

Building Community through Collaboration

How a team-driven approach has grown capacity and accelerated community development in rural Minnesota

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mhp
Minnesota Housing Partnership

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, Mark had lived many places he didn't call home. A state prison cell. A cockroach-infested motel room. An apartment complex populated with alcoholics and drug addicts — two substances he had battled himself.

He had setbacks with his sobriety that led to arrest and suffered a stroke that left him partially disabled.

But, at the grand opening of the Beacon Hill housing development in August 2016, Mark kept repeating one phrase: "I feel so blessed."

Mark was one of dozens of residents who moved into the new supportive housing development in Grand Rapids within days of its completion. A $9.4 million project, Beacon Hill helped to fulfill an urgent need for additional affordable and supportive housing in rural Itasca County, Minnesota. But, evidenced by the packed room of local residents and leaders from across the state, it was clear this housing project is special.

Certainly, it's notable in its design, bringing together families and individuals, some with disabilities or troubled pasts, to create a diverse but connected community of more than 120 residents. Perhaps even more exceptional, though, these 48 units were the tangible result of a unique collaboration among local leaders representing a diversity of interests, from corrections to housing to mental health.

In 2013, the concept for this community was born when seven Itasca County leaders came together for the **Housing Institute**, an initiative of the Minnesota Housing Partnership with support from the Greater Minnesota Housing Fund**.** Over 13 months, they worked diligently toward their goal to create Beacon Hill; but they also built partnerships that will benefit their region for years to come.

For Audrey Moen, Housing Manager at Northland Counseling Center, the impact of the Housing Institute could be summed up in six words. "Many hands make for light work," she said at the grand opening. "That's exactly what happened here. We had people from many different levels and many different areas making this dream come true."

This white paper outlines the evolution and successes of the Housing Institute.



THE IMPETUS FOR THE INSTITUTE: Addressing the needs of rural communities

In many regions of rural Minnesota, there's a significant gap between the supply of affordable housing and the number of people who need it.

The Minnesota Housing Partnership (MHP), with key support from the Greater Minnesota Housing Fund (GMHF), created a new program to close that gap through collaboration and capacity building.

In just six years, the Housing Institute has proven a team-driven model can make all the difference in turning aspiration into action, and visions for community development into reality.

When the Housing Institute was launched in 2010, Minnesota was in the throes of the economic crisis. Like so many other states, it was hit with a wave of foreclosures and bankruptcies among developers. But that blow compounded challenges rural communities had faced for many years.

Rural areas already struggled with limited funding for rehabilitation of existing housing or the construction of new housing. Applying for state and federal funding, which includes complicated processes and regulations, was difficult for the small number of public servants who juggled many responsibilities. And, adding urgency to equation, many units of affordable housing built in the 1980s using federal funds were quickly reaching the end of their mortgage terms, opening the door to convert affordable units to market rate.

In response to these pressing factors, the Housing Institute was created to bring together housing leaders and stakeholders to share their experiences, learn best practices, and develop creative solutions to bring quality affordable housing to their communities.

Like the model itself, the Institute is a collaboration. MHP has taken on the lead role in convening, guiding and providing technical assistance to the Institute participants, while GMHF provides critical funding and planning support that is central to the Institute's success. With additional funding support from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Capacity Development Initiative, the Housing Institute has evolved as an in-depth 18-month program including training, peer-to-peer learning, and a focus on local housing-related needs.

OUR MODEL: At its foundation, the Housing Institute is about relationship building. It is rooted in the belief that, by creating partnerships and working in collaboration, rural areas are able to:



Increase housing production



Preserve existing units of affordable housing



Achieve economies of scale while retaining local control



Learn from others experience and knowledge



Combine resources to take on a new project or program

Since its launch in 2010, MHP has pro-actively sought out participants from across the state. In that outreach, staff share the long-lasting goals and collaborative design of the Institute. By facilitating a regional approach to housing development, the Institute provides a unique opportunity for Housing and Redevelopment Authorities (HRA), Economic Development Authorities (EDA) and other local organizations to collaborate.

Moving beyond individual leadership, the Institute relies on a group model that capitalizes on local expertise and resources. Participants form teams comprised of several entities in a region, often including city, county, HRA and EDA staff. As the convener, MHP doesn't prescribe the make-up of the team. Each Institute supports three or four teams with five to seven individual members each.

Enhancing local and regional collaboration has been a clear need articulated by the vast majority of Housing Institute participants.

"Never before has there been a collaborative effort by multiple agencies to address housing in Cloquet," the Cloquet/Carlton team explained in their 2014 application. "Potential or strengthened collaboration and partnerships [are necessary to] increase affordable housing options for Cloquet and Carlton County residents." Ultimately, the team included representatives from the HRA, Carlton County Public Health and Human Services, the City of Cloquet, the Cloquet Police Department, One Roof Housing and the Salvation Army.

