



Texas REALTORS® and Hispanic Real Estate Professionals Come Together to Fight for Common Advocacy/Diversity Goals – March 2014

The 83,000-member Texas Association of REALTORS® (TAR) doesn't argue with statistics. It has a long, proud history of embracing the ethnic diversity within the state, whose Hispanic population is second in the nation, and growing steadily. So when the Texas Real Estate Political Action Committee (TREPAC) Director Leslie Cantu learned about the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® Diversity Grant program, she thought, "It's not enough to embrace our changing demographics - here's an opportunity to do something for it!"

Working with the 2013 TAR Chairman Joe R. Stewart, TAR Association Executive Travis Kessler, and Director of Professional Development Debra (Waldman) Hernandez, it became clear that the simple act of forging connections with the Texas chapters of the National Association of Hispanic Real Estate Professionals (NAHREP) would have great potential value. Here were two industry organizations working in parallel, but not together, in the same geographic space, facing the same demographic and legislative issues. In terms of efficiency and strength, collaboration between the two made nothing but sense -- but as far as anyone could remember, it had never been attempted.

With the ultimate goal of engaging the two groups in joint efforts to promote affordable and sustainable housing through political advocacy, TAR decided to start by bringing the leadership together. It applied for and received a \$5,000 Diversity Grant from NAR, which covered much of the cost of hosting a summit it called "Nuestra Oportunidad" ("Our Opportunity"), a day-and-a-half event that took place in mid-August 2013 at the TAR offices in Austin, just across the street from the state capitol.

"We invited the leadership of each of the five NAHREP chapters in the state of Texas, and the Professional Development Directors and/or Government Affairs Directors of the corresponding local associations within TAR, and they were intrigued -- every single one attended," reports Cantu. "They all arrived with high expectations, and left with the same," she continues. "Jason Madiedo, the current president of NAHREP National, told us that it was the first time ever that Texas' Hispanic real estate professionals were being recognized and embraced as partners. It was good for all of us to feel that we were coming together to help people realize the American Dream."

The summit kicked off with a cocktail reception that celebrated the Hispanic culture as participants got acquainted. The program itself was packed with information. It opened with TAR leadership and NAR's Director of Diversity and Community Outreach, Fred Underwood, discussing "Our Opportunity".



Political consultants educated the participants about “Los Datos” (“The Facts”), political trends of Hispanic voters and Hispanic housing market statistics. NAR’s VP of Political Strategic Planning, Bill Malkasian, made participants aware of “Los Recursos” (“The Resources”) of the REALTOR® Party programs. Two state elected officials representing both political parties provided lively banter about the affect of political advocacy on their own legislative efforts related to housing and the Hispanic community, from water, to transportation, to education.

"We really showed the participants that political advocacy has a direct impact on housing, and revealed all that TAR already does on behalf of NAHREP members and their clients, from working on legislative issues, to helping to elect REALTOR®-friendly candidates," says Cantu.

Armed with this information, the NAHREP leaders and their counterparts from the local REALTOR® associations were then asked to work on “Su Misión” (“Your Mission”) to develop and further diversity goals for their prospective partnerships. The exercise was for each group to discuss ways to collaborate on viable initiatives that could be implemented back home, while also tapping into the resources available through NAR, TAR and the local associations. "Lots of good ideas emerged," says Cantu, who views these plans as the real measure of the summit's success. "These local Texas organizations are now committed to working together for the betterment of Hispanic housing consumers."

She has already seen evidence of this, in the form of recent Diversity Grant applications that list NAHREP as a partner, among other collaborations. She and other members of the TAR leadership have been asked to share their expertise on political advocacy and investing in TREPAC at NAHREP meetings at which their local REALTOR® associations have now been invited to participate. Other states have expressed an interest in following TAR's lead in engaging fellow industry organizations to work together toward common diversity goals.

"We're so encouraged, and our hope is to build on this momentum," says Cantu. "We're already planning to reach out to the NAREB (National Association of Real Estate Brokers) and AREAA (Asian Real Estate Association of America) organizations here in Texas, and see what we can accomplish."

To learn more about Texas REALTORS®' efforts to connect with colleagues at the National Association of Hispanic Real Estate Professionals and to heighten awareness of their shared and respective issues serving Texas homebuyers and homeowners, contact Leslie Cantu, TREPAC Director, Texas Association of REALTORS®, at lcantu@texasrealtors.com or 512.480.8200.



Leaders from the Texas state and local associations, along with leaders from NAHREP chapters in Texas, helped to organize a summit to encourage working together on issues like affordable housing and access to sustainable housing finance.