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REALTOR® AE

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SPRING 2021

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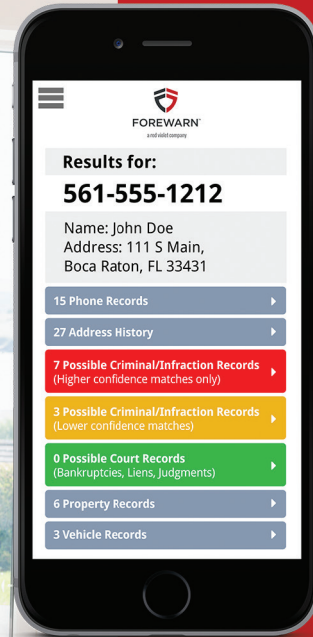
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Advocacy and Alliances

Greetings, all! In this advocacy-focused issue, there is much to be learned, considered, celebrated, and inspired by. But above all, there are reasons to be grateful—especially for the gift of each other and our alliances as we navigate the issues that challenge REALTORS®.

According to its mission statement, the REALTOR® Party is “a powerful alliance of REALTORS® and REALTOR® associations working to protect and promote home-ownership and property investment. The REALTOR® Party speaks with one voice to advance candidates and public policies that build strong communities and promote a vibrant business environment.”

I'm grateful for the tremendous efforts the REALTOR® Party has made throughout the challenges of the last year. I'm grateful for the decisions National Association of REALTORS® directors made that played a critical part in directing advocacy on the most critical issues facing our nation. Some of these decisions challenged established relationships, but all were critical to bolstering the core values of our associations and what it means to be a REALTOR®.

As you read through the following pages, consider your role as an association executive and the part each of us plays in helping one another. All of us are hopeful for a better 2021, but new challenges have already tested our ability to speak with one voice this year. Despite these challenges, every REALTOR® association has continued its advocacy, and NAR has maintained its commitment to protecting the interests of REALTORS® and their clients.

“We had more questions [about] our endorsements and RPAC funding than I can ever remember,” says Rebecca Grossman, CEO of the Scottsdale Association of REALTORS® in Arizona. “But we held strong and fell back on our process



and consistency, and got through. We have already had one-on-one meetings with our newly elected council members—even those we didn't endorse—and are hopeful we can build new relationships and continue to advocate for our members.”

So many of you have proved your adaptability and creativity in finding advocacy solutions. You have adapted during the pandemic to ensure real estate remains protected, and you haven't let negativity make you lose sight of the difference you can make. You succeeded in engaging leaders and elected officials in meaningful ways even in virtual settings, and you built relationships at every level of government.

Look to your alliances throughout the trials you have yet to encounter. NAR is there to support your efforts at the state and local levels and to provide encouragement in all that you do. New programs and initiatives include customized and simplified advocacy resources, better marketing and communications, and more effective ways to measure success.

Spring is the perfect time to put new NAR resources—from grants to training opportunities, such as Fairhaven—to work, if you haven't already. And most

importantly, we must share with each other. I've never met an AE who wasn't happy to share ideas or best practices; the greatest resource is another AE.

Let's pause, take a deep breath, and acknowledge that all of us are wading through a time of uncertainty. Thankfully, we are not on this path alone. Learn about our advocacy resources, consider these options with open eyes and hearts, celebrate our wins, and practice gratitude.

To get started, send a thank-you to your government affairs colleagues who work every day to bring the association's advocacy efforts to life. They speak on our behalf to crowds who might not want to hear their message. They are the unsung heroes who make a difference in those late-night meetings.

And to all of my colleagues, thank you for being the steady hand that lifts each other up! ■



Janet Kane, RCE, CAE, CIPS, is CEO of MetroTex Association of REALTORS® in Dallas and chair of the Association Executives Committee.



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HomeTown Gives Back

The 306-member HomeTown Association of REALTORS® in Sycamore and Sterling, Ill., proved in 2020 that even a small association can serve the community in a big way. Using a \$1,500 Community Rebuilding Grant from the National Association of REALTORS®, the association supported the creation of the Project Underpass Unity Mural in DeKalb, Ill.

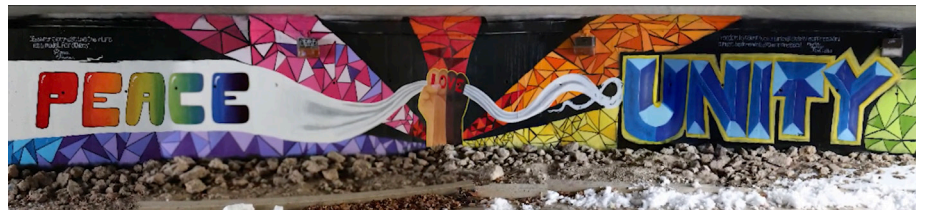
Connecting Northern Illinois University to a public park, the underpass had been tagged with graffiti in the aftermath of the killing of George Floyd in May 2020. HomeTown worked with Alderman Scott McAdams and DeKalb artists including Aaron C. Robertson to create a new mural, paying for paint and other supplies. The project was completed in November.

“Rather than merely cleaning up the graffiti, this was a unique opportunity to collaborate with community partners to create a positive solution that focuses on diversity and inclusion while recognizing the grave and intense challenges we face as a community,” says HomeTown CEO Heather Wiedrich.

Separately, HomeTown used a \$4,500 Placemaking grant from the



From left, HAR Advocacy Chair Christopher Tenggren; artist Jordan Jacob; HAR President Todd Burghardt; HAR AE Heather Wiedrich and her son, Matrix; artist Aaron Robertson; Alderman Scott McAdams; and artists Ivy Vargas and Shannon Gallagher.



National Association of REALTORS® to partner with the DeKalb Park District and other community partners to establish a Toddler Garden at a city park. “REALTORS® live, work, and volunteer

in their communities and take pride in working to improve them,” Wiedrich says. “Grassroots projects like these foster healthier, more social, and economically viable communities.” ■

Sussex Hosts Drive-in Event

Instead of canceling its popular installation and awards banquet completely, the Sussex County Association of REALTORS® in Delaware forged ahead with the ceremony in December, joining the drive-in trend with an event held in the parking lot of a local sports complex. The socially distanced event attracted dozens of members.

SCAOR recognized multiple award winners, board members, and committee chairs on an outdoor stage while

attendees watched from the comfort of their cars. Radios were tuned to a special announcement frequency, and the association provided attendees with boxed lunches from SmashMouth Burgers.

“We knew our normal banquet would not be possible, but we needed a way to honor our awardees and thank our board members and committee chairs for their service over the past year,” says Patricia Anderson, SCAOR CEO. “This was a fun al-



ternative to the traditional ceremony, and yet still allowed the individual recognition our volunteers deserve.” ■

125

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AE Awards Recognize Service, Excellence, and Commitment

The National Association of REALTORS® recently recognized several REALTOR® association executives. Jarrod C. Grasso, RCE, CEO of New Jersey REALTORS®, accepted the 2020 William R. Magel Award of Excellence. Named for a longtime association executive, the award is presented annually to an individual who has excelled as an AE and has a record of participation, mentorship, and other contributions to the AE community. Read more about Grasso in this issue's AE Voices profile on page 28.

