



“Innovative Affordable Housing and Homeownership Strategies to Build Neighborhood-level Resilience”

**Department of City Development
City of Milwaukee, WI**

PROJECT CONTEXT

Over the last decade, the affordable housing crisis has risen to a boiling point in the United States. Unfortunately, many Milwaukeeans are no strangers to these housing woes. Many residents are spending 50 to 80 percent, or more, of their income on rent or mortgage payments – double to triple the standard defined amount for affordable housing. In addition, the City’s overall homeownership rate has declined since the Great Recession, dropping by nearly 14% over the last decade. Black residents in Milwaukee are especially strained, with 40% of Black renters spending more than half of their incomes on rent and homeownership rates in Black neighborhoods decreasing by up to 28%. Currently, Milwaukee’s Black-white homeownership gap is higher than all but 8 of the 100 metro areas in the US. Moreover, there are an estimated 400 properties where a bank foreclosure was initiated but not completed, centered in these same Black and brown neighborhoods. These properties are a direct result of the homeownership crisis in the City, and while they create vacancy and blight, they also drag down property values which are critical for wealth building.

Like homeownership and household wealth, Covid-19 has also had an unequal impact on Black and brown Milwaukeeans. The pandemic’s economic fallouts have increased economic insecurity for families already facing housing trouble, and put the assets of Black and brown homeowners at risk. In response, the City has deployed over \$15M in immediate rent and mortgage assistance to families and placed multiple moratoriums on evictions. The connection between housing stability and health outcomes has never been more evident than during the Covid-19 crisis, and the City remains dedicated to creating or improving 10,000 units of affordable housing over the next ten years. This includes scaling the [Strong Neighborhoods Plan](#), investing in the [Westlawn Choice Neighborhood](#) initiative, closely monitoring mortgage delinquency and foreclosure data to stay ahead of another great loss in homeownership, and budgeting for \$6.5M in 2021 to be allocated for a variety of housing and homeownership programs. These programs would prioritize reducing racial gaps in homeownership and supporting new and innovative homeownership models that maximize long-term affordability and community control of land. Milwaukee is looking to build neighborhood-level homeownership and housing resilience in the face of any future public health and economic challenges.

To support these efforts, the City’s Department of Development will partner with FUSE Corps to host an Executive Fellow for one year who will design and institutionalize an action-oriented strategic plan for innovative, affordable housing and homeownership in the City. The Executive Fellow will work across providers to map all of Milwaukee’s affordable housing and homeownership programs and resources; engage communities directly, primarily those in Black neighborhoods, to assess their needs and desires; and detail processes for scaling and piloting innovative alternative affordable housing models. This comprehensive response by the City to provide sustainable, affordable housing and homeownership options will enable Milwaukeeans to gain opportunities for upward mobility through their housing.



PROJECT SUMMARY & POTENTIAL DELIVERABLES

The following provides a general overview of the proposed Executive Fellowship project. This summary and the potential deliverables will be collaboratively revisited by the host agency, the Executive Fellow, and FUSE staff during the first few months of the Executive Fellowship, after which a revised scope of work will be developed and agreed upon by the FUSE Executive Fellow and the host agency.

Starting May 1, 2021, it is proposed that the FUSE Executive Fellow will work to quickly build deep relationships with a wide range of critical stakeholders, including staff across City departments; philanthropic and business institutions, specifically those apart of the Community Development Alliance (Greater Milwaukee Foundation, Zilber Family Foundation, Northwestern Mutual); the Housing Authority of Milwaukee and the Wisconsin Housing & Economic Development Authority (WHEDA); Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) Milwaukee; local community development financial institutions (CDFIs); and local action-oriented non-profits such as Acts Housing and other housing counseling agencies. The Executive Fellow will also conduct direct community engagement, focusing outreach in majority Black and high eviction neighborhoods.

Through this initial listening tour with stakeholders, the Executive Fellow will conduct a landscape assessment to map all of Milwaukee's affordable housing and homeownership programs, policies, and resources. The Executive Fellow will collate community needs, identify gaps in access to these programs and resources, the community's desires for more affordable housing options, and demand for homeownership in critical neighborhoods. This community assessment will be vital in determining the City's broader development strategy, centering typically underinvested communities' voices in future innovation housing programs and financial incentives. The Executive Fellow will also research national best practice and innovative alternative affordable housing models, exploring the applicability of these models locally.

