Module 4

The Action Plan
The first three modules focused on EAH’s benefits to employers, employees, real estate agents and the community and the types and structure of employer-assisted housing benefits.

This fourth module focuses on how to initiate and implement an employer-assisted housing benefit program in your community with an Action Plan.

Module 4: Learning Outcomes

At the conclusion of this module, you should be able to describe and discuss:

- How to conduct research on your community;
- How to form and create a team;
- How to identify and contact employers;
- How to meet with an employer.

Four Steps in the Action Plan

There are four steps in the Action Plan:

- Conducting research on your community;
- Forming a team;
- Identifying and contacting employers;
- Meeting with the employers.

The Action Plan, Step 1: Do Your Research

The first step in developing an action plan is doing your research. Are you able to answer the following questions about your market?

- Who provides homebuyer education and counseling services?
• What is the current median house price in your market?
• What is the current area median income?
• What federal, state and local financial assistance programs are available?
• Do any local employers currently implement EAH Benefits?
• What issues are important to local employers?
• What local housing initiatives have been discussed or implemented?

If you are not able to answer these questions now, your research should cover these areas.

Your research should include conducting a local market analysis (e.g., foreclosures) to find out about local housing costs, local income levels, neighborhoods in need of stabilization, and place-based employers in the community, as well as other factors.

You should also find out if there are financial assistance programs using federal, state or local money as well as if there are any local initiatives being launched, e.g., the state or mayor has prioritized a live-near-work program, or a local foundation is interested in supporting a new housing development.

You may want to consider working together as a team to conduct the research. This could be conducted at a Follow-Up Session after the EAH class, which is referred to in the Preface.

Housing Market and Census Research

United States Census Bureau

Key sources of data include the United States Census Bureau, which conducts a decennial census and publishes updated information annually with the American Community Survey. The Census Bureau collects a vast amount of data on community demographics, social factors, economics and housing. The Census website has some prepackaged community summary reports that are available for any community in the country.

American Community Survey

In addition to conducting a census every 10 years, the U.S. Census Bureau also surveys to estimate demographic trends in the years between the official censuses. These results are published in the American Community Survey, which provides the most up-to-date information on demographic, housing and economic trends.

American Community Survey: http://www.census.gov/acs/www/

Paycheck to Paycheck

The Center for Housing Policy maintains a Paycheck to Paycheck database. This database has data on housing and rental costs in select cities and also has data on the wages paid in typical professions in the cities. The Paycheck to Paycheck database allows you to analyze data either by metropolitan area or by occupation. We saw some data earlier from this database when we were discussing the workforce housing shortage. The Paycheck to Paycheck website, managed by the National Housing Conference, provides a good source of income and wage data for many metropolitan areas.

Paycheck to Paycheck website: http://www.nhc.org/chp/p2p/.

Bureau of Labor Statistics

The Bureau of Labor Statistics maintains wage data for all occupations in metropolitan areas throughout the United States.


NAR Research

In addition to data from the government agencies, the National Association of REALTORS’ website has a wealth of information on local housing markets and the economy. NAR research includes housing statistics and data, market forecasts and economic outlooks, the results of member and consumer surveys, and reports on 150+ metro markets. The NAR website has information on local housing markets and the economy.

National Association of REALTORS’:

http://www.realtor.org/research-and-statistics/housing-statistics
In addition to the EAH Class Online Community (http://www.reaction.communityzero.com/eah2) reference in the Preface, you might also want to subscribe to e-newsletters that provide updates on housing issues. Some of these include the following:

- Housing Matters Smart Brief, https://www2.smartbrief.com/signupSystem/subscribe.action?pageSequence=1&briefName=macfound&campaign=in_brief_signup_link

**TOOL**

In the Tools & Resources section of your Participant Guide, you will find Action Plan Worksheets (p. TR.1) on how to find these websites to access the data you need.

**Federal, State and Local Financial Assistance**

As we saw in the examples of the Philadelphia “Home Buy Now” program, the District of Columbia, and the Johns Hopkins University and Hospital employer example, it is often possible to leverage state, local and federal housing money into an employer-assisted housing benefit.

Here are some ideas on the types of places you might look for this type of information.

One of the key sources of information on existing programs will be your local nonprofit housing organization. These are the same organizations you may be partnering with to be on your team. They may also be able to deliver homebuyer and homeownership education and counseling.
One of the best places to find out about local finance programs is to contact your local state housing finance authority. If you don’t know the name of your local state housing finance authority, you can find it through the National Council of State Housing Finance Authorities at http://www.ncsha.org/. Select About HFAs. Select State Housing Finance Authorities. A list of state housing finance authorities should be displayed on the screen.

Additionally, there are federal programs such as those administered by HUD, or by state and local organizations. These include programs such as the FHA, VA and USDA Rural lending programs.

