

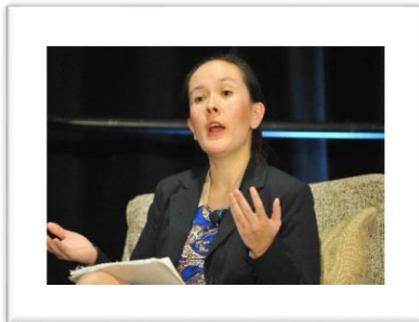
HOUSING ASSISTANCE COUNCIL



HAC 2016 RURAL HOUSING CONFERENCE: *BUILDING RURAL COMMUNITIES*



Renaissance Washington D.C. Downtown Hotel
November 30 - December 2, 2016



CONFERENCE OVERVIEW

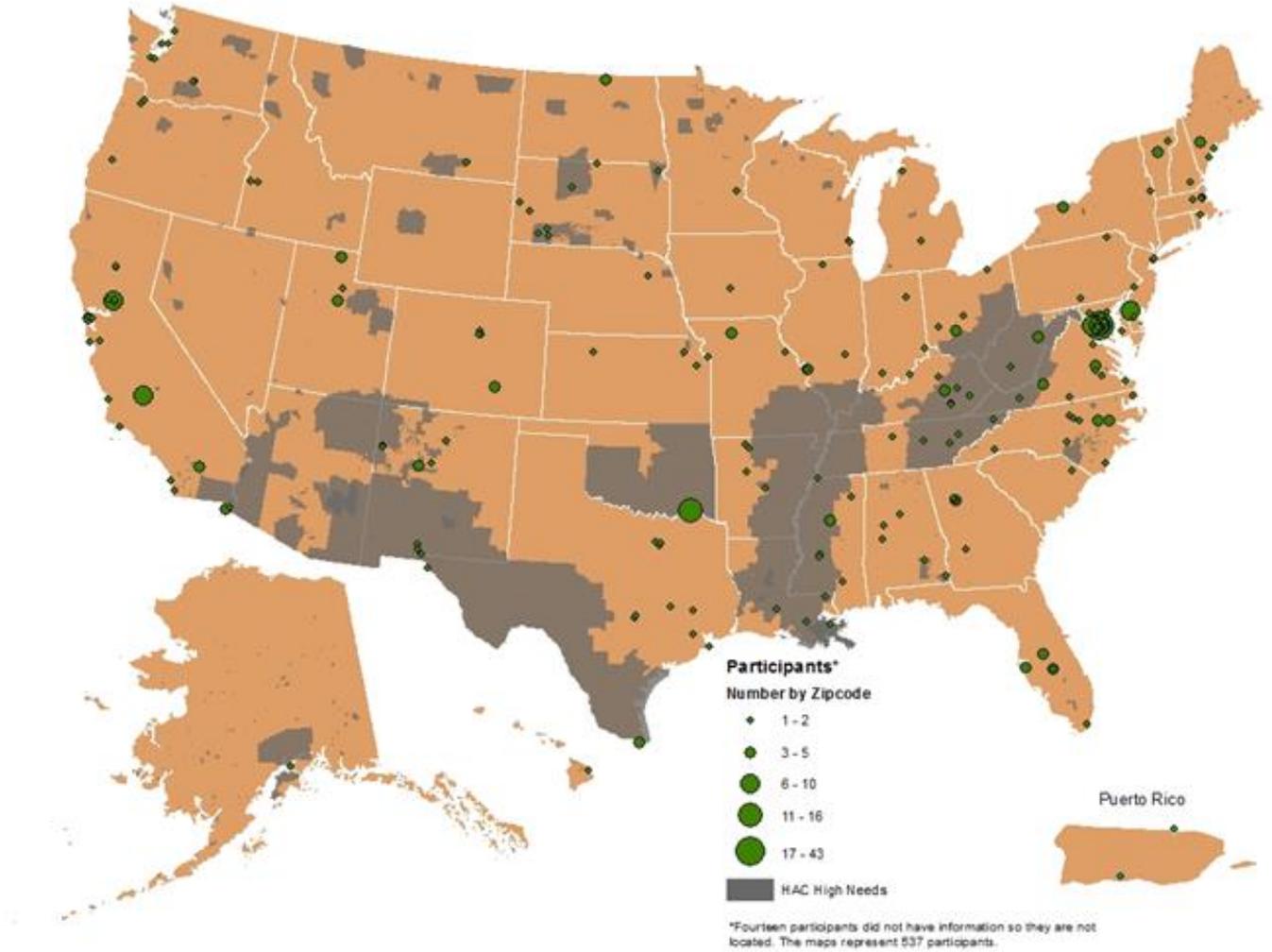
The Housing Assistance Council (HAC) convened the 2016 HAC Rural Housing Conference: ***Building Rural Communities*** in Washington, D.C. from November 30 - December 2, 2016, with pre-conference activities on November 29th. Since its inception, HAC's Rural Housing Conference has aimed to offer rural housing practitioners learning and networking opportunities to advance efforts to provide decent and affordable housing for our nation's rural poor.

