

Fair Housing Initiatives Program (FHIP) Information Resource Center Newsletter – March, 2012

IRC Newsletter Features This Issue

The FHIP NOFA is out, and in this issue we use **How Do I...** to help you prepare for one key change 2012 FHIP grant negotiations. **Communicating with Audiences** is about the methods HUD is using to connect and interact with interested individuals, including those in need of services and supporters. **PR that Worked** is grantee-to-grantee talk about how to market your fair housing messages. **Power to the People** is part one of a two-part article on crafting a comprehensive social media policy for your fair housing organization. **New HUD Rule** is an overview of HUD's new rule to ensure that HUD's core housing programs are open to all eligible persons.



How Do I... Prepare for a Key Change in 2012 FHIP Grant Negotiations?

Each FHIP 2012 grant awardee will be required to provide a continuity of operations disaster plan. To comply with this requirement an awardee must:

1. Develop an emergency preparedness plan of operations to implement in the event of a natural and/or man-made disaster. The plan must cover disasters in geographic areas which may affect the grantee's ability to operate in the region the grant was awarded to serve.
2. Identify and appoint a Disaster Liaison responsible for ensuring that the plan is current and that it addresses all key areas of the organization (personnel, equipment, finance, etc.).
3. Disaster Liaisons will be required to provide copies of their organization's disaster plan to the FHEO Regional Director and Government Technical Representative assigned to them in support of their grant(s).

The disaster plan must be presented during grant negotiations, because the grant will not be executed until the plan is provided.



Communicating with Audiences: HUD and Grantees Launch Housing Discrimination Media and Training Campaigns

In late February, FHIP 2010 Education and Outreach Initiative National Media Campaign grantee the **National Fair Housing Alliance** and HUD launched a new series of radio and print public service advertisements (PSAs).

Most of the PSAs are designed to teach individuals and families how to recognize and report discrimination in housing because of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, familial status, and disability, including discrimination in mortgage lending because of issues related to pregnancy and/or parental leave. Several promote the Fair Housing Act's goal of inclusive neighborhoods.

The campaign includes eight print ads in English, Spanish, and Chinese and four (two 30-second and two 60-second) radio PSAs, each in English and Spanish.

The PSAs are available at HUD.gov/fairhousing and www.nationalfairhousing.org.

HUD's press release can be read at

http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/press/press_releases_media_advisories/2012/HUDNo.12-035.

In January 2012, FHIP 2010 Education and Outreach Initiative National Media Campaign grantee **Consumer Action** and HUD launched a new television public service announcement (PSA) in English and Spanish. In March 2012, Consumer Action will launch the TV PSA in three Asian languages. The organization also developed complementary radio ads in five different languages. These ads will be available for viewing on HUD's website in April 2012.

Consumer Action developed two fair housing brochures on fair housing protections and how to file a housing discrimination complaint. These brochures are available on Consumer Action's website: www.consumeraction.org. In addition, Consumer Action developed a fair housing training module and launched a series of train-the-trainer fair housing roundtable sessions to educate approximately 250 community based organizations on the protections of the Fair Housing Act.



Power to the People: Empowering Your Fair Housing Organization with a Social Media Policy

Social media tools, a term used to represent a group of constantly evolving web and mobile based technologies, incorporate video, photo, audio, text, and *engagement*. Engagement is the opportunity for anyone online to share your content, along with their thoughts about it, with you and everyone else online.

How can you channel this engagement so that it advances your goals? You can't control the conversation, but you can develop a comprehensive social media policy that outlines what your organization can and can't do (legal aspects of online engagement), and will and won't do (organizational culture and style of online engagement) in the name of engagement. (Continued next page)

Once you have created a comprehensive policy and communicated it, you and your staff should feel confident about using online engagement with the public to advance your fair housing goals.

