



American
Bankers
Association®

Telling Your Housing Story:

A Banker's Communications Guide





Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Housing Story Themes	4
Helping First-Time Homebuyers Achieve Their Financial Goal	4
Providing Capital for In-Demand Rental Housing	5
Housing Choices Are Essential to Vibrant Communities	6
Media Relations	7
Developing Your Media Relations Strategy	7
Sample Media Tools	10
Sample News Release	10
Sample Media Advisory	11
Sample Pitch E-mail	12
Sample Op-Ed	13
Sample Social Media Posts	15
Sample Tip Sheet for Consumers	16
Sample Key Messages on Homeownership and HMDA	17
Sample Photo	18
Share with ABA	19
Social Media	19
E-mail	19
ABA Community Commitment Awards	19



Introduction



About this Guide

American attitudes towards housing's central role in communities have remained constant in recent years, while individual preferences for buying or renting have changed slightly. According to the 2013 How Housing Matters Survey commissioned by the MacArthur Foundation, roughly 7 in 10 Americans believe housing stability provides a variety of positive benefits, including the safety and economic well-being of communities and children's ability to perform well in school. The survey also indicated that although more than 70 percent of renters aspire to someday own their own home, 57 percent of Americans believe that "buying has become less appealing" and 54 percent believe that "renting has become more appealing."

As perceptions shift back and forth with housing market conditions, it is important to underscore bank's involvement in all types of housing that provide stability for American communities and families. According to annual Gallup polls on confidence in various institutions, American confidence in U.S. banks is only beginning to rebound from its record low of 21 percent in 2012, increasing to 26 percent in 2013. Banks can continue to restore consumer confidence by communicating the essential role they play in providing capital for all types of housing throughout their communities—from recapitalizing public housing projects to providing mortgages for creditworthy homebuyers.

How to Use this Guide

All housing markets are products of local economies, so there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach for telling your bank's housing story. However, this guide offers three themes as suggestions on how to tell your story in a compelling way to the general public. It also includes information on why and how to create a media relations plan, complete with sample communications tools for executing your plan. Finally, this guide provides avenues for you to share your housing story with ABA to help you amplify your message.

Housing Story Themes



Following are three housing story themes to help banks think about ways to tell their housing story to the media and general public. Each theme includes suggestions for specific bank employees that should inform or participate in the media strategy, third party validators who can speak to the value of bank involvement and tips for telling a compelling story.

Helping First-Time Homebuyers Achieve Their Financial Goal

Bank Employee Suggestions

- Branch Manager
- Loan Officer

Third Party Validation Suggestions

- First-time homebuyers
- Credit or housing counselor
- President of the home owners association
- President of local REALTORS® Board

What to Consider When Telling Your Story

- Does your bank either host a first-time homebuyer program or partner with another institution (e.g. Regional Federal Home Loan Bank, State Housing Finance Agency, or HUD-Approved Housing Counseling Agency) that prepare the first-time homebuyer? If so, be sure to highlight these efforts to let the general public know there are programs out there to take the guesswork out of buying a first home.
- Does your bank offer a specific product for first-time homebuyers? If so, tell how the features of the product enabled a specific first-time homebuyer to purchase his or her first home.
- Does your bank offer additional online resources for first-time homebuyers? If so, try to direct attention to those resources to raise consumer awareness. If not, consider developing some. [See ABA's sample tip sheets on mortgage lending to get started.](#)
- Are there specific populations that are having a difficult time qualifying for their first homes, perhaps because of new underwriting requirements? If your bank has developed programs for families that depend on seasonal employment or income, or recent immigrants that require special attention, you should describe these efforts to show your institution's active engagement. Consider writing an op-ed to your local newspaper, leading with an anecdote of a creditworthy customer. [See the sample op-ed to get started.](#)

