

A Marketing Plan for

Baltimore Neighborhoods, Inc.

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Everyone at BNI has shown me time and again what a remarkable organization it is: a rare organization that, quite simply, does what it sets out to do.

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*Fair housing: The ability to move anywhere one wants—
within his means—without being afraid to do so and
without having people questioning one's right to do so.*

—From the BNI newsletter, June 1969



*The ache for home lives in all of us, the safe place where
we can go as we are and not be questioned.*

—Maya Angelou



Introduction

Few people would dispute the notion that shelter ranks with food and clothing as a human being's most basic needs. Yet the story of fair housing in the United States is an ongoing history of suffering, struggle, protest, and persistent, occasionally successful attempts at legislation.

President Eisenhower opposed desegregation so strongly until 1957 that he hesitated to enforce federal desegregation laws even when state governments flouted them. Although President Kennedy chastised the Eisenhower administration for its inaction, he himself felt he had to delay proposing fair-housing legislation until it seemed politically feasible.

The landmark federal Civil Rights Act of 1968 gave individuals the protection of law. It forbids discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, and national origin in the sale and rental of housing; discrimination or the intent to discriminate in advertising; and blockbusting, the practice of inciting white homeowners to abandon their neighborhoods when a black moves in. Although the law provides some exemptions, these are nullified with regard to race by the Civil Rights Act of 1866.

Until 1968, Baltimore Neighborhoods, Inc., (BNI) could only informally suggest that realtors, neighborhood associations, and businesses not discriminate, for the benefit of the community. BNI did garner the respect and support of many businesses and organizations because of its high-profile founders and board members, but it had no power of enforcement against those who insisted on continuing their discriminatory practices.

With the passing of the 1968 Civil Rights Act, BNI had the authority of law behind it. The November 1970 BNI newsletter reports that BNI had filed nine suits starting in early 1969. Today's lawsuits still cite the Civil Rights Acts of 1968 and 1866.

Another significant development was the Supreme Court's determination in 1983 that private fair-housing organizations like BNI and testers could be named as plaintiffs in

lawsuits. The Housing and Community Development Act of 1974 added women as a protected group. The Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988 broadened protection for people with disabilities over the level originally established in 1973 legislation and added families with children as a protected group. It also gave the federal Office of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) the power to take administrative enforcement action against those who violated fair-housing regulations. Within the past five years, the Maryland Commission on Human Relations gained the same enforcement powers.

As the history of United States civil rights legislation demonstrates, fair housing is an evolving field. Although legislation is an arduous process of small incremental gains, the Democratic process has worked. Americans have succeeded in obtaining protection through legislation and changing oppressive attitudes.

The United States is becoming increasingly and inevitably multicultural. “Multiculturalism” and “diversity” are not short-lived, trendy concepts but the present and future of our country. Studies have projected an increasingly ethnically diverse younger population, as recent immigrants start families, alongside an increasingly white older generation, as the predominantly white baby boomers grow older.

An overwhelming majority of Americans—84% of whites and 93% of blacks—feel that, at the time when affirmative-action programs were adopted, they were necessary to help women and racial minorities overcome discrimination. By contrast, a minority of white and a majority of blacks think that affirmative-action programs are still needed today to help overcome discrimination.

Whites’ and blacks’ opinions diverge sharply with regard to the incidence of discrimination—40% of whites and 74% of blacks feel that racial minorities in the United States are routinely discriminated against. Similarly, only 27% of whites but 62% of blacks feel that blacks are less likely than whites to get any kind of job for which they are qualified.

A study published by HUD in 1991 found that the incidence of housing discrimination against blacks is 53% to 59% and 46% to 56% against Hispanics.

Minorities in the United States face a daunting challenge in finding and financing housing outside of areas that already have high concentrations

We must think of fair housing as a part of the total civil rights movement.

Unfortunately, as a nation we have suffered because we have not considered it as such. Just think how much further we would be toward equal employment if we had really zeroed in on the issue of fair housing! Just think where we would have been in desegregating our educational institutions if we had addressed fair housing with more vigor!

—Arthur S. Flemming, from remarks made at The Fair Housing Act After Twenty Years conference, 1988

of minorities. These areas tend to offer poor education, few community support organizations, and few job opportunities.

The fact that the many surveys of Americans' opinions do not address fair housing illustrates the degree to which American society underestimates the influence of housing on education, employment opportunities, and quality of life. Even in 1988, when critical fair-housing legislation affecting nearly all Americans was passed, organizations like The Gallup Poll did not ask people's opinions on housing matters.

Just as housing itself is rendered invisible in these polls, a large and growing segment of our population is overlooked. To people with disabilities, housing accommodations can make the difference between dependence and independence. Simple modifications, such as curb cuts and ramps or policy changes permitting pets, can make housing accessible to the nearly one in five Americans with disabilities.

BNI's fair housing for people with disabilities project has found that, despite legislation that all new construction must meet minimum accessibility requirements, architects, builders, and inspectors continue to design, construct, and approve inaccessible housing. This project is just one way in which the organization continually reassesses the state of fair housing, educates the many parties involved in it, and enforces the mandates of law.

Every day, BNI defends the civil rights of people in Maryland through advocacy and empowerment. Yet BNI does not advocate for or empower itself. We have all heard the clichés about preparing for the new millennium and adjusting to a rapidly changing marketplace where demands change endlessly. They are clichés because they are true. BNI, like everyone else, *is* poised on the threshold of the next millennium, and this *is* a time of unprecedented change.

BNI knows how to handle change: nearly 40 years of navigating the civil rights movement through high and low tides and holding a steady course through the stormy evolution of attitudes, laws, and demographics have prepared it to redefine itself and adapt to a changing marketplace.

Housing discrimination is one of America's most serious problems.

Without it there would be less decay in the cities, less unemployment and fewer jobs unfilled, no need for courts to order busing to achieve school desegregation...For its practical impact on the economic, social, and political health of the country alone, it is a problem that concerns us all.

—United States Department of Housing and Urban Development Office of Policy Development and Research, Fair

Housing and the Real Estate Industry, 1977

Who is BNI?

