

Alphabet Soup: Breaking Down All Those Housing and Community Development Terms

Confused by the acronyms and initials dotting your reading material? All fields have them, and housing is no exception. Here's what many of the most common mean.

By **Shelterforce Staff** - April 14, 2022



Photo by Flickr user Matt Gibson, CC BY-NC 2.0

Confused by the acronyms and initials dotting your reading material? All fields have them, and housing is no exception. Here's what many of the most common mean.

Jump to any letter:

A C D E F G H I L M N P Q R S T U Y

AFFH – affirmatively furthering fair housing

Language from the Fair Housing Act stating that all federal agencies have a duty act proactively with regard to fair housing. AFFH is used to refer to either that duty, or the actions and regulations that spell out how that duty is to be realized, which have been highly contentious. [Read more.](#)

AMI – area median income

The median household income for a given metropolitan area. Often used to determine both eligibility for affordable housing and what constitutes affordable rents or prices. Read "[The Secret History of Area Median Income](#)"

C

CAPACD – National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development

(often pronounced "capacity")

National membership association.

CBA – community benefits agreement

An agreement negotiated between community stakeholders and (usually) a developer to mitigate the effects of the development through things that benefit the community. [Read more.](#)

- **Potential confusion alert:** "Community benefits" is also the language used to refer to a requirement the Affordable Care Act placed upon nonprofit hospitals to support their communities.

CCP – Center for Community Progress

A national advocate and technical assistance provider focused on addressing vacant properties. Formerly the National Vacant Properties Campaign.

CDBG – Community Development Block Grants

A block grant [administered through HUD](#) to municipalities or states that can be used for a wide range of purposes that are supposed to further community development in some way.

CDC – community development corporation

A type of place-based nonprofit organization that uses tools of planning and real estate development to support its community. [Read more.](#)

- **Potential confusion alert:** Outside of the community development field, “the CDC” is commonly understood to mean the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

CDE – community development entity

A *certification* from the CDFI Fund that allows an organization to receive New Markets Tax Credit allocations or loans or investments from other CDEs that have received NMTC allocations.

CDFI – community development financial institution

A designation for community lenders that have met the standards to qualify to apply for funds from the federal CDFI Fund, housed at the Treasury Department. [Read more.](#)

CHDO – community housing development organization (often pronounced “choe-doe”)

A *designation* for community-based organizations allowing them to access a portion of federal HOME funds set aside just for them. CHDOs—which overlap heavily with CDCs—must, among other things, be private nonprofits with designated geographic areas and least one-third of their board composed of representatives of the low-income community.

CHNA – community health needs assessment (often pronounced “china”)

A process that nonprofit hospitals must conduct every three years to determine how to direct their community benefits. [Read more.](#)

CLT – community land trust

A form of community ownership where an entity (usually a community-controlled nonprofit) holds land in trust for community benefit, while others own and operate buildings of various sorts on that land. [Read more: “Understanding Community Land Trusts”](#)

- **Potential confusion alert:** Sometimes shortened to “land trust,” which can generate confusion with conservation land trusts, which are about open space preservation.

CoC – continuum of care

A regional or local planning body that coordinates housing and services funding for homeless families and individuals. A formal designation for federal funding purposes.

CRA – Community Reinvestment Act

A law passed in 1975 designed to rectify discrimination on the part of financial institutions by requiring them to make loans and investments in all places where they take deposits.

[Read more.](#)

D**DBE – disadvantaged business enterprise**

A term used in some targeted contracting or purchasing policies to try to be more specific (or sometimes broader) than M/WBE (Minority- and Women-owned Business Enterprises).

DTI – debt-to-income ratio

A measure used in underwriting mortgages.

E**ELI – extremely low income**

Usually refers to households earning less than 30 percent of the area median income.

ESG – emergency solutions grant (formerly known as emergency shelter grants)

A federal program intended to help people exit homelessness.

ERA/ERAP – emergency rental assistance (program)

Federal program funded in two waves in 2020 and 2021 to provide rental assistance for those experiencing financial repercussions from the COVID-19 pandemic.

F

Fannie Mae (less commonly known as the Federal National Mortgage Association, or FNMA) and Freddie Mac (less commonly known as the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation, or FHLMC)

Two government-sponsored enterprises (GSEs) that purchase batches of mortgages made by local lenders, giving the lenders more liquidity to make more loans.

FAR – floor area ratio

The ratio of a building's footprint to the size of the parcel it's on. A measure that's often regulated through zoning.

FHA – Federal Housing Administration

An agency of HUD whose primary goal is to provide mortgage insurance so that more people can access mortgages.

- **Potential confusion alert:** Sometimes confused with the no-longer-in-existence Farmers Home Administration, or FmHA, an agency of the USDA.

FHEO – Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity

An office within HUD.

FMR – fair market rent

A measure set by HUD, per region, and used to determine how much HUD will pay toward rent for Housing Choice Voucher holders.