Providing Capital for In-Demand Rental Housing

Bank Employee Suggestions

- Commercial Loan Officer

Third Party Validation Suggestions

- Mayor's Office
- Local Chamber of Commerce
- Housing Developer

What to Consider When Telling Your Story

- Has there been an increase in the local demand for rental units? If so, focus on the role the bank has played in financing multifamily developments in your area.
- Is the rental housing part of a larger story, such as a neighborhood or commercial corridor revitalization? Frame the housing development as a neighborhood anchor and customer base for surrounding retail.
- Consider the jobs! In the current economy, don't forget to highlight that multifamily housing provides a lot of temporary construction jobs, as well as permanent jobs needed to support rental housing and its tenants.
- For additional ideas about how to convey the community benefits of multifamily rental properties, visit the [We Are Apartments Campaign](#), sponsored by the National Apartment Association and the National Multifamily Housing Council.
- For additional facts about regional or local rental housing trends such as vacancy rates and rental prices, refer to the Department of Housing and Urban Development's quarterly publication, [National Housing Market Summary](#), or the Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University's annual publication, [The State of the Nation's Housing](#), typically released in June of each year.



Housing Choices Are Essential for Vibrant Communities

Bank Employee Suggestions

- Community Reinvestment Officer/CRA Officer
- Corporate Responsibility Officer

Third Party Validation Suggestions

- Regional Federal Home Loan Bank
- State Housing Finance Agency
- Community Development Financial Institutions
- Community-Based Organizations
- Housing Developer

What to Consider When Telling Your Story

- Housing choices are as unique as Americans themselves, reflecting individual financial situations and lifestyle choices. Provide an example of a neighborhood that has a mix of different types of housing:
 - **Market Rate Homeownership** such as single family homes, townhouses, and condominiums.
 - **Market Rate Rental Housing** such as multifamily apartments and single family rentals.
 - **Affordable Homeownership for Low- to Moderate-Income Families** such as homebuyer assistance programs, lease-to-purchase programs, and guaranteed mortgages in a rural community through United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) 502 Loan Guarantee Program.
 - **Affordable Rental Housing for Low- to Moderate-Income Families** such as mixed-income projects through the Low Income Housing Tax Credit, recapitalized public housing projects through HUD’s Rental Assistance Demonstration Program, single room occupancy (SRO) projects through HUD’s Continuum of Care Program, including Veterans Supportive Housing with services (HUD-VASH), and senior apartments through HUD’s 202 Supportive Housing for the Elderly Program.
- Affordable housing typically has some public subsidy as part of the project’s underwriting. Consider mentioning the specific program to strengthen partnerships with state and local public agencies that administer the funds.
- Bank regulators understand what “Low and Moderate Income” populations are, but would the general public? Public opinions about affordable housing are generally positive when the message is thoughtfully crafted. Focusing on specific beneficiaries such as homeless veterans or low-income seniors, or appealing to core American values such as choice, hard work, or opportunity, are ways to gain public support for affordable housing. For more tips, read the Center on Housing Policy’s August 2013 report, *Building Support for Affordable Homeownership and Rental Choices: A Summary of Research Findings on Public Opinion and Messaging on Affordable Housing*.



Media Relations



Engaging with local newspapers, radio and TV to tell your housing story is an effective way to communicate your bank's efforts to a larger audience, as well as play a key role in your reputation building effort.

Media attention can provide the following:

- Bolster your bank's overall reputation
- Highlight your bank's housing programs
- Explain your bank's role in the local economy
- Maintain a connection with key stakeholders across the different media platforms they consume (broadcast, print, online, social)
- Position bank employees as subject-matter experts on real estate finance

Developing Your Media Strategy

Only you can get the story out about your bank's contributions to the local housing market. Below are a few ideas and tips for working with your local media.

Select Media Contact

Let your local news media know who your press contact is for real estate lending issues. Have your press contact meet with your local reporters periodically to establish an ongoing relationship with them. Make sure that all of the information you send to the media includes contact information, such as name, title, phone number and e-mail address.

Target Media

One of the most important steps in beginning media outreach is to prepare a targeted media list. Begin by identifying local and regional media outlets and then identifying reporters who cover business, banking, personal finance and real estate. You can do this through their website or by calling the main line.

