

NAHP Update

Becoming a COQ Property Has Become Streamlined, More Inclusive

BY JENNIFER JONES

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NAHMA created the [Communities of Quality \(COQ\)](#) National Recognition and Awards Program to make clear that the affordable housing industry succeeds in creating housing that is safe, attractive, modern, and well maintained—and that residents in this housing are often aided in ways rarely addressed in conventional rental housing settings. This is an important message to convey to policymakers, government agencies, industry specialists and the general public.

When your property meets NAHMA's high standards in physical maintenance, financial management, programs and services, employee credentials and other criteria spelled out in the [National Communities of Quality Recognition Program](#) application, it becomes a member of an elite group.

Recently, NAHMA established a special task force to take a "deep-dive" look at the NAHMA COQ program



with the goal of updating, streamlining and improving the program, including aligning it with any new regulatory protocols while still maintaining the high standards that prove affordable multifamily properties are assets to their communities.

"We wanted to encourage more affordable housing communities to apply to be nationally recognized as COQ properties," Kris Cook, CAE, NAHMA CEO, said. "The

2021 COQ Award winner
Knightsbridge Apartments in
Arlington, Va.

objective was to make the application more readable and responsive, especially for the properties other than Department of Housing and Urban Development regulated properties such as tax credit and Rural Development communities to participate."

After months of review, the task force improved the

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NATIONAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION (NAHMA)—Protecting the Interests of Affordable Housing Property Managers and Owners



2021 COQ Award winner Mill Pond Apartments in Littleton, Mass.

application making it easier to read, understand and complete. The revised application is available on the NAHMA website on the National Communities of Quality Recognition Program [webpage](#).

Besides making the program more accessible for non-HUD properties to participate, the revamped application changed the scoring to provide more weight to programs and services the properties do regularly. There is also an opportunity to earn extra credit in Healthy Housing, Green/Sustainable or Energy-Efficient Housing, and Accessible and/or Adaptable Housing categories.

That means affordable housing communities can earn extra points toward certification as a COQ property by participating in federal, state or local agency programs geared toward creating healthy environments for res-

idents, being LEED certified or incorporating energy-efficient amenities, and providing more accessible units than are required by code.

“The purpose of the COQ program is to identify communities that are truly above average. NAHMA is trying to proactively change the criteria to gather information demonstrating that the applying community deserves the designation. We have stream-

lined the process so the application should be easier while maintaining the quality of the designation,” said Michael

Johnson, executive vice president of Alco Management and task force member.

Properties that earn a minimum of 225 points, or 200 points for properties with 49 units or less, on their application merit the COQ National Recognition.

BENEFITS OF COQ CERTIFICATION

Properties can submit the national recognition appli-

details. A directory of the AHMAs is available at <http://www.nahma.org/membership/ahma-directory>.

Affordable multifamily properties that qualify for the National Communities of Quality designation receive the following benefits:

- Permission to use NAHMA’s state-of-the-art Digital Smart Badges designed for your COQ property webpages
- A certificate suitable for framing and display
- A template press release for personalizing and sending to local media
- A free subscription to *NAHMA News*, a popular bimonthly newsletter featuring the top news affecting the affordable housing industry
- A listing under the National Registry of Communities of Quality on NAHMA’s website
- Permission to use the Communities of Quality trade-marked logo on stationery and printed materials to promote your property

“THE PURPOSE OF THE COQ PROGRAM is to identify communities that are truly above average. NAHMA is trying to proactively change the criteria to gather information demonstrating that the applying community deserves the designation. We have streamlined the process so the application should be easier while maintaining the quality of the designation.”

cation to their local AHMA at any time throughout the year. Please check with your local AHMA for its program

Additionally, Nationally Recognized COQ properties that score at least 325

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Example of a digital smart badge

webpage pops up if a visitor clicks on the badge, ensuring NAHMA has certified the property or company as a COQ property or Corporate Partner. If, for any reason, the COQ designation is rescinded by NAHMA or allowed to lapse by the company or property, the association can invalidate the smart badge. The association works with Yoshki Ltd., an online brand protection and image management company, to implement and maintain the smart badge program.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Detailed application information and submission materi-

points on their application become eligible for the annual NAHMA [Communities of Quality Awards](#). If a property initially received less than 325 points when its COQ National Recognition appli-

ment and the Westminster Company added the badges to their websites to highlight their COQ Nationally Recognized properties.

