

Sharing Power with Communities

Minnesota Housing

Management Innovation: Human Resources

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Equity is based on the notion that everyone affected by a decision has a seat at the table. “Nothing about us without us,” goes the rallying cry from historically disenfranchised communities that have long asked for a say in policy decisions that will ultimately affect their lives more than those that make the decisions themselves.

And what better way to be at the metaphorical table than to be in “the room where it happens,” as Lin-Manuel Miranda paraphrased Alexander Hamilton. Getting a seat at the table requires knowing there is a table, and ideally being extended an invitation. Inviting individuals whose qualification is living in the very predicament that policies aim to solve, listening to their voices and heeding their words is what Minnesota Housing considers power sharing. With a newly created position, the Director of Equity and Inclusion, now embedded in the agency’s leadership, Minnesota Housing is striving to take advantage of every opportunity to share power with communities at every level, from internal concerns to strategy setting to external program policies. This nomination captures the many ways the agency is doing so.

Objective

At Minnesota Housing, we are on a journey to become more inclusive, equitable, just and antiracist. We understand that Minnesota has a racist history in housing, and that government, at all levels, have played a part in creating and furthering racial disparities. We know countless communities in Minnesota distrust government because of its role in these perpetuating community harms, and therefore it is our responsibility as state government leaders to earn their trust. One way we are building trust is by creating more transparency in our efforts and by finding ways to share power in our decision-making.

The Agency has taken the challenge of incorporating community members in planning and decision-making in a variety of ways. These efforts include:

- Sharing power with individuals with lived expertise
- Sharing power with community-based organizations
- Sharing power with culturally specific populations

Below are specific examples of initiatives where we found opportunities to share power with different groups. There is a low cost to this engagement, given that payments to consultants with lived experience can be attached to related programs and can be at hourly rates lower than consulting firms. The benefits far outweigh the costs to conducting this engagement, and the resulting trust raised between communities and state government are immeasurable.

Sharing power with individuals with lived expertise

Olmstead Implementation Office Work Groups: *Sharing power with people with disabilities*

In 2019, Governor Tim Walz signed an Executive Order asking the Minnesota Olmstead Subcabinet members to look at new opportunities to address the needs of individuals with disabilities. In response, five work groups began meeting in June 2021. In addition to Agency staff and service providers, people

with disabilities join the conversations to share life experiences on the topic. The groups will then make recommendations to the Subcabinet.

MICH Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness: *Sharing power with people with lived experience of homelessness*

Recognizing homelessness as the most egregious form of housing injustice, the Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness is focusing its next strategic plan on housing, racial and health justice. The Interagency Council hired 11 consultants with lived experience of homelessness to lead a community-driven process to develop a definition of housing, racial and health justice for people facing homelessness. The process involved participation of over 140 people in five working group sessions and three community conversations between April and June 2022. Since then, the consultants have been working with state agencies on creating the specific strategies and outcomes for the strategic plan.

Drafting the Agency's Strategic Plan: *Sharing power with people with lived experience of housing instability*

Minnesota Housing is currently working with 12 consultants with lived experience to help to develop our next strategic plan. A research firm fielded 259 applications for the 12 spots, which pay \$50 an hour. The consultants work with us to incorporate their expertise throughout our planning process, from synthesizing and interpreting information to identifying priorities and strategies to writing the plan. The consultants are a diverse group with respect to race/ethnicity, age, abilities, religion and offer a wealth of expertise. Some of the consultants have progressed from homelessness to homeownership, and others have brought their lived expertise to their professional lives by becoming counselors and housing navigators. Some of the consultants confront housing instability and significant barriers today.

Capacity Building Grants: *Sharing power with people who recognize community organization potential*

In 2022, the Agency first implemented the Community-Based Reviewer Pilot Program in conjunction with the Capacity Building Grant Program RFP process. Eleven community members were selected to score, interview and select Capacity Building grantees alongside staff. The reviewers were paid a stipend for their time, completed onboarding and training, and provided feedback to staff throughout the process and at end of the pilot. We are using the feedback and lessons learned to create the structure and capacity to implement the use of Community Reviewers throughout the Agency.

Agency Hiring Practices: *Sharing power with job candidates with lived experience of housing instability*

Minnesota Housing is in the process of incorporating the value of lived expertise in hiring. Beyond reevaluating what type and how much of experience is required for positions, a recent position description also included language naming the importance of honoring lived expertise and our role in addressing historical and current racism in housing.