Three executives were named to the Dr. Almon R. (Bud) Smith, RCE, AE Leadership Society in recognition of their commitment to the advancement of REALTOR® association management and anticipated future contributions to the profession: Amy DuBose, RCE, Bryan-College Station Regional Association of REALTORS®, Texas; Cliff Long, RCE, Orlando Regional REALTOR®



Grasso



DuBose



Long



Vanstrom



Rose

Association, Fla.; and Breanna Vanstrom, RCE, Boise Regional REALTORS®, Idaho.

And finally, Carla Rose, RCE, CEO of the Salisbury/Rowan Association of REALTORS®, N.C., accepted the 2020 Terry McDermott Community Leadership Award, given to AEs, association staff, and regional MLS executives who excel in community service and activism. Named for NAR's 1998–2005 executive vice president, the award includes a \$500 donation/honorarium made in the award recipient's name to their charity of choice.

"I am honored to have been selected for the Terry McDermott award, and I am thrilled that the Rowan County Family Crisis Council will benefit from this," Rose says. "It is in my role as CEO of our small REALTOR® association that I continually feel inspired to be a better beacon and to do more at the local, state, and national level."

Congratulations to these outstanding professionals! For more on these and other awards, visit nar.realtor/ae/professional-development/ae-awards-and-recognition. ■

And the Crown Goes to...

Congratulations to the 21 state and territorial associations that were recognized as Triple Crown winners in 2020, meeting their REALTORS® Political Advocacy Committee fundraising and participation goals. View a list of the 419 local association Triple Crown winners at realtorparty.realtor/recognition/triple-crown.

- | | | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Arkansas* | 7. Kansas* | 14. Oklahoma* | 21. West Virginia |
| 2. Connecticut | 8. Kentucky* | 15. Puerto Rico | *Also awarded the |
| 3. District of Columbia | 9. Mississippi* | 16. South Carolina* | President's Cup |
| 4. Idaho* | 10. Missouri* | 17. South Dakota* | for meeting both |
| 5. Illinois* | 11. Nebraska* | 18. Utah* | advocacy and |
| 6. Iowa* | 12. Nevada* | 19. Vermont* | RPAC goals. ■ |
| | 13. North Dakota* | 20. Virgin Islands | |

COVID-19 Vaccine Guidance

Whether your association chooses a voluntary or mandatory COVID-19 vaccination policy, you should develop communications that clearly inform employees of its terms. Visit nar.realtor/coronavirus/covid-19-guidance-for-workplace-vaccination-policies for details.

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Antibodies for the Inevitable

Immunity to Change discusses how to build resilience ahead of new challenges.

According to Webster's Dictionary, "immunity" means that something "has no effect on you—for example, you might be immune to a disease or to criticism." But what about change? It's inevitable, but it is also one of the most difficult challenges for many people. How can an "immunity to change" help us as leaders?

Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey attempt to answer that question in *Immunity to Change: How to Overcome It and Unlock the Potential in Yourself and Your Organization*. This insightful book provides an easy-to-follow framework for readers to use in building their immunity. It's divided into three parts:

- A new way to understand change;
- The value for individuals, work teams, and organizations; and
- An invitation to try the book's approach and monitor the results.

The premise of the first section is that the challenge to change and improve is misunderstood. When we experience the world as "too complex" (which, I would venture to say, most of us did in 2020), there is a mismatch between the world's complexity and our own at that moment. You can mend this mismatch by increasing your own complexity, the authors say.

Research-driven, this section delves into scientific studies and data. You don't have to dig too deeply into the numbers, however; the authors offer readers the outcome: It is possible to reach higher planes of mental complexity, and such growth will correlate to more effective leadership.

Section two discusses how to build resilience to change. While immunity won't result in the complete elimination of anxiety, the authors say, it will help manage the feelings of defenselessness or danger that can result from change. By building an adaptive mindset, you can avoid being overcome by such feelings and meet changes head-on.

For example, one executive's goal is to delegate more. As he delegates, he gathers information about his team's strengths and his own as a leader. It's uncomfortable at first, but he eventually discovers new and deeper ways to connect, and together the team produces better outcomes.

The last section offers relatable stories from organizations that have delved into immunity-building work. The strategy that resonated most with me was a team-based approach that advises starting with a chart that defines each individual's commit-

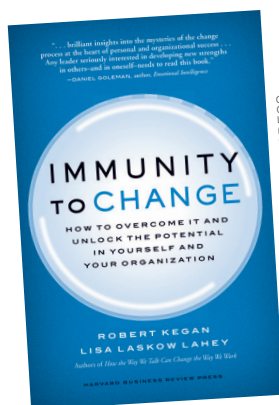
ment, outlines the first steps an individual needs to take, and indicates how progress toward goals will be measured.

The authors encourage people to share the chart with their teams in order to achieve the steps needed on the way to immunity. Further, each individual must ask co-workers, friends, and significant others to define the "one big thing" that's holding him or her back in every area of life.

This will sound familiar to anyone who has encountered Brené Brown's work, but not everyone is a fan of teamwork when personal vulnerability is a featured aspect. The authors offer tips on maintaining a sense of security here, such as invoking a "knock-knock rule" that asks the person "knocking" to offer feedback in the spirit of inquiry, while allowing the person whose "door is knocked on" to feel free to say, "No thanks, I'm not inviting you in."

Kegan and Lahey also suggest guiding questions for creating one's immunity chart, including "If your colleague were to make progress on the specific goal he or she identified today, how would it significantly improve team communications and increase team learning and productivity?"

Immunity to Change can be dense in parts, but after witnessing so much change in 2020, I recommend reading through it for some great tools and insights on increasing your immunity individually and with your team—be it staff, association members, or your own family. We're all in this together. ■



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It is possible to reach higher planes of mental complexity, and such growth will correlate to more effective leadership.



Elizabeth S. Breen is AE of the Santa Ynez Valley Association of REALTORS® in California.

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FOCUS: 2021

Associations take innovative approaches
to advancing 2021 advocacy priorities.

BY RICHARD WESTLUND

Affordability, lack of inventory, taxes, and fees were among the top issues for state and local REALTOR® associations before the pandemic. COVID-19 has intensified those issues in many areas, while adding a slew of new concerns for real estate brokers, property owners, and consumers.

With strict limits on in-person advocacy, associations are using virtual collaboration platforms, digital tools, and National Association of REALTORS® resources to advance the interests of their members and communities.

A recent NAR survey of association executives and government affairs directors found that the No. 1 priority at the state level was taxes, as legislators are considering real estate-related taxes to make up budget deficits from the ongoing economic slowdown.

