



The Voice of Real Estate in Northeast Ohio

DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

Presidential Advisory Group Report

June 24, 2022

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PURPOSE

Akron Cleveland Association of REALTORS® (ACAR) has three Core competencies: Advocacy, Professionalism and Connections. Through *Connections* ACAR will foster relationships that ensure success through inclusion, engagement, relevance, and vitality.

To truly collaborate as an ally and to advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in real estate, the ACAR Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Presidential Advisory Group was established by 2020 ACAR President, Brant Smith. Our charge was to develop a DEI strategy to identify components of systemic oppression in real estate that exist in Akron and Cleveland, educate ACAR's membership and the public, and make recommendations to position ACAR as an agent of change and advance necessary reforms.

COMPOSITION

ACAR Volunteer Leadership

President/ Chair- Candice Eberhardt

President Elect- Akil Hameed

Past President- Beth Rodgers

ACAR Staff-

CEO- Mike Valerino

Former CEO – Sandy Naragon

Member Engagement & DEI Representative – Roz Campbell

Communications Director – Kelli Moss

ACAR Members

Alex Cruz

Dan Tyson

Deb Bonner

Gwen Petway

Kady Overton

Val Tocci

Feliz Colon

Community Partners

Monique Winston- Cleveland Realtist

Amber Lewis- Cleveland Realtist

Tanesha Hunter- Fair Housing Center for Rights and Research

Toya Kelker- Akron Realtist

Judith Hill- Akron NAACP President

INTRODUCTION

Many organizations are now including DEI in their principal values. However, intent is just the beginning. Significant action is required to implement strategies and initiatives that address and prevent biases within an organization and that promote inclusivity, recognition, respect, and appreciation.

For DEI efforts to be effective and impactful, organizations must back up their good intentions with resources. They must dedicate time, energy, and money to ensuring diversity and awareness are an integral part of the organizational culture, recruitment, and larger business strategy. Alignment does not happen by accident. It must be fostered deliberately from top to bottom with consistent support from leadership.

Executing an effective DEI program is no small undertaking. It requires inclusive, strong, and consistent leadership. Such initiatives are no longer a business choice, they are a moral imperative for managing a 21st-century organization.

The DEI Presidential Advisory Group (PAG) has collaboratively established some recommendations designed to advance ACAR's DEI strategy. Recommendations and supporting rationalizations are provided throughout this report.

ACAR's 2021-2023 Strategic Plan identifies four strategic priorities. One of which is to collaborate as an ally to advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion in real estate. Each item in the plan's "Idea Repository" was organized into three categories:

- Planning/Preparations
- Operational
- Communications/Marketing/Other

The PAG has organized the recommendations in the report according to these categories as well.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Planning & Preparation

Recommendation:

1. Adopt the following DEI statement-

ACAR and its partners unite to deliver intentional and strategic action steps to educate our respective members, advocate legislative and regulatory changes that build diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging in the real estate industry.

Rationalization:

A DEI statement is essential because it demonstrates ACAR's commitment to building an inclusive culture that is welcoming to people of all backgrounds (age, race, sexual orientation, etc.), therefore removing barriers that prevent groups from participating equally and fairly resulting in a sense of belonging and justice. Much like a mission and values statement, a DEI statement will prove to be more than just a marketing exercise. It will serve as a commitment to change.

Recommendation:

2. Ensure diversity on the board of directors is consistent with diversity of the membership. This can be accomplished through changes in governance that would give consideration to diversity.
3. Create a new position on the Board of Directors that can be seated by Presidential appointment or by virtue of position. (ex. President of Institutes Societies and Councils).
4. Include DEI information in the New Member Packets.
5. Insert DEI and Fair Housing information into New Member Launch.
6. Place more focus on accessibility to ACAR events, meetings etc. (time of day, days of the week etc.).
7. Focus on how we communicate/meet the members where they live –video - text messaging etc.
8. Implement best DEI practices from other Associations
9. Measure outcomes not just output. Measure diverse representation at all levels of our organization, identifying what percentage of leadership positions are filled by people in underrepresented groups and determining if that percentage has increased over time. Determine if the people in the unrepresented groups are succeeding, and if they have a clear path to advancement. If it is determined that minority groups are underrepresented at the leadership level and are not on a clear path to advancement and success, ACAR may have barriers to development that need to be removed.