In researching the existence of financial resources and housing programs in your community, your local government officials, such as the mayor, city council, county commission, community and economic development agencies and housing agencies can also be sources of information.

The Metropolitan Planning Council also provide resources on financial assistance programs. (http://www.metroplanning.org/eah)

Include the information you find on federal, state, and local financial assistance programs when conducting homebuyer workshops.

Students interested in a more detailed discussion of affordable housing should consider taking NAR’s Expanding Housing Opportunities course, which provides a comprehensive overview of affordable housing, including affordable lending products.

**TOOL**

*Find Downpayment Assistance Programs* (p. TR.13) and *Examples of State and Local Housing Programs* (p. TR.25).

**Identify Existing Employer EAH Programs**

You should also research any existing local employers implementing employer-assisted housing benefits. To identify these, you might talk
to the local economic development agency and chamber of commerce and search the local newspaper and business journals for articles about employer-assisted housing and the employers who are implementing these programs.

You may also want to contact the local society for Human Resource Management to see if they know of any local employers implementing EAH. The SHRM website lists local regions, state councils and chapters. http://www.shrm.org/Communities/Pages/default.aspx

Finally, you might wish to talk to your local nonprofit organizations to find out if they know of any employers who currently offer an employer-assisted housing benefit.

Your strategy will vary depending on whether EAH programs currently exist in your community. When no program currently exists, you will want to facilitate the process.

It is not effective to call upon employers who already have EAH programs. In places such as Santa Barbara, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Chicago and elsewhere in Illinois, many existing employer-assisted housing benefits exist. If there is an EAH program already in existence (whether an employer's own program or a community/nonprofit effort), it is important not to strike out on your own but rather see if you can become a part of that program.

**TOOL:**

*Examples of Employers Implementing EAH Benefits (p. TR.21)*

**EAH Legislation**

As we discussed earlier, funds provided by an employer as part of a financial assistance benefit to help an employee buy a home generally do not receive special tax treatment by the IRS or by state governments.

However, there are some exceptions, as we saw earlier with the Illinois
Tax Credit. Other states have introduced similar legislation, but it has not to date passed. Other states had passed EAH legislation but it has expired and has not been extended.

As part of your research, you should check the most recent status of legislation, if any, in your state.

The Metropolitan Planning Council (http://www.metroplanning.org/eah) and the Center for Housing Policy (http://www.housingpolicy.org) are also following state and federal legislative efforts.

You may want to contact your state REALTOR® Association’s Government Affairs department to see if they are monitoring EAH legislation in your state.

NAR is monitoring which states, in addition to Congress, have introduced or passed EAH legislation.

The Action Plan, Step 2: Form a Team

The next step in your action plan is to form a team. However, you may want to start forming your team first so that the other members can assist with the research activities in Step 1. The nonprofit organization on your team can be particularly helpful in providing this type of information.

Team Member Expertise

The creation of a team brings together experts from several different areas to assist in the development and implementation of an employer-assisted housing benefit.

A team provides expertise in multiple areas:

- Lending and finance expertise;
- Financial assistance resources information;
- Homebuyer and homeownership education and workshop assistance;
- Foreclosure intervention and prevention assistance;
• Counseling services;
• EAH benefit plan administration.

The team should include individuals and organizations with expertise in the homebuying process, experts in lending and finance and those with knowledge of financial assistance sources.

The team should be able to provide homeownership and homebuyer education, financial literacy and counseling services. The team should also be able to assist in the foreclosure prevention process, including providing foreclosure assistance workshops and intervention counseling.

Typically, the team should include the real estate agent, a lender, and a nonprofit counseling organization. The team may also include others such as a title company representative, home inspector and home maintenance and repair specialists.

Benefits of the Team Approach

Having a team makes it much easier to approach an employer. When approaching the employer, it is critical that the team members be prepared and credible. The team, particularly if it includes a nonprofit organization, creates this credibility.

The employer sees more value in having several different organizations partnering together on a project and often views the nonprofit as a credible, motivated party to the transaction.

There are also benefits from employer-assisted housing to the team. The benefits include an expanded client and customer base, a new source of referrals, increased name recognition, and a positive image and increased visibility in a community.

Team Leader

Someone on the team will need to be the team leader. The team leader coordinates and manages the action plan and the team.
The team leader’s responsibility includes identifying and recruiting the appropriate team members, identifying and contacting the employers and scheduling and conducting the meetings with the employers.

The team leader will coordinate with the team to see who should attend the meetings with the employer. The employer might want to meet all of the members of the team.

The team leader will also schedule and coordinate the educational workshops.

The team leader would be the contact point for the employer and the person the employer should contact with additional questions.

Because of their skills, experience, and resources, a nonprofit organization is a good candidate to be the team leader. However, if there is no nonprofit organization in the community, the real estate professional could also undertake this role if he/she has the time, commitment, and resources.

