Cultural, Relevant and Effective:

Proven Practices for Successful Outreach to Communities of Color





Communicating critical information to those who often need it most — especially in communities of color and rural areas — has never been more urgent or difficult. As housing costs rise, and neighborhoods once deemed affordable increasingly move out of reach for many households, sharing information quickly could be the difference between housing security and not having a place to call home. Just 40 years ago, it was easier to reach community members through network television, local radio, newspapers, knocking on doors, and at meetings and events.

Times have changed. People are busier than ever. With the growing popularity of social media, streaming television and radio, search-engine marketing and online events, to name a few, finding and reaching the right consumers with the right message at the right time has never been more challenging. There are barriers, and internet access remains a significant one. However, housing organizations across the country have consistently cut through the "noise" to get their audiences the information they need in time to make the best decisions for their households.

What are they doing? And what successes can you learn and implement for your organization?

Purpose of the Guide

How can housing nonprofit organizations nationwide engage more households in need, especially communities of color? NeighborWorks America, a congressionally chartered national nonprofit striving to make every community a place of opportunity, is committed to helping them do just that.

The purpose of this guide is to help community-based housing organizations identify effective outreach practices to increase access to rental and homeownership information within communities of color.

During the 2008 foreclosure housing crisis and recent pandemic, the ability to quickly communicate information to households kept millions in their homes or helped them find suitable housing in the short and long term. Effective outreach practices worked well for the organizations used to develop this guide. These practices can help other housing and community development organizations as they adapt strategies for the communities they serve.

Why This Guide Matters

An outreach practices guide can help housing organizations keep the dream alive for the individuals and families they have been called to serve. The dream? Having a place to call home. Housing nonprofits often look for ways to quickly reach and engage a greater number of people with time-sensitive information. This guide offers the opportunity to see how a cross-section of peer organizations in housing — facing similar challenges and current market conditions — are connecting with their audience.

Process used to determine effective practices

During Spring and Fall 2022, NeighborWorks America assembled housing nonprofits from across the country for focus groups and listening sessions to gather real-time information about their outreach practices. These participating organizations cited their commitment to communities of color. Participants talked about who they were trying to reach; their communications infrastructure; the impact of culture and language on their outreach strategies; and what worked, what did not and why. This guide curates the results of those conversations into practical, actionable steps that housing organizations can adapt for the communities they want to reach and serve.



Successful Outreach Starts with a Plan

An important step for effective outreach starts with a plan. Can you wing it and get results? Sometimes you can. But in almost every case and at any budget, your organization could reach and engage more of your audience if you start with a written plan, even a short one.

A basic plan should include the following:

Goal: What specific result do you equate with success? For example: Number of signups, program applications, event attendees, inquiries, social shares, visits to a website or engagements from a certain audience

Audience: Who do you need to reach to meet your goal? Know things about your audience including: housing status; what interests or motivates them; what barriers they face; their age, income/employment, ethnicity, language and culture; household structure; where they live; literacy level; internet access; and how they prefer to receive information.

Message: What do you need your audience to know so you will meet your goal? For your audience to take action, should the message sound like it is coming from a good friend or a trusted authority? Is it formal or informal and in what language? Know what to say and how to say it so your audience will understand.

Delivery: How does your message need to be delivered and at what time? Your audience has

a preference, and you need to know what it is. The preferred delivery may be digital, social, mobile, television, radio, streaming television and/or radio, newspaper, posters or community signs, or even face-to-face interaction. Should the delivery be made during the morning, afternoon or night?

Call to action: What do you need the audience to do and by what deadline? Will they need to make a call, apply, buy a ticket, or complete a form or survey? A clear call to action is an important step to reaching your goal.

Audience support: How will you support your audience when they respond? Your plan may include items such as a dedicated phone number or website landing page, customized script for staff, automated email or text response, multiple 24-hour payment options, or online signup form or printed signup form at events. If the call to action should only happen during specific hours and or days, create a plan to reflect that.

Results analysis: Review your outreach results to see if you are on track. Are your results what you expected? If not, it's time to make a change. Digital, online and social platforms offer excellent advantages for analysis and quick adjustment to outreach efforts that do not perform well. Having an analysis process in place before you start your outreach is important — regardless of your outreach plan.



Budget: What is the budget? Knowing how much you can spend will dictate where you can effectively reach your audience — and for how long. Be careful. Just because the outreach channel is inexpensive does not mean it will be effective for your goal. Impressions are great but not when your goals are number of calls, signups or new customers.