Attendees were able to participate in 12 pre-conference meetings, 41 workshops, seven plenary sessions, and a variety of networking opportunities. Workshops were offered through four learning tracks that were designed to enhance participant knowledge of housing development, affordable housing finance, organizational development and innovation and current policy issues. Many of these workshops were also organized by learning series, such as Native American Housing, Veterans, Green Building and Self-Help Housing. HAC is proud to have had the partnership of USDA Technical and Management Assistance Providers, particularly Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC), NCALL, Little Dixie CAA, Florida Non-Profit, Inc. and Sec. 523 grantees who developed and organized the Self-Help Learning Series. Attendees also recognized their peers' accomplishments through the Rural Housing Awards. Three beautiful quilts were created specifically for the 2016 Conference which were raffled; the raffle proceeds were matched by HAC and awarded to nonprofits in the communities from which the quilts were crafted.

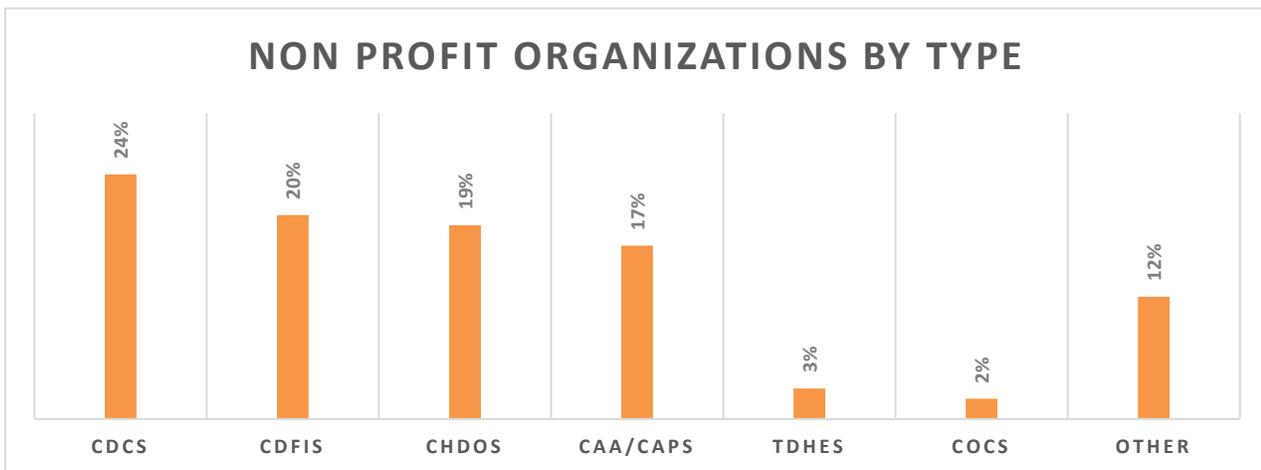
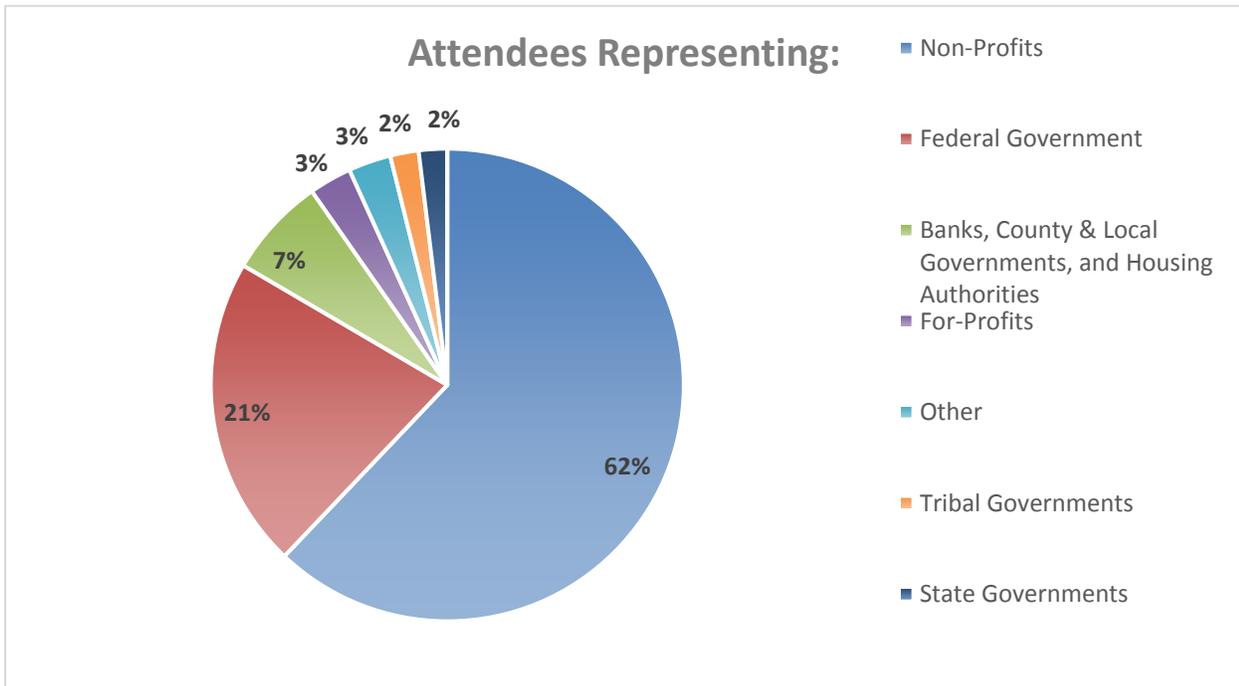
Over 630 rural housing practitioners registered to participate in the 2016 HAC Rural Housing Conference. Attendees were asked to provide feedback on the various workshops, plenaries, networking opportunities and conference logistics. A summary of the conference evaluations is provided in this report.

The following report provides a synopsis of the above-mentioned sessions and shares some of the feedback received from those who completed conference and workshop-specific evaluations.

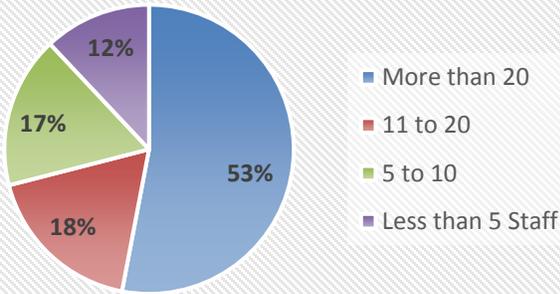
**HAC's 2016 CONFERENCE REACH IS NATIONWIDE
MANY REGISTRANTS WORK IN HIGH POVERTY REGIONS OF THE U.S.**



