residents did not see their salaries significantly increase.\textsuperscript{38} As earlier noted, DC has been ranked in various studies as one of, or the most, expensive place to live in the country. This places a further burden on those DC residents at the lower end of the economic spectrum.

- \textbf{Messages}

Perhaps the most overarching issue with the IZ program has been a lack of a clear mandate from the city government. While the goals of the IZ program, as stated on the DHCD website, are to “create mixed income neighborhoods; produce affordable housing for a diverse labor force; seek equitable growth of new residents; and increase homeownership opportunities for low and moderate income levels,”\textsuperscript{39} the program does not do this at all in practice. In fact, DHCD spokesman Marcus Williams stated that the IZ rental units required and lacked a “clear marketing strategy.”\textsuperscript{40}

Developers appear uncomfortable with IZ guidelines, and are frequently able to circumvent them. For instance, currently, IZ is exempt from the Downtown Overlay District, which encompasses the core of the downtown area in NW DC. The DD Overlay, according to someone familiar with the intricacies of the program, is exempt


\textsuperscript{39} “Inclusionary Zoning Affordable Housing Program Maximum Rent and Purchase Price Schedule.”

from IZ as the bonus density required to compensate developers is not hypothetically available as the Height Act of 1910 limits residential development. There otherwise is nothing on the books that defines why, exactly, the DD Overlay is exempt from IZ. This is highly problematic, as this would likely include most of the high-rise buildings that are being built. In fact, the 2012 Inclusionary Zoning Report noted that the majority of projects under construction at the time were relieved from IZ due to exemptions such as the DD overlay.41 Furthermore, the development booming within this area is extraordinary. Between 2009 and 2019, development inventory is expected to grow from 10,075 to 14,698. At the same time, the amount of affordable housing has been dropping- a trend seen throughout the city. During the same 2009-2019-time period, rents will increase from $1,662 to $2,024 in the area within the DD overlay. On the other side of the spectrum, one developer has been in a legal battle with the District for over five years, as he has been unable to sell two condo inclusionary zoning units since the very inception of the program, as no one has been able to qualify for the units.

However, in nearby Montgomery County, where a similar IZ program, called the Moderately Priced Dwelling Unit Program (MPDU) has been in place since 1974, developers “agree that the MPDU ordinance increases the cost of doing business in Montgomery County, [however], they view it as exactly that-one part of the cost of doing business in the county…Because MPDUs are required in nearly all developments in subdivisions in Montgomery County, developers think it is fair.”42

County, the inclusionary zoning program is part the larger community’s desire to be inclusive. This juxtaposition reveals that “IZ requirements must be clear and administered consistently so that developers can effectively predict when it is economically feasible to build projects that require inclusionary housing units,” and that DC would benefit from a more highly regulated system.

Unlike in the Mayors Challenge or in Montgomery County, the DC IZ program does not have a clear message, and in fact, it sends a very confused message to the people who wish to sign up for the program, to developers, and potential advocates because what it is in practice differs very much in practice from what it is in theory.

**Exhibit D: Messaging Strategies in DC’s IZ Program**

- **Broader Analysis**

  In Montgomery County, the messaging is clear with the MPDU program, and thus is clear with the developers: the city is intending to create a highly diversified neighborhood, and the IZ program is part of the vision. The MPDU program also utilizes similar messaging components: it has a consistent message (that inclusive communities are important); it leads with a value, and offers a solution (the value is inclusive communities, and the solution is inclusionary zoning); and there is political will to ensure that the program is implemented, as seen through the support from developers.

---

43 The Urban Institute, “Expanding Housing Opportunities Through Inclusionary Zoning: Lessons from Two Counties.”
DC has unquestionably made building easier for developers, a move that was necessary in areas like downtown DC about ten to fifteen years ago. The question is what is the broader vision for the city, particularly as it comes to affordable housing, and whether that is even part of the goals of the city administrators. This may hold the answer as to why IZ has fallen so short of its stated goals—perhaps administrators are not as focused on the goal of affordable housing as they are on a different vision of the city.

- **After Effects**

In July of 2016, the District’s Zoning Commission voted to change the current regulations so that the new income targeting would be 60% AMI for rentals and 80% AMI for homeowners. The Mayor and the D.C. Council had not yet voted on the Zoning Commission’s ruling. This is certainly a move in the right direction. However, the DD overlay is still exempted, and we will need to wait to see how the Mayor and Council will rule.

**VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING MESSAGING**

The Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness and D.C.’s Inclusionary Zoning Program offer a glance at how advocates have set up their campaigns previously. In the Mayors Challenge Campaign, the main components of the messaging strategy were as follows:

---

Exhibit E: Core Components of Messaging Strategies in the Mayor’s Challenge Campaign

- **Well Known Champion(s)**
  
  - The addition of well-known champions in the challenge who supported it and ensured the message was being pushed ensured that the campaign had backers.

