Open Communities is a leading voice for housing, economic and social justice in north suburban Chicago, working to promote inclusive communities that are welcoming to all.

Inclusive and diverse communities are healthy, robust and right. Our communities are richer when those who give to the northern suburbs also live here.

Founded in 1972 by north suburban residents and congregations, we are a nonprofit, membership-based organization dedicated to fostering economically and culturally diverse communities. We educate, advocate and organize in the name of social justice, working collaboratively with current and prospective residents, local groups and municipalities.

We Offer:
- Services
  - Fair Housing Discrimination Investigation & Education
  - Foreclosure Prevention Counseling
  - Landlord/Tenant Advice
  - Homesharing
  - Immigrant Leadership Development
- Advocacy & Organizing
  - Affordable Housing Advocacy
  - Community Organizing.

Open Communities calls on all north suburban Chicago residents to come together to foster welcoming, inclusive and just communities. We invite everyone to join the Welcome Movement!

The Welcome Movement is an attitude. It’s the belief that suburban communities benefit economically and socially when they embrace people of all ages, abilities, races, religions, ethnicities and income levels.

The Welcome Movement is collective action. It’s the common ground on which individuals, organizations, congregations, businesses, and government entities stand as they support current and potential residents in living where they choose.

The Welcome Movement is an outlet. It offers opportunities for residents with diverse backgrounds and circumstances—including those who might otherwise be marginalized—to work together in everyday civic life to build neighborly suburban communities.

By becoming a member of Open Communities and joining the Welcome Movement, you can help make the northern suburbs an open place to live, work and play. We offer opportunities to get involved at any level.

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Formerly known as the Interfaith Housing Center of the Northern Suburbs
Our Programs

Fair Housing Discrimination Investigation & Education

You have the right to live where you choose. This means you’re entitled to equal treatment when renting or buying a home. Federal, state and local laws protect each of us from being discriminated against because of personal characteristics such as race, color, religion, national origin, disability, sex and having children living with us.

Open Communities is here to help ensure everyone’s fair housing rights in Chicago’s northern suburbs. We can:
- Educate individuals, real estate professionals and municipal officials about fair housing laws and responsibilities
- Write a letter on your behalf to request that your housing provider accommodate your disability
- Investigate your claim of housing discrimination
- Assist you in filing a fair housing complaint
- Refer your case to attorneys who specialize in fair housing litigation.

If you feel you’re being treated unfairly, contact our fair housing experts. They’ll evaluate the facts of your situation and talk with you about your rights and options.

You can help make your community a more welcoming place by becoming a volunteer fair housing tester. In addition to the satisfaction of providing a valuable community service, testers receive a small stipend and travel reimbursement.

Foreclosure Prevention Counseling

The foreclosure crisis is one of the nation’s most pressing housing issues, and it’s been particularly hard on immigrants, people of color, and lower income families who became north suburban homeowners in the last two decades.

Open Communities is certified by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to provide one-on-one and group housing counseling services to prevent foreclosure, mortgage scams and lending discrimination. Our multi-lingual counselors are fluent in Polish, Russian and Spanish.

If you’re struggling to afford your mortgage, we can:
- Educate you about your available options and fair lending rights
- Review your loan documents and help you create a customized household budget
- Negotiate with lenders on your behalf to prevent you from losing your home
- Refer you to legal and financial resources.

Landlord/Tenant Advice

Your rights as a tenant are protected under state and local laws, which lay down requirements about security deposits, heating, property maintenance, entry, and eviction.

Open Communities works with people on both sides of rental agreements with the goal of creating better living environments. We provide:
- Information on rights, responsibilities and resources for renters and landlords
- Dispute resolution in a neutral environment
- Encouragement for landlords to rent to individuals and families with Section 8/Housing Choice Vouchers.

Homesharing

Renting a room is a time-honored way for homeowners to generate additional income or gain helping hands. For renters, finding the right room near work, school or public transportation can solve a short- or long-term housing need.

Open Communities’ Homesharing program matches residents who have rooms to share with renters who need living spaces. Since 1985, we’ve facilitated more than 700 matches throughout the northern suburbs, turning strangers into friends. To make sure potential housemates are compatible, our Homesharing coordinator prescreens both homeowners and renters, getting to know their personalities, living habits, and expectations, and introduces them to one another.

Renters must have a monthly income of at least $1,000 and excellent references. Homeowners must have at least one separate room to rent and provide access to a kitchen in good working condition.

Community Organizing

Open Communities is a vehicle for residents of all backgrounds to come together to work for housing, economic and social justice. We help people unite in their shared self-interest at the grassroots level so they can influence key decision-makers and create meaningful social change. We organize:
- Low-income or otherwise disadvantaged tenants threatened with displacement
- Residents of all income levels and backgrounds into social justice advocacy groups
- Civic and religious leaders and groups into a unified voice for justice.

Our Advocacy & Organizing

Affordable Housing Advocacy

At Open Communities, we believe that making housing available to people of all incomes and backgrounds makes the northern suburbs a betterplace to live. That’s why we:
- Collaborate with and build local and regional coalitions to advance fair and affordable housing programs, policies and legislation, and
- Provide support for bricks-and-mortar housing developments that meet a wide range of local needs.

Immigrant Leadership Development

Although one in four north suburban residents is an immigrant, few are engaged in civic life. Open Communities created and facilitates workshops to recruit and train immigrants to participate in local government and influence policies related to diversity and inclusion, including:
- I LEAD: Immigrant Leadership School (developed with the Voorhees Center at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) and the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights), and
- Community writing and action workshops (developed and delivered in conjunction with the UIC PRAIRIE Group).