

Primary Research Report



Prepared for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development



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Glossary of Acronyms





Glossary of Acronyms

FHA	Federal Housing Administration
FOD	Field Office Director
GSE	Government Sponsored Enterprise
HCA	Housing Counseling Agency
HUD	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
OHC	Office of Housing Counseling
SF	Office of Single Family Housing





Executive Summary





Introduction

HUD's Office of Single Family Housing (SF) and Office of Housing Counseling (OHC) have partnered to develop an Awareness + Visibility Project to increase the public's awareness of housing counseling, the number of Federal Housing Administration (FHA) borrowers that utilize housing counseling, and the number of people receiving housing counseling services. To that end, the offices are recommending a strategy to expand awareness of the value of HUD's housing counseling program as a tool to achieve a wide range of housing objectives:

- ▶ Increase awareness of housing counseling.
- ▶ Change perceptions of housing counseling.
- ▶ Motivate behaviors that lead to housing counseling.
- ▶ Create partnerships with stakeholders to make resources readily accessible.





Primary Research Overview

The first step in the strategy was to engage a research consultant to undertake primary research to thoroughly examine current awareness, perceptions, and behaviors of key stakeholders about pre-purchase counseling and education. The research team conducted a total of 25 focus groups among internal stakeholders, institutions, oversight agencies, and consumers to uncover current perceptions and experiences with HUD housing counseling and housing counseling in general to evaluate HUD's current image and gain insight into the value proposition of housing counseling for each stakeholder group. The results, outlined in this report, provide insight into how effectively OHC is communicating to stakeholder groups and ultimately informing future communications efforts for the Awareness + Visibility Project.





Stakeholders Defined

Stakeholders have been segmented into one of four groups. They are identified as follows:

Internal: Office of Housing Counseling, Office of Single Family Housing, Office of Field Policy & Management.

Institutions: Lenders, licensed real estate agents, housing counseling agencies, government sponsored enterprises.

Oversight Agencies: Those who have a direct or indirect impact on federal government policy, as it relates to housing counseling.

Consumers: Renters and first-time homebuyers.





Executive Summary

Overall Key Findings

Research findings were distilled into two categories: eye openers and confirmed beliefs, which are based on the original discovery sentiments shared by OHC and SF prior to research. Many of these sentiments were confirmed (i.e., confirmed beliefs), while the research team was surprised to hear others (i.e., eye openers).

Eye openers include: Basic money management for all consumers is needed (regardless of financial status); institutions are often hesitant to partner with HCAs; internal stakeholders do not always see the value of housing counseling; and the HUD name has both a strength and a stigma associated with it. All stakeholders cited the lack of awareness of the benefits of housing counseling among consumers. In fact, most consumers perceive that housing counseling is for those who are financially unstable and/or in foreclosure.

Confirmed beliefs include: Outreach efforts are imperative to getting the word out to all stakeholders, institutions and consumers who fail to see the full value of housing counseling.





Executive Summary

Additionally, it was no surprise that the term **counseling** was extremely negative to stakeholder groups, as it can imply that one has a problem that needs to be fixed. The research team dug more deeply into the issue, asking respondents to supply alternative names for **housing counselor**, which included: Housing Advisor, Housing Advocate, Housing Educator, and Housing Consultant.

The research team engaged in mystery shopping among 14 HUD housing counseling agencies across the country to better understand the consumer experience with the program. Researchers posed as first-time homebuyers at various HCAs nationwide to investigate the overall experience of a potential first-time homebuyer. The findings indicate that HUD HCAs provide several benefits for first-time homebuyers to engage in housing counseling, including knowledgeable and trustworthy counselors, empowering information, excellent preparation, and a welcoming and courteous atmosphere. In addition to the benefits identified above, several barriers were also identified, including difficulty in locating an HCA, one-on-one services delayed, time investment in group sessions, unexpected cost of housing counseling coursework, and process inconsistency across all HCAs.





Stakeholder Value Propositions

The goal of the research was to uncover the value proposition of housing counseling for each stakeholder group. These value propositions can then be used to develop messaging and inform a communications strategy for increasing awareness, changing perceptions, and modifying behaviors.

The following value propositions were gleaned for each stakeholder group:

Internal: Housing counseling informs and educates consumers about the benefits, advantages, and perceived risks associated with housing choices.

Institutions: Housing counseling produces knowledgeable, better-prepared consumers, which saves time and money and maximizes the success of the home-buying process.

Oversight Agencies: Housing counseling plays a significant role in educating consumers to make better housing decisions, especially as it relates to budgeting and wealth management.

Consumers: Housing counseling is a trusted resource that empowers consumers to make informed housing decisions.



Conclusion

This Primary Research Report is provided to inform HUD about the current state of awareness and visibility, and the value propositions that can be used to build engagement around the Housing Counseling Program.

Future work will recommend communications activities to increase awareness, change perceptions, and modify behaviors of those engaging in HUD housing counseling.

Ultimately, the goal is to reach more people who will benefit from working with a HUD HCA to address housing barriers and achieve housing objectives, including the goal of responsible and sustainable homeownership.





