## Leading Change One day at a Time

I believe, strategic change starts at the level of the organization's corporate culture. The RHA Leadership Team and I have invested significant time, resources, and energy toward the beliefs and behaviors that govern how our folks act in the organization. We live in an ever-changing world. Both policies and procedures are constantly changing. When the Rockford Housing Authority first came into existence, that was a different time, with other goals, a separate initiative, and a different mission statement. However, one idea that has remained the same over the past seventy-three years is the continued vision to help, assist, and support the needs of individuals in our community by providing them with housing. The RHA Ten Core Values shape our corporate culture. We work with our staff to understand how the Core Values relate to their day-to-day behavior. While times and situations may change, intrinsic ethical values do not.

Creating shared understanding starts with my external awareness, always being acutely agile, and flexible in my critical thinking, which ultimately defines the strategic outcomes and supports my short-term/long-term visions. Over the years, I have developed the ability to remain confident in finding opportunities to experience, even under severe and adverse conditions. I maintain a positive outlook, stay decisive, and encourage others to ensure clear and understood communications.



With change comes new aspects of the job and day to day tasks. The designation of RHA becoming a Move to Work Agency, brings a new aspect of "change" to not only RHA staff, but to the Rockford community. The Move to Work (MTW) designation provides the opportunity for additional partners who will work together to help us increase access to care, boost opportunities for resident employment, and improve

the quality of resident services. The policy and programs adopted through MTW include changes to the tenant-based Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program and policies.

Another example of change is the RHA Five Year Strategic Plan, the whole plan encompasses change. A lot can and will change in only five years. If we take a look back to 2020, we had COVID-19 pandemic was an ever-changing cycle, we worked remotely, participated in virtual meetings, and hosted educational classes via zoom. Within the Strategic Plan, you will see how we as an agency, as a community, and as individuals, changed.

If we are fortunate, change is sometimes a choice we can make, but I have learned, many times over, that change is thrust upon us. Change is the only thing in life one can count on. My leadership philosophy is simple, embrace change. I look at the problem from as many angles as possible and involve the RHA Leadership team by communicating issues and asking for their input. When I am in the throes of change, I look for the best payoff with an acceptable level of risk. Being flexible empowers me to address the age-old questions that we all have heard, "we have always done it that way," or "It's just not worth the risk?"

Leading in the times of change is a daily reminder to create shared understanding, as it is vital to our ongoing success, trust, empowerment, and cohesion that are paramount requirements of our organizational mission. A few recent RHA strategic change initiatives come to mind, one of which I will exemplify for you here.

The Rockford Housing Authority held the management responsibilities of Brewington Oaks and with the approval of a successful Section 18 Application with HUD, the RHA Team was able to allow the transition of the Low-Income Housing Program (LIHP) to Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV). With the completion of the resident journey of relocating all the residents, we were able then to move forward with a clear path with the deconstruction of Brewington's aging Twin Towers. The two buildings were on the brink of infrastructure failure. Aging buildings such as these can have lasting damaging effects on residents, including the elderly and vulnerable seniors.

As the leader of the Rockford Housing Authority (RHA) team, I was responsible to oversee a significant change in strategy that required a shift in organizational culture to support and sustain the new direction. The transition of the Low-Income Housing Program to Housing Choice Vouchers and the deconstruction of aging buildings required clear communication, involvement, training and support, transparency, feedback, continuous improvement, and responsiveness to create shared understanding and support among RHA staff and the community.

To create shared understanding, we communicated the reasons for the change and sought input from staff and the community on how to make the transition as smooth as possible. This helped build buy-in and ownership of the new approach. However, we faced challenges in ensuring staff had the necessary training and support to implement the new program effectively. Despite these challenges, we provided ongoing support, and staff felt confident in their roles and helped the program succeed. By being transparent about progress and results, we built trust and credibility with staff and the community and demonstrated the effectiveness of the new approach.