For local associations and members, housing availability and affordability are front and center in 2021. In fact, members' concern about housing was up 12 percentage points from the prior year's survey, while tax issues dropped 23 percentage points. Meanwhile, issues related to COVID-19—such as ensuring real estate remains categorized as an essential business—are also on advocacy agendas.

Here is a look at how four associations are driving their advocacy programs in a challenging economic climate.

New Orleans

Increasing the supply of housing—particularly affordable homes—is the top advocacy issue for the New Orleans Metropolitan Association of REALTORS®. “We have very low inventory, and prices are skyrocketing,” says Kelli Walker Starrett, the association's senior vice president/director of governmental relations and NAR's 2020–2021 GAD Institute chair.

To mobilize her association's 6,200 members, Starrett has launched a “check-in” program that provides access to NAR's toolkits for workforce housing initiatives and

other REALTOR® advocacy resources. “We have put our members on the mailing list for NAR’s *On Common Ground* as an entry point for other programs,” she says. “We also send new members a welcome letter outlining REALTOR® Party programs and services.”

As a tourist- and convention-oriented city, New Orleans has been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, and Hurricane Zeta caused additional issues in November. While eviction moratoriums have protected renters who lost their jobs, some housing providers have been facing financial concerns as a result, Starrett says. Unlike most other cities, New Orleans collects property taxes in advance, rather than for the prior year, she notes. “That means there is less immediate pressure on municipal revenues for 2021, but that is something we will watch in the future.”

One of the challenges in the association’s advocacy work is keeping members engaged when they are working from their homes. “Our association is working hard to give them information they need for their businesses, as well as for our advocacy priorities,” she says.

For 2021, the association has launched a new program that matches individual members with local elected officials for online conversations. “We want to be in the forefront when discussing issues related to housing and the local economy,” Starrett says. “REALTORS® are good at networking and adapting to changing circumstances, and we will continue to use virtual platforms to present our views on issues such as affordable housing.”

San Francisco Bay

David Stark, government affairs director for the 6,000-member Bay East Association of REALTORS® in Pleasanton, Calif., is concerned about how local governments will respond to the loss of revenue caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. “We have seen aggressive tenant protection measures that could drive family-owned housing providers out of the market,” he says. “Local governments are also eyeballing real estate transactions as a wonder drug for their financial ills.”

Housing availability is another challenging issue for the suburban community, which is located midway between San Jose and Oakland. “We will be working with local governments on the need to produce more housing, because the COVID remote work trend has exacerbated our supply problem,” he says.

On the positive side, the association was successful last year in advocating for real estate to be deemed an “essential” business, and there continues to be intense member interest in public health and safety rules, Stark says.

To keep members engaged and informed, the association sends out a weekly government affairs newsletter that covers top issues and includes advice for interacting with local leaders. “Logging on to a virtual meeting is a very different experience



MIAMI ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®

The Miami Association of REALTORS® placed a shipping container home on public land to publicize issues surrounding affordable housing.



Logging on to a virtual meeting is a very different experience than bringing hundreds of people to a city commission chamber.”

—David Stark, GAD, Bay East Association of REALTORS®

than bringing hundreds of people to a city commission chamber,” Stark notes. “Talking one on one through a screen is also more difficult than over a cup of coffee.”

As a result of the pandemic’s spike in work-from-home arrangements, Stark says, the association is working to educate homeowners and policymakers on issues such as reducing residential greenhouse gases and requiring electrical service upgrades while building support for 2021 advocacy priorities.

Stark says NAR’s Advocacy Everywhere program is a “go-to tool” for mobilizing members and consumers on community issues. The association also used the Campaign Services program to help elect several pro-homeownership mayors and a county supervisor last year. “Kudos to our membership for staying engaged in advocacy,” he says. “They are the real power of our program.”

Western Massachusetts

Shifting to virtual education and advocacy outreach has been a blessing in disguise for the REALTOR® Association of Pioneer Valley in Springfield, Mass. “Being able to hop on a video call is far more efficient than driving 45 minutes to a town meeting,” says Brendan Bailey, chief of staff and former GAD. “We have also adjusted our town monitor program, where our political coordinator arranges for members to speak with officials and be eyes and ears on the ground.”

For 2021, Bailey expects to focus on housing availability, smart growth, and rental-related issues when talking with local leaders in

In Short Supply

Housing inventory nationwide is lower than it has been since the National Association of REALTORS® began tracking data in 1982, according to a report released in February by NAR. Produced in partnership with the Rosen Consulting Group, “State and Local Policy Strategies to Advance Housing Affordability” calls upon policymakers to address the problem by adopting localized solutions in three key areas: financial policy, housing supply and zoning, and permitting policy reform.

“The demand for homeownership is as strong as it’s ever been, but far too often, we’re seeing families who are ready and able to purchase a home being kept out of the market because of the lack of affordable inventory,” says NAR President Charlie Oppler. “Circumstances vary from locality to locality, and lawmakers therefore must consider unique solutions tailored to their communities’ individual needs.”

Visit the REALTOR® Party site, realtorparty.realtor, and search for “Housing Affordability” to download the report.

the western Massachusetts region. “For instance, we will meet with Amherst town planners to be sure the REALTOR® voice is heard in upcoming discussions about affordable housing,” he says.

Bailey notes the importance of educating local officials about the tight housing market and building local coalitions that support greater diversity, equity, and inclusion through new residential development. “We discuss systemic things like zoning laws or lot-size regulations that impact the pricing and availability of homes,” he says. “We have also discussed the importance of housing near transit lines that allows workers to ride a bus into the city.”

The Pioneer Valley association is using a Consumer Advocacy Outreach grant from NAR and a supplemental grant from the state association to survey members and determine major issues affecting their areas, such as rural broadband access and restrictions on accessory dwellings that limit the housing supply.

Once American Strategies—a prominent political strategy, campaign management, and public relations consulting firm—analyzes the survey responses, Bailey plans to develop mailers and new landing pages to help members learn about advocacy efforts in their counties. The association is also generating a database of members who are interested in specific issues.

“We have embraced the digital side and are using a lot more video to promote our advocacy work,” Bailey says. “I also send

a regular email to brokers and office managers with the subject line ‘TOOLS FOR SUCCESS’ that they can copy and send to their agents. That plug-and-play approach can be a very effective strategy for reaching association members.”

South Florida

Easing condominium restrictions, boosting lower-cost multifamily housing, and piloting small “container homes” are among the ways the Miami Association of REALTORS® is addressing South Florida’s housing shortage.

“Supporting first-time homebuyers is at the top of the list of our members’ priorities this year,” says Danielle Blake, chief of advocacy for Miami REALTORS®, which serves more than 50,000 members in three counties. “Despite low interest rates, they need financial assistance.”

With land in short supply in the region, condominiums are typically the most affordable choice for first-time buyers. However, Federal Housing Authority loan limits, condo association insurance issues, and expiring Housing and Urban Development building certifications have limited their availability, according to Blake.

