

# Changing the Narrative of Affordable Housing: Final Report



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# Table of Contents

Executive Summary .....	1
Recommendations .....	2
a. Changing the Narrative	
b. Campaign Approach and Audience	
c. Key Campaign Elements	
Project Overview .....	5
a. Project Background	
b. Affordable Housing in the Sacramento Region	
c. Methodology and Timeline	
Summary of Findings .....	9
a. Literature Review	
b. Housing Advocate Interviews	
c. Sample Advocacy Campaigns and Toolkits	
d. Changing the Narrative of Affordable Housing Workshop	
Works Cited .....	23
Online Resources for Advocacy Campaigns and Toolkits .....	25
Acknowledgements .....	27

## Executive Summary

This final report, coauthored by Michael Rios and Brandon Louie, provides an overview of a study that was undertaken from July to November of 2015 to explore the opposition to and need for affordable housing, with a specific emphasis on the Sacramento region. Utilizing data from primary and secondary sources—including interviews with local housing advocates and affordable home residents, community workshops, peer-reviewed journal articles, and materials from other housing campaigns—this study found a number of commonalities between the local struggle for affordable housing and similar efforts across the country. This report describes the project’s approach, process and findings, highlighting what we know nationally and locally about this important issue. It also presents recommendations—culled from the convergence of various data sources—that identify potential messages, framing, data, resources, and organizational strategies to include in a campaign focused on changing the narrative of affordable housing in the Sacramento region. The three primary recommendations that can be drawn from this study include:

**Changing the Narrative:** A major goal of the study was to identify strategies to “put a face to affordable housing,” which will require changing the perceptions of multiple audiences and publics. Some of the key elements that respond to this goal include: a focus on affordable housing as a vital contribution to a community’s economic stability and vitality; and the use of research-based messaging and framing that personalizes issues, taps into community pride, celebrates the region’s diversity, and addresses distrust of government that translates into the lack of support for new housing policies and initiatives.

**Campaign Approach and Audience:** This recommendation offers a range of strategies and tactics based on campaign goals, organizations spearheading these efforts, the scale of a campaign, and targeted audience characteristics. Recommendations related to campaign approach and audience include: integrating communication tools with local community organizing efforts; using informal means of communication outreach through existing networks and small group meetings; connecting housing to other issues such as education, food access, health, and jobs; situating affordable housing as a larger societal benefit; targeting multiple audiences ranging from elected and appointed officials, to the general public and individuals over 50; enlisting trusted authorities as the preferred messengers of a campaign; and ensuring campaign tools and information are communicated simply, keeping in mind format and language accessibility.

**Key Campaign Elements:** The success of any campaign will depend on a number of important ingredients. In addition to some of the elements mentioned above, others include: articulating clearly defined goals and targets; enlisting regional and local partners with capacity to contribute to a campaign; highlighting successful examples of affordable housing, how it works, and the organizations that individuals can connect with; and communicating facts and figures that are compelling and motivating in ways people can easily grasp.

# Recommendations

This report is organized into three sections: *Recommendations*, *Project Overview*, and *Summary of Findings*. Below, the *Recommendations* are discussed in further detail. This is followed by a *Project Overview* including a description of affordable housing in the context of the Sacramento region, project partners, methodology and timeline. The final section describes the *Summary of Findings* that drive the report's recommendations and includes a review of the academic literature, a sample of campaigns and toolkits nationwide, a summary of interviews with affordable housing advocates and residents, and the outcome of a workshop where the results of the findings were presented and discussed to inform recommendations presented in this report.

## *Changing the Narrative*

- Demonstrate the importance of affordable housing to a community's **economic stability** and vitality. If possible, involve local business leaders as the messengers.
- **Use research-based messaging and framing**, focusing on strong values associated with the concept of "home," equality of opportunity, and societal benefits associated with housing affordability. Focus on empowerment and affordable homes as an "opportunity to provide people with access to success," not entitlement, handouts or charity. Avoid the term "affordable housing," which has become charged and stigmatized.
- Show the **diversity of people** who need affordable homes, who live in them, and who benefit from them. Be sure not to ignore extremely low-income individuals and families and people dealing with homelessness, who are often left out of the picture. Breakdown stereotypes and othering by showing that the people who benefit from affordable homes are already in our communities and live and work among us. Also address the lack of awareness regarding the full range and diversity of affordable home options and the value of neighborhoods that support all stages of life, with a mix of housing options.
- Connect the issue to people's own situations and families and **make it more personal**. Talk about people's stories and livelihoods, but avoid simply jumping right into solutions.
- Keep the problem from seeming insurmountable and **tap into community pride** by offering solutions and highlighting what is being done successfully in the region.
- Address the widespread **distrust of the government** that directly impacts housing policy and initiatives.

## *Campaign Approach and Audience*

- **Use public communication tools in conjunction with community organizing**

**efforts** . Despite the fact that there are nearly 1 million affordable housing residents in California, they have gone largely unorganized. Some of the people most affected here may not even know that housing affordability and high rent burdens are actually issues for them due to the normalization of high rent. Effectively mobilizing these community members could have a significant impact, both in Sacramento and other impacted regions.

