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## THE ROLE OF HUD'S HOME PAGE IN CARRYING OUT HUD'S MISSION

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### Introduction

HUD posted its first home page on the internet in April 1995. Since then, the home page has grown into an elaborate clearinghouse of information and services related to homes and communities, targeted both to citizens and to HUD's partners. It has been recognized by many major web reviewers, including USA Today, Yahoo, and the National Center for Supercomputing Applications; and recently, Government Executive Magazine named it one of the top 10 Federal Web Sites.

HUD's home page is a good example of the intention of the "new HUD" to step out of bureaucratic structures and to become more customer service oriented, meeting citizens and partners on their turf, using their vernacular. Instead of forcing users to figure out if they need "FHA" or "PIH" or "CPD," for example, we blend information across programs, organizing it by topic and constituency. And by linking to web sites already in existence, we are able to save time developing information - no point in reinventing the wheel. We just package it to make it as useful as possible to our audience.

In August 1995, when we first began keeping statistics, HUD's home page was visited 6,500 times by people outside the Department. In March 1997, it was visited 97,000 times. As more and more Americans gain access to the internet - from their homes (including their TVs), in their offices, from schools and public libraries, even in shopping malls - the significance of this new product (online information/services) becomes ever greater. It's fast. It's efficient. It's personal. It's timely.

The potential value of the internet to conduct the Department's business is enormous. We can provide current program information, announce funding availability and awards, provide and receive forms, offer interactive technical assistance and training, conduct meetings and discussions, and more. But even more exciting is the opportunity for HUD to speak directly to Americans, giving them information and providing services to help them find homes and to encourage and aid them in becoming involved in and taking charge of their communities. This is something new for HUD, and it's something we need to consider carefully. It's a chance to change how we do business. We are accustomed to providing our services through intermediaries (lenders, brokers, grantees, local and state governments, etc.). Now we have a vehicle for delivering service directly.

### The Challenges Ahead

In the short run, the challenge is to get everyone in HUD to appreciate and consider the possibilities afforded us by the internet technology, particularly in providing information and services directly to citizens (see "**Priorities for 1997**" attached), and to reach out to citizens and potential partners to let them know what we have to offer and to evoke their ideas. In the long run, the challenge is to think boldly and creatively to use this technology to help us be more flexible, efficient, and effective. We need to be willing to consider all options, including new kinds of partnerships and new organizations of HUD employees, to improve service to Americans.

In our quest to cut down the bureaucracy and make the Federal Government more responsive to the needs of its partners and of private citizens, the internet can play a major role. The internet will never be the only way that HUD carries out its mission. But without a doubt, the HUD home page will become a major way to provide information and services to citizens and partners

## HUD'S HOME PAGE ON THE INTERNET Priorities for 1997

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1. **Create More "Community Based" Information/Services** One goal of HUD's web presence is to provide a complete "soup to nuts" array of information, services, and tools. We don't want to just tell people how to buy a home, for example. We want to actually help them do it. We start by educating them with generic "big picture" information (e.g., how to buy a home) and then we lead them through the specifics (e.g., homes for sale in your community, local lenders, local real estate brokers, information about your community, etc.). To date, we've done a pretty good job developing the generic information. But we need to do a better job providing more specific local information and tools to finish the job.

Toward that end, we want to:

Work with CPD to create a web-based version of the highly acclaimed Community 2020 software, which provides a visual image of local information; and

Work with the local offices to increase the amount of local information/tools available and to make them more audience-focused.

We need to find ways to make sure that states that have only a small office or only a housing office still provide a full array of local information on homes and communities. And we need to find ways to make sure that local information in states that have multiple offices is consolidated and presented in a way that is easy for citizens to use.

