Culture Eats Strategy For Breakfast

PROMISING PRACTICES IN RACE, EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION IN THE GOVERNANCE OF NEIGHBORWORKS ORGANIZATIONS

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Roadmap

- ▶ Project Scope & Aim
- ▶ Methodology
- ▶ Practices and themes among NeighborWorks Network Organizations
- ▶ How NeighborWorks America can support and promote REDI work
- ▶ Questions & Discussion

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Project Scope & Aim

- To provide compass bearings for boards as they seek to lead the equity, diversity, and inclusion work in their organization.
  - Self-assessment
  - Right-sized community strategies

- Rooted in principles of good governance and shaped by:
  - COVID-19
  - National spotlight on systemic racism

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Caveats

- A broad foundation for future work.
- This topic is big, squishy, and alive.

- "Diversity" v. "Inclusion"
- The dichotomy between boards and staff
- Boards are comprised of individuals volunteering their time & expertise.

- My Lens

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Methodology

- ▶ Ongoing literature review
- ▶ Interviews with 17 board chairs, board members, & EDs representing 10 NeighborWorks organizations
- ▶ Additional interviews with 24 consultants, academics, and NeighborWorks America staff

- ▶ Interviews were based on referrals, organic, and off-the-record.

- ▶ Today is a working draft.

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Rooted in NeighborWorks Community Agreements

- ▶ Stay engaged
- ▶ Speak your truth responsibly
- ▶ Listen to understand
- ▶ Be willing to do things differently & experience discomfort
- ▶ Expect & accept non-closure
- ▶ Confidentiality

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(Some) Main Themes

- ▶ No Single Size Fits All
- ▶ Root in Data & Story
- ▶ Focus on People
- ▶ Form Determines Function
- ▶ Iterate, Iterate, Iterate

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So, what do these look like in practice?

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No Single Size Fits All

- Every community, every organization, every board is different.
- What fits a given organization changes with time, too.

- Don't assume what people need.
- Be intentional, mind your impact, strive for ownership.
- Listening requires the willingness to change.

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Root in Data & Story

- Numbers, stories, and histories provide shared context, shared understanding, and shared language.

- Examine the quality and resolution of your data.
  - Board matrices, surveys of staff & community, board turnover rates, etc.
- Provide greater access for (and listen to) community voices.
  - Formal advisory boards, town halls, etc.

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Focus on People

- Boards are comprised of individuals volunteering their time & expertise.
- Resilient relationships—based in trust and facilitated by grace—are essential.
  - Fear (of change, of the unknown, of losing control) is the biggest obstacle.
- Culture change is a collaborative effort, but someone needs to drive and lead the work.

- Provide support (especially knowledge) where needed.
  - Board mentorships, professional development, learning opportunities, etc.
- Turnover and succession are natural, inevitable, and chances for growth.

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Form Determines Function

- "If racism is structural, then anti-racism also must be structural."
  - Marc Bamuthi Joseph, VP & Artistic Director of Social Impact, Kennedy Center

- Recruitment strategies dictate who gets in the room.
- Agendas decide what is discussed.
- Budgets reveal priorities.
- Committee structures reinforce power dynamics.
- Term limits drive rates of change.

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Iterate, Iterate, Iterate

▶ Weaving REDI throughout a board requires continuous evolution to further the work.

▶ Keep listening and be willing to change.

▶ Refine your data and seek new stories.

▶ Continue emphasizing the empowerment of people.

▶ Evolve your forms to unlock new functions.

▶ Celebrate progress as it happens.
   ▶ But don't rest on your laurels.

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How can NeighborWorks America support network organizations and promote this work?

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The same themes apply.

- No Single Size Fits All
- Root in Data
- Form Determines Function
- Focus on People
- Iterate, Iterate, Iterate

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Specifically, this is what I heard.

- Observations
  - NWOs want the knowledge and resources to best achieve their missions, and they are best equipped to determine what those look like for them.
  - NWO leaders value the support of Relationship Managers, but sense that they are stretched thin.
  - NeighborWorks America mandates have a history of trying to be one-size-fits-all, with mixed results.
  - Congress is often invoked as an obstacle to fully engaging with issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion, particularly with regards to race.

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Specifically, this is what I heard.