A fillable, downloadable Action Plan can help you develop your plan every time outreach is needed for a program or event — or for general awareness. See more in the Resources section of this guide.

What successful organizations share

Some housing organizations are more consistent than others at effective outreach. During group

discussions, similar practices emerged that had contributed to these organizations' outreach success, despite different goals,

Over 97% of adults in the United States have a mobile phone Pew Research Center

Consider an outreach plan, even a brief one, for each outreach effort to be more effective.

audiences, geographies, strategies, budgets or even organization sizes. What practices did they share that can be adapted for your organization?

1. Have dedicated communications staff

It is not uncommon in small- to mid-size nonprofit organizations to have communications activities performed by staff with other responsibilities that do not include communications. However, multiple focus group and listening session participants have dedicated full- or part-time staff for outreach and communications, and some even have separate departments. These staff

3. Get detailed knowledge about the audience

Knowing details about your audience has never been more important. Session participants described their audiences with specific details, and they used that knowledge to develop their plans. Oweesta, a national Native CDFI intermediary, found that using traditional and low-tech methods of outreach provided high visibility in the rural communities they were trying to reach. They distribute information to native and tribal communities using bulletin boards, newspapers, and phone calls. Leveraging radio is especially effective, shares CEO Chrystel Cornelius.

members only work on communications, outreach and advertising, social media, online and digital marketing and media relations. In today's fast-changing outreach environment, organizations that don't have dedicated staff — even part-timers or interns — are often at a disadvantage. They may find it increasingly difficult to reach their audiences, especially with the time commitment for outreach.

2. Use an outreach plan

Multiple organizations said using an outreach plan increased their effectiveness. A written marketing plan or a one-pager for an event is an effective practice for organizations of all sizes in any industry. Is success possible without a written plan? Yes. Is it likely to last over time? No, it is not. A goal without a plan is not a sound practice.

"We are able to have different collateral and translate messaging outreach For immigrant communities and older adults, information may be complicated so having the opportunity to transcreate is very important."

María Jesús Cervantes, Chicanos por la Causa

To be truly effective at outreach, it is no longer enough to just know the geography, age, ethnicity, household structure and housing status of your audience. That is a good place to start. However, segmenting your audience based on their lifestyle preference, information needs and interests, and then tailoring a specific message to them, leads to more success. "The marketing can be different if we're targeting youth or if we're targeting elders," Cornelius says. Learn your clients' interests, what barriers they have, what help or resources they want, aspirations for

the future, what they listen to, read and watch, how they like to get information and more.

4. Understand the importance of culture vs. language

How should culture affect your outreach? Speaking the same language and being the same ethnicity does not guarantee an audience response. When reaching communities of color, successful organizations understood their community's culture, the

ethnicity and the language(s) these communities spoke. Having that cultural understanding informed how their messages were communicated and how their services were delivered. It also influenced the images and graphics used in their outreach, which reflected or were relevant to a specific audience. They noted reaching Spanish speakers means more than just translating a flyer to Spanish. For example, reaching a Latina of Mexican descent in Texas is different from reaching a Latina of Puerto Rican descent in New York or a Latina of El Salvadoran descent in Maryland. All are Spanish-speaking women, but they come from different cultural backgrounds and different geographies, and this should inform your outreach plan.

"While translation focuses on replacing the words in one language with corresponding words in a new language, transcreation services are focused on conveying the same message and concept in a new language."

"Six Ways Transcreation Differs from Translation," Smartling Learning Center

5. Translate Outreach Information Using Real People

Many housing nonprofits now serve audiences who speak languages other than English. To engage those with limited English proficiency or a preference to communicate in their first language, focus group organizations translated their outreach information. They used real people for the translations and recommended bypassing online translation sites, which can be inaccurate. They noted that having native speakers read and review the translations is a

must. Translation into any language goes beyond literal translation and focuses on the meaning of the words to ensure the translation is accurate and reflects the culture. Only humans can do that.

Little Tokyo Service Center, for instance, translates a newsletter into Japanese and mails it to residents each month. Other NeighborWorks network organizations have reported placing ads on radio stations, or **using billboards** in Spanish

to explain their services to would-be clients.

6. Stay away from colors, images or text that may be sensitive

When developing content for outreach plans for communities of color, most organizations noted there were colors, images or text they stayed away from. They valued the cultural nuances among the various audiences they served and avoided anything that could be sensitive. Content that could attract one audience could also be a turnoff for other audiences they served. Examples of content they avoided included patriotic symbols or government, politics, religion, law enforcement, certain colors that represent death, socio-economic status, the word "free,"

"Language and cultural competency are very important, so the clients feel very comfortable talking."