- Utilize face-to-face communication and presentations to small groups, using **informal means of community outreach** and message dissemination, such as through community networks and informal meetings.
- **Connect housing to other issues** such as health, transportation, food access, education, jobs, public safety, environmental sustainability, youth development, homelessness, and livable communities. Build local coalitions with broad support, including local businesses, prominent community leaders, nonprofits, state agencies, local police, healthcare professionals, teachers, churches, religious groups, and other respected members of the community who people see as non-biased.
- **Connect affordable housing to a broader segment of society** to highlight housing's importance and impact to those who would not traditionally see it as a main concern in their lives. It is important to recognize how it benefits the entire community—not just low-income families and individuals—through economic development and revitalization, improved neighborhood appearance, increased diversity, environmental sustainability and transportation efficiencies.
- **Target audiences** such as elected officials, the general public, planning commissions, the business community, youth, people over 50, and individuals from complementary sectors like education and healthcare. For the general public, mobilizing the base of supporters, affordable housing residents, those in need of housing, and people on the fence could be more effective than focusing on winning over the opposition. Organizing waiting lists and other key groups in need of housing—such as Sacramento's large population of refugees—could be another avenue to pursue.
- **Utilize trusted authorities as preferred messengers** such as business leaders, faith leaders, police, and former NIMBY opponents who are now supportive of affordable housing. Local celebrities who benefitted from growing up in an affordable home could also be highly effective messengers.
- Present all data and information in an informative but simplified way that people can understand, keeping in mind **format and language accessibility** to reach diverse populations.

## Key Campaign Elements

- **Build the capability for evaluation into a future campaign**, allowing advocates to measure the effectiveness of messages and methods in changing opinion and evaluate the actual impact of changed opinion on key metrics. Metrics could include the average time it takes to get approval to build a project, electing candidates for public office who publicly support affordable housing, etc. It is crucial to measure opinion before a campaign is launched to obtain the baseline data and survey the same people after a campaign to assess the campaign's impact.
- **Define what affordable housing actually is**, how it is funded and operates, how housing laws work, and how advocates can impact housing policy decisions.
- **Publicize who in the region is working** on this issue and how interested community members can connect with them and get involved.
- Highlight particularly **successful examples of affordable housing** in the region.
- Show the **fiscal impact of affordable housing in communities**, including amounts of jobs created and local and state tax revenues generated by housing. Data should also compare the cost of supporting affordable housing developments versus the costs associated with the increased social services and programs needed to assist those who lack a healthy, safe, decent place to live. Additionally, one can document deaths, illnesses and injuries that are attributable to substandard housing or homelessness.
- **Show increasing housing costs** for both rentals and home purchases, demonstrating how people are overburdened with rent in the region and how high rent is normalized. Highlight actual occupations and income levels to show "who" affordable homes impact and how these individuals contribute to our communities.
- Show the **need for affordable homes** versus the actual affordable housing stock available, including how long all the waiting lists are to get into affordable developments.
- **Use social math**, the technique of putting large numbers into a relevant social context to make them more compelling and easier to understand, to equate numbers and data with local landmarks and things that people can relate to in the region.

## Project Overview

### *Project Partners*

The primary focus of this initiative was to identify the ingredients of a place-based campaign, with guidance from housing advocates, to address NIMBY opposition to affordable housing in the Sacramento region. The intent was also to build relationships with critical local stakeholders and support strong affordable housing advocacy efforts already underway in the area to mobilize a constituency for housing. Ultimately, this research explores the possibilities and key components for a campaign aimed at changing the narrative around affordable housing in the Sacramento region.

This project was generously supported by AARP California, the UC Davis Center for Regional Change, the California Endowment, the Sacramento Housing Alliance, and Commons Civic Planning & Development.

The study was led by Dr. Michael Rios, Associate Professor of Landscape Architecture + Environmental Design in the Department of Human Ecology at the University of California, Davis. Dr. Rios was assisted by two students from the university, Brandon Louie from the Community Development Graduate Group and Elizabeth Godkin from the Landscape Architecture undergraduate program. Additionally, the project was supported by an advisory committee of local housing advocates.

### *Affordable Housing in the Sacramento Region*

Both local advocates in the Sacramento region and national scholars agree that housing is not seen as a key concern for a majority of Americans when compared to other big issues like healthcare and jobs. According to a 2004 analysis of public opinion research on affordable housing, less than 50% of the American public considers affordable housing to be a big concern in their region or the nation (Campaign for Affordable Housing 2004). As another study notes, “The politics of affordable housing are a bit perplexing. Given that paying for housing is often the largest expense most families face, it would seem likely that concern over these costs would register in national politics—but mostly it does not” (Koebel, Lang, and Danielsen 2004, 55). Yet, more than 50% of renters in Sacramento County are overpaying for their housing costs, according to the California Housing Partnership Corporation. Housing affordability may not register as a top concern for most Americans, but it is clearly an issue that is impacting a growing number of local individuals and families in and around California’s capital.

Despite the growing need in many regions for more affordable homes, a number of scholars have pointed to a lack of organization and power among housing advocates when compared with those opposed to affordable housing initiatives (Hamilton 2003; Scally and Tighe 2015; Newman 2012; Scally 2013; Nguyen, Basolo, and Tiwari 2012; Tighe 2010). Oftentimes, the powerful and effective opposition to affordable home development comes in the form of NIMBYism. This “Not In My Backyard” mentality generally exhibited by local

neighbors and residents can be described as “the protectionist attitudes of and oppositional tactics adopted by community groups facing an unwelcome development in their neighborhood” (Dear 1992, 288). NIMBY opposition poses significant challenges to affordable home development throughout the country, especially when coupled with powerful and enduring narratives based on stereotypes about affordable housing developments and their residents. Historically and currently, affordable housing has also been a highly racialized issue, and racial relations and identity are key components of organized efforts to both support and oppose it (Basolo and Hastings 2003; Goetz 2008; Iglesias 2002; Sturzaker 2011; Tighe 2012).

This lack of awareness and organization on the part of those in need of affordable homes—coupled with highly organized NIMBY opposition groups and their dominant narratives—poses a huge challenge for advocacy coalitions and campaigns seeking to mobilize greater support for housing issues in their areas. This is especially true in the Sacramento region, which is facing a growing housing crisis that is going largely unrecognized by the general public and local elected officials. Rising rental and housing costs have received much more attention in larger metropolitan areas, such as the San Francisco Bay Area, where it is more blatantly apparent how expensive housing has become and how average people are being priced out of the market.

