

# Airbnb's Work to Fight Discrimination and Build Inclusion

A Report Submitted to Airbnb

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# About Airbnb

Founded in August 2008 and based in San Francisco, Airbnb is a trusted community marketplace for people to list, discover, and book unique accommodations around the world—online or from a mobile phone or tablet. Whether an apartment for a night, a castle for a week, or a villa for a month, Airbnb connects people to unique travel experiences, at any price point, in more than 34,000 cities and 191 countries. And with world-class customer service and a growing community of users, Airbnb is the easiest way for people to monetize their extra space and showcase it to an audience of millions.

Hosts create profiles for themselves and their property, choose their own price and availability, and set guidelines for guests. Hosts and guests learn about each other through past reviews and personal communication through the Airbnb platform. Guests and hosts use Airbnb to confirm travel dates and expectations, and make and receive payments. After the stay, both hosts and guests leave reviews for one another, which are public for all future hosts and guests to read.

# A Message from Laura Murphy

When I was approached by Airbnb and asked to lead their effort to fight discrimination and bias, I was skeptical. After spending decades devoting my career to fighting for the protection and advancement of civil rights and civil liberties in this nation, at the American Civil Liberties Union and other organizations, I've seen many companies merely pay lip service to addressing the problems of racism and discrimination.

I was also skeptical because I wondered what one company, especially such an upstart in the sharing economy, could do to have a deep impact on ending racial discrimination among its users. After all, the sad truth is that racial biases (as well as other forms of bias) are deeply embedded in the culture of our nation. No one company can create an alternative universe where they do not exist.

In the area of housing and public accommodations in particular, for the vast majority of this nation's history it was legal to discriminate based on race and other immutable characteristics. Only about 50 years ago, after great social tumult, federal laws were enacted to prevent discrimination in the real estate and lodging industry, the two most prominent being the Fair Housing Act of 1968 and Title II of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. As important as those laws are, they were unevenly enforced and lacked sufficient strength to be universally effective. Even with those federal laws supplemented by state and local prohibitions, evidence points to the sad fact that discrimination in lodging has been one of the most intractable civil rights problems in our nation.

Further, I once served as the District of Columbia's first Director of Tourism in the early 1990s. I became familiar with the many tactics long used by hotels, restaurants, and tour companies to facilitate or ignore racial discrimination. Before a sharing economy company like Airbnb was even imagined, there were established problems with discrimination in the travel and tourism industry. During my stint as a tourism leader in the nation's capital, one of my greatest challenges was getting that industry to employ and do business with members of the Asian American, Pacific Islander, Latino, and African American communities, and to help circulate the tourism dollar so that it helped communities and neighborhoods outside the small corridor of federal monuments and attractions.

Finally, as an African American woman, I grew up understanding the sting of bias. My mother, who was born in New England, was terrified of travel in the southern United States. Even outside of the South, my family, like most black families, often had difficulty booking hotel rooms when traveling in the United States, even when it was clear that we had the means to do so. We knew that we were being turned down at hotels—even those with vacancies—merely because they did not want black customers. My parents told me stories about the Green Book and how black families had to stay with other black families because Jim Crow laws permitted most hotels and motels to deny accommodations to black travelers.

We would like to think that decades after these forms of overt biases were in place and sanctioned by law, in 2016 a company like Airbnb would not have to deal with these problems. Unfortunately, that is not the case: Airbnb has seen how African Americans and other people of color have been discriminated against when trying to find a place to stay. It was clear that Airbnb needed a comprehensive, end-to-end review of all facets of the Airbnb community, with a focus on how the platform can be designed to prevent and address discrimination.

Given that context, I had to ask: was it realistic to expect Airbnb to do better than others in the travel and lodging business and be a leader in overcoming longstanding industry practices and widespread bias? After engaging with key stakeholders and officials at every level of the company, my skepticism was replaced by enthusiasm for the task. Here is what I have come to believe:

**Airbnb is engaging in frank and sustained conversations about bias on its platform. More noteworthy, however, Airbnb is putting in place powerful systemic changes to greatly reduce the opportunity for hosts and guests to engage in conscious or unconscious discriminatory conduct.**

What initially persuaded me that change is possible at Airbnb was a series of conversations with key stakeholders, starting with my first conversation with Airbnb's CEO, Brian Chesky. In the course of a very substantive meeting, Chesky said to me with great conviction, "Airbnb will never be able to fulfill its mission without seriously combating discrimination on its platform." I heard a level of determination and commitment in his words, words that were repeated by the members of the executive staff throughout the company.

Brian Chesky was also forthright in admitting that his company was slow to address these problems. He and his co-founders Joe Gebbia and Nathan Blecharczyk started Airbnb in 2008 with the best of intentions, but were not fully conscious of racial bias when they designed the platform. He agreed and was personally concerned that there was an unacceptable lack of urgency around Airbnb's previous attempts to address allegations of racial bias within the Airbnb community, and vowed that such unconsciousness would not happen again.

