



Youth Programs



# YOUTH ADVOCACY TOOL KIT



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*"People say, 'What is the sense of our small effort?' They cannot see that we must lay one brick at a time, take one step at a time. A pebble cast into a pond causes ripples that spread in all directions. Each one of our thoughts, words and deeds is like that. No one has a right to sit down and feel hopeless. There's too much work to do."*

*— Dorothy Day, social activist*

*"Acting as an independent entity to try to end poverty housing, Habitat for Humanity will never catch up with the need. However, when we work to advocate for our needs, the dream of ending poverty housing can become a reality."*

*— Anne Myers, Sea Island Habitat for Humanity, South Carolina, USA*

*"By partnering with families and advocates to promote responsible policies, we seek to strengthen communities and reduce poverty throughout the world — building hope for the secure future God intends for us all."*

*— Jonathan Reckford, CEO, Habitat for Humanity International*

## SECTION 1

# MISSION AND ADVOCACY

### WHY IS HABITAT FOR HUMANITY INVOLVED IN ADVOCACY?

Habitat for Humanity was founded on the vision of ending poverty around the world. We cannot, however, reach the goal of safe, decent and affordable housing for all simply by building more homes.

According to the United Nations, more than 1.6 billion people live in substandard housing. People around the world lack adequate sanitation, regular electricity supply and adequate security. Habitat for Humanity would need to build 2 million homes per year for the next 50 years to solve the present worldwide housing crisis. At the end of those 50 years, because of growth trends, there would still be a need for 1 billion houses.

### WHAT IS ADVOCACY?

Advocacy means supporting and defending a cause you believe in. Although the term “advocate” is often used to refer to a paid legal representative, it also refers to someone who argues for a cause or course of action. Advocates support and argue for the rights of those who are in need or suffering from injustice. They also provide them the skills and opportunities to speak on their own behalf. Advocates work for justice by raising awareness of or changing situations and policies that are unjust.

Advocacy takes place on many different levels. Professional lobbyists advocate for specific legislation; nonprofits advocate for their clients and legislation that affects them; and individual citizens advocate for a community need or a cause. Each advocate uses his or her right to participate in our nation’s democratic process.

### POVERTY HOUSING STATISTICS

#### U.S. poverty facts

- In 2008, the number of households spending more than 50 percent of their income on housing rose by 16 percent, to 18.6 million households. That’s 44.2 million Americans. If the homeless and those living in severely substandard conditions are included, roughly one in six Americans is in need of a decent, affordable place to live. (*Harvard University’s Joint Center for Housing Studies, 2010*).

- One in three American homeowners spends more than 30 percent of his or her income on housing (*JCHS, 2010*).

The common theme among all forms of nonprofit advocacy is the strategic focus on challenging power imbalances and fostering change. In 2005, a Habitat for Humanity International task force created the following definition of advocacy for Habitat based on its strategic focus of providing decent, affordable shelter:

**Changing systems, policies and attitudes to achieve decent housing for all.**

Expanded version: Habitat for Humanity's advocacy is working to influence public opinion and decision-makers in all sectors to adopt policies and practices and transform systems that lead to the creation and preservation of housing for all, toward the goal of ending poverty worldwide. These sectors would include, but not be limited to, governments, individuals, religious communities, corporations and international financial institutions.

Effective advocacy comes in many forms. Ultimately, by changing the public's understanding of an issue and its solutions, advocacy can lead to a more just world. Habitat for Humanity staff and volunteers can make an impact in the following ways:

- *Educate.* As an advocate, Habitat for Humanity can change how the public and elected officials view housing issues and the challenges facing the families we serve. Some legislators will have in-depth knowledge about housing issues; others will know very little. All will be constantly bombarded with information and requests from various interest groups and constituents. It's Habitat's job to keep the housing issue front and center among competing priorities, and to shape how the public perceives and reacts to the challenges.
- *Witness.* Habitat offers staff and volunteers a chance to witness the challenges faced by the poor. Habitat can inform the public and change its opinion using the data and stories we gather about the needs of the poor, the effective solutions, and the resources required to battle the causes and effects of poverty.
- *Enlist allies.* As Habitat educates the public and elected officials, we enlist individuals and organizations to support housing policy change.
- *Tap resources.* Politics and policy are about the distribution of scarce resources. By educating the public and drawing attention to housing challenges and issues, Habitat helps to raise it to "top-of-mind" importance among competing causes.
- *Improve services for those in need.* Using Habitat's knowledge of housing programs, we can call attention to ineffective policies that create unnecessary barriers to services, and work to improve them. Advocates also hold legislators accountable for their decisions, ensuring that they make informed and careful choices.

- *Facilitate connections between legislators and constituents.* Legislators want to connect with and be responsive to their constituents, and we can facilitate those important connections. Legislators welcome opportunities to better understand their constituents' needs and build relationships with them. In the process of introducing them to our housing programs and the families we serve, we can establish Habitat as an experienced resource that legislators and their staffs will turn to with housing questions.
- *Empower the families we serve.* By including our homeowners in conversations and relationship building with their legislators, we empower the families we serve with skills and opportunities to speak for themselves.

## EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY

A chapter's capacity for advocacy and choice of advocacy methods will depend on its size, location and staff, and on Habitat's key issues. No one plan fits all, so each affiliated organization has flexibility to determine what works best in its situation. The most successful efforts strive to incorporate participation of the entire staff, uniting them in the dual call to serve and advocate.

Effective advocacy requires specific action that likely will influence the budgets of decision-makers, an action to change or challenge the system. Advocacy is everyone's job.

Habitat for Humanity International is providing direction for a global advocacy agenda, along with training, resources and guidance for contextualizing the agenda to address national, state and local issues.

Effective advocacy also requires new skills, research, monitoring and evaluation, and different ways of communicating. We cannot simply add advocacy to our existing job descriptions and expect success.

Planning for advocacy is unlike strategic planning, where goals, objectives, activities and evaluation are presented as a seamless and logical pattern. Advocacy planning acknowledges that there are hidden agendas, different values and ideologies, incomplete information, and conflict in the world of public policy. As a result, both planning and practicing advocacy happen side by side. Nimbleness and flexibility are the keys to success.

After every action, it is necessary to adjust the goals for planning the next step. Therefore, assessment is a constant task throughout advocacy planning, rather than the final step.

Advocacy planning is a continual process. If some groups have not been involved in the initial stages of planning, they can be included later when plans are being reviewed and modified.

- There is not a single county in the United States where a full-time minimum wage worker can afford even a one-bedroom apartment at what the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development determines to be the Fair Market Rent. (*National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2006*).