BNI is a civil rights organization dedicated to justice in housing. A coalition of neighborhood associations, downtown Baltimore businesses, and community organizations founded Baltimore Neighborhoods, Inc., in 1959 to combat high levels of racial steering and blockbusting in Baltimore City. BNI's forward-thinking founders knew that, if the situation were permitted to continue, the city would wither. Baltimore could not sustain the loss of many of its middle- and upper-income residents coupled with the strain on its resources presented by a rapid turnover of residents.

Throughout its 38 years, BNI has remained a pioneer at the forefront of Baltimoreans' civil right to fair housing. Historically, BNI has set a progressive agenda for fair-housing in the Baltimore metropolitan area. BNI's board and staff members have been unafraid to confront racism and discrimination, even before fair-housing legislation supported their work.

BNI has consistently sought to expose the hidden depths of discriminatory practices in its efforts to ensure fair housing for all people in Baltimore. It has frequently identified and helped rectify shortcomings in fair-housing legislation. In addition, by making visible those groups who face discrimination, BNI has heightened awareness of the many forms of discrimination.

BNI has a history of responding to the changing needs of the communities it serves. Although it initially served the Baltimore metropolitan area, BNI now serves the entire state of Maryland in various capacities. The counseling program for tenants and landlords fields over 22,000 phone calls a year from throughout the state. In 1994, a full-time project manager was hired to address the fair-housing needs of people with disabilities. Other programs include tenant organizing for Baltimore City residents and Section 8 counseling for Baltimore City and County residents. All of these programs are essential components of BNI's mission to achieve justice in housing.

Mission

BNI is a private, nonprofit fair-housing organization serving the Baltimore metropolitan area that works to eliminate prejudice and discrimination and to enforce, promote, and defend human and civil rights secured by law.

Purpose

Specifically, according to BNI's by-laws, "the purpose of Baltimore Neighborhoods, Inc., shall be exclusively charitable and educational. To effect said charitable and educational purposes, the particular business and objectives of the corporation shall be (1) to lessen neighborhood tensions; (2) to eliminate prejudice and discrimination; (3) to defend human and civil rights secured by law; and to (4) combat community deterioration." BNI's mission and purpose remain substantially the same today as when the organization was founded.

Program

BNI's work encompasses many activities (see Activities of the Corporation). Although all of these efforts support the organization's mission, they make it difficult to capture succinctly the breadth of BNI's work. As a result, for example, a landlord who contacts BNI for assistance may be unaware of BNI's work in fair housing and tenant organizing and the organization's far-reaching educational efforts. Most people whom BNI serves remain unaware of the principle of fair housing that guides BNI.

Customers

BNI's work is so fundamental to Marylanders' well-being that the customer base could be considered to include all Maryland residents.

■ Primary customers

BNI's primary customers are people in the real estate rental and sales market: homeseekers, tenants, and landlords. They usually contact counselors by telephone, although some go to the office in person.

Many of the tenants are poor blacks, many with no more than a high school education. The landlords tend to be small-property owners and are racially diverse. The fair-housing customers are minorities—frequently

The Baltimore business community has already applied imaginative and bold thinking to the problem of rehabilitation of the downtown area. But a city is not only buildings; a city, fundamentally, is its people. This same type of bold and imaginative thinking must also be applied to the problem of what type of population we want the future of Baltimore to have. Whatever may be the solution ultimately...the important point is that the problem is now one which must be squarely faced up to; and only a direct attack upon it by the effective people in the business community holds any hope for solution.

—Representatives of several neighborhood and community associations in a letter to the Greater Baltimore Committee proposing the forming of Baltimore Neighborhoods, Inc., 1958

Activities of the Corporation

In order to carry out the purposes of the corporation [BNI], Baltimore Neighborhoods shall operate in the Baltimore metropolitan area to:

1. encourage the living together of citizens as good neighbors without regard to race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, marital status, physical or mental handicap, or sexual orientation;
2. seek resolution of complaints of housing discrimination, thus thwarting discriminatory practices through conciliation and legal services;
3. conduct a continuing educational campaign to inform citizens of their rights and responsibilities under the housing sections of federal, state of Maryland, and local civil rights law;
4. work with the housing industry to end real estate practices detrimental to fair housing and to encourage industry support of open housing;
5. work in “changing neighborhoods,” educating residents and helping them maintain stable, integrated neighborhoods;
6. encourage groups who work at the federal, state, and local levels to generate support for an open housing market;
7. operate as an information center for material on fair housing and civil rights and for inquiries concerning open-housing legislation, house financing, landlord-tenant relations, etc.;
8. work to increase the supply of low- to moderate-income housing available;
9. counsel with tenants and landlords as to their rights and responsibilities;
10. provide leadership and resources in the bettering of tenant-landlord relations;
11. help tenants organize to improve their living situation; and
12. undertake other activities which are consistent with the general purposes of the corporation and which are approved by the Board of Directors.

—*Baltimore Neighborhoods, Inc., By-Laws, Article II*

people with disabilities or families with children, as well as racial minorities—and have varying income levels. Because of their minority status, they have been subjected to discrimination. Most members of the Section 8 mobility program are low-income black women. The tenant organizer works primarily with tenants of low-income housing.

Often, callers indicate that they had to call several other agencies before learning about BNI, most often through word of mouth. Others have contacted BNI because they remembered flyers they received from BNI at community fairs or from local community groups.

■ Secondary customers

BNI's secondary customers are extremely varied, with each group playing an important role in the housing market. They include:

- tenant, landlord, and neighborhood organizations;
- social service agencies (churches, community and ethnic organizations, social workers, other fair-housing groups);
- realtors and realtor organizations;
- educational institutions (high schools, colleges and universities, libraries);
- employers and employee-assistance programs;
- funding providers (federal, state, and local governments, corporations, United Way);
- the legal community (law enforcement officers, judges, lawyers, clerks of court);
- the construction industry (designers, architects, developers, builders, housing inspectors); and
- the media.

BNI does an admirable job establishing and maintaining contact with many of these groups through outreach and education. Through letters and telephone calls, BNI introduces itself to groups and generates requests for speakers to make presentations.