“About 60% of our active market is condominiums, and we have been addressing these types of issues for more than a decade,” she says. “This year, we will be talking with our congressional representatives [and] leaders at FHA, HUD, Fannie Mae, and Freddie Mac about the flawed models and regulations that limit access to condos by the elderly, as well as our highly diverse population of first-time buyers.”

To engage members, the Miami association is using Voter-Voice’s “13 Months of Advocacy” strategy, which includes email surveys, member stories, “virtual fly-in” meetings, and awareness campaigns for elected officials. That initiative has been supported by a 2019 NAR REALTOR® Party mega-grant. The association also created a consumer-facing platform to help its members and potential buyers quickly assess eligibility and qualifications for homebuyer programs.

“One of our most exciting initiatives is our container home project, which looks at repurposing shipping containers for affordable housing,” Blake says. “We built one using an NAR grant and situated it on Miami-Dade County-owned land. Along the way, we have learned so much about the barriers to affordability, and we can apply that knowledge to our advocacy work in the future.” ■



Richard Westlund is a Miami-based freelance writer.



CAPITOL DAYS RECONCEIVED

REALTOR® associations are successfully nurturing relationships with local and state officials in spite of limits on in-person gatherings.

BY IAN P. MURPHY

Policies that affect housing and commercial real estate—taxes, affordability, development fees, zoning—are arguably some of the most impactful in the country. If it involves the built environment, it affects everyone. Unfortunately, “the shelter-in-place limitations imposed in 2020 have complicated our ability to build and maintain relationships with local elected officials,” says David Stark, government affairs director for the Bay East Association of REALTORS® in Pleasanton, Calif. “We are not able to rally the troops to go to the city commission chambers to testify on an issue, or get together with leaders for one-on-one meetings over a cup of coffee.”

Reaching herd immunity to COVID-19 may bring back shoe-leather advocacy over the next couple of years. In the meantime, associations are relying on alternative avenues to build relationships with elected officials and other policymakers, and to educate them on issues critical to REALTORS®.

Extending Outreach

As with everything in pandemic life, virtual meetings have become a lifeline.

Covering 68 towns and cities, the REALTOR® Association of Pioneer Valley, Mass., already had its work cut out for it in connecting with all of the local and state representatives involved in setting policy in the region. With in-person meetings curtailed, RAPV launched “Mayoral Minute” Zoom calls to facilitate chats with local leaders.

“We ask them what’s going on in their cities and if there are any proposals that might affect homeowners,” says Brendan Bailey, RAPV’s chief of staff and former GAD. “This provides good face-to-face time, even though it’s virtual.”

The association records the sessions and shares them with the participating mayor and members in the area, who in turn use the information to stay on top of the issues and keep clients up to speed. “It’s a great vehicle for helping our members while educating our mayors,” Bailey says.

Open Invitations

The exchange of information regarding a policy or proposal is a two-way street. The New Orleans Metropolitan Association of REALTORS®, for example, invites officials to engage with members at quarterly virtual joint sessions of its political coordinators and Government Affairs Committee.

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"We invite elected officials to attend virtually and give them a half-hour to speak about what's going on in their areas," says Kelli Walker Starrett, senior vice president/director of governmental relations and NAR's 2020–2021 GAD Institute chair. "We also invite municipal employees, such as building inspectors. It's easier for them to attend virtually than set up face-to-face meetings."

One official—the Clerk of Courts for the City of New Orleans—has become a regular resource, even volunteering to lead a 200-strong Zoom meeting on eviction moratoriums. "This is what we're looking for—a person who's going to call you when housing issues come up," Starrett says.

Local officials have been eager to help during the pandemic, she adds, whether it's recording a video about the importance of REALTORS® or calling to take the pulse on a new proposal. "Usually, we play a lot of defense," Starrett says. The situation "has really put us in a much better position, because we have been able to be much more proactive with the policy decisions they are making than we had in the past."

Maryland REALTORS® also schedules virtual meetings with legislators, regulators, and REALTOR® constituents and has invited officials to appear as panelists in webinars on topics such as coronavirus response and racial justice. In March, the association held a Zoom news conference to announce the results of its first State of Maryland Housing survey, inviting officials to review its findings.

"We invited a couple of legislators who are working to address some of the challenges identified in our statewide poll," says Bill Castelli, senior vice president of government affairs for Maryland REALTORS®. "This gives the legislators and the bills we support some additional exposure. We hope it will encourage legislators to reach out to us, too."

The Northern Virginia Association of REALTORS® had already established relationships with new and returning supervisors in its largest jurisdiction, Fairfax County, ahead of the pandemic. Since last March, the association and its Public Policy Committee have invited them to multiple virtual meetings and events such as a "Politics & Pancakes Virtual Breakfast" featuring political analyst David Wasserman.

"They appreciate the opportunity to hold meetings with us—even virtual meetings," says NVAR GAD Josh Veverka. Senior Vice President of Public & Government Affairs Mary Beth Coya notes, "We are providing our members with information while also giving the elected officials a platform to build relationships with their constituents."

Safe Scheduling

Although it is a struggle to maintain the personal touch for which REALTORS® are known, association executives say virtual meetings have made it easier to meet with local, state, and federal

Top Tips for Outreach

- Keep legislators educated about REALTOR® priorities by issuing fact sheets on key industry issues.
- Show policymakers you respect their safety by remaining vigilant about socially distanced options.
- Create talking points well in advance of virtual meetings with policymakers, so your leaders can be well prepared.
- Invite elected officials to engage with your members by participating as experts in webinars, virtual panels, and town hall meetings.
- When an important vote is on the line, be sure your membership is equipped with timely information to share with local officials and state reps; they likely have communities and goals in common.

officials. "It is so much easier to set up Zoom calls than to schedule meetings and build in travel time," says Danielle Blake, chief of advocacy for the Miami Association of REALTORS® in Florida. "Even big meetings with HUD officials and our representatives in Washington are done virtually."

The Columbus Board of REALTORS® sent about 20 members to a virtual version of the Georgia Association of REALTORS® annual advocacy event, REALTOR® Days at the Dome, in March. Still, AE Lorri Edwards, RCE, EPRO, says she hopes to invite local officials to CBR's annual luncheon in person soon.

NVAR also took its annual Lobby Day in Richmond virtual this year, avoiding the usual daylong bus trip to the state capital. In addition to Zoom calls, NVAR staff exchange texts with legislators and their staff. "It has become even more prevalent during COVID," Coya says. "They will text us during a subcommittee or committee meeting if they have questions about a bill or an amendment and want to know our position."

In addition to facilitating meetings, Maryland REALTORS® sends legislators fact sheets on key issues and uses email and texts to mobilize REALTORS® to contact their representatives and voice their positions on the issues—especially "if a floor vote is imminent," says CEO Chuck Kasky.

Such grassroots advocacy goes a long way toward making up for the lack of organized, in-person activity, Bay East's Stark adds. "It's harder to engage officials talking on the screen, so when we can mobilize our members and consumers, it's a powerful way to let officials know there are many people who are interested in our issues."

