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## RE-INVENTING AMERICA'S AFFORDABLE HOUSING DELIVERY SYSTEM: MISSION ENTREPRENEURIAL ENTITIES ARE HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

*Study by the Affordable Housing Institute identifies characteristics of these entities,  
Provides focused and critical recommendations for policy makers*

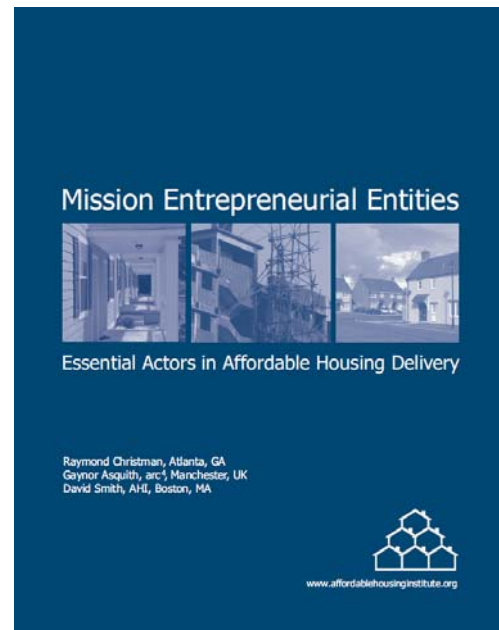
**BOSTON – (January 6, 2010)** – The Affordable Housing Institute (AHI) today published its landmark study, *Mission Entrepreneurial Entities (MEEs): Essential Actors in Affordable Housing Delivery*. A year in the making, this study – co-authored by Ray Christman of Atlanta, Gaynor Asquith of Manchester UK, and David Smith of Boston – calls out these entities as a distinctive type of non-governmental organization, highlights MEEs' importance as change-makers, and points the way for reordering resource priorities.

"MEEs are the most effective housing organizations we didn't know we had," said AHI founder and study co-author David Smith. "Misnaming them obscured their importance; in actuality, they act like a keystone species in an ecosystem. Government creates legislative programs and affordability resources, communities identify challenges. Without MEEs, programs can be stillborn and problems can go unsolved. Once MEEs are in place and functioning, like pollinating bees they make necessary connections, so other players in affordable housing provision find their natural places and become much more productive."

The study had been previewed at a Washington DC symposium, held in concert with World Habitat Day, and co-hosted by the National Housing Conference, the Housing Partnership Network, and AHI. In addition to the co-authors, panelists included Debra Schwartz of the MacArthur Foundation, Tom Bledsoe of the Housing Partnership Network, and Michael Pitchford, CEO of Washington DC-based Community Preservation and Development Corporation.

According to AHI's study, the key is "mission entrepreneurship." Acting as an entrepreneur isn't important just in the for-profit world, but also essential for mission-oriented entities like non-profits. Mission entrepreneurs innovate new solutions, and find new and more effective ways to use existing resources. Their final product is positive social change.

"The Affordable Housing Institute has produced a long-awaited analysis," said Conrad Egan, President of the National Housing Conference. "It tells how and why mission directed entrepreneurial entities focused on producing and preserving affordable homes in the USA and the UK are successful, and how lessons about their powerful progress can illuminate and energize further momentum toward more affordable homes for all."



To create the study, the principal authors used a case method with in-depth evaluations of 23 MEEs, 12 from the US and 11 from the UK. "Coming from the British sector, I was struck by the evolutionary convergence of the US MEEs with those in England," said study co-author Gaynor Asquith, principal at arc<sup>4</sup> Consulting. "That two such divergent environments produced entities with similar roles and successor characteristics tells me the findings are robust and applicable globally."

Profiled MEEs were drawn from all around both countries for diversity of market, scale, history and government. "We found big geographic gaps between need and capacity," said study co-author Ray Christman, Executive Director of the Livable Communities Coalition and former head of the Atlanta Federal Home Loan Bank. "With so much American growth in the South and Southwest, with most of the MEEs in the Northeast and along the coasts, we need a national strategy to jump-start new MEE formation in places where we have the need and the sources but not the MEE capacity to turn problems into solutions."

"In its recent study, the Affordable Housing Institute shines an illuminating light on key - but often obscured - players in the affordable housing arena," said Nicolas Retsinas, head of Harvard's Joint Center for Housing Studies and a former HUD Assistant Secretary for Housing. "It puts forward a new template for understanding how the motive of mission can intersect productively and effectively with market-driven entrepreneurial forces. The study does more than catalog this new species of affordable housing actors, it also clarifies their contribution and what they need to play an ever greater role in a global housing agenda of a decent, safe and affordable place to live for all."

The study was funded partially from the proceeds of a two-year \$1,000,000 grant to AHI from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to promote research and education on the socioeconomics of housing and shelter in urbanizing countries throughout the global south, with emphasis on housing as a catalyst for improving informal communities and non-governmental organizations as enterprises that make visible change. "This study demonstrates that if we are to support these entities, we have to name them by what they are, instead of what they aren't," Smith added. "Recognizing that MEEs are enterprises that act as entrepreneurs, policy makers can reorient global development grant-making and technical assistance, can spur more focused and effective study, and can import and export ideas between global north and south. We at AHI can also use the learning to focus our work with MEEs as we help them become established and grow into being critical players in the housing finance ecosystem."

The study, 257 pages including detailed profiles of all 23 MEEs, is available free electronically (7 Meg pdf), with bound copies available at \$25 (including shipping) direct from AHI, via [http://www.affordablehousinginstitute.org/AHI\\_MEE\\_report\\_order.php](http://www.affordablehousinginstitute.org/AHI_MEE_report_order.php).

***About the Affordable Housing Institute***

*The Affordable Housing Institute, a 501(c)(3) public non-profit, is a global housing finance thought leader whose mission is to help pro-poor innovators build healthy housing ecosystems worldwide, with an emphasis on the Global South. We do this through research that inspires practical and actionable outcomes, education that informs and equips change makers, and consulting that leads to both local innovation and transferable models.*

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