No civil rights act, however historic, will be final. We would look in vain for one definitive solution to an injustice as old as the nation itself—an injustice that leaves no section of the country and no level of American life unstained. This administration has pledged that as long as racial discrimination denies opportunity and equal rights in America, we will honor our constitutional and moral responsibility to restore the balance of justice.

—From President Johnson's message on the 1966 Civil Rights Bill

A two-year federal grant in 1994 enabled BNI to develop an intensive education and outreach program designed to increase awareness and understanding of Fair Housing Act rights and responsibilities regarding people with disabilities. BNI's program reaches people with disabilities, groups that serve and advocate for the disability community, and many groups involved in the housing design and construction.

BNI conducts educational programs, such as training on tenant-landlord law issues for law-enforcement officers, and participates in community fairs where representatives meet and talk directly with customers.

In addition, BNI informs other organizations and advocacy groups about its work so that they can refer their customers for BNI's services. This type of networking has enabled BNI to reach a much larger group of people with disabilities, for example, than it would have without the assistance of disabilities groups.

BNI also produces several manuals. A grant from Baltimore Equitable Insurance Foundation, Inc., for example, subsidized the production of a tenant-landlord manual and its distribution to district court judges, clerks of court, housing inspectors, and libraries throughout the state.

BNI currently approaches several large employers in the area to recruit testers. Interns and testers are also recruited from local colleges and universities.

BNI recently developed a mailing list of media to receive press releases, and two public service announcements are distributed to radio stations monthly.

■ Internal customers

BNI's internal customers include the staff, the Board of Directors and other volunteers (testers, lawyers, VISTA volunteer), and members.

Staff

BNI's staff members are the organization's foremost public relations officers for its primary customers. Representatives of the entire organization, the staff demonstrate its commitment to take action on behalf of its customers.

A long line of cases shows that it is not merely of some importance but it is of fundamental importance that justice should not only be done but should manifestly and undoubtedly be seen to be done.

—*Gordon Hewart, Rex v Sussex Justices,*
1923

While BNI's staff has grown from two to 16, the demands on them have increased commensurately: Most of the new positions were created to manage new or expanded projects.

BNI's staff members are dedicated. They care about BNI and BNI's mission and in interviews exhibited a consistent understanding of BNI's mission and how its programs support that mission. (This is not common in a nonprofit organization!)

Salaries are low, even compared to those at other fair-housing organizations, but BNI's generous benefits package attempts to help compensate for the low salaries. The board is examining forms of career development to help retain staff. Some interviewees feel that the rate of staff turnover is too high, while others commented that it is remarkably low.

Volunteers

Volunteers, too, demonstrate a deep commitment to fair housing and to BNI in particular. The estimated value of volunteer hours donated to BNI in 1995 was \$45,000, the equivalent of two full-time staff members.

Volunteers serve on the board, work as testers and tenant-landlord counselors, perform numerous administrative tasks, and provide legal services. Their contribution of time and energy is critical to BNI.

The Board of Directors is closely involved in BNI's day-to-day operations. Board members serve on a variety of committees, each of which has established goals and objectives to help guide the organization and evaluate its progress.

Members

Although BNI has received few new members in recent years, existing members staunchly support the organization. They are willing to give financial support: A recent fund drive with a goal of \$5,000 quickly reached the \$7,000 mark. But they do not seem as interested in attending BNI's fundraisers, the annual meeting and an auction-dinner.

Members are crucial to BNI for several reasons:

- They provide needed income.

In 1996, membership contributions of \$25,000 made up 5% of BNI's operating budget.

A century has passed—more than 100 years—since the Negro was freed. And he is not fully free tonight. It was more than 100 years ago that Abraham Lincoln, a great president of another party, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. But emancipation is a proclamation and not a fact.

A century has passed—more than 100 years—since equality was promised. And yet the Negro is not equal.

A century has passed since the day of promise. And the promise is unkept.

—From President Johnson's Selma speech, 1965

- Institutional members form part of the support network linking other civil rights and social service groups with BNI.

Many churches and neighborhood organizations are BNI members. BNI also has reciprocal memberships with other fair-housing organizations.

- Members are a critical element in asserting legal standing in fair-housing lawsuits.

When BNI claims that certain housing practices have harmed a community, membership support from that community boosts BNI's credibility and helps substantiate the claim.

- Much grant funding hinges on the number of members.

Organizations bestowing grant funds want to see community support for an organization before they will contribute their own funds to it.

Competition

■ Fair-housing service providers: a model community

Because the field of fair housing is very cooperative both locally and nationally, BNI has no direct competition for providing fair-housing services. Fair-housing organizations share materials and information for the benefit of their fellow organizations. Research results are compiled and shared at conferences, via the Internet, in libraries, and through the mail either at cost or at no charge.

Although many organizations' activities overlap those of BNI, no one organization serving the Baltimore metropolitan area provides the wide range of services that BNI offers. In addition, few can boast the staffing and funding devoted to fair housing that BNI has.

- The American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland enforces fair-housing laws and promotes integration. Only one staff member is dedicated to fair housing, however, and the organization generally takes on only class-action or precedent-setting suits.
- Citizens Planning and Housing Association, with one housing staff member, promotes stable, integrated neighborhoods as one component

If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich.

—*John F. Kennedy, Inaugural address,*

1961

of its efforts to ensure access to a high-quality public education and make neighborhoods safe and healthy.

- St. Ambrose Housing Aid Center, with a staff of 40, works to stabilize neighborhoods and helps finance loans for homebuyers.
- The Greater Baltimore Community Housing Resource Board, with a staff of one, serves to educate realtors and the general public about fair-housing rights and responsibilities.
- Like BNI, the Maryland Commission on Human Relations enforces fair-housing laws, but its educational and outreach programs are now inactive because of severe budget cuts.
- HUD, too, provides enforcement. It also funds many fair-housing organizations, including BNI, through a variety of grant programs.