10. Schedule DEI training for Leadership, CEO and Staff, Leadership Development and Nominating Committee, Council on OR NAR Leadership Development.
11. Educate new agents about the cost of marketing and direct them to resources available to assist them. For example, NAR Photofy app.

Rationalization-

ACAR should make certain that DEI initiatives that are designed to build a diverse, inclusive, and equitable culture are generating real change by measuring more than just demographics. A comprehensive look at inclusion, retention and advancement will offer a better yardstick for DEI success. Measure diversity across volunteer leadership, membership, and employees.

Recommendation:

12. Consider approving a policy to encourage the use of minority vendors when seeking products and services for ACAR.

Rationalization-

Understanding the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion in all aspects of our society is crucial. We must invest in DEI in our supplier base as our membership becomes more diverse to avoid getting left behind. Organizations that prioritize DEI when seeking vendors for products or services are well positioned to have a greater positive impact on employees, members, vendors and the communities where they live and work.

Operational

Recommendation:

13. Strengthen existing partner relationships between ACAR and Akron/Cleveland Realist, Ohio Realist, WCR-NEO, LGBTQ+ and Real Estate Alliance CLE through collaboration, support, and cross promotion to members.
14. Identify a key contact person from each organization to include in the event planning details and facilitation. Grants are often available to assist with event cost. Collaboration between partners can help with the investigation of the availability of such grants.
15. Educate members about all partner organizations and the benefits available from each partner organization. Establish website cross promotion for members to find information about partner organizations.

Rationalization

The benefits of collaboration between partners are numerous:

- The coming together of diverse stakeholders who may not otherwise meet.
- The pooling of both tangible and information-based resources.
- The sharing of ideas and information.
- The diversification of talents and capabilities of individuals between agencies.
- The limiting of overlap in services and the coordination of existing services gaining access to skill sets of a group of people that may be required for moving DEI initiatives forward.
- Research and analysis that are broader in scope and more expansive in detail than those done by a single organization in isolation.
- A unique chance to gain a better understanding of other organizations.

Recommendation:

16. Establish a standing Diversity Committee

Rationalization-

A governance group is needed to oversee ACAR's DEI efforts and to carry this work forward. It should be an open standing committee, so that any member wishing to become involved will be welcomed find a place where he/she belongs.

Recommendation:

17. Create a staff position that is responsible for DEI

Rationalization-

A dedicated DEI staff person would have the responsibility to develop and carry out DEI goals. Therefore, they can place their full attention on DEI strategies, current practices, and best practices that place us in position to stay current and informed regarding innovation in the DEI space.

Marketing and Communications

Recommendations:

18. Create banners and slides for onsite and virtual presentations, podcast, and videos promoting the commitment that ACAR has regarding DEI and Fair Housing.
19. Amplify our voices via messaging regarding systemic bias of appraisals and combine our voices to push issues that need change. For example, only 1% of Appraisers are people of color which has been a contributing factor to the undervaluing of properties being sold or purchased by minority buyers and sellers. Another constant issue are the instances of implicit biases many Realtors, buyers and sellers belonging to minority, or specific groups are faced with during the sales process.
20. Fund ACAR leadership, staff, and volunteers to attend meetings of organizations dedicated to distinct groups, i.e., Realtist all three levels, Asian, Hispanic, LGTBQ, WCR, etc.
21. Research the steps to establish a National Association of Hispanic Real Estate Professionals (NAHREP), Asian Real Estate Association of America (AREAA) chapters in NEO or at the State level.
22. Focus on diverse representation throughout all event planning through collaboration. Be intentional. For example, use of minority vendors for products and services etc.
23. Utilize existing universal DEI logos on all communications to eliminate confusion and show consistency.

Rationalization

Strong DEI communication is more important now than ever. This is not just a box to check off. It is not one statement or a series of Instagram posts showing “solidarity”. It is more than simply putting more people of color on our website. ACAR’s efforts to advance change should not be perceived as using DEI as a marketing tool. That is why we must back our words up with actions and understand the importance of crafting our messaging through a DEI lens.

Promote DEI strategies and commitments through strong marketing programs that exhibit ACAR’s values and clarity of intent. This will allow ACAR to reach our diverse membership, produce stronger ideas and achieve member engagement to help develop deeper connections and foster a feeling of **belonging**.