

Building Future Leaders for Affordable Housing

Virginia Housing

Management Innovation: Human Resources

HFA Staff Contact

Maria Pruner

maria.pruner@virginiahousing.com



Virginia Housing



Building Future Leaders for Affordable Housing:

Virginia Housing's Fellows Program

Management Innovation HR Category

May 2025



“Our Fellows program equips the next generation of affordable housing leaders with impactful, real-world work experience.”

Tammy Neale, CEO, Virginia Housing

Brief Description

Launched in 2023, the Virginia Housing Fellows Program is a **two-year, full-time, salaried fellowship program** designed to equip high-potential early-career individuals with the knowledge and experience necessary to drive innovation and positive change for both our organization and our nonprofit partners in Virginia’s affordable housing sector. Our program provides hands-on, substantive projects that allow Fellows to develop leadership, analytical, and industry-specific skills while contributing to the mission of the entities that they support. The result of this innovative human resource management initiative is attracting talent to Virginia Housing and strengthening our operations while also providing benefits to nonprofit partners in our Housing Delivery Network. This program introduces a new generation of professionals with diverse backgrounds to Virginia’s affordable housing community.

Why It Was Undertaken

Over 75 million Baby Boomers are retiring, creating a critical generational shift for employers across the United States. Younger generations must be prepared to take on leadership roles, making programs that build leadership pipelines urgently needed. At Virginia Housing, the average age of our associates is 49, nearly 6 years older than the U.S. average age of 43.3, highlighting the need to prepare the next generation of leaders in affordable housing.

The program was created as an **emerging leadership pipeline** to address the growing demand for skilled leadership in the affordable housing sector. Our goal is to build future leaders for the affordable housing industry, especially from underrepresented communities that we serve, and give them the opportunity to develop expertise through active participation in impactful projects. The Fellows Program prepares the next generation of professionals to meet the increasing need for affordable housing through department rotations and experience working for a nonprofit partner.

The idea for the program was sparked by requests from several of our partner organizations, who serve on Virginia Housing’s advisory councils. They requested a program to train future leaders and provide the opportunity for them to apply for a loaned fellow sponsored by Virginia Housing.

What We Have Accomplished

The Fellows Program has been a transformative **career-launching platform**, helping participants gain the expertise and network needed to advance in affordable housing. This two-year, full-time, salaried program provides early career individuals with lasting skills and connections to make significant contributions to the sector. A key aspect of the Fellows Program is its ability to shape the career trajectories of its participants.

The first cohort was composed of four Fellows who were immersed in the dynamic world of affordable housing. Fellows were embedded in one of four divisions — Programs, Legal, Finance, and Operations — based on their interests and career goals and paired with Virginia Housing’s Associate Chiefs, who mentored them throughout the program, providing invaluable insight into leadership, strategic decision-making, and the affordable housing industry.

The first year focused on hands-on work across various departments, giving Fellows a broad understanding of housing and operational processes while contributing to key projects. In the second year, the Fellows spent eight months working directly for influential partner organizations within our Housing Delivery Network.

The **Better Housing Coalition (BHC)**, **Virginia Housing Alliance (VHA)**, **Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC)**, and **Virginia Poverty Law Center (VPLC)** applied for and were assigned a Fellow to be embedded in their workforces four days a week for eight months. During this time, Virginia Housing continued to provide the Fellows with salaries, benefits, and ongoing professional development. The Fellows increased our partners' capacity, and the partners provided a different perspective in affordable housing for the Fellows.

Training and development were central to this program. The Fellows joined Virginia Housing's robust **Emerging Leaders Program** with 23 other future leaders; participated in panel discussions with leaders from Homeownership, Rental Development, and Community Outreach; and collaborated with key affordable housing leaders both within and outside the organization. They represented Virginia Housing at conferences like the Governor's Housing Conference and attended impactful sessions, including one by Richard Rothstein and Leah Rothstein, the authors of *Just Action: How to Challenge Segregation Enacted Under the Color of Law*. In their final three months at Virginia Housing, Fellows received targeted career support, including resume reviews, networking opportunities, mock interviews with HR recruiters, and training on career development, behavioral interviewing, and resume writing.

Why It Is Meritorious and Meets NCSHA Award Judging Criteria

Innovative

The Fellows program introduces a comprehensive, structured approach to leadership development within affordable housing. This innovative program provides two years of employment with a salary commensurate with academic achievement; unparalleled experiential learning opportunities in different Virginia Housing departments; mentorship; and exposure to strategic policy work, housing nonprofit organizations, and various other aspects of the affordable housing industry. A particularly innovative approach is providing significant work experience with partner agencies in the second year – this is a distinct difference from typical internship programs.

The program ensures that each Fellow obtains a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities in affordable housing. The program not only prepares them for career growth but also fosters competitive leadership in the affordable housing space.