In contrast, despite similar and growing concerns, the housing situation in the Sacramento region has become a silent crisis. According to analyses done by the California Housing Partnership Corporation (2014), in Sacramento County from 2000 to 2012, median rent rose 12% and median income dropped 13%. Additionally 58% of renters and 44% of homeowners in Sacramento County are overpaying for housing costs according to data collected from the U.S. Census. Another startling statistic is that for every 100 extremely low-income renter families in need of an affordable home, Sacramento County only has 17.4 units available, earning it a dismal affordability ranking of 76 out of the 100 largest counties in the country (Leopold et al. 2015). With such low affordable housing supply and such long waiting lists, it can take years for families to get into a decent, safe, affordable home in California’s Capital Region. Despite this growing need, local, state and federal funding for affordable housing has been cut by 69% since the housing crisis of 2008, according to Housing California (2015), and recently approved state legislation will do little to remedy this situation. In addition, local mixed income housing ordinances have been severely weakened at both the city and county level as well (Garvin 2014; Branan 2014; Bizjak 2015).

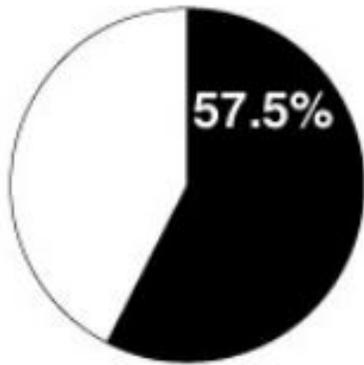


Figure 1: Renters overpaying in Sacramento County

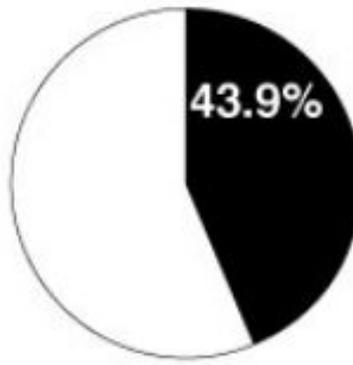


Figure 2: Homeowners overpaying in Sacramento County

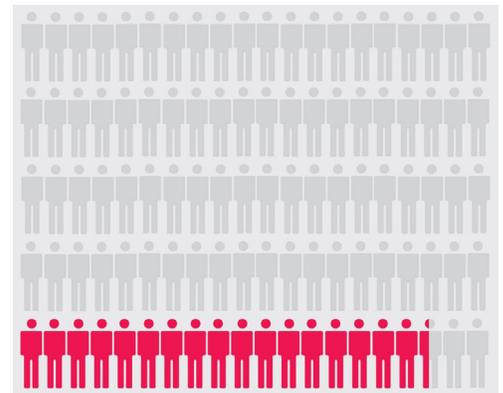


Figure 3: Only 17.4 affordable units are available for every 100 extremely low-income renter families in need of an affordable place to live in Sacramento County

The Sacramento region has a very diverse population and is the political and policy center of California, the 8th largest economy in the world (Masunaga 2015). However, despite its much-touted diversity and integration, Sacramento—like many other cities in the United States—is still grappling with widespread wealth inequality and the historical and geographical legacy of racially restrictive housing covenants, urban renewal programs and mortgage redlining, coupled with the impact of the more recent subprime mortgage and housing crisis (Hernandez 2009). Sacramento provides a snapshot of a community on the verge of widespread housing unaffordability trying to grapple with increasing housing needs amidst marked wealth and racial inequality and pockets of fierce NIMBY opposition. It affords a unique case study through which to analyze the opposition to and need for affordable housing, and explore potential avenues for increased housing advocacy.

### *Methodology and Timeline*

Outreach, data collection, and analysis for this project took place between July and November of 2015. Initial background research involved examining nineteen academic journal articles and twenty-four sample advocacy campaigns and toolkits from around the country. In order to put this information into a specific regional context, it was then combined with local data sets, reports, and dialogues with fifteen individuals working on housing affordability issues in the Sacramento area. Participants represented four affordable housing developers, four housing-related service providers, and six community organizing/advocacy organizations focused on housing campaigns. A few of the participating organizations have overlapping missions and activities that span these divisions. Interviews were also conducted with ten affordable housing residents, providing videotaped testimonies and personal stories from those directly impacted and supported by local housing initiatives. These discussions lasted approximately one hour. All participants were identified through snowball sampling, with initial contacts provided by the project team and a local advisory committee primarily composed of organizational representatives affiliated or collaborating with the Sacramento Housing Alliance.

From this information, the UC Davis team developed summaries, visuals, and testimonial video clips to be compiled into a housing advocacy toolbox for future use. Feedback on the process, direction, and deliverables of the research project was initially provided by a local advisory committee at a workshop held on August 31, 2015 at AARP California's headquarters in downtown Sacramento. Preliminary findings were also shared at the Sacramento Regional Affordable Housing Summit hosted by the Sacramento Housing Alliance on September 28, 2015. A final community workshop was held on October 29, 2015 in Sacramento to present findings and solicit input from over forty regional advocates representing housing, local government, public health, youth development and other key sectors.



Figure 4: Changing the Narrative of Affordable Housing project partners, including representatives from AARP, Commons Planning, the Sacramento Housing Alliance, and the UC Davis Center for Regional Change

## Summary of Findings

The following section highlights the significant findings gleaned from these various sources, as well as recommendations for future research and advocacy work on this important issue.

### *Literature Review*

As noted earlier, the scholarly literature on this topic recognizes that housing is not seen as a key concern for many Americans unless they are personally affected by housing issues. This poses a significant challenge for advocacy coalitions and campaigns seeking to mobilize greater support for affordable housing in their regions. The public is often generally supportive of affordable housing as a concept, but becomes oppositional when it comes to specific projects proposed in their immediate vicinity. This phenomenon is known as the principle-implementation gap and helps explain the existence and potency of NIMBYism (Tighe 2012). “When the issue transforms from general to specific—when it becomes personal—the public is far less supportive of accepting housing for moderate and low-income people. Darker feelings of fear overtake fairness and opportunity for many Americans” (Campaign for Affordable Housing 2004, 5).

