



Three-Year Strategic Plan



HOUSING NETWORK
OF RHODE ISLAND

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HOUSING NETWORK
OF RHODE ISLAND

Dear Colleagues,

We are pleased to share with you this three-year strategic plan for the Housing Network of RI (HNRI). The plan is the culmination of a year-long stakeholder engagement effort to better understand the role HNRI plays within the sector, what unique value it contributed and to chart a clear path forward. Staff, board members, HNRI members, service providers, community partners, and funders contributed their valuable input to this process and the plan has been made stronger for it. Through this work we identified three core priorities that will guide and anchor our efforts in the years ahead: strengthening coalition building, expanding public support, and advancing effective policy advocacy to move our mission forward.

The last five years have brought the affordable housing crisis in our state to the forefront. The pandemic served to highlight years of under-investment in our sector and the devastating impact that inadequate housing planning and policy making can have on Rhode Islander's ability to obtain and maintain housing affordable for a wide range of incomes. Between ARPA funding and the recently approved state housing bonds, we find ourselves in a time of unprecedented investment in affordable housing with the recognition that these investments will still not address the need for safe and affordable housing for all residents.

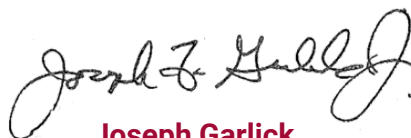
This strategic plan recognizes and celebrates the gains made in the past few years while also acknowledging the need to continue to advocate, promote, and support policies, initiatives and funding to ensure that all Rhode Islanders live in a safe, healthy, and affordable home in thriving communities. As such, this plan reflects our intention to shift from a member service organization to serving as a broader cross sector alliance of organizations and entities with a shared value.

Through this strategic plan HNRI will more directly focus its energy and resources by prioritizing three key areas of work: coalition building, increasing public support, and policy advocacy. As we look to the future, we recognize that realizing this vision will require broad-based engagement and partnership across sectors and communities. We are excited at the opportunities before us to increase and preserve the supply of high-quality, affordable homes for all Rhode Islanders, together.

Sincerely.



Melina Lodge
Executive Director



Joseph Garlick
Board Chair



Who We Are

Defining our past and future.

Since its inception in 1992, the Housing Network of Rhode Island has served as the state's membership organization for agencies committed to strengthening community vitality through the development of high quality affordable housing. Our members have built thousands of affordable homes and initiated community revitalization efforts in communities across Rhode Island.

In 2017, HNRI launched the Housing Opportunities Initiative, (subsequently branded as Homes RI) as a statewide movement to increase the supply of safe, healthy and affordable homes and decrease housing cost burden through cross sector partnership development and coalition building.

Our new strategic plan reflects the evolution of our organization. Over the next three years, we will be shifting our role from a member service organization to supporting a broader alliance to advance our priorities. Such a change will more directly focus the energy and resources of HNRI toward achieving our vision and desired impact.

Our New Vision

All Rhode Islanders live in safe, healthy, and affordable homes in thriving communities.

Our New Mission

To increase and preserve the supply of high-quality affordable homes across Rhode Island through coalition building, increasing public support, and policy advocacy.





Our Beliefs

The values that shape our impact.

High Quality Housing as a Basic Human Right and Foundation for Well-Being:

Everyone has the right to safe, affordable, permanent, and high-quality housing. Stable housing is the foundation for improving life circumstances, including access to healthcare, education, and employment.

Equity and Community Empowerment:

Housing solutions must be responsive to the diverse needs of communities and systemic inequities in housing must be addressed.

People-Centered Solutions:

We prioritize resident and community-driven approaches, where solutions are designed with people, not for them.

Collaboration, Collective Action, and Shared Power:

Collaboration and collective action are central, as working together strengthens efforts and amplifies voices. We emphasize the importance of collective action to create sustainable, long-term change and recognize that we are stronger as a broad coalition.

Holistic and Sustainable:

Housing is part of a broader ecosystem of support that includes access to resources like healthcare, education, and employment. Collaboration and collective action strengthen our efforts and amplify our voices to advocate that new and existing housing must be high quality, safe and sustainable.



The Process

Developing our strategic vision.

This strategic plan was developed with input from a broad array of stakeholders and data points from within and outside of the Network. The process was supported and facilitated by our strategic planning consultants, Dana Ginestet and Jim Berson.

A core planning team comprised of staff and board members, as well as community leaders, was formed at the onset to lead this planning process. The team was tasked with reviewing and synthesizing information from various sources and providing important feedback on all elements of this plan. Their efforts were crucial to ensuring that the process was carried out thoughtfully and efficiently.