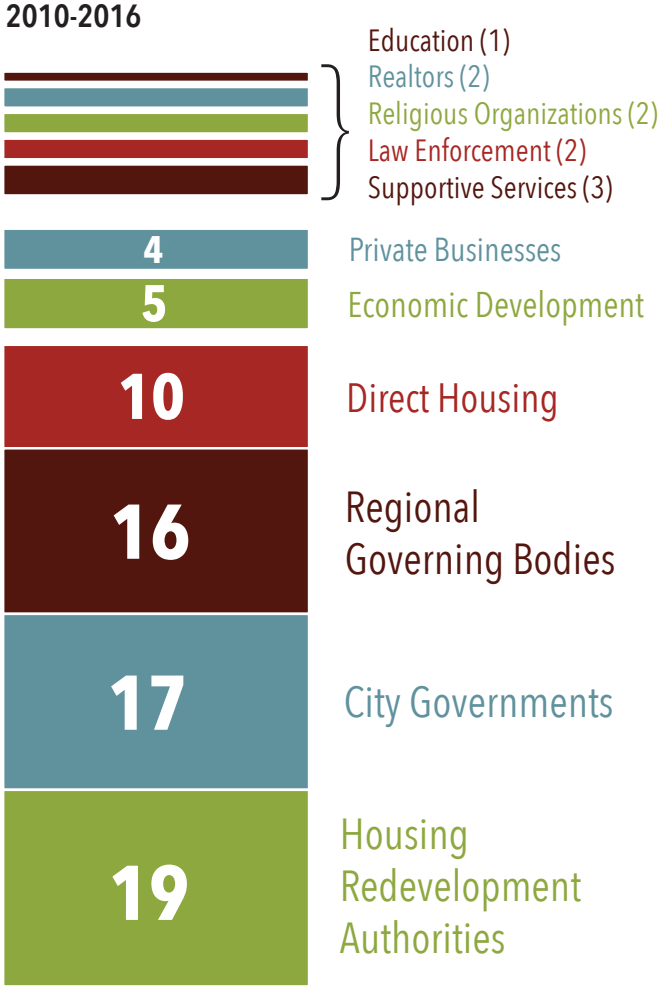
As of March 2016, the Institute had convened four rounds, with a total of 13 teams comprising 82 total team members representing 68 entities.

The evolving Institute: TEAMS

As the Institute evolved, so did the teams. While early rounds were primarily comprised of housing stakeholders, later rounds included a greater mix of individuals on each team, expanding to a community development focus. With early buy-in and team members from sectors like private business, police and corrections, public works, and the faith community, the development projects garnered greater support.

AFFILIATIONS OF TEAM MEMBERS

2010-2016



MAPPING INSTITUTE IMPACT: More than 65 different entities engaged

KEY
HRA: Housing and Redevelopment Authority
EDA: Economic Development Authority
EDC: Economic Development Commission

ROUND 1
April 2010 - October 2011

Lake / Cook Team
- Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency
- Cook County Grand Marais EDA
- Lake Cook HRA
- Two Harbors HRA

Lincoln County Team
- City of Tyler
- Lake Benton EDA
- Lincoln County EDC
- Lincoln County HRA

Grow Crow Wing Team
- Brainerd Lakes Area EDC
- Brainerd HRA
- City of Crosby
- Crow Wing County HRA
- Pequot Lakes HRA

ROUND 2
May 2011 - August 2012

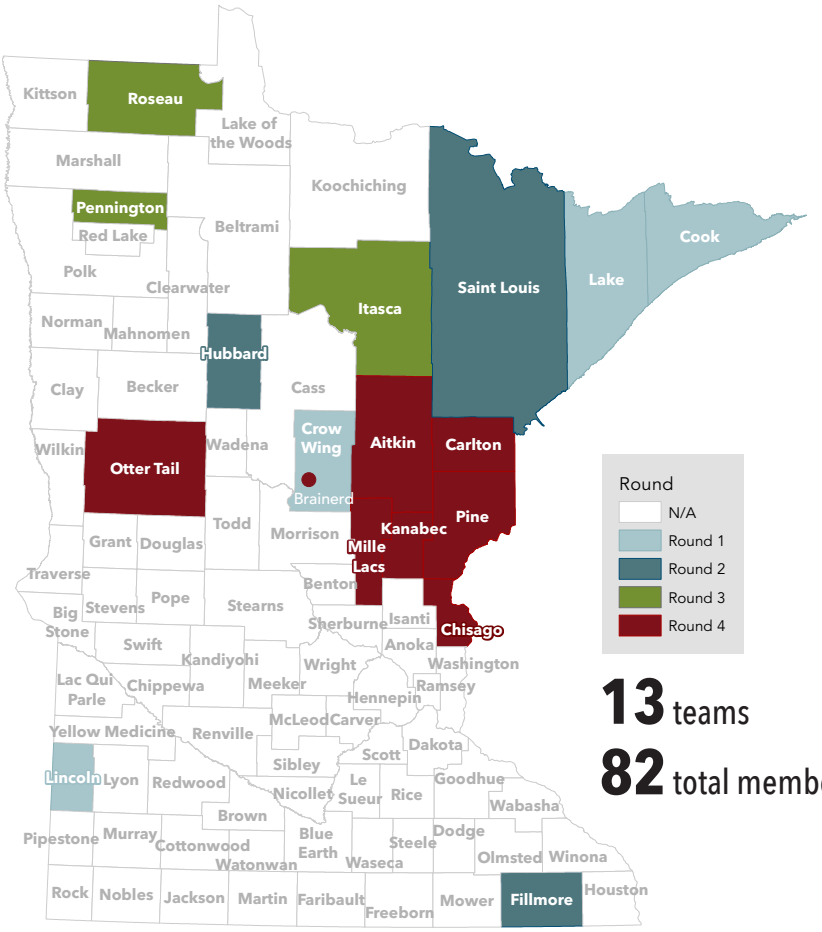
Bluff County Team
- Coffee House Real Estate
- Fillmore County Board
- SE MN Community Action Agency
- Winona County EDA

