

Focus Areas

- Organizational Policy
- Fair Housing
- Community Development

TA CONSULTANTS:

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PROGRAM PERIOD:

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Neighborhood Development Services

RAVENNA, OH / NDSOHIO.ORG

Empowering Rural Communities Through: Fair Housing Practices Through Strategic Policy Updates

Background

Neighborhood Development Services (NDS) provides housing, lending and neighborhood revitalization services across northeast Ohio and parts of Pennsylvania. During the Rural Community Development Initiative (RCDI) grant period, NDS set out to strengthen internal systems and partnerships to support fair housing access and community development.

With guidance from technical assistance consultants, the organization completed a comprehensive review of its internal policies, operational practices and housing programs. This work was designed to improve consistency across teams and ensure that the organization's approach to property management and resident services supported equitable access and stable housing for all.

By focusing on policy alignment, staff training and data collection, NDS created a foundation for more transparent operations and stronger outcomes for the communities it serves.

The Challenge

While NDS had long worked to serve households with constrained financial resources, the organization saw the need to more closely examine how its practices influenced housing access and ensured compliance with federal law. One key

“Being able to pivot the way we did ... we're going to reach areas and people that we probably wouldn't have reached if we stayed on target the way we were originally.”

— JENNA CARIGLIO-DORRIS,
DIRECTOR OF ASSET MANAGEMENT, NDS

challenge was the variability in decision-making by third-party property managers—particularly around tenant selection, lease enforcement and communication. Without clear expectations or consistent guidance, these differences could lead to uneven experiences for residents.

Additionally, NDS recognized the need to build shared understanding across its staff around fair housing practices. While commitment to equitable outcomes was high, team members needed structured tools to examine day-to-day processes and identify areas for improvement. The RCDI program offered the support and time required to build this foundation.

RCDI Support & Technical Assistance

With support from the RCDI grant, NDS worked with consultants to conduct a full organizational review and

design a strategic action plan. Consultants began by leading collaborative sessions with staff and board members to surface goals, challenges and operational priorities.

This was followed by a detailed review of internal documents, including the organization's website, policies and rental application materials. Findings from this process were used to develop a customized implementation plan, which included:

- Internal policy updates tailored to staff roles and responsibilities.
- Sample guidance for third-party property managers on improved tenant engagement.
- Revisions to the rental application process.
- A staff onboarding and training framework focused on fair housing operations.
- Tools to track data and measure the impact of policy changes.

By the end of the engagement, NDS had a clear roadmap to guide future work. The organization also began exploring ways to improve its external communications and deepen relationships with local partners focused on expanding access and opportunity.

Key Achievements

- Completed an organizational review to assess internal policies, rental practices and application processes.
- Developed a practical framework for third-party property managers to support compliant and consistent operations.
- Created staff training modules focused on housing access and tenant engagement.
- Implemented tracking tools to monitor outcomes and strengthen accountability across the housing portfolio.



LESSONS LEARNED & BEST PRACTICES

1

Facilitated assessments can highlight overlooked areas in policies and practices and point to actionable solutions.

2

Implementation strategies are most effective when tailored to the organization's structure, services and community partners.

3

Collaborative input from staff builds buy-in and improves the quality of the work.

4

Shared language and clear expectations help align internal practices with external goals.

5

Data can support future program design and demonstrate commitment to fair housing access.

WHAT'S NEXT?



With its new implementation framework in place, NDS plans to apply policy updates across internal teams and third-party property management operations. The organization is also exploring opportunities to improve how it communicates with the community and to use data insights to inform future strategies.

By embedding fair housing practices throughout its work, NDS is laying the groundwork for stronger community development partnerships across the region.