Additional reporting by Richard Westlund. ■

Ian P. Murphy is senior editor of REALTOR® AE magazine.

IN EVERY DARK CLOUD

While the challenges of the last year were substantial, many AEs found unexpected silver linings.

BY AMY DUBOSE, RCE, C2EX, AHWD

"Sometimes adversity is what you need to face in order to become successful." —Zig Ziglar

When you face adversity, you have two choices: You either embrace it or hide from it. It is often up to us, as leaders, to adapt and remain positive so that our members and organizations can be successful. When the challenges of 2020 hit, many of our colleagues jumped in feet first, meeting members and staff in the moment, and found silver linings amid the upheaval. These are a few of their stories.

It's OK to Be Human

Wyndi Austin, CEO of the Ventura County Coastal Association of REALTORS® in California, realized by the end of 2020 that COVID-19 had transformed her more than she expected. "This pandemic allowed us to be more emotional and real," she says. "It brought a

wall down for me. I don't have to be this strict professional—I can be human. I am more casual now—casual, more open, and honest."

Pre-pandemic, Austin says, she was working toward a certain image every day: the consummate professional who says the right things and projects the proper appearance. She never imagined that the year would help her shift her mindset and allow her to break down those walls. "I had staff comment, 'You just seem so much more relaxed.' How could you not be?" she says. "The other side of that just would not work. I can still be a really good leader without being so rigid."

Making Connections Through the Chaos

As the world shut down, many association executives sought connection as best we could—often in a virtual setting. Debbie Ashbrook, CEO of the Central Panhandle Association of

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REALTORS® in Florida, did just that. “I formed an extremely tight bond with four CEOs I would not have had before,” she says. “It has been the biggest thing for me.”

Weekly calls blossomed into meetings where they shared a wide range of experiences and tackled a variety of topics. After a few months, Ashbrook approached the Florida REALTORS® about the possibility of doing a weekly call for AEs, and Anne Cockayne, director of local association services, took on the task.

Connecting with colleagues is the best way to help us feel less alone, in good times or bad. “The most important takeaway from Florida’s weekly Zoom gathering is the opportunity for our AE family to connect face to face,” Cockayne says. “During a time of isolation and uncertainty, camaraderie with one’s peers can be a real stabilizer. Our sessions have morphed into an AE think tank of sorts where ideas flow freely—are sought—and problems are solved.”

Expanding One’s Comfort Zone

Monica Peña, CEO of the Greater McAllen Association of REALTORS® in Texas, was hesitant to get in front of the camera. She had some insecurities about her voice and presentation. “I was not really eager to do it,” she says. “Then, COVID happened. There was so much information coming to us. I knew members would watch it and listen, where they may not read it. I thought ‘I’m just going to have to go live.’”

Peña and her leadership team started Membership Mondays, a live, weekly video series. To build her level of comfort, she watched YouTube videos on communicating effectively on video and the tools needed for good production. “The biggest silver lining was the connection that people made,” Peña says. “Members got to know me better and see my personality.”

Having bridged the gap between the personal and professional and getting plenty of positive feedback from members, GMAR continues to do videos every two weeks. “This is going to be the primary way to communicate information to our brokers and members over at least the next six months,” Peña says.

Communication Is More Than a Buzzword

Year after year, future leaders told the Broward, Palm Beaches & St. Lucie REALTORS® Association in Florida that the No. 1 thing the association should improve upon was communication. CEO Dionna Hall worked with her staff and leadership teams to ramp up the association’s communications during the pandemic, incorporating enhanced video with staff specialists, social media, email, text messages, and virtual town halls. “Members saw us as not asking for something, but giving something,” she says.

Hall and her team devised a plan to call all designated REALTORS® along with the 1,300 new members it had recently acquired in a merger. It proved to be a key opportunity to walk through all of the association’s available resources with members and offer help, but the team found that most members were just thankful to have the interaction. “Honestly, many members appreciated hearing a friendly voice on the other end,” she says. “Our members were very lonely.”

The association then expanded its outreach further. “Individual touches with our members really worked,” Hall says. “We determined what the additional pain points were. From there, we increased training on specific topics and created programs around our members’ long-term and short-term needs. We repurposed our outreach team to do personalized Zoom meetings with offices that directly addressed specific broker pain points. Offices felt they were getting very individualized attention from their association.”

Meeting People in Place

CEO Ryan McLaughlin and the leadership team at the Northern Virginia Association of REALTORS® made it clear from the beginning of the pandemic that the association would remain open for business—at least in a virtual environment—despite areawide shutdowns. The team looked at the membership engagement experience at every level and incorporated new tools to meet members and staff where they were.

“I have wanted to build the member experience stronger ever since I got here,” McLaughlin says. “We were able to empower staff to think outside the box and not fear failure. Now, we are looking at things that are going to be put into action permanently—a full reorganization based on new ways of delivering services. It’s forced us to be more nimble and flexible.”

COVID-19 provided the association with an opportunity to make changes—from contactless lockbox and supply pickup outside its headquarters building to rethinking its office space—that it might have otherwise taken more time to complete.

Adversity often forces change within organizations, and 2020 was proof of that. As AEs proceed through 2021, we should keep these stories in mind as evidence that whatever challenges the months and years ahead might hold, we can learn something from them and adapt. Every moment holds a lesson, no matter how uncomfortable it may feel at the time. ■



Amy DuBose, RCE, C2EX, AHWD, is association executive of the Bryan-College Station (Texas) Regional Association of REALTORS®.

Lobbying and the Law

You have a right to lobby, but not to lobby illegally.

The beginning of a new year is a time many REALTOR® associations and members set important legislative and policy priorities. With that done, now is an excellent time to review the applicable lobbying laws to ensure that your efforts to influence such priorities are and remain compliant.

Every state has its own lobbying laws. REALTOR® associations and association staff engaged in lobbying activity must comply with a web of ever-changing registration requirements and reporting obligations. While commonalities exist, no two jurisdictions' lobbying laws are the same, and in many cases, cities, counties, and even local municipalities have distinct sets of laws that cover lobbying.

It would be impossible to cover every jurisdiction's lobbying laws here, and association staff are encouraged to read more state-specific guidance at the National Conference of State Legislatures website, ncsl.org (search for "How States Define Lobbying and Lobbyist"). What follows is an outline of important lobbying vocabulary and laws that can help guide your efforts to influence the issues while staying in full compliance.

Lobbying

Lobbying is most often defined as attempting to influence both legislative and administrative actions. A few states, such as Oregon, define it as covering legislation only. "Attempts to influence" typically require direct action or contacts with a covered officeholder or government employee, but jurisdictions are increasingly regulating grassroots and indirect lobbying activities, such as asking consumers to contact

their legislators on a particular issue. For instance, Maine recently passed a law requiring non-lobbyists to file grassroots lobbying reports when they make or incur expenditures of \$2,000 for grassroots lobbying in a calendar year.

