

Promote Your Property

With a Well-Planned Event



Want to give your new development visibility and publicize the successful results of federal and state investments in affordable housing? A groundbreaking, frame-raising or ribbon-cutting can do just that!

In addition to marketing your development, a well-planned event provides the perfect forum to thank stakeholders and solidify community and local government support. Let the North Carolina Housing Finance Agency assist you in showcasing your property, helping pave the way for your next development and ensuring the availability of both financing and community support for affordable housing.

LET'S GET STARTED



OUTLINE YOUR EVENT

The stage of development determines whether you are holding a groundbreaking, frame raising or opening. Don't rule out doing more than one event. The more you promote your property in your community and with elected officials, the better.

Consider your optics. Outline the size, scope and type of event you wish to hold. What will the weather be like during the month you choose? Check community calendars for competing events.

Determine which elected officials you will invite and who may keynote the event. Will guests and reporters be able to speak with residents and tour the property? If your budget allows, providing snacks or a meal can allow your guests to experience the sense of community that your residents will enjoy in their new homes.



CHOOSE THE DATE AND TIME

Sometimes the headlining speaker determines the date. If you want a member of Congress, a state legislator or the mayor to be your headliner, their schedule may determine event timing. Mondays and Fridays give elected officials the greatest flexibility. Set the date 30 days in advance to give ample time for planning.

Contact major partners to discuss the date. It takes dedicated partners to bring developments like these together and they, like us, will want to support your event and highlight their contributions. Reach out to us and other partners to ensure your event does not conflict with other commitments.

Choose a time. Late morning allows time for participants and attendees to arrive, flows into lunch and is not the hottest part of the day. It is also convenient for media, increasing the likelihood that your event may make the news. Avoid early mornings, evenings and weekends unless necessary.



TAKE CARE OF LOGISTICS

Plan for refreshments. Food will likely be determined by your budget and other resources, but plan on at least having bottled water. You may decide to hire a caterer to serve lunch, or simply arrange for staff to provide snacks and drinks.

Reserve special items in advance. Think about your event's layout. Will it be inside or outside? Where will the speakers stand? Where will the audience sit? You may need to rent a tent, a podium or chairs for guests. Determine any additional needs such as a stage, heaters or microphones.

Ask key people to save the date. Once you have coordinated a date with headliners and funding partners, ask other key people to save the date before you send out invitations and be sure to announce the date of the event on your social media.

Start building the crowd and start building energy. Consider how you will build a crowd, particularly if elected officials will attend. Your employees, your partners and their employees can boost the crowd. If you have a board, ask them to lobby elected officials and make announcements at other organizations.

Don't forget to include your residents. Not only can they add to your crowd and excitement, they provide an opportunity for lawmakers and partners to meet the people who benefit from affordable housing investments

GET THE INVITE OUT

Decide who should be invited. Invite key federal, state and local elected officials. The NC Housing Finance Agency Community Outreach Representative can help identify officials. Invite partners and be sure to include program staff, directors and board. Local chamber of commerce executives, booster groups and neighborhood associations should be invited. You may also wish to invite other local dignitaries—the sheriff, police chief, fire chief, town council members—and local advocacy groups.

Create invitations. Electronic invitations are popular and can save time and money. Include date, time, the address and directions to the event, enclosing a map if possible. Note any confirmed headliner. For example, "Join Congressperson Doe in celebrating the Grand Opening of Manor Trace". Indicate if food will be served. If you mail invitations, print them yourself to save costs.

Assign a staffer to be a point of contact. Invitations should list an email and phone contact for RSVPs. Ask an employee or volunteer to take over this duty and to follow up with elected officials to determine the VIP list.

Send them out. Use standard etiquette. Invitations to elected officials are addressed to "The Honorable John Doe." The salutation should say "Dear Congressperson Doe" or "Dear Senator Doe." Ideally, you should send your invites out 30 days prior to the event. If you mail them, use first-class postage.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Finalize the event's location. If the weather is not oppressive, outside is generally a good choice, but have a backup plan in case of rain. Lobbies and common areas lend themselves to events. Consider the size of the event and what space will be appropriate. Always lean toward a smaller space, as it will make the number of guests appear greater.