A comprehensive policy covers three areas of social media engagement:

1. The nuts and bolts of how your organization will use social media to market your fair housing messages. This section should be distributed to, read by, and signed off on by staff authorized to work on and monitor your organization's online presence.
2. How employees can engage social media relative to your organization. This section should be distributed to, read by, and signed off on by all staff in your organization.
3. How the public can participate in your online communities. This should be published online wherever you engage with the public.

This article details what you should include in the section of your policy that details the nuts-and-bolts of how your organization will use social media tools to market your fair housing messages. Some of the details, for example, some of the definitions, could be incorporated in the section of your policy that is distributed to all employees, or the section written for the public that explains how they may participate in your online communities.

Detailing How Your Organization Will Use Social Media Tools to Market Your Fair Housing Messages

This part of your social media policy covers the internal, nuts-and-bolts definitions and staffing of your organization's social media activities.

- An outline what the policy document is and to whom it applies.
- A definition of the purpose and scope of your organization's presence on social media platforms. (Why are you using social media? What do you expect to achieve?)
- A definition of what you mean by social networking and social media tools within the context of your work. You should include what tools and platforms are covered by the policy and how they will be used. Be specific. For example, once your authorized representative posts a tweet about a local fair housing event, is she/he authorized to respond to tweets from the public, and what can he/she say?
- A list of the staff that are authorized to represent your fair housing program via social media.
- A list of the titles (and names, though this will change) of staff who will set up and maintain the technical aspects of your social media accounts (domain names, administrator names, user names and passwords, etc.).
- A list of the titles (and names, though this will change) of the individual(s) responsible for social media site security.
- A list of the titles (and names, though this will change) of individuals who can provide the following approval(s): to open or close accounts; to suggest content and/or develop content; to sign off on content before it's posted; to use organization or HUD logos and trademarks.
- A list of the titles (and names, though this will change) of the individual(s) charged with monitoring whether social media tools are being used according to the policy.
- A policy for linking to other sites and for use of cookies.
- A definition of legal issues relating to the following, along with any rules: freedom of information; content disclaimers; how freedom of speech applies to content you produce; how laws about copyright, fair use, financial disclosure, and plagiarism apply to your site.
- A list (with definitions/descriptions) of what information can and cannot be shared and a definition of what your organization considers personally identifiable information.
- A definition of what can and cannot be said on social media sites in an official capacity. (Including personal opinions and how your authorized representative should respond to comments/criticisms, if at all) and how authorized employees should identify themselves when they are online representing the organization.
- A statement about how all authorized users must abide by the rules of service for the different social media tools.
- A list of applicable privacy laws for dealing with information posted by the public and any rules.
- A definition of disciplinary actions if the guide is not followed by staff.

In designing your policy, keep in mind that your fair housing organization needs to keep up with the rapid changes in existing media and new tools, and keep up with staff changes, so plan for the time and resources needed to keep your social media policy current.

Next time: *Employee Social Media Engagement and Public Participation Guidelines*



PR That Worked

In May 2011 Stephanie Waller (HUD Fair Housing Initiatives Program) and Andrea Collins (WilDon Solutions, LLC, a FHIP contractor) talked to President and CEO Keenya Robertson and Vice President Gail Williams of Housing Opportunities Project for Excellence, Inc. (HOPE, Inc.) in Miami, Florida, about their media endeavors on behalf of fair housing.

Utilizing the Media Is Awesome

According to Keenya Robertson, “media can be a powerful educational tool.” To illustrate her point, Ms. Robertson cited the situation of family denied housing in a mobile home park that was turned around when local media highlighted the situation.

A boy and his parents came to Miami to live with his grandfather. The family was required to submit the child’s report card as part of their application and was denied because of the child’s conduct grade from the previous year. Jeff Weinsier and Nick Bogert, reporters for the Problem Solver Unit at WPLG-TV (ABC 10) in Miami, covered the story.