- **Lead with a Value, Then Offer a Solution (catered toward the specific audience)**
  
  - The main message itself being pushed is that veterans should not be languishing on the streets and that it is our duty to ensure that they do not, as they have served our country. That is the value. The solution is that we have the resources, through HUD-VASH and utilizing best practices such as Housing First.
o **Consistent Messaging**

- Messaging has been consistent throughout the challenge. As there is one message, it is not confusing for people to follow.

o **Political Will**

- As veterans are a bi-partisan issue, the challenge has had bi-partisan support and thus political will. Political will in this case was created by the strong value message and supported by the messaging from the First Lady.

During the Mayors Challenge Campaign, this messaging strategy was also evoked in messaging strategies in the local level, such as when the Mayor of Portland and County Chair of Multnomah County sent signed letters to landlords throughout their area urging them to rent to veterans. After their doing so, hundreds of landlords, many of them private, offered to rent their units to veterans.

In Washington, D. C’s Inclusionary Zoning Program, there is absolutely no messaging strategy. The lack of consistent messaging and the inability of the program to relate to different audiences are only two of the reasons why the program has failed.

However, in nearby Montgomery County, the similar MPDU program has succeed by using the following messaging strategy:

**Exhibit F: Core Components of Montgomery County Messaging Strategy**
- **Lead with a Value, Then Offer a Solution**
  - The value is inclusive communities, and the solution is inclusionary zoning.

- **Local Champions**
  - Local champions are critical to ensure that the messaging is pushed.

- **Consistent Message**
  - The MPDU program has a consistent message: that inclusive communities are important.

- **Political Will**
  - Political will/bi-partisan support is seen through support from developers as well as advocates.

All in all, then, it appears as though the core components of a messaging strategy are the need to:
1) Lead with a value, then offer a solution;

2) Be consistent with the message; and

3) Create political will with the message, which will further the message and what it is trying to accomplish.

A final strategy that may be utilized is having a champion advocate the message.

**Exhibit G: Final Recommendation for Affordable Housing Messaging Strategy**
IV. BRIEF SUMMARY OF FINDINGS BASED ON RESEARCH QUESTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>RQ1</strong></td>
<td>At least as it pertains to affordable housing, messaging should:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lit review, case studies, interview</td>
<td>o Be consistent;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Use values;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Have a champion;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Be catered towards the specific audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RQ2</strong></td>
<td>o Notion of worthy vs. unworthy poor;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lit review, interviews</td>
<td>o Advocates should pursue legislative campaigns, unless they have a great deal of time and resources on their hands to pursue a national messaging campaign.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RQ3</strong></td>
<td>Messaging should:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lit review, interviews, case studies</td>
<td>o Have universal values;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Cater the message towards specific audience and use monetary incentives if needed;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Avoid language that might overwhelm the audience into thinking the problem is unsolvable;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Speak to the collective benefit the housing will have for the community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

V. AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. How does the variable of time and duration factor into the strategies recommended for those who are designing affordable housing programs?

2. How does one distinguish between messaging and program design?
VI. CONCLUSION

Throughout the interview portion of this thesis, I was often told that there were “too many messages” in the affordable housing field. In some ways, I agree with this statement. I have found that it doesn’t matter WHAT the message affordable housing advocates bring across, it matters HOW they bring it across. If housing advocates can use more effective techniques - the ones proposed in this thesis - then perhaps there can also be less messages out there. In order to combat NIMBY attitudes and the idea that certain people who utilize affordable housing are “unworthy” of government resources, policy advocates must utilize messaging tactics such as consistent messaging, using value messaging, and offering solutions from the point of view of the audience.

Many housing advocates may find that it is useful to still do national housing campaigns, and I do not disagree. However, my question would be what is the value of this campaign? If it is to influence people outside of the housing industry, then it will likely not be very productive.
Appendix

Beverly Ebersold interview- October 7, 2016

Beverley Ebersold is the Director of National Initiatives at the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness

Jenny: You were involved from the start in the campaign, correct?

Bev: Correct.

Jenny: How were things started?

Bev: So, the Mayors Challenge actually began back in 2014. And it spurred from a U.S. Conference of Mayors conversation around ending Veteran’s Homelessness that then Secretary Donovan and USICH Director Barb Poppe had with a group of mayors discussing the incredible work of leaders in Phoenix and Salt Lake City. Mayors in Minnesota, Minneapolis and Columbus, Ohio, had suggested the idea of a friendly competition between the mayors around achieving the goal of ending veteran homelessness. It was through those discussions that it had started, and the mayors were interested. USICH and HUD worked initially to have calls with those communities to see what was the extent to which they would participate in this. So, kind of building off of that momentum, that is when USICH, HUD and VA engaged the White House and Office of the First Lady, through Joining Forces around this issue. We were beginning to see that were many resources appropriated and in place to achieve the goal, as well as political interests in doing this. So, that was really kind of what led to the work of having the First Lady announce a Mayors Challenge in 2014. So then in June there was an event at the White House with over 80 plus mayors and staff from all of the federal agencies with USICH, HUD, and VA that attended to kick off this challenge for mayors to get engaged in ending veteran homelessness in their communities. I want to back up to say that even in the early stages when HUD and USICH were talking about this, VA was totally looped into conversations. Obviously this is something that is a federal partner
partnership. and obviously we can’t end veteran homelessness without the VA. And that was kind of the impetuous, the VA can’t do this alone- and you know, that was kind of what brought Secretary Donovan and Barb Poppe in the mix with messaging into the communities, that “we all have to help those men and women who served this country and the VA can’t fully do this alone.”

