



Breaking Barriers and Building Bridges: Kelli Dickerson’s Inspiring Path to CREW Visionary



Kelli Dickerson
CREW Visionary
Inducted 2023

For women in commercial real estate, the CREW Network has long been the go-to organization for education and career advancement. Recently, the CREW Network Foundation recognized Kelli Dickerson, Principal of Asset Management at BGO, as one of its latest CREW Foundation Visionaries.

Dickerson joins an elite group comprising only 120 of the CREW Network’s 14,000 members. CREW Foundation Visionaries are recognized for their support of CREW Network’s mission of advancing women in commercial real estate through business networking, industry research, leadership development and career outreach.

Dickerson’s contributions to CREW encompass serving in multiple leadership roles. She has served as CREW DC chapter board delegate and board member, chapter executive committee member, CREW Network Foundation board director, DEI Council Chair (2024), and board liaison to two committees.

We sat down with Dickerson to discuss her career journey and her roles in the CREW Network, including the anti-racism education subcommittee and other initiatives she has helped create.

How did you begin your real estate career and involvement with the CREW Network?

Kelli Dickerson: Like many women today, I did not initially plan to enter the real estate field. I found my way into real estate as a temp at a property management firm early in my career. This unexpected opportunity felt right as I deepened my commercial real estate knowledge.

During my initial years, I primarily worked in property management. My career took a turn when I moved to Washington, D.C., to work for Trammell Crow and a client lured me into asset management. This transition marked a pivotal point in my career.

It took some time to find my niche and connect with like-minded professionals in the industry – or ‘my people’ as I like to say. The turning point came when I discovered the CREW Network. I am extremely driven and, when I joined CREW in 2014, I was all in. I saw this organization as a place where I truly belonged and I immersed myself. As a black woman in a traditionally male-dominated industry, I wanted not only a professional network, but also a cultural experience that combined learning with fun.



What inspired you to assume leadership roles within CREW Network and the CREW Network Foundation?

Dickerson: I view my CREW involvement as a way to ensure that another woman of color will be ready to take my place in the industry – and the organization – when the time comes. It is essential to pave the way for the next generation of Black women in the industry.

I became more involved in CREW committees and eventually the CREW Network Foundation board because of the profound connection I felt with the people within the organization. I started by participating in a professional development committee, which made perfect sense to me. We were teaching valuable skills not only to ourselves, but also to our fellow members.

A pivotal moment came in 2020. A small group of us within CREW decided to form an anti-racism subcommittee. We were resolute in our commitment to educate ourselves and our Washington, D.C., members on addressing anti-black racism and bias while navigating the often-sensitive nature of these discussions.



Co-leading the anti-racism subcommittee, I found my voice and began speaking candidly about my ideas for further enhancing our organization's commitment to DEI.

The role of chapter delegate, bridging the gap between our local chapters and the larger CREW organization, was a role I could not turn down when I was appointed to the CREW DC board. I had always been keen on understanding the bigger picture—what the grand plan was for our local chapter, how we fit into the larger network, and how we could contribute to the organization's nationwide DEI commitment.

This opportunity felt like a perfect fit, allowing me to play a crucial role in shaping the future of CREW and ensuring that our DEI efforts had a broader impact across the organization.

A year later, CREW Network was in search of foundation directors. It was at that moment when I realized, "Yes, this aligns with my aspiration of discovering the next woman with a story like mine". Fortunately, I was appointed and have thrived, and my primary objectives are to further enhance their educational initiatives and actively fundraise.

What has been your role in advancing diversity, equity and inclusion at CREW Network?

Dickerson: One important endeavor was to create an anti-Black racism education cohort. This initiative was born out of a collective desire to foster awareness and action in the realm of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI).

We identified an experienced DEI specialist to guide us through an intensive 12-week program and, with the backing of the stalwart CREW DC board, committed to offset some of the costs. To maintain the intimate and confidential nature of the cohort, we invited 10 to 15 CREW DC members to join us.

