



Strategic Plan

October 2021 - September 2024



Meeting this Moment

With the strong financial support of Congress over the past four decades, NeighborWorks America has grown into a national force promoting affordable housing and community development in urban, suburban and rural communities. In partnership with our network, we collectively have leveraged our annual federal appropriation into billions of dollars of investments in local communities. Every year, these investments help expand access to affordable housing, open the door to home ownership to tens of thousands of people, create and maintain thousands of jobs, and revitalize under-resourced communities.

As the nation emerges from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, NeighborWorks America's network of nearly 250 local nonprofit organizations stands primed and ready to respond to some of the most pressing challenges facing our country.

Rapidly rising construction costs and rising property prices make it harder to develop and rehab affordable housing for renters and homebuyers, leading to higher rents and home prices and further cost-burdening low-income renters and pushing homeownership out of reach for more potential buyers. Lack of affordable inventory for both multi-family and for sale single family homes remains an enormous issue facing many communities. And accessing sufficient capital to respond on the scale needed to make a significant difference remains a challenge for NeighborWorks network organizations.

The pandemic and experiences over the past year illustrated the criticality of the interconnected nature of health, housing, and the economic stresses facing families and communities across the country and reinforced the understanding that we will need creative and comprehensive solutions.

OUR MISSION AND VISION

NeighborWorks creates opportunities for people to live in affordable homes, improve their lives and strengthen their communities. We work to make every community in America a place of opportunity.

CORE BELIEFS

- Our fundamental core belief is that families and communities need quality affordable housing to thrive. Housing anchors the investments in people and place needed to address equity and eliminate structural barriers to opportunities that can improve lives.
- All individuals and families deserve housing stability, to build wealth, and make decisions that impact their future. Equitably meeting the housing needs and improving the communities of underserved populations is essential for individuals, families and communities to thrive.
- Communities are more equitable, inclusive and equipped to be resilient, healthy, vibrant places when the residents, nonprofits and leaders that serve them are empowered to drive and sustain positive change.
- Communities are positioned to thrive when residents are engaged, leading the charge to make positive change, and there is a local infrastructure of strong nonprofits that have the capacity and resources to provide access to affordable housing, improve lives and strengthen communities.

We know that “home” is not just the building where we live, but also the community that surrounds and supports us, and that all deserve equitable access to opportunity.

In the midst of intersecting crises impacting every community we serve, our sustained record of results, combined with prudent fiscal management and exceptional stewardship has garnered strong Congressional and partnership support and has positioned NeighborWorks for increased impact over the next three years. The resilience of the NeighborWorks network has never been more evident as these organizations have nimbly risen to address the needs of their communities. To this strong community infrastructure, NeighborWorks will continue to add critical value through grants, technical assistance, capacity building, training and leadership development, organizational assessment, and thought leadership.

To meet this moment, our October 2021- September 2024 strategic plan focuses on equitable recovery and resilience. It does so by investing for greater impact: this moment requires new ways of working, new strategies and approaches, and expanded access to resources to replicate and scale proven strategies. NeighborWorks America and the network are well-positioned to respond, not just to this crisis, but the next one as well.

NeighborWorks America stands committed to its mission, made all the more urgent in this time. At NeighborWorks, we know that “home” is not just the building where we live, but also the community that surrounds and supports us, and that all deserve equitable access to opportunity.

OUR VALUES

To achieve our mission and vision, we must continue to strengthen an organizational culture built on shared values. We always strive to live the core values that are fundamental to our work and how we engage with each other and those we serve:

- **Accountability** – We are accountable for achieving excellence through measurable, impactful outcomes
- **Integrity** – We create an environment of transparency and honesty that is built on respect and openness
- **Inclusion** – We foster inclusive access and participation across diverse stakeholders to ensure we build on diversity as a strength
- **Collaboration** – We foster effective collaboration and work in partnership with others to achieve results
- **Stewardship** – We are resourceful, responsible stewards, promoting sustainable practices and leveraging resources to maximize impact



Organizational Goals

Over the next three years, NeighborWorks will work with its network partners to respond to the continuing affordable housing crisis affecting so many American communities. In the wake of pandemic and growing movement to address structural inequities, our short-term goals and outcomes reflect the need to meet this moment, even as our long-term aspirations for impact remain the same. NeighborWorks was chartered to create places of opportunity in communities across the country, and between 2022 and 2024 we will remain true to that mission as we focus on four specific organizational goals:

1. **Create, preserve and invest in affordable housing and wealth building**
2. **Foster stronger, more equitable communities**
3. **Strengthen the capacity and sustainability of the NeighborWorks network**
4. **Strengthen a culture of accountability and belonging at NeighborWorks America**

For each of these goals, we have defined a set of measurable, three-year outcomes and the key initiatives that we expect to undertake to achieve the outcomes. Please note that the activities and programs described after each goal below do not reflect the totality of NeighborWorks's organizational effort, but rather the work that we aspire to do together, in service of the strategic plan.



This moment requires new ways of working, new strategies and approaches, and expanded access to resources to replicate and scale proven strategies.

GOAL 1

Create, preserve and invest in affordable housing and wealth building

We know that stable, affordable housing is a platform for financial wellbeing and provides a pathway to build wealth. Communities of color have historically been barred from intergenerational wealth building through housing discrimination and structural barriers--- these disparities are further exacerbated during periods of crisis. Creating pathways to wealth building through affordable rental housing and sustainable homeownership is fundamental to creating equitable opportunity.

Over the next 3 years, NeighborWorks will increase access to capital and catalyze and amplify innovative solutions to create and preserve affordable housing in communities across the country. NeighborWorks will also focus on reducing barriers to wealth building in communities of color by supporting customer-centric approaches which anchor responsive services for individuals at each transition point on the housing continuum. This includes offering programs that stabilize people at risk of homelessness and support them all the way through sustainable homeownership, if desired. Through new partnerships, expanded funding, and replicating successful housing solutions, NeighborWorks America will strengthen its investment in strategies that support housing stability and wealth creation.

2024 Outcomes

- The NeighborWorks network leverages over \$45 billion in investment by 2024. This investment in communities includes 50,000 rental and 5,000 single-family homes produced, 70,000 new homeowners created, and \$650 million in new residential lending and \$5 billion in commercial lending;
- NeighborWorks supports 60,000 households to remain stably housed; and
- NeighborWorks America expands access to capital for NeighborWorks organizations by establishing at least four new partnerships to bring low-interest rate debt and/or equity to support network investment in their communities.

Key initiatives

- 1A. Expand access to capital
- 1B. Invest in replication and testing of innovative strategies that dramatically improve access to affordable housing
- 1C. Strengthen continuum of services for improving financial health and wealth of low-income and households of color

GOAL 2

Foster stronger, more equitable communities

We know that comprehensive approaches are needed to address the complex, multifaceted issues facing communities. While housing is a critical anchor, comprehensive approaches are required to help communities recover from the pandemic and become more resilient in the future. We must connect housing to health, education, economic development, public safety, and workforce development through community-driven strategies that meet unique local needs, and invest in the development and empowerment of resident leaders to craft solutions to the challenges facing their communities to build stronger, more equitable communities.

Over the next three years, NeighborWorks will deepen its support for comprehensive, place-based and resident-led efforts with a focus on holistic, cross-sector approaches to advance equity and pandemic response efforts. NeighborWorks will partner with the network, residents, and community stakeholders to develop and implement local strategies aligned with a shared vision and framework for comprehensive community development and build capacity to attract and deploy resources. Under this goal, NeighborWorks will continue its commitment to inclusive resident engagement, which is central to creating and sustaining positive change. We will help equip organizations to work across sectors and connect their strategies to community-led plans. We will also support organizations to assess long-term change in their communities and elevate our story of positive impact in communities across the country.

2024 Outcomes

- Demonstrate the impact of comprehensive approaches to advancing equity and pandemic recovery in 30 communities (inclusive of rural, Indigenous, and communities of color) through a strategic layering of capacity building tools, training, investment, leadership programs, and data and evaluation tools to deepen or expand resident-led comprehensive community development;
- 50% of the network systematically engages residents in guiding and implementing community development strategies, with a focus on elevating models for engaging residents in rural areas and for promoting leadership among communities of color; and
- Create a strategic, integrated communications plan and implement strategies to highlight our thought leadership in Comprehensive Community Development (CCD) through a variety of channels and platforms.

