

AN “ACADEMIC HOME” FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING



Fern Tiger Associates | 201 Clay Street, Suite 290 | Oakland, California 94607 | 510.208.7700

ASU STARDUST CENTER FOR AFFORDABLE HOMES AND THE FAMILY

In his inaugural speech in 2002, incoming ASU President Michael Crow described the need to move beyond the traditional university to become a “*New American University*” and articulated several “design imperatives” that the University would be pursuing in this quest. The creation of ASU’s Stardust Center for Affordable Homes and the Family was seen as one tangible way to bring many of President Crow’s “design imperatives” to reality.

Launched in 2003, the Center defined a mission, vision, and a set of strategies intended to create a stronger connection between the University and the many communities in the surrounding region. To ensure administrative support, the Center was initially housed in the Office of the President and began with start-up funding from a major donor. In its early years of operation, the Center brought local, regional, and national visibility to issues of affordable housing in a new way, while also bringing attention to ASU’s goals of redefining the University’s role in Arizona and building social capital in the region. Most significantly, the Center saw as one of its key roles the construction of prototype, affordable, energy-efficient houses (with research-driven studies of the efficacy of the models).

PROJECT DATE: 2011

SECTOR: *Affordable Housing, University Programs*

FTA SKILLS AND SERVICES: *Organizational assessment, strategic planning*

ASU STARDUST CENTER FOR AFFORDABLE HOMES AND THE FAMILY
was established in 2003 with a unique strategy that combined research, design, and advocacy to increase the development of quality affordable family housing.

ASU STARDUST CENTER FOR AFFORDABLE HOMES AND THE FAMILY

Stardust Center used a unique, integrated four-pronged approach to promote quality affordable housing. It combined design, research, public education, and advocacy in an effort to build public will and influence decisionmakers about the benefits of affordable housing for both urban and rural areas.

The early commitment of funds allowed the Center to enable its staff to “hit the ground running.” Staff quickly and proactively defined goals and projects; by 2006 an Advisory Board — comprised of regional stakeholders, ASU faculty and administration, and national leaders in affordable housing — was in place. Because the Center had dedicated funding intended to support its efforts for a period of two to three years (and a belief that additional funding would flow for later years), the Center was able to create and drive an ambitious mission.

By mid-2007, the Center was becoming the “go-to place” for information, knowledge, and experience related to affordable housing throughout Arizona, and most specifically in the Greater Phoenix region. But it was also facing a new, harsher reality — the additional funding that was expected did not materialize and the Center was moved into an academic unit, lessening its prestige and leverage at the University.

Beginning in 2005, the Stardust Center developed four model houses proving that energy-efficiency, quality design, and low-cost construction methods could inform and support the creation of appropriate housing for communities across Arizona.



Between 2004 and 2012, ASU Stardust Center for Affordable Homes and the Family “moved” four times: from the Office of the University President to the Office of Research to the College of Design to Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts to the Global Institute of Sustainability.

ASU STARDUST CENTER FOR AFFORDABLE HOMES AND THE FAMILY

Over time, the Center (currently housed in the Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts) faced reductions in funding and administrative support along with changes in lines of reporting. To address the funding gap and to extend the life of the Center, Stardust turned from more proactive approaches to reacting to available contract work with public agencies and foundations.

In early 2011, with a mandate to continue pursuing the organization's mission (but without any guarantee of funds beyond that year) the Center approached Fern Tiger Associates (FTA) to assess options for the future. Although requiring a more compressed process and timeline than FTA's normal strategic planning entailed, the firm agreed to work with the Center.

Based on interviews with a diverse group of stakeholders, analysis of available data, review of financial information, and knowledge of ASU's overarching goals and intentions, FTA's report reflected an intention to maintain the Center's purpose amid changes in the economy, the University, the housing arena, the state of Arizona, and the Center itself. Over the six-month period, FTA developed recommendations suggesting a reinvention of the Center, in part as a response to fiscal realities, but also as a logical and appropriate step in returning to the larger goal of building outreach and awareness of the need for affordable housing. The recommendations created the potential for the Center to expand and enhance its purpose within a new academic "home" (Global Institute of Sustainability).