Background





Background

HUD's Office of Housing Counseling and Office of Single Family Housing have partnered to develop an Awareness + Visibility Project to increase awareness of housing counseling, the number of FHA borrowers that utilize housing counseling, and the number of people receiving housing counseling services. To that end, the offices are recommending a strategy to expand awareness of the value of HUD's housing counseling program as a tool to achieve a wide range of housing objectives:





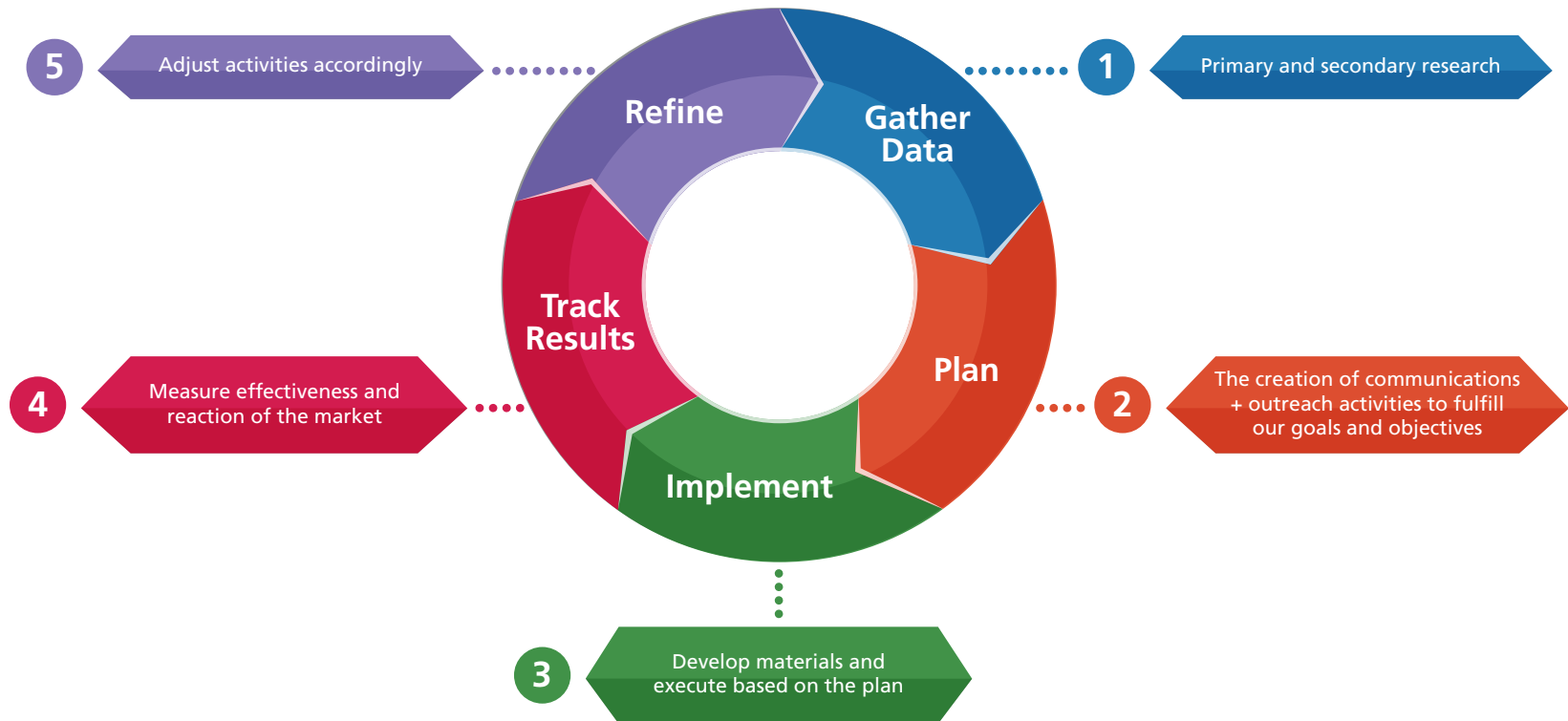
Project Process





Project Process

The overall process is proven to be an effective structure of a successful behavioral change plan. This strategic model provides the road map to successfully fulfill objectives. The process includes:





Discovery

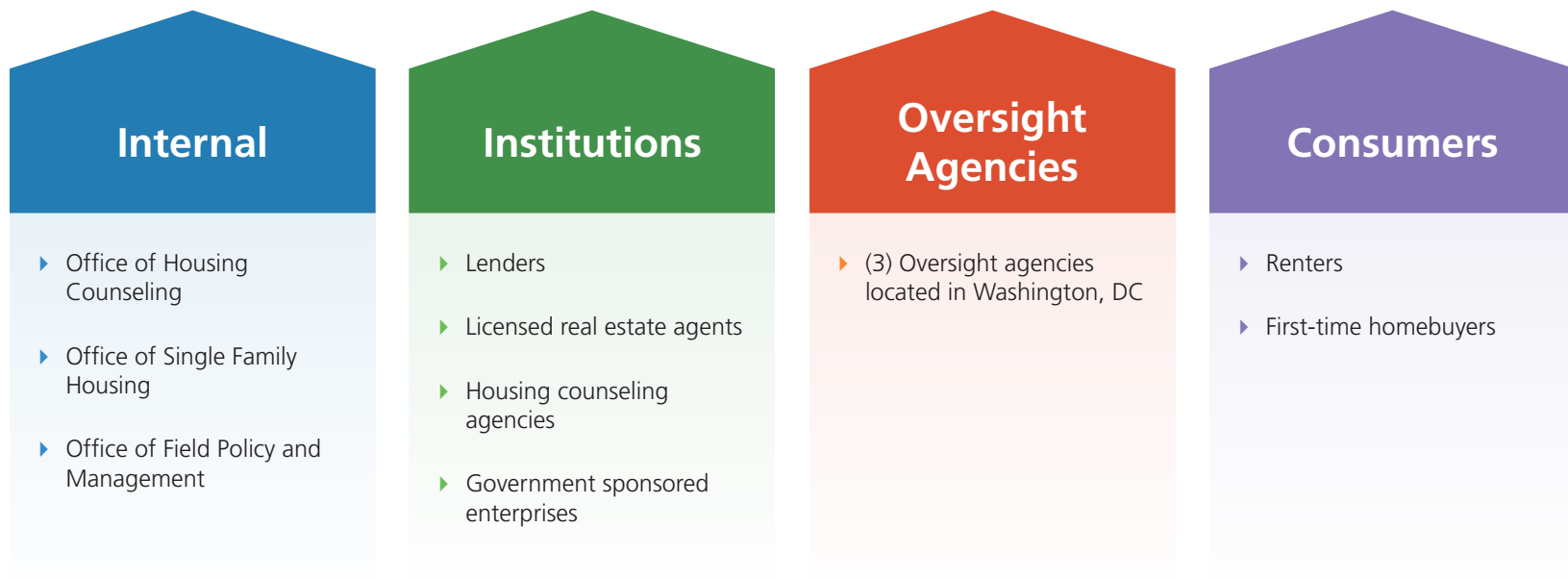




Discovery

To create an effective Awareness + Visibility Project, the research team first undertook a discovery process to better understand stakeholder perceptions and experiences with HUD housing counseling services. This discovery includes primary and secondary research, both of which produce key qualitative and quantitative findings that aid in the development of targeted communications activities.

Stakeholders





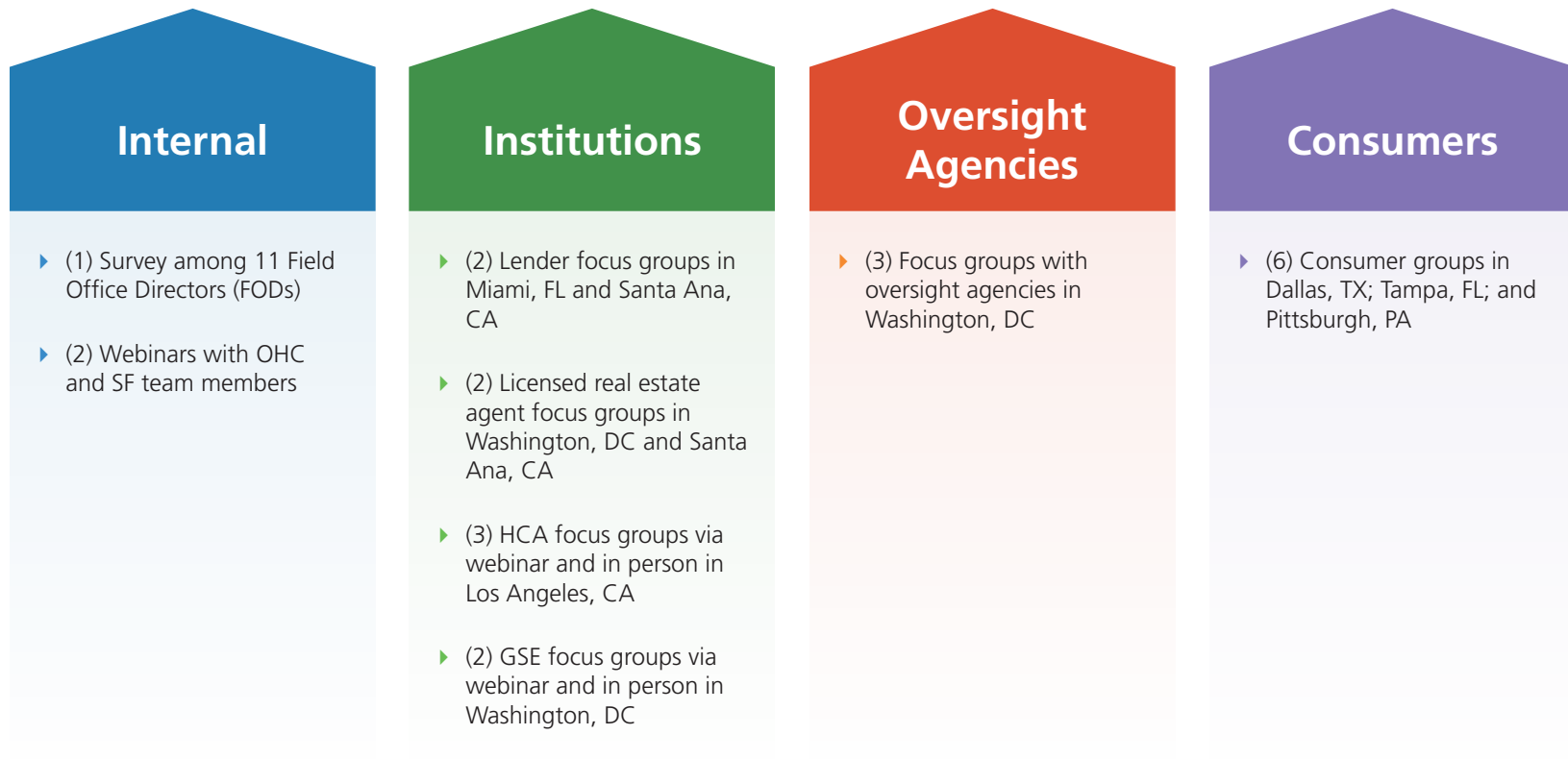
Methodology





Methodology

Primary research consisted of multiple focus groups and surveys conducted with each of the four major stakeholder groups of the Awareness + Visibility Project. Specific primary research efforts included:





Discussion Topics

Discussion topics focused on three key areas: perceptions, awareness, and behaviors related to home-buying and housing counseling. Topics of pre-purchase discussion were selected based on the following desired research outcomes:

- ▶ To uncover current perceptions and learn of experiences with HUD housing counseling and housing counseling in general;
- ▶ To evaluate HUD's current image;
- ▶ To gain insight into the value proposition of housing counseling.