Role of the Nonprofit

A nonprofit organization is a critical member of the employer-assisted housing team. You need to have a nonprofit on your team to be successful and, for the most part, the nonprofit organization will usually be the team leader.

The selected nonprofit should be experienced in providing counseling, including foreclosure intervention and homeownership, homebuyer and financial literacy education.

The nonprofit can be a source of information regarding available financial assistance benefits. They will be able to provide a lot of the information as suggested in Step 1.

Some nonprofits may also be able to administer and manage an EAH benefit on behalf of the employer and handle reporting and program measurement activities.
Participation on an employer-assisted housing team may help the nonprofit reach out to the population it serves and be a source of referrals for the nonprofit organization’s other services.

Note: NeighborWorks is making plans to offer a version of NAR’s EAH Class at their NeighborWorks Training Institute. This will give nonprofits the knowledge they need to develop their own EAH programs and encourage them to partner with real estate professionals and lenders.

Nonprofit Housing Organizations

Counseling services should be provided by a US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) approved counseling organization that has the tools and expertise to help the client resolve financial problems, determine actual household needs and draw up a budget and spending plan that begins to prepare the buyer to meet the financial requirements of his or her new home.

The following steps demonstrate how to find a housing counseling agency using the HUD website. Go to the website for HUD approved counseling agencies: http://www.hud.gov/offices/hsg/sfh/hcc/hcs.cfm. Select a state. A list of housing counseling agencies should appear.

Additionally, you may want to go to the NeighborWorks website at www.nw.org. NeighborWorks provides housing counseling in many locations nationwide. They also have a listing of foreclosure counselors at http://www.neighborworks.org/homes-finance/foreclosure/foreclosure-counseling-(NFMC)/find-a-foreclosure-counselor/

You also can talk to your state housing coalition or local council on philanthropy. Both organizations should be able to refer you to approved counselors in your area.

Well-known counseling organizations include:

- NeighborWorks® (www.nw.org);
- HomeFree-USA (www.homefreeusa.org);
• Neighborhood Assistance Corporation of America (www.naca.org);
• National Foundation for Credit Counseling (www.debtadvice.org);
• Other local counseling organizations.

**TOOL**

*Find Nonprofit Housing Counseling Agencies* (TR.51)

**Nonprofit Organization Fees**

Depending on how the nonprofit organization is funded, fees may be applied to the educational and counseling services they provide, or they may be able to provide the services to the employers at no cost. If fees are applied, they are typically very reasonable.

Many nonprofit housing counselors are funded through government or private grants to provide education and counseling services. In these instances, the nonprofits are often able to provide their services at no cost to the client or the employer.

In other instances, it may be necessary for the nonprofit to charge a fee for the education and counseling services. These fees typically range from $25 to $100 per participant. Employers are usually able to negotiate a flat annual fee with the nonprofit.

In some cases, the nonprofit provides flat fee services between $2,000 and $3,000 per year. For larger organizations, the annual fees may be more.

**Role of the Real Estate Professional**

The real estate professional should play an active role in helping to organize and/or conduct the homebuyer and homeownership workshops. This is where the real estate professional can educate employees on how to buy a home and the homebuyer process. Real estate professionals are experts on topics such as the role of the real estate professional; what is a buyer’s agent; neighborhood conditions; property values and trends; and knowledge of the local marketplace.
Real estate professionals can also show employees an example listing of available homes in the area. They can maintain and make available to current and prospective employees a listing of homes, or apartments, for sale or lease in the local area.

As a member benefit, REALTORS® can take advantage of NAR resources. One of these are REBAC’s Consumer One-Sheets for a Buyer Kit. These can be distributed at the homebuyer workshops. See http://rebac.net/home-buying-getting-started/home-buyers-toolkit

Another resource for REALTORS® is the REALTOR Property Resource® (RPR). RPR provides comprehensive property data to provide powerful analytics and dynamic reports that can be used in workshops. See http://www.narrpr.com

It is important that a real estate agent not conduct a foreclosure assistance workshop if he/she is not qualified to do so. Instead, the qualified nonprofit organization with foreclosure expertise that is participating as a team member should fill this role.

A real estate agent can use an EAH program as a source of credibility. Through their partnerships with the team, the real estate agent can show a commitment to preserving and revitalizing the community, and as having an interest in the welfare of the community’s workforce.

Also, remember that in many cases, the transaction process starts long before a consumer picks up the phone to call a real estate professional. The challenge is to stay in touch with clients to cement a relationship with a true buyer. To become a trusted advisor, a real estate professional needs to be at the center of any conversation about real estate well before the consumer buys a home.

This means building enduring relationships that start before a sale and continue beyond closing - in other words, making sure that the transaction never ends. Participating in an employer-assisted housing benefit plan can help you build this type of relationship with clients. By periodically conducting homebuyer and homeownership classes for the
employer, the real estate agent has the opportunity for regular introductions to new clients and customers.