It is important to recognize that NIMBY opposition is not homogenous, although their issues and tactics are often repetitive and predictable and, thus, can and should be planned for as part of any affordable housing campaign (Iglesias 2002; Scally 2013). NIMBY concerns can vary based on individual household attitudes, local elected official attitudes and concerns, the local subsidized housing history, conditions within the current housing market, and regional tensions brought about by uneven legacies of exclusionary zoning and other NIMBY-related actions. The basis of NIMBY concerns are generally geographical proximity to proposed developments and fears based on stereotypes of affordable housing residents and prospective tenants. Affordable housing is a highly racialized issue and the fears and stereotypes that fuel NIMBY opposition and anti-affordable housing narratives are often centered on race (Basolo and Hastings 2003, Goetz 2008, Iglesias 2002, Nguyen, Basolo, and Tiwari 2012, Tighe 2012). Whether affordable housing residents are seen as deserving or undeserving is also crucial and intimately tied to racial and ethnic identity. Despite these fears, it has been found that “well-managed housing that fits the scale of the neighborhood seldom produces the negative impacts” that opponents fear (Tighe 2010, 9). Still, NIMBY opposition can have a significant impact on a region’s social justice and equity goals by overriding sound planning and decision-making in determining where developments are sited, inadvertently legitimizing discrimination and segregation (Nguyen, Basolo, and Tiwari 2012; Scally and Tighe 2015).

Members of NIMBY opposition efforts are generally non-Latino white, wealthier, highly educated, and suburban and see themselves as deserving, contributing, law-abiding community members (Goetz 2008). Neighborhood and community type, degree of homogeneity, and level of concentration of pre-existing affordable housing sites are also key factors influencing NIMBY attitudes (Dear 1992). Anti-government sentiment and distrust of government and developers are also common NIMBY characteristics (Tighe 2012). Much opposition takes place outside of traditional democratic processes and represents only the voices of those residents privileged enough to already live in those communities (Scally and Tighe 2015). In addition, public agencies and elected officials

can be powerful sources of opposition to affordable housing because they are often focused on community economic development and increasing tax revenues and affordable housing is perceived as a hindrance to such efforts (Hamilton 2003; Scally 2013). There are a number of commonly expressed NIMBY concerns—which may or may not mask less socially-acceptable concerns about race and deservingness—such as fears about impacts on property values, schools, personal security, crime, social decay, quality of life, poverty concentration, density, appearance, the environment, traffic, parking, local services and funding.

The academic literature notes that NIMBY opposition is often predictable, so advocates and developers should plan ahead and engage early in the process. The four tactics that developers and advocates can prepare for and utilize are political support, community support, positive media coverage and litigation/legal support (Iglesias 2002). However, scholars also caution that power dynamics and political realities do not generally favor housing advocates and their constituency, who are often weak, fragmented, poorly funded and poorly organized (Hamilton 2003). In addition, challenging ideological beliefs, fears and stereotypes can be a challenging task and there are many opponents of affordable housing who will never be convinced of its necessity or merits. While social marketing campaigns promoting affordable homes are one potential solution for housing advocates, their effectiveness is limited by the extent to which community members trust their political leaders and developers and believe the campaign's advertising (Tighe 2010). Although multiple attempts have been made by housing advocates across the country, there is little empirical evidence demonstrating whether or not education and social marketing campaigns promoting affordable housing actually have an effect on NIMBY attitudes and actions (Scally 2013; Koebel, Lang, and Danielsen 2004).

### *Housing Advocate Interviews*

Interviews with housing advocates, developers and community organizers in the Sacramento region provided invaluable local information to juxtapose with the national data gathered from the academic literature on NIMBYism and affordable housing initiatives. A number of commonalities emerged between the two, with local advocates echoing key sentiments found in the literature, most notably:

- Housing is not recognized as a priority issue in the region, despite Sacramento's own affordability and rent burden crisis.
- People generally like the "idea" of affordable homes, but not specific, nearby developments.
- NIMBY opposition is mostly based on stereotypes, especially regarding race and class and whether or not current or prospective affordable housing tenants are seen as deserving.

- There is a strong association of “affordable housing” with the negative connotations of “public housing,” combined with fears of negative community impacts.

Along with these important similarities, the interviews also highlighted key concerns and opportunities specific to the Sacramento region.

Among the top concerns for local advocates was a lack of funding and political will in support of affordable housing. The loss of redevelopment money and gap funding dealt a substantial blow to local efforts. In addition, the 2008 housing crisis took a significant toll and the impact continues to be felt, such as with the weakening of local housing ordinances. New sources of permanent funding for affordable housing have proven difficult to win in the current political and economic climate. Additionally, land availability, regulations and zoning requirements are other significant barriers.

This funding and political climate is coupled with the pervasive belief that there is already enough affordable housing—or even too much—in Sacramento and that the region is “naturally affordable” and does not face the same housing problems as the San Francisco Bay Area. According to one interviewee, while affordable rental stock does exist, this is partly because so much of it is in such poor condition and is not well taken care of or managed by trustworthy developers. This advocate emphasized focusing on the fact that actual affordable housing is done by reputable, accountable developers and is separate from cheap, unsafe housing that might be available, but undesirable and unhealthy. As noted in a number of interviews, getting into an affordable home is a challenge for those who need it, with long waits, complicated qualifications, credit check costs, rising rents, and other significant barriers.

