

The Establishment of a Viable Housing Center for Research and Outreach: A Successful Collaboration among Researchers, Community Leaders, Policy Makers, and Consumers

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Introduction

The faculty of the Housing and Demographics Research Center (HDRC) engages in research focused on improving the quality of life of Georgia's families, particularly as it relates to housing. The Center focuses on the consumers of housing and the policies that affect them. The Center has ongoing collaborations with public and private housing organizations on local, state, and national levels, however there has been a need to seek more stable funding to support the work of the center. The purpose of this poster is to share our experiences with others in the field.

Background Information

The HDRC at the University of Georgia is a member of the National Consortium of Housing Research Centers, founded in 1988. The Consortium is a group of 15 university members, three associate members, and the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) Research Center. The Consortium has a mission to advance housing research in the United States, and a vision to be recognized as a leading source of information on this research. The Consortium recognizes that housing is a product and a process that produces a bundle of attributes for individuals, families, and communities. As such, housing influences and is affected by public policy decisions. The physical form of housing and the forces that determine it are major topics of study for Consortium members.

The University of Georgia Housing and Demographics Research Center (HDRC) is located within the Department of Housing and Consumer Economics (HACE) in the College of Family and Consumer Sciences (FACS). The HDRC has established itself as a highly resourceful program. It is noteworthy that the HDRC does not receive any intramural resources of any kind to support its existence or operations. No faculty or staff lines are provided to the HDRC. No University of Georgia budget support or physical facility is given to support the HDRC.

Given its complete dependence on external funding, the achievements of its affiliated faculty are both noteworthy and laudable. Valuable contributions to UGA's research, teaching and outreach missions are being made by the HDRC. Beneficiaries include not only Georgia's citizens but also vitally important sectors of the Georgia economy including the housing industries, the manufacturing industries which rely heavily upon the availability of affordable work-force housing to compete in the global marketplace, and the agricultural industries which have suffered because of the lack of adequate housing in rural areas of Georgia.

The faculty of the HDRC conduct research concerned with benefiting the consumers of housing. Examples include:

- Analysis of consumer issues related to housing
- Analysis of Georgia housing and population data
- Housing policy research
- Identifying demographic changes that impact the housing community
- Designing research methodology and collecting primary data related to housing needs and preferences
- Distributing research findings to policymakers and the general public
- Providing education and training, particularly related to first-time homebuyers, home safety, energy conservation, and consumer financial literacy.

Projects

Examples of previous research can be found in Sweaney et al. (2004), Tinsley & Sweaney (2004), Tinsley & Cude (2003), and University of Georgia Housing and Demographics Research Center (2004). The HDRC has partnered with the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) and the Georgia Municipal Association in initiating a housing education and technical assistance program for cities in Georgia, the *Georgia Initiative for Community Housing* (2005). The goal of the Initiative is to simultaneously improve the housing quality of Georgia's

residents and enhance community economic development. By enabling local leaders to fashion solutions to their community's housing needs, the three collaborating organizations will lead and assist communities in creating and launching a locally-based comprehensive housing action plan. The centerpiece of the initiative is a series of facilitated retreats.

The initiative is supported primarily through in-kind time contributions of faculty and staff from the three partnering organizations. But, in addition to a \$17,000 start-up grant from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, the HDRC has secured an additional \$75,000 in support of this program: \$50,000 from the Georgia Power Company and \$25,000 from The Wachovia Foundation.

Conclusion

Since its inception the HDRC has struggled with the lack of dependable funding. Recently, the center has gained support from developing partnerships with housing related advocacy groups and organizations. During the past year, a powerful board of advisors has been assembled. These members include: Association of County Commissioners of Georgia, Georgia Power Company, Fannie Mae Atlanta Partnership Office, Georgia Manufactured Housing Association, Federal Home Loan Bank, Georgia Association of Realtors, Home Builders Association of Georgia, and a Georgia State Senator. At the present time the board of advisors, with the cooperation of the governor, is working on a strategy to form a Housing Commission for the state of Georgia. Developing partnerships will continue to ensure the success of university research and outreach.

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Endnotes

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