It is also worth noting that the majority of respondents agreed to be contacted for future research opportunities, should HUD proceed with the recommended communications activities.





Overall Key Findings





Overall Key Findings

What's in a Name?

Throughout the discovery process, stakeholders repeatedly expressed concern about the name, *housing counselor*. It is no surprise that the term *counselor* can imply that one has a problem that needs to be fixed. The research team dug more deeply into the issue, seeking out the actual definition of the word, and even asking respondents to supply alternative names.

coun·se·lor

'kouns(ə)lər/

noun

1. a person trained to give guidance on personal, social, or psychological problems.

“an alcohol abuse counselor”

Top four alternative names for
housing counselor

1

Housing Advisor

2

Housing Advocate

3

Housing Educator

4

Housing Consultant





Overall Key Findings

Awareness, Attitudes, and Behaviors of HUD Housing Counseling

	Internal Stakeholders	Institutions	Oversight Agencies	Consumers
Awareness	Aware	Aware	Aware	Unaware
Perceptions				
HUD name	Favorable, HUD provides "Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval"	Favorable, associated with FHA loans	Favorable	For low socioeconomic status audiences, negative perception
Office of Housing Counseling	Favorable, provides valuable services to consumers	Semi-favorable, services provided are valuable, with the exception of perceived favoritism with other competitor institutions	Favorable, provides valuable services to consumers	For low socioeconomic status audiences, negative perception
OHC values/benefits	Provides valuable resources to consumers	Provides time-saving resources to consumers	Provides valuable resources for consumers	Provides financial assistance for down payments
OHC disadvantages	n/a	Possible favoritism with competitor institutions	n/a	Group sessions are time consuming





Overall Key Findings

Awareness, Attitudes, and Behaviors of HUD Housing Counseling (cont'd)

	Internal Stakeholders	Institutions	Oversight Agencies	Consumers
Behaviors				
Current behavior	Lack of engagement in housing counseling	Acts as an advisor to consumers on all pre-housing education and counseling	Passively supporting HUD housing counseling	DIY online research for information about housing and homeownership, trusts institutions and peers for advice
Barriers to behavior change	Communication infrastructure	Perceptions of biases towards possible competitor institutions	Communication infrastructure	Lack of awareness, lack of time, perception of income being too high for services
Motivators to behavior change	Increase in internal stakeholder engagement with refreshed communications materials	Awareness and change in perception of HUD housing counseling	Increase in delivery of information and communication from internal stakeholders	Awareness and a change in perception of HUD housing counseling





Overall Key Findings

While all of the feedback gleaned from the stakeholder focus groups is informative and valuable, a few themes were noted that will undoubtedly shape the development of a communications strategy and messaging:

Consumers have a lack of awareness about HCAs and housing counseling

Most consumers are unaware of all the benefits that are available to them, such as down payment assistance, tax benefits, home improvement grants, and default programs, to protect them and their families in case of financial hardship.

Messaging from institutions and online platforms in support of HCAs is seen as imperative

Overwhelmingly, respondents agree that the ideal place for HUD housing counseling messages is at touch points when consumers first start thinking about buying a house, such as licensed real estate agents, lenders, and online platforms, such as Zillow and Trulia, and others.

Empowering language is useful when communicating to consumers

All respondents agree it is important for HCAs to use language that is more empowering. For example, the words “qualify” and “affordability” can be perceived as demeaning. Using words/phrases such as “financing options” and “purchasing power” are positive, empowering, and engaging.

HCAs should act as mediators for institutions

Respondents agree it is imperative that the HCAs understand and work with all parties involved, such as the licensed real estate agent, the lender and, of course, the consumer, and act as an unbiased mediator on behalf of the consumer.





Overall Key Findings

There are both positive and negative connotations to the HUD name

Using the HUD name offers a sense of uniformity, security, and value (“Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval”). However, the HUD name is also associated with low-income consumers and foreclosures.

Appealing to a younger audience (millennials) is imperative

Respondents agree that HCAs must find a way to appeal to a millennial audience in order to remain relevant.

Lack of internal stakeholder awareness

Among internal stakeholders, respondents are not aware of any outreach efforts launched for HUD housing counseling or the OHC.

