



## CASE STUDY

# CONVERGENCE UNITING FOR HOUSING AFFORDABILITY COLUMBUS®

## Bloom614: A Digital Gateway to Homeownership

Bloom614 is a web-based platform designed to simplify and humanize the homebuying journey for first-time homebuyers and homeowners in Central Ohio. Developed through a collaboration between CONVERGENCE Columbus and the Affordable Housing Alliance of Central Ohio (AHACO), the site serves as a centralized, user-friendly hub for financial readiness tools, educational content, and access to down payment assistance and local support programs. By offering an interactive and locally specific alternative to traditional housing and banking websites, Bloom614 helps users navigate complex systems with greater confidence and trust; while also equipping housing practitioners with curated resources they can share directly with the communities they serve.

### PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

The Bloom614 platform emerged from a broader effort by AHACO and CONVERGENCE Columbus to address barriers to homeownership. A regional landscape study and housing professional survey revealed that many first-time homebuyers were overwhelmed by fragmented information spread across multiple websites, agencies, and institutions. Rather than adding another static resource, the partners set out to design a digital experience that streamlined information, reflected local realities, and met users where they were.

Implementation was grounded in a cross-sector, community-centered approach. AHACO leveraged its long-standing relationships with nonprofit organizations, housing counselors, and real estate professionals to convene a working group that helped identify relevant programs, verify content accuracy, and shape the platform's

overall structure. CONVERGENCE Columbus and the Mortgage Bankers Association contributed industry expertise, national perspective, and coordination support, helping ensure alignment between community needs and financial systems.

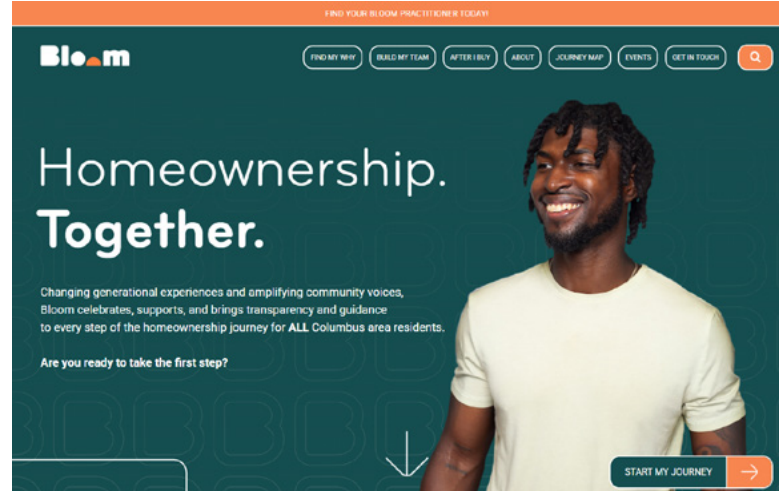
A local design firm partnered with the project team to develop a visually engaging, easy-to-navigate website that could accommodate multiple audiences and functions. First-time homebuyers participated in user testing and feedback loops, influencing the site's tone, language, and functionality. This human-centered design process helped differentiate Bloom614 from more transactional housing websites and reinforced trust among users.

The website soft-launched in October 2023, with additional features completed in spring 2024. AHACO supported rollout and adoption through press conferences, social media outreach, partnerships with trusted community organizations, and a contracted public relations firm. Bloom614 was also embedded into broader outreach efforts, including the Rebuild Wall Street Campaign, which focused on building generational wealth in communities of color through partnerships with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and young professional networks. Ongoing content updates and platform management ensure information remains current and locally relevant.

## LESSONS LEARNED AND TIPS FOR REPLICATION

One of the most significant lessons from Bloom614 was that awareness alone does not guarantee engagement. Despite early investments in billboards, radio advertising, and national partnerships, website traffic did not initially meet expectations. The team learned that users often encountered branding confusion or failed to make the final step from awareness to action. However, once users reached the site, engagement levels were strong, confirming that the platform's design and content effectively met user needs.

This insight prompted a strategic shift toward more targeted, conversion-oriented outreach. Partnerships with trusted local practitioners, in-person community events, and direct referrals proved more effective at driving meaningful engagement than broad awareness campaigns. The experience highlighted the importance of clear pathways that connect users directly to digital tools within a crowded online environment.



Several practices emerged as especially replicable for other communities:

- **Anchor the platform in trusted local organizations** that already have credibility with residents and practitioners.
- **Use a partnership-driven model** that positions the platform as a shared resource, encouraging buy-in and content contributions from multiple stakeholders.
- **Invest in human-centered design and user testing**, particularly with the intended beneficiaries, to ensure relevance and trust.
- **Treat the website as a living project**, with dedicated staff time for regular updates, outreach, and relationship management.

The team also learned that sustaining quality requires ongoing capacity. AHACO estimates that maintaining Bloom614 requires approximately 10 hours per week for content updates and coordination, prompting exploration of more robust content management systems and clearer partner roles.

Finally, Bloom614 underscored the value of planning for data and referral tracking early. While housing professionals can currently see when they are contacted through the platform, future enhancements aim to strengthen referral pathways and outcome tracking. These improvements will help deepen accountability, measure impact, and further integrate the platform into local housing ecosystems.