Other stakeholders take just as seriously the problems of discrimination on Airbnb's platform. Along with top management, these stakeholders and constituents, notwithstanding vigorous criticism, made me confident that greatly reducing bias on Airbnb's platform was achievable. Among the stakeholders I met with as we worked on this challenge were:

- **Hosts:** The vast majority of hosts we engaged believe that discrimination inhibits their ability to earn supplemental income, it is bad for business and their collective reputations, and they are invested in seeing it end. They also want freedom to determine who stays in their home. Airbnb sought to strike a balance between homeowners' rights and the need to have people on their platform who embrace the company's mission, i.e., not tolerating discrimination based on certain immutable characteristics.
- **Victims of discrimination:** After speaking with victims of discrimination, the majority wanted to use the site again, and felt that there were specific reforms that could be put into place to, if not eliminate, then at least greatly diminish bias.
- **Employees:** Airbnb employees are proud of where they work and don't want their employer to do anything to facilitate discrimination or let these kind of problems fester. Before this review started, a number of employees had formed internal working groups to come up with solutions. They showed up at town halls with thoughtful questions, and sought ways to be involved. They made it clear that they wanted to be part of the solution not just for African American travelers but for Latino, Asian American Pacific Islander, and LGBTQ, people with disabilities, and other travelers as well. My particular thanks go to Global Policy Director Sarah Bianchi, Director of Product Donna Boyer, and Director of Diversity and Belonging David King for their leadership and tireless work.

- **Civil rights organizations:** Civil rights leaders are rightly concerned about the advancement of civil rights in the sharing economy. A number of them have written very thoughtful articles, given speeches, and have written letters to Airbnb about the need to structure inclusion and eliminate bias. They have graciously offered their input on dozens of proposed solutions, and have agreed to work with Airbnb to hold the company accountable.
- **Federal and state regulatory agencies:** Regulators want to see good faith efforts on the part of businesses in the sharing economy. They encouraged Airbnb to be proactive and not wait on government before changes were put into place.
- **Elected and appointed officials:** When their constituents complain, public leaders jump into action. These officials act as an important barometer of consumer concerns. As part of this 90-day review process, a number of elected officials have engaged Airbnb in meaningful discussions about discrimination and government concerns related to bias.
- **Travel and tourism executives:** The Internet has led to the creation of a plethora of innovative services for travelers. Many potential Airbnb partners wanted to engage in cooperative travel enterprises, but only if they were sincerely addressing discrimination. Travel and tourism partners had a variety of useful and practical suggestions.
- **Leaders and expert consultants, including:**
  - **The Honorable Eric H. Holder, Jr.** Mr. Holder served as the 82nd U.S. Attorney General from 2009 to 2015, making him one of the longest-serving attorneys general in U.S. history. Serving as the nation's top law enforcement official, he oversaw the prosecution of hundreds of terrorists and white collar criminals, and instituted major reforms to criminal justice and policing practices. He also significantly reenergized the enforcement of federal civil rights laws. After leaving the U.S. Department of Justice, he returned as a partner to Covington & Burling, LLP.

- **Margaret L. Richardson.** Ms. Richardson joined Airbnb's global policy development team in August. Prior to this, she was Of Counsel at Covington & Burling, LLP, where she served as an outside advisor and worked closely with the Airbnb team on this project. From 2009 until July 2015, she was a counselor to U.S. Attorney General Holder, serving as White House Liaison, Deputy Chief of Staff, and Chief of Staff, respectively. Prior to joining the Obama administration, she worked on the Obama Biden campaign and transition teams in a variety of capacities.
  
- **John Relman.** Mr. Relman is a noted civil rights attorney in Washington, D.C. who has represented scores of plaintiffs and public interest organizations in individual and class action discrimination cases in federal court. Mr. Relman has written and lectured extensively in the areas of fair housing and fair lending law and practice, and has provided numerous training classes and seminars for plaintiffs' lawyers, fair housing organizations, the real estate industry, and lending institutions. He is the author of the *Housing Discrimination Practice Manual*, published by the West Group.
  
- **Dr. Robert W. Livingston.** Dr. Livingston is a Lecturer of Public Policy at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government. Prior to joining Harvard, he held faculty positions at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University, and the University of Sussex in England. Broadly speaking, Dr. Livingston's research focuses on diversity, leadership, and social justice. His work has been published in numerous top-tier academic journals.
  
- **Dr. Daniel Efron.** Dr. Efron is an Assistant Professor of Organisational Behaviour at London Business School. Previously, he taught at the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University. He earned his Ph.D. from Stanford and his B.A. from Yale. His research examines the psychology of ethical decision-making, discrimination, and hypocrisy, and has appeared in such scholarly publications as the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, and *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*.

- **Dr. Peter Glick.** Dr. Glick is the Henry Merritt Wriston Professor in the Social Sciences at Lawrence University. His foundational work on benevolent sexism (with Susan Fiske) received the American Psychological Association's Allport Prize for best paper on intergroup relations. In addition to more than 80 articles and chapters, Dr. Glick has co-edited or co-authored three books, including the *SAGE Handbook of Prejudice* and *The Social Psychology of Gender*.

To these thoughtful stakeholders, I can only say thank you for working with me and working with the team at Airbnb to slog through these tough, emotionally charged issues. These problems did not materialize overnight, and Airbnb will not fully resolve them in the short term, but I strongly believe we are off to a very serious and productive start.

The advice of these stakeholders and consultants is the basis for my report, which outlines the policy and product changes Airbnb will make to help fight discrimination. While this issue garnered significant attention after some African Americans highlighted their negative experiences when using Airbnb, I am confident that the policies and proposals being implemented by the company will help everyone who has ever been discriminated against because of who they are, where they are from, what they look like, or whom they love.

