



## NeighborWorks® America: *A Caring Workplaces, Committed Employees* Case Study

Report No. 2

**NeighborWorks® America provides an advantageous, results-oriented working environment for creative, talented professionals in the housing and community development field. Through this case study, medium/large nonprofits can both discover their own *Caring Workplace* strengths and identify opportunities to further enhance employee commitment and performance by helping staff fulfill their potential on the job, at home, and in the community.**

The *Caring Workplaces, Committed Employees* initiative by the Family Strengthening Policy Center aims to enhance employee and volunteer commitment to nonprofit human services organizations and the children, youth, families, and communities they serve. Caring workplaces contribute to family stability by assuring paid and volunteer staff receive support in meeting family responsibilities that might otherwise distract them on the job or contribute to unpredictable absences, burnout, and premature departures.

This first case study showcases the many ways that NeighborWorks® America is helping staff members realize their potential at work and manage their family and community responsibilities. A national nonprofit organization created by Congress, NeighborWorks® America creates opportunities for people to live in affordable homes, improve their lives and strengthen their communities. NeighborWorks® America, local

NeighborWorks® organizations, and Neighborhood Housing Services of America make up the NeighborWorks system, which has successfully built healthy communities since 1978.

### Impetus

In the early years of the decade, the challenge for NeighborWorks® America was to continue to improve its competitive position for attracting and retaining a diverse, high-quality and multi-cultural staff, even as rapidly rising health plan premiums necessitated a policy shift to employee cost-sharing. More recently, Congress has asked NeighborWorks® America to assume responsibility for the National Foreclosure Mitigation Counseling Program. Staff members have been challenged with supporting this critical priority while still advancing the organization's core mission.

## Solution/Strategy

To ensure its competitive position as an employer, NeighborWorks® America:

- Regularly reviews its compensation structure with a focus on levels where the organization can have the greatest impact: administrative staff and others in lower-paid positions.
- Has enhanced family-friendly policies and practices (see next section).
- Provides opportunities for staff members to contribute to the organization and realize their potential.

### NeighborWorks® America At-a-Glance

<b>Employees</b>	<b>260 in the Washington, D.C., corporate headquarters and eight district offices</b>
<b>Volunteers</b>	<b>None (national level)</b>
<b>Affiliate/Members</b>	<b>230+ local NeighborWorks® organizations across all 50 states, District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico</b>
<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Providing an advantageous, results-oriented working environment for creative, talented professionals in the housing and community development field</b>
<b>URL</b>	<b><a href="http://www.nw.org">http://www.nw.org</a></b>

For workforce demands related to the foreclosure program, the organization has augmented resources to help staff manage priorities.

From the perspective of the Family Strengthening Policy Center, some of the most important commitments that distinguish NeighborWorks® America include: attending to compensation with an emphasis on lower level positions, organizing a week-long volunteer initiative for staff members at an offsite location, and investing in studies and obtaining data to drive their decisions. Also, its caring culture is evident in the many ways the organization invests in its employees, particularly by promoting wellness and energy renewal, and in the response to an unexpected death of a coworker.

## Caring Workplace Components

As a caring employer, NeighborWorks® America has promoted financial stability, wellness, energy renewal, and professional development.

### Fringe Benefits

To enhance total compensation, NeighborWorks® America offers a generous benefits package that is worth 36 percent of salaries and wages.

*Insurance Coverage:* sponsored plans include medical, dental, life, and long- and short-term disability coverage. The organization currently pays approximately 95 percent of the health plan premium for individuals and families.

*Paid Leave:* staff members accrue medical, family, parental\*, and annual\* leave. Employees with a newly born or adopted child can receive four weeks paid parental leave in addition to medical leave and any applicable short-term disability payments. Also, employees can donate annual leave to coworkers

\* Enhancements that NeighborWorks America has made since 2003.

who have exhausted their paid leave and are unable to return to work due to illness or disability. Staff members with dependent children can access parental leave for the purpose of parent-teacher conferences as well.

*Retirement\**: 401K plans with employer contributions help staff build savings for retirement, and educational seminars regarding this benefit encourage staff, especially younger generations, to make regular contributions. The vesting schedule for employer contributions has been revised and is more generous than the regulations of the Pension Protection Act of 2006.

*Commuter Benefits*: staff members can elect to deduct funds from their pay on a pre-tax basis towards commuter expenses. Implementing an automatic transfer of funds to the employee travel card wherever the municipality allows has ensured the funds are immediately available for staff members' use.

### **Wellness and Renewing Energy**

*Alternative Work Schedules*: options include compressed workweeks that shorten the workweek by lengthening workdays; flexible workweeks where staff members can, with a supervisor's approval adjust their starting and ending times around core hours; and telecommuting schedules that permit staff to work from home once or twice a week. At NeighborWorks® America approximately 16 percent of the staff members telecommute.

*Employee Assistance Program (EAP)*: this service, which the organization actively promotes, not only helps staff resolve personal problems that may disrupt work or their family life but also provides managers and supervisors with tools to help them manage workplace issues and to support staff

members who are facing personal problems. Employees' family members, including domestic partners, can directly access EAP services. As a recent example, the organization was able to arrange for bereavement counseling through the EAP when a staff member unexpectedly passed away.