Sharing power with community-based organizations

Community Connectors (HomeHelpMN): *Sharing power with trusted community organizations*

In our Homeowners Assistance Fund program, HomeHelpMN, we felt it was imperative to contract with trusted community organizations to ensure all communities had access to sound information about accessing the program. For Indigenous, Black and communities of color, housing discrimination and discriminatory and predatory lending have created profound distrust in the mortgage and lending industries. Trusted community-based organizations are critical partners to inform, engage and empower homeowners to access the assistance they need through HomeHelpMN. We contracted with 10 organizations across the state to achieve this goal. Working with the Connectors has taught us about specific needs of communities and improved our outreach efforts.

Assigning Points to Equitable Development Projects: *Sharing power with local residents to inform project design*

In 2020, Minnesota Housing added a category for additional points to its annual multifamily housing project selections. The Equitable Development Point Category is now incentivizing developers to connect with communities most impacted, such as Somali elders in Southern Minnesota (a real example), to inform the design of a rental property to uniquely suit their needs. Rather than being recipients of housing designed without them, this puts cost-burdened communities closer to the “co-pilot” seat. This effort has attracted attention from local housing departments and national HFAs.

Capacity Building Grant Program: *Sharing power with community-based organizations addressing root causes of housing instability*

Annually, Minnesota Housing makes grants to fund activities that build the capacity of organizations and communities seeking to address root causes of housing challenges and create thriving and inclusive communities. Communities most impacted by housing challenges and disparities are experts and key partners in developing solutions to these challenges. We trust organizations and communities to use their knowledge and creativity to develop strategies that work for them.

Creating programs for populations with unique needs

Homebuying Partnership Program: *Sharing power with homebuyers seeking non-interest-bearing loans*

We are in the process of launching a program that will provide a pathway to homeownership for prospective homebuyers who would prefer non-interest-bearing loans paired with a downpayment and closing cost loan, a first in the state. This program addresses a systemic barrier to homeownership faced disproportionately by people with sincerely held religious beliefs who are also predominately persons of color. In developing the program, staff conducted one-on-one interviews with organizations that serve potential recipients, ensuring that we center community voices from the inception of the program.

Recognizing the Cultural Competence of Tribal Nations: *Sharing power with Tribal Nations*

The Agency’s Housing Stability and legal teams developed a way for Tribal Nations to automatically earn points in development proposals that ask how applicants serve specific cultural communities. In the past, Tribal Nations were required to demonstrate how they were serving their own community in a culturally competent manner. The Agency responded to complaints and dropped the requirement that Tribal applicants explain this, given that they solely serve a specific cultural community.

Visual Aids

> Workgroups

- [Affordable Safe Accessible Housing](#)
- [Data Collection Practices](#)
- [Juvenile Justice & Special Education](#)
- [Prevention of Abuse & Neglect](#)
- [Workforce Shortage & People with Disabilities](#)

Minnesota Olmstead Plan Workgroups


In 2019, Governor Tim Walz signed an [Executive Order](#) asking the [Minnesota Olmstead Subcabinet](#) members to look at new opportunities to address the needs of individuals with disabilities. These included:

- Remove barriers to providing services to people in the most integrated setting
- Address inequalities that don't allow people to live, learn, work, and enjoy life in the community
- Find ways to improve the health and welfare of people with disabilities.


In response to the Governor's Executive Order, the Minnesota Olmstead Subcabinet authorized workgroups to explore five topics. The workgroups began meeting in June 2021.

Each group includes State Agency staff, service providers and people with disabilities who can share life experiences on the topic. The groups will explore ideas for about nine months and then make recommendations to the Subcabinet.


Learn more about each workgroup by clicking on the images below.




Housing
Affordable, Safe, Accessible Housing Workgroup




Data Collection Practices Workgroup



Education
Juvenile Justice & Special Education Workgroup



Employment
Workforce Shortage & People with Disabilities Workgroup



Preventing Abuse
Prevention of Abuse & Neglect of Workgroup

How do I apply to join a Workgroup?

Workgroup applications are currently closed and will re-open next year. Please [sign up for our newsletter](#) to be notified when they open.

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Capacity Building Program

The Capacity Building Program funds activities that build the capacity of organizations and communities to address root causes of housing challenges and create thriving and inclusive communities. Communities most impacted by housing challenges and disparities are experts and key partners in developing solutions to these challenges. We trust organizations and communities to use their knowledge and creativity to develop strategies that work for them.