These changes are merely a first step. Airbnb understands that no one company can eliminate racism and discrimination. Fighting bias is an ongoing task that requires constant vigilance from all of us. And there is no question that we will continue to see examples of bias and discrimination in society, the sharing economy, and Airbnb in the future. As certain product tools are built and implemented, they will need to be refined and updated. The task of fighting discrimination is difficult, but Airbnb is committed to continuing this work in the future, and I will personally hold them to their word. We all should.

As a former Director of Tourism, I also see enormous potential for Airbnb to bring tourism to communities that haven't benefitted from it in the past. Airbnb hosts are thriving in communities like Southeast Washington, D.C. and the South Side of Chicago. Tourism dollars are flowing into local businesses. And as Airbnb continues to tackle difficult issues, it must also seize the opportunity to help deliver economic benefits to these and other underserved communities.

Moving ahead, effectively fighting bias and discrimination also requires ongoing listening to thoughtful individuals and groups in the Airbnb community and outside of it. I welcome your continued input, ideas, and advice on the steps Airbnb can take to build a community where anyone can belong anywhere.

Airbnb was founded to bring people together. Fighting discrimination is fundamental to the company's mission, and I am confident that our work as advocates in concert with the company itself will help create a community that welcomes everyone.

# Summary

Airbnb is a company that has made home sharing easier and more popular, and it has shown how home sharing can both facilitate travel and bring people from disparate backgrounds together. Fighting discrimination is fundamental to the company's mission. While there are countless examples of Airbnb hosts and guests who have forged positive connections with people from different backgrounds, there have been too many unacceptable instances of people being discriminated against on the Airbnb platform because of who they are or what they look like.

A team representing executives from every Airbnb department conducted a comprehensive examination of how Airbnb has fought discrimination in the past, where these efforts fell short, and how they can be improved in the future. Based on that review, Airbnb has committed to make a series of product and policy changes that will help fight discrimination and bias. These changes include:

- **The Airbnb Community Commitment**

Airbnb believes everyone in the Airbnb community should be held to a standard that goes above and beyond what is required by law. Beginning November 1, 2016, everyone who uses Airbnb around the world will be asked to affirmatively agree to uphold the following commitment before they book a listing or share their space on the Airbnb platform:

*"We believe that no matter who you are, where you are from, or where you travel, you should be able to belong in the Airbnb community. By joining this community, you commit to treat all fellow members of this community, regardless of race, religion, national origin, disability, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation or age, with respect, and without judgment or bias."*

- **A New Nondiscrimination Policy**

Agreeing to the Airbnb Community Commitment also means agreeing to follow Airbnb's

strengthened and more detailed nondiscrimination policy. Like the Community Commitment, these rules are stronger than what is required by law.

- **A Permanent, Full-Time Product Team to Fight Bias and Promote Diversity**

Airbnb has assembled a permanent team of engineers, data scientists, researchers, and designers whose sole purpose is to advance belonging and inclusion and to root out bias.

- **Encouraging the Growth of Instant Book Listings**

Airbnb wants to make booking a listing easy for everyone. Instant Book allows certain listings to be booked immediately—without prior host approval of a specific guest. Airbnb will accelerate the use of Instant Book with a goal of making one million listings bookable via Instant Book by January 2017.

- **Going Beyond Photos**

Profile photos help hosts and guests get to know one another and can serve as an important security feature. At the same time, some have asked Airbnb to remove profile photos from the platform. Airbnb's new product team dedicated to fighting discrimination will experiment with reducing the prominence of guest photos in the booking process and enhancing other parts of host and guests profiles with objective information.

- **Enforcing the Rules, Supporting Our Community**

To improve its response to discrimination complaints and better enforce its policies, Airbnb overhauled its enforcement protocols. The Airbnb team developed new tools to quickly and reliably route concerns regarding discrimination to a group of trained specialists who are dedicated to both identifying and combatting discrimination.

- **Open Doors**

Airbnb is committed to implementing solutions that help ensure everyone can use the site to find a place to stay. If someone is discriminated against while using the platform, Airbnb wants to make it right. To achieve this goal, Airbnb is instituting Open Doors. Under Open Doors, if a guest is not able to book a listing because they have been discriminated against, Airbnb will ensure the guest finds a place to stay.

- **Welcome to Our Home: Addressing Unconscious Bias and Bringing People Together**

In order to help create a world where anyone can belong anywhere, Airbnb will offer new training to help people learn how to fight bias. As the program develops, we will highlight hosts who have completed this training.

- **A Diverse Workforce, A Diverse Community**

Airbnb realizes that becoming a more diverse company will make it a stronger company. Airbnb wants to ensure its workforce is more diverse and has work to do to achieve this goal. The company will implement the Diversity Rule, a new Airbnb policy that will mandate that all candidate pools for senior-level positions include women and candidates from underrepresented backgrounds. Airbnb will also expand efforts to bring economic opportunities to minority-owned business and encourage more people from underrepresented populations to use Airbnb.

These changes are only Airbnb's first steps. Fighting discrimination will require constant and ongoing work. The internal working group that produced this report will continue working to both implement these initiatives and evaluate additional steps Airbnb can take to ensure the Airbnb community is truly fair for all.

