

# Partnerships in Action



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## Working together to innovate a better future

Michael S. Lockett

With such a broad need for project support and such a paperwork-laden route to funding them, it can be difficult for community development corporations and funders to rapidly identify a specific project and put it into action. But that’s not always the case. Recently, the Tarrant County Development Corporation (DCTC) and BB&T orchestrated such a project, funding the addition of solar panels to houses built for working families to reduce their monthly power bills by nearly 80%. This has been shown to be disproportionately effective in helping families maintain ownership of the houses.

“I visited Development Corporation of Tarrant County, learned more details about their development work and explored how BB&T could support them in a defined way” said Mark Nerio, vice president and community development specialist at BB&T. “He [Charlie Price] mentioned the solar panel emphasis with the affordable housing they were building.”



“What we’re building is the best we can build for the family,” said Price, president of the DCTC, a CDC focused on providing opportunities for working class families making less than 80% of the area median income to own efficient, healthy homes. The houses are all ADA-compliant, making them ideal for anyone who lives there, from disabled veterans to working families.

“It’s amazing what it can do for a family’s long term survivability,” said Price. The homes, uniformly built to Energy Star standards, are designed to reduce monthly expenses of the homeowners through effective insulation, hybrid water heaters, and most recently, solar panels, all in order to reduce a family’s bills by hundreds of dollars a month. Price noted that the solar panels help cut energy costs by slightly more than 75% for the 1690 ft<sup>2</sup> single family home pattern they construct.

“We’re using that money [from BB&T] to put solar panels on houses. What we’ve found of the working families is that it’s about getting their monthly living expenses as low as possible so they have enough residual income to keep the house up,” said Price. “We’re going to start using xeriscaping and capturing as much water as we can. What we do is keep their in-housing expense to a certain point that they can afford and keep them in their house long-term.”

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These efforts saw DCTC awarded the Audrey Nelson Community Development Achievement Award in 2016 for their efficiency and quality of work. A recent interview in the Star-Telegram talked to some of the new residents of the houses constructed by DCTC. The story, written by Traci Peterson, talked to one of the new homeowners, Pablo Velazquez, who related that his family has space to have separate rooms for their children, and the bills remained the same as a residence half the size of the new house. The article can be found here: <http://www.star-telegram.com/news/local/community/arlington-citizen-journal/article55627270.html>

The project comes as part of a focus on the part of both the development corporations and the funders to build better, more efficient, and greener homes for the families. By building innovative homes that allow a better quality of life for working families, where the reduced bills will offer them a better chance to remain there, BB&T hopes to continue to work with DCTC to push the standard for homes constructed under the auspices of CDCs everywhere, improving quality of life and economic viability for their homeowners.



“We’re supportive of neighborhood revitalization and affordable housing,” said Nerio. There’s a bigger picture to contributing to new and unique ideas that help out low income homeowners, he offered, in that by pushing the state of the art, other development corporations would follow once they saw the benefits projects like these offered.

In the future, BB&T is sure to continue to look for opportunities to work with CDCs around Texas to support advances which better the lives of low-income homeowners. “There is such a huge need for affordable housing in all markets,” said Nerio.

And just the same, DCTC continues to work to build affordable, efficient housing for the working families it serves. “There’s never sticker shock when someone buys one of our houses. It’s the other way around,” said Price. “We care. We’re from here. Our nonprofit is from here. Our board members are from here. We have an interest in our community.”