Key initiatives

- 2A.** Focus investments through new multi-year capacity-building and grant funding program
- 2B.** Provide CCD and Resident Leadership Tools, Training and Peer Collaboration
- 2C.** Assess Community Change and Tell Story of Impact

GOAL 3

Strengthen the capacity and sustainability of the NeighborWorks network

The network is the major delivery system through which NeighborWorks America achieves its mission. By increasing the strength, capacity and sustainability of the network, we exponentially increase our impact and our ability to build strong communities even during crisis. NeighborWorks America and the network have been a critical source of housing and community services during this pandemic due to the scale, efficiency and resilience of the network. We want to continue to strengthen capacity and build deep sustainability so that NeighborWorks Organizations respond to challenges in the future.

To achieve this goal, over the next 3 years, NeighborWorks America will increase the capacity and sustainability of the NeighborWorks network to build strong and resilient communities through enhanced levels of funding/investment, capacity building, technical assistance and learning/collaboration opportunities. We will support organizational resilience by ensuring network members have sufficient knowledge and resources to assess community needs, access the resources to deliver critical services, and are positioned to meet the next crisis, be it economic, disaster-related or other systemic calamity. In addition, we will work toward addressing long-term human resource capacity needs by piloting new ways to build a diverse talent pipeline as we know many community development professionals will be facing retirement over the next several years.

2024 Outcomes

- Further strengthen the sustainability and capacity of the network by assessing the capacity and financial health of 100% of NWOs and providing targeted support such as business strengthening, portfolio strengthening, and sustainable business services or other similar resources to NWOs with an intentional focus on network organizations that serve communities of color and areas of persistent poverty;
- 100% of NWOs take at least one step to increase their ability to meet and respond to crises by identifying and addressing a gap needed to strengthen preparation and readiness (e.g., business continuity planning, cybersecurity, disaster preparedness); and
- Pilot 3 initiatives designed to increase diversity of talent in NWO entry-level, mid-level and executive-level staff.

Key initiatives

- 3A.** Strengthen financial sustainability of the network through capacity-building, fundraising, training and peer collaboration
- 3B.** Strengthen organizational resilience through preparation, training, best practices
- 3C.** Develop a diverse talent pipeline for the sector

GOAL 4

Strengthen a culture of accountability and belonging at NeighborWorks America

To accomplish these ambitious outcomes will require the common commitment and best efforts of everyone across the NeighborWorks network. But it will also be necessary to strengthen a culture of accountability and belonging within NeighborWorks America itself. The strategy therefore includes a set of organizational initiatives designed explicitly to accelerate our progress in making this critical internal evolution.

By living our values of stewardship, accountability, integrity, inclusion and collaboration, NeighborWorks America will advance a culture that fosters belonging and deepens our impact. Institutionalizing our Race, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion work so it is part of our fabric as an organization, not a separate initiative, is crucial to meeting this moment. We want to ensure NeighborWorks America has the culture, processes, and staff capacity to continually increase equity and inclusion in all that we do.

Over the next 3 years, NeighborWorks America will cultivate a culture of belonging by committing to practices that advance diversity, equity and inclusion across all levels of the organization. We will work to ensure our corporate practices are aligned with our strategy and our values. We will make an equitable transition to the hybrid workplace, while creating places and spaces for opportunity for staff within and across the organization. We will also work to make our accountability mechanisms more consistent across the organization to optimize performance.

If these initiatives are successful, our workforce at all levels will be representative of the communities NeighborWorks serves. We will have seamlessly transitioned to a hybrid workplace and we document a strengthened staff commitment to NeighborWorks, as measured by an increasing net promoter score. And perhaps most important, as an organization we will not only live our values, but lean into them as well.



2024 Outcomes

- Further strengthen staff commitment to NeighborWorks as measured by an increasing net promoter score;
- Successfully transition to a hybrid workplace; and
- Ensure workforce at all levels is representative of the communities NeighborWorks serves.