Lobbyists

Most states require two foundational elements to qualify as a lobbyist: (1) The individual must receive a threshold amount of money; and (2) payment must be connected to the individual engaging in lobbying activity. Take Georgia, for example: A lobbyist is defined as a person who receives or anticipates receiving \$250 or more per calendar year for promoting or opposing the passage of covered legislation.

Some jurisdictions also use lobbying laws to regulate organizations. Organizations that employ, retain, or compensate another person for the purpose of lobbying are sometimes considered "lobbying entities" or "principals." Arizona, California, and Illinois are among the states that include these designations.

Registration and Reporting

Obligations to register and report are heavily dependent on the relevant legal definitions noted above. Registration fees range from \$0 (Arkansas) to several hundred dollars (Massachusetts) and often require annual renewal. Typically, lobbying reports are filed under a proscribed, ongoing schedule, which can vary based on the legislative calendar and range from monthly (Missouri) to quarterly (North Carolina) to annual (North Dakota) filing obligations.

Lobbying is most often defined as attempting to influence both legislative and administrative actions.

Gifts

Lobbyists and lobbying entities must heed a patchwork of ethics laws restricting the giving of gifts to covered officials. Government officials and employees are typically the targets of these laws, but lobbyists and lobbying entities are advised to also obey such laws in order to avoid troublesome or embarrassing interactions with key covered officials.

A gift can include anything from a meal and refreshments to travel or invitations to events—even events sponsored by your REALTOR® association. Before providing gifts to government officials or staff, be sure to check the gift and ethics laws to ensure the gift is permissible.

Despite the legal complexities, the right to lobby government officials and employees on issues of importance to REALTORS® is protected under the First Amendment. Exercise this right and do so with full knowledge of, and in compliance with, the relevant lobbying laws. ■



Jonathan Waclawski is the National Association of REALTORS®' senior political compliance counsel and director of legal affairs.



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Fired Up for Fair Housing

Associations planned a variety of activities and events for April's annual fair housing commemoration.

Fair housing issues have moved to the forefront of national discussion recently, and state and local REALTOR® associations are working to champion change. For Fair Housing Month in April, associations organized innovative events and activities with the goal of raising awareness among members and the general public about discrimination in housing and what can be done to build a better, more equitable present and future.

The **Saint Paul Area Association of REALTORS®** in Minnesota developed a slate of creative, distance-friendly activities and events to keep REALTORS® and the community engaged all month long, says Becky Wegscheid, the association's government affairs director. One major initiative was the creation of formal fair housing proclamations in conjunction with area officials, based on the National Association of REALTORS®' draft proclamation available at the REALTOR® Party website. Wegscheid said in February that SPAAR hoped to have at least two dozen city and county governments participate.

April editions of SPAAR's videos and podcasts have a fair housing focus and include an invitation to members to sign the Fair Housing Declaration available at nar.realtor. Other activities include the display of SPAAR's "Owning Up!" exhibit, co-produced with the local Mapping Prejudice project; resource kits mailed to all members; special educational opportunities, such as SPAAR's "Owning Up!" class; and an all-ages coloring contest.

Wegscheid credits the association staff for the variety in SPAAR's Fair Housing Month program. "Every staff member has been involved in creating this," she says.

The focus for the **Chicago Association of REALTORS®** was on bringing in top-notch speakers, says Kristopher Anderson, director of government and external affairs. At press time, CAR was set to host Marcia Fudge, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, at the association's Fair Housing Month Fireside Chat event, to be held via Zoom.

For CAR, part of promoting Fair Housing Month is acknowledging the difficulties of the past; one of 2020's speakers was a Cook County commissioner whose father had experienced housing discrimination. "We acknowledge the past," Anderson says, "and we're also cognizant of our achievements as an association. We're making great strides and trying to be good leaders."

The **Akron Cleveland Association of REALTORS®** in Ohio kicked off its Fair Housing Month activities at the end of March by offering the National Association of REALTORS®' "At Home With Diversity" certification course, says Jamie McMillen, vice president of government affairs. All ACAR staff members have earned the certification, she adds.

McMillen says the association encouraged local mayors to officially declare April Fair Housing Month in their cities, and ACAR staff hoped to meet with area Realtists, members of the National Association of Real Estate Brokers, if local health regulations permitted. Additionally, the association is offering an "Introduction to Gender Identity & Pronouns" class as part of an ongoing diversity series developed with The Diversity Center, a local nonprofit.

The **Ann Arbor Area Board of REALTORS®** worked with the nonprofit Fair Housing Center of Southeast & Mid

Michigan on Fair Housing Month activities, says AAABOR CEO Tom Renkert. AAABOR is asking members to publicly pledge their support to federal, state, and local fair housing laws and to make a donation to the FHC's mission. Supporting REALTORS®' names will appear in an ad in the April edition of the *Ann Arbor Observer*. AAABOR is also sponsoring the FHC's annual Fair Housing Breakfast benefit, set for October.

Texas REALTORS®' plans included promoting fair housing across all channels—social media, email, magazine, and website—to members in April, says Angela Brutsche, vice president of communications and marketing. The association is offering educational programs that promote fair housing, such as the AHWD course, "What's Fair in Fair Housing," and "United Texas: Housing Initiatives That Work."

Keeping the public informed about REALTORS®' commitment to fair housing is also a priority, Brutsche notes, and Texas REALTORS® planned consumer outreach on radio, digital, email, print, and social media channels. These efforts incorporate NAR's fair housing messaging and ad components, Brutsche says, since they "are eye-catching and quickly convey a strong message."

For more Fair Housing Month activity ideas or information on applying for NAR fair housing grants, contact Wendy Penn, NAR's housing opportunity manager, at wpenn@nar.realtor or 202-383-7504. ■



Catherine Mesick is coordinator of advocacy operations for the National Association of REALTORS®.



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Toward a More Transparent, Thriving MLS

The brokerage cooperative that has served real estate for more than 100 years has never faced more pressure.

The nation's multiple listing services are under intense scrutiny today. Lawsuits, transparency demands, and national policy edicts all scream for attention. A marketplace mandate has been laid at the feet of the MLS: Earn and keep the consumer's trust.

A philosophy of affirmative transparency can be your guide. Seeking ways to shine sunlight on the MLS' pro-competitive and pro-consumer processes and benefits has never been more important.

While you're shining that light, why not look at ways to improve the experience you give participants and consumers? In a five-part online series for REALTOR® magazine, I covered a range of issues MLSs should be addressing. Here are three potential trouble spots:

1. Coming Soon listings. Does your MLS have a policy around Coming Soon listings? Do Coming Soon listings go out to broker participants but not consumers? If so, for how long? Has your MLS defined how long a listing can be Coming Soon or in a delayed showing status?

Examples derived from real current situations highlight the inconsistencies. Take the case of Sally Seller, who wants to delay showings and internet advertising for a few weeks so she can prepare her home. Amy Agent lists the home in both the Sunny MLS and the Breezy MLS, but the systems have different rules for Coming Soon status:

- The property can't be shown to buyers in Sunny but can be shown in Breezy.
- Days on market do not accrue in Sunny but do in Breezy.
- The property is not published to brokers' IDX websites in Sunny but is in Breezy.