Hubbard County Team
- Headwaters Regional Development Commission
- Hubbard County Regional EDC
- HRA of Park Rapids
- Mahube Community Council, Inc

St. Louis County Team
- Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency
- City of Virginia
- City of Eveleth
- East Range Joint Powers Board
- Hibbing HRA
- Range Transitional Housing

ROUND 3
April 2013 - April 2014

Itasca County Team
- Grace House
- Itasca County HRA
- Kootasca Community Action
- MN Department of Corrections
- Northland Counseling Center



13 teams

82 total members

Roseau County Team
- City of Badger
- City of Greenbush
- City of Roseau
- Northwest Minnesota Housing Cooperative
- Northwest Multi-County HRA
- Roseau County

Thief River Falls Team
- City of Thief River Falls
- Genereaux Realty
- Inter-County Community Council
- LV Contracting
- Northland Community & Technical College

ROUND 4
January 2015 - October 2015

Central Team
- Brainerd HRA
- Brainerd Restoration
- City of Brainerd
- Menk Jewelers
- Pueringer Investments
- Region 5 Development Commission

Cloquet / Carlton Team
- Carlton County Public Health and Human Services
- City of Cloquet
- Cloquet/Carlton HRA
- Cloquet Police Department
- One Roof Housing
- Salvation Army, Northern Division HQ
- Zion Lutheran Church

East Central Team
- 7 County Senior Federation
- A Place for You
- Central MN Housing Partnership Inc
- East Central Regional Development Commission
- Lakes & Pines Community Action Council
- Mille Lacs Corporate Ventures
- Mora HRA

West Central Team
- City of Fergus Falls
- City of Pelican Rapids
- City of Perham
- Fergus Falls/Otter Tail County HRA
- Mahube-Otwa CAP, Inc.

During the Institute application process, MHP prompted teams to start thinking about possible projects or programs to pursue. The application asks for three ideas, including a proposed goal or objective, the target population to be served, funding availability and how the program or project fulfills a community need.

In the most recent Institutes, teams have worked together during the first in-person gathering to prioritize ideas and, by the second meeting, reach consensus on what project to pursue. During the first meeting, teams also elect a leader who is responsible for communicating with MHP and other team members, setting up and guiding local team meetings, and making sure team goals are accomplished in a timely manner.

Team goals have varied from the creation of a regional services website to the building of a permanent supportive housing development.

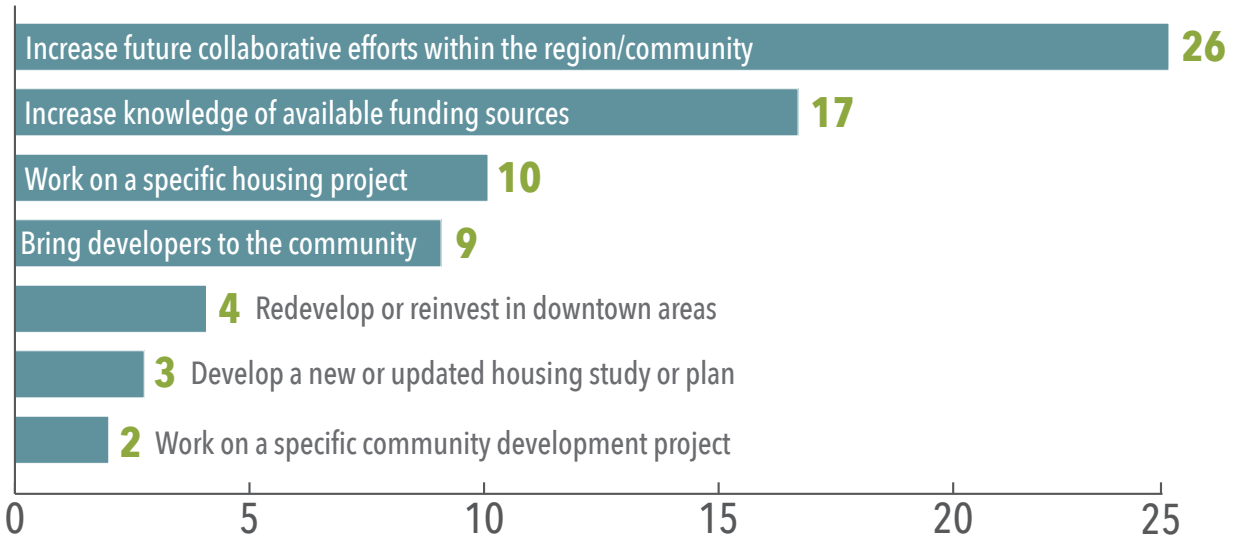
The Housing Institute embraces that variety with customized curriculum. In their application, potential teams are asked to identify their community needs so MHP staff can tailor the Institute content to the needs of participants. However, some of the overarching topics addressed in the majority of Institutes include:

- ***Project financing***
- ***Preservation of rural rental housing***
- ***Communications and messaging***
- ***Community engagement***
- ***Navigating HUD's Section 3 and Fair Housing and Equity Assessment***
- ***Updates on state and federal policy***

The evolving Institute: GOALS

When the Housing Institute first convened in 2010, the primary challenge it sought to address was the rise in foreclosures, which was at the highest level in years, forcing record numbers of homeless families into shelters. By the fourth iteration of the Housing Institute in 2015, the focus of the teams had largely shifted away from foreclosure and recession recovery to focus more on regional development strategies and workforce housing plans.

Why did you join the Housing Institute?



Source: 2016 Housing Institute participant survey

CASE STUDY: Establishing goals based on need in Itasca County

Long before the idea of Beacon Hill, Audrey Moen was confronting a crisis. "I was personally getting nine or 10 calls every single day from people who needed housing," Moen said, "many of them in tears."

For years, Moen had watched the lack of affordable housing in Itasca County grow more and more pronounced. She knew people were living in the woods, under bridges along the Mississippi River and in tents behind Wal-Mart. She knew there were people who had been couch-hopping for up to two years. And a local study backed up her assumption: The Wilder Foundation found that homelessness had increased 22 percent in Itasca County from 2003 to 2013.

But Moen's hands were tied by a lack of resources. Even with a Section 8 voucher, she explained, many potential tenants were turned away because the rent was too expensive or the landlord barred residents with criminal histories. If the rent could be covered by the subsidy and the tenant was eligible, she added, the unit often wouldn't pass inspection — in fact, a 2015 study found that, in Itasca County alone, more than 1,200 rental units were considered substandard. Not surprisingly, the local homeless shelter, Grace House, was constantly at capacity, forcing people to put their name on a wait list rather than secure a bed.

Born and raised in Grand Rapids, Dale never thought he'd face homelessness. But when he returned to his home town in 2015, he couldn't find any place leasing for less than $700 per month. Living on a fixed income and undergoing dialysis, the only place he could afford was his sister's couch. With six people living in a two-bedroom apartment, Dale struggled with depression and anxiety. The bills started stacking up, but asking for help, he believed, was a sign of weakness.

Finding that help for people like Dale became the central focus of the Itasca County Housing Institute team, which, along with Moen and Northland Counseling Center, included representatives from Itasca County Housing and Redevelopment Authority, Itasca County Health and Human Services, KOOTASCA Community Action, Grace House, Minnesota Department of Corrections and Itasca County Probation.



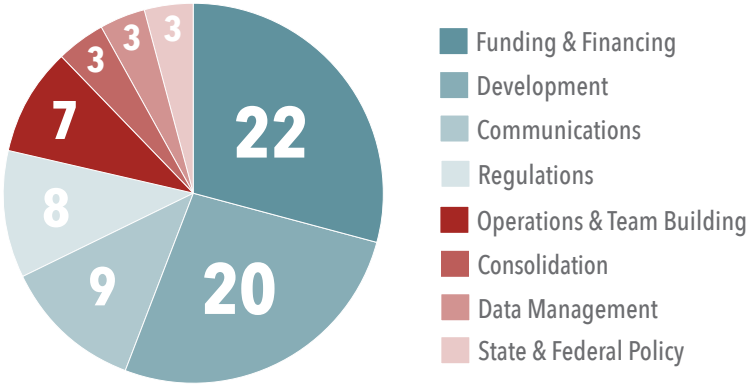
Itasca County Housing Institute team members planning for Beacon Hill (Photo by Patrick Photography)

Because of the focus on collaboration, the Institute includes in-person workshops that provide an opportunity for teams to learn from expert presenters on key topics, and meet with each other and other teams in the region. To facilitate that collaboration, initial homework emphasizes team building and roles, including exercises that build understanding of the members' backgrounds and organizations' priorities.

The in-person workshops are also critical in providing vital information and technical understanding on housing and community development. **Since 2010, the Institute has hosted more than 65 individual speakers with expertise in various aspects of housing and community development.** Common themes across rounds have included data acquisition and application, communication strategies, and an array of conversations about funding.

