

Self-Helper

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Shine a Spotlight



If there ever was a time to shine a spotlight on the Mutual Self-Help Housing Program, it would be now. With funding cuts threatening the programs' existence, all of us who believe in self-help housing must do what we can to save it. This edition of the Self-Helper focuses on topics that may help in this cause. Inside there are articles on lobbying, new ideas for recruiting program participants, some inspiration and maybe some facts to share with others.

One of the ways that NCALL is shining a spotlight on the program is through a new website. NCALL's Self-Help Team has created a promotional website for Region III, www.selfhelphousingspotlight.org. This website houses promotional materials that grantees all over our region can use to help with both recruitment and public understanding of the program. There are videos and video interviews of current and past self-help families discussing different aspects of the program...from the finished product, to the struggles that they faced throughout the process, to the amazing positive changes the program has made in their

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Providing comprehensive, quality services for self-help housing

Spotlight *(Continued from Page 1)*

lives. We think these videos will help overcome the trepidations and skepticism that families seem to feel when they hear about self-help. We seem to live in a Google society. We hope these positive stories will help provide reassurance and motivation to potential participants prior to joining and throughout construction.

In addition to videos, you will find articles pertaining to the program and grantees, testimonials from participants and photos. If your

organization has photos to share, or receives positive press, forward it to NCALL so we can add it to this website for other grantees, potential families and the public to see. Additionally, NCALL will continue to video current and past clients, suppliers, and contractors to continue to get a wide perspective on the program and it's benefits.

Another section of the website includes a brief overview of each grantee in Region III. With that section we also are including

success measures. More about this can be found later in the newsletter.

Take a stand, reach out to the public, hold events, talk to congressional and local leaders. There is no better time than now to shine a spotlight on why this program is so important to communities and to the families that participate. We hope you will partner with us to support this new project and help carryout this vision for the future of Self-Help Housing.

Tips for Marketing on YouTube



YouTube has grown substantially since it was launched in February 2005. Currently, YouTube is the largest video sharing website with 60 million unique views each month. In fact, YouTube is the 4th most trafficked website in the U.S. and the 2nd highest trafficked website globally. With access to such a vast audience, it's no surprise that marketing has been firmly implemented and taken advantage of this technology.

NCALL's Self-Help Team has created a YouTube profile to help promote the Mutual Self-Help Housing Program. These videos are also available on Region III's new promotional website via YouTube, www.selfhelphousingspotlight.org, along with other information mentioned in the previous article.

We encourage our grantees to help promote the program by creating a profile on YouTube and uploading videos. Please send a link to Meghan at NCALL via email (mfitzgerald@ncall.org) so it may be added to the Self-Help Housing Spotlight website as well.

Want to post clips on your own YouTube site? Here are some YouTube marketing tips to get you started:

- Utilize the share option by sending emails to your friends and colleagues or posting a link on a social networking site like Facebook, Twitter, Google Buzz, orkut, tumblr, Blogger, MySpace, hi5, Live Spaces, Bebo, and StumbleUpon.
- Adding friends is a powerful way to gain exposure on YouTube. This can be achieved by sending friend invites.
- Once your profile has acquired friends, you invite them to subscribe to your page. This

will ensure that a link to your videos will be on their home page.

- Be sure your video appeals to the community.
- Encourage others to share your videos.
- Utilize YouTube tags to increase visibility in search results. Use adjectives to target people and match your title and description to the tags.

Check Out NRSHHA's New Website

The National Rural Self-Help Housing Association has started a new blog. Visit them at www.selfhelphousinghub.com. There you will find videos, photos, research and up to date information, as well as discussions.

Planting Seeds – A Personal Perspective

A few weeks ago my two boys that are 3 and 4 spent the day visiting my 73 year old mother. That particular day the weather was mild and the three of them spent all day in the garden pulling out the dried flowers and vegetable stalks to prepare the beds for spring. As the boys pulled out the old plants, they noticed that many of them had seeds. My mother explained that they could take the seeds home and plant them and that they would grow into a beautiful garden. So they eagerly gathered as many seeds as they could hold. When I arrived to pick them up, they were excited to show me the work they did and the seeds that they had collected. I could see how proud they were when they showed me their bags of seeds.

My mother also looked proud; she commented, “It looks like we have two more little farmers in the family.” She smiled and commented that seeds are not only planted in the ground, content in knowing that she just planted a love for gardening in my boys.

The boys were a mess, covered in dirt with red noses and cheeks. I had to scrub them up before I would even put them in the car. I expected them to fall asleep as soon as we got on the road, but the whole way home they just went on and on about the seeds. I asked how would they know what seed they were planting? My youngest explained that it didn’t matter what the seed was, that he could put it in the ground and water it and it would grow into something wonderful.

That’s when I realized it’s not about

the seed; it’s about what the seed represents. It’s a hope and chance offered by the seed. There’s the possibility that with hard work and effort, the seed will take root.