**Jenny:** Is the main audience for the Mayors Challenge Campaign mayors, or is it multi-layered? Is it mayors, and then from that, the mayors are touching other people?

**Bev:** Yes, and let me back up a second, before I talk about intended audience, to also say, as this planning was happening, and it was coming out of the First Lady’s Office, there were also several other initiatives on the ground that HUD and VA were working on and that includes the 25 Initiative and the Priority Community Technical Assistance. So HUD and VA were already on the ground, kicking off work with these twenty-five cities, and the importance of that is it brought in national partners and technical assistance providers, like Community Solutions, the National Alliance to End Homelessness, the National League of Cities, and the National Coalition on Homeless Veterans. At the same time there was the federal push coming out of White House, there were these TA efforts on the ground that dovetailed nicely to help promote and message the goal of ending veteran homelessness, which ultimately, the reason for that was that it came from *Opening Doors* and USICH. I just want to add that it nicely dovetails with national partners who were brought in because they were doing work on the ground. And, I guess one of the key things we’ve seen in communities, like Phoenix, Salt Like, and New Orleans is that because their mayor was actively engaged and involved in the work, it was really showing that communities, that we have a solution to this, and that political involvement was a key ingredient to the success in the communities. So I think that the messaging at that first kind of kickoff event was intended, and still is intended, to target mayors and elected officials. So one of the things that was unintended to come out of the event was when we asked communities to sign on, it wasn’t just mayors, we also had county officials as well as several governors that signed onto the Challenge. Because of the messaging and enthusiasm, it also branched out to other elected officials engaging
around the issue. So the intended audience has been mayors, but it has also moved to elected officials, and what we have found is that because elected officials’ engagement, it certainly-the messaging also has been instrumental to move onto other community officials, like the Continuum of Care, the local VA medical directors, and just other social service providers in the community. The messaging was not just being pushed on a national level from the White House, but there was messaging both from HUD internally to their staff on the ground, and the same from VA nationally to their staff on the ground, and the same from USICH was pushing out the message to the regional coordinator team, who is based out in the field, was pushing that message to the communities. So again, initially targeting those big twenty-five, but I think to date we’ve had over eight hundred sign on to the challenge.

Jenny: And what exactly was the message being pushed?

Bev: That ending veteran homelessness is achievable. That we have effective solutions and best practices such as Housing First, the use of VASH vouchers which are similar to a Housing Choice voucher with services that is a strong partnership between HUD and VA to serve veterans with the most needs. Additionally, there were supportive services for veteran families that could rapidly rehouse individuals. So there were a series of resources available to communities to help achieve the goal. It was kind of a proof point to achieve this given the resources and so one of the things that came out of this was a document called 10 Strategies to End Veteran Homelessness and there are ten specific strategies that we were promoting with communities and the first one being political will with mayors. This is fast forwarding a little bit, but this also created, because the messaging was out there, because communities were working diligently, and looking at their data, to see how they were working against progress against the goal of ending veteran homelessness, and a part of this we recognized, was that we had to be looking at and measuring communities the same way. So we developed criteria and benchmarks to end veteran homelessness so that communities had a guidepost and were all looking at a definition at how to achieve it in the same way. Which then led to a federal confirmation
process where USICH, HUD and VA have communities submit information to assessed if communities had effectively achieved the goal.

**Jenny:** Can you tell me affordable housing is part of the Mayors Challenge Campaign?

**Bev:** Sure. The ultimate goal in all of this is that veterans should not be languishing on the streets. One of the best practices is Housing First, which is basically house a veteran and provide them with services and you’re implementing them with a housing first system and the success of stability is pretty phenomenal as well. So it’s helping to push communities to provide access to housing as quickly as possible. There have been different landlord engagement events, where there have been local partnerships with different landlords, sometimes large landlords, and associations, to prioritize veterans into housing. Additionally, many public housing authorities through HUD created local preferences to serve veterans, which also increased access to affordable housing. Some other things that directly resulted from the Mayors Challenge in my opinion were innovations such as risk mitigation funds, which are funds that are meant to incentivize landlords to rent to veterans. So there’s been a culmination of events similar to that, that have provided new units and access to affordable housing and work being developed in an organized fashion, and the Mayors Challenge really allowed some opportunities for a coordinated response to the issue, a coordinated response as whole, and a coordinated response in terms of accessing the issues. And so we’ve also learned that the way that communities have learned to prioritize veterans that are most in need of supportive housing, or HUD-VASH, which are the most intensive services, versus rapid rehousing, which is someone might need a unit but might not need intensive service or a short term option of that, and so, engaging landlords has been a pretty significant piece of the work, and so, as you are pretty likely aware, the First Lady presented a video message around accessing landlords, which I think the communities used that messaging when they had local events when they tried to engage landlords. So it’s for a series of local events, with the mayor kind of spearheading the work.
**Jenny:** So kind of going off of what you just mentioned about the First Lady, do you think it is important to have a “Champion”, like the First Lady, or mayors, in a messaging campaign? Do you think that the Mayors Challenge Campaign would have been as effective without the First Lady championing it in the beginning?