### Housing improves health

- Studies show that 84 percent of U.S. homes have a bedroom with detectable levels of dust mite allergens. Many of these have levels that can contribute to allergies or asthma. (*The Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology, 2003*).

Planning that uses a participatory approach leads to more equitable power relations and more inclusive citizenship. Participatory planning for citizen-centered advocacy includes:

- *Building organization and networks.* Participatory analysis and decision-making help strengthen leadership and communication within and among organizations.
- *Promoting political education.* It involves new knowledge about power, politics and experiences that develop citizenship.
- *Strengthening planning for negotiation.* The process delineates a clear map of the key actors.
- *Building constituencies.* When we involve many stakeholders — particularly the people most affected by the advocacy issue — more people will be informed and motivated, and the campaign will have more legitimacy.

A chapter should not embark on an advocacy initiative without a plan of action.

To have a global impact with your event, it is essential to send a consistent message to our many audiences. Regardless of how you bring attention to the day or what housing issue you choose to focus on, together we can ensure that the importance of advocacy is viewed through a consistent lens.

With this in mind, make sure you follow these guidelines when planning your advocacy event:

#### Advocacy is not:

- Public awareness: Advocacy is not just a public campaign to inform people.
- Informing governments about Habitat for Humanity.
- Raising public awareness about Habitat for Humanity and its affiliates.
- Fundraising. The primary purpose of advocacy is not to increase Habitat for Humanity International's budget.

#### Do's:

- Do contact your affiliate or your Habitat for Humanity International support staff about issues you plan on addressing.
- Do support Habitat for Humanity-approved legislation.
- Do join other organizations in their advocacy efforts.

#### Don'ts:

- Don't support a particular candidate for office.
- Don't use federal funds for political activities.
- Don't speak on behalf of Habitat for Humanity International.

For the official Habitat for Humanity U.S. advocacy policy, please refer to Appendix II in this tool kit or visit [habitat.org/getinv/events/whd/whd\\_resources.aspx#PO\\_0](http://habitat.org/getinv/events/whd/whd_resources.aspx#PO_0).

## GLOBAL TALKING POINTS

These global talking points will help you convey the key issues that affect Habitat for Humanity and communicate the meaning behind advocacy efforts.

- Today, 1.6 billion people live in inadequate shelter around the world; 1 billion of those live in slums. By 2030, it is expected that 2 billion people will live in slum communities.
  - The world's housing situation is a crisis in need of attention and action.
  - In the past five years, more than 14.1 million people have lost their homes to natural disasters.
  - In 2011, Habitat dedicated its 500,000th home in Maai Mahiu, Kenya, and raised the walls on its 500,001st home in Paterson, New Jersey.
  - Estimates suggest that the number of urban residents vulnerable just to earthquakes and cyclones will grow from 680 million people in 2000 to 1.5 billion people in 2050.
  - Humanitarian actors, government officials and policymakers around the world should understand the crucial role shelter plays and develop the capacity and expertise to fully support recovery after a natural disaster.
  - As the international community seeks to meet critical shelter needs, reconstruction should occur within the framework of a comprehensive urban strategy and development plan supported by the local government and its citizenry.
- Exposure to dampness and mold in homes is estimated to contribute to approximately 21 percent of current asthma cases in the United States. Annual cost: \$3.5 billion. (*Indoor Air, 2007*).

- Children in bad housing have increased risk of viral or bacterial infections and a greater chance of suffering mental health and behavioral problems. (*Shelter, September 2006*)

## SECTION 2

# ADVOCACY EVENTS

### **World Habitat Day**

The United Nations has designated the first Monday of every October as World Habitat Day, a day to reflect on and call attention to the state of human settlements and the basic right to adequate shelter. This is an excellent time to remind your local community and legislators about Habitat's work toward ending poverty housing both in your community and abroad. Habitat provides tool kits and materials to help your group get involved. For more information, visit [habitat.org/gov/take\\_action/world\\_habitat\\_day.aspx](http://habitat.org/gov/take_action/world_habitat_day.aspx).

### **Build Louder**

Habitat for Humanity's multiyear advocacy campaign, Build Louder, focuses on changing U.S. policies surrounding neighborhood revitalization, secure tenure and other issues to improve access to adequate and affordable housing around the world.

To learn more about how Habitat is working toward neighborhood revitalization and global secure land tenure and to become an online advocate, visit [habitat.org/buildlouder](http://habitat.org/buildlouder).

### **Habitat on the Hill**

Habitat's Government Relations and Advocacy Office runs an annual, national Habitat on the Hill conference. Check with your affiliate or visit [habitat.org/habitatonthehill](http://habitat.org/habitatonthehill) for more information, scholarship opportunities and conference schedules. Also read [Appendix III](#) for information on Habitat's legislative agenda.

### Student advocacy

A few dedicated youths can inspire others in the community to embrace Habitat's mission. Get involved! Habitat student advocates, like all Habitat supporters, are:

- Working to raise public awareness of poverty and substandard housing.
- Garnering support for efforts to address these issues.
- Facilitating progress toward the goal of eliminating substandard housing.

### Act! Speak! Build! Week

Act! Speak! Build! Week is a student-initiated week of advocacy on behalf of Habitat for Humanity and housing issues. It is celebrated the first week of April. This event empowers young people, ages 5-25, to educate themselves and their communities and move people to social action.

This week exists because, in order to achieve Habitat's goal of eliminating poverty housing and homelessness from the face of the earth, we must change not only what we do but also how we think — and young people play an important role in this effort.

Habitat for Humanity International encourages all Habitat groups to participate in at least two events each year that raise awareness and advocate for decent global housing.

Planning Act! Speak! Build! Week activities the first week in April or celebrating World Habitat Day the first Monday in October is a great way to build momentum. When planning your event, please refer to the resources provided in this manual and check out [habitat.org/youthprograms/parent\\_teacher\\_leader/asbw\\_default.aspx](http://habitat.org/youthprograms/parent_teacher_leader/asbw_default.aspx). Groups that register online will receive a promotional package, pending availability.

Advocacy should be incorporated into the vision and activities of every campus chapter or Youth United group.

To learn about specific advocacy activities, including letter-writing campaigns, refer to [Section 3](#) of this tool kit.

## ADVOCATING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH YOUR AFFILIATE

Whether you are a campus chapter or a Youth United group, it is important to work with your affiliate to develop and implement consistent, coordinated advocacy activities and messages. This is an exciting chance for you to collaborate with your affiliate and make a lasting difference in your community.