# Chapter One:

## Airbnb's Nondiscrimination Review

An increasing number of Airbnb hosts and guests have voiced their concerns about being discriminated against when trying to book a listing because of their race, sexual orientation, or gender identity. Discrimination flies in the face of the company's mission to build a world where anyone can belong anywhere.

This outcry from the community led Airbnb to closely examine their nondiscrimination policies and procedures. Airbnb has had nondiscrimination rules in place since the early days of the company and has removed hosts and guests from the platform who violate these rules. However, the examination quickly uncovered that this issue is complicated, and highlighted a range of deficiencies and areas ripe for improvement. It was clear that Airbnb needed a comprehensive, end-to-end review of all facets of the policy and the Airbnb community, with a focus on how the platform can be redesigned to prevent explicit and implicit discrimination.

In late May, I was approached by Airbnb and asked to lead this review. The review and my role were announced publicly on June 2, 2016. I immediately traveled to San Francisco to convene a team representing a range of departments across Airbnb and created a standing internal working group tasked with completing this review. The internal working group included senior representatives from the following Airbnb departments:

- Business Affairs
- Communications
- Customer Experience
- Data Science and Analytics
- Design
- Diversity and Belonging
- Engineering
- Executive Staff
- Financial Planning and Analysis

- Host and Community Operations
- Legal
- Marketing
- Procurement
- Product
- Public Policy
- Research
- Talent/Human Resources
- Trust and Safety

Together, this team worked tirelessly to examine every facet of Airbnb, and crafted a range of policies and initiatives that will help fight bias and discrimination. Specifically, the team evaluated:

#### **Hosting and Booking**

We examined precisely how hosts share their space and how guests then interact with hosts, paying particular attention to the design of our platform and how it did or did not facilitate fair interactions between people who do not know one another.

#### **Policies**

Airbnb has a wide range of rules and regulations governing host and guest conduct. We examined how these policies intersect and when, how, and why they were drafted.

#### **Enforcement and Response**

Critically, we studied how these policies are enforced and how Airbnb's internal teams are trained to respond to instances of discrimination.

#### **The Airbnb Team**

We studied the lack of diversity on the Airbnb team, and our efforts to reach out to hosts and guests in underserved communities.

#### **Partnerships**

We looked at the organizations that collaborate with Airbnb and the need for Airbnb to build broader and enduring relationships with diverse travel, civil rights, grassroots, small business, social science, and educational institutions. If Airbnb

wants to be at the forefront of tackling discrimination, it will be mutually beneficial to be a part of a sustained dialogue with diverse individuals and organizations.

From day one, we recognized that we did not have all the answers and formally engaged a range of experts who provided guidance throughout this process, including former U.S. Attorney General Eric H. Holder, Jr., Dr. Robert W. Livingston of Harvard University, Dr. Peter Glick, Dr. Daniel Efron, and civil rights lawyer John Relman.

Additionally, Airbnb senior officials met with a range of experts and advocates, including:

- Color of Change
- The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
- The Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund
- The National Urban League
- The Rainbow/PUSH Coalition
- The National Women's Law Center
- The Congressional Black Caucus
- The ACLU Racial Justice Program
- The Equal Justice Society
- The National Council of Negro Women
- The National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education
- The Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
- The NAACP
- The Brennan Center for Justice
- The National Coalition for Black Civic Participation
- The Center for American Progress

We also held a series of individual calls and consultations with a range of other organizations representing the disability, Latino, Muslim, South Asian, Asian American Pacific Islander, and LGBTQ communities.

# Chapter Two:

## Key Findings and Lessons Learned

Our comprehensive review process generated a series of key learnings that informed changes to our platform and policies. Among these findings:

### 1. **There is No Single Solution**

There is no one product change, policy, or modification that can eliminate bias and discrimination. Bias and discrimination have been regrettable parts of society for centuries, and combatting these odious and objectionable behaviors is not easy and cannot be accomplished with one modification or initiative. Indeed, the experts we consulted through our review identified a range of factors that contribute to bias and unfair treatment. Tackling these challenges requires a sustained and multifaceted approach.

### 2. **Discrimination Must Be Addressed**

There have been over 100 million guest arrivals in Airbnb listings, and the overwhelming majority of Airbnb hosts are respectful and welcoming of all guests. Unfortunately, it is clear that discrimination is a problem and the company believes that one instance of discrimination is one too many. The company's analysis has found that, as interest in traveling on Airbnb has continued to grow, guests—regardless of race or other factors—can face difficulties booking a listing. Dynamics such as traveling during a peak time to a desired market during a major event can impact supply availability. But Airbnb's research also has generally confirmed public reports that minorities struggle more than others to book a listing.

### 3. **Workflows for Addressing Discrimination Must Be Improved**

While Airbnb has long prohibited discrimination, the company's internal processes were unclear to the front-line customer service teams who receive calls from concerned guests and hosts. As a result, some members of the community did not receive the timely, compassionate response they expected and deserved when they reported instances of discrimination.

#### **4. Airbnb's Nondiscrimination Policy Must Be Stronger**

Airbnb's nondiscrimination policy was well-intentioned and required hosts and guests to do more than follow applicable federal, state, and local laws. Unfortunately, awareness of the policy was extremely limited, and the processes around enforcement were not designed to reflect the enormous growth the platform experienced. Additionally, the policy did not adequately address a range of practical situations faced by Airbnb hosts and guests.