Celebrating successes and milestones achieved during the transition helped build morale and motivated staff to continue their efforts. It also demonstrated to the community the positive impact of the changes being made. Encouraging feedback and continuous improvement was also crucial. By listening to staff and the community's feedback, we identified areas for improvement and demonstrated our commitment to continuous improvement. Being responsive to concerns or challenges that arose during the transition was essential. We addressed them promptly and openly, demonstrating our commitment to the success of the new program.

Reflecting on this experience, I realize that creating shared understanding and support for significant changes in strategy and culture is not easy. However, by focusing on clear communication, we were successful in implementing the new approach and achieving our goals. I am proud to have been part of this effort and believe that these lessons can be applied to other organizations facing significant change.

I truly hope the Brewington Oaks as a model, was helpful and provided a better understanding planned transformation. Based on this corporate culture model, I have outlined for you, eleven ways below in which you can implement strategic change and start at the level of your organization's corporate culture.

In subsequent upcoming RHA INFOCUS Newsletters, I will also share with you, additional examples of strategic change based on other RHA recent programs such as the Jobs Plus Initiative, a deeper look into The Move to Work (MTW) designation, as well as the decommissioning of Fairgrounds Valley. No matter what size or level or organization is, strategic change typically starts at the level of an organization's corporate culture because culture is a powerful force that influences how people behave, make decisions, and approach their work. When an organization wants to make a significant change to its strategy, it often needs to change its culture to support and sustain that change.

1. **Define the desired culture:** The first step in changing an organization's culture is to define the desired culture that aligns with the new strategic direction. This involves identifying the behaviors, values, and attitudes that will support the new strategy.

2. **Communicate the vision:** Once the desired culture has been defined, it's important to communicate the vision for the new culture to all employees. Leaders should explain why the change is necessary and how it will benefit the organization.

3. **Lead by example:** Leaders must model the behavior they want to see in others. They should demonstrate the desired values and behaviors and hold themselves accountable for living up to them.

4. **Align systems and processes:** To reinforce the new culture, organizations may need to make changes to their systems and processes. For example, if the desired culture is one of innovation, the organization may need to create a process for soliciting and implementing new ideas.

5. **Provide training and development:** Employees may need training and development to acquire the skills and knowledge required to support the new culture. This may involve providing training on new processes or technologies, as well as training on the desired behaviors and values.

6. **Measure progress:** Organizations should measure progress in changing the culture and adjust their approach as needed. This may involve conducting surveys or focus groups to gather feedback on the culture change initiative.

7. **Empower employees:** To make the culture change sustainable, employees need to feel empowered to make decisions and take actions that align with the new culture. Leaders should delegate authority and encourage employees to take ownership of their work.

8. **Recognize and reward desired behaviors**: Organizations should recognize and reward employees who demonstrate the desired behaviors and values. This can help reinforce the new culture and encourage others to adopt the same behaviors.

9. **Address resistance:** Change is often met with resistance, and culture change is no exception. Leaders should anticipate resistance and have a plan in place to address it. This may involve addressing concerns and fears, providing additional training, or involving employees in the change process.

10. **Foster collaboration:** Collaboration and teamwork are often important aspects of a new culture. Leaders should encourage collaboration and create opportunities for employees to work together to achieve common goals.

11. **Be patient**: Changing an organization's culture is a long-term process that requires patience and persistence. It's important to recognize that culture change is not a quick fix and may take several years to fully take hold.

In conclusion, strategic change often starts with a change in an organization's culture, but it requires a multi-faceted approach that includes defining the desired culture, communicating the vision, modeling the desired behavior, aligning systems and processes, providing training and development, measuring progress, empowering employees, recognizing, and rewarding desired behaviors, addressing resistance, fostering collaboration, and being patient. By taking these steps, organizations can successfully shift their culture to support a new strategic direction.

Regards,

Laura



ROCKFORD HOUSING AUTHORITY
FIVE YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN 2023 - 2028