- One's health is directly linked to housing and housing-related basics such as water and sanitation. In Mexico, researchers at the World Bank and the University of California, Berkeley, found that replacing dirt floors with concrete floors improved the health of children, including a 20 percent reduction in parasitic infections, a 13 percent reduction in diarrhea and a 20 percent reduction in anemia.

- 2.6 billion people — 39 percent of the world's population — live without access to improved sanitation, and 751 million people share their sanitation facilities with other households or use only public facilities. (*World Health Organization, 2009*)

Your affiliate is aware of issues in local legislation that affect social services and land acquisition in your area. They may also have volunteers, staff members or board members with a considerable amount of experience with advocacy who can help your chapter thrive in this area.

Work with your affiliate to develop strategies for local advocacy efforts, including participating in coalitions. Schedule a meeting with your affiliate to share your goals and plans for the year.

## **PLANNING YOUR EVENT**

### **Understand the issues**

Before planning any advocacy event, your group should be well-informed on the issue. You might invite a representative from your local affiliate to speak to your group, tour poverty housing areas in your community, or do one of the other activities detailed in this section.

### **Know your audience**

Whether you are planning a letter-writing campaign or hosting a shantytown, it's important that you know whom you are advocating to. Ask your Habitat affiliate about the political process in your city to better understand how changes are made. Visit [habitat.org/gov/public\\_policy](http://habitat.org/gov/public_policy) for more information.

Before choosing an advocacy event, make lists of people who need to hear your message in order for change to take place. This list should include voters, officials and the media. It will also be beneficial to brainstorm groups that might be interested in helping spread your message or may benefit from improved housing in your community.

### **Create your message**

After you have researched the housing issues in your community and come up with a list of individuals you would like to advocate to, your group should decide what issue your advocacy event will center on. Once you have chosen your topic, brainstorm a motto or phrase that sums it up. You can support this motto with a picture or image and a list of key facts that support it. Read Section 3 for more details on including a strong "ask" statement in your advocacy.

### **Choose an event**

Once you have decided on your message, decide what event will best get it across. Brainstorm with your group about which activities will be most effective for your particular message.

When choosing your event or activity, keep in mind how long each event will take. Is the activity your group has chosen realistic? How much time is needed to plan this event, and how much will it cost? Also, try to choose activities that everyone in the group can participate in.

Whatever activity is chosen, make sure to:

- Contact your local affiliate about local issues you may be addressing.
- Contact your Habitat for Humanity International Youth United or Campus Chapter representative if you plan on addressing any state or national issues, so that we can provide you with pertinent, up-to-date information.
- Act respectfully and responsibly at all times. You are the voice and face of Habitat in your community!

## **AFTER THE EVENT**

- Send out thank-you messages to collaborating organizations, sponsors, participating media and committee members.
- Follow local news and legislation. Keep the group updated on other votes, the results of their advocacy, responses in the local newspaper, etc.
- Let us know how it went! Email us at [youthprograms@habitat.org](mailto:youthprograms@habitat.org) to share your experience.
- Reflect with you group:
  - What was your favorite part of the experience?
  - What do you think was most effective?
  - What would you do differently next time?
  - What are some ideas for future advocacy events?
  - What did you learn about housing and advocacy?

## **MOVING FORWARD**

In order for Habitat for Humanity to reach its goal of eliminating poverty housing, we must strive to change the systems, policies, attitudes and institutional behaviors that lead to inadequate housing and homelessness. Youths are an essential element to the realization of the Habitat mission. With enthusiasm and desire for change, young people can advocate for decent, safe and affordable housing to be a global mandate.

Using the resources in this tool kit, your group will be well-equipped to hold an advocacy event, facilitate a letter-writing campaign and raise awareness in your community. As always, Habitat for Humanity International is here to support you in your endeavors. Please contact us with any questions, and good luck with your advocacy efforts!

- Children under 5 living in Habitat for Humanity houses in Malawi showed a 44 percent reduction in malaria, respiratory or gastrointestinal diseases compared with children living in traditional houses. The effect of improved housing on the health of young children was as high as that of water and sanitation programs. *(BMJ, 2001)*

- Access to land is fundamental to adequate shelter. Having legal title to that land encourages families to invest and improve their homes and allows them to access credit and other public services such as water and electricity. Nearly one-sixth of the world's population is living without secure tenure. (UN-HABITAT, 2008)

## SECTION 3

# ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES

## INCORPORATING THE "ASK"

Remember, strong advocacy has a specific "ask." At each event, include a letter to the editor, letter-writing campaign or petition signing that you can send to a government official afterward. For a list of asks to focus on in your letters and petitions, visit [habitat.org/gov/take\\_action](http://habitat.org/gov/take_action).

Below are some examples of chapter activities you may already be doing that can incorporate advocacy:

- *Chapter or steering committee meetings:* Create a mini-lesson on a current legislative issue that affects the availability of affordable housing. After the lesson, ask club members to write a letter to their government representative.
- *Fundraisers:* Have individuals decorate a paper hammer for \$1. Donate the money to Habitat, and send the hammers to your government representative with a letter urging legislative support of affordable housing.
- *Speakers:* Invite a speaker to talk about poverty housing in your area or ask a legislator to talk about his or her stance on housing issues. Have letters applicable to the speaker's topic available for individuals to sign afterward.
- *Publicity:* Incorporate information about housing issues in your event publicity. For more information on press releases and letters to the editor, refer to Section 5 and Appendix I. You might:
  - Put facts about poverty housing on your posters and fliers.
  - Include information on poverty and legislation in press releases or letters to the editor.
  - Invite legislators and community members to build days and events.

Find tools to help you do these activities at [habitat.org/youthprograms/ages\\_14\\_25/asbw\\_resources](https://www.habitat.org/youthprograms/ages_14_25/asbw_resources).