Julie Itahara, Little Tokyo Service Center

etc. But remember, for some audiences this same content might be welcomed. This underscores why detailed knowledge of your audience is important – especially in communities of color. they trust earned media, such as recommendations from friends and family." Word of mouth is more than just telling others about a newsletter, program or event so they can share it. The prac-

7. Use integrated outreach communications

The focus group noted the importance of integrated communications to reach an audience. Audiences today are more complex, so there is no "one way" or magic potion to engage them. There are a variety of outreach channels, so the more you know about your audience, the better you will be at selecting the appropriate mix. Oweesta has found success using Facebook to reach tribal communities. But they also use radio, newsletters, listservs and more. And during the pandemic, Little Tokyo Service Center reached out individually to clients to talk one on one.

8. Promote word of mouth because it wins

Word of mouth is still undefeated! When focus-group participants were asked which type

of outreach consistently generates results, "word of mouth" came out on top almost unanimously. "Even though it's not as quantifiable, it works phenomenally among tribes or clients," Cornelius shares.

According to Nielsen's Global Trust in Advertising report, "92% of consumers around the world say



"One thing that can lead to images or particularly words that are inappropriate is whenever you use translation services and you do not double check them."

Malcolm Yeung, Chinatown CDC

tice now includes community forums, social media shares, online reviews, video testimonials and referrals from clients, friends and family. For word of mouth to work best, use your organization's various communications channels to let others know what is going on. Then ask your clients, staff and followers to share, too.

9. Develop local TV, radio and print media relationships

Securing media placements takes perseverance, flexibility and the ability to build and maintain relationships with reporters. Giving journalists what they need builds trust, and each time you provide helpful information you become more of a go-to resource in their eyes. Chinatown CDC has a close relationship with Chinese media in San Francisco. "We'll use Chinese media, in particular, to highlight whatever sort

of critical issue is going on at the moment," Executive Director Malcolm Yeung says. The news articles also mention the support services the organization has available.

To develop relationships with members of the media, read and distribute their work. Subscribe to reporters' media sources and show support by

"Word of mouth advertising is the process of influencing organic discussions about your brand. It's a free advertisement from a customer that comes from having a positive experience with your brand. Highly involved buyers often recommend their personal contacts both online and offline."

"Word of Mouth Marketing: How to Get a Free, Sustainable Flow of New Customers" by Michael Keenan, Shopify Retail Blog

sharing their stories through your social distribution channels and by email. Go to events and conferences where you might meet reporters, virtually and in person, and introduce yourself and your organization's impact. Other things that will help establish a strong relationship? Preparing materials in advance. If your organization helped create more Hispanic or Latino homebuyers than last year, ensure you have data showing this.

Use internet research to decide which reporters to pitch. An event celebrating new Black homeowners, for instance, may attract a race/ethnicity reporter. And don't forget to reach out to news desks at local television and radio stations. Write strong, succinct pitch

emails that contain the vital information. And remember to follow up briefly by phone! Some real-life results? Asian Americans for Equality used its relationships with Chinese media to create a 20-minute informational interview on a local Chinese news radio station. Meanwhile, Little Tokyo Service Center connected a social worker with Korean media, explaining what the nonprofit provided and how to contact them.

10. Analyze what works and what does not

A common practice among the organizations in our sessions was sharing what worked and what didn't. Although a particular platform or tactic did not emerge, they did analyze their outreach efforts. To know if your outreach is on track to reach your goal, analyze the results. What outreach effort drove the most cost-effective

"We use lots of brochures and local newspapers, and radio presence is really the lifeline of communications to these communities."

Chrystel Cornelius, Oweesta

responses or greatest number of people to an event? How many calls went to your dedicated phone line? How many flyers did you pass out and in what languages? What were the ages or key demographics of those who clicked on your program's landing page? What were the results from a post-event survey? If you are not intentional and thoughtful with your outreach, reaching communities of color can be a challenge. Analyzing the results during your outreach

> effort is ideal for adjusting quickly and increasing effectiveness. If the results are disappointing, there is time to make a change.

11. Build trust with the community

Trust is a must in communities of color if you want to achieve outreach success.