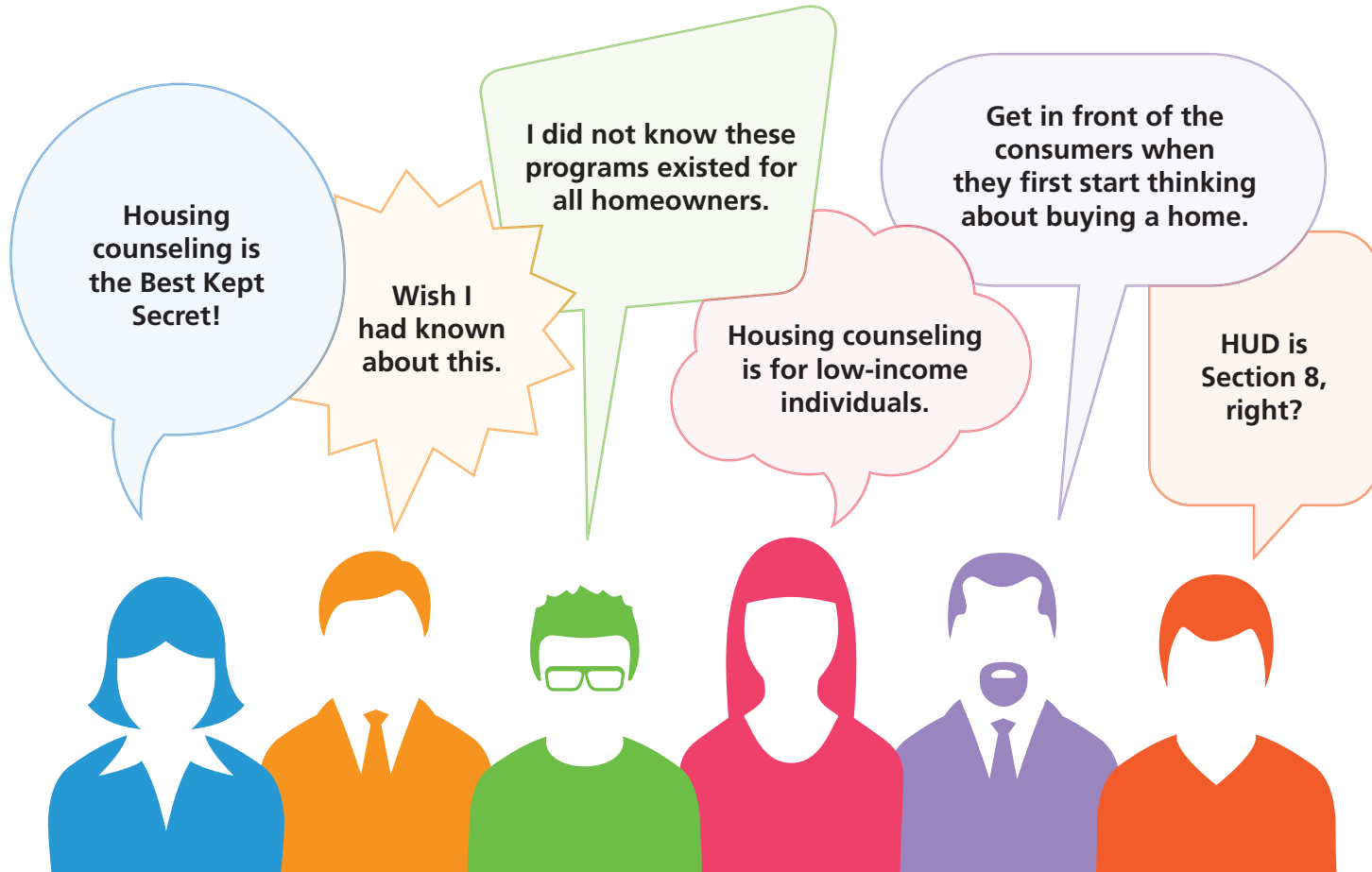




Overall Key Findings

Say What?!

Interesting Quotes from Stakeholder Focus Groups





Eye Openers + Confirmed Beliefs





Eye Openers + Confirmed Beliefs

Eye openers and confirmed beliefs are based on the original discovery sentiments shared internally by the OHC and SF before any research was conducted. Many of these sentiments were confirmed (i.e., confirmed beliefs), while others were surprising to hear (i.e., eye openers).

Eye Openers:

Eye openers are themes that the team found surprising to learn. They include the following:

- ▶ **Basic wealth/financial management among consumers is needed.**
- ▶ **Housing counseling is a best kept secret.**
- ▶ **Consumers' mindset is shopping vs. buying. (Many consumers will "shop" for a home, which can lead to impulsive, poor financial decisions; whereas housing counseling will prepare consumers to be ready to "buy" a home.)**
- ▶ **Internal stakeholders lack engagement with housing counseling with minimal communication among HUD offices.**
- ▶ **Oversight agencies are advocates of HCAs.**
- ▶ **Institutions are hesitant to partner with HCAs.**
- ▶ **HUD name is both a strength and stigma.**
- ▶ **Inconsistencies exist among HCAs throughout the country.**

Confirmed Beliefs:

Confirmed beliefs are themes that the team expected to hear. They include the following:

- ▶ **Call it anything BUT counseling:** All respondents agree that the phrase *housing counseling* denotes negative impressions in the mind of consumers and can be associated with other forms of counseling, such as alcohol abuse and suicide counseling.
- ▶ **Outreach builds awareness:** Respondents agree that outreach efforts are absolutely imperative to getting the word out to all stakeholders.
- ▶ **Stakeholders fail to see the value of housing counseling:** Respondents, particularly institutional stakeholders, do not fully understand the role of an HCA and are not fully convinced that HCAs are impartial to their needs. Many HCAs have licensed real estate agents or lenders speak at their workshops, and an outside party possibly taking away their client threatens them.
- ▶ **Cash is king:** Consumers only engage in housing counseling to obtain down payment assistance.
- ▶ **HUD housing counseling benefits all stakeholder groups:** Respondents who are aware of the benefits of housing counseling agree that HCAs provide value.





Mystery Shopping





Mystery Shopping

The research team engaged in mystery shopping among 14 HUD HCAs across the country to better understand the consumer experience with the program. Anonymity was maintained and HUD was not informed of the identity of the agencies.

Mystery shoppers compared their experiences based on the following criteria:

Experience at organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Availability of a counselor• Average wait time to speak with a counselor• One-on-one vs. group counseling
Impressions of housing counselor	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Knowledgeable• Courteous• Trustworthy
Information provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Quality of information• Suggested resources
Overall impressions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Was the visit worth your time?• Did you learn anything new?• Did staff attempt to sell you anything?• Did staff offer to keep in touch?



A number of themes can be drawn from the perspective of a potential first-time homebuyer. These key findings have been distilled into two categories: **benefits** and **barriers to entry**.