Complainants can contact HUD or the Maryland Commission on Human Relations to report discrimination. Only recently were these offices given the same enforcement powers that BNI has had since 1968. As a result, BNI has a longer history of handling all phases of complaints, including those that cannot be settled out of court. BNI has the advantage over HUD that it is intimately familiar with the Baltimore housing market.

All of these organizations work cooperatively, referring cases to one another as appropriate. For example, according to its publications, HUD will refer complaints to local organizations that have fair-housing laws and enforcement powers comparable to its own.

Many fair-housing organizations share reciprocal memberships with one another. BNI's board also includes representatives from other private and government fair-housing organizations.

There is a potential territorial conflict with the Fair Housing Council of Greater Washington, which serves the District of Columbia, Virginia, and outlying Maryland suburbs. Again, however, BNI and the Washington Fair Housing Council routinely refer cases to each other as appropriate. There appears to be great potential for collaboration between the two organizations. Their services complement each other, and as BNI and the Washington Fair Housing Council services begin to overlap, they should be able to rely on each other as a resource.

Refuse to believe the bank of justice is bankrupt.

—*Martin Luther King Jr.*

Some interviewees mentioned concern about the Washington Fair Housing Council's motivations and suggested that the organization might try to take over responsibility for fair-housing in Baltimore. If this should become an issue, BNI has the tools to protect itself: an established presence and an understanding of fair housing in the Baltimore metropolitan area, an excellent reputation, the resources to handle the case load, and support from other members of the fair-housing community. This marketing plan will address additional ways in which BNI can strengthen its position.

■ Competition for funding

BNI faces increasing competition for funding. The organization's sources for funding include:

- government contracts and grants (39%),
- corporate grants (24%),
- interest from the endowment and enforcement funds (22%),
- United Way funds (9%),
- member contributions (5%), and
- miscellaneous sources such as sales of publications (1%).

Government funding (39%)

BNI competes with many housing organizations for grant funding through HUD's Fair Housing Initiatives Plan (FHIP) and Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. Neighborhood and other community associations have recently entered the competition for CDBGs as well.

BNI receives funding for certain activities from Baltimore City and some counties, although they have no obligation to compensate BNI for or fund its services. When Prince Georges County eliminated its tenant-landlord office, it began referring all calls for tenant-landlord counseling to BNI. Inquiries from Prince Georges County escalated from one percent of BNI's total tenant-landlord calls, in 1992, to 23% in 1995 (6,230 out of 27,137 calls). The county refused to provide funding assistance despite a number of discussions of the matter with BNI. As a result, BNI has drasti-

Civil rights: Those rights guaranteed to the individual by the 13th, 14th, and 19th Amendments to the Constitution of the United States and by other acts of Congress; esp., the right to vote, exemption from involuntary servitude, and equal treatment of all people with respect to the enjoyment of life, liberty, and property and to the protection of law.

—*New World Dictionary of the American Language*

cally reduced its services in the county because of the drain on its resources. As a private organization, BNI has the independence to make such decisions, but this was apparently a difficult move for both staff and board members. Nearly every person interviewed mentioned the situation with Prince Georges County.

This example illustrates two problems: the risk of losing government funding and the “honor system” nature of BNI’s municipal funding. Because government funding is so volatile and a large portion of BNI’s operating budget derives from government funds, BNI is always at risk to lose a significant portion of its income. The Prince Georges County situation is just one example. The Maryland Commission on Human Rights, too, had to curtail its activities because of budget cuts. The competition for government funding and the volatility of these funds make them less desirable than other sources.

Corporate grants (24%)

Funding from Maryland Legal Services Corporation has enabled BNI’s tenant-landlord program to be offered statewide, and a grant from The Abell Foundation supports BNI’s Section 8 mobility program. With appropriate development, additional funding from other corporate and foundation sources should be possible.

BNI has encountered resistance from a number of corporations because of their perception of its work. They are familiar with the lawsuits, and many disapprove of the testing program. These corporations clearly do not think of BNI as a civil rights organization. They are unaware of the broad range of BNI’s activities, and they do not understand the need for testing. Nor do they see widespread community support, through membership, for BNI’s activities.

With a greater understanding of BNI’s mission and programs and increased membership, corporate support for BNI should increase. BNI has a longstanding relationship with Maryland Legal Services Corporation (MLSC), for example: MLSC lawyers provide many services to BNI and understand the nature of BNI’s work. BNI must develop this type of relationship with additional corporations to increase the likelihood of obtaining funding from them.

BNI has already begun developing such relationships. The new executive director recognizes that BNI’s survival depends on diversifying funding

**We are engaged in a great adventure—
as great as that of the last century,
when our fathers marched to the
western frontier. Our frontier today is
of human beings, not of land.**

*—From President Johnson’s message on
the 1966 Civil Rights Bill*

sources through increasing membership and corporate funding. It takes time, however, to develop any relationship. This year, BNI has received only token funding from the new corporations it has approached, but that should change with continued development work.

**Equality is the heart and essence of
democracy, freedom, and justice.**

—A. Philip Randolph

Endowment and enforcement funds (22%)

BNI currently withdraws interest income from its endowment and enforcement funds to support its operating budget. Additional corporate funding would enable BNI to let the interest income accrue.

Member contributions (5%)

Currently, member contributions account for only five percent of BNI's operating budget. BNI should attempt to increase this figure significantly. Recent fundraising goals have seemed relatively low; the most recent membership drive set a goal of \$5,000, and contributions now stand at \$7,000.

BNI receives approximately 23,000 telephone calls each year from people seeking its assistance. These are potential members. They can attest to and appreciate BNI's work.

Significant membership funding comes from churches and community groups. BNI should cultivate relationships with these groups because they have the potential to refer many inquiries—and potential members—to BNI.

Marketing Plan

BNI is in many ways in an enviable marketing position. As a service provider, it offers a unique product. It has a growing staff and a large corps of dedicated volunteers. It has a solid reputation for integrity. The organization is constantly seeking new challenges and new and more effective ways in which to offer its services. All of these give BNI a significant advantage over many other small nonprofit organizations: It has already laid the foundation for a full-scale marketing plan. As with many nonprofits, BNI must begin to focus attention on marketing and development, while maintaining its high quality of service in other areas.

