

Dwellingplace



Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Plan



Dwelling Place of Grand Nonprofit Housing Corporation

Board and Executive Message

June 29, 2020

To the Community,

On behalf of Dwelling Place, we are pleased to share our 2020-23 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan with the community.

Dwelling Place was founded in 1980 by a dedicated group of community members concerned for residents in the Heartside Neighborhood of Grand Rapids who were low-income or struggling with homelessness. Today, more than four decades later, we offer affordable housing opportunities to low and moderate income households in more than 30 apartment communities across four counties in West Michigan.

Moving beyond the one-dimensional labels we often see assigned to these households in the media, Dwelling Place aspires to raise community awareness and celebrate the genuine diversity present in the residents we serve. Similarly, we believe that our capacity to serve the community will be enhanced if we work towards maintaining a board and employees whose demographic makeup closely parallels that of the neighborhoods and communities we serve.

We also feel it is important to note that during the drafting of this plan, the nation underwent a major social upheaval following the death of George Floyd, a black man, at the hands of law enforcement in the City of Minneapolis. That event and the protests that followed throughout the United States, served to raise public awareness to the consequences of racism, both personal and systemic, which is still prevalent in all of our major institutions. Dwelling Place accepts its responsibility to be an agent for change in offering housing and employment opportunities to all persons in an equitable manner, mindful of the influences of implicit bias and disparate impact in our work.

Dwelling Place is committed to achieving the goals outlined in this plan. We pledge to engage with the community to increase our cultural competence as individuals and as an organization. By cultivating a working environment that engenders a sense of belonging for everyone and a governance and staffing structure that is equitable for all who participate in it, Dwelling Place hopes to reach its greatest potential as a diverse, inclusive, and equitable organization.

We look forward to implementing this plan and are hopeful that it will help guide our path to reaching our highest potential. We are pleased to share this plan with the community. We encourage your thoughtful review of this plan and welcome your input or related questions.

Dennis Sturtevant
Chief Executive Officer

Annamarie Buller
Board Chairperson

The Dwelling Place Mission Statement

The mission of Dwelling Place is to improve the lives of people by creating quality affordable housing, providing essential support services, and serving as a catalyst for neighborhood revitalization.

Core Values and Beliefs

We Believe:

- Diversity in people and in the use of land builds healthy neighborhoods.
- All people deserve a choice of quality affordable housing environments.
- Dwelling Place should act as a leader in the field of housing development.
- Our residents are our customers and they deserve and expect professionalism in the services they receive.
- The input of our customers, and an ingrained respect and trust of the broader community, is crucial to our success.
- Staff and Board must have opportunities for professional development and personal growth.
- Financial stability is crucial in order to fulfill its mission.

We Value:

- High standards of ethics and conduct of the staff and Board.
- An open and inclusive decision-making process.
- Substantial and significant communication between all of our constituents.
- Collaboration and alliance building with others in order to encourage neighborhood revitalization and stabilization.

Plan Overview

Dwelling Place is pleased to share its Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan. *The mission of Dwelling Place is to improve the lives of people by creating quality affordable housing, providing essential support services, and serving as a catalyst for neighborhood revitalization.* The plan is rooted in a belief that cultural competence in the board and employees of Dwelling Place are essential elements in achieving that mission.

The Dwelling Place Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan (The Plan) aspires to create a common understanding among the board and employees in the meaning and importance for valuing diversity, equity, and inclusion at Dwelling Place. It outlines the process through which Dwelling Place has approached the creation of the plan and it establishes measureable goals that can be evaluated against desired outcomes in a process of continuous improvement.

Dwelling Place is committed to building a diverse, fair, and high-performing organization where board members, employees, and residents will report a strong sense of community and belonging. This plan is designed to align the organization's work to meet the needs of the residents and the communities we serve, while empowering all participants in that process to engage fully. This plan will be reviewed and updated on an annual basis.

Background

Since its founding in 1980, Dwelling Place has maintained a strong commitment to equal opportunity and affirmative action. Historically, evidence of this commitment was documented in Affirmative Action Plans, Equal Opportunity policies and through periodic reporting about the demographic makeup of our board and employees. The broad expansion of Dwelling Place's efforts to serve and empower disadvantaged and disenfranchised populations is further evidence of that historic commitment.

Today, however, we recognize that maintaining our effectiveness as a non-profit, community development organization is predicated on building a deeper understanding for the meaning of diversity in our work. We also recognize the importance of maintaining an organization that fosters inclusiveness and equitable treatment within our board, our employees, and in the community.