#### **5. Airbnb's Platform Can Be Leveraged For Good**

Hosts and guests overwhelmingly share our commitment to diversity and belonging and are eager to open their homes. Airbnb has an opportunity to leverage that goodwill to educate more people about the steps they can take to fight discrimination and unconscious bias. Moreover, Airbnb provides an enormous opportunity for economic empowerment and entrepreneurship that should be fully developed and realized.

#### **6. Airbnb's Workforce is Not Sufficiently Diverse**

Airbnb may have been slow to address concerns about discrimination because the company's employees are not sufficiently diverse.

#### **7. Quality Bias Training Needs to Be Made More Accessible**

Airbnb recognized the importance and effectiveness of training to combat unconscious bias and offered these trainings to hosts at the Airbnb Open in November 2015. This event was attended by a small number of Airbnb's hosts and was not otherwise made accessible online or required for employees.

#### **8. Photos Are Useful, But Should Not Be as Prominent**

Airbnb believes profile photos are an important feature that help build relationships and allow host and guests to get to know one another before a booking begins. While important, photos capture only one dimension of a person's identity. The reviews a person receives, the number of reservations accepted and rejected, social media profiles, and other factors that can provide substantial information about a person are not always properly highlighted on the Airbnb platform. Photos are also an important security feature: hosts and guests want to know who they will be meeting when a stay begins.

#### **9. Guests Need Greater Support When Booking**

Many guests struggle to book a reservation when they begin using Airbnb. It is not easy to determine if these guests are discriminated against because of their race or because of other characteristics, such as not having any reviews, and are thus rejected by hosts who prefer guests with an established track record on Airbnb. As a business, Airbnb must work to improve this and address the very real problem that some guests have been discriminated against and need additional assistance.

#### **10. Airbnb Should Expand Host Opportunities in Communities of Color**

Airbnb's research and data show that Airbnb listings can bring new housing options and economic opportunities to neighborhoods that have been underserved by traditional hospitality companies. While many listings already exist in underserved communities, the company can do more to reach out to communities of color to encourage them to take advantage of this economic opportunity, and I hope community organizations will partner with the company on this effort.

# Chapter Three: Policy Changes

After evaluating these challenges and lessons learned, Airbnb has committed to a series of policy and product changes that will be implemented immediately. These changes are broadly assigned to eight categories:

1. The Airbnb Community Commitment
2. Enforcing the Rules, Supporting Our Community
3. Open Doors
4. Fighting Bias and Bringing People Together
5. One Million Instant Book Listings
6. Going Beyond Photos
7. A Permanent Full-Time Team of Engineers to Fight Bias and Promote Diversity
8. A Diverse Workforce, A Diverse Community

## **The Airbnb Community Commitment**

Airbnb will require all users to explicitly acknowledge that they share the company's commitment to creating a world where anyone can belong anywhere. The company will also substantially improve its policies and the enforcement of rules that help prevent discrimination:

1. Beginning November 1, 2016, everyone who uses Airbnb around the world will be asked to affirm and uphold the Airbnb Community Commitment before they book or share their space on the Airbnb platform. All users will see a message asking them to affirmatively certify that they agree with the following commitment:

“We believe that no matter who you are, where you are from, or where you travel, you should be able to belong in the Airbnb community. By joining this community, you commit to treat all fellow members of this community, regardless of race, religion, national origin, disability, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation or age, with respect, and without judgment or bias.”

Users who do not certify that they agree with this commitment will be prohibited from using Airbnb.

2. Implement a new nondiscrimination policy. Under the guidance of former U.S. Attorney General Eric H. Holder, Jr. and noted civil rights attorney John Reiman, Airbnb has rewritten its nondiscrimination policy to ensure there is no tolerance for discriminatory practices in the Airbnb community that violate our policy. The new policy requires Airbnb hosts and guests to do significantly more than merely follow applicable laws. It is available in Appendix One and will apply to everyone who uses Airbnb as of September 8, 2016. By agreeing to the Airbnb Commitment, users certify that they will also adhere to this new nondiscrimination policy. As noted above, users who do not agree to the Airbnb Commitment will be prohibited from using Airbnb.
3. Remind hosts of the Airbnb nondiscrimination policy at key points during the hosting and booking process. These reminders will be in place by the end of 2016.
4. Hold hosts accountable. Some guests have reported requesting a booking and being informed by the host that a listing that was advertised as vacant was not available. In some cases, it appears that these listings were then made available for the same trip to guests of a different race. Going forward, Airbnb will develop a feature to help prevent this from happening. If a host rejects a guest by stating that their space is not available, Airbnb will automatically block the calendar for subsequent reservation requests for that same trip. This feature will be implemented in the first half of 2017.

### **Enforcing the Rules, Supporting Our Community**

To ensure Airbnb improves its response to discrimination complaints and better enforces its policies, the company significantly improved its enforcement and response protocols. As part of this, an array of teams worked to develop and implement technology that rapidly identifies cases of reported discrimination, and immediately routes those cases to a group of trained specialists. The teams also developed thoughtful enforcement procedures to ensure those cases are handled consistently and with the utmost care by a group of trained specialists. If a guest or a host believes they have been discriminated against, Airbnb will investigate their complaint and take action if the policy has been violated. Every customer service employee will receive robust training so they can better identify potential

discrimination and route any suspected or reported discrimination to a specially trained team focused on addressing and combating discrimination. All team members will receive this training by January 2017.

