



## LHA Primary Function Debate

### *Membership Association Vs. Service Provider*

LHA is at a crossroads. The following discussion should take place with the objective of providing clear direction on how to accomplish our mission moving forward.

Should LHA predominantly operate as:

- A) A membership association with the primary purpose to act as a convener, resource hub, educator and legislative/policy advocate for our stakeholders who are themselves working to create housing for people with I/DD?
- B) A service provider that operates programs and initiatives ourselves that make a direct impact in the community or offers technical assistance via consulting to stakeholders working to create housing for people with I/DD?
- C) Some combination of the two?

If we choose option B or C, rules of engagement will be developed to coordinate the activities.

### **History & Intent**

During the founding of LHA, board members envisioned our alliance addressing deficits in a system that led to the shortage of affordable housing for people with I/DD. There was no limiting of LHA around activities traditionally aligned with a membership association or a service provider. The door was left open to both versions of LHA. In fact, we did not necessarily see LHA as needing to fit into one category, but instead the hope was simply to serve as a catalyst for addressing a myriad of issues we identified in many different ways.



However, in the context of the two standard industry approaches listed above (membership association and service provider), we seem to be operating in the gray area between the two. We have coordinated summits, moderated panels at conferences, collected and disseminated resources/best practices and advocated for legislation to support our cause. We have functioned in many ways like a membership association. We have also developed programs like Legacy HOMES and constructed plans to offer direct technical assistance for a fee to stakeholders like Regional Centers on topics such as strategic housing planning and housing access services. This could be interpreted as falling more under the category of a service provider.

When we look out into the nonprofit space we see many examples of organizations that fall into the two separate buckets, but not many agencies that do both. Either they are membership associations like Housing CA, SCANPH, NPH, and California Disability Services Association, whose primary functions are to coordinate convenings, lead education sessions, and perform legislative advocacy, or they are intermediary agencies like CSH, LISC, Enterprise, and NeighborWorks that offer programs and technical assistance. However, the latter is not collecting dues from members.

### **Conflict vs. Missed Opportunity**

The challenge we face is that we are mainly funded like a membership association, but may also have the desire to offer direct services. In recent years there have been discussions on providing services or technical assistance directly through LHA. Thus there is potential for conflict with dues-paying members who may see our services as competing with them now or in the future.

One option is to decide not to offer direct services or technical assistance as a function of LHA, and instead simply make referrals to member organizations when we are approached by



potential clients. In this scenario, is there then the possibility that needs go unmet if our members do not have the capacity to meet the need? For example, if Redwood Coast Regional Center contacts us about a technical assistance need, and no current member is interested or able to provide that support, have we limited ourselves in serving as a catalyst for the creation of housing?

## Considerations

- Do we opt to restrict our activities into one of the two identified standard industry functions: membership association or service provider?
  - If we opt for the membership association, to limit potential conflict, are we restricting ourselves in addressing unmet needs?
    - Strengths of this option:
      - This model is feasible within current capacity
      - We can continue to advocate for legislation, best practices, the SSF, and committee objectives that serve the collective good of our alliance through our newsletter, summits, webinars and external conference panels
      - There is no need to develop business models or operating plans for individual services
      - There is no need to vet or hire consultants to provide technical assistance or rapidly grow our internal operations
    - Weakness of this option:
      - It limits revenue opportunities
      - It limits ways in which we can serve as a catalyst and support committee objectives



- If we opt to keep the door open to functioning as a service provider, to make the most direct impact when needs arise across the state, do we alienate members and risk our ability to function as a membership association?
  - Strengths of this option:
    - We are able to generate consulting fees
    - We are able to meet service needs across the state where no member is providing services
    - We are able to directly build capacity within the I/DD service system and the housing & community development sector to potentially create future opportunities for members to create housing
  - Weakness of this option:
    - The lack of capacity to research & develop potential service/technical assistance products and models
    - Our services may conflict with current members and discourage future members from joining LHA
    - It will be complicated to navigate the potential fairness of offering certain services that may benefit some members and hurt others
    - The need to vet and hire consultants to meet service request needs