Over the two-year grant period, selected grantees will use grant funds for one of the following:

- Organizational Capacity Building
 - Grantee will use funds to build its own capacity to address root causes of housing challenges and housing disparities, build power in communities most impacted by housing challenges and disparities, pilot innovative solutions to housing challenges, and support inclusive and equitable communities.
- Intermediary Capacity Building
 - Grantee will use funds to build the capacity of others through pass-through grants or technical assistance in the grantee's area of experience and expertise. The purpose is to develop and strengthen the capacity of communities, stakeholders and organizations operating in the areas of housing planning, community and program development and community engagement.

Application Process

We plan to open the program for Requests for Proposals (RFP) in 2024 for contracts starting in 2024 or 2025.

For details on the RFP process, [read the 2022 Capacity Building Program RFP](#) (for reference only).

Eligible Applicants

- Tax-exempt nonprofits
- Tribal governments and Tribal Business Entities
- Collaborations between two or more entities if at least one participating entity is a tax-exempt nonprofit, Tribal government or Tribal Business Entity and will be designated to enter into contracts with Minnesota Housing

Ineligible Applicants

- Non-Tribal government entities
- For-profit businesses

Excerpt from Housing Stability Job Description

“Recognizing this work operates within the context of institutional racism, this team strives to create equitable access and outcomes for people who live in supportive housing. It is our collective commitment to have the awareness that we are not perfect in this area; to own it when we stumble and recommit to advancing equity and taking anti-racist actions in our daily work.”

“This Supportive Housing Team knows that incredible insight and wisdom can be gained as a result of having lived experiences of homelessness and/or navigating government systems. While this experience is not a requirement for the job, nor would you ever be required to disclose it, such experiences are honored and valued and are seen as advantageous skill sets that would be directly applicable to this job.”

Call to Community: Minnesota Housing Consultant Position

Background

Minnesota Housing is currently looking for 12 consultants to join their efforts to development their next strategic plan, which guide the agency's work for the next four years. Minnesota Housing is a state agency that effectively serves as the state's housing bank, providing loans and grants to finance housing that is affordable for low- and moderate-income Minnesotans. The agency has an annual program budget of nearly \$2 billion and serves over 50,000 households each year.

Minnesota Housing has contracted with Rainbow Research to support them with their initiative to hire consultants. We are looking for a diversified team of consultants with low-to-moderate incomes and 1 of the following 7 lived experiences:

- first-time homebuyer (which would include homebuyer education participants)
- existing homeowner buying their next home
- homeowner seeking or receiving a home-improvement or rehabilitation loan
- resident of a manufactured-home community
- renter who lives in subsidized housing with income and/or rent restrictions
- renters who hold a rental housing voucher
- people who have experienced homelessness, including people who currently live in permanent supportive housing

This is an opportunity for people with lived experiences in different housing scenarios to have a direct impact on Minnesota Housing's efforts to provide all Minnesotan the opportunity to live in safe, stable housing that is affordable in a community of their choice and create an inclusive, equitable and just housing system.

What to expect

The team of consultants will help the agency understand the information that it is receiving about housing needs and solutions and establish priorities and strategies for the next four years. Consultants can expect to work 6-14 hours a month between March to September of 2023. Tasks include reviewing materials, providing verbal and written input, attending meetings (virtual option available), and others. Hours will fluctuate month to month depending on the tasks required. Meetings will be scheduled to best accommodate other commitments (including other work and family) that the consultants may have. We recognize that consultants will not be able to attend every meeting, but if a meeting is missed, consultants will have an alternative path for providing their input.

Preferred qualifications

There is no required education or work experience to apply. Applicants should be able to attend regular meetings, work on a team, interact with stakeholders, and be willing to vocalize their thoughts, ideas, concerns, and questions. We are seeking applicants who are passionate about working on the state's efforts towards a just housing system. Applicants must have experienced



in the last 5 years 1 of the 7 housing situations and consider themselves to have low- to moderate incomes and faced barriers to accessing safe, stable housing that is affordable.

Compensation

Consultants will be compensated at \$50.00 per hour.

How to apply

If you are interested in being part of the consultant team, please submit your application to the following [link](#).

If you have any questions, please email Lateesha Coleman at lcoleman@rainbowresearch.org