Any guest who believes they have been discriminated against will also have enhanced options to report their experience to the Airbnb team. Members of the Airbnb community will be able to:

1. Flag an Airbnb message to quickly report discrimination or hate speech to Airbnb. These user flags are available now from the website, and Airbnb is working to expand and enhance this tool by January 2017.
2. Visit the new Nondiscrimination section of the enhanced Help Center, which will have additional information regarding Airbnb's policies and a place for users to report their concerns.
3. Quickly access more information about Airbnb's policies and how to report a concern. Every Airbnb guest who requests and is denied a reservation will receive an email with a link to information about Airbnb's community standards, which will include rules for hosts and information on how to report instances of discrimination. This will be implemented no later than November 1.

### **Open Doors**

Ultimately, every guest who visits Airbnb is looking for a place to stay, but for a few, this has been made more difficult because they have been victims of discrimination. Airbnb is committed to implementing solutions that help ensure everyone can use the site to find a place to stay, and if someone is discriminated against while using the platform, Airbnb wants to make it right. To achieve this goal, Airbnb is instituting Open Doors.

Under Open Doors, if a guest is not able to book a listing because they have been discriminated against, Airbnb will ensure the guest finds a place to stay.

The Airbnb team will do this by providing timely, 24/7, personalized, hands-on support from a specially trained Airbnb employee who will help the guest find a place to stay on Airbnb. If there is not a similar Airbnb listing in the market, Airbnb will identify an alternative accommodation option.

## Welcome to Our Home: Addressing Bias and Bringing People Together

As a company whose mission is to create a world where anyone can belong anywhere, Airbnb is committed to both fighting bias and encouraging people to open their homes to guests from different communities and cultures. Airbnb will pursue this goal by:

1. Launching anti-bias training. Not all discrimination is explicit, and we all have biases that we may not even be aware of. That is why Airbnb engaged with one of the country's preeminent experts in this field, Dr. Robert Livingston, to help develop trainings that will help reduce unconscious bias. This online training will be made available to every Airbnb host beginning November 1, 2016. As the program develops, we will work to highlight hosts who have completed the training.
2. Expanding anti-bias training for everyone who works for Airbnb. Airbnb currently has an anti-bias training program that has been completed by 25 percent of all employees. By January 31, 2017, all Airbnb employees will have completed the new and enhanced training. Airbnb customer service representatives are on the front lines of dealing with hosts from around the world; these employees will receive specialized anti-bias training by January 2017.

## One Million Instant Book Listings

Instant Book allows certain listings to be booked immediately—without prior host approval of a specific guest. To achieve these goals, Airbnb will accelerate the use of Instant Book with a goal of one million listings bookable via Instant Book by January 2017.

Instant Book makes it easier for guests to be accepted by hosts on the platform if they meet some basic qualifications, and hosts can set preferences that serve the purpose of automatically filtering guests, including whether the listing is pet-friendly, suitable for events, or features particular amenities. More importantly, Instant Book reduces the potential for bias because hosts automatically accept guests who meet these objective custom settings they have put in place.

Airbnb has already worked to increase the number of Instant Book listings, which has more than doubled in the past year.

## Going Beyond Photos

Some advocates have asked Airbnb to consider removing photographs from its guest profiles, noting that removing a person's picture and even using a pseudonym prevents a host from discriminating against a guest based on certain immutable characteristics. Creating these kinds of anonymous tools has helped people successfully apply for mortgages and employment opportunities, just to name a few examples.

However, profile photos are essential to Airbnb's overall mission of building a community and creating durable, lasting relationships between host and guests that continue long after a reservation has ended. Creating these kinds of relationships is far different from merely facilitating an anonymous transaction.

After thoroughly analyzing this issue, I came to believe that Airbnb guests should not be asked or required to hide behind curtains of anonymity when trying to find a place to stay. Technology can bring us together and technology shouldn't ask us to hide who we are. Instead, we should be implementing new, creative solutions to fight discrimination and promote understanding. I believe the various policy changes outlined in this report meet that goal.

Still, I believe there is room for improvement in the Airbnb platform on this issue. The reviews a host and guest have received, their social media presence, and other information regarding Airbnb community members are not always properly highlighted on the Airbnb platform. Research indicates that people base decisions on conspicuous and prominent information, and Airbnb has committed to making this information easier to access. By the end of 2016, Airbnb will modify the reservation request system to better feature objective information regarding trip details and—where available—reputation-enhancing data such as reviews and verified ID to reduce the potential for bias. As part of the process outlined above, Airbnb will also experiment with reducing the prominence of guest photos in the booking process.

These changes are rooted in research. Airbnb recently partnered with experts at Stanford University who found that reputation systems like review scores can significantly extend the trust between dissimilar users. Making review and other objective data more readily available could help overcome some people's inclination to only trust people who are like them. The initial study performed by the Stanford researchers examined a range of demographic features, but did not include race. Airbnb is currently working with the same researchers on a new study that will consider race as a factor.