If a real estate professional approaches an employer alone, without a team, and without a nonprofit organization, he or she may be viewed as simply interested in trying to get clients. If he or she approaches the employer as part of a team, he or she is seen as part of that team and will have a greater chance of success in working with an employer.

The team also enables the real estate professional to partner with others who have additional expertise to assist with developing EAH benefits. The real estate professional will be able to utilize the expertise of nonprofits, lenders, home improvement specialists and other experts to help offer a valuable benefit to the employer. Additionally, team members can be used as a source of introductions to employers and can help access local financial assistance programs.

Role of the Lender

A lender can be a valuable addition to the team. The lender should know what low-cost financing alternatives are currently available from their organization and from state housing finance organizations. They also should be able to identify mortgage financing that works with EAH financial assistance.

The lender should also understand current mortgage underwriting requirements and can assist in explaining these requirements at homebuyer workshops, as well as to employees during the homebuying process. A lender may provide added depth when meeting with employers. You may want to work out special arrangements with a lender to provide a benefit to participating employees. Many employers will not want to restrict their employees to a particular lender, but if a lender offers an incentive or an attractive mortgage product, employees may choose that lender.

CRA Considerations

There may be an added benefit for the lender to be part of the team. The Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) is designed to encourage commercial banks and savings associations to meet
the needs of borrowers in all segments of their communities, including low- and moderate-income neighborhoods, typically defined as at or below 80% of area median income. A lender’s participation on a team may help it meet its CRA goals, especially when the employees’ incomes are within the CRA income range. "Understanding Employer-Assisted Mortgage Programs: A Primer for National Banks" (http://www.occ.gov/topics/community-affairs/publications/insights/insights-employer-assisted-mortgage-programs.pdf) discusses this and other benefits for a bank involved in making mortgages for borrowers participating in employer-assisted housing benefit programs. It also looks at how banks can offer loan products to complement employer-assisted home purchase programs and discusses how these programs can be offered in the conventional secondary mortgage market.

Several broad categories of financial capability activities that help potential bank customers, help banks strengthen their communities, and support the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) include:

- Basic financial product knowledge
- Financial empowerment initiatives
- Financial education and coaching
- Home ownership counseling
- Counseling services;


The findings of a TD Bank survey in 2014 shows that there is ample opportunity for lenders to participate in homebuyer workshops.

"...63% of REALTORS® felt that lenders should offer more information on affordability programs. While most of the respondents were familiar with such loans, they reported that only 20% of their buyers are aware of affordability programs...."

HomeStreet Bank’s EAH Program

Affinity Lending is a special department at HomeStreet Bank (Simplicity Bank as of March 2015) that offers an employer-assisted housing program called the Hometown Home Loan Program. Select employers and membership organizations include the Hometown Home Loan program in their benefits packages, saving their employees and members thousands of dollars on their home loans. The Hometown Home Loan has been helping employees become homeowners since 1994. This program is made possible by a partnership between the employers who adopt the program and housing professionals, such as Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, local partners, such as the Washington State Housing Finance Commission and the Portland Housing Center, as well as many municipal and community organizations. Benefits include reduced closing costs, homeownership education, and downpayment assistance programs. See more at https://www.homestreet.com/business/partnership-programs/employer-benefit-program.

Other Partners and Roles

In addition to the nonprofit organization and the lender, you may wish to include other partners on your team including title companies, appraisers, home inspectors and other companies that can assist with home maintenance and repair.

The real estate professional or the nonprofit partner (and sometimes the employer) can negotiate with these service providers on the home purchase transaction for reduced fees. For instance, they may negotiate with a lender for reduced loan origination fees or for low cost or no cost credit reports. They may also negotiate for reduced appraisal fees or home inspection costs.

Such companies as Lowe’s or Home Depot are excellent sources of information on what is necessary to maintain a home once you own it and on how to make normal household repairs. It is important that homeowners understand the maintenance and repair requirements of homeownership, particularly if this is their first home.
NAR’s Partnership with Lowe’s

Lowe’s and NAR have teamed up to provide REALTORS® an exciting real estate marketing tool. Under this exclusive program, Lowe’s will send valuable coupons and rebate offers to your customers and clients, on your behalf, via highly customized direct mail. Best of all, it’s absolutely free to REALTORS®. As an added benefit of Lowe’s participation in the REALTOR® Benefits Program, REALTORS® can purchase gift cards and receive a five (5) percent discount. You can build this benefit into any EAH benefit offered by an employer. For more information, visit LowesRealtorBenefits.com.

Team Building Tools

The Tools & Resources section of this guide includes several tools to help you build a team. You will find tips on how to find nonprofit housing counseling agencies and an Action Plan Worksheet – Form a Team, where you can identify the roles required of your team, identify specifically which organizations you currently know that might fill these roles on your team and make note of roles where you have not yet identified any organizations or individuals. There are also sample letters you may wish to use when contacting nonprofits, lenders and other team members.