Managers of COQ properties are encouraged to visit

THE SMART BADGES ARE IMAGES CREATED BY HTML CODE to be incorporated into a company's or community's website. A verification webpage pops up if a visitor clicks on the badge, ensuring NAHMA has certified the property or company as a COQ property or Corporate Partner.

cation was first submitted, it may elect to update the original application to earn more points if improvements have been made to the property since its initial application.

ADD DIGITAL SMART BADGES

Another available benefit is NAHMA's state-of-the-art [Digital Smart Badges](#), which instantly convey to web visitors the superior status of your community as recognized by NAHMA through the COQ program.

Recently, Alco Manage-

the National COQ Recognition Program [webpage](#) to learn how to implement smart badges on their property webpages.

A special, separate smart badge is also available for COQ Corporate Partners, who are management companies that have at least 50% of their property portfolio accepted into the COQ National Recognition program.

The smart badges are images created by HTML code to be incorporated into a company's or community's website. A verification

als for the NAHMA COQ National Recognition and Awards programs are available at <http://www.nahma.org/awards-contests/communities-of-quality>.

An overview of the COQ National Recognition program, including a quick how-to apply video and overview flowchart, is available at <http://www.nahma.org/awards-contests/communities-of-quality/national-recognition-program>. **NU**

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Helping Teams To Grow and Thrive, Not Just Survive

One in 4 Americans has a mental illness. Since COVID, it's 1 in 3, presenter Amy Kosnikowski Dilisio told attendees of the Well-Being: Leadership Edition, How To Respond, Support & Care for Today's Teams session at the NAHMA Biannual Top Issues in Affordable Housing Fall Conference in October. Choice Properties sponsored the session.

She went on to say less than one-third receive the treatment they need. She told the crowd that surveys show that 50% of employees want their companies to help with job stress. Furthermore, 62% of employees have missed work for mental health, but 26% lie about

mental illness is a medical condition that can be treated, and the person can go on to live a healthy and productive life. Mental illness is defined as a mental, behavioral, or emotional disorder affecting a person's thinking, feeling or mood. Each person may have a different range and spectrum of experiences, even with the same diagnosis, such as anxiety and depression.

"My husband and son have ADHD, which is a mental condition. I like to spin it like it's their superpower. They see everything in a way I don't," she said.

Regarding mental health, Dilisio said it is essential to know what is important to you and your teams and how to respond appropriately.

Amy Kosnikowski Dilisio's Suggested Resources

Mercer: Hero Health and Well-being Best Practice Scoreboard

Wellable: Employee Wellness Industry Trends Report

Swift Bunny: Customized employee survey options

National Alliance of Mental Illness: Visit NAMI.com

Mental Health of America: Tips for starting a conversation, mental health screening, free webinars, tips to boost mental health and self-help tools

Change Direction: Excellent resources, including five-sign tools, emotional life skills and healthy habits of well-being

MentalHealthFirstAid.org: Training to assist those in crisis

Bring Change 2 Mind: Dedicated to encouraging mental health dialogue and raising awareness, understanding, and empathy. Especially helpful are the "Talk Tool" and greetings cards geared to mental well-being

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: Call 800-273-TALK (8255)

STAFF SHORTAGES AND BURNOUT can be the biggest challenges for employees. For example, some people can get down and bounce back, but some get so low that they don't know how to rebound.

why they are taking time off because they are afraid of the stigma.

"Work-life balance is the goal," Dilisio said. "Teams want to do their jobs, but they want to be respected and treated with dignity."