A larger group including the Board of Directors, staff, and core planning team members participated in an all day strategy retreat in November to offer additional input.

KEY INPUTS TO THE PROCESS INCLUDED:

- Interviews with individual members of the Board of Directors
- Focus groups for Housing Network member organizations and staff
- Financial analysis examining three years of audited financial statements
- External stakeholder interviews
- Internal Capacity Assessment using the McKinsey Capacity Assessment Grid, a tool for nonprofits to assess their organizational capacity
- PESTLE (Political, Economic, Sociological, Technological, Legal and Environmental) analysis examining trends captured through interviews conducted with thought leaders in affordable housing and advocacy related to affordable housing and a literature review of national trends



Key Learnings

The planning process and strategic plan were shaped in part by some of the key learnings that emerged from the listening and research conducted. These included the following:

An Opportunity to Clarify Roles and Expectations	Some internal and external stakeholders shared that there is some confusion and a lack of consensus around the identity, mission, and scope of HNRI, as well as its relationship to Homes RI and external organizations within the housing ecosystem in RI. The strategic plan provides HNRI an opportunity to more sharply define and articulate what HNRI is, what it can do, and what it cannot do.
Housing Development and Preservation Resource Challenges	Despite the recent injection of governmental resources and the passage of the housing bond, there remain significant limitations in resources, particularly funding and staffing capacity, that impact service delivery and the ability to meet rising expectations. Navigating the boom-and-bust cycle of public funding for affordable housing is a critical challenge that the Network and its members will encounter over the next several years. The Strategic Plan offers an opportunity to proactively respond to this challenge.
Varying Perspectives on the “Size of the Tent”	There were a wide range of perspectives on how big or small the “tent” should be to achieve HNRI’s goals. On the one hand, broad-based advocacy is viewed as instrumental in securing funding and other legislative successes at the State House and ballot box over the last several years. At the same time, more diverse voices and perspectives can mean that the organization takes on issues that may not directly benefit each member organization. Our strategic plan provides an opportunity to build wider support for our priorities while recognizing that not all our alliance members may agree on every priority.



Key Learnings (cont'd)

Adaptation and Change	Change is seen as inevitable by many, with recognition that the housing and nonprofit sectors, as well as the political environment given the recent election, are evolving. There is a need for HNRI to consider pivoting and adapting to these changes, whether through rebranding, focusing on internal processes, or responding to the changing needs and expectations of its members. This may also include adapting to the political climate and adjusting to new methods of collaboration, leadership, and governance, as well as preparing for leadership transitions and workforce needs in the sector.
Human Resource Challenges	The sector is experiencing challenges around recruitment and retention of the next generation of community housing development professionals and leaders. Staff recruitment and retention are broadly recognized to be a significant challenge, at all levels from entry to leadership roles, across the sector.



Strategic Pillars

Expanding our vision, deepening our impact.

STRIVING FOR IMPACT

During the planning process the following four pillars emerged as core components to achieving our new mission. Our four pillars are detailed on the following pages. Each priority is defined to ensure common understanding. Then, specific strategies are outlined that reflect how we will make progress on each priority. Finally, a statement defining success, or what we hope to achieve with sustained efforts is articulated.



Coalition Building

Build a bigger, stronger, more diverse alliance.



Public Support

Mobilize public support for production of affordable housing.



Public Advocacy

Utilize Policy Advocacy to drive systems change.



Internal Capacity

Build organizational capacity and strengthen internal infrastructure.





Priority #1

BUILD A BIGGER, STRONGER, MORE DIVERSE ALLIANCE.

HNRI officially launched Homes RI in 2017 as a statewide movement to increase the supply of safe, healthy and affordable homes and decrease the housing cost burden that too many Rhode Islanders face. This coalition of organizations working together to increase and preserve the supply of safe, healthy and affordable homes throughout Rhode Island is broadly recognized as a powerful voice for collective action and advocacy and the greatest contribution of HNRI to the housing ecosystem in the state. Expanding the tent to include a broader range of partners and interests is desired and seen as valuable to building the movement.

STRATEGIES

1.1	Identify and map potential additional stakeholders and develop tailored engagement approaches to address gaps.
1.2	Pursue cross sector collaboration opportunities with sectors outside of housing, like healthcare, education, and workforce development, to create an alliance with varied perspectives and resources.
1.3	Establish a clear understanding of membership model including eligibility, roles, responsibilities, decision making, benefits of membership, and expectations.

DEFINING SUCCESS

A robust alliance of diverse stakeholders - including nonprofits, community organizations, developers, government officials, and business leaders - working together to mobilize support to make affordable housing a priority in every community across Rhode Island. Success means that these partners are united in their commitment to affordable housing and our alliance can coordinate our efforts to leverage resources and influence policy at all levels.