Another popular local opposition argument states that infill development of affordable housing in downtown and midtown Sacramento is just too expensive to be viable. According to Sacramento housing advocates who participated in this study, there is a general sense that the city favors commercial development and affluent residents to support its restaurants and other high-end amenities, promoting upscale live-work units filled with residents with deep pockets; it no longer views mixed-income development as viable because of the subsidies necessary to offset expensive rent. The “affordable by design” concept—a push to count accessory dwelling units like granny flats or mother-in-law units as affordable housing stock—has also become popular in a number of local jurisdictions, even though there are no guarantees that such units would be priced affordably.

Connected to these issues is the recent weakening of local mixed income housing ordinances in the City and County of Sacramento. According to local housing advocates, these ordinances were not given a chance to succeed and, since the housing crash, developers have been able to use their political power to walk away from their obligations associated with these ordinances. Local governments are now moving to in-lieu fees rather than requiring that a percentage of new housing developments be set aside as affordable. While local officials claim these fees will generate funds to help offset

the loss of redevelopment money and will alleviate poverty concentration in new growth areas, housing advocates argue the current fees are set far too low to significantly address the region's growing need for affordable homes. Interviewees identified these changes as a major turn away from some of the progressive work that was accomplished before the "Great Recession".

Even when affordable housing has support in the region, interviewees noted that extremely low-income (ELI) individuals and families are often left out of the picture. Deep income subsidies are especially difficult to acquire because of higher costs that go towards building and maintenance. As a result, people who would qualify as extremely low-income often get stuck paying more than they should for their monthly rent, since there are less ELI units available. People dealing with homelessness are some of the ELI constituents that require the most assistance, and this is a large issue in the region that is not being properly and effectively addressed. Along with a lack of transitional housing for this population, there is also a lack of funding and political will for dealing with the issue. And with weakened housing ordinances allowing for a smaller supply of affordable housing, while increasing rent and housing costs create an ever-increasing demand for it, this problem will only get worse.

In addition to housing affordability, some housing advocates also identified housing accessibility as another key concern often overlooked locally. Townhouses are the common, popular style for new housing developments in Sacramento. However, one cannot "age in place" with them and this type of housing is not appropriate for people with physical disabilities, due to stairs and other access issues. This is a particularly important concern for urban infill development, where multi-story, single-family units have become the design norm in order to maximize the number of dwellings that can be placed on smaller lots.

From the interviews, it was also found that fear of NIMBYism may be more pervasive and drive more actions in the Sacramento region than in other regions of California. Interviewees shared a common perception that NIMBY opposition is persistent in certain neighborhoods and this influences which areas community developers consider as "viable" for affordable housing development. New growth areas have also posed a significant challenge to affordable housing development, such as North Natomas. As a result, affordable housing in the region often gets sited in politically weaker, poorer communities with less resistance because it is easier for developers.

Compared with the influence of local NIMBY opposition, some interview participants also recognized the need for greater collective power on the part of affordable housing supporters in the region. Effectively mobilizing the base of support was seen as an important challenge that needs to be addressed, especially when it comes to the involvement and leadership of affordable home residents, prospective tenants and people of color. Rather than trying to convince those who might be strongly opposed to the issue, advocates noted the more significant impact could potentially be achieved if a grassroots constituency for housing was galvanized.

While local advocates identified a number of concerns specific to their area, they also highlighted important regional strengths and opportunities to draw upon in order to address these challenges. First and foremost, interviewees agreed that the region has many high quality affordable home developers with a great deal of experience that can demonstrate significant successes. There are numerous examples of well-designed, aesthetically-pleasing, and successful affordable housing communities in the Sacramento area, including some mixed income developments in higher income neighborhoods. Interview participants noted that these showcase communities could be coupled with an abundance of powerful resident stories and testimonies.



Figure 5: Examples of well-designed and successful affordable housing communities in the Sacramento area include Domus Development's La Valentina, Mutual Housing California's New Harmony, and CFY Development's Warehouse Artist Lofts

Along with a variety of competent, reputable developers, the region also boasts strong and diverse community groups, advocates, community organizers and coalitions. This includes some political allies and support as well. There are a large number of people in the area who benefit from affordable housing or could benefit from it if more were available, so there exists a great deal of untapped potential for organizing and political mobilization. Finally, Sacramento has great racial and ethnic diversity, as well as a strong knowledge base, such as the potential for more partnerships with local universities including UC Davis and Sacramento State.

Local housing advocates and organizers also mentioned a number of political opportunities that might represent important leverage points for further organizing and campaign work. Local and regional opportunities included Sacramento Mayor Kevin Johnson's 10,000 Housing Units initiative, Redevelopment boomerang funding, local housing trust funds, and the previously mentioned Mixed Income Housing Ordinances. Statewide policy prospects included statewide housing trust funds and the establishment of permanent sources of funding for affordable housing, along with cap and trade funding for transit-oriented development. At the national level, the recent Supreme Court Fair Housing ruling in Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs v. The Inclusive Communities Project, Inc. opens up litigation opportunities related to housing discrimination based on disparate impact.

## Sample Advocacy Campaigns and Toolkits

In order to learn from the strategies employed by other affordable housing advocacy efforts working to combat NIMBY opposition, twenty-four campaigns and toolkits from around the country were analyzed. In general, these campaigns worked to “mobilize supporters of affordable housing to influence land use decisions and...correct negative perceptions of affordable housing and get out the truth about its benefits, particularly regarding whom it serves” (Partnership for Sustainable Communities 2010, 1). Different organizations and coalitions took a number of approaches to addressing these issues. A variety of campaign materials were examined, including PowerPoint presentations, pamphlets, posters, advertisements, facilitation guides, infographics, television commercials, maps, and reports. Toolkits generally came in the form of online clearinghouses containing links, graphics and sample documents. Links to a selection of coalition and campaign online resources can be found in the final section of this report.



Figure 6: Examples of campaign materials developed by advocates with the Sacramento Housing Alliance and Housing Illinois

for these campaigns ranged from local elected officials and business owners to the general public. However, the researchers with the Partnership for Sustainable Communities recognized the inherent challenge in assessing the effectiveness of such messages and campaigns without the employment of thorough evaluation tools.