During discussions, organizations highlighted that audience trust was important to their success and by the same token, lack of trust could be a major barrier to any outreach effort. You must demonstrate that your organization cares for your audience, the things they care about and the community where your organization is located. These steps are important, especially in communities of color, where skepticism is common. Interacting with residents regularly, listening to their concerns, helping their families, directing them to resources, helping to resolve neighborhood problems, participating in community events, attending neighborhood forums and town halls, and so on, are building blocks of trust. Once this trust is established, it opens the door for other opportunities. Chinatown CDC offers coffee hours to discuss issues with residents, Yeung says. They also hold resident meetings and





"We continue to have strong relationships with media, so we have established TV shows and radio shows through partnerships that we do with our media partners. This includes consistent opportunities to promote our different programs and services."

María Jesús Cervantes, Chicanos Por La Causa

community-building events. "We really want our residents to build trust in each other and us, so if they do need services, they know we're here."

12. Leverage partnerships with community leaders and organizations

Another common practice is forming partnerships with local leaders and other community organizations that provide different services or resources and often reach other audiences of interest. Working together, you and your partner can serve different audiences, share housing information with more people and focus on addressing the issues facing your communities. Leveraging partnerships also helps distribute information more quickly through a wider network. During the start of the pandemic, organizations leveraged partnership networks to get housing information into the hands of those who lost their jobs. They were also able to link partners with those seeking health services, rental or mortgage assistance, and more.

13. Leverage your budget for maximum exposure; social media helps

The annual outreach budget among participating organizations ranged from a few thousand dollars to more than \$100,000 and showed a lot of creativity. Organizations with limited budgets regularly leveraged media relationships, especially radio, to gain earned media opportunities; they used targeted paid advertising for specific types of outreach or programs. They relied on community-based newspapers, often in other languages, for regular media coverage to keep up brand awareness with minimal dollar investment. They also leveraged their budgets with social media — unpaid and paid — and used a mix of different platforms from around the globe based on the audience and language preference. For example, a few organizations used WeChat to reach people of Chinese descent for local events. Organizations used Nextdoor in rural and suburban areas for program information, and LinkedIn for media and partner relationships.

14. Remember to meet people "where they are" A number of organizations said they attend fairs, celebrations and community events as a means of reaching constituents. Asian Americans for Equality found that face-to-face events where they provided information about free resources at tables and booths generated high interest from consumers within the Asian community. Chicanos Por La Causa had similar success. Other NeighborWorks organizations have connected with consumers at churches and bodegas. Meanwhile, Neighborhood Housing Services of Baltimore understood the reluctance Black people in their community felt when seeking housing assistance at a public event. Using geo-targeting, the organization distributed vital information via email and door hangers to homeowners facing foreclosure during the pandemic.

"Every community has its own specific tools that they're using so we rely on our partners to know the most effective tools." Krystal Langholz, Oweesta

Getting there from here: How organizations can implement these practices

Many reading this guide are interested in ways to further engage with the communities of color they already serve or want to explore ways to reach new communities of color because their service areas are changing. Regardless of your starting point, the basics below can help your organization get from where it is now to where it wants to be:

Other things to consider

As your organization considers how to leverage this guide to better reach and serve communities of color, be aware:

1. The competition for your audience is high and well-funded by for-profit companies.

Your team will need to stay current with the latest outreach practices and resources to compete for the attention of your audience. Your outreach may be working, but is there room for improvement?

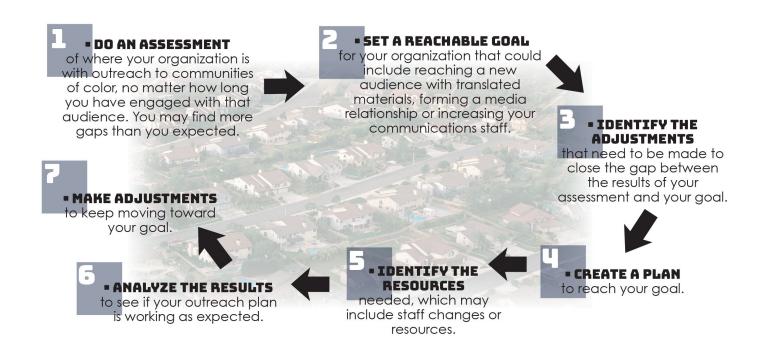
2. Having dedicated staff for outreach could also include part-time staff, interns or communications volunteers.

There are multiple sources to add these roles to your team, including people who are already passionate about your organization such as supporters, subscribers and followers. Partnerships with universities and community organizations can also help.

3. A growing social media presence means your organization will probably need someone to monitor your content and the conversations your content generates.