The Action Plan, Step 3: Identify & Contact Employers

The third step in the Action Plan is Identifying and Contacting employers. You should work with your team to see what team member is the best person to make the initial contact with the employer.

Identify Local Employers

There are many employers in a local market. As a real estate agent, you may or may not be familiar with all of these employers. Often, everyone is familiar with the major local employers, but not everyone is familiar with all the employers in the area.
It is best to start your employer identification process with employers where you have an existing relationship or with whom your team members have an existing relationship. You might also ask your team members to identify employers with whom they have a relationship. Think of the transactions you have been involved in. Where did the buyer work? Where did the seller work? Also, consider employers you know from your memberships in local organizations. Faith-based organizations are often a good source of information and contacts on local employers. You might also consider some of the employers you have read about in the local newspaper or local business journals. These employers are often trendsetters who are interested in new and innovative programs. You should contact your local economic development agency for information on employers they believe might be interested in an innovative and cost-effective benefit that may help employers to meet their goals and objectives.

Finally, you should consider the types of employers who might benefit from an EAH program. These were discussed in Module 2 and include employers who have a need to recruit and retain workers and who can use an EAH program to increase staff loyalty.

**TOOL**

*Identify Local Employers Worksheet (p. TR.7).* This worksheet will get you started in identifying local employers.

**Whom to Contact**

It is critical when you contact the company, that you contact the appropriate individuals. It is best to contact the owner of the company or senior management. These individuals see the big picture and are responsible for the bottom line of the business. They are likely to see the value of an employer-assisted housing benefit and understand how employer-assisted housing can help them with their business goals such as recruiting and retaining employees, creating positive publicity for their company and helping to stabilize and revitalize surrounding neighborhoods. Owners and senior management are the decision makers for the company.
At other times, you may wish to speak with the human resources manager in the company. The human resources manager understands the costs of employee recruitment and retention and represent the department that will be responsible for administering the employer-assisted housing benefit. You will likely work closely with the human resources department to initiate the benefit and schedule workshops.

The key difference between owners, senior management and human resources, is human resources is not often the ultimate decision maker. Human resources may also be resistant to taking on the additional work to administer an EAH benefit. Owners and managers may see the value of the program more readily.

How to Contact an Employer

When you contact an employer, you should always attempt to network your way into the company. Cold calling is probably not going to be an effective technique. Use your team and your clients as a source of referrals. It is usually best if a person with whom you have an existing relationship refers you to the company, or if a person refers you to the company with whom a team member has an existing relationship.

If you do not have an existing relationship with an employer, consider ways to get a referral. For instance, you might approach a business organization about using a regular meeting as an opportunity to introduce employer-assisted housing to their membership and thereby reach employers this way.

You might also consider developing new contacts with employers involved in such organizations as the Chamber of Commerce, the Rotary Club, or other business trade groups. You may want to schedule a meeting with these groups and introduce EAH to them via the group PowerPoint presentation.

To make the initial contact with the employer, you can use the sample letter to the employer found in the Tools & Resources section. After you send the letter, be sure to follow-up with a phone call. Make sure the
The employer received the letter and offer to answer any questions the employer may have.

You will then want to ask the employer when you can schedule a time for you and your team to meet with him or her to discuss EAH in more detail. Use the phone call as an opportunity to set-up a meeting with the employer.

**TOOL**

Included in the Tools & Resources section in the Participant Guide is a sample letter you might send to an employer (p. TR.33). There is also a worksheet to keep track of the employers you contacted and the outcome.

### The Action Plan, Step 4: Meet with Employers

The fourth step in the Action Plan is meeting with the employers. You should work with your team to see what team member(s) should meet with the employer and what their role will be.

#### Preparing for the Employer Meeting

Once you have your team in place and have identified and contacted an employer, the next step is to meet with the employer. Before you meet with the employer, you want to make sure you do your homework. It is very important that you prepare for the meeting so you are familiar with what to say and how to react to any objections the employer may bring up.

You should be aware of the employer’s primary business, their locations in a community, the number of employees at each location, the types of jobs these employees perform and the workforce wage levels. You should research the employer and know what concerns the employer’s industry may be facing. You should be familiar with the issues that are important to the employer and how an employer-assisted housing benefit might help address these issues. At the meeting, the employer can discuss specific needs and concerns. The employer’s business or industry may determine what type of benefit they offer.
Additionally, you should be aware of the employer’s culture. Is the employer a socially motivated employer? Is the employer interested in investing in the adjoining neighborhood? Does the employer have an interest in helping to create a work-life balance for employees?