Replicable

The program's model, which focuses on hands-on learning and leadership development, can be adapted by other organizations seeking to develop future leaders in the affordable housing industry. The investment of resources brought new and varied talent into Virginia Housing, increased the capacity of partner organizations, sparked passion for affordable housing careers in the participants, and supported affordable housing efforts. Other HFAs have created fellow and intern programs; however, none so far have done so as a career launch program for the affordable housing industry that combines internal and external experiences.

Responded to a Management Challenge or Opportunity

Leadership transitions, especially between generations, can be critical to organizational development. Having a diverse staff across generations, demographics, and life experiences has consistently been shown to boost employee satisfaction, reduce turnover, drive innovation, and enhance industry competition. Virginia Housing has already leveraged internships as a cost-effective, low-risk strategy to identify new talent, increase productivity, and bring fresh perspectives to the organization. The Fellows Program takes this approach a step further, providing a longer and more targeted method for attracting and developing early career talent.

Achieved Measurable Improvement in Agency Operations

The Fellows' rotations played a pivotal role in advancing key projects aligned with the Authority's goals. These rotations not only contributed to the completion of important initiatives but also equipped the Fellows with valuable skills, including project management, research, and effective communication, while deepening their understanding of public policy and affordable housing issues. The program also strengthened relationships with our partners.

Provides Benefits That Outweigh Costs

With the migration of Baby Boomers out of the workforce and the entry of less experienced candidates, there is a dramatic transition occurring in the workplace that many organizations are not prepared to meet. By investing in the development of future leaders, the program helps address the critical shortage of skilled professionals in affordable housing. The Fellows contribute immediately to organizational success while preparing for long-term career growth.

Demonstrates Effective Use of Resources

The program leverages mentorship, structured training, an existing Emerging Leaders Program, and real-world project experience to provide Fellows with tools needed for career advancement, all while contributing to the organization's broader mission. The Fellows also assisted with multiple volunteer efforts through their tenure, supporting IGNITE, our employee-led volunteer council.

Achieves Strategic Objectives

This program is directly aligned with two key strategic goals outlined in our Strategic Plan.

Strategic Goal 1: Address State Housing Needs by Partnering with the Housing Delivery Network, particularly **Strategy 1: Preserve and Strengthen the Housing Delivery Network**.

By building a sustainable leadership pipeline for our partners within Virginia's affordable housing industry, the Fellows Program helps increase local capacity to develop and manage affordable housing, ultimately providing greater access to thriving communities.

Strategic Goal 4: Deliver Superior, Long-Term Financial and Operational Performance to Strengthen Achievement of Mission, specifically **Strategy 2: Drive for Operational Excellence**.

By focusing on developing talent who represent communities we serve, the Fellows Program advances our mission, supports our Core Values, and serves the community at large.

Conclusion

The Virginia Housing Fellows Program is a transformative initiative that builds the next generation of leaders in Virginia's affordable housing sector. Through its focus on mentorship, hands-on experience in both governmental and nonprofit sectors, and leadership development, it ensures that Fellows are prepared to tackle the industry's challenges and lead efforts toward more sustainable, inclusive housing solutions. For its innovation, impact, and potential for long-term success, the Virginia Housing Fellows Program is a deserving candidate for the NCSHA Management Award.

Appendix

Marketing



Become a Leader in Affordable Housing

Apply Now to Virginia Housing's Two-Year Fellows Program

What is the Fellows Program?

The Fellows Program is not an internship, but rather a full-time, as a Fellow at Virginia Housing. If accepted, you'll spend the next two years working alongside creative leaders at one of the nation's most successful state housing authorities. You'll be working on real projects, and developing industry knowledge, leadership skills, and a strong network.

Who Should Apply?

We're looking for emerging leaders: people who are innovative, creative, and excited about our affordable housing mission. They may have different backgrounds, but all will share our deep commitment to success. Virginia Housing is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Further, we seek candidates from diverse backgrounds and traditionally underrepresented communities.

How Will This Help Your Career?

As a Fellow, you'll work in a collaborative environment with experienced professionals and business partners, with opportunities to learn and grow.

- **Year One** - You'll work with an Associate Chief, divisional managers, and business partners as you learn about the internal workings of Virginia Housing.
- **Year Two** - You'll work with external business partners on research assignments, gaining exposure to more industries and organizations, enhancing your network and skills.
- **At the end of your two-year fellowship**, you'll receive a letter of recommendation from Virginia Housing's affordable housing industry experts.



Apply Now
Scan QR code or
VirginiaHousing.com

We're looking for amazing people! Come join Virginia Housing as a Virginia Housing Fellow.

In conjunction with our 50th Anniversary, Virginia Housing is launching its very first Fellows Program. We're seeking emerging leaders with the desire to learn more about the affordable housing industry, while serving the people of the Commonwealth. We want candidates who will commit to a 2-year program. Our Fellows will focus on developing industry-specific knowledge and building business skills to prepare for leadership roles. Working across divisions, Fellows will have the opportunity to learn and grow their skills, while gaining valuable work experience at the nation's premier housing finance agency.