### **A Permanent, Full-Time Product Team to Fight Bias and Promote Diversity**

Airbnb has assembled a permanent, full-time team of engineers, data scientists, researchers and designers whose sole purpose is to advance belonging and inclusion and to root out bias. This team will perform tests with input from social science experts, examine algorithms, and make ongoing adjustments to the technical underpinnings of Airbnb's platform to achieve these ends.

I know of no other technology company that has created such a team as a permanent part of its structure. Just as teams of lawyers were assembled to fight discrimination in the mid-20th century, it is my hope that 21st-century engineers will do their part to help eliminate bias and set an example for other technology startups and companies in the sharing economy to do the same.

### **A Diverse Workforce, A Diverse Community**

Airbnb realizes that a more diverse company is a stronger company. Airbnb wants to ensure its workforce is more diverse and has work to do to achieve this goal. Airbnb will:

1. Create a new, comprehensive plan to recruit and retain a diverse workforce. Later in September, Airbnb will file a report indicating that approximately 9.64 percent of all its United States-based employees are from underrepresented populations. Airbnb is committed to ensuring that the percentage of employees from underrepresented populations in the U.S. increases to 11 percent by the end of 2017, and is taking a series of steps to help recruit more employees from underrepresented backgrounds. Airbnb will:
  - a. Implement the Diversity Rule, a new Airbnb policy that will mandate that all candidate pools for senior level positions at Airbnb include women and candidates from underrepresented backgrounds.
  - b. Substantially expand efforts to recruit new employees from Historically Black Colleges and Universities, schools with large Latino populations, and schools with large female populations in science and engineering.
  - c. Assure that all hiring managers and their team leaders be assessed, in part, on their efforts to diversify their teams.

2. Expand efforts to bring economic opportunities to minority-owned business. Airbnb recognizes that its employees and business relationships outside the company inform how they think, operate, and solve problems, and they are committed to bringing more economic opportunities to minority communities and minority-owned businesses. Currently, one percent of Airbnb's total procurement spend goes to suppliers owned by underrepresented minorities, women, veterans, members of the LGBTQ community, and businesses in Historically Underutilized Business Zones. Airbnb will work to increase this figure to 10 percent of total procurement spend by 2019. To oversee this commitment, Airbnb will hire a Manager for Supplier Diversity. This newly created full-time position will be responsible for identifying opportunities where Airbnb can more actively engage with and support minority-owned and -operated businesses here in the United States.
  
3. Encourage more minorities to host on Airbnb. Airbnb offers economic opportunities to every American, and the typical Airbnb host in the U.S. earns \$5,900 per year. Minority communities in particular have benefitted from hosting. For example, the number of Airbnb guests grew 78 percent year-over-year in the 30 New York City zip codes with the largest percentage of black residents, compared to 50 percent city-wide. Airbnb will do more to encourage people in underserved communities to take advantage of the economic opportunities hosting provides. In the next several months, Airbnb will partner with community-based organizations like the National Urban League to encourage people to share their space and create trainings for hosts in minority communities. Initial trainings will take place in Springfield, Massachusetts; Washington, D.C.; Gary, Indiana; and Detroit. Airbnb will advertise in media outlets that have historically reached more people in communities of color, and continue to explore additional partnership and marketing opportunities that reach a diverse audience.

# Conclusion

Fighting discrimination and bias is difficult and while these policy, product, and operational changes are a strong step in the right direction, achieving the goals outlined in this report will require constant vigilance and ongoing work. I hope everyone who shares my commitment to fairness and equality holds Airbnb accountable, evaluates these measures, and shares their thoughts on how the company and community can continue to make travel fair for all.

# Appendix One:

## The Airbnb Nondiscrimination Policy

### **Airbnb's Nondiscrimination Policy: Our Commitment to Inclusion and Respect**

Airbnb is, at its core, an open community dedicated to bringing the world closer together by fostering meaningful, shared experiences among people from all parts of the world. Our community includes millions of people from virtually every country on the globe. It is an incredibly diverse community, drawing together individuals of different cultures, values, and norms.

The Airbnb community is committed to building a world where people from every background feel welcome and respected, no matter how far they have traveled from home. This commitment rests on two foundational principles that apply both to Airbnb's hosts and guests: inclusion and respect. Our shared commitment to these principles enables every member of our community to feel welcome on the Airbnb platform no matter who they are, where they come from, how they worship, or whom they love. Airbnb recognizes that some jurisdictions permit, or require, distinctions among individuals based on factors such as national origin, gender, marital status, or sexual orientation, and it does not require hosts to violate local laws or take actions that may subject them to legal liability. Airbnb will provide additional guidance and adjust this nondiscrimination policy to reflect such permissions and requirements in the jurisdictions where they exist.

While we do not believe that one company can mandate harmony among all people, we do believe that the Airbnb community can promote empathy and understanding across all cultures. We are all committed to doing everything we can to help eliminate all forms of unlawful bias, discrimination, and intolerance from our platform. We want to promote a culture within the Airbnb community—hosts, guests, and people just considering whether to use our platform—that goes above and beyond

mere compliance. To that end, all of us—Airbnb employees, hosts, and guests alike—agree to read and act in accordance with the following policy to strengthen our community and realize our mission of ensuring that everyone can belong, and feels welcome, anywhere.