In analyzing a number of affordable housing campaigns through the study conducted by the Partnership for Sustainable Communities and from organizations themselves, the importance of proper pre- and post-campaign evaluation methods became very clear. It is crucial to measure opinion before a campaign is launched to obtain the baseline data and survey the same people after a campaign to assess its impact. Other key metrics should also be developed and utilized, including “the average time it takes to get approval to

The Partnership for Sustainable Communities (2010) analyzed a number of affordable housing campaigns that took place between 2000 and 2010 and came up with some findings worth noting. Regarding the framing and messaging used by various efforts, they noted, “The most commonly used message has been to showcase the kinds of people who need affordable housing, including firefighters, police officers, nurses, and teachers and explaining that these people often can’t afford to live in the towns where they work” (2). Targeted audiences



to build a project in a certain community, or the degree of improvement in the chances of electing candidates for public office who publicly support affordable housing” (Partnership for Sustainable Communities 2010, 3). While the capability for evaluation is a key component that should be built into all advocacy initiatives, it is something that most affordable housing campaigns have not done up to this point.

One challenge in meaningfully measuring support for housing is the principle-implementation gap, since people may support the general concept but oppose specific developments in their immediate vicinity. In order to overcome this, survey questions should be operationalized to focus specifically on “actions respondents would be willing to take to support a proposed project in their community” rather than more general approval (Partnership for Sustainable Communities 2010, 3). The cost of survey research and public opinion polling is another significant barrier, especially for nonprofit housing organizations with limited financial resources. Organizations and campaign coalitions may need to seek out funders willing to finance survey research as a key component of their social marketing strategies.

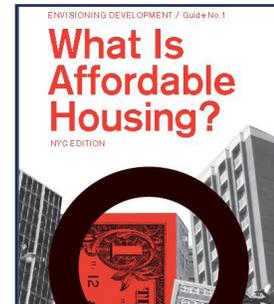
Campaigns also generally used very broadly targeted media in their efforts to promote affordable homes, de-stigmatize affordable housing residents, and combat NIMBY opposition. This strategy includes wide dissemination of media materials to the entire population, such as through websites, television commercials, newspaper ads, billboards, or posters. However, direct marketing techniques such as high-volume telemarketing or direct mail efforts targeted to specific demographic groups and constituencies were much less common, but could be very effective and worth exploring by future campaigns. These efforts could target specific groups of potential supporters who are on the fence about the issue but are open-minded, as identified through surveys or other methods. This approach could be useful for building an ongoing base of individual supporters to create a constituency for housing in the region. Also, direct marketing creates a clear way to measure the effectiveness of various advertising methods and messages, such as a metric to quantify the cost per supporter added to a mailing list.

In addition to the need for evaluation tools and the potential of direct marketing techniques, a number of other best practices were also identified through an examination of previous advocacy campaigns and the related literature. The following strategies were highlighted by the Partnership for Sustainable Communities and other housing organizations as being particularly effective:

- Face-to-face communication and presentations with small groups and individuals.
- Social marketing tools used in conjunction with community organizing campaigns
- Highlighting affordable housing’s positive impact on the economic strength and stability of a community.

The following are examples of campaigns studied by the research team, demonstrating the variety of approaches and strategies adopted by housing advocates across the United States:

**The Center for Urban Pedagogy** is a Brooklyn nonprofit that utilizes art and design to enhance civic engagement. They created a guidebook and an interactive workshop toolkit called “What is Affordable Housing?” that explains the basics of affordable home and neighborhood development. This free popular education resource clarifies affordable housing agencies, programs, requirements, qualifications, and funding in an informative, nonpartisan, visually-appealing style. It is meant to encourage community dialogue and discussion about local housing affordability, demographics and development. Some of the information and activities are specific to New York City and Chicago—the two guidebooks that have been developed so far—but much of it is relevant to and can be adapted for any community.



**The Vermont Housing Awareness Campaign** launched in 2002 to increase public awareness about the need for affordable housing in the state. In its messaging, this campaign switched from using the term “affordable housing” to instead referring to “housing that average Vermonters can afford.” At the start of their efforts, they conducted a public opinion survey with 300 people from across the state to gauge their knowledge and perceptions of housing needs, determine what types of housing they would accept in their communities, and test out their messaging. The campaign utilized annual reports, a speaker’s bureau and advertising—including radio and newspaper ads, a series of posters, and two videos. This initiative brought together a diverse coalition of forty-three organizations, such as banks, business groups, state agencies, environmental groups and housing advocates. Initial polling showed that a majority of Vermonters believed their neighborhoods did not have housing shortages or issues. The campaign was able to significantly increase this awareness level and build a more supportive base for affordable housing development, with 79% of people surveyed in favor of affordable home development after the education campaign.

**The Minnesota Housing Partnership’s Housing Minnesota Campaign** ran from 2002-2005 and focused on legislative policy goals for affordable home development. They targeted voters, business leaders and politicians with a brochure, radio ads featuring then-governor Jesse Ventura, billboards, print advertisements and ads on public transportation. Advertisements featured different groups with specific housing needs, such as seniors, teachers, mechanics, cooks, healthcare workers and childcare workers. They also organized a convention in 2002 attended by 1,300 people titled “Homes for All.” Advocates were able to push for the successful enactment of a property tax measure that reduced taxes on affordable housing and defeated budget cuts targeted at housing programs. This initiative was particularly successful because its focused policy efforts were combined with a media campaign that raised the visibility of the housing issue and effectively framed the concerns for the public.

If she can't afford a place to live,  
she can't afford to care for your dad.

HousingMinnesota is a collaboration of organizations  
working to create more affordable housing in Minnesota.  
For more information,  
visit [www.HousingMinnesota.org](http://www.HousingMinnesota.org)  
or call 651-649-1704.