Priority #2

MOBILIZE PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR INCREASED INVESTMENT IN AND PRODUCTION OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING.

HNRI mobilizes public support for increased investment and production of affordable housing through a series of strategic goals aimed at raising awareness about the issue, shaping public opinion, and galvanizing action at the local, state, and federal levels. These goals are critical in creating a broader, more supportive environment for the implementation of effective housing policies.

STRATEGIES

2.1	Educate decision and policy makers at the federal, state, and local levels to enhance their understanding of the need for and methods to create affordable housing.
2.2	Increase engagement and mobilization of residents of affordable housing.
2.3	Define and segment target audiences to message and mobilize (e.g., general public, community leaders and influencers, private sector, philanthropy, others)

DEFINING SUCCESS

Communities across RI have municipal planning and zoning boards populated with housing-supportive members who actively champion policies that make affordable housing a priority. We will have successfully shifted the narrative on zoning and land use policy, reframing it as a tool for equitable growth rather than an obstacle. There will be a widespread shared understanding across all partners that the affordable housing crisis is rooted in systemic failure, not individual choices, and that meaningful change requires collective action. Investment in affordable housing will be recognized as not just necessary, but as a predictable, planned, and essential component of community development.





Priority #3

UTILIZE POLICY ADVOCACY TO DRIVE SYSTEMS CHANGE.

Systemic change is needed to address the long-standing under-supply of affordable housing in our state. To initiate this change, we engage in a variety of policy advocacy efforts aimed at addressing the deep-rooted funding and policy changes that are needed to ensure that all individuals have access to safe, healthy, and affordable homes. The coalition's impact can be seen in several key areas, including legislative change, public support, and community engagement.

STRATEGIES

3.1	Establish a relationship management strategy to cultivate, enhance and sustain relationships with key decision makers.
3.2	Enhance communications efforts and systems to keep Coalition members and other interested parties aware, connected, and involved.
3.3	Maintain and strengthen the reputation of HNRI as housing content expert and relevant body in the policymaking arena.

DEFINING SUCCESS

High-level of engagement from members to achieve advocacy goals. Removal of roadblocks to develop affordable housing. Educating the public and elected officials on the importance of increasing affordable housing investment and production across the state. Realizing tangible wins in terms of increased public investment in affordable housing development.



Priority #4

BUILD ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY AND STRENGTHEN INTERNAL INFRASTRUCTURE TO PROMOTE SUSTAINABILITY, GOOD GOVERNANCE, AND OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY.

As a coalition dedicated to addressing the housing crisis, we need to strengthen our internal capacity to ensure that we can effectively scale our efforts, drive systemic change, and sustain our long-term impact.

STRATEGIES

4.1	Rebrand and rename HNRI / Homes RI to better reflect cohesion of our mission, vision, priorities, and role.
4.2	Develop new HNRI bylaws to reflect changes in organizational priorities, structure, and governance that clearly articulate expectations for Board members.
4.3	Pivot our funding model to reflect and support our strategic priorities and emerging work.
4.4	Evaluate our service and program portfolio and align it with our strategic plan.
4.5	Evaluate our staffing model (job roles and responsibilities) and align them based on our updated program and service portfolio

DEFINING SUCCESS

High-level of engagement from members to achieve advocacy goals. Removal of roadblocks to develop affordable housing. Educating the public and elected officials on the importance of increasing affordable housing investment and production across the state. Realizing tangible wins in terms of increased public investment in affordable housing development.



Implementation Framework

A companion document to this Strategic Plan is the Three-Year Implementation Framework, intended to assist in measuring and evaluating our efforts. It assigns responsibilities and establishes various timelines to ensure forward momentum. Clear outcomes associated with each of the strategic priorities are identified so that we can monitor progress.

HNRI leadership will regularly monitor progress against this implementation framework and make necessary adjustments to ensure success in achieving key milestones and short, mid and long term goals.



Acknowledgements

HNRI thanks all the individuals who offered their time, energy, and perspectives in helping to develop this strategic plan.

STRATEGIC PLANNING CORE TEAM

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Colin Penney, South County Habitat for Humanity (Vice-President)*

Sharon Morris, Omni Development Corporation (Treasurer)*

Laura Jaworski, House of Hope CDC (Secretary)*

Christian Belden, Church Community Housing Corporation (Director)

Candace Harper, West Elmwood Community Development Corporation (Director)

Charlie Thomas-Davison, Women's Development Corporation (Director)

**Indicates that these Board members also served on the strategic planning core team*



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