■ A reputation for integrity

BNI is often involved in difficult and controversial issues, yet its staff members do not lose sight of their purpose.

After establishing the Greater Baltimore Fair Housing Advertising Task Force with local businesses, BNI found itself in an awkward position: BNI discovered that a member organization of the task force was violating the laws that the group had been established to enforce. Futile attempts at negotiation led to BNI's filing a lawsuit against the organization. Despite this difficult situation, BNI did not compromise its principles.

BNI is known for doing what it says it will do. Tenant-landlord counselors cite the many callers who appreciate that when they call BNI, they get results. Often, callers have already sought assistance from other organizations but did not receive any help.

■ **A growing, vital organization**

BNI is not afraid of change. It is constantly diversifying and looking for new areas in which to concentrate its efforts. These are signs that BNI is a growing, vital organization.

BNI's status as a private organization gives it the independence it needs to thrive.

■ **Although BNI staff members and volunteers are hard at work and are highly successful, for several reasons too few people are aware of the organization and its accomplishments.**

A poorly understood concept

Americans today don't consciously think of fair housing as a fundamental civil right. They associate the phrase "food, clothing, and shelter" with the needs of the homeless, rather than their own basic needs, which they now take for granted.

Even when their rights are threatened, people often do not fight to protect them. Tenants bide their time until they can move to another apartment. People seeking a house continue their search in another neighborhood.

In addition, the blatant discrimination of the past has succumbed to more subtle forms that are harder to detect without systematic testing.

Because the law is constantly changing, frequently unclear (and made clear only with a body of precedent-setting lawsuits), and rarely a topic of public discussion, many people do not even know what their rights are.

The average person today who hears the phrase "civil rights" or "fair housing" responds with a blank stare. Civil rights are no longer a "hot" topic. Most people do not know what fair housing means. A search for the term "fair housing" in the library yields little. (The keyword used is "discrimination in housing," a more limited, and an inaccurate, term.)

An unclear image

BNI suffers from an inaccurate, unclear image that is compounded by the breadth of its services and the enormity of the issues:

- To those who are unfamiliar with it, BNI is the organization that sues people. Skewed media coverage suggests that BNI is in the business of suing, even though it brings lawsuits only after attempts at negotiation

More than 125 years after passage of Reconstruction laws giving African Americans the right to be free of discrimination in the possession and disposition of property, and more than 25 years after passage of the Federal Fair Housing Act of 1968, discrimination continues to be a serious barrier to the full enjoyment of rights due to all persons who call our country their home.

—*United States Commission on Civil Rights*, The Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988: The Enforcement Report, 1994

have failed and after the staff, board, and legal counsel have deemed the case worthwhile.

- By contrast, BNI is many different things to the people it serves. Because each division generally works with a caller from establishing the case through resolution, the caller may not be aware of the many different functions that BNI serves.
- BNI is also easily overlooked because of the enormity of the problems that it addresses. BNI's frequent op-ed pieces rightly discuss the issue at hand—discrimination, integration, or community organizing, for example—rather than turning the focus to the organization. Although it may be in the midst of controversy, BNI is not usually the focus of it.

Confusion about BNI's jurisdiction

Also contributing to BNI's unclear image is that its divisions serve different areas of the state: tenant organizing serves Baltimore City, Section 8 and fair housing serve the Baltimore metropolitan area, and tenant-landlord counseling serves all of Maryland.

Unreliable funding sources

A narrow range of funding sources not only places BNI at risk but also limits its marketing and development activities. BNI relies heavily on government funding and on endowment- and enforcement-fund interest that is subject to market fluctuations.

Stagnating membership

BNI has received few new memberships in recent years. Many members have supported BNI for decades, and, although they care about BNI and fair housing, they do not get involved by attending fundraisers.

The members do not reflect the demographic profile of BNI's primary customers, a group that would be a perfect target for a membership campaign. The membership should reflect the demographic profile of BNI's existing customers, as well as the desired customers.

Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible, but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary.

—*Reinhold Niebuhr*, *Children of Light and Children of Darkness*, 1944

Central Marketing Problem

■ **BNI's customers—primary and secondary—are unaware that it is a dynamic and exciting organization.**

BNI's internal customers—those who are involved in the organization's daily operation—are well-informed of the many ways in which BNI is tackling housing problems in Maryland. BNI's external customers, however, are not as aware of what BNI does or has done or the importance of BNI's activities to them.

Central Marketing Solution

■ **BNI needs to get people excited:**

- by showing customers (both primary and secondary) how dynamic and involved an organization it is,
- by bringing housing issues to life for its customers, and
- by getting its customers involved.

As part of this process, BNI must develop specific vehicles to:

- **establish the issues clearly and**
- **state exactly what the organization does and what it has accomplished.**

At this pivotal time, BNI has an ideal opportunity to launch a campaign that, if effectively implemented, could get all of its customers excited about what it is doing.

Next year is the 30th anniversary of Civil Rights Act of 1968 and the 10th anniversary of the Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988, legislation that has made many of BNI's accomplishments possible.

The year after that marks BNI's 40th anniversary, which falls on the eve of the new millennium. This important anniversary—and the many possibilities for celebrating its opportune timing—must not be overlooked.

The only way to get equality is for two people to get the same thing at the same time at the same place.

—Thurgood Marshall

Implementation

■ **BNI needs to develop programs and establish processes that communicate the vitality of the organization.**

I have made a number of suggestions that, if implemented, should help BNI achieve the image-making goals I have described. This plan is modular, however, so that if funding is unavailable for certain projects, other projects can proceed without suffering greatly. Certain steps, particularly those under short-term programs will be critical to this plan's success.

The short-term and long-term programs outlined below establish the groundwork for an ongoing marketing effort. The section on anniversary programs outlines special one-time projects that I believe would make the launching of this marketing plan unique and truly dramatic. BNI deserves a big birthday bash.