## SIMULATION ACTIVITIES

- *Welcome Home Housing Simulation:* Each student participant is assigned a character with a distinct economic situation, family and biography to role play. Participants seek housing in order to understand various challenges associated with finding shelter.
  - *Sleep out/shantytown:* The purpose of a sleep out is to raise awareness about poverty housing and homelessness in the minds of both the participants and the observers. It is imperative that the tone for this event is respectful and the goals are explicitly stated. For guidelines on how to host a sleep-out/shantytown, refer to [my.habitat.org/download/g323c9/](https://my.habitat.org/download/g323c9/).
  - *Apply for housing:* Fill out a homeowner application from your local Habitat for Humanity affiliate, and talk about the three requirements for partnership (need, willingness to partner and ability to repay). Also research the application for government-subsidized housing or housing assistance. How do the applications compare?
  - *Housing hunt:* Give each participant a budget and a profile of life circumstances, and have each research housing options available given these circumstances. Bring everyone together, and ask participants to share which option they chose and why.
  - *Spending situations:* Create monthly budgets for fictitious or real individuals and families. Ask participants to make the same kind of choices that those actually living in poverty make when expenses are greater than income. Include details for income, rent, transportation, food, insurance, car payments, etc. Certain participants may incur “unexpected difficulties,” forcing them to make even tougher choices.
  - *Housing lottery:* Everyone who signs up to participate is told that he or she could spend the night in a five-star hotel (or another really nice place) or find themselves without a designated place for the night. By random selection, determine where each participant will spend the night (e.g., a nice hotel, a school administrator’s house, a campsite, a typical home, a shelter or no designated place). The locations should be reflective of the income distribution in your community or the world. Have participants spend the night at an assigned location and reconvene in the morning for reflection.
  - *Plunge event:* Coordinate with a local shelter to have participants spend a night. Have participants sign waivers to release your affiliate, school or chapter from responsibility.
- Women are particularly affected by insecure tenure. Increasing and protecting women’s access to land tenure can decrease their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS, violence, human trafficking and the impact of natural disasters. Women own less than 15 percent of the land worldwide. (*International Center for Research on Women, 2006*).

### Housing has a positive impact on children

- Owning a home leads to a higher-quality home environment, improved test scores in children (9 percent in math and 7 percent in reading), and reduced behavioral problems (by 3 percent). (*“Low-Income Homeownership: Examining the Unexamined Goal,”* 2002)

## AWARENESS ACTIVITIES

Statistics in the margins of this tool kit can be used to supplement these activities.

- *Shocking shack:* Create a life-sized inadequate shelter. Attach a sign to declare its importance. For example:
  - “One in four people endure the hardships of poverty.”
  - “Tired? How would you like to share your sleeping space with insects, rodents and five family members?”
  - “Everybody deserves a decent place to sleep.”
  - “Where are YOU going to sleep tonight?”

Post members around the shack to talk with observers and to share details with them about the worldwide issue of poverty housing.

- *Living statistics:* Be the statistic that you are sharing. For example, for the statistic that one in four people worldwide endure the hardships of poverty, designate every fourth person of your group as living in poverty by asking them to wear an identifying article.
- *Large visual:* Make a large display, poster or banner that displays important information, such as the projected housing need or living wage versus minimum wage in your area, and display it in a highly visible location.
- *Giveaways:* Pass out something small that has a statement or fact about poverty housing. Pieces of candy or nuts and bolts work well. You can create inexpensive necklaces by knotting a nut or bolt on the center of a string.
- *Lunchtime learning:* With permission from your school, include a fact about poverty housing on a small card with each lunch sold on the day of your event. See the margins of this tool kit for poverty facts.
- *Representations of reality:* Have a visual representation of poverty in the world. Construct houses that show the relative size and condition of the homes of the rich and those of the poor.
- *Act out:* Perform a drama depicting the struggle to secure affordable housing. Show the stress, frustration, fear and resentment that may be involved. Scenes might include a government office, childcare, working two jobs or having little time to sleep. Descriptions from the Welcome Home Housing Simulation, described earlier in this section, can be useful.
- *Sandwich boards:* Wear sandwich boards with a strong message — a photo, statistic or statement — about affordable housing. Stand or pace in a prominent location on campus where many will see the messages.
- *Clothesline:* Write and draw messages on T-shirts that communicate the poverty housing situation. Hang the shirts in a prominent outdoor place.

- *Light the night:* With the permission of your community or your school's administration and fire marshal, place paper bags with a candle inside around your campus at night. Place a statement or fact about poverty housing on the outside of the bag.

## EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

- *What a house means:* Have students write or draw a picture that depicts why their home is important to them or their favorite thing about their home. Ask the students to share their work.

Next, break the students up into small groups and ask them to imagine or draw what a home would be like under poverty circumstances such as:

- Lack of electricity.
- Lack of heat or air conditioning.
- Lack of running water.
- Leaks.
- Overcrowding.

Bring the group back together to share. Finish the activity with a discussion about what poverty housing means, how Habitat for Humanity works and how their advocacy work will help eliminate poverty housing.

- *Poverty housing cause and effect:* This activity is designed to illuminate the connection between poverty housing and other problems in the community. Ask students to brainstorm all the effects of poverty housing — on individuals, families, the neighborhood and the community.

Next, ask students to brainstorm all the causes of poverty housing. Either as a whole group or smaller groups, have students map out the connections between causes and effects.

Finally, have the group share their maps. Point out any cycles that exist and how other social problems such as health care, the environment, crime, education, gentrification, transportation, etc., are tied to poverty housing.

- *Legislative process:* Study the legislative process in an effort to increase the effectiveness of your advocacy. Learn about the roles constituents have in the legislative process and voting laws. A political club or government teacher at your school may be willing to help.
- *Habitat for Humanity lessons:* The Habitat for Humanity lesson sets include handouts, worksheets, assessments, answer keys and rubrics designed to teach public and private school students about housing issues around the world.

The "Spread the Word" section of Habitat's elementary school curriculum concentrates on advocacy and can be found at [habitatyouthprograms.org](http://habitatyouthprograms.org).

- Children who live in bad housing have lower educational attainment and a greater likelihood of being impoverished and unemployed as adults. (*Shelter, September 2006*)

### Homeownership builds wealth

- Owning a home, especially for lower-income households, is an important means of wealth accumulation. For low-income minority families, median average annual housing wealth appreciation is \$1,712, whereas there is no nonhousing wealth accumulation. This wealth is achieved both through equity and forced savings resulting from mortgage repayment. (*U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Office of Policy Development and Research, 2004*)

## OFF-CAMPUS ACTIVITIES

- *Neighborhood tour:* Take people on a guided tour, either on foot or in a vehicle, of a neighborhood with many substandard homes and then to a neighborhood with Habitat for Humanity homes. Ask the affiliate to assist you. Before you tour, explain where you are going and what participants should look for: both the negative and positive aspects of the area. If possible, students should talk with people they meet in the community to learn what they like and what they would change about the area. After the tour, students should reflect on their experience through journaling, drawing or discussion.
- *Community scavenger hunt:* Find the local food banks, shelters and social service offices. Which grocery stores accept food stamps? Where is subsidized housing in your community? Do this without the assistance of a personal vehicle or the Internet; you will have to ask others for rides or take the bus.
- *Voter registration with Habitat homeowner families:* Do a concentrated set of voter-registration drives. College-age students can team up with groups on campus that already do voter registration, such as student government.
- *Shadow day:* Get permission to spend a day following someone from a grassroots organization that is concerned with housing issues. Share your observations and what surprised you, touched you and inspired you with others during a group meeting.