She likened mental illness to diabetes. Someone with diabetes can be treated and live a healthy life. Likewise,

"We want our teams to grow and thrive, not just survive," Dilisio said, "but in no way should you diagnose someone. But you can support your teams, before they become completely burned out, to go get help."

She said it is essential to stay connected with your team and encourage them to get assistance if needed.

You can also create a caring culture that is supportive of workplace wellness.

"When people are appre-

or enhance the workplace. I want to do my job well; however, if I need help or assistance, will you support me?"

Staff shortages, high customer demands and workplace stress can be the biggest challenges for employees resulting in burnout. For example, some people may get down and be able to bounce back, but some get so low that they don't know how to rebound.

The No. 1 thing employers can do is to normalize mental health and work-life balance discussions to reduce the overall stigma.

"It starts with us as leaders. Support your teams to be at their best. Believe that your team being mentally healthy will increase produc-

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tivity and overall job satisfaction. Create an open-door policy to discuss challenges and obstacles,” Dilisio said. “Know that job stress is real and have open discussions of what the employee may need to be supported.”

For example, have an “AMA” or Ask Me Anything conversation, which requires creating a safe space built on a trusting relationship and using positive and encouraging language. She recommends using the

are looking to you to set the example and the tone for the work-life balance.”

She said everyone should know the five signs that someone is suffering with their mental health: not feeling themselves, withdrawn, agitated, not caring for themselves, and feeling hopeless.

“When you recognize these signs over a period of time, there may be an opportunity to engage or intervene to assist the employee. But

and acceptance instead.

So, what can companies do?

The first step is to evaluate. Review your strategic plan and current employee offering to support their mental health and wellness, such as Employee Assistance Program (EAP) options. You may even survey employees on what services they would like, additional benefits that may be needed, and what program they would participate in, such as exercise or

to further the discussion of mental health and wellness with monthly “lunch and learns” and webinars. Popular topics are “Strategies To Combat Stress” and “Methods To Bounce Back and Recharge.”

The next step is to update. Companies may need to revise their policies, procedures, and benefit offerings to reflect best practices to increase work-life balance.

Finally, it is time to formulate. This is where a “game plan” is created with wellness goals.

“Let’s be well together and allow teams to recharge,” Dilisio said.

That could mean designating time to log off, allocating quiet time, creating “no meeting Fridays,” or allowing mental health days. She said some companies

are turning off email servers after hours or making “stress-less kits” goodie bags to distribute to employees.

“It is OK to not be OK,” Dilisio said. “However, it is not OK to suffer without support. The answer is different for every team, every company.” –JJ NU

As a popular national speaker, team builder and Apartment All-Star, Amy Kosnikowski Dilisio defines her offerings in three words: Motivate, Inspire, and Educate. Her mission is to be that spark that inspires positive change, helping others approach challenges through a new perspective and truly encouraging others to realize their potential.

“MAKE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS RELEVANT to your teams and company. The tone and pace are set by us as leaders,” she said. “If you’re focused on your mental health and being well, you’re giving permission to others to do the same. They are looking to you to set the example and the tone for the work-life balance.”

company’s human resources department, which may have numerous tools, tips and resources.

Leadership has to prioritize mental health and workplace wellness and know that there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Each company has a unique culture, and its employees have distinctive needs.

“Make mental health and wellness relevant to your teams and company. The tone and pace are set by us as leaders,” she said. “If you’re focused on your mental health and being well, you’re giving permission to others to do the same. They

before you engage, think about what to say and ensure you know what is going on. And recognize they may not be ready to engage or talk about it; however, it is impactful to know someone cares,” she said.

It can be as simple as asking if they are OK or saying you noticed they aren’t entirely themselves at work.

At moments like this, it is vital to participate in “active listening.” That means listening to understand the situation while being aware of your body language and facial expressions. It also means listening without judgment but with empathy

stress management series.

