

# NAHMAanalysis

NATIONAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

## Ensuring NAHMA Members Receive the Latest News and Analysis of Breaking Issues in Affordable Housing

National Affordable Housing Management Association – 400 N. Columbus Street, Suite 203 - Alexandria, VA 22314  
Phone 703-683-8630 - Fax 703-683-8634 - [www.nahma.org](http://www.nahma.org)



February 27, 2014

NAHMAanalysis 2014-0227

### NAHMA's New Partnership with the Congressional Management Foundation

#### **Background**

Creating user-friendly advocacy toolkits for our Executive Council and AHMA members was a goal in NAHMA's Strategic Plan for 2012-2016. In our ongoing efforts to increase advocacy activities and provide members with resources to better communicate with Congress, NAHMA recently partnered with the Congressional Management Foundation (CMF). CMF is a non-partisan, non-profit foundation dedicated to improving congressional operations and enhancing citizen engagement through publications, training, and management services. As a result of this partnership, NAHMA now has a variety of online videos in our Grassroots Advocacy Toolkit that will improve our members' interactions with their elected officials. These videos and those which will follow offer members a multi-media platform to learn about the best practices in grassroots advocacy.

Over the past decade, CMF has researched the communications between members of Congress and their constituents through Congressional staff surveys, opinion polls and case studies. What they have found consistently is that members of Congress and their staff place the highest value on constituent communications, and that constituents had the most influence on their member. In a 2010 survey of over 250 congressional staff members, most of the staff surveyed (97%) noted that constituent visits to the Washington office and to the district/state office have 'some' or 'a lot' of influence on the voting of an undecided representative. This influence was higher than any lobbyist or industry group.

CMF has also surveyed citizens in order to gain a better understanding of the dialogue between average Americans and members of Congress. This research with citizens found that 91% of the individuals who had contacted a member of Congress in the last five years were motivated to do so because they cared deeply about the issues they appealed for or against. However, CMF has identified several challenges faced by individuals when they attempt to voice their opinions. Misunderstandings of the legislative process and the way Congress functions are cited as two barriers for citizens to overcome. CMF has also seen discouragement as a challenge to engagement from constituents. In one study, CMF found that of citizens who had not made contact with their representatives in the last five years, 55% chose not to do so because they believed members of Congress did not care about their views. Similarly, 62% of the individuals who had contacted a member of Congress in the last five years felt their member disregarded their opinions and message.

With these challenges in mind, CMF has recommended that individuals be concise and persuasive in their messages to members of Congress, and that sharing personal stories of how legislation will affect you is one of the most effective communication tools. Members of NAHMA can greatly improve their advocacy efforts with the use of these recommendations and others found within CMF items catered to NAHMA. As the owners, managers and developers of affordable housing properties, NAHMA members possess a unique combination of community involvement and credibility that will strengthen communications with Congress. We encourage members to examine the following CMF videos for tips on improving communications and ultimately promoting congressional investment in affordable housing.

### **How to Hug a Porcupine**

The first CMF video posted to the NAHMA Grassroots Action Toolkit is *How to Hug a Porcupine: Relationship Building with Members of Congress and Why It's Important*. This video serves as an excellent introduction to the advocacy process and the Foundation's best communication practices. According to CMF:

“This program will help participants overcome that discomfort, revealing the methods and benefits for building relationships with elected officials. Participants will learn who do Congress and state legislators listen to; what congressional staffers believe are the most effective communications tactics for influencing undecided Members of Congress; and how to conduct effective in-person meetings, influence legislators at town hall meetings, and effective advocacy in the state/district.”

Additionally, CMF's President Brad Fitch will present these items to NAHMA members at our March 2013 Meeting. This session will take place from 2:45-4:00 PM on Monday, March 10.

To watch this video, please [click here](#) to visit our Grassroots Advocacy Toolkit webpage (Approx. 10 min).

### **What Congress is Looking for in Constituent Communications**

The second informational video from CMF demonstrates that Members of Congress care deeply about what their constituents think. But to grab the lawmaker's attention, your message has to stand out. This video will walk you through the best elements to include in an email, letter, or fax to a legislator and what is most likely to get their attention.

To watch this video, please [click here](#) to visit the Grassroots Advocacy Toolkit webpage (Approx. 3 min).

### **Conclusion**

Our recent partnership with the Congressional Management Foundation is the next step in enhancing NAHMA's advocacy initiatives. Later videos and webinars will have more advanced strategies to improve advocacy communications such as instructions on inviting members of Congress to attend events. We are excited to share their materials with our members and hope that these communication recommendations will assist you in your own grassroots actions with NAHMA.