2. **Increase Citizen Information and Services** We are working with the National Performance Review (NPR) team to implement their goal to make all interactions with the Federal Government available to citizens via the internet. We've already started to do this, by providing 18 "services" to the public via the White House "Commonly Requested Federal Services." But we've only scratched the surface. We need to get program and field managers and staff to step back and see what we have to offer directly to citizens, now that we have this technology. We need to:
  - a) look at what we already have on the home page and decide if it could be presented more concisely and clearly,
  - b) talk to citizens to find out what other kinds of information and services, connected with homes and communities, that they'd like to see us provide, and
  - c) work with our partners to create "continuums" of information and services

In the next year, we will work with all the program areas and field offices to stimulate development of information and services targeted directly to citizens.

3. **Develop Interactive Business Processes** Managers all over the Department are beginning to embrace the internet and to develop creative interactive applications; and we will encourage more of that, urging them to reengineer as they automate. Online forms processing, interactive meetings and discussions, online (real time) technical assistance and training programs, automated applications (with built-in "help" functions), interactive home sales, and other important business functions should be part of HUD's immediate future. We will be working with Department managers to stimulate interest in online processing and to replicate and expand on successes.
4. **Incorporate Multimedia Presentations** With new devices now available, which enable people to cruise the web using their televisions (ie - no computer needed), we need to consider that sector of the audience in the ongoing development of the home page. Those who are accustomed to being entertained by their TVs are likely to respond better to multimedia presentations (animation, video, audio), rather than just reading text. To that end, we are creating animated, audio-video "mini-pages" targeted to the audience using their televisions to access the web.

5. **Marketing!** Market the home page to ensure that a) each sector of the audience knows where to find information targeted to them and b) to get constructive feedback so we can enhance the home page. Our Director of Marketing and Outreach already has begun an aggressive outreach program. She will be

- a) Demonstrating HUD's home page at national conferences and meetings
- b) Conducting focus groups with segments of our audience
- c) Developing additional promotional materials
- d) Researching and contacting related web sites, to establish appropriate links to the HUD home page
- e) Instructing the field webmasters on how to demo the page and hold focus groups with local audiences

## IDEAS FOR INTERNET "SERVICES"

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### 1. **HOMESNET** - Create a one-stop Federal home selling service.

✎ Develop a partnership with other Federal agencies with homes to sell (USDA, VA, FDIC), providing Americans a shopping center for Federally-owned homes.

✎ Web users could come to the HUD home page and find listings/pictures of homes for sale; click on a map to see where the homes are located; select more demographics that interest them (e.g., shopping centers, day care centers, schools, economic mix, etc.) and have those shown on the map; use the mortgage calculator to get a rough idea how much they can afford; see an interactive checklist of the steps to home buying, where they can click on any step and get help from a computer "angel" who can answer their questions; click on a link to local real estate brokers's home pages and make an appointment to see the home; click on links to local HUD-approved lenders, fill out forms for pre-approved mortgages, and actually get an approval; learn about RESPA and other consumer protections/options; and more. Fort Worth already is piloting an online bid operation.

### 2. **24-Hour Community Toolkit** - Create a 24-hour a day, 7 days a week one-stop community toolkit for mayors, governors, CD directors, CDCs/CHDOs, and other community organizers, via the web.

✎ Train some of our best CPD reps - wherever they are in the country, allowed them to create flexible schedules (e.g., night shifts, split shifts, maybe even work at home) to be available to anyone who needs ideas, solutions, information, connections, or just a sensitive ear in addressing community problems

✎ Take a small portion of the TA money we hand out, pick our very best TA providers wherever they are in the country, and put them online

✎ Create partnerships with other Federal agencies who could join us in providing online TA, making HUD the "window to the Federal Government, for communities"

### 3. **It Takes a Village - Or a Community...** Use the home page to educate and engage Americans in their communities.

✎ Create an eye/ear-catching educational piece to introduce Americans to the value of communities to them, personally

✎ Begin with something to teach them about the value of "community" to each individual, and take them through learning about their communities, finding out how they can help in their communities, and connecting them with volunteer opportunities/ clearinghouses in their communities.