Budget

I have indicated approximate costs and suggested possible funding sources below each program. A few general funding considerations are as follows:

- Whenever possible, BNI should seek in-kind contributions, grants, and volunteer assistance to defray costs.
- BNI should apply increases in membership funds toward advertising. Institutional advertising is unlikely to receive outside funding but could significantly increase BNI's name recognition and subsequent memberships, so that BNI could ultimately recoup its initial investment.
- Increased corporate grant funds should be used first to reduce the amount of interest withdrawn from the endowment and enforcement funds, as long as government funding continues at its current rate or increases. As corporate funding increases, it should then be used to reduce BNI's dependence on government funding.

A door has been sealed up for 200 years. You can't open it overnight, but little crevices are coming.

—*Mary McLeod Bethune*

■ Short-term programs

For the first stage of this marketing plan, BNI's board members will need to give deep consideration to fundamental questions about BNI, such as:

- What are BNI's plans for growth?
- Does BNI plan ultimately to serve the entire state?
- If not, how can BNI clarify what areas it serves and in what capacity?

Statewide vs. metropolitan

The board must decide whether it plans for all of BNI's divisions to broaden coverage to the entire state. This crucial decision will affect every other component of the marketing plan.

This decision may be made easier and more objective by planning a discussion with a focus group that includes a cross-section of BNI's current primary and secondary customers, from low-income tenants and landlords to influential corporate leaders. If possible, it would be beneficial to include potential customers, as well.

Budget—A very informal meal for one meeting of a group of 15–20 volunteer focus group members would cost \$50–\$100.

A new name?

The board must next decide whether to change BNI's name. This decision should be a priority because it will affect every other program outlined in this plan.

The name of an organization should, as much as any marketing tool, reflect the organization's mission. If BNI is to commit itself to serving the entire state of Maryland in all of its divisions, I strongly suggest that the board consider adopting a new name for BNI.

But if BNI plans to continue serving primarily the Baltimore metropolitan area, I do not think a name change is necessary. If the tenant-landlord counseling program will remain the only division with a statewide presence, an alternative might be to give that program its own, more "all-encompassing" name. (In this case, the challenge would be to establish clearly the program's connection with BNI's mission and other fair-housing activities.)

Budget—The cost depends on what the board decides to do. Of course, no costs would be associated with keeping the name as it is.

Even though the arc of the moral universe is long, it bends toward justice.

—*Martin Luther King Jr.*

If the tenant-landlord counseling program adopts a name, a statewide campaign consisting of radio and newspaper advertisements should be launched to publicize the service. A corporation, such as the Maryland Legal Services Corporation, could be approached to underwrite the cost of about \$30,000.

Adopting a new name for the entire organization would involve producing a number of print materials, including a logo, stationery, and signage, in addition to a radio and newspaper campaign. The total cost would be approximately \$30,000, assuming that the design would be donated. Coordinating the announcement of a new name with the advertising campaign outlined under long-term programs would eliminate the cost of a separate campaign.

Mission statement

The board needs to establish a mission statement and use it. An effective mission statement is clear and simple, informative and inspirational. It captures the essence of the organization without explicitly naming every activity or every audience.

Budget—\$0.

Public relations specialist

Adding a public relations specialist on staff would be an important first step to coordinating this marketing plan. Although this should be a full-time position, BNI could hire a part-time employee or consultant or share a full-time employee with another organization.

Unfortunately, corporate or government grants are unlikely to fund such a position. Some of the programs I outline below could be accomplished by current staff members and volunteers, but a specialist would bring the expertise and attention to coordinate these activities to their best advantage. Furthermore, BNI staff already have more than enough demands on their time.

One possible method of acquiring the new position would be to move an existing staff member, such as the current administrative assistant, who has communications experience, into this position, and then to solicit funding for a new administrative assistant.

Budget—Salary and benefits for a full-time public-relations specialist would cost \$30,000–\$40,000.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, having its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

—*Declaration of Independence, 1776*

Media relations

One of the public relations specialist's most important responsibilities would be coordinating a media relations program. Improved media relations should help BNI gain greater media coverage. With the comparatively small costs of staff time, correspondence, and possibly small events, BNI can cultivate relationships with media that could gain more exposure than advertising can buy.

Because many print articles on BNI cover lawsuits, BNI has a reputation for being litigious. Coverage of BNI in business publications *The Daily Record*, *Warfield's Business Record*, and *Harford Business Ledger*—important news sources for corporate audiences—consists almost exclusively of lawsuits and settlements.

The *Sun* has covered a variety of topics, including many op-ed pieces, editorials, and real estate columns. The amount and diversity of *Sun* coverage has dropped significantly since BNI discontinued its real estate column in 1994. The decrease also coincides with a decline in the number of lawsuits BNI has filed.

In other areas, such as Section 8 and neighborhood integration, BNI gets lost in the shadows cast by the monumental issues of civil rights and discrimination.

BNI cannot and should not avoid coverage of lawsuits, but it can attempt to counterbalance the emphasis on litigation in its media coverage. It is important for BNI to continue submitting op-ed pieces because they keep the issues vital and encourage people to think about them. BNI should also pursue reinstating the weekly *Sun* column, which gave it excellent exposure and provided a useful service to readers. This column allowed BNI to choose its agenda, rather than being at the mercy of reporters.

BNI's speaking engagements on television and radio programs have also been highly popular, and more opportunities like these should be successful.

One concern with media coverage is that BNI must keep some of its activities confidential and protect the identities of its testers. It is, therefore, important to focus on developing relationships with key media. Holding an informal (and inexpensive) breakfast or lunch to meet the media and discuss a relevant topic could be a start. BNI could establish itself as an important resource for information on all housing issues.

I love America more than any other country in the world, and, exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually.

—James Baldwin

Marketing and development committee

The board's fundraising committee should refocus its efforts to include both marketing and development, the underpinnings of successful fundraising. An additional function of the committee would be to support and guide the activities of the public relations specialist on staff.

Budget—\$0.

Web site

BNI should establish a presence on the World-Wide Web. Doing so should enable the organization to disseminate information to many of its secondary customers free of charge. Some of the print publications mentioned below, such as the speakers bureau/media guide could be eliminated or scaled back if the information were made available on the Web.