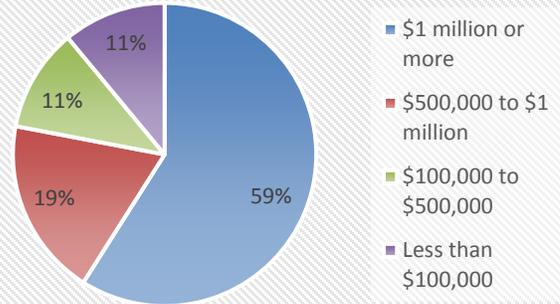
QUICK FACTS



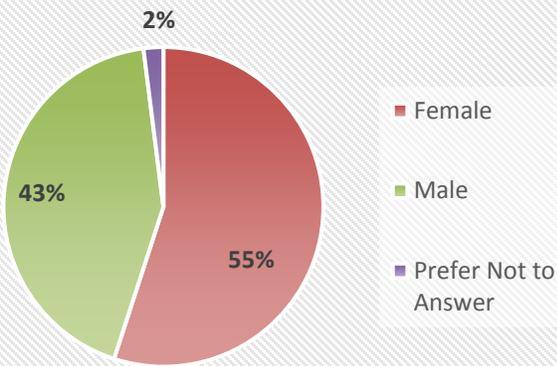
Organization Staff Size



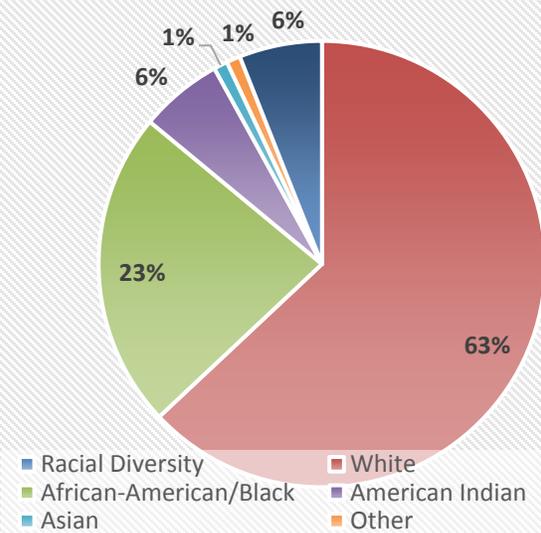
Operating Budget



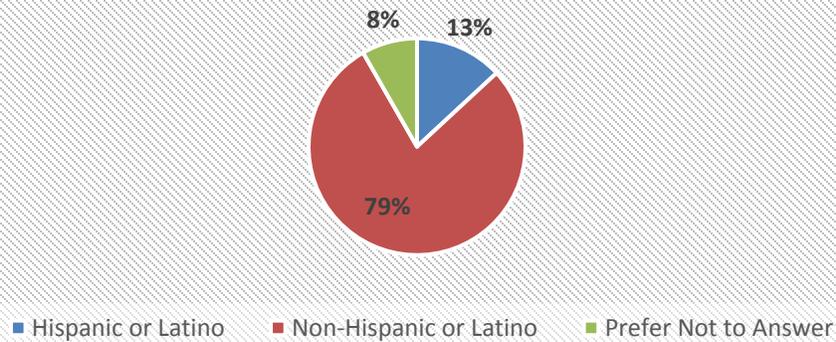
Attendees by Gender



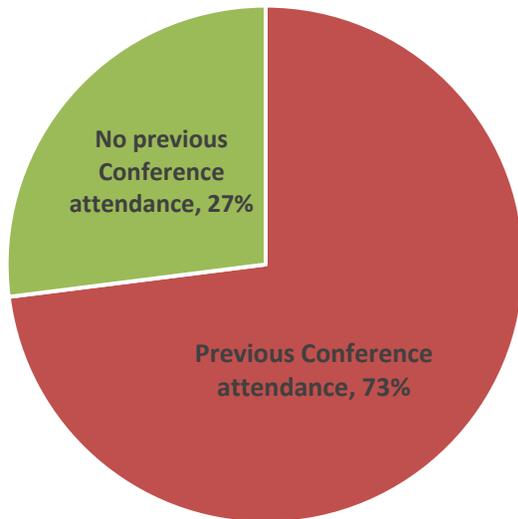
Diversity



Ethnicity



Repeat Attendance



- 100% of respondents reported **overall conference** to be from “Good” to “Excellent”.
- 97% of respondents reported the **networking opportunities** to be “Good” to “Excellent”.
- 100% of respondents rated **HAC staff** as “Good” to “Excellent”.

What I liked best about the Rural Housing Conference was:

- 1) that it was “professional, well planned, political speakers and the Capitol Steps.”
- 2) “the relevant workshop topics, and great speakers.”
- 3) “Perfect time to connect with others and think about future plans for my organization. All resources in one place.”
- 4) The opportunity to meet individuals that have the capacity to assist my projects.”