In 2015, Dwelling Place became affiliated with NeighborWorks of America, a national intermediary created by Congress in 1978 to further the work of community development across the United States. Through this affiliation, the Dwelling Place Board was afforded an opportunity to participate in an 18-month board training program called "Excellence in Governance". As part of that process, which ended in 2018, the Board made a decision to focus more attention on issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion within the organization. HR Collaborative was contracted as a consultant to assist the Board and

employees in the creation of a formal “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan” for Dwelling Place.

In 2018, HR Collaborative engaged Faye Richardson-Green to facilitate an initial conversation with the Board as part of an effort to create a common understanding (definitions) for diversity, equity, and inclusion. This process resulted in the establishment of a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Council (Council), comprised of employees and board members. Two full board meetings were devoted to this effort with Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Council meetings convened between those meetings. In June of 2018, the Board formally adopted definitions recommended by the Council.

Definitions

Diversity: Diversity includes all the ways in which people differ, encompassing the many characteristics that make one individual or group different from another. While diversity is often used in reference to race, ethnicity, and gender, we embrace a broader definition that also includes, but is not limited to age, national origin, religion, ability status, sexual orientation, economic class, education, familial status, and language. Being diverse means engaging the broadest possible representation of individuals, experiences, and perspectives in pursuit of our mission.

Equity: Equity is fair treatment, access, and opportunity for all people, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that prevent full participation. Improving equity involves increasing justice and fairness within procedures, processes, and distribution of resources. Addressing equity issues requires an understanding of the root causes of outcome disparities within our society.

Inclusion: Inclusion is the active, intentional, and ongoing engagement of all stakeholders, creating authentic and empowered participation. An inclusive culture fosters respect in words and actions for all people and exists when each person feels valued and encouraged.

Assessment of Current State/Culture

In their role as the consultant for development of a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan, HR Collaborative facilitated a process to assess the current state of diversity, equity, and inclusion within the organization, providing the Council with recommendations for initial year plan goals. All of the supporting documentation is available upon request.

Survey Outcomes:

In December of 2018, Dwelling Place administered surveys to its board members and employees to measure engagement and perception around diversity, equity, and inclusion practices. Several main areas for focus surfaced following an analysis of the survey results.

These include:

1. Finding ways to improve the sense of value and respect that board members and employees convey to each other in their interactions.
2. Improving our effectiveness in recruiting for diversity for employees and board membership, and
3. Offering training, orientation and professional development opportunities with an emphasis on equity for access by all employees and board members.

Focus Group Interview Outcomes:

During March and April of 2019, HR Collaborative conducted focus groups with Dwelling Place board members, employees, and residents to further inform development of the plan. Findings from the focus groups led HR Collaborative to make the following suggestions for further improvements:

1. Create strategies to increase employee and board awareness about training and development opportunities.
2. Enhance the orientation and onboarding experience for employees and board members to engage them in the work and culture of the organization more effectively.
3. Develop formal protocol for adopting, updating and communicating organizational policies and procedures to increase clarity and consistency.

Community, Board, and Employee Demographics:

The demographic makeup of the board and employees for Dwelling Place fairly represents the makeup of the community it serves. The tables provided in *Appendix A* show a summary of demographics for the board, employees, and the residents who live in our apartment communities. Please also note that requests for demographic information from residents is largely optional, so the tables in Appendix A may underrepresent certain demographic categories.

Goals

Recommendations:

The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Council determined, based on experiences, assessments, surveys, and focus group themes, that much of the first year's work should be focused on addressing foundational objectives to set the stage for more progressive action in future years' plans. They determined that purposeful work toward strengthening overall communication, recognition, and training of employees and board members should be the primary focus for The Plan. Goals 1 and 2, therefore, reflect a focus on internal development of employees and board members. Goal 3, on the other hand, is more focused on external actions and relationships in the community.

Goal 1: Create a culture of inclusion where board members, employees, and volunteers are emotionally and intellectually invested in Dwelling Place and Dwelling Place in them.

- a) Hold a minimum of two organization-wide events annually.
- b) Engage board members, employees, and volunteers in ongoing focus groups and/or surveys to measure engagement and program effectiveness.
- c) Create and implement programs to ensure individuals are recognized in meaningful ways.
- d) Develop a strategy to inform and engage board members, employees, and volunteers about the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion.
 - 1. Offer education and training programs to promote the DEI goals and actions for board members, employees, and volunteers.
 - 2. Ensure consistent and effective verbal and written communication.
 - 3. Plan for annual Employee/Board/Resident workgroups to discuss ways to create, enhance, and implement inclusion strategies.
 - 4. Ensure that implementation and allocation of resources will be prioritized by all leaders of the organization.