Our primary goal was to facilitate a journey of self-discovery, learning, and empowerment. Participants were encouraged to absorb these insights and become ambassadors of change within their own companies. Our intention was to ensure that this message of positive transformation resonated throughout CREW DC. The initial feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive.

Undoubtedly, engaging volunteers for a 12-week commitment proved demanding. Additionally, DEI specialists have limited availability. As a result, our committee has been exploring ways to revisit and streamline the program to make it more accessible.

What was your role in creating the DEI Council at CREW Network?

Dickerson: Our DEI Council emerged from our anti-racism discussions. The DEI Council addresses not only anti-racism, but also any other factors that might hinder inclusivity in the workplace. Our DEI Council is an inclusive and open platform, fostering difficult discussions and ensuring the commitment results in a tangible increase in chapter inclusivity in programming and access.

For example, when planning an event, we now consider whether we can provide closed captions, as it benefits hearing-impaired individuals and those who may have challenges with audio processing. We have also aligned our content with the calendar—such as many ethnic and religious holidays and such—to make it more relevant, ensuring that it resonates with our colleagues. This shift is a really positive outcome and I am proud of the work we are doing.

What inspires you to be involved with the CREW Network Foundation and its scholarship program?

Dickerson: I'd like to underscore that my inspiration for the CREW Visionary status was influenced by a colleague in our Seattle office – Kim Addy. I am dedicated to advancing the CREW Network Foundation, whether through financial contributions or time investments. Our goal is not just to increase the number of scholarships, but also to consider the evolving needs of women in the future, including women pursuing graduate degrees or those already in the workforce.

The Linda Hollemon Scholarship Endowment, in conjunction with the CREW Network Foundation, plays a crucial role in supporting female students pursuing higher education that will ultimately lead to careers in commercial real estate. Our efforts in the past year have laid the groundwork for the expansion in the number of scholarships to span from college to graduate students starting in 2024.

My commitment to this cause really goes beyond simply providing financial support—it's about being a dedicated advocate for the CREW Network Foundation's diverse initiatives. We are acutely aware of the need to reach scholars at the local level.

This year, we have successfully engaged four women in D.C. This is precisely why my personal donation commitment carries significant weight. While I contribute to various causes, this particular commitment represents a lifelong dedication to making a difference right here in my community.

Our efforts extend beyond providing scholarships. We stay connected with our scholars and offer ongoing support. I encourage our scholars to be as fearless as possible when facing challenges and it is something I am still learning as well. This reminds me to maintain humility and not overstate my own abilities, and to remain as forward as anyone else in the organization.

One of the reasons I stay deeply involved is the incredible energy I receive from working with CREW at both the local and national levels. I would not continue unless I see increased diversity. Engaging with like-minded individuals who understand the work we do is profoundly validating.

How does BGO benefit from your participation?

Dickerson: For my colleagues within BGO and for our organization as a whole, CREW has empowered us to express our needs and perspectives in a more articulate and confident manner, particularly concerning DEI in the workplace. This, in turn, leads to a more engaged and resilient workforce at BGO.

Secondly, our involvement in CREW provides us with exposure to a wider talent pool. We can attract and bring in talented individuals, enhancing our organization's capabilities and diversity.

Additionally, CREW serves as a catalyst for change within our organization, signaling a deep commitment to these principles from top leadership down to our employees on the front lines. This commitment garners recognition, amplifies our visibility, and encourages ongoing efforts within the company. It essentially acts as a measure of corporate accountability that propels us to continuously improve at the company level.

Lastly, the professional skill-building opportunities and valuable education offered by CREW networks and chapters are additional significant benefits.

What does the future look like?

Dickerson: Looking ahead, I am committed to remaining actively engaged at the chapter level. My aspiration is to run for chapter president. As one of the largest chapters, CREW DC must adapt to accommodate our growth, and I hope to lead initiatives aimed at expanding our reach and ensuring ongoing DEI education.

There is still much work to be done, and the responsibility to bring allies into our organization falls on my shoulders and those of our future presidents. We must persist in creating an environment conducive to cultural and corporate shifts that benefit women in the workplace.