## OTHER ACTIVITIES

- *Watch a movie:* Show a film about some aspect of poverty, and hold a discussion or reflection afterward. Be sure to respect copyright policies. Be sure to obtain permission from the copyright owner before broadcasting the movie. It is acceptable to have a table, jar or other place for donations. Donations should only be a suggestion. Some films that touch on poverty:
  - “It Was a Wonderful Life”
  - “The Motorcycle Diaries”
  - “Born into Brothels”
  - “Slumdog Millionaire”
  - “The Visitor”
  - “Slum Survivors”
  - “Billy Elliot”
  - “The Grapes of Wrath”
  - “The Pursuit of Happyness”
  - “Good Fortune”
  - “City of God”

Be sure to check ratings before showing films, as some may contain violent situations.

- *Scavenger hunt:* Post clues with relevance to poverty housing, with each clue leading to the next.
- *Writing contest:* Accept essays, news reports, feature writing or other types of writing. Ask donors to provide prizes. Consider publishing the pieces for distribution on campus or in your community.
- *Artwork:* Invite all willing artists to creatively portray their ideas for solving the problem of poverty housing. Classes could view the works and reflect on what can be done to remove poverty from the world.

- Homeownership increases intergenerational wealth accumulation through improved educational achievement in children, which leads to greater earnings when these children enter the work force.  
*(“Low-Income Homeownership: Examining the Unexamined Goal,” 2002)*

- Homeowners live in larger, higher-quality units; they enjoy better housing services with costs that fall over time; and they stand to make considerable returns if they remain owners for a long time. (*Research Institute for Housing America, May 2001*)

## SECTION 4

# ENGAGING ELECTED OFFICIALS

## INVITING ELECTED OFFICIALS TO YOUR COMMUNITY

Inviting an elected official communicates your concern for poverty as well as your desire to do something about it. You also have the opportunity to build a relationship face to face.

Please contact Habitat's Office of Government Relations and Advocacy if you intend to invite a member of Congress to speak. Email [HFHIAdvocacy@habitat.org](mailto:HFHIAdvocacy@habitat.org) or call 202-628-9171, ext. 4900.

### Choose your official:

- City council member
- Mayor
- State legislator
- Governor
- Senator or representative

### Invite the official:

- Contact the official's office to ask if he or she is available.
- Information about contacting officials is included later in this section.
- Consider sending a letter of invitation first. The invitation should include:
  - An introduction of yourself and Habitat for Humanity.
  - Your group's advocacy efforts to end substandard housing.
  - A suggested itinerary.
- Follow up with a phone call.
  - Give more details of what you have in mind for the visit's activities and logistics.

- Ask if he or she has any alternate or additional ideas for locations or activities.
- Agree on an itinerary.

**Plan appropriate activities:**

- Coordinate with the local affiliate to take the official to a work site.
- Introduce a homeowner.
- Visit your local affiliate office.
- Take a tour together of housing in the city.
- Ask the official to address your campus or community in some way, such as a speech, forum or informal meet-and-greet.

**Coordinate with the official:**

- It is important that you keep the official informed of any changes in times or plans before he or she visits.
- It is appropriate to confirm the visit with his or her office.
- Be prepared! Planning will help make the experience worthwhile for all involved.

**Market the appearance:**

- Advertise the official’s visit around your school and community through posters, announcements, ads in the school and local newspaper, banners, etc.
- Alert the media to the official’s visit; they will probably be interested.

**Follow up:**

- Be sure to write a thank-you note.

## **HOW TO CONTACT YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS**

To find your elected representatives, use the following websites and addresses. Please note that with increased mail security, written letters take approximately three to six weeks to reach federal representatives. For timely issues, email your officials through their individual websites. This ensures that your message is received and not screened out as unwanted email.

When you are in contact with federal officials, please inform Habitat’s Office of Government Relations and Advocacy by emailing [HFHIAAdvocacy@habitat.org](mailto:HFHIAAdvocacy@habitat.org), or by calling 202-628-9171, ext. 4900.

**Federal legislators**

*Senator*

[senate.gov](http://senate.gov) (for office address, email and phone)

Mail to:

The Honorable [full name]

United States Senate

Washington, DC 20510

**Housing strengthens communities**

- Owner-occupied housing has a beneficial effect on the local economy by increasing consumer spending, providing tax revenues and fees, and growing businesses and jobs. Building additional homes requires additional employees, goods and services from the general economy. *(JCHS, 2006)*

- Homeowners are more likely to be satisfied with their homes and neighborhoods and are more likely to volunteer in civic and political activities. (*Research Institute for Housing America, May 2000*)

*Representative*

house.gov (for office address, email and phone)

Mail to:

The Honorable [full name]

United States House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

Capitol Hill switchboard: 202-224-3121

*President of the United States*

whitehouse.gov (for email and phone)

Mail to:

President (full name)

The White House

Washington, DC 20500

White House Comment Line: 202-456-1111

**State legislatures Internet links**

[ncsl.org/public/leglinks.cfm](http://ncsl.org/public/leglinks.cfm)

**City/county/local representatives**

[congress.org](http://congress.org) (for office address, email and phone)

**Habitat for Humanity International****Office of Government Relations and Advocacy**

[BuildLouder@habitat.org](mailto:BuildLouder@habitat.org)

202-628-4441

## **VISITING ELECTED OFFICIALS**

If you want to meet with your legislator, you have to be organized and well-prepared. Please note that you should carefully coordinate with your affiliate when visiting a legislator.

To schedule an appointment, you should mail or fax a formal meeting request to a Congress member via his or her office scheduler. Follow up on your request by calling the member's district office or Washington office, and ask to speak to the scheduler. Also consider the opportunity to meet with a staff member. Congressional staff members are very influential and are frequently knowledgeable on housing issues.

- *Time it well.* The best time to have this kind of visit is on a weekend or during a recess. Easter recess is a time when many members return home. Call your member's district office to see when he or she will be in town. Such visits are good options for chapters or groups far from Washington, D.C.

