



**IF YOU KNOW BETTER...  
YOU DO BETTER**

**MassHousing's New Approach to  
Diversity Training**

**Myra Carmona**  
Vice President of Talent and Culture





**WHO AM I?**





# ABOUT ME

- Hired as **Director of Human Capital Management and Organizational Development** in December 2016
- Role redefined after a change in leadership – **Vice President of Talent and Culture** in July 2018



# MY PAST EXPERIENCE



# HOW DID WE START

Initial goals to:

- Meet one-on-one with every director, manager, and supervisor in the Agency (75 employees)
- Understand each person's experience
- Assess the culture through honest and open dialogue

# DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE



- Over **75 million citizens** in the United States are considered millennials.
- Millennials make up **38% of the working age population** and **44% are people of color**.

**As the workforce make-up is changing, our training efforts must change too.**



# ADVANTAGES OF DIVERSITY TRAINING

Studies show that diversity training improves competencies in the workplace by:


- **Reducing the potential for conflict**
- **Increasing a team's effectiveness**





# OUR CHALLENGE

- Identify “blind spots” in how we talk with staff and how managers manage.
- Recognize that staff often did not know what they did not know.
- Find a training that represented a fresh approach and seek employee buy-in.



**If you know better,  
you do better.**



# 1. FIND FACILITATOR/PARTNER

- Sought a dynamic, experienced facilitator.
- Matched our needs to a young woman of color who is a good fit for the Agency.




## 2. CREATE A FOCUS GROUP

- Managers recommended staff to participate.
- Focus groups represented a cross-section of employees with regard to gender, age, race, and tenure.
- Focus groups considered diversity and inclusion issues related to their work and helped build content for future trainings.



### 3. CONVENE FOCUS GROUP

- The first round of discussions highlighted the issues of diversity and inclusion broadly
- The conversations were interactive and thought-provoking
- The sessions were engaging and welcoming with discussions **among** staff instead of a presentation **to** staff.



## 4. ANALYZE FOCUS GROUP OUTCOMES

- The focus group identified unconscious bias as an important topic.
- Specifically, staff in the focus groups felt that their colleagues would appreciate this training.

## 5. PILOT TRAINING

- Following the success of the focus groups, a **pilot training session** of 20 employees was held.
- The pilot training helped refine the content of the trainings to ensure its effectiveness.
- Feedback drove the content for future Agency-wide trainings.



## 6. IMPLEMENT TRAININGS AGENCY-WIDE

- Managers and staff had separate trainings to ensure that everyone had a safe space to speak freely.
- Training room set-up was careful and deliberate.
- Employees sat at small tables of four to facilitate conversation and were encouraged to sit with colleagues whom they did not know well.





# LESSONS LEARNED FROM OUR 3-STEP PROCESS

The utilization of focus groups was different from past trainings and different from what most staff had anticipated.

Staff felt that the focus group was a good experience overall and became “cheerleaders” for diversity training efforts.

Pilot trainings helped ensure relevant content that met staff needs.

Resulting Agency-wide trainings were on-point for subject matter and training style.

# SUBSEQUENT TRAININGS

Importantly, the content for the next two trainings was derived from the evaluations completed by Agency staff.

Specifically, they asked for trainings on:

- Unconscious bias
- Generational bias

# MEASURING SUCCESS

In an anonymous survey collected at the close of each session:

98% of participants reported that the balance of trainings was “good” to “great.”

Employees felt that the trainings were productive.

Participants wrote that they were “comfortable” and “excited about future topics.”



# NEGATIVE STAFF COMMENTS

- “Second speaker needs to speak louder or have a microphone.”
- “The timing of the training makes it difficult as it falls during a very busy time.”
- “3 hours of a work day is too much.”
- “There is a lot to absorb in the one 3-hour session. A follow-up session would be very helpful and worthwhile.”
- “I personally would have liked slightly more substance and less time on group ice breaker exercises.”

# POSITIVE STAFF COMMENTS

- “The conversations that resulted from this training are invaluable - we need to strive for a constant culture of acceptance. Very well done.”
- “Very engaging and great way to get people to talk.”
- “Helped me realize where I've been guilty of unconscious biases.”
- “Open discussion made it very easy to talk.”
- “I think the discussions with our table were most fruitful and interesting.”



# WHAT WORKS?

Staff involvement in content design helps ensure buy-in to the process.

A fresh approach ensures staff buy-in and acceptance.

Real results in attitude and mindset often take three to five years.



# WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

- Diversity trainings must become part of an on-going culture of education at MassHousing.
- We hope that employees will come to expect regular conversations on these important topics.



**Diversity is being invited to THE dance.**

**Inclusion is being asked TO dance.**





# THANK YOU!

**Myra Carmona**

Vice President of Talent and Culture

[mcarmona@masshousing.com](mailto:mcarmona@masshousing.com)