CONFERENCE EVENTS WELL RECEIVED AS REVEALED BY EVALUATIONS



PLENARY SESSIONS

Inequality: The Rural Perspective

Rep. Blaine Luetkemeyer (R-MO) opened the conference with a candid assessment of housing issues before the new Congress and Trump Administration. Luetkemeyer sponsored HR 3700, a wide-reaching housing bill that was signed into law in 2016. Luetkemeyer noted that the bipartisan effort behind HR 3700 could be replicated for future housing legislation. Luetkemeyer also stated his eagerness to work with the Trump administration on cutting regulations and related GOP priorities. Luetkemeyer chaired the House Financial Services Committee’s Housing & Insurance Subcommittee in the 114th Congress. 

John Henneberger of the Texas Low-Income Housing Service reminded attendees of the importance of core housing and community development programs in USDA, HUD and other agencies. He is a MacArthur Foundation “Genius Award” winner and a long-time housing advocacy thought leader. 

Rep. Keith Ellison (D-MN) shared with conferees a wide-ranging look at federal policy, offering that housing is foundational for better health and related outcomes. In addition to discussing his own priorities as a member of the House Financial Services Committee and as Chair of the House Progressive Caucus, Ellison discussed the broader importance of rural voices in the national dialogue. 



Congressman **Blaine Luetkemeyer**, Texas Low-Income Housing Service **John Henneberger**, and Congressman **Keith Ellison**

The Changing Face of Rural America

HAC's Lance George shared the "Ruralities of Housing" highlighting rural trends in population, diversity, aging, and housing affordability. This presentation set the stage for Rural LISC's Andy Saavedra to moderate a discussion with three panelists on how national trends play out in their communities and broader work. The panelists included Whitney Kimball Coe (Center for Rural Strategies), Tanya Fiddler (Native CDFI Network) and Agatha So (National Council of La Raza). While acknowledging challenges, the panelists were resolute in offering signs of hope for their rural constituencies. 



HAC's **Lance George**; Rural LISC's **Andy Saavedra**, Center for Rural Strategies **Whitney Kimball Coe**, Native CDFI Network's **Tanya Fiddler**, and National Council of La Raza's **Agatha So**.

National Rural Housing Coalition Plenary: What the Election Means for Rural Housing

National Rural Housing Coalition Executive Director, Bob Rapoza, joined Karen Speakman, the Coalition's President, in briefing attendees on the Coalition's activities and previewing the Coalition's agenda for the new Congress and Administration. Attendees left with a clearer picture of the rural housing policy landscape for 2017.

Opioid Epidemic: The Rural Perspective (cont'd)

USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack offered a deeply personal assessment of the opioid epidemic's toll on rural America while discussing the Administration's response. In a lengthy question and answer session, Vilsack noted the importance of treatment availability for those struggling with addiction. Vilsack also suggested that the "Farm Bill" ought to be renamed to reflect its importance to all rural—not just agriculture. 

Alan Morgan, CEO of the National Rural Health Association, gave a vibrant defense of rural America while noting the interconnectedness of rural challenges. He welcomed opportunities for HAC and the conference’s attendees to work with his organization and his members on issues of mutual concern. And while acknowledging the seriousness of issues including the opioid epidemic, Morgan was bullish on rural America’s outlook. Morgan’s contention that housing is critical to addressing the opioid crisis received coverage in The Atlantic’s [Citylab](#). 



USDA’s **Tom Vilsack** and National Rural Health Association’s **Alan Morgan**

BUILDING RURAL COMMUNITIES: A DISCUSSION

In this session, participants broke out in five groups to discuss short white papers that were shared prior to the conference. Key takeaways from each discussion will help to guide HAC’s work in 2017 and beyond.

Topics discussed and key takeaways:

1. Nurturing Rural Leaders

Nurturing Rural Leaders: New rural leaders might emerge from various industries and walks of life—going beyond housing industry insiders is key to finding and nurturing rural leaders for our industry and community. It is wise to emulate best practices from communities and organizations that have found ways to nurture rural leaders. And “homegrown” often works; find reasons for folks to contribute to their own communities; looking for outside help or leaders from the outside isn’t always feasible, or the best option. Finding ways to engage young leaders (e.g. fulfilling work/mission) is important, especially with the younger generation. Opportunities for new leaders to build skills exist, and they must be shared.