- *Prepare.* Set and confirm an appointment. Study the specifics of the legislation or issue that affect your congressional delegation ahead of time. Be sure to have local data and personal examples of the impact of the issue on your community. Be sure your strongest talking points include the “ask.”
- *Be prompt.* Make sure you are on time. Remember, legislators have busy schedules and you are serving as a representative of Habitat for Humanity.
- *Be organized.* Have your key points organized, know your facts and be ready to answer any questions from the legislator. If you are going with more than one person, meet in advance to orchestrate the visit. Remember that you are representing your school, affiliate and Habitat for Humanity as a whole.
- *Be honest.* If you don’t have an answer to a question from your legislator, do not make one up. Tell your legislator that you don’t know but will get that information to him or her.
- *Be confident.* Present your views to your policymaker with conviction. You are the expert in this area, and you know what you are talking about. Have confidence, but also be polite. Communicate your position in a way that does not put your legislator or his or her staff members on the defensive. Explain your position with local or personal stories when possible.
- *Be brief.* A legislator’s time is very valuable, so don’t waste it. State the facts and your argument, and explain how the issue will affect constituents. Be organized, and leave time for your legislator to respond and ask as many questions as he or she would like.

## USE YOUR HABITAT FOR HUMANITY RESOURCES:

- Tell Habitat’s Office of Government Relations and Advocacy when you intend to visit federal members of Congress (HFHIAvocacy@habitat.org, 202-628-9171, ext. 4900).
- Work with your local affiliate or regional support center when visiting state or local legislators. Find your local affiliate’s contact information at [habitat.org/cd/local](http://habitat.org/cd/local).

- Homeowners are more likely to know their U.S. representative (by 10 percent) and school board head by name (by 9 percent), and are more likely to vote in local elections (by 15 percent) and work to solve local problems (by 6 percent). (*Journal of Urban Economics*, March 1999)

**Global poverty facts**

- By the year 2030, an additional 3 billion people, about 40 percent of the world's population, will need access to housing. This translates into a demand for 96,150 new affordable units every day and 4,000 every hour. (*UN-HABITAT, 2005*)

**SECTION 5**

# INTERACTING WITH THE MEDIA

## THE DO'S AND DON'TS OF WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

**Do:**

- Choose one spokesperson to speak with the media.
- Return calls from the media the same day.
- Hold media events at times that are appropriate considering deadlines.
  - Television and radio deadlines are two to three hours before airtime.
  - Morning papers have an early evening deadline.
  - Afternoon papers have a late morning deadline.
- Be sure to greet the media when they arrive at an event. Have your spokesperson ready to answer any questions.
- Introduce media members to youth volunteers and homeowners who will provide a good interview.
- Concentrate on the positive aspects of the program and each event.
- Research answers to questions. Provide honest, factual answers.
- Invite media representatives, especially television anchors and feature columnists, to volunteer with your Youth United project.
- If building, provide safety gear for everyone. Make sure there are hard hats, goggles, gloves and nail aprons for every construction volunteer.
- Remain confident, friendly and calm.

**Don't:**

- Call a media outlet on deadline to pitch a story.
- Ask to review the story before it goes to print.
- Hold a news conference unless you have something major to announce.
- Contact the media unless you think the story is newsworthy.
- Make something up if you don't know the answer; find out the truth.

## INTRODUCING YOUR STORY TO THE MEDIA

Media sources to consider:

- Newspapers
- Alternative weeklies
- Television
- Radio
- Newsletters of groups interested in youth or housing issues
- School media
- Community websites

## WRITE A PRESS RELEASE

### Purpose of the press release

Your press release serves two purposes: to attract the media to your event and to clearly spell out the message that you want the media to report. Your press release may be printed word-for-word. Therefore, be precise and make sure your intended message is clear. Your press release gives the media the go-ahead to cover your event in advance. Release it one to two weeks before your event.

A press release should answer the following questions in the beginning section:

- Who is involved?
- What is happening?
- Where is it happening?
- When is it happening?
- Why or how is it happening?

### Press release logistics

When the time comes to distribute your press release, you will hopefully have a relationship with someone at each media source that is going to cover your event and will know how to deliver the release. Many reporters prefer to receive press releases via email. Make sure to cut and paste the text of your press release into the body of the email; many reporters will not open emails with an attachment because of computer viruses. You may also mail or fax the press release.

### Press release format

*Heading*

- Follow the format in the sample press release in Appendix I.
- The release date should be one to two weeks before the event.

- One out of every three city dwellers – nearly a billion people – lives in a slum, and that number is expected to double in the next 25 years. (Slum indicators include lack of water, lack of sanitation, overcrowding, nondurable structures and insecure tenure.) (*UN-HABITAT, 2006*)

- As much as 70 percent of the urban housing stock in sub-Saharan Africa, 50 percent in South Asia, and 25 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean is of poor quality and not in compliance with local regulations. (*"Housing for All: Essential for Economic, Social, and Civic Development,"* 2006)

#### *Title*

- This is the most important part of the release; if it fails to catch the editor's eye, he or she may not think the event is interesting.
- Include the event's name in the title to make it identifiable, e.g., Act! Speak! Build! Week. Make sure to also include Habitat for Humanity in the title.

#### *Lead paragraph*

- Start with the city and state where your event will be held.
- Include the date you are sending the press release.
- Include three points about your event that are uncommon, effective or unique to attract the editor's interest.

#### *Second paragraph*

- Include a quote from a Habitat spokesperson.

#### *Third paragraph*

- Build upon the three points of your event that you outlined in the lead paragraph.
- Also include relevant information such as time, date and place of the event.

#### *Fourth paragraph*

- Include a quote from your chapter president or steering committee chair that speaks to the reason for the event, which is advocating for affordable housing.

#### *Fifth paragraph*

- Highlight the history and Habitat activities of your group.
- Keep this brief; three sentences will be sufficient.
- Include the chapter's or group's "wish list" for tools, volunteers, donations, etc.
- Highlight any ongoing or special events, such as weekend workdays, Collegiate Challenge trips, large annual fundraisers, etc.

#### *Final paragraph*

- This is called the HFHI boilerplate. It is a standard description of the organization that is frequently used. Do not modify it (it is included in Appendix I).

### **Press release template**

Press releases for Act! Speak! Build! Week are available at [habitatyouthprograms.org/actspeakbuild](http://habitatyouthprograms.org/actspeakbuild).

### Write a letter to the editor

Letters to the editor are a powerful way to reach thousands of people. You can write letters to editors of newspapers, newsletters, magazines — any appropriate printed medium. Letters to the editor can serve two functions: They can applaud an article or efforts made by an individual or organization, or they can point out a shortcoming in society and call for change. In either case, the letter should include information about Habitat for Humanity International and the local affiliate. See below for tips on writing letters to the editor.

