PARTNERSHIP IN ACTION

Heading Home Minnesota Funders Collaborative

At Research in Action, we work only with partners who commit to an ongoing learning and transformation process that replaces transactional engagement with reciprocal relationships that are accountable to and benefit community as they envision it. **Because of this core value, the path of a partnership is often revealed as we walk it with community, guiding the next right step for a systems partner to advance racial justice.** In this dynamic way, we strategically deploy our research skills, facilitation strategies and capacity building to support our partners in targeted ways that create near- and long-term change.

From 2021 to 2023, the Heading Home Minnesota Funders Collaborative contracted with RIA to support its work to 1) understand the systemic barriers to housing stability in Minnesota and 2) identify and fund community-identified policy solutions to end homelessness. Utilizing our Equity in Action model, our partnership was iterative: beginning with a landscape analysis that revealed key barriers, continuing with the co-development of a program to identify solutions from directly impacted community, and culminating in direct technical assistance to ensure that program honored and elevated community expertise.

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS
6 months

RIA conducted a landscape assessment that included 25 interviews with community housing stakeholders looking closely at how different institutions, organizations, and programs impacted low-income renters, people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, and Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) communities across the state over 18 months of the COVID-19 pandemic.
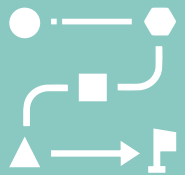
PROGRAM CO-DEVELOPMENT
7 months

This process revealed that, not only are current housing systems lacking, but racial and rural disparities in access to housing are also widening. To address the root causes of this urgent problem, RIA co-developed a program for HHMFC to administer that would support three regional tables led by people with lived experiences to identify top priorities and potential solutions to prevent homelessness and housing instability locally and statewide.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE
6 months

To advance the program, HHMFC funded three anchor organizations to connect with and convene people most impacted in their region. To ensure they had the ability to engage in ways that centered community expertise and led to actionable recommendations, RIA provided direct technical assistance, supporting staff at two organizations in Greater Minnesota. RIA created individualized toolkits that featured tangible strategies from RIA's work, as well as direct coaching to ensure equitable and transparent engagement.

POLICY AGENDA

This technical assistance and targeted support provided essential skills in facilitation, power sharing and community-led policy development that allowed directly impacted communities in Duluth and Winona – along with key system stakeholders with the ability to implement changes – to articulate specific and actionable solutions to homelessness.

Landscape Analysis

Program Co-Development

Technical Assistance

Starting with step one in our Equity in Action model, we conducted a landscape analysis, looking closely at how different institutions, organizations, and programs have impacted low-income renters and people experiencing or at risk of homelessness – in particular, BIPOC communities across the state. To do this, we interviewed 25 community housing stakeholders who work primarily low-income renters, and interfaced with the current housing systems tools over 18 months of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key aspects of this work included:

Guiding Principles: At RIA, we believe that shared language and values are essential to effective and actionable work together. RIA first worked with HHMFC to identify its guiding principles, including systems change, anti-racist, statewide, cross-sector collaboration, and community-centered.

Qualitative Interviews: Based on the guiding principles and articulated goals, RIA co-created interview guides and conducted conversations with 25 stakeholders.

Key Themes & Recommendations: From these interviews, RIA identified 12 key themes and recommendations in two core areas: *Collaborative Table Framework* and *Investment and Engagement Strategies.*

Having identified the need for a collaborative table framework, RIA co-developed a program that HHMFC would administer to support regional tables led by people with lived experience to identify top priorities and potential solutions to prevent homelessness and housing instability locally and statewide.

Key aspects of this work included:

Program vision: RIA facilitated pre-planning workshops with HHMFC and relevant Housing Justice Collective partners to finalize the project plan proposal and scope of work, defining the members that will form the core partner team that would guide this project. RIA also drafted a collective project narrative with HHMFC that served as the unified language for the core partner team to refer to throughout the project.

Powermapping: RIA developed and conducted powermapping sessions with community members in Duluth, Moorhead, Mankato, Bemidji, Pine City, Winona, and Mora to learn from those directed impacted by homelessness which areas in Greater Minnesota are most affected.

Anchor organizations: RIA worked with HHMFC to craft a call for collaboration and evaluate proposals from community-connected organizations in the three areas identified by community to serve as funded anchor organizations for the regional tables.

Many organizations that serve community members lack the specific skills and approaches necessary to engage with those most impacted in ways that center their expertise and result in real, accountable change. Once the regional anchor organizations were identified, RIA created individualized toolkits that featured tangible strategies from RIA's work as well as direct coaching to ensure an equitable and transparent engagement process.

Key aspects of this work included:

Direct coaching: With knowledge of their specific work and larger landscape, staff at the two organizations met with RIA each month for 6 months to share and explore the pain points or challenges they were experiencing as the work to convene the tables was in progress.

Targeted expertise and customized toolkits: RIA provided expertise and support that built both anchor organizations' capacity around co-creating community-led and transformative processes, strategies to cultivate self awareness, shared values and accountability for groups or teams, as well as tools for conflict navigation, creating intentional spaces, and strategic facilitation.

The solutions identified by community not only redirect HHMFC resources and programs in more effective and equitable ways but also reshape the broader landscape to increase housing stability.

Policy and Systems Changes