The Executive Fellow will work with internal and external stakeholders to develop an action-oriented strategic plan for innovative housing and homeownership in the City, with the primary goal of expanding opportunities for Black Milwaukeeans to gain capital and upward mobility through housing and homeownership. The plan will outline other short and long-term goals, timelines, and priority areas. This plan should be flexible and easily integrated into the Inter-Agency Housing Plan currently in development. The Executive Fellow will detail which existing programs and resources are most impactful, how those can equitably be scaled, the programs and resources that should be phased out or merged, and which new programs, policies, and resources should be piloted. This will include determining each program's financial implications, developing models outlining each program's financial needs over the next 3-5 years, and return on investment (overall impact on goals) year over year.

In the next phase, the Executive Fellow will create a thorough and holistic implementation framework. The framework will establish clear roles of internal and external stakeholders, building strong lines of communication and collaboration between the public, private, and non-profit sectors. The Executive Fellow will work to initiate activities that are most urgent and can be implemented quickly. This will include collecting all applicable data across key stakeholders, determining processes for consistent sharing on this information, and designing a unified and shared data system for tracking progress on goals, and the long and short-term impacts of the plan. This Executive Fellow



will also foster strong community feedback loops, to support determination of which new programs to pilot or how alterations to current resources are perceived. The Executive Fellow will be essential to combatting the looming eviction and affordable housing crisis facing Milwaukee.

By April 2022 the Executive Fellow will have overseen the initial implementation of the strategic plan, making sure it is as efficient and effective as possible. This will include the following:

- *Participate in deep community engagement* – Connect with individuals and community-based organizations in key neighborhoods to understand community needs, gaps in resources, and access issues; bring forward the community-voice to articulate strategies and policies that will have the most community impact
- *Conduct a thorough review of the current landscape* – Conduct a deep landscape analysis, collating all relevant programming, policies, and processes; map gaps and identify cross-cutting themes; collect and analyze existing data; strengthen existing lines of communication between stakeholders
- *Develop recommendations and form a comprehensive strategic plan* – Outline short and long-term goals, timelines, priority areas, in close consultation with key stakeholders; scale or design programs and resources that will be most impactful; model out financial implications of each program; determine which new models to pilot or scale first
- *Engage stakeholders and catalyze buy-in* – Demonstrate cross-cultural agility and successfully engage with all relevant stakeholders; solicit feedback from major stakeholders on strategic plan; identify barriers to implementing any recommendations; incorporate input from stakeholders to build consensus and ensure that the strategy is supported and successful
- *Develop implementation framework and roll out recommendations* – Develop a shared vision and goal for the plan; establish framework with clear roles of internal and external stakeholders, collate relevant data and metrics, setting benchmarks for tracking progress; develop processes for continued sharing of information among stakeholders
- *Support long-term implementation* – Oversee implementation of strategies considered low-hanging fruit; work with leadership across Departments to manage the initiative; measure and broadly share progress towards goals; create the necessary internal and external systems to ensure proposed strategies are sustainable and can successfully be implemented, including continued incorporation of feedback from the community

KEY STAKEHOLDERS

- **Project Supervisor - Lafayette Crump**, *Commissioner*, Department of City Development
- **Vanessa Koster**, *Deputy Commissioner*, Department of City Development
- **Executive Sponsor - Aaron Szopinski**, *Policy Director*, Mayor's Office

QUALIFICATIONS



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- At least 15 years of professional experience in a relevant field
 - Robust record of success with project management, engaging a variety of cross-sector stakeholders and managing cross-functional teams
 - Some experience or knowledge of federal, state, and local housing subsidies/guidelines
 - Ability to utilize creative financing for implementation of new systems or programs
 - Passion for supporting typically underinvested communities in the housing sector i.e. low-income people, communities of color, people with disabilities, seniors, and the homeless
 - Strategic decision-maker who is effective at mapping out program and policy impact
 - Excellent community engagement skills and cross-cultural agility, ability to relate to a wide variety of diverse audiences with strong emotional intelligence and empathy
 - Proven cultivator of strategic partnerships, relationship and coalition building, and collaboration
 - Persistent in obtaining information and creatively resourceful in identifying solutions to complex problems
 - Ability to synthesize complex information into clear and concise recommendations
 - Ability to sustain progress and facilitate change management within potentially ambiguous environments
 - Self-motivated, goal-oriented, entrepreneurial leader who can also be an independent worker
 - Exceptional written and verbal communication skills with an ease in public presentations
 - Understands the need for solutions to support all people in a community regardless of race, religion, gender, immigration status, or ethnicity

FUSE Corps is an equal opportunity employer with a core value of incorporating diverse perspectives into our work at every level. We encourage candidates from all backgrounds to apply for this position.