



Accelerating Housing Production:

Bridging the Gap Between Pro-Housing State Laws and Housing Supply

Rising housing costs have left millions struggling to afford stable housing, prompting states to pass ambitious legislation to remove barriers to development and incentivize housing production. However, producing more housing depends on cities and towns effectively implementing reforms and complying with state law.

How can state leaders support cities and towns in producing more housing?

The Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab conducted interviews with 65 government leaders, practitioners, and researchers to learn about local barriers to faster housing production and how states could help local governments implement legislative reforms.

“ I think there is a tendency to assume when a bill has passed, it’s done. ... Great news, everybody! We’re going to get our duplexes! But often it doesn’t work that way. ”

— Ezra Klein, author of “Abundance,” on “The Ezra Klein Show.”

We identified four main barriers that slow housing production:

1. Lengthy, complex permitting and approval processes: Planning departments, especially in smaller cities and rural areas, can quickly become inundated with a backlog of applications, delaying approvals and constraining process improvements.

2. Challenging zoning and land use reforms: Planning staff responsible for implementing zoning reform legislation often lack experience revising complex code documents. They are also stretched thin between reform projects and daily application review responsibilities.

3. Limited developer support: Developers often face complex, siloed, and unclear approval processes. This creates uncertainty and risk and discourages investment, especially from smaller or less experienced developers and those who lack experience building preferred housing options, such as accessory dwelling units and “middle housing.”

“There is no one person in the city who understands the entire user journey of someone trying to build housing.”

— City government staff member interviewed by the GPL

4. Gaps in real-time housing data: Outdated and fragmented data systems rarely track key housing production metrics and milestones, which slows decision-making. Local planning staff often balance daily tasks with overseeing housing system reforms and reporting for the state government.

Opportunities to Strengthen Implementation

In any given state, cities and towns are working in isolation and with limited resources to implement and comply with the same laws and regulations. State executives and housing agencies are uniquely positioned to provide centralized support to local government and catalyze housing production. We identified five specific ways states can help bridge the gap between policymaking and implementation:



Direct support: Provide hands-on assistance to interpret legislation, streamline processes, update zoning codes, and implement reforms.



Tools and templates: Develop and share standardized resources, such as sample code, procurement language, and review workflows to scale effective practices.



Peer learning and coaching: Create networks and other opportunities to share proven approaches, reduce duplication, and build momentum for implementation.



Measurement and accountability: Streamline reporting requirements and offer technical support for local data systems.



Policy improvement insights: Build processes to learn from local implementation experiences and incorporate lessons into future housing state policy and legislation.

State Housing Production Accelerator

This GPL initiative supports state agencies in advancing housing reform implementation at the local level. The Accelerator will support a small group of states with applied research and technical assistance focused on strengthening the states' capacity and systems in the five areas identified above. The Accelerator will also support a larger group of states through a community of practice offering regular learning calls, sharing impactful success stories, and disseminating insights from the GPL and other leading research and technical assistance organizations. By helping states translate state-level reforms into local action, the Accelerator aims to expand housing supply, ease affordability pressures, and support more stable, thriving communities.

[Click here](#) to learn more about the GPL's State Housing Production Accelerator.

[Email us](#) to connect on our housing production work.



The [Government Performance Lab](#), housed at the Taubman Center for State and Local Government at the Harvard Kennedy School, helps governments deliver better outcomes for their communities. We work with state and local leaders to identify existing challenges, design possible solutions, test and demonstrate effectiveness, and scale promising practices.

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