**Bev:** No, I think it was the White House, and FLOTUS’s engagement that helped create political engagement among the mayors. I think that the issue at hand is a bipartisan issue. Therefore, when the White House calls on political leaders, they accepted the challenge. It was very instrumental in helping to organize this challenge. When the White House organized this, it also allowed federal partner champions around this work. Secretary Shinseki around this time was at the VA and he made a concerted effort that we will end veteran homelessness and we will do this. So we also had a champion in a federal cabinet secretary position at VA, a champion in the HUD cabinet position, at USICH, whose responsible for coordinating the federal agencies, and even though both cabinet secretaries have moved onto different things, the new secretaries that have moved in, because this was a White House effort to continue that messaging and keep a strong hold to push on this.

**Jenny:** Do you think that the Mayors Challenge Campaign is a large part of why veteran homeless has dropped 47% since 2010?

**Bev:** I think the Mayors Challenge is a significant part of that. We were able to garner the political will and leadership into communities.
Sheila Crowley interview- July 14, 2016

_Sheila Crowley is the former President and CEO of the National Low Income Housing Coalition. Dr. Crowley was on the staff on the National Low Income Housing Coalition from 1998 until her retirement in early 2016._

**Jenny:** How and why has affordable housing been messaged in the past, and how is it currently being messaged?

**Sheila:** This is a topic that a lot of people spend a lot of time thinking and worrying about and about which there is certainly no consensus on what the right message is. In the affordable housing world, there is a cacophony of messages as opposed to “A” message. A couple of things that are important and show up periodically are that the term “affordable housing” is almost meaningless because it is so nebulous that people can take what they want from it. There is one school of thought that distinguishes between affordable housing and subsidized housing and affordable housing is preferable to subsidized housing. The older forms of providing housing for low income people, public housing and subsidized housing, are terms about which people have negative connotations. I think it’s not really the term as much as it is the association of that housing with the people who live there. There’s always a perception that providing housing for low-income people in and of itself is a bad thing, so there is opposition around that.

There’s always these notions that there are terms that we shouldn’t be using, including the term affordable housing. But it has to be very specific to a particular campaign or issue or particular population. For example, there was a threat against an inclusionary zoning law in the state of Massachusetts with an attempt to override it with a referendum. Housing advocates started a campaign to defeat the referendum and hired experts to help them with the messaging. What they found through polling was that affordable housing was a positive term in that context. The point is that you can’t generalize from one campaign to the next, and you certainly can’t say what you found last year or two years ago still holds, because it’s a very, very fluid environment.
So here’s the problem. Relying on polls and focus groups to test messages and having something current and focused on what you’re trying to do in a given campaign is very expensive. Most advocates don’t have the resources to do regular messaging research. Most of is done by the Relators or for-profit companies, because they are able to pay for that kind of research that may or may not be relevant for advocacy campaigns.

On the other hand, very generally, over time, we have found that people are more sympathetic to the concept of ending homelessness then they are to the concept of building more housing. Of course ending homelessness requires that you build more affordable housing, but ending homelessness is tied to a particular goal, as opposed to a program. People are not overly interested in programs. They are interested in outcomes and in things that seem to be solutions to a particular problem. So, you can talk about improving nutrition, and people seem to support that, but you certainly can’t talk about food stamps, or SNAP. Also, generally people are most supportive of housing production programs then they are of housing assistance, such as vouchers, because these are perceived as being a welfare program.

A lot of people like the mortgage interest deduction (MID) and few perceive it as a housing subsidy. There is also growing support for modifications to the MID, when people are presented with alternatives and their consequences.

**Jenny:** Something I noticed in my studies so far was that in some research studies on affordable housing, some people answered questions such as “do you agree on the production of affordable housing” favorably because they thought they should, but their behavior didn’t actually match how they had answered the polls when it came down to it. Did you find this to be true?

**Sheila:** People will often be more supportive of things in the abstract or of things they think are needed in their community. People will say that something is needed in my community, but that doesn’t guarantee they will support actually having it in their community. There is a fair amount of research about the issue of property values. People won’t say their object to having poor people or people with mental illness or drug addiction living near them. They will say they object to having any kind of housing, such
as rental housing, that will have a negative effect on my property values or rental housing will have a negative effect on their property values. But the data show that property values are unrelated to the form of tenure or who lives in neighboring properties. One’s own property values are most affected by the condition of neighboring properties. So you can have a homeowner who lives in your community but whose house is a wreck or is a nuisance and that bring down your property values. And you can have a house that has a group home for people with mental illness and if the property is maintained or the house looks decent from the outside, it has a neutral or positive effect on your property values. But people often use a proxy for expressing their fears and their biases and they can legitimize those when they talk about property values. So, you always have to be careful when people raise that question. The other thing of course about property values is that we’ve become so convinced that our homes are an asset rather than a social good and objecting to anything that will undermine your asset is considered acceptable, even though it might be a cover for racial or other kinds of biases.