Budget—\$0. Free Web sites are available through the National Fair Housing Alliance and the Enoch Pratt Library. It will require staff time, however, to organize and update the information.

Speakers bureau/media guide

BNI should establish and promote a speakers bureau made up of its own staff members and volunteers, as well as representatives of organizations from its secondary customer base, including lawyers, educators, designers, and representatives of the housing and fair-housing industries. A booklet for the speakers bureau could be designed to serve as a BNI media guide, as well.

Budget—A two-year supply of 1,500 booklets with cover letters and postage would cost approximately \$2,500.

Calendar of events

BNI should establish a master calendar of events—including conferences, fairs, seminars, workshops, presentations, media releases, advertising, production schedules for publications, and other important dates—for internal use. This could be an invaluable planning and organizing tool.

Refocused and redesigned print publications

Every publication BNI produces should stem from the organization's mission. Both the writing style and the design should be consistent throughout all publications. The quality of the writing should be top notch. The logo should be used in all publications and be reproduced

**Men are shaped by their world. When
it is a world of decay, ringed by an
invisible wall, when escape is arduous
and uncertain, and the saving
pressures of a more hopeful society
are unknown, it can cripple the youth
and it can desolate the man.**

—From President Johnson's
*Howard University commencement
address, 1965*

consistently. Production should be professional looking. These are important, inexpensive elements of an identity plan. Ideally, the public relations specialist would be responsible for writing or editing and producing all publications.

- As existing supplies are depleted, each print publication should be revised according to the guidelines outlined above.

Budget—\$0 over current costs.

- As BNI's primary form of communication with many of its customers, the newsletter should express BNI's vitality, state BNI's mission, and make clear BNI's wide range of activities. Both the verbal and visual voices should be reconsidered with the above guidelines in mind.

Distribution should be broadened to include important media, public and school libraries, and neighborhood associations.

After a year, BNI should conduct a readership survey to ensure that it is meeting readers' needs.

Budget—The added cost of increasing distribution to 1,500 would be about \$150–\$200.

The cost of adding a second color to the newsletter would be about \$500 over current printing costs for a one- to two-year supply of mastheads. The redesign could be donated.

A readership survey distributed to 1,500 people would cost approximately \$700.

■ Long-term programs

Increased membership

To potential donors, a healthy membership means a healthy organization. In order to attract corporate donors, BNI will need to increase the number of members.

I believe that BNI would easily attract many more members through more aggressive telemarketing and direct-mail campaigns. The most recent direct-mail campaign exceeded its goals by nearly 50%. Continuing and intensifying such efforts should gain more visibility and support for the organization.

Neither free choice nor poverty is a sufficient explanation for the universally high degree of segregation in American cities. Discrimination is the principal cause of Negro residential segregation, and there is no basis for anticipating major changes in the segregated character of American cities until patterns of housing discrimination can be altered.

—Karl E. Taueber, from "Residential Segregation," *Scientific American*, August 1965

Twenty-three thousand customers call BNI each year for assistance. They, more than many others, can attest first-hand to the good work BNI does. Yet they are not solicited for membership.

Every contact with customers is an opportunity to:

- obtain their names, telephone numbers, and addresses;
- disseminate information about all of BNI's activities; and
- invite these customers to call BNI if they need further help and to share information about BNI with their friends.

In April, a Columbia, Maryland, couple was approached for membership in BNI. They had never heard of BNI. When they understood the organization's mission, they not only enthusiastically agreed to become members, but they also got two friends to join.

To broaden BNI's reach further, counselors could ask all callers how they learned about BNI, what organizations they contacted before calling BNI, and whether those organizations told them about BNI. BNI would quickly learn which organizations would benefit from its outreach and education programs.

Every volunteer should be a BNI member. Soliciting volunteers for memberships, however, has been a touchy matter. Even when a special rate of \$5 was established, volunteers resented being asked for money in addition to their contributions of time and effort. Perhaps volunteers could automatically be made members, regardless of monetary contributions. They could still be solicited for donations during fundraising campaigns, but the message should be carefully shaped to explain the need for their money and BNI's appreciation of their invaluable personal contributions.

As part of a renewed membership campaign, BNI must ask its members what membership means to them:

What does membership mean? Is a newsletter sufficient? Would broadened *pro bono* newsletter distribution eliminate the only "perk" of membership? Is it sufficient for a person simply to know that he is a member of BNI? Do members understand the commitment to civil rights that they express every time they support BNI? Do they know what BNI is "about"? Are they aware of the tremendous good that BNI does? Should

This great, rich, restless country can offer opportunity and education and hope to all—all black and white, all North and South, sharecropper and city dweller. These are the enemies—poverty, ignorance, disease—they are our enemies, not our fellow man, not our neighbor. And these enemies too—poverty, disease, and ignorance—we shall overcome.

—From President Johnson's *Selma* speech, 1965

members be able to recognize each other (through bumper stickers, slogans, certificates, or membership cards, for example)? Would it be beneficial to establish a membership program with special certificate programs for landlords, realtors, or contractors? Why do people decline or hesitate to become members? Would people more readily become members if they knew someone else who is involved in BNI? Would a campaign asking members to bring in more members or volunteers be successful? Does BNI membership give people a sense of power? Do members feel a sense of ownership of or involvement in BNI? How do they want to be involved? How involved do they want to be?

Answering questions like these should help BNI understand and redefine its relationship to its members. A focus group with current members, as well as people who have let their membership lapse and others who declined membership, would be a solid investment. They may be content with the program as is, or they may recommend changes. Their answers should help direct BNI's decisions.

Budget—A direct-mail campaign to 25,000 recipients would cost about \$20,000.

A five-day telethon to 1,500 people would cost about \$1,500.

A very informal meal for one meeting of a group of 15–20 volunteer focus group members would cost \$50–\$100.

Additional board members

Currently, the Board of Directors represents diverse players in the field of fair housing. It does not, however, reflect the demographic profile of BNI's primary customers. The board should grow to represent all of the protected classes, a range of economic levels, and various ethnic groups on its board. Several interviewees suggested, for example, that BNI might become more involved in Baltimore's Asian, Hispanic, and Native American communities.