Then educate. Create an awareness campaign about mental health and wellness tips through email messages or employees’ intranet. Let people know what is acceptable to say and how to respond to someone who needs help. Also, increase the understanding of what benefits, such as counseling and telehealth, are available to them free of charge. Leaders have multiple tools and resources available to them and need to know how, where and who to refer their employees who may need help. Many companies have an ongoing education plan

Integrating DEI Into Your Business Practices

In 2020, in the wake of George Floyd's death at the hands of Minnesota police and the racial inequality protests it sparked, many companies made diversity, equality and inclusion (DEI) pledges and commitments.

Two years later, according to Danielle Willis, it is time to review whether those pledges were meaningful or just trendy. Her presentation, *DEI Workshop: Is Your DEI Strategy Too Legit To Quit?* at the NAHMA Biannual Top Issues in Affordable Housing Fall Conference in October, gave attendees tools to integrate DEI strategies and effectively create change successfully.

She said in the aftermath of George Floyd, there was a reaction but not a response. Many corporations and companies created and filled new positions for chief diversity officers, increased their commitment to hire and retain more people from underrepresented segments of the population, held DEI awareness and training, sought out more diverse suppliers, and committed an estimated \$49.5 billion to address racial inequality.

"How did you respond, and how did you lead?" Willis asked the audience. "Is your strategy integrated into your business practices, and was your organization ready for the change?"

Willis said there are two methods for strategic integration: the peripheral approach

and the embedded/integrated approach.

In the peripheral approach, companies create activities and initiatives focused on social issues separate from the core business.

"They are activities to satisfy external expectations. They are outside of the core business, and over time they become unneeded," Willis said. "They're not about understanding endemic racism. They're about garnering external legitimacy."

The peripheral approach results in fragmented activities that fail to positively impact the business or societal outcomes.

The embedded/integrated approach is when social issues are incorporated into the organization's core activities, structure and policies. They become part of the company's strategy and its daily routines and operations.

If you don't have an inclusive culture, you will have problems finding dedicated employees. Willis said that people who don't see themselves in your organization would be less likely to want to work there.

"Younger generations are looking for DEI. DEI has to be a part of your organization," she said. "If that cultural foundation isn't there, it's like you're building on sand."

Organizational leaders have to ask themselves, do employees feel seen and heard? Are employees "quiet quitting"? Quiet quitting refers to doing

the minimum requirements of one's job and putting in no more time, effort, or enthusiasm than is necessary.

"In 2020, when you sought to implement a DEI strategy, did the staff know why? Why now? What happens if you don't implement change?" Willis asked. "Were there individuals who didn't think there was systemic racism? Were there community partners looking for a change in order to do business?"

Willis said explaining to staff the why now could help overcome resistance to change. Creating the change requires acknowledging cultural differences in people and educating employees on how to interact with someone different from them effectively.

Willis said, for example, some cultures won't look you in the eye because that is considered offensive.

"Often there is a need for training to occur and an awareness of difference to interact with one another," she said. "It's not necessary for you to walk in my shoes. I just need you to be empathic to me and to understand my culture. My culture and my experiences will impact me differently than you."

Employees and leadership must be open to learning and recognize their own limitations.

"Be humble enough to know there might be a gap in your knowledge about a

cultural group," Willis said. "For example, not all African Americans or blacks experience things the same way. Ensure you don't overly generalize information."

It is also essential to create a psychologically safe place.

"If someone doesn't feel safe to ask a question, to make a contribution, then they aren't going to challenge the status quo, which is where innovation happens," Willis said.

Reinforcement is important to sustain the changes, including creating accountability for leadership.