Bobby Buyer sees the listing on a Breezy MLS IDX site and requests a showing. Sunny MLS' rules say Amy can't show the property, which confuses Bobby, since Breezy MLS' website shows the property is open to showings.

Once the house is moved to active status, Bonnie Buyer finds it on Sunny MLS' website. That site shows that the listing has been on the market for one day, but Bonnie's agent is a subscriber to Breezy MLS and tells her the listing has actually been on the market for 23 days.

The different rules begin to feel like market manipulation. Sally is disappointed by the listing's inconsistent advertising and showing communications. Bobby is frustrated that a property advertised as available for showings on one site is unavailable. Bonnie feels lied to. And Amy is perplexed because her client and the potential buyers have been let down, and it looks like her fault.

"Can't we all just do this the same way?" agents ask. It's a question worth exploring: When should local flexibility give way to national rules? In Part 5 of the online series, I offer a framework for deciding when uniqueness takes precedence and when consistency should be prioritized.

2. MLS areas. MLS listing areas—the traditional codes agents have used to classify listings geographically—are functionally obsolete. Yet listing a property in 520 versus 530 is so ingrained that mentioning the eventual demise of the practice leaves some agents feeling bereft.

Whether MLS listing areas should be used to define a property's location is no longer just a question of personal prefer-

SPECIAL SERIES MLS 2021: Earning Trust Through Transparency

ence. It causes damage to the credibility of the MLS, the broker, and the agent. Consider the facts:

- These static areas don't keep up with changing neighborhood or school boundaries. They're dated and arbitrary, and they often split subdivisions and neighborhoods.
- Areas are often based on older government maps that defined redlining areas—possibly the greatest concern that the MLS should consider.
- Agents consistently "game" areas with listings that should be elsewhere or request to double-list in different areas. This puts an undue burden on the MLS to support an outdated practice.
- Agents give clients more refined searches—and therefore, higher-quality results and experiences—with map-based searches.

Some agents will continue to list and search by area. They'll miss listings, and so will their clients. Clients who miss their dream home will conclude—rightly—that the MLS didn't serve them or their agents well. The MLS should consider its reputation and liability when discussing the retirement of MLS listing areas. Map-based search superiority makes the MLS a higher-value service provider.

3. Rich media. A builder recently said his company wouldn't use the MLS to advertise because it only allowed a maximum of 15 photos of 800 by 600 pixels each. While that conclusion is probably outdated, we've created an impression with some consumers that an MLS platform is made to box in media rather than expand and invite new-media innovation.

Remote home shopping, showings, and purchases have accelerated greatly because of the COVID-19 pandemic. In many areas, mobile technology capabilities have outpaced what we're capable of displaying in MLS systems. And yet there is innovation: Digital floor plans are squeezing their way into core MLS systems; FBS' FlexMLS integration with FloPlan is one example. Multiple video uploads are table stakes. Interfaces for 360-degree videos and 3D walkthrough tours are becoming more commonplace.

Accepting the input and integration of rich media content into the MLS will be critical to keeping brokers and their clients engaged.

Accepting the input and integration of rich media content into the MLS will be critical to keeping brokers and their clients engaged. Advances may be a potential competitive advantage or an opportunity to catch up. Can the MLS provide a platform where rich media is experienced within the MLS interface? Can the MLS provide a simplified way for brokers to access rich media and present it directly on their consumer-facing websites?

A seamless participant experience is paramount. It's currently a clunky process to get media from the vendor to the agent, to the MLS, and back to the broker's website. Cutting-edge MLSs and vendors are building tools to automate the placement of rich media because consumers are demanding it. When the MLS can't meet participants' needs to distribute rich media, brokers and agents will go directly to platforms such as WellcomeMat that can.

Consumers and brokers are demanding this kind of media support. It's the MLS' opportunity to provide it. ■



Sam DeBord is CEO of the Real Estate Standards Organization (reso.org). You can reach him at sam@reso.org. Read the entire series on MLSs at magazine.realtor/mls2021.



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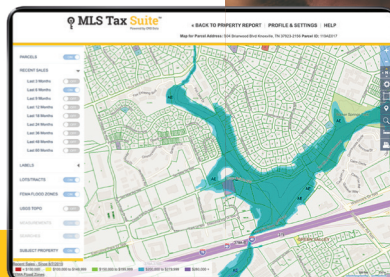


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Replacing Yourself

Preserve your legacy by ensuring that your successor has what it takes to lead.

As the executive of a small association, you handle everything. And as the person running the show, you've worked long, hard hours to bring the association to where it is now. In the event you are suddenly out of the picture, you don't want to lose everything you've worked so hard to accomplish, do you?

Many people think succession planning is only for planned departures. But there is also the possibility of an unplanned departure. In the event something unexpected happens, a succession plan functions as a business continuity plan that not only preserves the association's viability through a transition, but also maintains your legacy.

When an AE leaves, a lot of institutional knowledge leaves with that person. A business continuity or succession plan should consider what someone else would need to know when stepping into the role, and how to find that information without asking a lot of questions or reinventing the wheel. This means every process and procedure should be documented in an easily accessible format.

Approach documentation step by step in order to create a guide that allows someone who has never done some aspects of your job before to do them. Given everything you do, this could be a daunting task.

Start by writing down each step of a single aspect of your job. Include a brief description of the overall purpose and goal of the process—the “why” behind the task. A helpful resource is the AE Local Operational Procedures Grid available at nar.realtor. (Find it under Retirement and Succession Planning Resources for AEs.)

In the event something unexpected happens, a succession plan functions as a business continuity plan.

You should also maintain an up-to-date directory of vendors and their contact information, as well as information regarding the association's various bank and credit card accounts. Although IT professionals never recommend writing down passwords, you should have a way for someone else to access your systems. Talk with IT to determine a process for the association president to access systems, and include that information in your documentation.

Hiring the New You

Once you've covered the processes and procedures of your job, the next step is to provide your board of directors with resources. Depending on your board, members may or may not have the knowledge or experience to hire a new executive. Do they understand the qualities that make for a successful AE? Is the position description up to date? Do board members know how to screen résumés and the types of questions to ask? Do they know the legal ramifications involved in an executive search?

Put succession planning on the board agenda annually so members are

informed about what to do. In the event of your departure, the board will need to put a search committee in place, and its members should have some previous experience in hiring. They should also be familiar with market-based compensation, background checks, and employment agreements.

Another resource that should be included in a succession plan is a list of executive search consultants. Even if search committee members have hired before, they might not want to conduct a search themselves. The National Association of REALTORS® Strategic Association Management team is a great resource for finding reliable consultants; committee alignment is easier to achieve when working with a skilled consultant.

The executive search committee must not rush the hiring process. An AE has a unique skill set, and volunteer leaders should understand that it will take time to find a replacement in the case of an unplanned departure. Many variables will factor into the search.