Upon completion, our Fellows will have a good understanding of the affordable housing community and the vital role Virginia Housing, and its partners play in this space. Each Fellow will also have the opportunity to participate in an affordable housing project during their second year with one of our housing partners, gaining practical work experience.

Virginia Housing is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Further, we encourage applicants from diverse backgrounds and traditionally underrepresented communities to apply.

Qualified candidates must possess:

- Bachelor's Degree in Community Planning & Development, Policy, Legal, Business Administration, Communication, or a similar area of study or equivalent work experience in a business environment.
- A willingness to learn and grow.
- A few years' experience in a business environment.
- Be highly collaborative with effective communications skills.
- Ability to be adaptable and flexible in a dynamic environment.
- Extremely organized with strong writing and research skills.
- Experienced in Microsoft Applications (Outlook, Word, Excel).
- Problem-solving, critical thinking, and analytical skills.

All candidates must submit an essay along with their application on one of these topics "What affordable housing means to you" or "How you believe affordable housing impacts communities". The essay should be 2 pages, double spaced using 12 pt. Arial font.

Virginia Housing is one of the nation's premier housing finance agencies. Our mission is to help Virginians attain quality, affordable housing, which we accomplish through our public-private partnerships. We are committed to a healthy and diverse workforce. We offer on-site conveniences and professional development opportunities.

Applications and resumes are accepted online only at <http://www.virginiahousing.com/careers>.

This position will close at midnight on March 31, 2023.

This is a paid fellowship at a rate of \$55,000 annually plus benefits.

- EOE -

Training

Virginia Housing Fellows Program Professional Development Program



Summer Onboarding Program, 2022

- New Essentials Onboarding Program for all Associates
- Full Day Fellows Orientation
- Peer to Peer Coaching Session around developing a leadership goal
- 4 Book Club Sessions on *The Color of Law* and follow-up community event with author of sequel
- Fellows Virtual Watercoolers with ice breakers
- Deep Dive Lunch Sessions
 - Homeownership Originations
 - Homeownership Servicing
 - Rental Development
 - Community Outreach

Emerging Leaders Program, Fall 2022-Spring 2023

Eight-month leadership program that focuses on leadership skills, business acumen, property tours, and mentorship along with 23 other emerging leaders from the Authority

Loaned Fellow Preparation, Spring 2024

- Full Day Workshop to prepare professionally for a new workplace
- Workshop for Loaned Fellow Partner Organization
- Networking lunch with Loaned Fellow Partner Organization mentors and fellows.

Career Advancement Training Program, February-June 2025

- LinkedIn Learning - Lunch & Learning
- Overcoming Imposter Syndrome Workshop
- Begin With WE Book Discussion Workshop (*authority-wide culture initiative*)
- Resume Writing & Behavioral Interviewing
- Your Career, Your Roadmap Workshop
- How to get the best out of LinkedIn - Lunch and Learn
- Mock Interview Practice
- Grow Your Future Through Goal Setting Workshop
- Developing a Professional Mindset Workshop
- The Power of Feedback Workshop

Partnerships and Progress

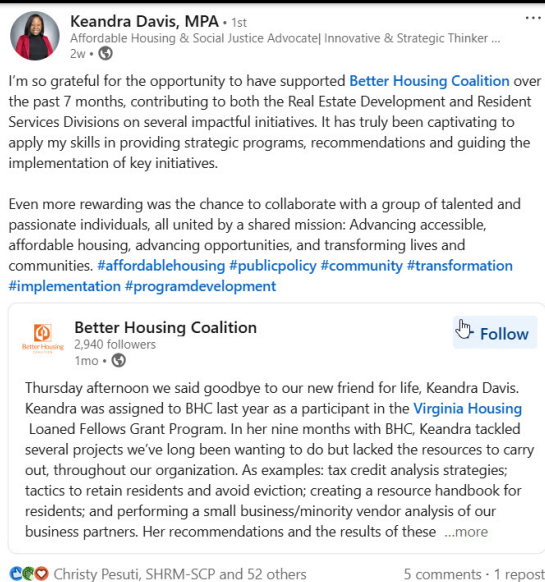


Getting to Know You: Keandra Davis

Keandra Davis wants to change the world. A Virginia Housing Fellow, she's lending her policy knowledge and research skills to Rental, Community Outreach and Homeownership while learning the ins and outs of the affordable housing industry.

And by night? She's a Ph.D. student dedicated to serving marginalized communities.

There's another mission on her plate...



Partner Organizations



Fellows



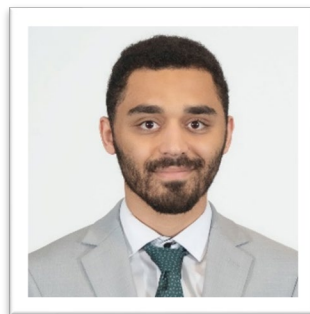
Keandra Davis,
Programs Division Fellow



Jasmine Martin,
Finance Division Fellow



Michelle De La Cruz,
Operations Division Fellow



Charles Miller III, MPA
Legal Division Fellow