Willis concluded her presentation by sharing what she called the DEI Serenity Reflection:

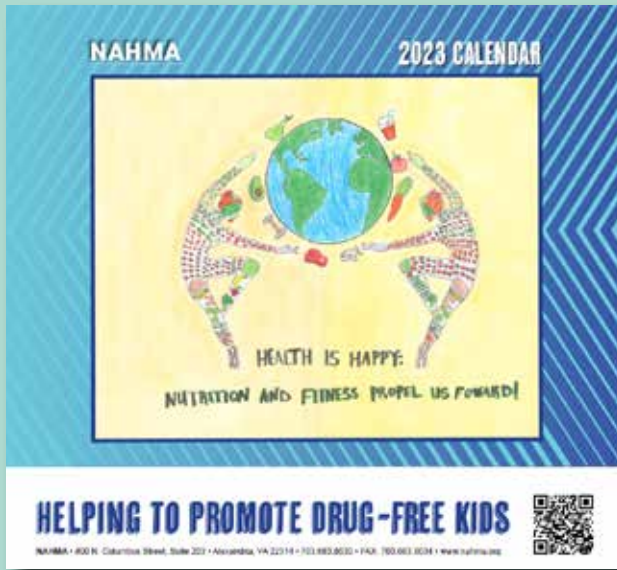
"Help me to accept the things I cannot change. (The world and nation are becoming more diverse. Current and future workforces expect DEI. Lenders, government partners, and communities are expecting, sometimes demanding, meaningful and impactful DEI action.)

The courage (desire, knowledge and ability) to change the things that I can. (Embed into organizational strategy. Manage the change. Hold leaders accountable.)

The wisdom to know the difference." —JJ NU

Danielle Willis lives a purpose-driven life as an executive coach and diversity, equity and inclusion consultant for the Knight Consulting Group. She partners with organizations to create and sustain inclusive environments where all people can thrive and achieve their full potential as their authentic selves.

2023 NAHMA DRUG-FREE KIDS CALENDAR



ORDER YOURS TODAY!

*The winners have been chosen!
The cover art selected!*

It's time to order your 2023 NAHMA Drug-Free Kids Calendars—at the same affordable price as last year!
Just \$5.50 each! The \$5.50 calendar cost is a Department of Housing and Urban Development and
Department of Agriculture allowable project expense.

*Also, place your order by Nov. 11, 2022, and enter
the NAHMA Lucky Draw for free prizes!*

NAHMA Lucky Draw Prizes!

- 3 Free NAHMA Meeting Registrations (Value: \$430-\$655 each)
- 5 copies of A Practical Guide to Tax Credit Management (Value: \$30 each)
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- 5 American Express Gift Cards (Value: \$100 each)

Drawing will be held on Dec. 9, 2022

Calendars make great holiday gifts for your properties, community event giveaways and colleagues. This year's theme, "Healthy Is Happy; Nutrition and Fitness Propel Us Forward" is illustrated through the unique poster art created by children, seniors and adults with special needs living in affordable housing. Support the drug-free message today. Send in the attached order form without delay. Or, download the order form through the Online Store at www.nahma.org.

2023 NAHMA DRUG-FREE KIDS

CALENDAR ORDER FORM

Order by Nov. 11, 2022, and enter the NAHMA Lucky Draw!

YES, I would like to order 2023 Drug-Free Kids Calendars and show my ongoing support of drug-free and safe community housing. If I order by Nov. 11, 2022, I will be entered into the NAHMA Lucky Draw for the prizes listed.

***Please print clearly. All fields required. Incomplete forms will not be processed.**

Name: _____

Apt. Complex: _____

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City: _____ State: _____ ZIP: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____

Email: _____

Management Company: _____

Name of AHMA: _____

Number of Calendars: _____ x \$5.50* (+ 6% sales tax if in Virginia) = \$ _____

* The \$5.50 calendar cost is a Dept. of Housing & Urban Development and Dept. of Agriculture allowable project expense.

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11-49 calendars ordered, shipping and handling \$1 per calendar = \$ _____

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100 calendars or more, flat rate of \$50 = \$ _____

Total Order (Number of Calendars Total + S&H Fee Total) \$ _____

PAYMENT INFORMATION (Orders For Less Than 100 Must Be Prepaid)

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Expiration Date: _____ Security Code: _____

Name on Card: _____

Authorization Signature: _____

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Allow 3-4 weeks for delivery
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