FHFA – Federal Housing Finance Agency

Federal agency created during the Great Recession to take conservatorship of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mae. It continues to regulate both. Read "[Doing Their Duty: Should Fannie, Freddie Invest More in Underserved Markets?](#)"

G

Ginnie Mae – Government National Mortgage Association (GNMA)

A government agency within HUD (not a GSE) that guarantees government loans, including those made through the Federal Housing Administration, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, USDA Rural Development, and the Office of Public and Indian Housing.

GSE – government sponsored enterprise

A company that is run privately but supported (and regulated) by the government to achieve some public purpose. Most notably, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.

H

HAUTMSS – housing affordable until the market speculation starts (pronounced "hot mess")

An alternative to "Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing" [proposed by Steve King in Shelterforce](#).

HELOC – home equity line of credit

A form of home-equity loan that allows the borrower to draw funds as needed.

HFA – housing finance agency

A government agency, typically at the state level but also sometimes local, that oversees housing finance and the distribution of federal Low Income Housing Tax Credits.

HOME – The HOME Investment Partnerships Program

A formula grant program given to states and localities which can be used to fund building, buying, and/or rehabilitating affordable housing for rent or homeownership or providing direct rental assistance to low-income people.

HOPE VI – Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere VI (pronounced “Hope 6”)

A much-criticized public housing redevelopment program that operated from 1993 to 2010.

[Read more.](#)

HUD – Department of Housing and Urban Development

A federal agency formed in 1965. HUD oversees public housing and vouchers, federal anti-homelessness efforts, fair housing enforcement, HOME funds, CDBG, and the FHA.

I

IZ – inclusionary zoning

A policy in which a municipality requires the inclusion of affordable housing units within certain developments (or the funding thereof off-site by the developers.) The preferred term is now inclusionary housing policies, often shortened to “inclusionary.” Read [“10 Ways to Talk About Inclusionary Housing, Differently”](#)

L

LIHTC – Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (often pronounced “lie-tech”)

A program within the U.S. Treasury Department that provides tax credits for investing in the construction or renovation of affordable housing. Read [“Chicago Changes How It Allocates Tax Credits to Improve Racial Equity”](#)

LISC – Local Initiatives Support Corporation

A national CDFI, tax credit syndicator, and community development intermediary. Read [“How LISC, Enterprise Hope to Bring More Capital to Developers of Color”](#)

LTV – loan-to-value ratio

Used in lending to talk about what percentage of a property's total value a loan is for, and thus how large a downpayment is required.

M

MDI – minority depository institution

A federal designation indicating banks and other financial institutions that are either owned or directed primarily by members of certain groups—African American, Asian American, Hispanic American, and Native American.

M/WBE – minority/women-owned business enterprise

Usually a formal term indicating at least 50 percent ownership by a "minority" or woman. The term is typically used in targeted contracting or purchasing programs. Read "[Women- and Minority-Owned Businesses' Is a Meaningless Category](#)"

N

NACEDA – National Alliance of Community Economic Development Associations

Membership organization for state and regional associations of community development corporations.

NAEH – National Alliance to End Homelessness

National advocacy organization.

NAHB – National Association of Home Builders

National trade association.

NAHT –

1. National Alliance of HUD Tenants

A national organizing group representing the interests of tenants in privately owned but HUD-subsidized housing.

2. **National Affordable Housing Trust**

A nonprofit low-income housing tax credit syndicator, specialized financial intermediary, and development advisory firm.

NALCAB – National Association for Latino Community Asset Builders

National membership organization.

NAR – National Association of Realtors

National trade association.

NCCED – National Congress for Community Economic Development

Formerly a membership organization of community development nonprofits, defunct since 2008.

NCH – National Coalition for the Homeless

NCRC – National Community Reinvestment Coalition

An association of more than 600 community-based organizations that promote access to basic banking services, affordable housing, and more. NCRC has a particular knowledge of and advocacy around the CRA.

NFHA – National Fair Housing Alliance

National advocacy and legal organization.

NHC – National Housing Conference

A big-tent membership organization of affordable housing stakeholders.

NHTF – National Housing Trust Fund

A source of funding for the development of primarily rental housing affordable to extremely low-income households, funded by a fee on Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac activity.

NHLP – National Housing Law Project

National advocacy organization focused on legal aspects of housing justice.

NHT – National Housing Trust

A national nonprofit engaged in housing preservation through public policy advocacy, real estate development, and lending.

NIMBY – not in my back yard

A person or group that claims to support affordable housing or other community amenities, but opposes development that would affect their neighborhood directly, often for specious reasons. [Read more.](#)

NLIHC – National Low Income Housing Coalition

An advocacy group focused on the housing needs of extremely low-income renters.

NMTC – New Markets Tax Credit

A federal tax credit for investing in "distressed communities."

NNA – National NeighborWorks Association

Trade association for NeighborWorks chartered organizations.

- **Potential confusion:** Not the same as NeighborWorks America (see below), which is the Congressionally supported organization that certifies, supports, and trains NeighborWorks organizations.