I suggest filling existing vacancies on the board with diverse representatives of and spokespeople for BNI's customers. This measure is not an attempt at tokenism: The board could gain needed insights and perceptions by seeking members who are active in communities with which BNI is, or wishes to become, involved.

Now let none of us, in any section, look with prideful righteousness on the troubles in another section or the problems of our neighbors. There is really no part of America where the promise of equality has been fully kept. In Buffalo as well as in Birmingham, in Philadelphia as well as Selma, Americans are struggling for the fruits of freedom.

—From President Johnson's *Selma* speech, 1965

Another option would be the more complex process of establishing advisory groups as BNI begins forging relationships with new groups. This process helped successfully launch the fair housing for people with disabilities project in 1994.

Increasing the number of board members could bring additional benefits, such as increased membership (since new board members tend to bring in new members) and additional committee members to help with marketing programs.

Although the board is already active and involved, it bears mentioning in the search for new board members that all board members should be expected to be active by regularly attending meetings and serving on a committee. Because board members could be excellent spokespeople on BNI in relation to their areas of expertise, they should be candidates for the BNI speakers bureau and media guide.

With a full board arises the issue of term limits. It may become necessary to establish term limits to ensure the opportunity to bring on new board members in the future.

Budget—\$0.

Advertising campaign

Effective advertising depends on frequent placement. If the funds are not available for BNI to broadcast its message consistently and frequently, the advertisements should be postponed rather than scaled back.

- Public service announcements

BNI should continue its regular distribution of public service announcements to radio stations. I recommend developing a series of PSAs for television stations as well.

Budget—Radio PSAs: \$0 over existing costs.

Television PSAs: \$5,000–\$15,000, depending on whether this project is coordinated with the video described under Anniversary programs below. This project would make an excellent candidate for corporate funding.

- Frequent radio advertisements

All Americans must have the privileges of citizenship regardless of race. And they are going to have those privileges of citizenship regardless of race. But I would like to caution you and remind you that to exercise these privileges takes much more than legal right. It requires a trained mind and a healthy body. It requires a decent home, and the chance to find a job, and the opportunity to escape from the clutches of poverty.

—From President Johnson's *Selma* speech, 1965

Budget—Running one spot every weekday for a year would cost about \$7,000. Weekly placement could rotate among two or three radio stations.

- BNI should develop a print-media campaign with frequent placements in the *Sun*, the *Baltimore Chronicle*, regional papers, neighborhood newsletters, and school newspapers.

Budget—\$50,000–\$75,000.

■ Anniversary programs

With BNI's 40th anniversary less than two years away, the time is ripe to start planning the celebration. These plans should capitalize on the important decisions the board will have made regarding BNI's mission, audience, and name. During the anniversary celebration would be an appropriate occasion, for example, to announce such significant changes as a new name and a commitment to broaden the organization's services.

Each program of the celebration should be guided by the message of the central marketing solution: **BNI needs to get people excited**. By involving its customers in the celebration and bringing the organization's mission to life through the celebration, BNI can do just that.

The celebration should highlight landmarks in the history of fair housing, BNI's unique role in the history of fair housing in Maryland, BNI's achievements, and its plans for the coming years.

By bringing these issues to life, BNI should captivate its audiences. Few people understand how recently fair-housing rights were gained, how difficult it has been to obtain legal protection for these rights, and how important BNI and its founders have been in securing and defending these rights in Maryland. A well-done first-hand account of the Civil Rights Movement—coupled with the message that BNI continues to carrying this movement forward today—could make a powerful impact on audiences.

- Symposium

With corporate sponsorship, BNI could organize a symposium on fair housing. BNI should choose excellent local and regional speakers and a keynote speaker of national stature to address attendees.

The audience should be carefully considered. Perhaps BNI should focus on customers beyond fair-housing groups. Students, neighborhood associations, and social service agencies are just a few possibilities.

Budget—\$40,000. Corporations like the Rouse Company, Allstate, and The Abell Foundation could sponsor the event.

- Video with companion brochure

Although produced as part of the anniversary celebration, both the video and the brochure would be used for several years for education, outreach, marketing, and development.

Budget—\$70,000.

- Commemorative book

A commemorative book would provide an opportunity to publish a history of BNI, as well as a sorely needed history of fair housing in the United States. This could be a resource not only for BNI's local customers but also for other fair-housing organizations. It could also be used as a fundraiser.

Budget—Approximately \$1 per copy for printing. This would be another prime candidate for corporate underwriting.

Conclusion

Despite aggressive outreach and education programs, BNI has traditionally taken a passive role in marketing and has just recently begun a concerted development program. To ensure the continued vitality and viability of the organization and to support its development efforts, BNI must begin actively marketing itself.

Launching a comprehensive marketing and development campaign is a huge undertaking, but BNI is entering this process in solid standing. It already has the solid foundation of:

- a dedicated and capable staff, board, and volunteers,
- a good sense of purpose,
- satisfied customers,
- the goodwill of its peer organizations,
- a strong network of related community organizations, and
- continuing financial support from its grant-makers.

It must take advantage of this position of strength to avoid falling victim to ever-increasing competition and an increasingly disengaged general public.

There are five requirements for effective fundraising:

- name recognition,
- a positive image,
- a reputation for using contributions for the stated purpose,
- a reputation for a high-quality service and product,

- and an understanding of the cause and its importance to the donor.

BNI is well on its way to fulfilling these requirements. The critical components that BNI needs to address are name recognition and a positive image. BNI cannot rely on increased name recognition alone without developing an image that captures the essence of all of the organization's activities.

By keeping potential donors informed of its activities, BNI can secure a reputation for its effective use of contributions and the high quality of its service. BNI must continue to approach foundations that support the types of activities that it does. By establishing creative linkages with the organization's mission and program, BNI may approach an even broader range of foundations.

The ultimate goal of every marketing program is to generate funding that will, in turn, enable the organization to reinvest those funds toward accomplishing its mission. By adopting the programs suggested in this plan, BNI should position itself for more successful development and fundraising efforts.