HOPE, Inc. has made a point to know the media (for example, who will cover what), and “knows how to pick up the phone.” The organization invited the reporters to serve as masters of ceremonies at a luncheon to honor the child. The mobile home park approved the application the night of the luncheon.

Advice to Other Fair Housing Organizations

When we talked, both women agree that an ongoing dilemma fair housing organizations face is that they need visibility to court the kind of results noted above, but that getting visibility is a very labor and/or funding intensive job. They offered the following advice to fair housing organizations working to focus more on PR.

Master everything free before you begin spending money

To secure placement of PSAs, both women focused on the number one morning radio show personality in their market by attending his events, introducing themselves, and getting to know him. As a result, they have been able to invite him to host some of their activities, and his station has featured HUD’s housing discrimination PSAs with HOPE Inc’s tag line. Mr. Robertson believes that the most effective marketing HOPE, Inc. does is radio PSAs.

To use local news stations to cover fair housing you have to know what interests them

It is difficult to be recognized. The media is not that interested in administrative complaints, but the media is interested when a fair housing organization is filing a case and if money is involved. For example, a case against Cornerstone Residential Management, Inc., a prominent Florida affordable housing developer and property manager, resulted in a sizeable settlement. When the case was filed it was hot, but not after five years. However, HOPE, Inc. landed an opportunity with the local Miami CBS affiliate channel and on CNN because both were interested in the settlement.

Another time it may be hard to be recognized is Fair Housing Month. According to the two women, the media may say *hmmm...* about Fair Housing Month, *unless* you make it important to them by holding an event featuring a media worthy keynote speaker or activity.

Develop a media contact list first, then send press releases and see who is interested

Ms. Robertson and Ms. Williams suggest starting with small papers and local magazines. Organizations can use help acquiring media contacts, and a good media consultant can do that legwork successfully. A media consultant is invaluable for keeping up with contacts that change constantly, and that expertise is something you can buy from a consultant who is connected and on top of her/his contacts.

Media consultants can help with more

Both also agree that even an organization that knows its business and has a good writer can use help learning to simplify its messages and shape them for different media.

HOPE, Inc. has utilized the services of a marketing consultant, and the two women say that even if an organization only uses a consultant once, it can learn from and duplicate a lot of what a consultant can do.

Make sure you promote your local expert

Lastly, Ms. Williams suggested that an organization’s president/CEO should be positioned as a local expert in fair housing and promoted to the media as a resource, something HOPE, Inc. learned from its use of a consultant.

HUD Rule Prohibiting LGBT Discrimination in HUD Housing

On January 30, 2012, U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Secretary Shaun Donovan announced new regulations to ensure that HUD's core housing programs are open to all eligible persons, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or marital status. The rule was published February 3 and went into effect March 5, 2012.

The rule, published as Equal Access to Housing in HUD Programs – Regardless of Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity, and also known as the “HUD LGBT Rule” does not create additional protected classes in civil rights laws. What the rule does do, though, is address LGBT equal access issues through program requirements.

According to Assistant Secretary for Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity John Trasviña, “This rule is a breakthrough for equality for the 5.5 million people living in public housing or who have a HUD voucher, the estimated 1/3 of new home buyers who have a FHA insured loan, and for all Americans served by HUD.”

The rule covers HUD assisted and FHA insured housing providers and FHA lenders, including religious organizations. Private housing providers that do not receive HUD funds and do not have FHA insured loans and non-FHA lenders are not subject to the regulations. Note, however, that other state, local, and federal civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination may still apply to those lenders and providers.

The press release announcing the new rule is on the HUD website at

http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/press/press_releases_media_advisories/2012/HUDNo.12-014.

The rule itself can be accessed at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2012-02-03/pdf/2012-2343.pdf>.

HUD has posted a 30-minute long webinar training explaining the rule on its YouTube channel at

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lkcMIyQZzA0&feature=colike>.

More information about HUD and its programs is available at www.hud.gov/lgbthousingdiscrimination.



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