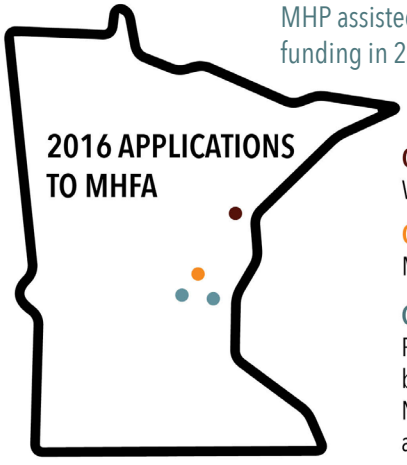
A workshop highlight for many participants has been the **funder and developer "speed dating."** In these sessions, teams are responsible for creating a clear vision and presenting that to a funder or developer. They receive feedback that helps to clarify their concepts, while funders hear about projects before receiving an application and developers get connected to rural opportunities, including project concepts with free land or possible tax-increment financing.

WORKSHOP SPEAKERS 2010-2016



"As a housing developer, Sand Companies has been able to connect with communities and regions in need of housing," said Jamie Thelen, President and CEO of Sand Companies. "It gives us an opportunity to learn about challenges in many areas of our state and, at the same time, share some of our successes in housing. The Institute is a great collaboration that gives all attendees new ideas."

According to Minnesota Housing Commissioner, Mary Tingerthal, the Institute benefits funders, as well. "The Institute can bring people together in a community to solve their toughest housing issues — and then connect them to the resources they need to get the job done," she said. "**We see better, more competitive applications to Minnesota Housing for scarce resources from communities that participate.**"



MHP assisted several Housing Institute teams apply for funding in 2016, including the cities of Cloquet and Mora.

CITY OF CLOQUET
White Pines: 35 units of affordable housing

CITY OF MORA
Mysa House: 24 senior housing rental units

CENTRAL MINNESOTA HOUSING PARTNERSHIP
Princeton: Rehab of West Birch townhomes; building of new East Birch townhomes
North Branch: 20 new units for people with serious and persistent mental illness

The Institute isn't a simple training; it provides ongoing support and continued momentum between workshops, as well. To that end, a team leader is designated to ensure the group continues to meet to pursue its projects, and an MHP staff liaison is assigned to assist each regional project.

The MHP liaison attends monthly meetings to help determine and guide project planning. MHP also provides information on funding sources and works with team members to apply for project funding. Depending on the type of project, MHP liaisons assist in writing timelines, budgets, and Requests for Proposals; attend meetings to present the proposed project to boards or elected officials; and guide the team through the development process.

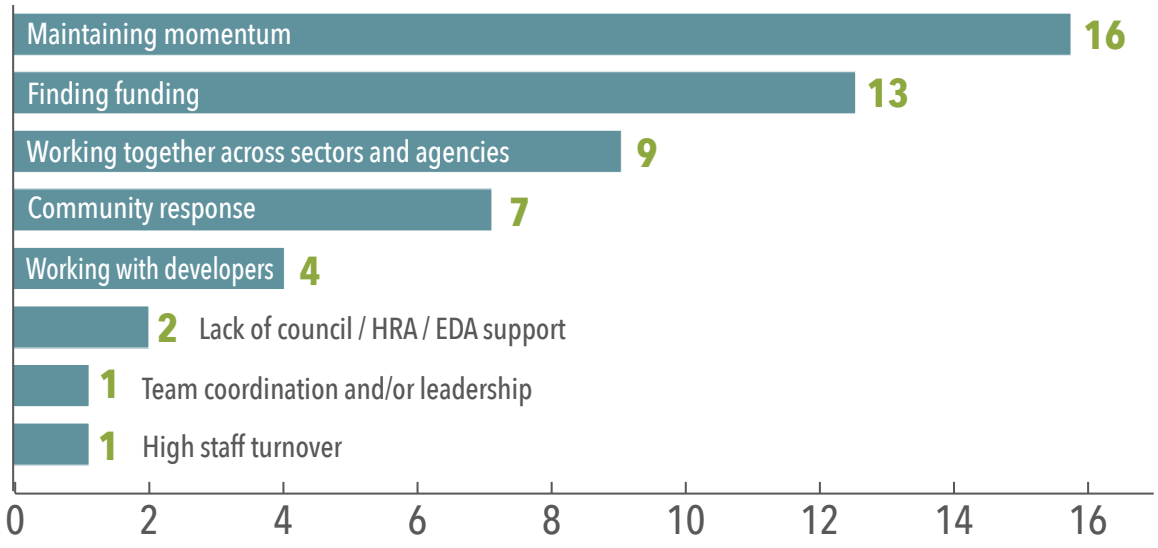
Creating housing and community development is complex work. Even with the Institute's targeted skill building, the teams still face significant obstacles. A 2016 survey of Housing Institute participants found that the most cited challenges were finding funding, maintaining momentum and working together across sectors and agencies. But survey respondents also noted that the Institute was crucial in helping them address those difficulties.