Note that content, no matter how good or relevant, is still open for interpretation and needs to be monitored. It also shows your community that you are listening and engaged and not just trying to sell a product.

Sharing a range of resources — several at no cost — is an important part of helping housing organizations become more effective at reaching communities of color. For organizations with limited





staff or financial resources, these resources can expand existing outreach and open the door to new outreach efforts. Below is a curated list by category of available resources that can supplement the local resources you are currently using.

PLAN

Consumer Research Online

• Pollfish: Online consumer research by demographics, psychographics, and behaviors with screening questions and down radius of a location or census tract.

• SurveyMonkey: Easy online consumer research by demographics, psychographics, and behaviors but more limited features.

DESIGN AND DEVELOP

Graphic Design and Images

a. Graphic Design

Canva: Self-service, free-to-use online graphic design tool to create social posts, videos, flyers, posters, and so on.

Adobe Express: Self-service online content creation platform for social media (posts, stories, or ads), flyers, brochures, memes, magazine-style blog, posts, or explainer videos.

Fiverr: Freelance services for graphic design, video creation, voiceover, social and digital marketing, and so on.

Ripl: Self-service platform to design content for social media such as animated videos, collages, slideshows, and layered static image posts plus schedule or post instantly to TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, and YouTube

b. Photos, Videos and Music

Free and paid self-service platforms that include

culturally relevant photos, videos, illustrations, and images to use in various outreach platforms when royalty-free photos are not included in another design platform (for example, iStockPhoto, Admerasia/Getty Images, TONL, Pexels, Unsplash, Pixabay, Shutterstock)

Translation Services

a. Visit online translation providers that offer real people for professional translations into multiple languages (for example, Translate.com, Translated, Gengo)

Create Videos

a. Design

Canva, Envato: Online access to creative assets like graphic templates, website themes, photos, video, or audio that can be customized with colors, fonts, images, and music).

Doodly: Whiteboard animation software that does not require design or technical skill to create professional videos or hand types in various ethnicities)

Fiverr.

b. Voice-Over

Voice Talent Now: Affordable voice-over with several women/men, ethnicities, and languages for a radio/TV commercial, voicemail, on-hold, IVR, web audio, or other long-form narration. Fiverr

c. Text Captions and Subtitles for Videos Rev: Provides captions, transcripts, and subtitles to reach a wider audience. Wavel.ai: Provides captions, subtitles, voiceovers, and dubbing in multiple languages.



Resources for outreach

TOOLS TO GET THE WORD OUT

Social Media Management

a. Planning

Hootsuite: Management platform to create, schedule, listen, and analyze social content in one place.

Sprout Social: All-in-one management for organizations focused on growing social media beyond basic schedules and posts with advanced features like CRM integration and marketing funnels.

PostPlanner: Content curation platform to create best content, for organizations focused on increased engagement.

Onlypult: Tool that allows posts and scheduling to social media, blogs, messenger platforms and Google My Business.

Digital Marketing

a. Advertising

Google ads: Organization ad appears on Google when someone searches for a similar program or service to increase calls, visits, and web traffic; Google assistant available.

Google My Business: Free business profile that shows up in searches and includes services, programs, events, blog posts, photos, and videos plus allows responses to reviews.

Microsoft ads: Organization ad appears on Microsoft Bing or Yahoo when someone searches for a similar program or service to increase calls, visits, and web traffic that converts; Microsoft specialist available.

Bing Places for Business: Free business directory and profile that shows up in Bing searches and includes services, programs, events, blog posts, and photos.

Adroll: marketing platform for managing social, digital, email ad, and retargeting campaigns for any size business.

b. Direct and Email Marketing

Postcard Mania: Google ad and direct mail integration for targeting down to the mail carrier level that includes a direct mail piece, mail tracking, online follow-up and retargeting ads, and call tracking.

Mailchimp: Online marketing platform that allows targeted designs and messages across channels for email, social ads, landing pages, and retargeting ads.

Radio and Print

a. Radio

Radio Advertising Bureau: National radio association that helps advertisers of all sizes — at no cost — develop radio strategies, campaigns, promotions and so on. Can help organizations reach renters, homebuyers and homeowners. Email memberresponse@rab.com

b. Print

National Newspaper Publishers Association: Newspaper association for community-based newspapers reaching the African American community, targeting down to the city level via newspaper, social, and digital communications.

Streaming Radio, TV, and Social

(Live and Recorded)

a. Streaming Radio Advertising

Audiogo: iHeart radio stations, Univision, Pandora, Tuneln, Podcast One, and so on, with radio ad creation for \$10).

iHeart Radio: Radio stations that reach 9 out of 10 radio listeners in multiple languages with radio ad creation included).