The type of benefit an employer could offer may depend on the employer’s business and objectives. For example, hospitals are facing a shortage of nurses — and financial assistance can move them ahead of their competition and help to retain employees. Other place-based employers may want to help stabilize the communities in which they are located. Financial institutions need to sell mortgages, so they might want to offer their own mortgage products as part of the program. Manufacturers want a stable workforce nearby. Municipalities want their workforce to both live and work in their community.

You need to make sure you conducted research on the community and local housing market as well as existing financial programs and housing initiatives and present this information to the employer. This research was discussed in Step 1.

You should make copies of anything you would like to distribute to the employer at the meeting. Having this material ready can help reduce an employer’s concerns and show that you are prepared. In fact, one real estate agent was called upon to give a presentation to human resources staff immediately following a meeting with management.

Lastly, you should rehearse the talking points and script before you meet with the employer.

Employer Meeting Outline

Let’s talk about what should take place during the employer meeting. First, you should make it a point to introduce yourself and to introduce your team. Also, make sure you mention any team members who are not with you and their roles so the employer understands the depth of the team you have created. As pointed out previously, it is important to let the employers know you are part of a team so they will not think you are working alone on this effort. The employer will likely view the team approach more favorably.
You also want to let the employer know the purpose of the meeting: that you and your team would like to give an overview of a benefit they can offer to their employees; how this benefit can help the employer, employee and community; and how the team can help to implement these benefits.

Discuss with the employer the information you found out during your research on the local community. Give the employer information on the local housing market and the listing of employers implementing EAH included in the Tools & Resources section.

Provide an overview of employer-assisted housing, the three (3) EAH options and the benefits to the employer, employee and community. You should let the employer know that EAH can help solve concerns related to the company’s objectives and goals, such as retention or community public relations. You may want to have the employer discuss some of his or her particular issues and concerns and then discuss how an EAH benefit can help address these concerns.

In discussing the three key types of employer-assisted housing, include your team’s role and the employer’s role in implementing these benefits. Explain all the logistics and the steps in administering and managing an EAH benefit. Your nonprofit partner may be able to assist the employer with the plan administration and management. Also refer the employer to the Step-by-Step Guide on Implementing an EAH Benefit.

You may also want to show the employer the flyer and PowerPoint that will be used for the homebuyer workshops and any other materials you will give to the employees at the workshop. If you have created the foreclosure prevention resources package, show the employer those resources and emphasize that the company can disseminate them to employees.

Homebuyer & Homeownership Education Overview

The first EAH benefit you should introduce to the employer is the homebuyer and homeownership education workshops. Start by reviewing the content of these workshops and what will be covered in the

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**Slide 76**

Exercise: Three (3) EAH benefits

- Discussion exercise:
  - What will you discuss in your meeting with the employer related to:
    - Homebuyer homeowner benefit
    - Counseling benefit
    - Financial assistance benefit
workshops. This information was covered previously in Module 3. Discuss how the workshops and foreclosure prevention resources can help their employees.

Next, describe the role of the real estate agent and team in organizing and conducting the workshops. Note that this is the one benefit that can be implemented by the real estate agent and/or the team. Also note that the employees are not obligated to work with you or the team members after the workshops. They can select their own real estate professionals or lender to work with.

You may not be able to cover everything in one workshop, so you may need to have several workshops. Certain employees may be interested in certain topics. This would also be something you would discuss with the employer.

Discuss the employer's role and what the employer can do, such as providing a space for the workshop on-site and providing snacks. If the employer is not willing or able to offer space for the workshop, let him or her know that the workshops can be conducted at other, neutral sites such as the nonprofit's offices.

**One-on-One Counseling Overview**

You should describe the value of one-on-one counseling to employees and discuss the role of the nonprofit partner, including fees, in providing the counseling sessions. You should also discuss where the sessions are held and what the employer's role is. This was previously discussed in Module 3.

Let the employer know that homebuyer education and one-on-one counseling programs can be a good phase one to an employer-assisted housing benefit. These programs are easy and inexpensive to implement. There is no need for the employer to make a significant financial investment.

**Financial Assistance Overview**

You should review the types of financial assistance benefits (loans, grants and matched savings) with the employer. Also, review the financial and staffing resources needed to implement a financial assistance benefit as
well as the tax implications and any tax advantages. Tell the employer he or she may want to conduct a cost benefit analysis before implementing a financial assistance benefit. Explain that you can be available to answer additional questions and point to useful resources. Refer employers to the Step-by-Step Guide to Implementing an EAH Benefit available on www.REALTOR.org.

Mention that even if employers determine not to offer a financial benefit, they can still assist their employees in this area by connecting them with other sources of financial assistance, such as city and state financial assistance programs. After you review the types of EAH options, the final step in the meeting is to see if the employer is interested in offering an EAH benefit and discuss what you can do to make that happen.

After you review the types of EAH options, the final step in the meeting is to see if the employer is interested in offering an EAH benefit and discuss what you can do to make that happen.