**Jenny:** I was thinking about something you said earlier, about how there has been a cacophony of messages coming out of the affordable housing world. Do you think that has more to do with the advocates or more to do with the fact that it’s hard to message affordable housing?

**Sheila:** Well, the world of people who attempt to influence policy around housing is quite diverse. It includes the mortgage industry, and the home building industry, and the real estate industry, and a lot of for-profit multifamily developers, as well as the whole non-profit world, the whole world of public housing authorities, and the owners of section 8 properties, and it includes advocates and people who provide assistance to the homeless. So it is a wide array of viewpoints. Attempting to influence public policy is primarily about protecting your program and increasing resources into your program. We have this long laundry list of various programs built up over time. It is easy to understand why that happens because politicians want to say they did something that they can name versus saying I worked to improve a program that somebody else thought up. So we have way too many little programs, and way too many programs that have not been modernized in a very long time. And we have people who have a very strong vested
interest in maintaining programs the way they are and not improving them. It’s a very dysfunctional community.

There have been numerous attempts in the nearly 20 years I was in Washington to get everyone on the same page, to talk about things thematically and have a unified voice. It always breaks down between people whose goal is profit and people whose goal is seeking social good. So we end up with something that people can agree to that it so generic and so benign that is has no function to it at all.

The other problem of course is the nonprofit world is very dependent on funders to pay for the campaigns that we do, and although there is a lot of lip service that is paid to having people working together on campaigns, people are not funded to function that way. So at the end of the day, you have to operate your programs and your campaigns in a way that funders will support. Each board wants its own imprint on a particular campaign.

So we have a lot of separate campaigns and even those where there is a conscious effort for a campaign to be seen as independent of the sponsoring organization, no one else has ownership over it. As any given time you can see lots of different campaigns going on that sometimes have very similar messages and folks get very confused by them. And at the end of the day, campaigns that don’t have a policy goal tend to be pretty meaningless because they have no way to measure whether the campaign is effective. A policy goal is to pass a piece of legislation or increase funding or get a new regulation. Campaigns that are more generic and don’t have a policy goal as the outcome tend to fizzle out. But then a lot of people say they don’t want to have to have a policy goal because they want to stay away from controversy, saying the campaign isn’t political.

**Jenny:** This is something I thought of, but I’m not entirely sure if it would actually work. Would it be helpful for an organization like NAEH to have, for instance, one of their goals or strategies in a strategic plan something like “the addition of more affordable housing”?
**Sheila:** I’m fairly cynical about strategic plans, having worked on a number of them. They do help you maintain focus. Everyone wants you to have one because they don’t want you to just be floating and moving from thing to thing. But most organizations today are really buffeted about by external forces. The strategic plan would theoretically help you stay focused in the context of that, that’s absolutely true, but the strategic plan can just get completely blown of course by an election for example, especially if you’re in the policy arena.

**Jenny:** Sure, and like you said, it’s especially difficult when you’re at the behest of funders. I once worked at a nonprofit and at any moment a program could get cut.

**Sheila:** Funders can be very fickle. You’re always at the mercy of what the latest thing is. The worst is when a major foundation announces it is about to do a new strategic plan. Everyone thinks, oh no! What’s the new thing going to be? Then the question is, do you stay focused on what you’re trying to do, or do you follow the money? And I think it’s a huge mistake to follow the money, because you don’t get anywhere if all you are doing is what funders wants you to do.

**Jenny:** What do you think has been the most successful affordable housing campaign?

**Sheila:** Well, I’m biased, but I think our campaign to get the National Housing Trust Fund passed was quite successful. It took a very long time. And the lesson from that is that you just don’t give up. You just get keep working at it day after day after day, and you don’t listen to the detractors. Part of the reason why we were able to do it is that we had funders who were quite committed, the Melville Charitable Trust. We didn’t get everything we wanted for the National Housing Trust Fund, but we ultimately had a success that was quite important. But that was just keeping our eye on the ball and staying with it, and making sure that our board was 100% committed to staying with it.

**Jenny:** Do you think that a successful messaging strategy should have a national message or local message?

**Sheila:** I think it depends a lot on what you’re trying to accomplish. If you are simply trying to do a public education campaign, then a national message is good. But public
education campaigns that are good are expensive and short lived. There are a handful of them that people can point to, like the very iconic image of the Native American with the tear, that kind of stuff. If you are trying to get something done through a local government, then a national message is less effective than figuring out what the local message should be. An example would be that campaign in Massachusetts- they did very specific polling to see what would resonate with voters in that specific referendum at that particular time. So that message was developed around that. Messages are part of a campaign I guess. So the message isn’t in and of itself the end, it’s part of the campaign, and the campaign should have an achievable and measureable end.