**HousingMinnesota**  
Build the foundation

Funded by The Minneapolis Foundation, the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency, the Greater Minnesota Housing Fund, and the Family Housing Fund.

**The Marin Consortium for Workforce Housing** organized a campaign focused on the promotion of affordable housing for workers from 1996-2000. They made use of various advertising strategies—PSAs, print ads and bus billboards—and direct outreach through speaking engagements. Ads featured individuals, identified by name, who were among those affected by the county’s high housing costs, such as a teacher, firefighter, police officer, paramedic, nurse, doctor, and childcare worker. Speakers were recruited to make presentations to service clubs, city councils, and planning commissions and to show a video on workforce housing. A housing caucus and training was also organized to help interested groups learn how to be more effective advocates for workforce housing. The campaign effectively engaged local business leaders as champions of the issue and accomplished several local policy changes that benefitted affordable housing. The combination of an ad campaign with a speakers’ bureau was also an effective method to raise awareness about affordable housing and reinforce the campaign’s messages.

## *Changing the Narrative of Affordable Housing Workshop*

At the culmination of the information gathering phase, a community workshop was held on October 29, 2015 in Sacramento to present findings and solicit input from over forty regional advocates representing housing, local government, public health, youth development and other key sectors. In attendance were also a number of the affordable housing residents who participated in the video testimonial interviews as part of the project. This nearly full-day event was organized and facilitated by representatives from the UC Davis team, AARP California, Commons Civic Planning & Development, the UC Davis Center for Regional Change, and the Sacramento Housing Alliance.



Figure 7: Scott Ball from Commons Civic Planning & Development addresses workshop attendees

During the workshop's morning session, the UC Davis team presented findings and recommendations from their research and solicited feedback and input from the attendees. Through facilitated discussions organized around the World Café model, participants explored opportunities for a proactive media campaign designed to humanize and articulate the story of those involved in creating healthy, affordable homes in the Sacramento region. In the World Café session, attendees were divided into eight groups and were placed in one of two tracks. Each track was composed of four stations and participants stayed with their groups throughout the exercise, cycling through the stations and participating in ten-minute-long facilitated discussions at each station. Each station focused on one of the following questions and, in rotating between them, participants were able to provide input on all of the topics. Specific questions at each of the stations included:

- What should be the focus of a public education campaign and who should be the targeted audience(s)?
- What resources, tools, data, and information are most important to include in a public education campaign and why?
- What type of framing, messages, and narratives should be included in a public education campaign include?
- How can an affordable housing campaign address issues that matter most to you, your sector, constituency, and/or community?

Each station was managed by a facilitator and a notetaker, who helped prompt the conversation and recorded participants' input. At the end of the session, facilitators and notetakers with the same questions gathered briefly to share their notes and compile a combined list of the top responses they received. Finally, these responses were then shared back to the full group of attendees in order to recognize the feedback that was generated and to prompt further discussion on the workshop's identified topics. The following were the most common responses, suggestions, and concerns expressed by workshop participants during the World Café session:



Figure 8: UC Davis students Brandon Louie and Elizabeth Godkin lead a World Café discussion session with local housing advocates

*What should be the focus of a public education campaign and who should be the targeted audience(s)?*

- Make the focus of the public education campaign about everybody, not just low-income families. Anyone can find themselves in need of affordable housing—as we witnessed very recently during the housing crisis of 2008—and everyone is impacted by housing affordability. Everyone also benefits when communities have affordable homes. Affordable homes benefit our community, not just them or those people.
- Promote whole, livable, diverse communities. Another term used by participants was “complete communities.” Neighborhoods should be inclusive of all stages of life, with a mix of housing options to fit all situations and budgets. The campaign should address the lack of awareness regarding the full range and diversity of affordable home options beyond just Section 8 and public housing. This can also help move the focus away from low-income families and place it on the benefits to society as a whole, following the successful model adopted by the anti-tobacco campaign. This campaign dramatically increased its effectiveness when it shifted the focus away from smokers and targeted secondhand smoke, making it a campaign about everyone.
- Along with the diversity of affordable housing options, the campaign should also highlight the diversity of stories that are present within each of them. It should put a face to affordable housing, humanizing both the people and their homes.
- The public education campaign also must address the widespread distrust of the government. Affordable housing programs cannot be sustained without government funding and support, and these initiatives are severely impacted when constituencies lack faith in the competency of their government officials and agencies.
- Key target audiences for the campaign include the general public, local elected officials, and businesses. Youth and people over 50 are also important demographics to single out and mobilize, as are individuals from complementary sectors like education and healthcare. Additionally, funders and foundations can be targeted to promote greater financial assistance for affordable housing initiatives.
- Regarding key messengers for the campaign, local celebrities who benefitted from growing up in an affordable home could be powerful spokespeople for this issue.

*What resources, tools, data, and information are most important to include in a public education campaign and why?*

- Information and resources defining what affordable housing is are crucial. This is a very complex and confusing issue—especially when it comes to housing financing—so advocates could greatly benefit from simplified explanations focused on where funding for affordable housing comes from and where it goes, how tax credits work, who administers the programs, etc.
- Data and information should highlight the huge need and scope of the local housing problem, demonstrating the lack of affordable homes and the length of waiting lists for existing developments. It could also be helpful to show where affordable housing is located and where it is available in the region.
- Data should also compare the cost of supporting affordable housing developments versus the costs associated with the increased social services and programs needed to assist those who lack a healthy, safe, decent place to live. This can demonstrate that money not invested in affordable homes will have to be spent many times over down the road due to all of the problems associated with inadequate housing.
- All data and information must be presented in an informative but simplified way that people can understand. Format and language accessibility are also important concerns. The region’s diverse populations and language needs should be taken into account in order to ensure that all groups are properly informed about the issue.
- Format and mode of dissemination can take a number of forms, including billboards, online social media, bus ads, earned media opportunities with events and press, resident video testimonies, television ads, fliers, and tours of successful affordable home developments already in existence in the region.