To ensure that the right person is in place after your tenure, you can tap nar.realtor for a number of resources to assist with succession planning and strategic association management. Search for “Retirement and Succession Planning Resources for AEs” and “Strategic Association Management.” For additional information and resources, contact me at ckaptur@nar.realtor or 312-329-8311. ■



Carole Kaptur is the director of strategic association management at the National Association of REALTORS®.



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Simplifying the Standards

New diversity and fair housing requirements can be easy to satisfy.

In 2020, the National Association of REALTORS® introduced new diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and fair housing components to its Core Standards. For association executives new to this space, satisfying these requirements might seem overwhelming. But fulfilling these new standards doesn't have to be difficult or costly.

The resources NAR already makes available to state and local associations are a good starting point. Its implicit bias video, for example, is ready-made to be used in virtual and in-person trainings. Set up a Zoom meeting or webinar, and you can easily broadcast the video as part of a presentation or town hall discussion.

Consider tapping NAR, a local university, or another source for guest speakers. We had a successful Facebook Live presentation last year that featured a local sociology

professor who provided a thorough history of fair housing efforts in our community. Putting information on a public forum demonstrates transparency and a genuine commitment to bringing these topics to light.

The Core Standards also suggest creating a diversity committee at your association. NAR's diversity committee offers a model, and your state association may have resources available, too. Don't be surprised if members flock to join—ours did.

The Core Standards also require strategic plans to include DEI and fair housing components. If you tap a consultant to help create your plan, make them aware of this so they can direct the conversation on implementation. If your strategic plan isn't up for review yet, consider convening your leadership or a member focus group to add these components to the existing plan.

If you're worn thin from 2020, completing these new requirements may seem burdensome. But consider how these standards might provide a springboard for deeper conversations with your staff and volunteer leadership about making meaningful changes. As AE, you are in the strongest position to take the lead.

An inclusive culture can help spur ideas from your staff and volunteers on practical ways to meet new Core Standards requirements. The need to bring DEI and fair housing to the forefront has never been greater. ■



Gilbert S. Gonzalez, RCE,
is CEO of the San Antonio
Board of REALTORS®, Texas.

Creating a Safe Space

Do people of color feel comfortable and welcomed at your association?

It's a noble goal to expand representation of protected classes in your membership and leadership, says *How to Be an Anti-Racist Real Estate Pro*, a new book by Dr. Lee Danielle Davenport. But you might not realize that your environment may feel unwelcoming to the people you want to reach.

For people of color to step forward, you must create an environment that is a psychological "safe space" for everyone. In it, everyone—including people of color—feels welcome and heard in conversations,

and safe to learn, contribute, and challenge the status quo without being ignored or marginalized.

In consulting, Davenport asks leaders and workshop participants to answer questions such as:

- Are there participants who might feel it's unsafe to learn, contribute, or challenge the status quo?
- What could be improved upon to promote psychological safety for all participants?
- Do you feel included, or are there conversations to which you haven't been invited?

- When you offer input, do you feel like your view is trivialized or ignored?

"When a firm or association is inadvertently repelling people, those in leadership are not aware of how they show up to those they lead, nor of the psychological needs of those they lead," Davenport writes. "By leadership actively and energetically working daily toward creating a truly safe space, more diversity becomes the natural byproduct."

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Lobby Level

New Jersey REALTORS®' CEO Jarrod Grasso has been protecting member businesses for more than 20 years.

Jarrod C. Grasso, RCE, joined New Jersey REALTORS® in 1999, serving as vice president of government affairs for nine years before accepting the role of CEO. Following the belief that association executives can help each other and the industry succeed, he continues to advocate for private property rights, his members, and the real estate industry.

Grasso has also taken an active role at the national level, serving as a National Association of REALTORS® director and chair of the Association Executives Committee in 2015. He has been honored on numerous occasions for his work in the association and in the community, and last year received the William R. Magel Award of Excellence from NAR (see page 6).

REALTOR® AE asked Grasso about advocating for the industry and how fellow AEs can get involved.

Q: How has your experience as NJAR's chief lobbyist informed your tenure as AE?

Grasso: That role gave me the opportunity to have firsthand knowledge of the issues that impact the industry. Government affairs is one of the most important member services our organization provides, if not the most important. When a member asks, "What have you done lately?," we are proud to answer with a recent legislative victory or accomplishment.

Q: What are the emerging issues you see affecting REALTORS® over the next decade?

Grasso: In New Jersey, protecting an agent's ability to be classified as an



“Honesty is the key to any relationship, whether with members or elected officials.”

independent contractor is No. 1 on our priority list. Our New Jersey lobbying team is also focused on updating some of the state's more antiquated real estate statutes and regulations. Operating during a pandemic has opened our eyes to the fact that our laws need to reflect today's digital business.

Q: How has NAR's support aided your efforts on behalf of New Jersey REALTORS®?

Grasso: Whether it's the availability of funding through the Issues Mobilization Committee to assist us in our fight to defeat an additional realty transfer fee or giving us matching funds to help protect agents' independent contractor status, NAR is always ready to help. Colleagues at associations outside the REALTOR® family are envious of the resources we have available.

Q: What do you feel is the biggest advocacy moment, or “win,” of your career?

Grasso: One of the biggest wins for our team was when we defeated a proposal to extend the state's sales tax to seasonal rentals in New Jersey. We immediately went into action, actively lobbying against the proposal, and we pulled out all the stops—calls, emails, meetings. Less than 48 hours from when the proposals were put forward, they were no longer a part of the budget process. It was a moment we saw the true power of the New Jersey REALTOR® voice.

Q: What advice can you offer AEs who want to build relationships with local and state officials?

Grasso: Honesty is key to any relationship, whether it's with your membership or elected officials. The second part is follow-through; if you say you are going to do something or find a piece of information for an elected official, you must follow up. It doesn't have to be right away, but trust me: The elected official or their staff will remember if you don't follow up. ■

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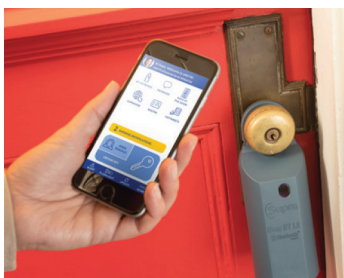
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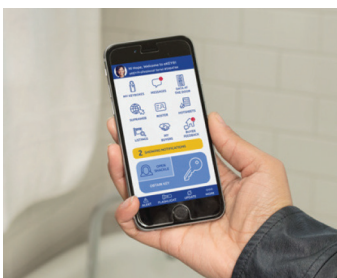


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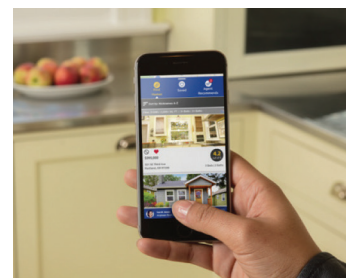
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