- **Inclusion** — We welcome guests of all backgrounds with authentic hospitality and open minds. Joining Airbnb, as a host or guest, means becoming part of a community of inclusion. Bias, prejudice, racism, and hatred have no place on our platform or in our community. While hosts are required to follow all applicable laws that prohibit discrimination based on such factors as race, religion, national origin, and others listed below, we commit to do more than comply with the minimum requirements established by law.
- **Respect** — We are respectful of each other in our interactions and encounters. Airbnb appreciates that local laws and cultural norms vary around the world, and expects hosts and guests to abide by local laws and to engage with each other respectfully, even when views may not reflect their beliefs or upbringings. Airbnb’s members bring to our community an incredible diversity of background experiences, beliefs, and customs. By connecting people from different backgrounds, Airbnb fosters greater understanding and appreciation for the common characteristics shared by all human beings and undermines prejudice rooted in misconception, misinformation, or misunderstanding.

### **Specific Guidance for Hosts in the United States**

As a general matter, we will familiarize ourselves with all applicable federal, state, and local laws that apply to housing and places of public accommodation. Hosts should contact Airbnb customer service if they have any questions about their obligations to comply with this Airbnb Nondiscrimination Policy. Airbnb will release further discrimination policy guidance for jurisdictions outside the United States in the near future. Guided by these principles, our U.S. host community will follow these rules when considering potential guests and hosting guests:

## Race, Color, Ethnicity, National Origin, Religion, Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, or Marital Status

Airbnb hosts **may not**:

- Decline a guest based on race, color, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, or marital status.
- Impose any different terms or conditions based on race, color, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, or marital status.
- Post any listing or make any statement that discourages or indicates a preference for or against any guest on account of race, color, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, or marital status.

## Gender

Airbnb hosts **may not**:

- Decline to rent to a guest based on gender unless the host shares living spaces (for example, bathroom, kitchen, or common areas) with the guest.
- Impose any different terms or conditions based on gender unless the host shares living spaces with the guest.
- Post any listing or make any statement that discourages or indicates a preference for or against any guest on account of gender, unless the host shares living spaces with the guest.

Airbnb hosts **may**:

- Make a unit available to guests of the host's gender and not the other, where the host shares living spaces with the guest.

## Disability

Airbnb hosts **may not**:

- Decline a guest based on any actual or perceived disability.
- Impose any different terms or conditions based on the fact that the guest has a disability.
- Substitute their own judgment about whether a unit meets the needs of a guest with a disability for that of the prospective guest.
- Inquire about the existence or severity of a guest's disability, or the means used to accommodate any disability. If, however, a potential guest raises his or her disability, a host may, and should, discuss with the potential guest whether the listing meets the potential guest's needs.
- Prohibit or limit the use of mobility devices.
- Charge more in rent or other fees for guests with disabilities.
- Post any listing or make any statement that discourages or indicates a preference for or against any guest on account of the fact that the guest has a disability.
- Refuse to communicate with guests through accessible means that are available, including relay operators (for people with hearing impairments) and email (for people with vision impairments using screen readers).

- Refuse to provide reasonable accommodations, including flexibility when guests with disabilities request modest changes in your house rules, such as bringing an assistance animal that is necessary because of the disability, or using an available parking space near the unit. When a guest requests such an accommodation, the host and the guest should engage in a dialogue to explore mutually agreeable ways to ensure the unit meets the guest's needs.

Airbnb hosts **may**:

- Provide factually accurate information about the unit's accessibility features (or lack of them), allowing for guests with disabilities to assess for themselves whether the unit is appropriate to their individual needs.

### Personal Preferences

Airbnb hosts **may**:

- Except as noted above, Airbnb hosts may decline to rent based on factors that are not prohibited by law. For example, except where prohibited by law, Airbnb hosts may decline to rent guests with pets, or to guests who smoke.
- Require guests to respect restrictions on foods consumed in the listing (e.g., a host who maintains a Kosher or vegetarian kitchen may require guests to respect those restrictions).
- Nothing in this policy prevents a host from turning down a guest on the basis of a characteristic that is not protected under the civil rights laws or closely associated with a protected class. For example, an Airbnb host may turn down a guest who wants to smoke in a unit, or place limits on the number of guests in a unit.

When guests are turned down. Hosts should keep in mind that no one likes to be turned down. While a host may have, and articulate, lawful and legitimate reasons for turning down a potential guest, it may cause that member of our community to feel unwelcome or excluded. Hosts should make every effort to be welcoming to guests of all backgrounds. Hosts who demonstrate a pattern of rejecting guests from a protected class (even while articulating legitimate reasons), undermine the strength of our community by making potential guests feel unwelcome, and Airbnb may suspend hosts who have demonstrated such a pattern from the Airbnb platform.

**What happens when a host does not comply with our policies in this area?**

If a particular listing contains language contrary to this nondiscrimination policy, the host will be asked to remove the language and affirm his or her understanding and intent to comply with this policy and its underlying principles. Airbnb may also, in its discretion, take steps up to and including suspending the host from the Airbnb platform.

If the host improperly rejects guests on the basis of protected class, or uses language demonstrating that his or her actions were motivated by factors prohibited by this policy, Airbnb will take steps to enforce this policy, up to and including suspending the host from the platform.

As the Airbnb community grows, we will continue to ensure that Airbnb's policies and practices align with our most important goal: To ensure that guests and hosts feel welcome and respected in all of their interactions using the Airbnb platform. The public, our community, and we ourselves, expect no less than this.