The evolving Institute: FUNDING

The MHP Sustainable Community Engagement Fund (SCEF) offers matching grants to organizations and communities receiving technical assistance from MHP. Grant funds are used for the development of affordable housing, including conducting housing studies, hiring specific consultants, participating in charrettes, and more. Over the course of the Housing Institute, 14 participating entities have received awards of up to $10,000 (the maximum grant award) to assist in the pursuit of their goals. **Since 2010, nearly $105,000 has been awarded to Housing Institute participants through SCEF.**

"While applying for senior housing development funding has been an incredible amount of work, the resources and support network from the Institute have helped us to work through the process," said Rose Dunn, the Executive Director of the Mora Housing and Redevelopment Authority. "We've partnered with an excellent developer, have an incredible amount of community support, as well as support from the HRA board, city and county EDAs, city council and other Institute team members."

What challenges did you face in achieving your Institute goals?



IN ROUND 1, the Lincoln County team received a $6,690 Sustainable Communities Engagement Fund grant (see page 9) to help launch a new comprehensive website, **"At Home in Lincoln County,"** as a one-stop shop for county-wide housing information. But that wasn't all.

"Through our work with the Institute, we gained the information necessary to have the Lincoln County HRA pursue funding to **purchase and complete two sets of twin homes** that had been foreclosed on by the bank prior to completion of construction," said Vince Robinson, Executive Director for the Lincoln County Economic Development Commission. "Also, with the assistance of MHP and the Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership we completed a housing analysis that sparked a **new housing subdivision in Hendricks and the predevelopment of another housing subdivision in Ivanhoe**. This analysis was used by the HRA to convince the Hendricks Housing Authority to allow them to take over management of a 12-unit USDA housing project that was in serious disrepair. The HRA worked to find substantial funding for this project and has completed major renovations to the 12 units; as a result the **occupancy has gone from 30% to 100%**."

The Lake County team also created an online housing resource center — and has seen significant success since the completion of the Institute, as well. The Lake County HRA secured more than **$3.5 million in funding** from multiple sources, weatherized and remodeled **eight units of housing** throughout the county, and also established **mini-grant and business loan** programs. But perhaps most important of all: their Housing Institute team is still meeting every month.

IN ROUND 2, the St. Louis County team worked to redevelop a church and school campus into **24-28 units of affordable housing**. Unfortunately, despite securing funding from the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency (MHFA), neighborhood opposition resulted in the project not moving forward. But that didn't mean that the Institute wasn't a critical learning process. "The Housing Institute is solely responsible for the collaboration within our group and opened the doors to future collaboration on other projects," said Adam Venne of Range Transitional Housing.

Following its work in the Housing Institute, the Hubbard County Housing and Redevelopment Authority was able to access $34,000 per year from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to help support operations of Cornerstone Apartments in Park Rapids, an **8-unit transitional housing facility.** After years of struggling services and operations, the HRA contracted with Mahube Community Council to provide services to residents.

In Bluff Country, the Housing Institute brought stakeholders together. "It helped to meet other team members and understanding what they're doing," said Vonda Budde of the Southeast Minnesota Community Action Agency (SEMCAC). Since then, Budde noted, SEMCAC has **purchased and rehabbed a 16-unit apartment building**.



At Home in Lincoln County website

IN ROUND 3, Thief River Falls had seen an increase in regional population, and the need for additional housing options to accommodate workers at major employers like Digi-Key and Arctic Cat. During the Housing Institute, the Thief River Falls team met with developers and funders. As a result, D.W. Jones Management received funding from the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency and **began building River Pointe Townhomes, a 24-unit income-restricted building**. **In addition, West River Falls Estate, a market rate building with 104 units**, was built using workforce housing funds from the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED). Both projects will be completed in Fall 2016. The team also helped to advocate for a new Workforce Housing Development Program, which will award **$4 million to support market rate projects in Greater Minnesota in 2016 and 2017**.

"Because of the Housing Institute, we were able to connect with developers, one of which has since completed two large projects in our community," said Mark Borseth from the City of Thief River Falls. "**And a much heightened and better educated housing initiative has been developed."**

The Roseau County team also saw that economic growth had caused a shortage of housing, making it difficult for businesses to recruit employees to the area. During the Institute, DEED **provided a workforce housing grant** to a private developer to build 30 units of workforce housing. Sand Companies met with the Roseau team during an Institute workshop — and built **Tamarack Place, a 41-unit apartment property**.

IN ROUND 4, the East Central team engaged a developer (D.W. Jones) and submitted multiple funding applications for **24 units of senior housing with services** in Mora that could open as soon as Summer 2018. Through their work during the Institute, the team received a grant to develop a **"one-stop shop" website for housing resources** specific to the East Central region. "**And our group continues to meet monthly**," said Rose Dunn of the Mora HRA. "We continue to make progress on team goals, as well as collaborating on new efforts collectively and in smaller partnerships. In fact, **our group has grown** to include Central Minnesota Council on Aging, Cloquet Housing Authority, and the City of Pine City Administrator."