Key initiatives

- 4A. Live our values by integrating equity and inclusion into NeighborWorks America's way of operating
- 4B. Equitable transition to hybrid workplace
- 4C. Create places and spaces for opportunity for staff within and across the organization
- 4D. Optimize accountability structures and processes by implementing regular customer feedback mechanisms and using data to drive learning and decision making

GLOSSARY

Backbone organization – An organization that guides vision and strategy, supports collaboration, ensures accountability and mobilizes resources in support of a shared outcomes. The term originally referred to a lead organization in a collective impact model, although the use has expanded to encompass other forms of collaboration. Backbone organizations are common in comprehensive community development efforts, where one organization may play a lead role in aligning multiple cross-sectors partners under a shared vision and strategy for advancing positive community change.

Belonging – Feeling of security and support with a sense of acceptance, inclusion, and identity. This can be measured in our culture pulse and organizational diagnostic surveys with a variety of Likert scale statements. Fostering belonging has been shown to result in lower turnover, fewer sick days, greater productivity, as well as greater employee satisfaction and commitment to the workplace.

Communities of Color – Identity-based communities that hold a primary racial identity that describes shared racial characteristics among community members. The term aims to define characteristics of the community that its members share (such as being African American or Indigenous) that supports self-definition by community members, and that typically denotes a shared history and current or historic experiences of racism. The community may or may not also be a geographic community. Given that race is a socially defined construct, the definitions of these communities are dynamic and evolve over time. Racial identities included are all Indigenous communities, Latino, Asian and Pacific Islander (further disaggregated according to local preferences), African American, African, Middle Eastern, and Slavic communities.

Community Building and Engagement (CB&E) – A resident-driven approach that allows for community ownership of both strategies and outcomes. It trusts that resident knowledge, skills, relationships, leadership, and collective ability are key to creating and sustaining positive and equitable change. CBE is a critical component of comprehensive community development, aimed at creating places of opportunity for all. At NeighborWorks America, CB&E is also a line of business for organizations that invest in all three of the following areas: developing resident leaders, facilitating community cohesion, and supporting collective capacity through resident-driven groups and initiatives.

Community Impact Measurement (CIM) Framework – A Success Measures evaluation framework designed measure change at the community level over time in terms of resident quality of life, social capital and physical conditions. NWOs use a common set of data collection tools including a resident survey and property/block observation tools in a selected neighborhood in their service areas on a recurring cycle (3 years) to understand changes over time. Often this is integrated with their comprehensive community development strategy in the area.

Comprehensive Community Development (CCD) – An intentional approach to creating places of opportunity by improving lives and strengthening communities. By creating a shared vision, unified strategy, and local infrastructure to attract and deploy resources, CCD creates vibrant local communities that offer people equitable opportunities to thrive. CCD is also built on a foundation of inclusive resident engagement, which is central to creating and sustaining positive change. Several core goals and strategies underlie CCD efforts, but every effort is unique and determined locally by residents and community stakeholders. Robust CCD strategies are guided by community-driven plans that are supported by multi-sector partners. CCD is ambitious and requires local capacity and significant, sustained long-term investment to achieve long-term change.

Culture of Accountability – Systems, structures, processes, and practices that intentionally support performance management such that we hold ourselves accountable to reaching our goals, living our values, and operating with excellence at all levels of the organization.

Diversity – Full range of differences and similarities, visible and non-visible, that make each individual unique. A broad scope of perspectives and experiences.

Equity – Creating access to opportunities through consistent and systematically fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals. This includes individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment, such as Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American people, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other people of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) people; people with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and people otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.

Inclusion – The state or act of being included wherein multiple perspectives, differing ideas, and individuals from different backgrounds are engaged and collectively create an environment that shapes organizational policies, practices and culture.

Net Promoter Score – The gold standard customer experience metric used by millions of businesses to measure and track how they are perceived by their customers. It measures customer perception based on the question, “How likely is it that you would recommend [organization/product/service] to a friend or colleague?” Depending upon their response, customers fall into one of three categories: promoters, passives, and detractors. The score is based on the percentage of promoters minus the percentage of detractors.

Race, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (REDI) – A corporate priority to drive equity and inclusion within NeighborWorks America and across the NeighborWorks network and to foster an organizational culture and climate that identifies, addresses, and resolves inequities. REDI includes a decisional framework which includes three pillars to advance REDI: workplace, workforce, and community engagement. An equity plan systematically and strategically identifies patterns that allow inequities to exist as well as the needed changes in our practices, protocols, and policies in order to advance inclusive excellence.



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