

# Equity and Anti-Racist Staff Training

## **Minnesota Housing**

Management Innovation: Human Resources

### **HFA Staff Contact**

Josh Nguyen

[josh.nguyen@state.mn.us](mailto:josh.nguyen@state.mn.us)

## Overview

Minnesota Housing Finance Agency is dedicated to becoming antiracist and contribute to equitable housing. Recognizing government's role in creating disparities, and our Agency's current role in making real change is critical towards becoming antiracist. At the Agency, we are challenging ourselves to not do things like we always have because it's easy. Doing real equity work means "walk the walk", investing in educating staff, and allowing things to move slowly and intentionally.

## Are innovative

The Agency's longest standing concrete work towards creating an equitable and antiracist culture can be found in the Cultural Competency Committee ("CCC"). The CCC was created nearly a decade ago, and it's comprised of a small group of employees who volunteer their time. This is no small task as the CCC meets bi-weekly to coordinate and develop content and training aimed at helping Agency staff become more culturally competent. Historically, all staff were required to complete four hours of CCC approved training per year; however, this year that requirement was increased to six hours per year, and within the past month, the CCC rolled out its first session of a series specific trainings that all staff are required to attend. This means that in addition to other required trainings (anti-harassment, ethics, cybersecurity), staff will also have a shared foundational understanding of the roots of inequities created by state government.

Another tangible action the Agency has taken is the creation of Director of Equity and Inclusion Position which was filled in April 2021. Some things to highlight about this position are that: furthering antiracist work is explicitly called out in the job description and this role is aimed at helping staff learn how to be more equitable in the work, not do the work for staff. This position reports directly Commissioner Ho and serves on the Servant Leadership Team (SLT), allowing for an equity subject matter expert to be present in all high-level conversations and has given the Leadership Team a look into what they should be thinking about within their division teams.

## Are replicable

Having a staff member whose sole purpose is to support staff in including equity and inclusion in goals, processes, programming, and ways of thinking, is a first step in building internal capacity to work thought challenges and support staff innovation.

The Agency's SLT has participated in group and individual racial equity coaching. First through the Woke Coach from 2019-June 2021, then through the Agency's Director of Equity and Inclusion June 2021-present. The Leadership Team is dedicating time to have difficult conversations and building the skills necessary to keep the Agency accountable to reaching the goal of becoming antiracist in our work and culture.

The Director of Equity and Inclusion trained CCC members on how to facilitate brave space conversations, and this training will be offered to all staff in the future. This has created capacity for the Agency to respond in the moment when current events that affect staff occur. Additionally, having required training for all staff on topics of race, identities and culture, which is creating consistent foundational language.

### **Respond to a management challenge or opportunity**

The Agency has been able to undertake many more action items now that there is a Director of Equity and Inclusion. One example is the implementation of the Equity Action Team (“EAT”). The EAT has the multiple purposes: to be the central place to track and communicate the work of all the Enterprise and Agency anti-racism and equity work; to be a forum for brainstorming, sharing ideas and looking at data; and to be a forum for staff to build skills in doing inclusion, anti-racism and equity work.

Over 40 staff voluntarily participate on this team and meet every other week to discuss and develop how the Agency can take concrete actions to become more equitable. For example, EAT provided feedback on the Agency’s Affordable Housing Plan prior to it going to Board for approval, and developed a list of suggested action items to add to division work plans which was presented to SLT. Recent discussions have included how to support staff-lead ideas and creating transparency around decision-making processes. It is clear the staff who are on this team continue to become more comfortable asking questions and “using their words”, something that is necessary for authentic and effective change.

### **Achieve measurable improvements in agency operations and achieve strategic objectives**

Support of equity and anti-racist work (not simply just statements) starts from the top down. Commissioner Ho and Leadership Team are leading by example by investing time in doing the work. SLT encourages managers and supervisors to support staff at all levels of the Agency to do this work. This is done through being paying for training and supporting staff in spending focused time on this work.

Having a dedicated Director of Equity and Inclusion tasked with helping staff become more antiracist and equitable instead of doing the work for staff helps build individual capacity to carry out the work independently in the future. Just as important, the Human Resources team is a genuine and true supporter of equity work. The entire team is on the Equity Action Team and all are Qualified Administrators of the Intercultural Development Inventory.

Another important component of achieving measurable improvements and strategic objectives is that equity is included in the Agency’s affordable housing plans and division work plans. This allows the agency to stay accountable to working towards goals grounded in equity and antiracism.

### **Provide benefits that outweigh costs / Demonstrate effective use of resources**

The Agency has also built internal capacity to administer the Intercultural Development Inventory (“IDI”). The IDI is a cross-cultural assessment of intercultural competence that is used to build intercultural competence to achieve diversity and inclusion goals and outcomes. Intercultural competence is defined as “the capability to shift cultural perspective and appropriately adapt behavior to cultural differences and commonalities.” The cost of taking the assessment is relatively low; however, the total cost can be significant because the assessment must be administered by a Qualified Administrator (“QA”), who has access to the assigned group and individual reports. External QAs charge for their time for facilitating group and individual report debriefs, and supporting staff in development their personalized plan, so that cost can add up quickly. Through the support of the Commissioner and Human Resources Director, the Agency now has 16 staff who are trained as QA. The training to become a QA is priced at \$1,800 a person, but the Agency saw the importance of having the capacity to provide the IDI to all staff and it has been an excellent professional development opportunity for the staff who are certified. Thus far under the coordination of the Director of Equity and Inclusion, a few work teams have taken the assessment and received a large group debrief of their combined results. Then everyone has been assigned to one or two QAs for an hour-long individual report review. Staff are also offered an additional session to discuss their development plan and can receive individual coaching from the Director of Equity and Inclusion.

The Director of Equity and Inclusion also operates as an internal consultant for relationship repair (internal and external), hosting brave space conversations, providing feedback and applying an equity lens as requested. An external consultant could be brought on for each of these tasks; however, this is an obvious cost savings.