

For the New Americans

## Developing User-Friendly Homeownership Counseling Resources

by Theresa Peyton

Language and cultural barriers can make the home-buying process – often intimidating even to savvy consumers – dauntingly difficult and nearly insurmountable.

Typically, homebuyers with limited or no English-speaking comprehension can find few information resources in multilingual translations.

In response, concern is growing in the housing counseling community to provide adequate multilingual counseling to help non-English speakers understand and navigate through the sea of available mortgage options and products. The U.S. Hispanic population, for instance, more than doubled between 1980 and 2000 to 35.3 million.

The NeighborWorks® Center for Homeownership Education and Counseling (NCHCEC) has developed a multitiered approach through training, tools, and resources to assist practitioners in reaching these currently underserved populations.

NCHCEC, for instance, offered the largest-ever presentation of Spanish bilingual homeownership courses at the NeighborWorks® Training Institute in Dallas in April. The courses were developed in a bicultural format.

The four most popular – *Métodos de Educación para Compradores de Casa: Entrenando a los Instructores* (Homebuyer Education Methods: Training the Trainer), *Aptitud Financiera: Enseñando Destrezas de Administración Financiera* (Financial Fitness: Teaching Financial Management Skills), *Consejería para la Compra de Vivienda* (Introduction to Housing Counseling), and *Aspectos Básicos de Préstamos Para Consejeros* (Lending Basics for Housing Counselors) – are structured to address the unique challenges practitioners face when working with Spanish-speaking clients.

### Meeting New Challenges

“As the cultural landscape changes and evolves,” said Jayna Bower, director of NCHCEC, “practitioners are

met with the particular challenges of the communities they serve, and require specific tools and skills to respond to those obstacles. The goal for NCHCEC is to provide practitioners with relevant, value-added tools and resources that serve the broadest client base.”

NCHCEC provides homeownership practitioners quality training, certification, and resources to further the reality of homeownership to all sectors of society nationwide.

During the training institute, NCHCEC further detailed its vision for Hispanic outreach efforts at a reception attended by Hispanic practitioners and trainers, NCHCEC partners, and NeighborWorks® staff.

NeighborWorks® America’s senior management spoke to the Corporation’s commitment to promoting homeownership within the Hispanic marketplace. Lori Hall, an NCHCEC faculty member and deputy executive director for Neighborhood Housing Services of San Antonio, outlined a progressive plan underway to respond to her largely Hispanic market.

As a NeighborWorks Full-Cycle Lender®, builder/developer, homeownership counseling center, and loan servicer, NHS of San Antonio serves as a solid business model for producing significant homeownership opportunities. Its portfolio of \$18 million includes building more than 300 new homes and rehabilitating more than 150 owner-occupied homes. To date, the center has provided pre- and postpurchase counseling to more than 1,700 families.

Maria Vacacela, a seasoned homeownership consultant and Training Institute trainer, applauded NeighborWorks® America’s efforts thus far. “The benefits of homeownership resources for Hispanics,” she said, “show that [NeighborWorks® America] has a stake and pride in being responsive to the community.”

By 2020, the Hispanic population is projected to

grow by 25.1 million, accounting for 46 percent of the total population growth of the United States.

Building a multicultural capacity within the ranks of homeownership counselors will be necessary to meet the future wave of non-English speaking individuals and families who will need homeownership counseling and resources.

### Rolling Out New Tools

As a large portion of the homebuying market will be Spanish-speaking, materials and resources will need to focus on this market segment. NCHCEC, working with various Hispanic organizations – National Council of LaRaza, LULAC, NAHREP, to name a few – is reaching beyond NeighborWorks® America's borders to provide training and information access to the widest audience possible. This approach coincides with NCHCEC's plans to substantially increase the pool of qualified homeownership counselors certified nationwide at a rate of 2,000 a year.

Only recently, NCHCEC unveiled a new resource tool for practitioners – Keys to My Home, a new Web site ([www.keystomyhome.org](http://www.keystomyhome.org)) created in partnership with E\*TRADE Financial.

This new learning tool, developed from the popular

NCHCEC resource manual, *Realizing the American Dream*, will offer practitioners another resource to their clients for much-needed help in understanding the homebuying process with user-friendly tips and information.

As consumers visit housing counseling centers to receive counseling and assistance, practitioners can direct them to the Keys to My Home site to reinforce learning and answer questions. The site will be offered in a Spanish-language version, and plans are already in the works between E\*TRADE and NeighborWorks® America for future rollout of computer labs.

Homebuyer Kiosks will address specific language, cultural barriers, and credit history issues that face many potential minority, and primarily, Hispanic homebuyers. By fall 2007, 16 kiosks are scheduled to be set up around the country in the nation's most underserved areas, including San Diego, Phoenix, Brooklyn, and Chicago.

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## Comprehensive Counseling and Education Resource for You and Your Clients



NeighborWorks® Center for Homeownership Education and Counseling (NCHCEC), in partnership with E\*Trade Financial, is pleased to bring you an exciting and highly useful new tool – one that will dramatically improve your homeownership education and counseling efforts.

Based on the nationally recognized curriculum from NCHCEC's popular prepurchase consumer manual *Realizing the American Dream*, **Keys to My Home** ([www.keystomyhome.org](http://www.keystomyhome.org), or accessible through <http://www.nw.org/nchec>) is a Web-based package of calculators, learning modules, and comparison tools.

Easy to use, clearly designed, and all completely free to practitioners and their clients, we're certain that Keys to My Home will be a cornerstone reference in your office.



**Log on today and boost your counseling power!**