News Release

News releases can be used to tell your housing story to the media. It is best to send them early in the day. Include the press release in the body of the e-mail and do not include attachments. Limit releases to no more than two pages. Be certain to include your contact information. [See sample news release.](#)

(Developing Your Media Strategy, continued)

Media Advisory

If you're planning an event to tell your housing story, invite your local media by issuing a media advisory. Include event date, times and scheduled speakers. Include one-line descriptions explaining who, what, when, where, why and how. Include a list of the elected officials and community and business leaders involved. Get your events listed on the radio, television and newspaper community calendars. Send the advisory to your media contacts six or seven days before the event. Always follow up by phone. [See sample media advisory.](#)

Pitching

Reporters are always looking for newsworthy and interesting story ideas. You can help by supplying them with a compelling local housing story. Simply draft an e-mail to several targeted reporters and offer yourself as a mortgage or commercial lending expert. Pitches should be personalized for each reporter. When pitching by phone, always ask the reporter if this is a convenient time and call in the morning to avoid deadlines. [See sample pitch.](#)

Op-ed

Op-eds, or opinion editorials, have always been an excellent way for organizations to position themselves as true thought leaders on a topic. As you become more visible in the media, this is an unfiltered, uninterrupted way that you can share your point-of-view about housing issues with the public. Op-eds are not meant to be self-promotional, but are meant to provide an opinion on a larger issue. Op-eds may also generate additional media inquiries and increase your media visibility. When submitting your op-ed for consideration, make sure you pay attention to deadlines and word length specifications. [See sample op-ed.](#)

Social Media

Using social media allows your bank to share its housing stories directly, in real-time, to create a sense of community, and to share your bank's values and personality. Make sure to promote your housing efforts on social media and on your website. See ABA's Social Media Guide at aba.com/housingmonth for more tips and ideas. [See sample social media posts.](#)

Tip Sheets

Providing consumer tips in your lobby, on your website, through social media or with the news media is an excellent way to educate your customers. ABA has several consumer tip sheets related to mortgage lending. Make the suggested tips your own by customizing them and posting them on your website. Share them with customers and the media. See ABA's customizable tip sheets related to mortgage lending. [See sample tip sheet.](#)

Key Messages

A very important step in media outreach is developing talking points or key messages to prepare experts for an interview. You should include three or four key messages and supporting points. The interviewee should use those points to stay on message during the interview. [See sample key messages on Homeownership and HMDA.](#)

(Developing Your Media Strategy, continued)

Build Relationships

Invite local reporters to lunch and offer to talk about the important role your bank plays in the local housing economy. Remember, nothing is ever completely off the record, so don't say anything that you wouldn't want to see in print. Also consider developing relationships with the press staff of your congressional members, state legislators, local elected officials and local community groups. Often they can assist with the press on your behalf.

Fact Sheets

A fact sheet about your bank is important to have on hand. Include your mission statement, facts about your bank and basic information about your recent accomplishments. When used to tell your housing story, be sure to include facts about your bank's housing efforts. Include your fact sheet in press packets for events such as number of mortgage loans, multifamily projects and community development loans.

Photography

Include a photo and caption with your press release or media advisory if it is appropriate for the media outlet you are contacting. Choose a photo that captures the essence of your housing story. Sometimes the most effective photos strike an emotional chord. For instance, a photo of an overjoyed first-time homebuyer on her new front porch is more effective than a photo of a business executive speaking at a podium as the first-time homebuyer looks on. [See an example of a compelling photo.](#)

Sample Media Tools



Sample News Release

Media Contact: Sarah Simpson
555-555-5555, name@anybank.com

Any Bank Celebrates 5 Years of Successful First Time Homebuyer Program

Anytown, Anystate – Now in its fifth year, Any Bank’s First Time Homebuyer program has helped more than 100 local families buy a home. The program was developed in response to a growing need in the community to help residents transition from rental to ownership.

“Buying a home is the single largest investment that most people will make in their lifetime,” said John Smith, president and CEO, Any Bank. “Our program seeks to help potential homeowners make an honest evaluation of their finances and develop a thorough plan so they can ultimately make a wise buying decision.”

The program is designed to guide homeowners through the home buying process. First time homebuyers are offered educational courses in the bank branch to help them understand mortgage loans. Qualified borrowers are also eligible for flexible down payment options and assistance. All first time homebuyers are welcome to submit an application and receive one-on-one financial counseling.

