New Era in Community Development

In its first 50 years, the field of community development made important strides, improving many severely neglected inner-city neighborhoods and rural communities across the nation. Local businesses and millions of affordable homes were constructed. Neighbors came together to clean streets, build parks and create safer communities. *We focus on communities because a person’s home—both the house and the neighborhood—is a critical factor in determining the quality of one’s health, education, earnings, and life expectancy. Home is where values are formed and votes are cast.*

Despite efforts to improve neighborhoods and to lift families out of poverty, race and income disparities persist. Today’s challenge is to shape the next generation of community development to achieve equitable and inclusive communities where all people reach their full potential. We concentrate on neighborhoods and communities that are led by and benefit local residents, yet this local focus also limits scale and constrains impact.

Opportunity Communities, LLC (OppCo) was created as a fresh and innovative business model that solves a fundamental structural challenge: retaining local control of resources and assets, that are continually reinvested back into the community, while benefiting from the efficiency and effectiveness of a larger scale entity.

Through OppCo participating community development non-profits leverage their combined resources to create administrative support and programmatic capacity in areas that benefit from scale and expertise. Control and governance remains local, guiding strategic direction, local programs, budget and assets. Without sacrificing local control, OppCo achieves a more sustainable, efficient and robust structure for community development activities to support stronger families, greater economic equality, and thriving communities that benefit all people.

OppCo was launched in April 2018 by two experienced Greater Boston non-profits who are piloting the new model. Across the two founding organizations is a housing portfolio of 1,150 apartments, providing a stable home to over 2,250 low- and moderate-income individuals. Over time, as OppCo expands its membership, it expects to manage tenant services and asset management of 10,000 affordable homes and to support its members to diversify and accelerate their affordable housing production.

**How OppCo works**

The innovation of OppCo lies in its joint venture model. Each member remains an independent non-profit with its own identity, 501(c)(3) status, board, mission, and assets. OppCo members continue as their community’s local non-profit working with residents, businesses and municipalities to improve community conditions and to affordably house and strengthen low-income individuals and families. Externally, it will appear as though nothing has changed.

Behind the scenes, at the heart of OppCo, is a central operating platform with blended service and staffing. By cost-sharing personnel, OppCo members can support a greater depth and breadth of positions than any could afford independently while offering greater opportunity for staff advancement.

OppCo members benefit from shared administration—financial management, human resources, operations, data and evaluation—and programmatic capacity in areas that benefit from scale and technical capacity including real estate development, asset management, and tenant services. What remains local are decisions about strategic direction, unique local programming, as well as control over budget and assets. Funders and investors will benefit from the knowledge that each member has access to deep financial and administrative skills and is less susceptible to disruptions caused by staff transitions.
What We Gain

- Greater, cost-efficient capacity to achieve impact within our communities.
- Members retain unique identities, and local control over mission, assets, and strategy.
- Investors and funders have high confidence in member ability to deliver results and organizational sustainability.
- Greater ability to recruit high capacity talent and to train local talent; more opportunity for staff advancement; deeper bench strength.
- High capacity for data collection, evaluation, and learning across communities to raise the bar for all.
- Positioned to capitalize on emerging local, regional and national trends.

OppCo provides a realistic way for community-based developers to grow capacity efficiently without sacrificing local focus and control.

Champions

The OppCo model has received an enthusiastic reception among funders, intermediaries and peer non-profits. We are grateful for the four visionary funders who made initial investments to support OppCo’s planning and early start-up. OppCo seeks start-up and implementation funding as we complete business planning to scale up and to further build out the model.

The Founders

Two accomplished community based non-profit developers, each exemplary-rated NeighborWorks America members, came together to form OppCo. The Neighborhood Developers (TND) serves three immigrant cities—Chelsea, Revere and Everett. Nuestra Comunidad (Nuestra) serves Roxbury, Mattapan and Dorchester neighborhoods of Boston.

Contact: Ann Houston
Chief Executive Officer
AHouston@oppcommunities.org
617-545-8312
www.oppcommunities.org