The families that take part in Self-Help Housing program have that same feeling. They all hold that tiny little seed of hope in their hands and they just want a chance to plant it and nurture it so it too can grow into something wonderful. They invest months of their time and effort, sweat and tears into building a home for their family and their neighbors. They are truly building a community one home at a time.

The rural communities we work in are often like a neglected patch dirt. They might be lacking opportunity and resources, but with a small investment and a little work they can develop into fertile ground.

In Region III, a modest 50 home project can have a huge economic impact on a rural community. On average 50 homes will add \$5 million in resources to revenue strapped communities, adding nearly \$700,000 directly into the local business. This boost to the economy will also create and support 75 new jobs. The 50 new families will also need “stuff” and they will spend \$142,000 annually supporting their local economy. The local government will collect \$300,000 in taxes and revenue from the 50 families over 10 years. These impressive figures do not even address the long term impact; the fact is that the initial investment of



federal funds when used for housing construction will turn over multiple times in this community.

Many rural communities are suffering and have a desperate need for new, energy-efficient, modest homes that fulfill the needs of their workforce. Other communities bare the scars of vacant forgotten houses and look to Purchase/Repair to help make them habitable again. The Self-Help program can and has addressed both of these issues, and helps grow a community’s future economy into something wonderful in the process.

Rural Development Rate Increase

- As of April 1, 2011, Rural Development is increasing their 502 Direct Note Rate to 4.675%.
- Keep this in mind when qualifying applicants!!

Host a "Homeownership Rally"it is a Blast!!!

If your Self-Help recruiting needs a boost... try hosting a Self-Help Homeownership Rally. It is a fun way to meet the public. This type of event can attract lots of people at once. Southeastern Wisconsin Housing Corporation just completed their first, and have already scheduled their second (see their poster on right).

Invite partners to participate, include Rural Development, NCALL and Realtors (if producing Self-Help Purchase/Rehab). Also invite congressional staff to stop in!

Here are some initial Best Practices:

- Schedule the Rally on a Saturday... 10:00 a.m. – 12 p.m. or 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. works well.
- Hold the Rally at a community center, library or school. The location should be easy to get to, with plenty of parking and in a large well-lit room.
- Create flyers and posters. Place posters in high traffic business locations like grocery stores, clinics, convenience stores, employers' lunch rooms. Flyers can be distributed to area businesses—you could e-mail them also.
- ADVERTISE it the newspaper a week or two ahead of the event. Ask the local radio station to run public service announcements. Invite the newspaper to come.
- Place balloons outside and inside, along with posters and photos! The idea is to relax, have fun, smile and get interest.
- Think about the flow of attendees...they should be

- greeted and directed to:
- 1st Stop** – a Sign-in Table...name, address, phone number and name tags
 - 2nd Stop** – you discuss the highlights of the self-help program
 - 3rd Stop** – previous self-help participants talk to attendees about their experiences
 - 4th Stop** – meet RD so they can give a brief update on their 502 Direct program
 - 5th Stop** – meet

your Realtor.... in this case SEWHC is producing Self-Help Purchase/Rehab, so the Realtors have become a valuable partner in connecting applicants to existing homes that need moderate rehab, and for community support.

Last Stop – attendees complete a prequalification. The self-help organization can guide the attendees in completing the initial paperwork. This is taken back to the office, and processed the following week.

The attendee is at the Rally for only a short time....20-30 minutes.

- Another option could be to

Join Southeastern WI Housing Corp. for our
Self-Help Purchase / Repair

Homeownership Rally!!



Free Admission
Door Prizes Available
Realtors Available
Saturday, March 19th, 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.
Delavan Community Centre
826 E. Geneva St.,
Delavan, WI

To register or for more information call SEWHC at 262-763-7851.

Southeastern Wisconsin Housing Corporation of Racine County's (SEWHC) mission is to open doors to affordable homeownership. Join us for our Self-Help Purchase/Repair Homeownership Rally and take your first step to becoming a homeowner. This program features:

- No Downpayment
- Low Interest Rates
- Payments Based on Income
- Finding and Repairing Existing Homes

SEWHC has assisted over 1,500 families become homeowners—you could be next!





308 Milwaukee Ave. • Burlington, WI 53105 • Phone: 262-763-7851 • Toll Free: 877-865-1948

draw attendees by promising a free credit report if they pre-register. This should only be done if there is enough room and personnel at the rally to review the reports privately.

- Have drinks and snacks available.
- Have a few door prizes and give them away during the rally... attendees do not have to be present to win.
- Take pictures.

The most important tip is to have fun at your rally!! You are promoting a valuable program to the community and smiles go a long way to relieve first-time homebuyer fears.

Lobbying

Now more than ever, Congress and your local leaders need to hear from you about the self-help program. But are nonprofits allowed to lobby? What are the rules and limitations?