2. Connecting Place-making and Place-based Opportunities to Rural Housing

Connecting Place-making and Place-based opportunities to Rural Housing: Place-making offers important programmatic and funding opportunities for the rural housing industry. Best practices ought to be shared, but no communities are alike—a strength and challenge of placemaking. Information sharing is critical as efforts take off. Defining placemaking is important, but getting “hung up” on the definition can thwart conversations with a broader audience. Low-income folks deserve access to art, design, and culture. And the economic benefits of placemaking must be part of all conversations. High quality data can help.

3. Persistent Poverty and Rural Inequality: Where does Rural Housing Fit In?

Persistent Poverty and Rural Inequality: Where does Rural Housing Fit In? Defining persistent poverty is important. Combatting persistent poverty is not easy, and what works requires sustained funding. The capacity of rural nonprofits to deliver housing, community development and social services is a driver of a community's ability to build opportunity. Funding for rural nonprofit capacity must be a priority for the public and private sectors. And working across sectors to maximize collaboration and cost saving is increasingly important.

4. Proposals for the New Administration

Proposals for a New Administration: It is important to be holistic and bring together housing with community and economic development. As the Administration and Congress take on infrastructure issues, rural housing ought to be considered as infrastructure investment. Important to engage potential allies (e.g. veterans' groups, AARP); also important to keep rural development programs at USDA; transfer to HUD or elsewhere could harm program delivery in rural areas. In short, broad engagement is the key.

5. Responding to the Opiate Crisis: Local Best Practices and the Connection to Affordable Housing

 Responding to the Opiate Crisis: Local Best Practices and the Connection to Affordable Housing: The problem is not new; rooted in broader rural condition. Imperative that stakeholders work across sectors and agencies, and that they have the tools to do so. Localities cannot handle it alone. HUD, USDA and other agencies can help, but policies are sometimes restrictive. A pilot program(s) to let localities experiment with approaches might be helpful. Education, awareness, and de-stigmatizing are all important aspects. The crisis is complex and a long-time in the making. Solutions will be multi-faceted.

An ongoing conversation. Download the discussion papers and continue to share your thoughts:

<http://ruralhome.org/calendar/nrhconf/1407-conf-discussion-papers-2016>

HUD, USDA AND VETERANS AFFAIRS: THE NUTS & BOLTS PLENARY

The Nuts and Bolts session gave participants an opportunity to hear directly from key agency officials charged with delivering the programs that matter most to their work. After hearing from agency officials, participants had the opportunity to sit down with top agency staffers to discuss issues and opportunities in depth. USDA and HUD representatives are perennial participants in the popular forum, and the addition of representatives from FHA and Veterans Affairs was in response to stakeholders telling HAC of the agencies growing importance to their work.



USDA Under Secretary for Rural Development **Lisa Mensah**, HUD Dept. Assistant Secretary **Valerie Piper** and VA Chief of Staff for Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Benefits, **Mike Frueh**



HUD Nuts and Bolts Panel:

Dr. Jackie Williams,
Mark Kudlowitz,
Ndeye Jackson,
William Snow,
Henrietta Owusu,
Robert Peterson, Rita
Flegel and Linda
Cherest

USDA Nuts & Bolts Panel:

Tony Hernandez, Joyce Allen, and Bryan Hooper

VA Nuts & Bolts Panel:

John Bell and Mike Frueh.

RURAL HOUSING AWARDS BANQUET

➤ **Cochran/Collings Award for Distinguished Service in Housing for the Rural Poor:**

USDA Undersecretary Lisa Mensah and Rural Housing Administrator Anthony Hernandez 



HAC's Board Chair, Andy Bias, Lisa Mensah,
Tony Hernandez, and HAC Executive Director,
Moises Loza

REVIEW OF WORKSHOPS BY LEARNING TRACK

95% of respondents “Agreed” or “Strongly Agreed” that the conference enhanced their **overall knowledge of rural housing issues.**

95% of respondents “Agreed” or “Strongly Agreed” that the conference enhanced their **overall level of rural housing technical expertise.**



Housing Development | 9 workshops | 238 total participants | **96%** “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that the workshops enhanced their knowledge of the subject matter.