NOFA – notice of funding availability

A formal announcement that government funds are available to be applied for. The government version of a request for proposals or a grant application.

NOAH – naturally occurring affordable housing

Term used to indicate housing that is relatively affordable and not receiving direct subsidies or subject to income restrictions. Often considered unlikely to stay affordable for long. (See [HAUTMSS](#).)

NSP (and NSP2) – Neighborhood Stabilization Program

Funding program created by the federal stimulus package for the Great Recession to allow for purchasing vacant and foreclosed properties and redeveloping them.

NW – NeighborWorks America (formerly Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation)

A Congressionally supported organization that certifies, supports, and trains a network of place-based community development organizations.

P

PBRA – project-based rental assistance (Commonly known as project-based Section 8)

Federal assistance for privately owned housing that stays with a given unit, rather than a given tenant.

PIH – Public and Indian Housing

An office of HUD.

PHA – public housing authority

An independent agency in charge of managing both public housing and housing choice vouchers for a given region or city.

PHIMBY – public housing in my back yard

People who actively support development of affordable housing, but not necessarily all market-rate development.

PJ – participating jurisdiction

The term given to any state, local government, or consortium that has been designated by HUD to administer a HOME program.

PMI – private mortgage insurance

Insurance that protects lenders if borrowers default. Typically required by lenders if a borrower's downpayment is less than 20 percent.

PSH – permanent supportive housing

Long-term housing that incorporates various ongoing supports, such as case management and health services, for those with additional needs.

Q**QAP – qualified allocation plan**

The rules and priorities set down by a housing finance agency that guide the allocation of low-income housing tax credits.

R

RAD – Rental Assistance Demonstration

A long-running pilot program at HUD intended to deal with accumulated capital needs in public housing by allowing PHAs to convert some units to project-based Section 8 assistance and attract private investment for renovation. Read "[Does RAD Privatize Public Housing?](#)"

REIT – real estate investment trust (often pronounced "reet")

Investment vehicles that own or finance income-producing real estate. [Housing Partnership Equity Trust](#) is a nonprofit one focused on affordable housing preservation.

ROFR – right of first refusal

A contractual right to enter into a transaction before anyone else can. [Tenant opportunity to purchase acts](#) offer some form of right of first refusal to tenants of a property that is for sale. Also shows up in [LIHTC deals](#). There can be various limits to the right, including what triggers it and how much the purchaser must offer.

REO – real-estate owned

Property owned by financial institutions post-foreclosure.

S

SAFMR – small area fair market rent

A pilot program by HUD to calculate fair market rents for smaller areas than metro regions in order to make it easier for voucher holders to move to higher-cost neighborhoods. Read "[Newly Suspended HUD Rule Would Have Expanded Access to Neighborhood Opportunity](#)"

SDoH – social determinants of health

All the factors beyond medical care and genetics that affect a person's health. Notably includes things like stable, healthy, and affordable housing; access to transportation; and a

safe neighborhood. [Read more.](#)

SEH – shared-equity homeownership

A collective term for forms of homeownership where the rights and responsibilities are shared between the homeowner and an entity representing wider community interests. Includes community land trusts, limited-equity cooperatives, and deed-restricted affordable housing. Read "[The State of Shared-Equity Homeownership](#)"

SMM – secondary mortgage market

The process by which mortgages are purchased in bulk to free up liquidity for local lenders to issue more mortgages.

SRO – single room occupancy

Housing where residents have a single room and share facilities such as bathrooms.

T

TBRA – tenant-based rental assistance

Rental assistance that follows a qualifying resident rather than staying with a housing unit. Typically referred to as vouchers.

TIF – tax increment financing

A method of financing a development whereby some portion of the new tax revenue for the area post-development is dedicated to paying off loans or investors for a period of time.

TOD – transit-oriented development

Development for which location, design, and density are meant to take advantage of, and encourage use of, transit, usually near a station or stop.

U

UGB – urban growth boundary

A zoning tool that limits urban development around a metro area.

USDA – United States Department of Agriculture

Federal agency that encompasses rural housing programs. Read ["Why Keep Rural Housing Programs at the USDA?"](#)

Y

YIMBY – yes in my back yard

A movement that supports increased housing development, especially dense multifamily development, as a way to reduce overall housing costs. Read ["YIMBYs: Friend, Foe, or Chaos Agent?"](#)

Notes:

We have only included national organizations of relevance to the affordable housing and community development fields. We cannot include organizations with a smaller footprint.

This is a guide to commonly encountered *acronyms and abbreviations* in the affordable housing world, not an attempt at a complete glossary. (We have, however, produced glossaries of clusters of terms to do with specific topics, such as [housing assistance eligibility](#) and [rent control](#), and may do more in the future.)

Did we miss something important? Please suggest additions in the comments!

Shelterforce Staff

Shelterforce is the only independent, non-academic publication covering the worlds of community development, affordable housing, and neighborhood stabilization.