Barbara Poppe Interview–July 13, 2016

Barbara Poppe is the founder and principal of Barbara Poppe & Associates LLC. She also served as Executive Director of the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness from November 2009 to March 2014.

Jenny: How and why has affordable housing been messaged in the past, and how do
Barb: A lot of affordable housing messaging has been very transactional. It’s about this new affordable housing development has been opening, and there’s been all this money invested in it, or there’s been a real estate deal, so a lot of affordable housing is just part of the market, it’s just one more real estate deal. Sometimes affordable housing has been messaged as kind of a moral issue, people deserve to have housing, it provides safe and decent housing, and morally we need to do that. You look at some of the national campaigns, like out of the National Low Income Housing Coalition and some of those are based in, their messages would be housing is a basic human right, so it’s a human rights issue. Sometimes it’s been messaged as part of – kind of like, it’s a platform for success and improvement for the community. You look at some of the messages that Enterprise Community Partners did, it was housing was a tool for community development and community improvement and a way for people to improve their lives. I think the most recent iteration of messaging has been about housing helps achieve other outcomes. So, housing is a vaccine that helps protect children from poor health outcomes, or housing is a way that we can improve educational outcomes. If you look at the National Housing Conference, they’re doing a lot of messaging around housing as a platform to achieve greater, or other broad goals, whereas earlier messages was that it was a tool to revitalize neighborhoods. And then there is all the negative messages how low income housing is the worst thing to ever happen to a neighborhood, renters are bad, and lots of lots of negative messaging that have come from opponents of affordable housing, and they are often opponents because they believe that people should pull themselves up from the boot straps. And then there are other people who just believe there shouldn’t be the live near people, so those are often times those are based in their racial issues or class issues. And then there is a whole set of messaging around fair housing. There’s lots and lots of stuff through the years on that. And then the other thing that sits in affordable housing is our overall American culture has monetized housing and it’s been monetized because if you invest in housing that’s a way we accumulate wealth. The message of the realtors is that if you invest in housing, that’s an asset that is monetized. I was having this conversation with my husband in 2010 when property values were dropping. We live in a pretty stable
neighborhood in Columbus but our property values were dropping, not as bad as some other neighborhoods but they were still dropping. From my perspective the value of the house was exactly the same, because it was a place where I lived, I loved the neighborhood, blah blah, blah, and his perspective was no, it’s lost this many thousands of dollars in value. If housing is always monetized, it loses its social value. For me, housing has immense family and social value, but a lot of times, I think we’ve monetized it so much that we don’t think about the social value that money brings. Then at other times there’s the aspect that the value of your house is really dependent on where it’s located. If you’re in an inner city neighborhood, you can have a fabulous house, but that house is in a low-income neighborhood, so your upside down in the value. You’ve spent more money to develop the house than its going to sell on the market. So that also factors into policy and what the messages are. Anyway, I think it’s a muddy stage. I think what messages have worked have depended on what the purpose of the messaging was.

**Jenny:** Should housing advocates be more focused on overcoming NIMBYism or on building sympathy and overcoming stigma? Or can they do both?

**Barb:** I go back to what’s the purpose. The messaging to solve NIMBY is perhaps going to be a different message than to build support. Because if you look at the messaging—because if you look at polling, you can actually have more people supportive of investment in affordable housing that is just a generic of affordable housing, it’ll be somewhere, but as soon as you say, “would you support an affordable housing project in your neighborhood” support goes down. That’s why I go back to what’s the purpose of the message. Is the purpose of the message to build support for more housing vouchers? You’d probably have a different message than how do I get this specific project built in this specific neighborhood. Messages have to be tied back to what is the purpose and intent of the message. If you look at Make Room, which is a national movement to advance the need of affordable rental housing, they recently did some polling. I think with messaging; the most important thing is the polling. Because messages are about what works at this time and place. Messages that worked ten years ago are not going to be the current- I would definitely look at what they found in their polling.
**Jenny:** So do you think a successful campaign needs to have a national strategy? It seems like local strategies would be the most effective in gaining sympathy.

Barb: If that’s what your purpose is. If your purpose is that you want to get your project started, that’s what your purpose is. I think if you look at Make Room, it’s a national campaign, that has messages- it uses some economic messages. You can also make a business case and that resonates with some people. For some people, the moral issue is that everyone deserves the right to the housing, and the think it would be immoral that we would have people in the United States that wouldn’t have a place to stay and that’s their moral issue. There’s other people where the moral issue is that people should pay their own way, pick themselves up by the boot straps, government should do nothing for them, and for them, pull yourself up by the boot straps is a valid moral argument. And so in America part of our challenge is the argument between the two viewpoints and we’re increasingly polarized. But there used to be a way that you could make an economic argument and the rights argument. There’s a saying that you didn’t really care why people supported your argument, you just cared that they did support your argument. I think in messaging you have to find messages that resonate with the range and it’s not uniform, you know, even in the state of Ohio, it’s not completely uniform, but you can have a set of messages that will generally- I mean come on, Apple has a set of messages that causes us buy that products that they sell. There are ways to sell things nationally, and they don’t necessarily completely localize campaigns when they roll out whatever they’re going to roll out.