- ► Recommendations
  - ► For the near term:
    - ► Promote and model REDI as a decisional framework.
    - ► Scale the size and reach of NeighborWorks America's REDI efforts to meet the demands of the work within NeighborWorks America and the broader network.
    - ► Expand recurring opportunities for boards and EDs to engage and learn across the network.
    - ► Provide additional resources and support for leaders of color in the network.
  - ► For the long term:
    - ► Incentivize diversity, equity, and inclusion practices in network leadership and governances.
    - ► Provide funding for network organizations to hire equity & inclusion coaches and consultants.
    - ► Increase formal and informal opportunities for peer learning and support (along with the resources to access these opportunities).
    - ► Explore creating regional teams of community builders to provide more localized support in REDI efforts.
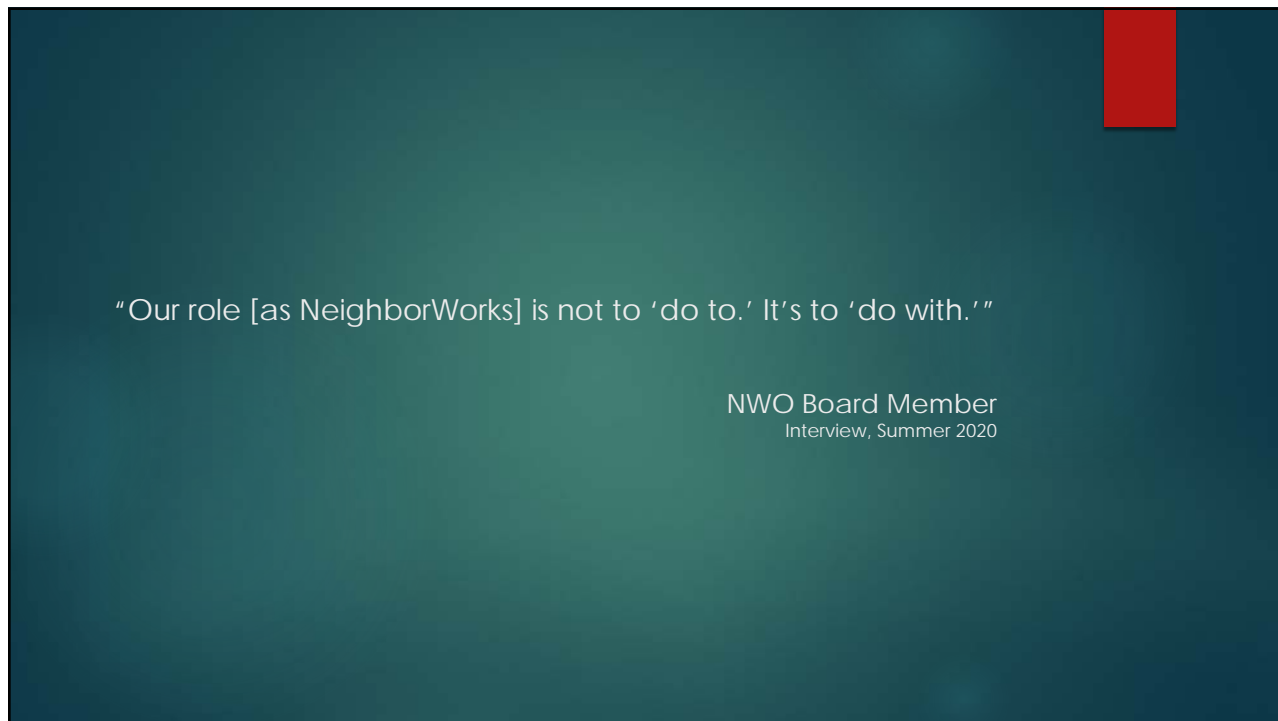   - ► Listen to feedback on how REDI (and the needs of the network) continue to evolve.

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"You have to find out how the government works."

Dorothy Mae Richardson,
Community Leader & Founder, Pittsburgh Neighborhood Housing Service
As quoted in *The Pittsburgh Post Gazette* on March 19, 1968
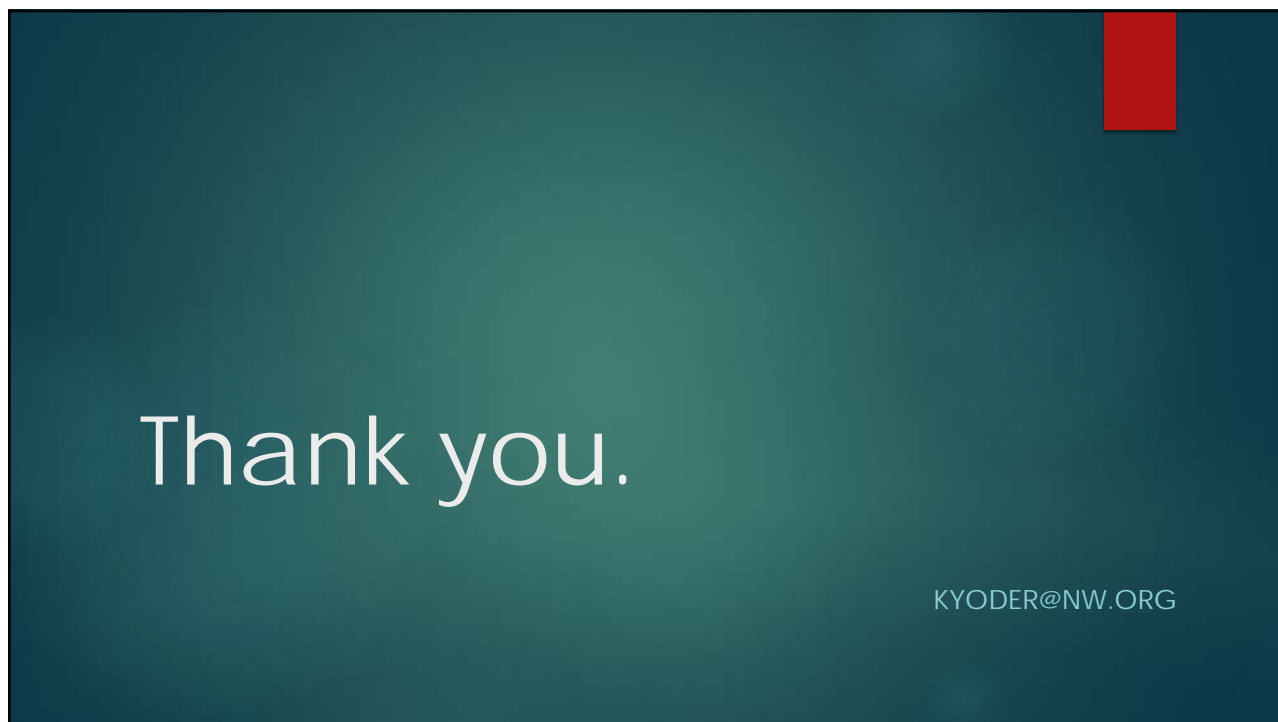
MRS D. M. RICHARDSON

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"Our role [as NeighborWorks] is not to 'do to.' It's to 'do with.'"

NWO Board Member
Interview, Summer 2020

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Thank you.

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