#### Tips for letters to the editor:

- Use letterhead if possible.
- Include your contact information. Also include a signature line with your title, such as “(school name) Campus Chapter president” or “Youth United (affiliate name) member.”
- Be familiar with the publication. Know what kind of readers it attracts and what types of letters it typically prints, and write an appropriate letter.
- If your letter is in direct response to a previously published article or column, include the headline and the date published in parentheses.
- Be timely. Don’t wait longer than a week to respond to an article, column or local event.
- Make your letter pertinent to that local outlet. Don’t send a form letter, especially if you would be using someone else’s words.
- Be short, concise and polite — write less than 200 words.
- Your letter should never attack a group or individual. If you are addressing a problem, define that problem and suggest possible solutions.
- Include pertinent information about Habitat for Humanity, including what Habitat is, the local affiliate’s contact information and recent news from Habitat.
- Check with your affiliate before you submit the letter. Remember, you are representing your campus chapter, affiliate and Habitat for Humanity International, so you want to make sure everything is accurate and appropriate.
- If you need assistance, please contact Habitat for Humanity at 800-422-4828, ext. 2412.

Send a copy of any published letters to [actspeakbuild@habitat.org](mailto:actspeakbuild@habitat.org).

More information on secure tenure and the benefits of homeownership for low-income families can be found in Habitat for Humanity’s Shelter Reports: [habitat.org/gov/public\\_policy/Research\\_resources\\_default.aspx](http://habitat.org/gov/public_policy/Research_resources_default.aspx).

# APPENDIX I

## SAMPLE MEDIA RELEASE

### MEDIA RELEASE

(Month, Day, Year)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE (or place an embargo until [time] and [date])

[Name]

[Affiliate/Campus chapter name] Habitat for Humanity

[Phone number]

[Email]

[Affiliate or campus chapter website]

### SAMPLE HEADLINE:

**[Affiliate or campus chapter name] Habitat for Humanity advocates to secure tenure on [event day]**

In recognition of [event], [affiliate/campus chapter name] Habitat for Humanity will address the lack of decent housing around the world, including the need for affordable housing in [local area].

[Affiliate/campus chapter] Habitat for Humanity will host a roundtable discussion, featuring [guest speaker], followed by a candlelight vigil. [Fill in details about your event, including a short description with date, time and location.]

[Quote from local affiliate/campus chapter spokesperson about the event and housing needs.]

[Facts and information about Habitat for Humanity and youth programs' international efforts.] Security of tenure is out of reach for many people in developing countries. An estimated 80 percent of the world's population does not have legal documentation of their property rights. Secure tenure not only facilitates opportunities for investment and wealth accumulation, but also provides a source of identity, status and political power and serves as a basis for the pursuits of other rights.

For further information, contact [name and title of contact person] at [phone number and email address].

**About [affiliate/campus chapter name] Habitat for Humanity**

[Insert affiliate/campus chapter boiler plate statement.]

**About Habitat for Humanity International**

Habitat for Humanity International is a global nonprofit Christian housing organization that seeks to put God’s love into action by bringing people together to build homes, communities and hope. Since 1976, Habitat has served more than 500,000 families by welcoming people of all races, religions and nationalities to construct, rehabilitate or preserve homes; by advocating for fair and just housing policies; and by providing training and access to resources to help families improve their shelter conditions. For more information, to donate or to volunteer, please visit [Habitat.org](http://Habitat.org), follow us at [facebook.com/habitat](https://facebook.com/habitat) or at [twitter.com/habitat.org](https://twitter.com/habitat.org), or join Habitat’s blog community at [habitat.org/blog](http://habitat.org/blog).

## **CREATE A PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT**

Public service announcements are used by nonprofit organizations to publicize issues of general interest. Space for public service announcements is free but can be difficult to obtain.

Contacting the appropriate person at each media outlet is essential. Many outlets have a public service director. For those that don’t, the best person may be the production or advertising manager at a newspaper or the community relations director at a radio station. Newspaper PSAs should be short and to the point. A radio PSA is usually 15 or 30 seconds long.

**Public service announcement request template**

(Print on affiliate letterhead.)

Date

Dear [media outlet name] PSA Director,

[Affiliate name] Habitat for Humanity is offering your station a public service announcement to educate the community about Youth United, an initiative that invites youths ages 5-25 to join Habitat for Humanity’s mission. Youth United homes are funded and built entirely by youths. This program is unique in that it shows how young people can make a difference in their community.

Our contact information

Youth United contact:

Address:

Telephone:

More than 3.5 million people in the United States currently live in substandard housing. Each year, many families in our area will not be able to afford a decent home. With your help in bringing the Youth United campaign to [city] residents, Habitat for Humanity can break ground on more houses in [state] this year, and the leaders of tomorrow will learn from this valuable opportunity to serve their community today.

To increase the reach of our public service campaign, we encourage you to incorporate this public service announcement in your news stories and to contact us at the above location and number if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

[Executive director's name]

[Affiliate name]

**Public service announcement template**

[Affiliate name] Habitat for Humanity wishes to invite young people, their parents and youth leaders to [event] at [date and time] in [location] and [description]. This event is part of Youth United Urban, a program to involve young people in Habitat's mission of ending substandard housing in [city] and throughout the world. Youth United homes are sponsored and built entirely by young people. To learn more about this event or Youth United, please contact [name] at [phone number] or go to [website].

# APPENDIX II

## OFFICIAL HFHI U.S. ADVOCACY POLICY

### PURPOSE

Affiliated organizations are encouraged to dedicate efforts to advocacy, which is defined as changing systems, policies and attitudes to achieve decent housing for all (Habitat for Humanity Advocacy Task Force report, July 2005, and adopted by HFHI's board of directors on October 2005). Affiliates are not required to engage in advocacy; however, if an affiliate chooses to participate in advocacy activities, then this policy sets forth the requirements that apply to all such efforts, including certain legal requirements.

### POLICY

Advocacy initiatives are intended to support HFHI's ability to carry out its mission and take into consideration the following elements: raising awareness, education, engagement and a call to action. Advocacy activities could include but are not limited to testifying at public meetings, educating others about policy issues, and sending letters to decision-makers.

Before engaging in advocacy with respect to legislation, ballot issues or referenda, etc., affiliates must adhere to the following:

- Affiliated organizations must consult with the other HFHI entities that could be affected by an individual affiliate's advocacy efforts. A single affiliate that wishes to endorse a statewide initiative shall consult first with its state support organization or the other affiliates in its state if an SSO does not exist. An affiliate wishing to endorse a citywide or countywide initiative shall consult first with other affiliates in the city or county. In all cases, the affiliate must clearly identify that it is speaking in its own name and not in the name of Habitat for Humanity.
- Endorsement of federal policies or legislation by affiliated organizations should take place only after consultation with HFHI's Office of Government Relations and Advocacy, and should not be inconsistent with positions taken by HFHI.