**Jenny:** What do you think has been the most successful housing strategy campaign?

Barb: Ha. Well, that is a good question, because in the last 30 years, we haven’t had a ton of successes in policy or housing on a national level. We did get the HOME Program, which was about 20 years ago. I was around, but I don’t remember what the messaging was. We did convince Congress on a big housing development program. There was also the campaign to get the Low Income Housing Tax Credit
Program started. And then recently, probably the most successful campaign is the National Low Income Housing Coalition’s United for Home Campaign, which started the Housing Trust Fund. If you look at states, there are some states which have started housing trust funds. That had big campaigns. Like Ohio campaign started a State Housing Trust Fund in the early 1990s. Florida had a big campaign. The state campaigns. More recently, Seattle has passed some housing levies. I think it’s possible in some cases, you can get a campaign that is locally based and has some impact. I think there’s some who would say that the campaign to end veteran’s homelessness has been successful because it’s such an easy sell, but it’s such a narrow focus. What surprised me is that senior housing hasn’t been bigger. They’re sort of trying to figure that out. There’s usually a campaign behind it, but I don’t know if it’s like a public awareness campaign as much as it is a campaign for legislative change. But right now Seattle is undergoing a housing levy, so they’ve got campaign materials out there, you could look at that. I believe they believe it is going to pass. So you might want to look at their work, how they’re messaging that, for that campaign. In Denver, I was out there a couple weeks ago, and they’re doing a lot of community engagement work to build support, and I don’t know what they’ve all got in their toolbox, but their city council and mayor are working on that.

**Jenny:** It seems like a lot of these are more local. And a lot of the messaging has come from more national organizations.

**Barb:** Yep. Make Room does not have a specific ask behind it, it is intended to increase public support for affordable housing. I think the National Low Income Housing Coalition United for Homes which created the National Housing Trust Fund a few years ago, and then they’ve had a national campaign to try to get indefinite. That’s been going for 7-8, maybe 10 years. I mean, there have definitely been legislative victories. Like making Low Income Housing Tax Credit permanent. But that was a legislative push, and it was targeted to certain members of Congress to do the right thing. But you’re more interest in the public awareness campaign, right?
Jenny: Yes, exactly. I’m more interested in how to shift people’s perceptions.

Barb: You should definitely check out Make Room then. That seems like it is most aligned with what you are trying to do.

Jenny: And particularly recent polling, it’s from like 2000, and data from 16 years ago, it’s just not relevant anymore.

Barb: Exactly. They just published the information in June of 2016. I don’t think it can get fresher than that.

---

Nan Roman Interview—July 8, 2016

*Nan Roman is the President and CEO of the National Alliance to End Homelessness.*

Nan: When I first started working on housing back in the 70s, it was at a national organization that was about community development really, but a major issue that it was
working on was residential displacement: the progressive loss of affordable housing units around the country. Because in the 70s there was an adequate supply of affordable housing for the low income households that needed it, but we could see that there was a big change happening resulting in the loss of that housing. There was urban renewal and slum clearance – not bad goals-- but the affordable housing that was lost was not being replaced. At that time, almost all multifamily housing was rental housing (except in New York, where there were cooperatives and condominiums). That started to change also, as rental buildings were converted to condos and coops, and those units were removed from the affordable housing stock. So the organization I was working for was communicating then that if we lost all of this housing, people wouldn’t have any place to live, and there would be homelessness which there wasn’t then. But that idea was roundly thought to be alarmist, and we were scolded frequently. People just didn’t think that the country would stand for widespread homelessness. Unfortunately, we were right. I think the message of affordable housing was similar then to what it has largely been now, which is that poor people need a place to live, so you have to have housing that is affordable to them.

Since then, I think there have been many efforts to use different messaging or to recast affordable housing in a light that is more pleasing, or acceptable or relevant to people. There has been messaging about the impact of housing on equity and diversity; about workers and workforce housing; and about neighborhood revitalization, community development, community renewal and place-based strategies. There have been messages around the housing needs of different populations, and progress in areas where legal rights to housing were established, such as fair housing and housing for people with disabilities. But I think it has been really difficult, through all of these approaches. I am not sure anything has been really successful in changing the way people see affordable housing.

Often people who oppose affordable housing see it as something that is going to affect their property values. For example, during the 60s and then the 70s after the riots, a lot of cities lost population. People were fearful that their communities were going downhill
and that the value of their housing was diminishing. There was a racial dimension to the issue, and sometimes there was fear that when affordable housing came into the neighborhood it meant that it was “turning” from white to black. Other times it was concern that, as neighborhoods lost population and were teetering on the edge of sustainability, more affordable housing meant that the neighborhood was on the road to failing. That’s not so much the problem now, because cities are on the whole thriving. Maybe now people don’t think that more affordable housing means their neighborhood is going to fail, so much as they are concerned it will affect their property values.