*Lactation Rooms\**: spaces are maintained at the offices or arrangements for privacy are made in smaller offices.

*Volunteerism\**: staff may use up to 40 hours of paid volunteer leave per year to support work in their communities. As an example, a four-day volunteer experience helping to build homes in the Gulf region has recently been arranged.

*Wellness Initiatives\**: NeighborWorks® Step Program uses the resources of the "America on the Move" challenge to help motivate and support physical activity and healthy eating. During the open enrollment timeframe, a screening day is scheduled for staff to monitor their blood pressure and cholesterol for better health. NeighborWorks® America also provides the opportunity annually for staff members to get a flu shot.

### **Workforce Development and Other Benefits**

*Staff Development*: NeighborWorks® America is the leading professional development provider in the field and delivers skill-based professional training at National Training Institutes across the country. Staff members are eligible to participate in the training institutes.

*Brown-Bag Seminars*: topics include volunteering, retirement planning, elder care and caregiving, and planning for college education.

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\* Enhancements that NeighborWorks America has made since 2003.

*In-House Training:* periodic training at the worksite updates or enhances staff skills and knowledge. Staff members also have access to self-directed e-learning programs to enhance their skills.

*Performance Management System:* NeighborWorks® America designed this system so that staff members see a direct connection between their work and the goals of the organization. Individual goals cascade from corporate, division, and unit goals. They also require a development goal for each staff member to help them further enhance skills.

*Intranet:* staff members are able to stay current on major accomplishments, trends, issues in community development, and key NeighborWorks® America initiatives. This virtual network helps staff learn about and enroll in benefits plans. Regular communications educate staff members about their benefits and build a culture that values the organization's multicultural workforce. Staff profiles on the intranet foster a sense of community. Since NeighborWorks® America employees are also located in regional offices, the intranet helps to connect staff.

*Summer Internships:* this 12-week program hires college students to complete a substantive project that exposes interns to the potential for a career in community development. One internship partner in this program is the Orphan Foundation of America.

*Tuition Reimbursement:* this subsidy is available to staff participating in a degree program related to their jobs or possible career at NeighborWorks® America. It is also available for attendance in conferences and for other staff development.

**“[A] talented, diverse, committed workforce is essential to achieving our mission. To attract and retain good workers, we regularly assess our management practices and employee benefits and strive to be among the top tier of employers. We are confident that our investments in workforce practices and programs pay dividends not only to the Corporation but also to the families and communities we serve.”**

– Kenneth D. Wade  
Chief Executive Officer  
NeighborWorks® America

### **Supporting Low-Income, Low-Wage, or Hourly Staff**

Employer-sponsored benefits and privileges are generally open to all staff. Occasionally the offices are closed in advance of a holiday or an extra day off is provided. Recognition can also be in the form of a gift card as a spot award for a job well done.

### **Required Resources**

As previously noted, benefits are equivalent to approximately one third of salaries and wages. NeighborWorks® America has performed studies to inform changes in workforce policies and programs. To help maximize the value of its investments, the organization encourages staff participation in benefits and privileges.

## Results

Staff members are more engaged and more connected and knowledgeable regarding how their work advances the mission. They can and do access resources for personal issues.

## CEO Statement

*“NeighborWorks® America recognizes that a talented, diverse, committed workforce is essential to achieving our mission. To attract and retain good workers, we regularly assess our management practices and employee benefits and strive to be among the top tier of employers. We are confident that our investments in workforce practices and programs pay dividends not only to the Corporation but also to the families and communities we serve.”*

– Kenneth D. Wade,  
Chief Executive Officer,  
NeighborWorks® America

## Advice for Other Nonprofit Organizations

NeighborWorks® America offers these suggestions to other nonprofit organizations.

- To foster employee commitment, the human resources department provides a personalized benefits statement to each employee. This statement enables staff to understand the impressive value of their total compensation package and also monitor their own contributions.

- Linking proposals to enhance employee benefits and privileges to the organization’s business plan increases the odds for success. NeighborWorks® America management review data, research, and the business rationale for each new initiative that demonstrates how it would help the organization and its employees.

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**This series of policy briefs produced by the Family Strengthening Policy Center (FSPC)** seeks to describe a new way of thinking about how to strengthen families raising children in low-income communities and how this approach can and should influence policy. The premise of “family strengthening” in this context, and as championed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, is that children do well when cared for by supportive families, which, in turn, do better when they live in vital and supportive communities. The series describes ways in which enhancing connections within families and between families and the institutions that affect them result in better outcomes for children and their families.

The Family Strengthening Policy Center is funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and is an initiative of the National Human Services Assembly, an association of the nation’s leading national nonprofits in the fields of health, human and community development, and human services.

The Center benefits from the guidance and involvement of the Family Strengthening Peer Network, which provides opportunities for its members to share knowledge on family strengthening strategies, learn what other organizations are doing, and find synergies and potential areas of collaboration.

This brief reflects the findings and views of the Family Strengthening Policy Center, which is solely responsible for its content. For more information or to access other family strengthening policy briefs, visit [www.nassembly.org/fspc](http://www.nassembly.org/fspc).

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