Spotify: (Spotify platform only with radio ad creation included): Self-service versions of advertising platforms to reach listeners of radio stations and podcasts, targeting available by music, interests, housing status, language, down to zip code, age, and so on.

b. Streaming TV Advertising

Hulu TV: A self-service advertising platform to reach viewers of Hulu streaming TV, yet video ad creation is not included.

c. Multiplatform Social Distribution

StreamYard: A live streaming studio in your browser that allows video broadcasts directly to Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, and other platforms with your branding and a professional TV-network look.

Press Releases

a. Ereleases.com: Release distribution to media professionals by industry, interest, media channel, location (local, regional, national).

Noticias Newswire: (release distribution to media outlets reaching Spanish-speaking consumers in the United States, targeting available).

National Newspaper Publishers Association: Re-

lease distribution to community newspapers reaching African Americans, targeting available.

Online Event Marketing

a. Eventbrite: Event marketing platform integrated with social media (local, targeting available by interest, event type and payment type).

Events.com: World's largest event-based platform with several digital and social promotional tools including Eventbrite (targeting available by interest, location, event type) to increase visibility and attendance.

NextDoor: Social platform for engagement at the neighborhood level, targeting by homeownership status, interest, age, event, down to neighborhood and so on.

OUTREACH SUPPORT

a. Digital Assets Organization

LinkTr.ee: Organizes and connects your social media, website, videos, music, podcast, events, and so on, with one online link.

Bit.ly: URL shortening service and a link management platform that allows custom links and tracking by digital outreach channel.

Jotform: (easy to create forms for nonprofits that look professional, can be in multiple languages, accept payments with analytics, and so on, and they are organized in one place).

b. Trends, Tracking, and Analytics

Google Trends: Platform to analyze the popularity of the top searches on Google by location, age, gender and so on; helpful for developing digital and social marketing campaigns.

Google Analytics: Platform to analyze, track, and report website traffic by location, origin, age, device, campaign, referring website and so on.



Bit.ly: Allows custom links and tracking by digital outreach channel, great for analyzing outreach campaigns.

Grasshopper: Virtual phone system that allows multiple phone numbers for incoming call tracking for outreach campaigns, auto texting for missed calls, voicemail tree in multiple languages; professional voice recording available.

c. Downloadable Plan Template

Fillable PDF Action Plan

What Organizations Can Do Next

After reviewing this guide, what comes next? Gather a small group. Decide the best move for your organization based on the practices and resources listed and be realistic about what your organization is willing and able to do. The organizations interviewed for this guide have successful outreach efforts to communities of color, but the combinations of their outreach channels and tools differ. Remember the audience that you serve and expect your combination of channels and tools to reflect their reality. Be nimble and willing to adjust to a rapidly changing communications landscape. When housing is concerned, time is of the essence.

Conclusion

We hope this guide, "Cultural, Relevant and Effective: Proven Practices for Successful Outreach to Communities of Color," has been useful and has sparked some fresh ideas. In the years to come, reaching and equipping communities of color with the tools they need will become even more critical as housing opportunities and the economy change. The effective outreach of your organization may be the reason they have a place to call home.

Acknowledgements

This outreach guide reflects the collaborative work of many colleagues at NeighborWorks America, within the NeighborWorks network and our partners. We would like to thank members of our internal working group, led by Barbara Floyd Jones, senior manager of Homeownership Programs & Lending, and Angela Gravely-Smith, director of Real Estate Enterprise Strategies.

We would also like to thank our network organizations, whose input, engagement and ongoing feedback was essential to writing this guide.

NeighborWorks network organizations who contributed to the information, resources and practices provided in this guide include:

- Asian Americans for Equality
- Chicanos Por La Causa
- Chinatown CDC
- Little Tokyo Service Center
- NHS of Baltimore
- Oweesta

About NeighborWorks America

For more than 40 years, Neighborhood Reinvestment Corp., a national, nonpartisan nonprofit known as NeighborWorks America, has strived to make every community a place of opportunity. Our network of excellence includes nearly 250 members in every state, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. NeighborWorks America offers grant funding, peer exchange, technical assistance, evaluation tools, and access to training as the nation's leading trainer of housing and community development professionals. NeighborWorks network organizations provide residents in their communities with affordable homes, owned and rented; financial counseling and coaching; community building through resident engagement; and collaboration in the areas of health, employment and education.

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