One of the many beneficiaries of the program expressed appreciation for the opportunity. “I’ve always wanted to own my own home. Now, thanks to Any Bank, my children, my wife and I have a place to call our own,” said Joe Johnson.

“Homeownership isn’t for everyone. The first – and most important – step of the program is to help customers determine if they’re financially ready for homeownership,” said Smith.

For more information about the program or to apply, visit our website at www.anybank.com.

Any Bank is a state chartered, family-owned community bank dedicated to providing financial services to meet the needs of its customers. Founded in 1914, Any Bank is headquartered in Anytown, Anystate and has three branches.

###

Sample Media Advisory

Media Contact: Sarah Simpson
555-555-5555, name@anybank.com

MEDIA AVAILABILITY: Local Bank Employees Build Habitat for Humanity Home

WHO: John Smith, president and CEO, Any Bank
20 Bank Employees
Robert Williams, Mayor, Anytown

WHAT: Media Availability during Habitat for Humanity/Any Bank home build following a brief presentation

WHEN: Saturday, June 7
10:15 a.m. – 10:45 a.m.

WHERE: 123 Anystreet Ave.
Anytown

Local bankers from Any Bank will be in AnyNeighborhood, Anytown on Saturday, June 7 to build a Habitat for Humanity house for the Johnson family: Joe, Mary, their two daughters and Mary's father.

Any Bank has partnered with Harry's Construction Company and Habitat for Humanity to build a home for a family in need. The home is part of a project led by Anytown Habitat for Humanity, which will consist of four single-family homes.

Now in its fifth year, Any Bank's annual home build is made possible through the hard work and dedication of the bank's employees. Five families in our community now have a place to call their own.

Want to talk to the experts about affordable housing issues in our community, new mortgage regulations or credit availability? Conduct a one-on-one interview during a media availability on Saturday, June 7.

Available for interviews:

- **John Smith, president and CEO, Any Bank**
- **Robert Williams, Mayor, Anytown**
- **Joe Johnson, recipient of Any Bank's Habitat for Humanity Home**

Visuals:

- **Bankers painting, putting up siding and wall board, and assembling cabinets**
- **Recipient family building**

Any Bank is a state chartered, family-owned community bank dedicated to providing financial services to meet the needs of its customers. Founded in 1914, Any Bank is headquartered in Anytown, Anystate and has three branches.

###

Sample Pitch E-mail

Tom,

Is credit in our community getting tighter or loosening? How difficult is it to get a mortgage or commercial loan in our market?

As the economy continues to recover, there's been mixed news coverage about the availability of credit. Our senior loan officer can set the record straight by answering important questions for your readers.

Any Bank's real estate lending expert Mike Davis is available for an interview in person or by phone to answer these questions and more about the future of mortgage and commercial lending in Anytown.

Davis has over 20 years of experience in mortgage banking in the Anytown Metro area. He has experience with FHA, VA and conventional loans. Davis works with a full range of borrowers and has a thorough understanding of the challenges borrowers face in the current mortgage market.

Some questions you may want to consider include:

- How has getting a mortgage loan changed over the last couple of years?
- How will national mortgage regulations impact our community?
- What should readers/listeners/viewers know if they want to get a mortgage loan?

If you would like to schedule an interview with Davis, please contact Sarah Simpson at name@anybank.com or 555-555-5555.

I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Thanks,
Sarah

Sarah Simpson
Director, Public Relations
Any Bank
Any Bank's Tagline

T: 555-555-5555 | E: name@anybank.com

Sample Op-Ed

Bankers Are Here to Help Through Mortgage Challenges

June is American Housing Month, when we celebrate the variety of housing choices that Americans make. Whether owning or renting, the basic principle is that you should be free to choose the home that works best for you and your family.

Unfortunately, that choice is increasingly made not by you but by distant bureaucrats in Washington, D.C. Arbitrary government rules have created artificial barriers to buying a home—and these barriers are hitting some groups—[such as retirees, first-time buyers, entrepreneurs and immigrants]—disproportionately hard.

There was once a clear path to homeownership. You saved a certain amount to put down and made sure that you could afford the monthly payment. If a banker knew you and knew that you were a reliable person, you might be able to get a mortgage even if you didn't have years' worth of tax returns and pay stubs.