Mystery Shopping

Benefits:

The analysis indicates that HUD HCAs provide a number of benefits for first-time homebuyers. These include:

Knowledgeable + trustworthy counselors

The research team found the housing counselors and staff to be extremely knowledgeable about the home-buying process. Another important theme is that the counselors seemed very trustworthy. Given the number of mortgage schemes and predatory lending that takes place in the industry, having the assurance that the agency is a trusted source of information is key, particularly for a first-time homebuyer, as it helps to increase peace of mind and instill confidence.

Empowering information

Most of the housing counseling agencies provided very helpful information about various programs that can assist with lowering down payment and even closing costs. Housing counselors also stressed the importance of education because it empowers the buyer to make the most informed decision.

Excellent preparation

Most HCAs preferred not to answer one-on-one questions and instead suggested that first-time homebuyers attend group workshops. These workshops seemed to be extremely informative and provided excellent preparation for potential homebuyers by answering questions they often did not even think to ask.

Welcoming + courteous

The majority of HCAs offered a welcoming and courteous atmosphere to first-time homebuyers. This warm environment helps put anxious minds at ease, especially during such an arduous process. There were only a few instances where staff was discourteous.





Mystery Shopping

Barriers to Entry:

In addition to the benefits, the analysis also identified a number of barriers. These barriers seemed to be more prevalent among agencies in major metropolitan areas.

Difficulty in locating an HCA

Although a list of agencies is provided on the HUD website, when phone contact was made, the research team was often redirected to other agencies that provide the actual housing counseling services. This experience may be a bit frustrating to a first-time homebuyer that is simply looking for information. Additionally, the research team contacted a few agencies by phone and had difficulty reaching a live attendant.

One-on-one services delayed

Once contact was made with an agency, the majority of them insisted that the homebuyer enroll in a workshop before one-on-one contact with a counselor can be made. Even when the research team visited the agencies face-to-face and requested only a few minutes of time with a counselor, mystery shoppers were often denied a meeting. Again, this may prove to be a very frustrating and discouraging experience for a potential homebuyer.

Time investment in group sessions

Another deterrent to obtaining housing counseling is the length of the workshops provided. Most agencies offered 6 to 8 hours of workshops/coursework. This is a significant time commitment for someone to undertake, especially if one is unsure if homeownership is the best option.

Unexpected cost of housing counseling coursework

While the majority of the workshops were offered free of charge, there were several instances where the shopper was surprised to learn there was a cost for registration. Again, this can be a major deterrent for a potential homebuyer who is simply seeking information.

Process inconsistency

The process that potential participants go through is inconsistent among HCAs. For example, some agencies require participants to go through a class, while some do not.





Key Findings by Stakeholders





Key Findings by Stakeholders

Internal Stakeholders

Insights from the Office of Housing Counseling, Office of Single Family Housing, and Field Office Directors

While all of the feedback gleaned from internal stakeholders is informative and valuable, a few themes were noted that will undoubtedly shape the development of a communications strategy and key messaging:

Overall, there is very little overlap when it comes to services offered by both FODs and HCAs. On occasion, consumers will call and FODs will answer questions typically answered by housing counselors, but then consumers will be directed to the FHA "800 number" and/or an HCA for further information.

Few overlapping services with HCAs

Respondents agree that *housing counseling* is perceived to only have utility for low-income consumers.

'Housing counseling' stigma

Many respondents believe that consumers may feel a level of "shame" when initially required by institutions to take housing counseling courses.

Shame in needing housing counseling





Key Findings by Stakeholders

Internal Stakeholders

Insights from the Office of Housing Counseling, Office of Single Family Housing, and Field Office Directors (cont'd)

Overwhelmingly, respondents agree that consumers consider the following criteria most important when engaging in the home-buying process:

- ▶ Affordability
- ▶ Down payment assistance
- ▶ Hidden costs
- ▶ Credit/FICO score
- ▶ Debt-to-income ratio
- ▶ Qualification and types of loans
- ▶ Closing costs/close escrow
- ▶ Basic requirements of obtaining a loan

Consumers are financially conscious

Overall, respondents believe that receiving up-to-date materials, such as brochures, toolkits, and other outreach materials, will enable them to direct the consumer to the most appropriate HCA. Additional resources from and communication with institutions and State Housing Finance Agencies (SHFA) is seen as beneficial for directing and informing the consumer.

Up-to-date information is beneficial

Respondents agree that consumers need to understand the financial cost of homeownership, beyond monthly principal and interest payments and utility costs, to ensure that they can weather a job loss or other financial crises to keep the home.

Consumers need to understand financial cost

Overall, respondents provided the following responses:

- ▶ **Pro:** Housing counseling is extremely beneficial due to the education the consumer receives through the program.
- ▶ **Con:** The term *counseling* delivers a negative connotation to the consumer, as counseling suggests seeking help for a negative situation.

Housing counseling services provided are Pros; term is Con





Key Findings by Stakeholders

Institutions

Insights from lenders, licensed real estate agents, HCAs, and GSEs

While all of the feedback gleaned from the institution focus groups is informative and valuable, a few themes were noted that will undoubtedly shape the development of a communications strategy and key messaging:

Outreach for housing counseling services

Consumers hear about housing counseling services primarily through word-of-mouth, although lending institutions have been known to offer their own version of housing counseling.

Misplaced expectations of counseling services

Consumers believe that enrolling in a housing counseling workshop will guarantee them a mortgage. They do not understand the value of education and preparation that counseling services provide.

Advantages and disadvantages of HUD name

Using the HUD name offers a sense of uniformity, security, and value ("Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval") for lenders, but for licensed real estate agents, the HUD name is associated with FHA loans, which is the second choice behind conventional loans for selling a home to a consumer group.