The Employer Meeting: Tools & Resources

As part of this program, we have developed a set of tools to help you meet with employers and initiate an employer-assisted housing benefit. These resources include:

- Employer talking points – review before meeting with the employer;
- Employer meeting script – review before meeting with the employer;
- Examples of employers implementing EAH benefits - print these examples out and give to the employer;
- Group meeting presentation - can be used for public meetings or meetings with governmental agencies;
- Homebuyer workshop flyer template – customize and use to promote the workshops;
- Homebuyer workshop presentation – customize and use to present the homebuyer workshop to employees;
- Want to Build Your brochure (an updated version will be replacing this brochure) - leave it with the employer to provide information on EAH;
Areas of Resistance

As you meet with the employer, it is important to recognize that you may encounter some resistance. One area in which you may encounter resistance is the use of the term *benefit* in describing employer-assisted housing. The word may have a negative connotation to an employer. "Benefit" may be associated with the employer undertaking specific legal obligations that cost money, such as health insurance benefits.

The use of the term *benefit* can sound alarm bells particularly for smaller employers who do not typically offer many benefits. If this is the case, avoid using “benefit” when describing an employer-assisted housing benefit and use other terms, such as “educational program” or “work-life program.”

Unless you are fully aware of an employer’s willingness to commit financial resources to an employer-assisted housing benefit, you should approach the issue of financial assistance with an employer cautiously. An employer may not be willing to offer financial assistance at this time. This may be due to financial constraints or because the employer is not sure of the value of the program. If this is the case, you should focus on homebuyer education and one-on-one counseling. Financial assistance can always be added later.

Employer Concerns

One of the key things you should do in preparing to meet with an employer is understand the objections to an employer-assisted housing benefit the employer may raise and be prepared to respond to them. Let’s discuss some employer objections and the response to each. These are also described more fully in the Talking Points tool.

Employers may note that they have high turnover but say they cannot afford to offer an employer-assisted housing benefit.
Your response to this situation could include:

- Telling them, if they have information on turnover costs, to conduct a cost/benefit analysis to quantify the benefit.
- Noting that they can target the EAH benefit to the jobs with the highest turnover to maximize value on their investment.
- Noting that they can begin by allocating a limited number of dollars to the program and not make a full financial commitment up front.
- Suggesting they offer homebuyer education and counseling programs as a first step. These programs can be provided for little or no cost.

Employers may say that they do not have any funds in their budget for an EAH benefit.

Your response to this situation should include:

- Suggesting they offer homebuyer and homeownership education and counseling as these can be offered at little or no cost.
- Suggesting they allow the counseling sessions to be conducted on-site and allowing employees time off to attend the sessions or to attend a closing.

Employers may say that they do not have staff available to administer an EAH benefit plan.

Your response to this situation should include:

- Suggesting homebuyer and homeownership workshops that require very little staff time. Staff is only needed for simple tasks such as handling signups for the workshops and booking conference rooms.
- Suggesting that they offer simple financial assistance benefits, such as one-time grants that do not require extensive ongoing administration.
• Suggesting that they use the nonprofit partner or another organization to administer the benefit.

Employers might say that they cannot afford to offer the benefit to everyone and that they are not able to offer benefits unless they are available to everyone.

Your response to this situation could include:

• Noting that only a small percentage of employees will need an employer-assisted housing benefit at any given time. Typically, this number is 10 percent or less. The employer can offer the program to everyone knowing that not everyone will use it at the same time.

• Mentioning that this is similar to what happens with some of their other benefits such as child-care and educational reimbursement. While these benefits are available to everyone, only a limited number of employees use these at any given time.

Employers may say that they can afford to offer very little, and that this will not be enough to make a difference for the employee.

Your response to this situation could include:

• Offering to provide homebuyer and homeownership workshops, which will cost the employer little or nothing.

• Mentioning that the real estate agent and the team can help identify local financial assistance programs and vendor discounts that can be utilized as part of an EAH benefit. This is a means of helping the employees get money to purchase a home, but not at a cost to the employer.

• Noting that even small amounts can help with closing costs.

• Noting that even providing a simple employer-assisted housing benefit sends a message to employees that you are interested in their work-life balance.
Last Steps Before You Leave

Before you leave the employer meeting, be sure to:

- Distribute the Want to Build Your Business brochure;
- Distribute your business card;
- Point out that there are more EAH Resources, including the *Step-by-Step Guide*;
- Ask the employer if he or she has any questions;
- Ask if you can follow up with the employer;
- Thank the employer for his or her time.

Class Summary

Here is a summary of what was presented in the EAH class:

- Workforce housing issues facing employers.
- Barriers to homeownership.
- Concept of employer-assisted housing, or EAH, and the key types of EAH benefits.
- Benefits of an employer-assisted housing to the employer, to the employee, to the community and to the real estate agent and the team.
- How to research your market.
- The importance of a team; and how to form a team.
- How to identify and contact employers.
- The strategies for meeting with an employer, addressing employer concerns and recommending an employer-assisted housing benefit that meets the needs of an employer.
- How to create a long-term business strategy for yourself, which will provide a source of referrals and establish you as a leading real estate agent in your community.
What’s Next?