Goal 2: To recruit, train, and retain board members, employees, and volunteers in an environment where differences are respected, cultural competence is aspired to, and highest potential is nurtured.

- a) Establish and ensure access to a standard operating and reporting system with clear policies and procedures for board members and employees.
- b) Identify and address barriers that may be preventing equitable participation, opportunities, or advancement including:
 - 1. Review and update Job Descriptions to reflect necessary job competencies and soft skills.
 - 2. Determine the needs of the employees in both job competencies and soft skills, at all levels.
 - 3. Ensure equity in job training.
- c) Create a mentorship program for board members, employees, and volunteers with a focus on successful integration and acceptance.
- d) Create a multi-faceted plan to recruit underrepresented groups for board members, employees, and volunteers.

Goal 3: Dwelling Place will build upon existing community partnerships and create new community partnerships in support of efforts to plan, promote, implement, and evaluate the effectiveness of its diversity, equity, and inclusion work.

- a) Review and update existing vendor procurement policies to increase opportunities for neighborhood-based and minority and women-owned business enterprise (MBE and WBE) to participate in the delivery of products and services to Dwelling Place.
- b) Establish and annually assess policies and procedures associated with organizational communication and marketing to ensure that all segments of the community have access to information about Dwelling Place in a manner that is both understandable and effective for their use.
 - 1. Incorporate “person-first” and “gender-inclusive” language in all communications and marketing materials utilized by Dwelling Place.
 - 2. Complete and publicly share an annual demographic summary of resident composition for all apartment communities owned and managed by Dwelling Place.
 - 3. Develop and maintain a timetable for publicly disseminating Dwelling Place’s new Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan, including ongoing updates as these occur.
- c) Review and update outreach and referral contact lists for all Affirmative Fair Marketing Plans for apartment communities owned and managed by Dwelling Place.
- d) Annually review and update policies designed to engage neighbors, persons with lived experience and potential housing applicants in the planning, design and lease up of new housing projects.
- e) Evaluate all Dwelling Place facilities for accessibility by all segments of the population.
- f) Identify and engage with advocacy groups (Fair Housing Center, Urban League, Hispanic Center, Grand Rapids HQ, YWCA, etc.) to seek input on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan.
- g) Conduct an annual literature review for best practices to remove disparate impact of protected classes in employment and housing screening policies and procedures.

Monitoring Progress

The goals identified in the initial year of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan for Dwelling Place will serve as a roadmap to foster a diverse, inclusive, and high-performing organization, providing opportunities for all participants to remain actively engaged. The Council is responsible for setting responsibilities and timelines to recommend to the Board. The group will report progress on at least a semi-annual basis to the Board. The Council will also be responsible to recommend amendments to the plan on an annual basis and more frequently as the need might arise.

Established goals in the plan will be tracked through the use of an interactive work plan and reviewed monthly by the Council. As the work plan is created, the work plan and progress reports will be shared widely with the board and employees. It will be available to others upon request.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Council

In June 2018, the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Council was formed by the Dwelling Place Board with volunteers from the Dwelling Place Board and employees. The Council has been instrumental in the creation of this plan and will continue in its role to monitor and report on progress to achieve the goals and outcomes outlined in the plan, as well as recommending amendments to the plan.

2018-2019 DEI Council Members include:

Annamarie Buller, Board Chair
Ken Kaminski, Maintenance Technician
Laurie Mullennix, Accountant
Zoe Post, Executive Assistant
Justin Rhodes, Director of Human Resources
Raphael Shamsid-Deen, Assistant Property Manager
Latrisha Sosebee, Marketing Coordinator
Rick Stevens, Board Member
Dennis Sturtevant, CEO
Grace Thuo, Accountant
Alex Valentine, Receptionist

Board of Directors include:

Annamarie Buller - Chairperson
Juan Daniel Castro - Vice Chairperson
David A. Byers – Treasurer
Sadie Erickson – Secretary
Francine Gaston
Kyle Irwin
Rich Kogelschatz
Eleanor Moreno
Gil Segovia
Rick Stevens
Tommie Wallace
Lee Nelson Weber
Renee Williams
Troy Zapolski