But bankers are no longer allowed to base decisions on their knowledge of your integrity. Instead, they must base decisions on a ream of data, thoroughly documenting a customer's ability to repay the loan. That means a homebuyer must have regular income, documented by two years of tax returns, pay stubs, account statements and credit history.

These rules are burdensome—often insurmountable—for many homebuyers: [NOTE TO BANKERS: CHOOSE A FEW OR ALL OF THESE ENTRIES AS APPLICABLE TO YOUR LOCAL MARKET]

- Retirees may have ample assets, but if they're not working they may not be able to prove income. If they cannot prove a flow of income, they may be left out of the housing market.
- First-time buyers are less likely to have adequate savings for a down payment, which often means lenders must charge more for the loan through insurance or points and fees. But making a higher-cost loan now results in legal complications, which makes banks reluctant to originate these kinds of mortgages.
- Immigrants face tougher loan prospects, but not because they're poor credit risks. In fact, the opposite is true. But because many immigrants are self-employed, work various jobs, or are recent arrivals, it's much harder prove their income in the way the government expects. Immigrants are also more likely to share housing with other families to save money or rent out rooms to help pay the mortgage. But such alternative income sources are difficult to apply toward ability to repay. These rules are already causing problems for borrowers in Puerto Rico.
- It's especially troubling that these rules hurt self-employed entrepreneurs—the embodiment of the American dream—because their income may be variable, seasonal, or hard to document.

While homeownership isn't for everyone, some evidence suggests that the new rules are suppressing the homeownership rate artificially. For example, the homeownership rate has fallen to its lowest level in nearly 20 years.

(Sample Op-Ed, continued)

Bankers welcome lending standards that provide strong protections for all consumers. But these standards must be sensible and flexible. Americans should have more flexible options to document their ability to repay, and bankers should be allowed to use their good judgment to serve all creditworthy homebuyers.

Bankers will continue to work with creditworthy homebuyers—we're here to help you through the challenges. All Americans should be able to choose the housing that works best for them.

Sample Social Media Posts

Facebook

Any Bank completed its third annual Habitat for Humanity home build yesterday in AnyNeighborhood! What a great experience. Be sure to check out the photos from the build. *–Upload several photos taken during event.*

This month marks the 5th anniversary of Any Bank's First Time Homebuyer program, which has helped more than 100 local families buy a home! To learn more about the program, visit: www.anybank.com. *Include the program's logo or other related image, if possible.*

Twitter

Your **#creditscore** can impact your **#housing** options. Check out these tips to improve your score (insert link to customized tip sheet)

Struggling with that down payment? Here are 6 tips for **#saving!** (insert link to customized tip sheet)
#futurehomeowner

Preparing to buy or rent? 10 terms you should know! (insert link to customized tip sheet)
#futurehomeowner #apartments #renters

#Transportation is 2nd largest expense for families. How **#efficient** is your location? <http://htaindex.cnt.org/map/> @CNT_tweets

See [ABA's Social Media Guide for American Housing Month](#) for more tips and ideas.

Sample Tip Sheet for Consumers

5 Important Questions When Choosing Your First Home

Moving into your own place can be exciting and frightening at the same time. Any Bank suggests considering the following questions when choosing your own home.

1. How much money do you have saved up?

Start with an evaluation of your financial health. Figure out how much money you have for a down payment or deposit on a rental. Down payments are typically 5 to 20 percent of the price of the home. Security deposits on rentals are usually about one month of rent and more if you have a pet. But be sure to keep enough in savings for an emergency fund. It's a good idea to have three to six months of living expenses to cover unexpected costs.

2. How much debt do you have?

Consider all of your current and expected financial obligations like your car payment and insurance, credit card debt and student loans. Make sure you will be able to make all the payments in addition to the cost of your new home. Aim to keep total rent or mortgage payments plus utilities to less than 25 to 30 percent of your gross monthly income. Recent regulatory changes limit debt to income (DTI) ratio on most loans to 43 percent.