The Housing Institute provided the opportunity for Otter Tail County to **conduct its first county-wide housing study in 18 years.** According to Gordon Hydukovich of the City of Fergus Falls, the Housing Institute helped to galvanize **56 units of housing starting construction in 2016 — with another 136 in the pipeline**.

During the Institute, the Cloquet/Carlton team chose a developer who worked with them to submit a funding application for **35 units of affordable rental housing in Cloquet**. For Louise Simon of the Salvation Army, the Institute provided time and space for action: "It gave us the opportunity to come together, away from our day to day jobs, so we can focus on this project."



River Pointe Townhomes in Thief River Falls will open in Fall 2016

CASE STUDY: Itasca County leaders make Beacon Hill a Minnesota model

Itasca County leaders were the first to admit that, before the Institute, they rarely worked together in meaningful ways. "We had long been accused of working in silos," said Diane Larson, Executive Director of the Itasca County Housing and Redevelopment Authority. "One of the greatest assets of the Housing Institute was bringing partners together, many of whom were not actual 'housers' but were important to housing in our community. The education provided to these non-housers is what made our collaboration such a success."

That collaboration included the Institute's in-person workshops, regular check-in meetings and even road trips. With the Department of Corrections at the table, the team toured a state prison to understand the challenges and needs of those with criminal records. They traveled to view supportive housing developments in other communities to hone their vision and learn best practices.

Supported by MHP's Community Development Director, Rosemary Fagrelius, the team came to understand the development process, and how to plan and implement a successful project. That included engaging a developer — Skip Duchesneau of D.W. Jones Development — who worked with the team to assemble an application for funding. It also included making the case for the project to potential funders and the community. To that end, the team contracted with Maxfield Research Group to conduct two studies: an assessment of the market demand related to the proposed Beacon Hill project, and a broader housing market analysis for the City of Grand Rapids.

Both studies supported the development of the proposed project. At the grand opening, a representative from American Bank reflected on the impact of that analysis. "I remember reading the assessment, with my door closed, and there were tears," she said.

With a united team dedicated to the development, the wider community rallied to support the project, too. City, county and even state officials worked together to ensure Beacon Hill had the land and dollars it needed.

"We collaborated in a strong team approach, working on a clear vision and the mission of what we needed to accomplish," Moen said. "This was one of the best collaborative efforts I have been involved in over the past 30 years in human services."

Having worked in the field for many years, even Duchesneau was impressed. "To get funded the first time on a complex project like this is really amazing," he said at the grand opening. "It's not a mistake that this happened."

> "The Housing Institute provided excellent training on funding streams, potential project obstacles, environmental impact considerations, financing and loan options, community engagement." ***Audrey Moen, Northland Counseling Center***

Beacon Hill isn't a typical development, either.

The 48 units at Beacon Hill are intended for different types of households: 28 units are townhomes for families with children, while the other 20 units are apartments embedded in a supportive structure that, in some cases, includes around-the-clock access to care. According to Warren Hanson, Executive Director of the Greater Minnesota Housing Fund, that spectrum of residents isn't common.

"The fact that you have family housing, you have formerly homeless housing and housing for people with disabilities — that's incredibly inclusive and it's making connections possible that don't happen in day-to-day life," Hanson said. "It's built right into the design here."

That prospect has inspired Moen, too. During a tour at the grand opening, she stopped in the Community Center, a space with a kitchen, gathering area and conference room that can be accessed or reserved by tenants. "Can't you just see people playing games and getting together to have socials here?" she said. The seeds of those social bonds have been planted early, with residents from the townhomes and

apartments gathering at the playground. "We've already seen them starting to build that community," Moen said.

With the variety of stakeholders at the table, the Housing Institute team understood that sustaining that community would take a village. At Beacon Hill, the two property managers live on-site, in addition to a cook and eight full-time staff who provide a variety of services, from three meals per day to Adult Rehabilitative Mental Health Services. That team approach to the tenants' success was a critical factor in D.W. Jones Management opening Beacon Hill's doors to residents who might not be welcome elsewhere, because of a troubled past.

"When you combine rental assistance with supportive services, you see huge successes," Duchesneau said.

The team hopes to continue those successes beyond Beacon Hill, as well. Dana Herschbach, Director of Asset and Housing Development at KOOTASCA Community Action, is already thinking about what's next.

"One of the great things to come out of the collaborative effort is we know and trust each other now," he explained. "The HRA and KOOTASCA were never partners but now we work well together. I have a dream for senior housing and I'm thinking of moving forward with that. As I do, I know I can turn to any of these team members."