Consider the photo. Think about background for speakers if photos are taken. Stage the event so that guests are looking at the property, or in a garden area facing a fountain or a playground, and place the podium so photos will include these backgrounds as well. Avoid backgrounds with highways, railroad tracks, unattractive structures and reflective surfaces, and consider how your photos will look on social media. Our Community Outreach Representative can assist in staging the speaking area and a group photo with our banner. Think about the position of the sun, and keep it at the back of the photographer.

PLAN THE PROGRAM

Determine the speakers. Keep the ceremony brief. The formal program should last no more than 30 minutes. Keep in mind that each speaker takes an average of five minutes. Appoint someone to act as a “master of ceremonies” to make introductions and keep the program on schedule.

Elected officials should be afforded the opportunity to speak. Those unable to attend may send an aide to represent them and speak on their behalf. Work with their offices in advance to determine these details and plan accordingly. Representatives from the NC Housing Finance Agency and other funding partners should speak. You may choose to have a vetted resident share how their new home has impacted their lives.

Determine the speaking order. Typically, your emcee will begin with a welcome and brief remarks. At this point it is appropriate for the emcee to briefly recognize people that played an important role in the community but do not give remarks. This often includes partners such as architects, subcontractors and engineers and elected officials that opt not to speak. If you choose to have an invocation, then this would follow next. Your first speakers will include non-elected guests or partners which include finance partners, board members, etc. Next will be elected people who have been invited to speak, beginning with local, then state and then federal officials unless you have a keynote or headline speaker. The keynote or headliner will be the last person to speak, unless they request otherwise to accommodate their schedule.

Be flexible. Your program will be fluid. Elected officials may not know if they are available until just prior to the event. Leave room for last-minute changes.

Always briefly recognize VIPs and special guests. If elected officials are present but not speaking, recognize them and give them the opportunity to stand and wave. Staffers representing elected officials should be recognized as well, and may wish to read or present a letter from their member. Other people, such as the local Chamber of Commerce president, board members and other dignitaries may be recognized as well.

ALERT THE MEDIA

Get help from the Agency. The NC Housing Finance Agency can help you promote your event. Let our Community Outreach Representative know that you would like help and our Public Relations and Marketing staff can draft and issue a media advisory for you.

Determine the media list. The Agency has an extensive media list but if you have personal contacts at your local media outlets, please let us know so we can include them. If you are handling the media, remember to include all local newspapers and television stations. If your property is in a small town, include media from the closest major city.

Issue a media advisory. The advisory should include the location, date and time of your event, the schedule and speakers and should be emailed to reporters. Highlight human interest angles, or what makes your property different. If you have a big name speaking say so in the headline, the opening paragraph and the schedule. If residents will be available to speak to reporters, include that information.

Social media. Many reporters use social media as a resource for stories, so send your event news directly to reporters. Begin promoting your event up to a month prior, with posts increasing as the event gets closer.

Make follow-up calls. Call the news assignment desk or reporters to check that they have received your advisory and reiterate why they should be interested in covering your event.

TIP: Hold tours and other activities after the ceremony!



THE BIG DAY

Stage it. Set up the podium and remember to be mindful of the background for pictures. Decide where speakers will sit based on their access to the podium. Arrange seating. Sometimes it is best to have fewer chairs than guests so that the crowd will appear bigger, but always consider the needs of elderly and disabled guests. Determine how tours, refreshments and the ceremony itself will be facilitated.

Designate an onsite press contact. Have someone available to greet the press, and designate an area with a good view of the ceremony for cameras to be set up. Ask reporters what they want to cover and do what you can to get reporters the interviews they need. Also, suggest interviews with your own leaders. Have someone available to answer technical questions about the property and financing. The more you help, the more likely the event will receive coverage.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Even the best-planned events have surprises. Keep your cool and be flexible! For example, sometimes a speaker may not show up. Be gracious, make an excuse for them and move on with the program.

After the program, If you are having a ribbon-cutting or other ceremony at the end of the program, determine how to best transition into this activity. You also may want to set time aside for guests to tour the homes and amenities and let them know where to go for tours. If providing refreshments or food, make sure your guests know.

Send thank you notes. Be sure to send thank you notes to elected officials who attended your event. You should also send notes to any officials who were unable to attend to thank them for supporting your development and invite them for a future personal tour.