2020 VIRTUAL CONFERENCE
Wednesday, September 16

National Training Day 1: 9am to 4pm
Nuts & Bolts Budgeting, Accounting & Finance for Housing Authorities

- Presented by national housing experts at BDO (formerly Casterline)
- Advanced registration required. Attendees may attend just one day or both – full conference is included in the registration fee.

11:00 am Conference Kick Off & Plenary
We kick off our fall conference with our plenary speaker Richard McLemore II, the Executive Director of an African American culturally inclusive organization that is focused on providing a holistic approach to housing for renters and home buyers. Through his personal story and his experience working in the affordable housing industry, our plenary will both inspire and provide insight to the importance of housing in Minnesota.

12:30pm Break for Lunch

1:00pm Concurrent Sessions
Evictions & Others Legal Issues with Legal Aid
At the time of the conference, we expect that the ramifications of the statewide eviction moratorium will be felt by housing authorities, landlords and tenants alike. This session will feature attorneys from legal aid and provide an update on the issues they are seeing.
Speaker: SMRLS

Addressing Disparities in Minnesota Homeownership
Minnesota has one of the greatest disparities in homeownership when it comes to race and ethnicity. This has a significant and long term impact on the ability of families to build wealth and self-sufficiency. Our session will showcase the many programs and approaches that can help communities address this inequality.

2:45pm Concurrent Sessions
Leading Amid COVID19 – Rice County HRA
This session features Rice County HRA and how two initiatives helped the HRA respond to COVID19. First, like many housing authorities, Rice County faced the difficult choice on how to maintain operations and comply with the stay at home order. One of the biggest issues was staff access to client files when most are maintained in paper form in the office. Joy Watson with the Rice County HRA will share her experience going paperless and lessons learned. This is an ideal time to consider this update as the costs incurred can be considered a COVID expense. In addition, Joy will share how her agency addressed challenges faced in rural counties including community strategies that increase access to affordable housing.

Tenant Screening: What Works & What Doesn’t – New Research & Recommendations
In order to fill vacant rental homes, most landlords gather data on each applicant’s criminal, rental, and credit history and income and compare these data points against company standards. These tenant screening practices are coming under increasing scrutiny by policy makers in Minnesota and around the country. The presenters and their partners recently engaged Twin Cities renter communities, landlords, and others to develop a comprehensive understanding of tenant screening systems, and to assess how well those systems perform for landlords and for tenants. This session will present and invite discussion of those findings and recommendations. Presented by Housing Justice Center and Family Housing Fund.

Many Thanks To Our Speakers!
Richard McLemore II, Plenary Speaker

Executive Director of McLemore Holdings and located in Saint Paul, Minnesota, McLemore Holdings, is an African-American culturally inclusive organization, focused on providing holistic professional development workshops, renters and home buyers educational courses, and healing circles - addressing the underlying psychosis behind criminal behavior. He is a three (3) time college graduate, most recently graduating from Metropolitan State University - with a Focus in Psychology. Prior to his current position, Richard was the Housing Director for Ujamaa Place; while simultaneously, acting as Program Manager for Alternatives to Violence Project-Minnesota. He dedicates his time facilitating psychosocial workshops on mental and emotional healing, for practitioners at State and Federal prisons, juvenile facilities, and county jails across the nation; Richard is also a Circle Keeper with the city of Saint Paul’s “ETHOS” Diversion program. He founded the Community Diversion Program—an extension of the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI). Richard is on the Board of Directors for We Are All Criminals and the Dispute Resolution Center and is also in the midst of writing his autobiography.

Evictions & Others Legal Issues with Legal Aid (Panel)

Mary Vrieze is a Minnesota Certified Paralegal working for the Housing Equality Law Project (HELP) at the Rochester office of Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services (SMRLS) for the past 20 years. Prior to working for SMRLS, Mary worked for over six years as a family law paralegal at Western Minnesota Legal Services and for two years at the firm of Kraft, Walser, Nelson & Hetting in Olivia, Minnesota. Mary received her Paralegal Bachelor of Science degree from Winona State University.

Marc Riese is a housing attorney working in the Rochester office for Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services (SMRLS) since June of this year. Prior to that, Marc primarily practiced child support law in Houston, Texas after serving a one year term as a law clerk on the Texas First Court of Appeals. Marc received his J.D. degree from St. Mary’s University School of Law in San Antonio, Texas.

John Buhta is a staff attorney with the Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services. He works in the Rochester office in the Housing and Consumer Unit since 2015. John represents low-income individuals in a variety of legal matters across eleven counties in southeastern Minnesota in furtherance of SMRLS’ mission to provide high quality legal services to eligible clients in a respectful matter and consistent with SMRLS’ Racial Justice Policy. Conduct community education and outreach.

Leading Amid COVID19 – Rice County HRA

Joy Watson, MPNA, is the Director of Housing with Rice County Minnesota since 2008, and has served as the Director since 2014. Joy holds an undergraduate degree in History Education from Dickinson State University and a master’s degree in Public and Nonprofit Administration from Metropolitan State University. In 2019-2020, she participated in the Rural Impact County Challenge training cohort, a partnership between the National Association of Counties and County Health Rankings and Roadmaps. The cohort consisted of 12 rural counties from around the United States who focused on housing as a social determinant of health.

Addressing Disparities in Minnesota Homeownership

Christina Akinola is a Business Development professional at Minnesota Housing in the Home Mortgage Programs Single Family division. She leads the Agency’s Lending Partner approval process. Christina also plays a vital role in developing and presenting at Minnesota Housings Real Estate Partners continuing education classes. Christina has held various positions in Business Development and in the mortgage industry for the past 18 years. She has a passion for helping people achieve equitable, affordable, and successful homeownership. Christina is also gives back to her community and as such serves on the Board of two local nonprofit agencies; Free2b! Inc. and Anoka Hennepin Educational Foundation. Christina lives in Champlin MN & loves to spend her spare time during quarantine exploring the amazing beauty of Minnesota State parks.

Tenant Screening: What Works & What Doesn’t – New Research & Recommendations

Eric Gustafson is a program officer at the Family Housing Fund, where he collaborates with renter communities, the rental housing industry, local government, and many others. In this role, he leads work to ensure homes in the region are safe and healthy while also reducing involuntary moves and displacement. He also works to improve the accuracy and fairness of tenant selection systems while helping applicants improve their ability to secure quality affordable housing. Additionally, Eric leads efforts to expand access to homes for households using rental subsidies. Prior to joining FHFund, he spent five years in engineering and architecture, and then 12 years in community development as an executive director and neighborhood organizer achieving policy and built environment outcomes in affordable housing, land use and transportation, local food systems, and economic development. Eric holds a bachelor of science in mechanical engineering from North Dakota State University and a Master of Public Affairs from the Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota.

Margaret Kaplan is the President of the Housing Justice Center, a non-profit public interest legal and policy advocacy organization dedicated to upholding the right to safe, stable, affordable housing free from discrimination. Margaret has over 20 years of experience in the field of affordable housing and community development, starting out as a community organizer with All Parks Alliance for Change. She began her legal career with the Housing Preservation Project, and subsequently worked for All Parks Alliance for Change and the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs at the University of Minnesota. Prior to joining HJC, Margaret spent six years as the Community Development Director at Minnesota Housing. Margaret has expertise in local, state, and federal housing policy and programs and is dedicated to using law and policy as a tools to effectuate community articulated outcomes for a more just and equitable society.