



NEWS & UPDATES

Workforce Housing Grants Available for State Realtor® Foundations/Associations

State Realtor® housing foundations or state Realtor® associations will soon be able to apply for grants under a new NAR program designed to stimulate and support workforce housing initiatives. The Ira Gribin Workforce Housing Grants, named in honor of NAR's 1989 president, will provide one-time grants to state Realtor® housing foundations or state Realtor® associations to support their workforce housing activities. Grants of \$50,000 and above, based on a sliding scale according to the number of Realtor® members in a state, will be available to state Realtor® foundations or state associations for eligible workforce housing programs and projects.

Applications and guidelines will be available in January 2009 .

Deadline Extended for Ambassadors for Cities Applications

Local associations now have until January 30, 2009, to submit an application for the Ambassadors for Cities award. The Ambassadors for Cities program highlights successes in which local REALTOR® associations, Mayor,s and cities have worked together to address housing opportunity issues. The program provides models that REALTORS® and Mayors can adopt in other cities. Each year, several REALTOR® associations and cities receive the Ambassadors for Cities designation and a \$5,000 award to foster their initiatives. Read about **successful programs** and **download an application**. Contact Wendy Penn at wpenn@realtors.org.

Help Make the New Neighborhood Stabilization Program a Success

In March, localities around the country will start spending federal money they received to help stabilize neighborhoods under the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. The money must be obligated within 18 months, so local officials will be looking to experts like REALTORS® for help in identifying housing rehab and other projects for improving communities and addressing blighted areas. Ideas for getting involved in this process are **available on Realtors.org**. For more info contact Megan Booth, mbooth@realtors.org, 202/383-1222.

EVENTS & TRAININGS

Home From Work Trainings

- January 7 – Cobb Association of REALTORS®
- January 8 - Eastern Connecticut Association of REALTORS®
- March 18 - Eastern Connecticut Association of REALTORS®

LEGISLATIVE NEWS & UPDATES

New Year, New FHA Mortgage Limits

HUD Secretary Steve Preston has announced new limits on the mortgage amount insurable by the Federal Housing Administration beginning January 1, 2009. Under the 2008 Housing & Economic Recovery Act, limits are set at 115 percent of a market's median house price. They can't be lower than 65 percent or higher than 150 percent of the national conforming limit of \$417,000. Preston says the limits will ensure FHA can continue to help struggling homeowners refinance and allow many first-time buyers take advantage of today's buyers market. Visit the [FHA.gov 2008 Mortgagee Letters](#) page for more about the new limits.

HUD Listened to NAR in Issuing Final RESPA Rule

On November 12, HUD issued a **final rule** on regulations governing the Real Estate Settlement Procedures Act. For the first time ever, lenders and brokers will be required, starting January 1, 2010, to give consumers a standard, easy-to-read Good Faith Estimate that includes the term of the loan, whether the interest rate is fixed or adjustable, if there are pre-payment penalties or balloon payments, and the loan's total closing costs. HUD estimates that upfront disclosures will save consumers some \$700 in closing costs. HUD received more than 12,000 comments with 6,000 coming from NAR members. NAR will continue its review to determine whether HUD adequately addressed NAR concerns.

NAR-Backed Rate Buydown Gains Traction

The Treasury Department is seriously considering actions to lower interest rates. Under the Treasury plan, lenders would sell newly issued mortgage-backed securities to the government provided the interest-rate on the loans collateralizing the securities was no higher than 4.5 percent. To pay for the plan, Treasury would issue bonds at 3 percent, creating a 1.5-percent spread that it could use for buying the securities. Those securities would then be purchased by secondary mortgage market companies Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, which are under federal conservatorship. In a **letter to James Lockhart**, chairman of the Oversight Board of the Federal Housing Finance Agency, NAR says a federal mortgage interest buy-down program would help spark the housing market. Read the [NAR Press Release](#).

Fannie Mae Gives Servicers More Flexibility to Help Borrowers Avoid Foreclosure

On December 8, 2008, Fannie Mae announced it was giving mortgages servicers more flexibility and more loss mitigation options to minimize foreclosures. The changes will allow servicers to act earlier to avoid potential delinquencies. The changes affect mortgages in mortgage backed securities (MBSs) and mortgages held by Fannie Mae in portfolio. [Read more.](#)

HOUSING & ECONOMIC INDICATORS

Pending Home Sales Index

The index, based on contracts signed in October, slipped 0.7 percent to 88.9 from an upwardly revised reading of 89.5 in September, and is 1.0 percent below October 2007, when it was 89.8.

"Despite the turmoil in the economy, the overall level of **pending home sales** has been remarkably stable over the past year, holding in a generally narrow range," says Lawrence Yun, NAR chief economist.

Existing-Home Sales

Existing-Home Sales Series is the premier measurement of the residential real estate market.

Existing-home sales declined on the heels of a strong gain in September as uncertainty and economic concerns increased in October. The EHS fell 3.1 percent to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 4.98 million units.

See all the [housing & economic indicators](#).

HOUSING OPPORTUNITY IN THE NEWS

Housing Solutions Spotlight

Irvine, CA Program Educates Public Officials on Affordability

NAR and the U.S. Conference of Mayors have named Irvine, California, an Ambassador City for its Public Officials 101 initiative, which provides homeownership education to Orange County mayors, council members, and city managers. The Public Officials 101 initiative was developed by the Orange County Association of Realtors® and the City of Irvine, along with other partners, including the Orange County Business Council. Read the [NAR Press Release](#).

Housing Initiatives in the News

Turning Abandoned Homes into a Neighborhood Again

Sometimes, a neighborhood can be improved just by diligently matching up potential homeowners with houses that otherwise would be abandoned, and developers with empty lots. In 2002 the homes of Detroit's oldest residential district were in serious trouble and suffering from abandoned homes. In some cases, homes were so derelict that they were either unusable, or had been "torched. McIntosh Paris Associates, hired by the Greater Corktown Redevelopment Corp, created this North Corktown Framework Plan. Part of the plan included homes in state receivership to be identified and inventoried, and arranged for title to be transferred to the GCRC. The GCRC then set out to find buyers for the usable homes, or micro developers for empty lots. Read the rest of this housing opportunity story. Source: [Planetizen](#).

Housing Opportunity Resources

Growing Elderly Population will have Significant Impact on the Nation's Housing Needs

An article in The Journal of the American Planning Association on aging and disability demonstrates implications for the housing industry and housing policy in the United States. The lack of accessible housing provides an opportunity for homebuilders to develop and market products that meet the needs of an aging population. [Download the Report](#).

Become a Fannie Mae Real Estate Broker

The [National Property Disposition Center](#) (NPDC) manages Fannie Mae's real estate owned (REO) properties. NPDC vendors are those involved in the REO process. Vendors include real estate brokers/listing agents.

If you would like more information about the Housing Opportunity Program please contact us at housingopportunity@realtors.org.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®

Housing Opportunities Program

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