

**2010 NCSHA Award Nomination—Ohio Housing Finance Agency
Management Innovation—Human Resources**

OHFA's Labor Management Committee: Collaboration for Change

Douglas Garver, Executive Director

Martin D. Smith, Director of Human Resources

A rapidly declining housing market and a potentially devastating economic downturn proved to be insurmountable obstacles for businesses unable to strategically respond to new demands. The Ohio Housing Finance Agency (OHFA) realized the need for operational changes that would allow for the creation of innovative solutions to unprecedented challenges while meeting the affordable housing needs for Ohio families. Agency leaders had a shared vision and a clear expectation to increase collaboration and creativity, maintain competition and decrease the control that causes unnecessary burdens on customers. A good relationship between labor and management is imperative for furthering change and creating a desired collaborative culture in an agency.

OHFA's senior leadership first conducted an in-depth examination of current organizational practices and found key actions necessary to affect change. Leadership quickly identified the need to create collaboration and consensus internally between OHFA management and the union. OHFA's Labor Management Committee (LMC), a group comprised of an equal number of representatives from the union and management had created the foundation for collaboration but had not yet achieved a true partnership. Representatives advocated only on behalf of their respective groups in meetings that did not address issues through shared consensus, discussion and strategy. LMC would need to transform into a true collaborative partnership to position the Agency as a statewide housing partner with a dedicated, mission-driven staff.

LMC addresses general issues that impact management and the union through a voluntary process with a shared expectation to anticipate and resolve mutual problems and improve the day-to-day working relationship. Moving from a hierarchical institution to an Agency with an empowered staff is a daunting task, but OHFA's LMC created a model to accomplish this goal. The committee agreed to restructure the group's values, discussions, expectations and outcomes to facilitate more effective communication between management and the union. By openly discussing mutual concerns of all employees in a cooperative effort to resolve issues, the LMC has become a model for increased communication and efficiency in the Agency. The two groups come to the table and often proactively resolve issues before meetings to ensure peak Agency efficiency and a consistent approach by management and the union.

Management and union representatives in LMC previously believed that their role on the committee was to represent their respective groups. They met separately to choose members and the topics to be discussed in meetings and then brought this information to the joint LMC meeting for collective discussion. Through the transformation to a collaborative committee, choosing members and discussion topics as a team allowed LMC to come to consensus on decisions that were best for the Agency as a whole and represented both sides of the staff.

The LMC was the result of merging several internal Agency committees together such as the joint budget committee and the health and safety committee for greater

HFA: Ohio Housing Finance Agency

Entry Name: OHFA's LMC: Collaboration for Change

transparency and to keep members more informed of best practices and decisions. Without this framework, collaboration throughout the Agency would not be possible. The strategies enacted with the LMC changes provided a means for employees to directly participate in decisions and discussions that impact their work, increasing engagement and professional development throughout OHFA. LMC successfully addressed the following Agency programs, policies and procedures:

- Teleworking Program
- Job Shadowing Program
- Budget costs and savings
- Transitional work policy
- Employee Handbook
- Policies for outside contractors, interns and temporary staff
- Performance review system

The efforts of OHFA's LMC were showcased at the Pathways to Excellence Conference, a joint labor management event hosted by the State of Ohio in July 2009. This Conference further enhances the efficiencies of state LMCs by demonstrating best practices and solutions for workplace challenges.

The LMC model helped OHFA actively engage its workforce and connect them to our mission and provided opportunities for collaboration and consensus both internally and externally. The group is dedicated to working together to anticipate and resolve mutual problems while strengthening their relationship and achieving measurable results: reduced absenteeism, improved quality and productivity and increased job security. Fewer grievances were filed in 2010 than ever before, helping managers spend time on project and program planning while providing a consistent and united approach to employee issues. Increased operational efficiency allowed the Agency to remain competitive and encouraged all employees to find areas for improvement, decreasing burdens on customers and developing innovative solutions to unprecedented issues. By streamlining existing committees and creating a basis for collaboration and consensus, the LMC model continues to create and improve cost-effective Agency operations.

LMC provides a comprehensive approach to critical issues and a baseline for future collaboration. Incorporating this new Agency-wide concept required building on the concepts of trust, accountability and engagement, all introduced previously to senior leadership, middle managers and front-line employees. Each of these core competencies can easily stand alone as good management values, but the applied combination provides a level of self-awareness for individuals that can help foster streamlined, strategic Agency operations.

Increasing collaboration and creativity, maintaining competition and decreasing the control that causes unnecessary burden on customers has helped OHFA not only survive the economic crisis but has positioned the Agency as a statewide and national resource. The LMC model will continue to ensure that employees know what is expected of them and engage in the mission, acting as OHFA brand ambassadors. Using this guiding philosophy, OHFA has emerged as a flexible, innovative agency with a guiding strategy that provides clear direction with achievable goals and measurable results.