Institutions

Insights from lenders, licensed real estate agents, HCAs, and GSEs (cont'd)

Objective language

It is important for HCAs to use language that is more objective. For example, the words “qualify” and “affordability” can be perceived as demeaning. Using words/phrases such as “financing options” and “purchasing power” are positive, empowering, and engaging.

HCAs as mediators for institutions

Both lenders and licensed real estate agents of the institution spectrum have specific agendas that focus on two different sides of the home-purchasing process. Licensed real estate agents work with the seller, and lenders work with the buyers. It is imperative that the HCA understands and works with both segments to benefit all parties involved. This will support the best outcome for the consumer.

Increase positive perceptions/trust with licensed real estate agents

Many respondents agree that more often than not, licensed real estate agents recommend that the seller consider a conventional loan vs. an FHA loan due to the perception that FHA loans take more time to process.

Unfavorable debt-to-income ratio

One of the most common ways a lender determines if a consumer qualifies for a loan is with the debt-to-income ratio. Lenders often find debt-to-income ratios are a barrier for consumers, regardless of income. Thus, this is an area where housing counselors may be helpful for all consumers.





Key Findings by Stakeholders

Institutions

Insights from lenders, licensed real estate agents, HCAs, and GSEs (cont'd)

Ready to buy?

Respondents feel that consumers often enroll in housing counseling believing they are ready to buy a home. The education they receive during counseling helps to confirm if they are financially ready to purchase.

Awareness of opportunities

Respondents believe that most consumers are unaware of all the benefits that are available to them, such as down payment assistance, tax benefits, home improvement grants, and default programs, to protect them and their families in case of financial hardship.

Licensed real estate agent/ lender is first step

Often times, consumers will first seek out a licensed real estate agent or a lender, because they are excited about shopping for a home, but then are “kicked back” to a housing counselor after realizing they may not be as qualified as they thought.

Messages for institutions and online platforms

Overwhelmingly, respondents agreed that the ideal place for messaging about HUD housing counseling is in front of the consumer when they first start researching buying a house with licensed real estate agents and lenders, or on online platforms, such as Zillow and Trulia.





Key Findings by Stakeholders

Institutions

Insights from lenders, licensed real estate agents, HCAs, and GSEs (cont'd)





Key Findings by Stakeholders

Oversight Agencies

While all of the feedback gleaned from the oversight agency focus groups is informative and valuable, a few themes were noted that will undoubtedly shape the development of a communications strategy and key messaging:

Overwhelmingly, respondents agree that an overall wealth management aspect should be included in housing counseling. This would be valuable to the consumer because the large investment needed to purchase a house affects the future outcome of private wealth. Knowledge surrounding how wealth is accumulated over time through mortgage payments is extremely beneficial to all those who purchase a house, regardless of cost.

Wealth management

The majority of respondents agree that a consumer rating system should be developed for HCAs, similar to the Yelp rating system used for restaurants. These ratings should be made available to consumers so they can assess the value of housing counseling. It will also help to encourage the housing counselors to improve their level of service.

Rating consumer experience

The word *counseling* may denote negative impressions in the mind of consumers. Utilizing alternative phrases such as 'housing consultant' or 'housing advisor' may prove valuable in changing perceptions.

Stigma in the word *counseling*

The group has mixed emotions regarding the HUD name being associated with housing counseling. Some believe that it is viewed negatively, while others believe that it provides a sense of trust.

HUD name





Key Findings by Stakeholders

Oversight Agencies

Insights from oversight agencies

Counselors do not always provide the level of service that the client may be expecting, due to the client's expectations of a "one-stop shop."

Level of service

Housing counseling may be viewed with more value to consumers if they are able to go to any HCA for answers to all of their housing questions. Many HCAs only specialize in particular areas, leaving the consumer to go back to the drawing board to find a new HCA, which may potentially discourage them from seeking the help of a housing counselor.

Services offered

A notable drawback is that many consumers are not aware that housing counseling services are available to them. Respondents suggest utilizing trusted networks, community figures, and trusted national organizations to spread the word about housing counseling to consumers.

Awareness

One of the major points that counselors need to inform homebuyers about is the difference in the cost of renting versus owning a home. Most consumers are accustomed to calling someone for repairs, and usually there is no cost to the consumer (renter), but that changes with homeownership.

The actual cost of homeownership





Key Findings by Stakeholders

Oversight Agencies

Insights from oversight agencies (cont'd)

Respondents agree that there should be a fee charged for housing counseling services as it creates value to the consumer; however, this fee should be affordable for all income groups/levels.

Fee for service

HCA's must find a way to appeal to a millennial audience in order to remain relevant.

Appeal to a younger audience

HUD agencies are supported by the government to ensure that regulation and oversight will deliver a fair outcome for the consumer.

HUD regulations ensure no conflict of interest

HCA's educate the consumer about the many financial assistance programs that help with down payment, closing costs, escrow, and updates to purchase property and post-purchase assistance.

Educational value of HUD services

Respondents all agree that educating the consumer about how and why to raise their credit score is one of the most important aspects of housing counseling because it enables the consumer to have a lower interest rate, which will significantly reduce costs in the long run.

Credit score education





Key Findings by Stakeholders

Consumers

Insights from first-time homebuyers and renters

While all of the feedback gleaned from the consumer focus groups is informative and valuable, a few themes were noted that will undoubtedly shape the development of a communications strategy and key messaging:

Lack of awareness

By and large, most consumers are simply not aware of the opportunity to obtain services, such as housing counseling, through a HUD HCA. Some are vaguely aware of housing counseling; however, they falsely assume they will not qualify due to their income bracket being too high.