In the meantime, that team is already having a lasting impact on the lives of Beacon Hill residents. At the Grand opening a staff member couldn't help but share a short anecdote. On August 1, she picked up one of the Beacon Hill residents to bring him to his new home. He had suffered long-term homelessness — living out of his van when shelters were full. When they pulled up to Beacon Hill, he was in disbelief. *Is this real?* he asked. *Is this really happening?*

She paused. **"He is now housed," she said blinking back tears. "He is so happy. This is how this project has impacted people's lives."**



From left: Ron Solheid, Deputy Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Corrections; Dale Adams, Mayor of Grand Rapids, MN; Audrey Moen, Housing Manager at Northland Counseling Center; and Diane Larson, Executive Director of the Itasca County Housing and Redevelopment Authority

From post-workshop surveys to personal conversations, the most common and compelling reported outcome from the Housing Institute has been increased collaboration.

Team members often knew of other individuals in their region working in housing, but prior to the Institute, didn't work together directly. The Institute changed that, uniting staff from different organizations to work on a shared project. Sometimes team members didn't get along because of opposing agendas, were unwilling to work with someone else on a team, or didn't put in the required time for a project. But, even when the partnerships faltered, the Institute compelled regional stakeholders to explore how they could work together.

The Institute also provided teams with an opportunity to tackle a project that they may not have had the staff capacity or knowledge to achieve on their own — and dedicated time and space away from work to focus on that particular goal.

A housing development project takes time, funding, planning and commitment from many groups. After their completion of the Institute, many teams continued to meet to see their project through. Even teams that disbanded still expressed the benefits of working with others in their region —and many members reported that the Institute resulted in additional housing development activities based on the knowledge and relationships gained through the Institute.

Participant feedback: 2016 SURVEY

In August 2016, MHP circulated an online survey to past Institute participants to understand the most helpful aspects of the program and identify the longer-term or ongoing impact of the program. More than 1/3 of the team members responded. The primary components of the Institute received overwhelmingly high marks. On a scale of 1-5 (with 5 being "extremely helpful") the following aspects garnered the highest percentages of **4 or 5 rankings**.

Workshop meetings every three months (90%)
Collaborating as a team (87%)
Technical assistance from MHP staff (79%)
Collaborating on a real-world project (76%)
Possibility of funding matches for projects (73%)

SURVEY RESPONSES: How did the Housing Institute impact collaboration among members of your team?

The Institute provoked important, though often heated, dialogue around the challenges we face as a community and the impacted parties.

The Institute got people talking about the possibilities.

The Institute helped develop the trust to work together.

Bringing us together away from our home community brought more focus and strengthened our relationships.

We normally would have worked in our own silos. Instead, even today, after the project is open, we are all committed and ready for the next project to start.

We have a better understanding of what each organization does. It helped to pull in the right people to move things along.

Like any new program, the Housing Institute model has evolved over its first six years, with several key lessons learned.

1) Team leaders are imperative. Team dynamics impact success, from attendance at meetings to project outcomes. Teams require a strong project leader — someone with planning capabilities, an understanding of the housing development process, and influence with local politicians.

2) Recognize regional differences. Different regions of Minnesota are facing different issues. Focusing efforts on three or four teams from a given region made designing the Institute group meetings easier and more relevant to participants.

3) Match funding helped facilitate action. The Sustainable Community Engagement Fund grants were vital to many of the teams, providing dollars and assistance from an MHP staff person to clarify a local need and develop a strategy to address it.

4) Connect teams to developers and funders. The funder and developer "speed dating" aspects of the Institute workshops were exciting and eye-opening for many participants — and invaluable for developers and funders, too.

6) Staff turnover can impede continuity. In each of the rounds, there were changes to the teams during and after the Institute, as members retired or moved on to different jobs. This was also true of MHP, with four of the original MHP staff liaisons and the MHP research lead leaving the organization since the start of the Institute.

As a direct result of the Institute's success, MHP — with continued support from GMHF — created a similar model for Native American communities. Building on years of work with American Indian tribes, **MHP launched the Native Community Development Institute (NCDI)** in 2015 as an opportunity to build capacity and foster regional collaboration among Tribal departments. Unlike the original Housing Institute, though, the NCDI has evolved to include wider community development issues, including land use planning, workforce development and food sovereignty. Like the Housing Institute, early evaluations from the NCDI show that Tribal teams appreciate the model as well, noting the benefits of cross-department teams and a structured focus on a specific project.

From Roseau to Cook to Fillmore counties, it's clear that the Housing Institute has had a lasting impact on approaches to rural housing and community development. As Lisa DeRosier of the Lake / Cook Housing Redevelopment Authority noted in a letter to MHP: **"By teaming up, more than $2.5 million was brought into Lake County for housing (and related) projects in five years. Without the Housing Institute these partnerships may have happened very differently — if at all."**

The Native Community Development Institute launched in 2015 with the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, Red Lake Nation and White Earth Nation

"By teaming up, more than $2.5 million was brought into Lake County for housing (and related) projects in five years. Without the initiative of the Housing Institute these partnerships may have happened very differently – if they would have even happened at all."

Lisa DeRosier, Lake / Cook Housing Redevelopment Authority

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