- As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, a Habitat affiliate may never engage in any political activity in support of any candidate. An affiliate is, however, allowed to lobby both its elected officials directly and to engage in grassroots advocacy (public education and letter writing campaigns, etc.), as long as the advocacy represents “no substantial part of the activities” of the affiliate. Because there is no clear definition of “substantial part,” the IRS looks at all facts and circumstances when deciding if the limit has been exceeded. The IRS also allows 501(c)(3) organizations to make an election under 501(h) of the Internal Revenue Code that applies a sliding scale to the specific amounts organizations can spend on lobbying activities, up to a maximum of \$1 million.
- The Federal Lobbying Disclosure Act does not apply to volunteers and is unlikely to apply to affiliate staff unless they spend more than 20 percent of their time on lobbying activities. Paid staff that spend more than 20 percent of their time lobbying are required to file disclosure reports in accordance with the LDA. State lobby disclosure laws vary greatly, so affiliates engaging in lobbying are required to verify state rules.
- No affiliated organization that receives federal funds may use those funds for the purpose of influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a member of Congress in connection with the awarding of any federal contract, the making of any federal grant, the making of any federal loan, the entering into of any cooperative agreement, and the extension, continuation, renewal, amendment or modification of any federal contract, grant, loan or cooperative agreement. Also, employees, including Ameri-Corps and VISTA participants, whose salaries are paid from federal funds, may not engage in any such activities during official duties.

#### RATIONALE

Habitat for Humanity successfully serves a subset of families living in substandard housing. However, HFH recognizes that home building alone will never achieve the goal of eliminating poverty housing worldwide. Habitat’s second mission principle, to “advocate on behalf of those in need of decent shelter,” makes a strong commitment to advocate and promote housing as an opportunity to every human being, educating society on affordable housing, and influencing policy decisions within societal institutions that make poverty housing and homelessness socially, politically and religiously unacceptable worldwide.

Habitat’s advocacy can and should occur at all levels of decision-making, i.e., local, state, federal and international.

*Original Version: Approved June 2005*

*Revised Version: Approved September 2009*

# APPENDIX III

## 2011 U.S. FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

### U.S. Domestic Priorities

#### *Habitat Neighborhood Revitalization:*

#### Rebuilding Communities, Supporting Economic Recovery

Habitat for Humanity affiliates are serving more families than ever before with the support of Habitat's Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative. Through innovative repair, rehabilitation and energy efficiency programs, and the deployment of national service members, the NRI is helping to rebuild and improve communities hit hard by the housing crisis and economic recession. Several federal programs provide critical resources supporting the NRI.

- Corporation for National and Community Service  
FY2011 Appropriation: No less than \$1.15 billion  
FY2012 Appropriation: \$1.258 billion  
CNCS' AmeriCorps and VISTA programs provide capacity building support and direct services to Habitat affiliates and the communities that affiliates serve. Habitat AmeriCorps service members recruit, train and manage more than 200,000 community volunteers each year, providing an estimated 1.6 million volunteer hours to Habitat affiliates, and touch nearly half of the houses built or rehabilitated by Habitat in the U.S.
- Self-Help Homeownership Opportunity Program  
FY2011 Appropriation: \$26.5 million (same as FY2010 and FY2008)  
FY2012 Appropriation: \$26.5 million  
SHOP is a unique approach to low-income homeownership using "sweat equity" and volunteer labor. Habitat uses SHOP funds to purchase land and make infrastructure improvements, primarily in support of new construction. This is the same level as in FY2010, the FY2011 House continuing resolution (HR1) and the president's FY2012 budget request.

- **Section 4 Capacity Building**  
FY2011 Appropriations: \$50 million (same as FY2010)  
FY2012 Appropriation: \$50 million  
Section 4, as currently authorized, provides Habitat affiliates with resources to build the staffing, skills and systems to maximize their impact on local communities. This is the same level as in FY2010, the FY2011 House continuing resolution (HR 1), and the President's FY2012 budget request.
- **Weatherization Innovation**  
**Improve Delivery of Federal Energy Efficiency Resources**  
Through the Weatherization Innovation Pilot Program, Habitat is demonstrating that by using its volunteer model, donated materials, and construction expertise, it can serve as a force multiplier for federal energy efficiency efforts.

#### *Self-Help Housing Solutions for Veterans and Military Service Members*

With approximately 1,500 local affiliates around the country, Habitat is well-positioned to meet the critical housing and reintegration needs of veterans. Habitat can enable the Veterans Administration to reach more low-income veterans by applying a self-help housing model to existing veteran resources.

- **Using Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing for Homeownership**  
Allowing veterans to use their VASH vouchers for mortgage payments (as public housing authorities already may choose to do with regular Section 8 vouchers) would enable Habitat to serve more low-income veterans with homeownership opportunities.
- **Using VA Home Loan Guaranty Program for Self-Help Homeownership**  
Habitat is working with the VA to create a model for Habitat affiliates to provide low-income veterans homeownership opportunities.

#### **U.S. International Priorities**

In addition to working in 1,500 communities in the U.S., Habitat operates in nearly 80 countries worldwide, with 90 percent of our partner families located outside the United States. More than ever before, shelter is critically needed throughout the rapidly urbanizing world and is indispensable for the success of our nation's investments in global health, education and employment.

#### *Housing for Haiti*

Habitat has worked in Haiti for more than 26 years and has increased its efforts to respond to the earthquake in January 2010. One year later, nearly 1 million people continue to live in "tent cities" with few alternative shelter options available. Significant gaps in funding also remain.

- Habitat recommends setting aside portions of future Haiti appropriations to address the ongoing shelter challenges of the disaster-affected population, including efforts that support permanent housing, rubble removal and community-based land-tenure solutions.

*Reforming Foreign Assistance for Housing and Urbanization*

USAID's lack of focus on shelter and urban issues in recent years has created substantial gaps in U.S. international development policy. There is currently no comprehensive strategy to address the rapid growth of informal settlements or prepare for the economic, social and security implications that slums have.

Habitat supported two bills related to urbanization in 111th Congress: The Shelter Land and Urban Management Act (HR1702) in the House and the Sustainable Urban Development Act (S3229) in the Senate. Both bills directed USAID to develop a strategy that fosters sustainable urban development in low-income countries around the world.

- Habitat requests support for similar legislation addressing urbanization, including adequate housing, land tenure, water and sanitation.



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