**Jenny:** So they think that their property values are going to tank versus the neighborhood changing?

**Nan:** Yes, I think so. Do you live in DC?

**Jenny:** Yes

**Nan:** I live in upper Northwest DC. DC is like San Francisco in that it is a small jurisdiction that cannot grow, and there is so much opposition to affordable housing. I don’t think it’s because people are worried their neighborhood is going to empty out. I think it’s because they are worried about the value of their property. Jenny: I’ve been reading a lot on this and I’m not sure that there is any evidence that can back up that people’s property values will go down. I’m also not sure that people will care if we tell them that though. That’s why I’m hoping a different kind of message will work.

I just don’t know what messaging exactly will work. And this is just my experience. It’s hard to know about the evidence. There have been a lot of studies. In the homelessness arena these studies often look at the impact of permanent supportive housing that is built in a lower income community, where the nice new buildings are more likely to be assets. It is not as common to find studies on the impact of permanent supportive housing on property values or other matters in higher income communities. In any case, no matter how much evidence you have that people move into affordable housing and there’s no
more crime and, and they don’t affect the property values, I’m just not sure that people believe it. And I think the closer they are to the affordable housing the less likely they are to believe it. That’s been my NIMBY experience -- the neighbors next door are the most opposed, and it kind of diminishes from there on out.

Jenny: Well, that kind of leads into another one of my questions, which is how relevant do you think messaging is to an affordable housing campaign? And, it might be that it’s not. And maybe there are other ways of getting about this change. I’m hoping that it can be though.

Nan: Well, so far, we’ve had a fairly negative discussion. But having said that, I think people are often motivated by self-interest. So, there are ways that you can try to persuade people that this is in their self-interest. It is in their self-interest to have people to teach in their schools, take care of their kids, work in the shops that they like and in the restaurants they enjoy going to – people who are able to take all of those jobs because they can live close enough to get to them and make it work. So one way to approach this is through people’s self-interest.

The other way to approach it is through policy changes. There is a tremendous amount of discrimination against people with disabilities – and it affects their income and the availability of housing. And there is housing and other discrimination against people of color, and against poor people. In some cases, there are legal protections with respect to housing for these groups, and city leaders could do a lot more to enforce these, and present a vision that values cities of diverse housing types and diverse populations. But cities often empower the residents of communities that just want to stop everything that is affordable. So in addition to messaging there is also law and policy.

And city leaders could do more to promote affordable housing. They could use public resources, including land, for affordable housing; they could prioritize investment in it; and they could ensure that any affordable housing that does exist is preserved. Cities often point out that they have terrible homelessness problems because of the lack of
affordable housing, and they are asking for money from the federal government for that. Yet they don’t preserve the affordable housing they have, they don’t set aside space for it in every neighborhood, they haven’t prioritized it in their public grants, and they haven’t eliminated local barriers to its construction. Too often they have raised the barriers to affordable housing; not lowered them.

Positive messaging about affordable housing can help and then show people how it can be asset and help them in their lives and also better public policy.

**Jenny:** There’s a lot of different actors involved in affordable messaging campaigns. Who would you say are important actors? I’d say some important people are policy makers, national organizations?

**Nan:** The building industry, housing finance industry, tenant groups, neighborhood groups, planners, business industry, realtors, and home builders are important actors. Sometimes other groups – like education or health care groups -- get involved because they realize that housing is a necessary platform for them to achieve their goals.

**Jenny:** What do you think has been a successful affordable housing messaging campaign?

**Nan:** I guess home ownership was a successful affordable messaging campaign. People feel strongly about it and prior to the recession there was also this enormous feeling -- based on data really and also just on the incredible degree to which the cost of housing was escalating -- that housing was the way to accumulate assets, wealth. That was the message -- not only was it the American Dream, which is a pretty good message, but also in the 90s and early 2000s, that it was the way for people to escape poverty. If poor people could just buy a house, it would appreciate tremendously and they would accrue assets. Of course, in the end that didn’t turn out so well – at least in the short run.
**Jenny:** I still think it’s been ingrained in everyone that if you don’t own your home you haven’t “made it” yet, though increasingly owning your home is out of reach.

**Nan:** Well I think you were asking about affordable….

**Jenny:** Well at one point owning your home was SUPPOSED to be affordable.

**Nan:** Well that’s true, and one of the big pitches is that it’s cheaper than renting in the long run. You’re investing in something and you get equity. That’s part of the messaging. Of course it’s not *always* true. Sometimes you go to sell your home and you can’t sell it for a profit. But anyway that’s the message, that you are smarter financially because you build wealth, or at least you get equity.

And when you think about it, decent safe and affordable housing is another message that has gotten a relatively positive response from people. Whatever you might think about that housing over there, you think people should have decent housing, they should have safe housing, and they should have housing they can afford. That’s a message that has stuck.

---

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


Center for Community Change. “Public Opinion Research.” Accessed November 15,