3. What is your credit score?

A high credit score indicates strong creditworthiness. Both renters and homebuyers can expect to have their credit history examined. A low credit score can keep you from qualifying for the rental you want or a low interest rate on your mortgage loan. If your credit score is low, you may want to delay moving into a new home and take steps to raise your score. For tips on improving your credit score, visit aba.com/consumers.

4. Have you factored in all the costs? Create a hypothetical budget for your new home.

Find the average cost of utilities in your area, factor in gas, electricity, water and cable. Find out if you will have to pay for parking or trash pickup. Consider the cost of yard maintenance and other basic maintenance costs like replacing the air filter every three months. If you are planning to buy a home, factor in real estate taxes, mortgage insurance and possibly a home owner association fee. Renters should consider the cost of rental insurance.

5. How long will you stay?

Generally, the longer you plan to live someplace, the more it makes sense to buy. Over time, you can build equity in your home. On the other hand, renters have greater flexibility to move and fewer maintenance costs. Carefully consider your current life and work situation and think about how long you want to stay in your new home.

For more information, visit www.anybank.com

Sample Key Messages on Homeownership and HMDA

There are many paths to quality housing and banks are prepared to help customers navigate whichever path they choose.

- It is important for people to choose the housing option that is best suited for their current lifestyle and financial situation.
- Americans should have a variety of affordable and attractive rental and purchase options, in line with their needs and resources.
- For many consumers, buying a home is the largest purchase they will ever make. Homebuyers should spend time talking to their banker, researching their options, and comparing lenders so that they can find a mortgage that fits their financial situation.

The Home Mortgage Disclosure Act (HMDA) is a tool that helps bankers, regulators and others understand the flow of mortgage credit in their communities.

- While the data can help bankers and regulators identify areas for further investment or examination, the HMDA numbers alone are not dispositive of bank fair lending performance.
- The current data collection is balanced against the need to protect the privacy of individual consumers.
- Expanding the data to be collected risks exposing individual financial information to the public and must be guarded against as Dodd-Frank Act mandates are implemented.

Lenders have a vested interest in encouraging minority homeownership that is fair and affordable. We are committed to helping more minorities qualify for loans and helping them get the loans that best meet their needs.

- Bankers want to provide mortgages to as many qualified borrowers as possible and to do so in a way that encourages a positive future relationship.
- Like many other businesses, banks understand that reaching out to minority populations makes good business sense. One in every four Americans is a member of a minority group, according to the 2010 U.S. Census.
- According to a 2012 study by the University of Georgia, the buying power of minorities in the U.S has grown into a diverse and formidable consumer market in the last decade.

Background:

The Home Mortgage Disclosure Act (HMDA) instructs banks to report their application and loan activities so that geographic locations of mortgage lending can be tracked. Since 1990, most banks and other mortgage lenders have been required to report all mortgage and home improvement applications and certain characteristics of the applicant, such as race, gender and income. In 2004, banks began recording even more data, such as pricing and census data. Section 1094 of the Dodd-Frank Act requires additional HMDA reporting; however, final rules on the new requirements have yet to be issued. Individual institutions report HMDA data to federal regulators in March and the Federal Reserve issues an industry report in September.

Sample Photo



Homeowner Laurie Magdalena and her four daughters stand in front of their new home with Jane Smith, president of Any Bank. Photo from 2011 ABA Habitat for Humanity Home Build.

Share with ABA



ABA is committed to amplifying the extraordinary efforts of its members. Let us help you share your housing story.

Social Media

Tag ABA on Facebook ([American Bankers Association](#)) and Twitter ([@ABABankingNews](#))

E-mail

Send affordable housing stories to the Community Engagement Foundation at CommunityEngagement@aba.com.

ABA Community Commitment Awards

Don't forget to submit your affordable housing project each year for the annual ABA Community Commitment Awards! [See ABA Community Engagement Foundation webpage for more information on award categories and entry deadlines.](#)

The ABA Community Engagement Foundation, a 501(c)3 corporation, is the successor to the ABA Education Foundation established in 1925. Through its leadership, partnerships, and national programs the foundation helps bankers provide financial education to individuals at every age, elevate issues around affordable housing and community development, and achieve corporate social responsibility objectives to improve the well-being of their customers and their communities.