Ways participants plan to apply knowledge or skills gained through the workshops:

- *“Marketing to bring, or keep younger, residents in the area to expand and revitalize the existing community.”* Reevaluating

Your Project When the Market Changes participant

- *“Follow up with Robert Mims (Veterans Affairs) to see how we can connect rural Vets who meet the (Specially Adapted Housing) criteria and wish to return to their rural home community.”* Reevaluating Your Project When the Market Changes participant
- *“Set up a meeting with RD and other stakeholders to discuss the potential preservation of 99-units owned by a private developer.”* USDA Multifamily Housing Preservation and Maturing Mortgages participant



Affordable Housing Finance | 9 workshops | 248 total participants | 98% “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that the workshops enhanced their knowledge of the subject matter.

Ways participants plan to apply knowledge or skills gained through the workshops:

- *“Talk to our PJ to explore the possibility of using HOME funds in one of our Self-Help projects.”* Homebuyer Development: HOME and USDA Section 502/523 participant
- *“Consider USDA 524 (Rural Housing Site Loans to see if we) may apply.”* Using VA and USDA Rural Development Programs on Tribal Trust Lands participant
- *“Get VA approved as a non-profit (to participate in the Homeless Shelter Program).”* Untying the Knots in Identifying Resources for Veterans Housing participant



Organizational Development | 6 workshops | 167 total participants | 95% “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that the workshops enhanced their knowledge of the subject matter.

Ways participants plan to apply knowledge or skills gained through the workshops:

- *“Strengthen the Bench”* (for greater depth and variety of skills)
- *“Review 2 CFR 200. Check procurement policies, internal controls.”* Top Ten Things You Need to Know to Implement the New Uniform Guidance participant
- *“Research journalist majors in our local college to partner with to (write) a story.”* Public Relations: Telling Your Nonprofit Story participant
- *“Review (our) website for “attractiveness” to potential funders. Ensure effective storytelling.”* Philanthropy for Rural America: A Conversation with Funders participant



Innovation and Current Policy Issues | 10 workshops | 213 total participants | 91% “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that the workshops enhanced their knowledge of the subject matter.

Ways participants plan to apply knowledge or skills gained through the workshops:

- *“Present outcomes through the increase in services available to community versus just using*

production outcomes.” Evaluating Your Organization: Gathering, Evaluating, and Using the Data participant

- *“Determine whether utility costs/rent should be lower in green building.” Energy Efficient Multi-Family Housing: Documenting the Impact participant*
- *“Begin using the new data tools presented to use in grant writing for my agency.” Big Data, Small Data ... Rural Data(?) participant*
- *“Determine how to access the senior community in isolated areas.” Aging in Community participant*
- *“Brainstorm ways that our organization can blend arts/culture/music and other creative placemaking concepts/principles into our mission.” Creative Placemaking participant*
- *“Meet with tribal officials to get them on board with concepts (that celebrate cultural heritage and build pride).” Addressing Barriers to Native Homeownership participant*
- *“Setup staff training on fair housing and continue to inform and train coworkers.” Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing participant*



Self Help Housing | 5 workshops | 185 total participants | 95% “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that the workshops enhanced their knowledge of the subject matter.

Ways participants plan to apply knowledge or skills gained through the workshops:

- *“Talk to N-Call. Analyze how this program fits in our organization. Move forward.”* Introduction to USDA’s Mutual Self-Help Housing Program participant
- *“Work on a new marketing plan for our self-help housing program.”* Self-Help Housing Marketing and Recruitment Brainstorming participant
- *“Work closer on preconstruction meetings with families to give them a more detailed plan of construction.”* Construction Management While Maintaining Family Labor participant

SECTION 502 PACKAGING TRAINING:



39 participants trained to become Section 502 Loan Packagers; **as of late January 2017, 21 (54%) passed the on-line exam.** *Congratulations, participants!*

Did you know that you can still access handouts and presentations from the workshops you attended (as well as those you didn’t) via the HAC Trainings app:

<http://ruralhome.org/calendar/nrhconf/1414-2016-conference-materials>

SPECIFIC USDA-RD QUESTIONS

- What have been the most challenging or unexpected aspects of this project?