Figure 9: Stacey Moore and Christina Clem from AARP California capture input from workshop participants

*What type of framing, messages, and narratives should be included in a public education campaign?*

- Framing and narratives should highlight the economic benefits of affordable housing for the entire community. When people have affordable places to live and are not spending all of their income on rent, they have more expendable income for necessities and to support local businesses. Affordable homes should also be framed as an effective “cost avoidance” strategy, since they actually save the government and taxpayers money that would have otherwise been spent on social services and other programs supporting poor people impacted by unhealthy, inadequate housing situations. This framing highlights what happens when communities do not invest in affordable housing, since their money must then go towards supporting services for people dealing with homelessness, emergency room visits, law enforcement, food assistance, etc.
- Narratives should focus on success stories and present hopeful, positive solutions. Stories can show affordable housing as an important stepping-stone for people’s upward social mobility. This message would identify affordable housing as a key stage in people’s lives that allows them to grow and prosper and then move on to achieve further life goals. In addition to focusing on the stories of current residents, these messages should also share the testimonies of people who used to live in affordable housing and have since moved on to homeownership or market-rate rentals thanks in part to the support they received.
- Framing should take advantage of Sacramento’s culture and diversity—the characteristics that make the region attractive and unique—recognizing the important role affordable housing plays in maintaining this diversity. People are attracted to the city and the region due to its diversity and creativity, and in order to maintain it we have to support housing and prevent displacement. Current conversations happening in San Francisco highlight the dangers of not acting, with residents lamenting the loss of cultural diversity and the unique character of the city due to widespread gentrification and displacement.
- Messaging for the campaign should focus on housing that benefits seniors, veterans, people dealing with homelessness, and people with disabilities. Previous initiatives have noted that these groups are seen as particularly deserving of assistance. However, messaging focused on “workforce housing” has been shown to be ineffective. Messaging highlighting housing for teachers, firefighters, police officers and other workers did not resonate with voters in previous initiatives, possibly because of the enduring power of the meritocracy myth in the United States.

How can an affordable housing campaign address issues that matter most to you, your sector, constituency, and/or community?

- Buy-in from multiple sectors is key. Everyone whose work is related to housing in any way—nonprofits, developers, transportation, health, etc.—should be engaged in telling the story. Connections between housing and public health issues are particularly strong and should be utilized to the fullest extent possible.
- Regarding resident leadership, the campaign should address the barriers faced by affordable housing residents who may want to be more involved in advocacy work but are not able to due to lack of transportation, lack of time, lack of knowledge, etc. Funding and resources are needed to support engaging residents in telling their stories as well as empowering them to use their voices. The opposition is well funded and we need money in order to support a grassroots campaign. Additionally, what kinds of skills and knowledge are needed for people to get involved and actively represent on this issue, understanding the complex dynamics of the housing issue?



Figure 10: Dr. Jonathan London from the UC Davis Center for Regional Change and Stacey Moore from AARP California report back on their groups' discussions from the World Café activity

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## Online Resources for Advocacy Campaigns and Toolkits

*Center for Urban Pedagogy*

What is Affordable Housing? Envisioning Development Toolkit

<http://welcometocup.org/Projects/EnvisioningDevelopment/WhatIsAffordableHousing>

*City of Fort Collins, Colorado*

“Faces and Places of Affordable Housing” & “Can I Be Your Neighbor?” Poster Campaigns

<http://www.fcgov.com/socialsustainability/faces-places-posters.php>

<http://www.fcgov.com/socialsustainability/neighbor-posters.php?key=affordablehousing/neighbor-posters.php#4>

*The Council of Large Public Housing Authorities, National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials, and Public Housing Authorities Directors Association*

ReThink Why Housing Matters Campaign

<http://www.rethinkhousing.org/>

*East Bay Housing Organizations*

Campaigns & Programs

<http://www.ebho.org/our-work>

*Florida Housing Coalition*

Sadowski Housing Coalition Campaign

[http://www.flhousing.org/?page\\_id=52](http://www.flhousing.org/?page_id=52)

*Housing Development Consortium*

Advocacy Campaign

<http://www.housingconsortium.org/advocacy/>

*Housing Leadership Council of San Mateo County*

Homes for All Campaign

<http://www.hlcsmc.org/take-action/homes-for-all>

*HousingWorks RI*

Campaign Infographics

<http://www.housingworksri.org/affordable-homes/research-center/infographics>

*The Kennedy Commission*

Gaining Ground: Housing Element Community Engagement Campaign

<http://www.kennedycommission.org/projects.html#gaining>

*Marin Consortium for Workforce Housing*

Marin Workforce Housing Trust

<http://mwht.org/>



*Minnesota Housing Partnership*  
Housing Minnesota Campaign Action Tools  
<http://www.mhponline.org/policy/tools-and-facts/tools>

*Nonprofit Housing Association of Northern California*  
Tools & Toolkits  
<http://nonprofithousing.org/category/resources/toolkits/>

*North Carolina Housing Coalition*  
Campaign for Housing Carolina  
<http://www.nchousing.org/advocacy/campaign>

*Vermont State Housing Authority*  
The Vermont Housing Awareness Campaign  
<http://www.housingawareness.org/>

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Brandon Louie, UC Davis: front cover photos and graphic, figure 3  
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Housing Illinois: figure 6  
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Mutual Housing California: figure 5  
Sacramento Housing Alliance: figure 6

### About the UC Davis Center for Regional Change (CRC)

The CRC is a solutions-oriented research center dedicated to encouraging and informing healthy, sustainable, and equitable regional development. We pursue this through engaged scholarship that is collaborative and multi-disciplinary. Our goal is to help solve pressing issues in California and beyond.

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