The word “Lobbying” is often misunderstood. Many nonprofit organizations assume they cannot lobby or they will violate the IRS, OMB, or funder requirements. Others may not know what constitutes lobbying. Let’s try to make some sense of this often misunderstood word.

What is lobbying?

Lobbying is an effort designed to influence a specific piece of legislation. The effort can be direct to a legislator or grassroots to the public, encouraging action on their part. Much of what nonprofits do in the course of their work is education, information, invited testimony, answering questions, sharing success stories, etc., which is not lobbying unless it references a specific piece of legislation. Do not confuse lobbying with political activity which is expressly not allowed.

First and foremost!

Federal funds received by nonprofit organizations may not be used to lobby. So in order to legally lobby, a nonprofit must have access to and use unrestricted funds for any lobbying that is undertaken.

How much lobbying is okay?

Nonprofit organizations must restrict their lobbying to “an insubstantial part of their total activities.” The risk is in the

interpretation of “insubstantial.” The nonprofit might establish a policy which caps its annual lobbying expenditures to an amount it considers insubstantial along with its rationale for the policy. A less vulnerable way is to take what is known as the IRS 501 (h) election which provides a formula for calculating maximum lobbying expenditures for direct and grassroots lobbying in relationship to exempt purpose expenditures. Electing 501(h) takes the interpretation and perhaps vulnerability out of lobbying. You may be amazed at how much lobbying your organization could safely spend under 501(h). Exceeding your limit under 501(h) results in a tax liability of 25% of the excess. If your organization has not formally taken the IRS 501(h) election then you fall under the insubstantial interpretation rule.

Track it and claim it

It is important to track expenditures on lobbying. Very few organizations can legitimately say they do no lobbying. So if you do lobby, then track it and claim it. Timesheets, mileage, travel, receipts are all important, whether proving that the lobbying is insubstantial or proving that it falls within the 501 (h) thresholds. Lobbying expenditures should be claimed on the annual IRS Form 990.

What is at risk?

The risk nonprofit organizations face is the loss or revocation of their 501(c)(3) status, which could mean the death of the organization.



Is a House Just a House? What is Your Impact?

In 2011, NCALL began to monitor the impact of the Mutual Self-Help Housing Program in Region III through the utilization of a NeighborWorks® America – Success Measures tool.

One of the desired outcomes for Mutual Self-Help Housing organizations is to have a positive economic impact on the community. The Success Measures tool helps determine that effect by calculating the local economic impact of a self-help housing program. This is done by measuring the one-time benefits to the local economy from construction, adding the move-in spending by homeowners in the first year, and estimating the ongoing benefits to the local economy over 10 years.

Some of the highlights of the results from the participants in this survey are available on www.selfhelphousingspotlight.org. Grantees, don’t forget to fill out your form and get it back to mfitzgerald@ncall.org so your organization’s impact can be calculated and displayed!!

(An example of the success measures outcome can be found in the “Planting Seeds” article.)

Regional Conference Call Planned

NCALL will be hosting another regional conference call on April 27th at 10:00 a.m. for an open discussion. Please join us and be prepared to share your thoughts and questions. More information will be coming out on this call later.

Homeownership Month is coming!

National Homeownership Month is in June and it will be here before we know it!! Start making plans now for your event. Host an open house, grant closing, ground breaking, homeownership rally or a work day. Invite the press, Rural Development, community members and legislators. Plan ahead for success!!

Application Processing AN

On March 3, 2011 Rural Development released AN 4553 which discusses the review and processing of 523 grant applications. This Administrative Notice (AN) provides strict guidance regarding grant processing. Rural Development's goal with this AN is to improve the consistency of processing pre-applications and applications for Self-Help grants. The AN emphasizes that the processing

checklists and timeline be strictly adhered to in accordance with RD Instruction 1944-I. They also emphasized the importance of a thorough application review by the state office for completeness, accuracy and conformance to program policy and regulations.

This AN replaces RD AN No. 4387 (1944-I) dated August 28, 2008, which expired September 30, 2009.

The End of 502 Set Asides

For the Self-Help Housing Program, funding for the participants' 502 loans has been partially set aside at the National Office, until now. On February 28, 2011, Rural Development published an Unnumbered Letter that formally ended the set asides for the Self-Help program. All of the 502 funds will have to come from the state

allocation where the grantee is located. This is being done because of the elimination of the 523 program in the 2012 fiscal year budget. Grantees will need to work closely with their State Rural Development office to plan ahead to ensure sufficient funds for their programs.

Grant Extension and Calculations AN

AN 4552, published on March 3, 2011, deals with grant extensions and calculations. According to Rural Development, during the 2009 Management Control Review, there were inconsistencies and irregularities in the development and processing of Section 523 grant applications. This AN hopes to clarify and reiterate the process for calculating grant amounts and covering grant extension requests.

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