Two of the most challenging aspects of the Conference were related to the planning process. First, determining the most relevant plenary and workshop topics early in the planning process during a general election year was a challenge knowing that new, or different, issues may arise. This gave us some concern on making sure that we were offering topics of value to the participants. This concern was mainly mitigated by HAC's engagement with its Conference Advisory Committee, which included a USDA representative, and consideration of survey results that HAC received from prior Conference and other training attendees.

The second challenge, one which HAC has continued to improve upon, has been to increase the participation of tribal representatives and leaders of tribally-based organizations. HAC continues to work through partners to expand its marketing and outreach throughout Indian Country.

- What advice would you give to other organizations planning a similar project? You should include strengths and limitations of the program. If you had the opportunity, what would you have done differently?

Organizations who seek to undertake a similar project should have a clear idea of the goal and objectives of undertaking a national conference. It should also have a clear idea of the expectations. It is challenging to delve deeply into a particular subject as part of a national convening where the audience, skill level, and experience is diverse.

HAC is considering changes to the Conference structure to increase its utility, and demonstrate that the participants will easily recognize the value of their training investment (registration, travel/lodging and staff time).

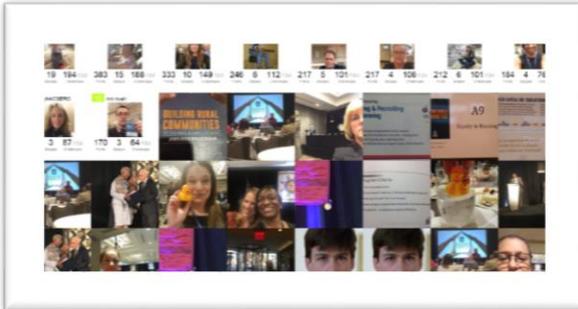
- If an innovative approach was used successfully, you should describe the approach in detail so that other organizations might consider replication in their areas.

HAC looks to new technologies as a way of improving the Conference participants' experience and how they learn from the event. For the past two Conferences HAC has used a Smartphone app as a way to provide as much content in the participants' hands before and during the Conference; we kept material available for those without such technology. In effect HAC has gone 'Green' by reducing the amount of paper used.

The technology, which includes tracking to see how Conference participants navigate the event by registering them into workshops help us understand what set of events is important to them and look at that by their interest, experience and skill level. Finally we expect to follow-up with the attendees to see what outcomes may be attributed to their Conference participation. We expect that this technology will help us ensure that HAC delivers relevant, impactful content.

SOCIAL MEDIA: #BuildingRural

“HAC’s social media channels were heavily engaged during the HAC 2016 Rural Housing Conference, resulting in over 100 social posts which generated over 200 shares and nearly 25,000 social impressions. Conference attendees were also able to engage in conference content and activity through the Conference App. A total of 406 users accessed the app before, during, and after the conference, spending a total of nearly 24,000 minutes engaging with conference content, networking with other attendees, and more.



One of the highlights of the conference was CLICK, an in-app scavenger hunt game which encourages attendees to interact with each other, conference speakers, and the conference materials. CLICK participants completed 1,835 challenges, sharing pictures and networking with other attendees to score points and win daily prizes. Beyond the raw numbers, CLICK became a focal point of the conference, generating conversation and energy, while encouraging attendees to

break out of their routines and meet new people. “



Videos from the 2016 Conference are available online:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLO2F8ZPxFOIj1j>

HAC’s **Carlos Muralles** shows off the CLICK competition to **Moises Loza**.

*“This was my first HAC Conference and I thought it was awesome!
Great sessions and great networking.”*

THANK YOU!

Acknowledgements

Major Contributors

Bank of America
Federal Home Loan Bank System
JPMorgan Chase & Co.
NeighborWorks® America
Rural Community Assistance Corporation*
The Home Depot Foundation
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban
Development
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Wells Fargo Housing Foundation

Conference Advisory Committee

bcWORKSHOP
California Coalition for Rural Housing*
Fahe*
Federal Home Loan Bank System*
Freddie Mac
Little Dixie Community Action Agency*
Milford Housing Development Corporation
National Alliance to End Homelessness*
National American Indian Housing Council*
National Low Income Housing Coalition
Rural Community Assistance Corporation*
Rural LISC*
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***HAC 2016 Rural Housing Conference Sponsor**

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