Online sources for information

The majority of respondents state that they use popular real estate websites throughout their home-buying cycle. Sites such as Zillow, Trulia, and ForSale.com are the most commonly used sites. Consumers also speak to the importance of consulting with people they trust, such as friends, family, and co-workers.

Stigma for the word *counseling*

The word *counseling* evokes negative images in the minds of consumers. Respondents mention phrases such as “threat of foreclosure” and “eviction” when expanding on what they think housing counseling will offer.

Negative associations with HUD overall

Overall, the name “HUD” conjures negative feelings in respondents. Respondents state they think of poor quality, low-income housing, or ‘Section 8’ rental properties.

“Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval” from HUD

All respondents agree that they would trust HUD housing counseling agencies more than agencies not associated with HUD.





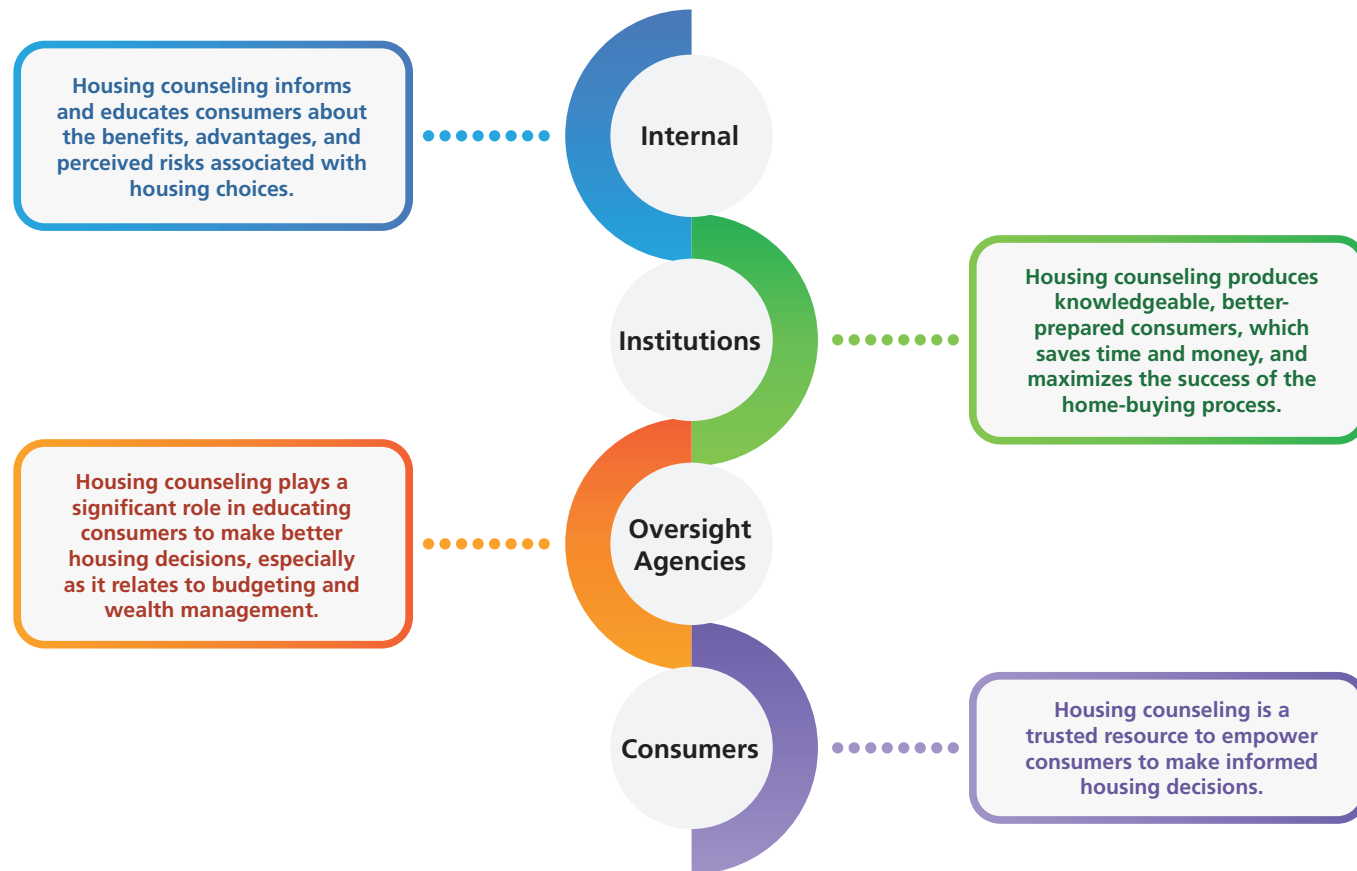
Stakeholder Value Propositions





Stakeholder Value Propositions

Primary research was conducted to uncover awareness, perceptions, benefits, and barriers to HUD housing counseling. Ultimately, the results of this research answer the 'So What?' question, which is, *what is the value proposition of HUD housing counseling for each stakeholder group?* These value propositions can then be used to develop messaging and inform activities for increasing awareness, changing perceptions, and modifying behaviors. The following value propositions were gleaned for each stakeholder group:





Conclusion

This Primary Research Report is provided to inform HUD about the current state of awareness and visibility, and the value propositions that can be used to build engagement around the Housing Counseling Program.

Future work will recommend communications activities to increase awareness, change perceptions, and modify behaviors of those engaging in HUD housing counseling.

Ultimately, the goal is to reach more people who will benefit from working with a HUD HCA to address housing barriers and achieve housing goals, including that of responsible and sustainable homeownership.