Your next step is to implement the action plan. You can do this yourself or ask the class sponsor and/or local REALTOR® association to play a role (see information on an optional follow-up class below).

You should complete the Action Plan Worksheets. These worksheets will assist you in conducting your research, finding team members and identifying and contacting employers.

You should also join the EAH Class Online Community for Students to network with other students and ask questions. See the “Online Community for Students” in the overview.

Optional Follow-up Sessions

You may want to work with your local REALTOR® association and ask them to hold a follow-up class. This session can be tailored to meet the needs of the students. The students may want to work on the Action Plan as a team, including identifying nonprofits and employers and conducting the local market research.

The follow-up class could also include practicing the role plays. There are five role plays to conduct.

The sessions could also include customizing and practicing the homebuyer workshop and the group presentation. It may also include creating a foreclosure prevention workshop and identifying nonprofits that can assist with this workshop.

Work with Your Local REALTOR® Association

State and local REALTOR® associations can also take the lead in developing partnerships and/or developing local EAH initiatives. Some state and local REALTOR® associations have started to develop workforce housing programs.
Some associations have established housing opportunity or workforce housing committees. You may want to see how to become a member of the committee.

Other REALTOR® associations have developed unique, local EAH programs and you might want to see how you can become involved with these programs.

NAR Employer Assisted Housing Initiative Guide:

NAR has developed the Employer-Assisted Housing Initiative Guide to be used by state and local REALTOR® associations to plan and develop an EAH initiative. The Guide provides a road map for associations to plan and implement an EAH initiative to help increase affordable housing opportunities for working families in your community. It can be found at http://www.realtoractioncenter.com/for-associations/housing-opportunity/workforce-housing/eah-guide.html. Funding assistance for an initiative is available via NAR's housing opportunity or issues mobilization grants. You may want to work with your local association to encourage them to implement an EAH program.

REALTOR® Associations EAH Programs:

The Wisconsin REALTORS® Association (WRA) partnered with the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA) to develop Wisconsin Housing Works. This initiative includes a website for REALTORS®, employers, nonprofits, government, and homebuyers to learn about EAH, identify roles and responsibilities, and design an EAH program (see http://wisconsinhousingworks.com).

The ADA County Association of REALTORS® (ACAR) has been working diligently on its employer assisted housing efforts in and around Boise, Idaho. ACAR first started its efforts with NAR’s Employer-Assisted Housing (EAH) class. They then formed a new task force of ACAR member volunteers who took the EAH class. In 2014, ACAR, with the help of the task force members and the Hope Home Foundation (http://hopehomefoundation.com), held an Employer Assisted Housing Summit in Boise.
Several employers indicated their interest in EAH on response cards, and the task force members followed up with each of them. "In the end, four employers showed a really sincere interest, and were moving forward on an EAH benefit with our help" said Marc Lebowitz, ACAR’s Executive Office. It’s a big step for an employer -- but it doesn’t have to be a scary one. In fact, the challenge for us is communicating to human resource departments how simple, easy, and painless it can be for the employer. We’re learning how to get that message across."

The Mainstreet Organization of REALTORS® (MORE) jointly hosted an Employer Assisted Housing (EAH) class with the REALTOR® Association of the Fox Valley (RAFV). About 50 real estate professionals participated in the class. "The EAH class spurred us to start talking to city officials in Aurora, IL and the Chamber of Commerce, to explore how we could use what we’d been learning," says Kristen Jungles, the Government Affairs Director for RAFV and MORE.

The city of Aurora has a strong down-payment assistance program and plenty of affordable housing is available. They also have a high percentage of employees working in Aurora who commute from elsewhere. MORE and RAFV partnered with the city and local lending institutions to hold a housing expo and trolley tour. They called it "Experience Aurora." The Mayor of Aurora sent a letter to local employers promoting the expo and tour. Several hundred employees attended eager to learn and to visit available properties. REALTORS® and lenders staffed booths and met with would-be homebuyers. An old-fashioned trolley shuttled visitors to 10 available houses within a 10-block radius of the expo site, with an additional 20 nearby open houses poised to begin immediately following the expo.

"The whole purpose of Employer Assisted Housing is to educate the workforce, and they were there to learn. They clearly knew that Aurora would be a good place to live, but they hadn’t known that it was an option." The success of the event has opened doors to corporations in Aurora, and local human resource directors are responding to Jungles’ outreach offering home buying presentations by
MORE and RAFV members who have received the EAH training.

Contact Information

If you have any additional questions about the class, contact NAR at eah@realtors.org and www.realtor.org/eahclass.