



Linking Housing and Community Services

A Municipal Action Guide

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THE CHALLENGE

Affordable housing for local residents remains a top concern for municipal officials across the country. However, ensuring an adequate supply of affordable homes is only part of the challenge. Many residents also need support services that can help them become self-sufficient—so they can retain their living accommodations and build better lives.

From health services and job training to parenting courses and childcare, local officials can work with others to link residents with the services they require. The challenge is to develop these services to meet local needs and then design a comprehensive plan that connects housing with community services tailored to specific segments of the local population.

STRATEGIES

Local officials can play a pivotal role in the development and implementation of comprehensive strategies for providing housing and the other support services to all residents who are in need in the community. Given that city officials have only a limited time to devote to the issues of housing and services, some approaches can be put into practice to begin to develop a comprehensive strategy.

- Become a vocal advocate for supporting the development of programs that appropriately assess and then meet the needs of the underserved in the community.
- Ensure that affected groups participate in the development of programs and the assessment of service delivery.

- Create an open dialogue among community non-profit leaders and local government staff that fosters an inclusive approach to developing this comprehensive plan.
- Take the lead in the management of the overall process by establishing and coordinating the linkage to public and private sector programs for the residents in the community.
- Continue to evaluate and monitor local trends, such as population shifts, income levels, transportation issues, and the availability of housing and services in order to plan for the funds to support and sustain your comprehensive efforts.

ACTION STEPS

1. Identify needs of population groups in the community. The first step to linking housing to community services is to understand and identify the community's needs.

Generally, the populations in need of housing-related community services fall into four categories described below. Each of these groups requires different services in order to find and retain their affordable housing and move toward self-sufficiency.

- **Dependent households.** Dependent households may include such groups as the homeless, mentally ill, unemployed/displaced workers, individuals with disabilities, ex-offenders, and drug and/or alcohol-dependent individuals. These households are very reliant on governmental and private assistance for survival, because of special needs or an inability to maintain stable employment. This is the population most often served through public housing and the federal Section 8 program, which provides housing vouchers for “very low-income” families.

This population may need an array of support services. In addition to housing, this group may require: food and clothing assistance; health services (free clinics, immunizations, well-baby care, dental, etc.); mental health counseling services; substance-abuse treatment; parenting courses; remedial educational services (English classes, GED courses); basic employment training; job preparation services; public transportation resources; and child care services.

- **Low-wage workers.** Low-wage workers contribute to their own support through minimum wage or other low-paying jobs, but still need public services to supplement their income. This population can include entry-level/minimum-wage earners, non-English speaking workers, under-skilled workers, single-parent families, military families, students, and migrant workers.

Affordable rental housing for this population is available using Section 8, HOME, low-income tax credits, or other local or state resources. These individuals and family units also often need some supportive services like childcare or health care coverage and a focus on higher education and training to obtain higher-paying jobs. Small business development services, computer training, and budget counseling services also may be appropriate.

- **Moderate-income population.** These individuals are earning a “living wage,” but still cannot find affordable housing near their places of employment. This group can include police officers, firefighters, municipal workers, teachers, retail workers, and others.

This population’s main needs center around the availability of affordable housing, with an emphasis on creating home-ownership opportunities near job centers. In addition, given the costs of childcare and health insurance, moderate-income families also may need assistance in these areas.

- **Elderly/Special Needs.** Each of the above three categories includes a sub-group of elderly/special-needs populations who will always require specialized housing and services. The needs and services may change over time as living costs escalate for the fixed income category. Local governments should consider a long-term strategy to maintain a comfortable and secure level of services to this group.

2. Determine the local resources and services, both public and private that are currently available. As the lists of all services are compiled, take a look at eligibility requirements to streamline procedures and reduce duplication in paper work.

3. Determine the gaps in resources and services and develop programs and plans to meet those needs. This process should be included in both your short term and long-term goals for each of the population groups.

4. Convene the stakeholders. The process of linking housing and community services starts with bringing together the key players in housing and community development. Local elected officials should consider convening a team that can work together to determine your community’s unique needs and develop strategies and actions to meet them. Key participants could include local government officials, housing and community development advocates (public and private); local financial institutions; private sector representatives including builders, developers and unions; community service providers; and community leaders.

5. Define your community’s goals and set priorities. Working with your local partners, begin to develop goals that are custom-tailored to your community’s unique characteristics and needs. Goals should be for both the long term and the short term; they should be visionary, yet realistic. Set priorities for each of the above groups that are in your community.

6. Develop an action plan. Once you have identified the populations in need and settled on your community’s goals, it is time to make a plan. Your community’s plan should include specific actions that all

Consider this: Develop a check-off system or coordinated service package to ensure that clients are receiving all services for which they are eligible.

of the key players can agree on, such as: developing a one-stop shop for dependent populations that combines workforce development and housing and social services; increasing homeownership rates in a specific area of your city or town; or developing an affordable childcare facility near a housing complex. The plan also should specify what agencies and/or individuals will be responsible for implementation of key tasks, and what resources they will need, including financial support, volunteers, etc.

7. Seek funding for the plan. Local governments should seek a diversified stream of funding to secure the success and sustainability of major initiatives aimed at linking housing and community services. Be creative in combining resources from the federal government, as well as the city, county, state and private agencies.

- **Federal:** While federal funding for housing has been in a steady decline in recent years, there are still a number of federal programs that cities can look to for assistance in linking housing and community services (see sidebar).
- **State:** State support for your plan can come through your state and regional offices of the departments of transportation, education, and health and human services. These agencies also receive allotments from the federal government. Local officials also should look to their Community Housing and Development Organizations (CHDOs), state housing finance agencies, state community development agencies, and other resources.
- **Local:** Numerous local entities can be tapped to provide various forms of support for your efforts, including financial support, volunteers, in-kind donations and more. Among the candidates are: housing/citizens groups, local businesses, philanthropies, and faith based institutions.

8. Coordinate services. Coordination is the key to linking housing and community services. Local elected officials are well positioned to manage the process of developing and implementing a comprehensive plan by ensuring better coordination among various city and county departments and service providers, and by linking public, private, and non-profit sector initiatives.

9. Take Action! You have now determined your community's needs and priorities, developed a plan, and are seeking funding resources. Now it is time to implement your plan. Keep all of your partners on board by spreading out responsibility for key tasks, giving ample credit for any and all successes, and creating opportunities for everyone to check in about your community's progress. Make sure the group is able to assess how things are going on a regular basis. This will allow you to adjust your plan as time goes on.

Keep in mind... Coordinate and Engage

Coordination is the key to any successful comprehensive effort. Strive to link your housing and community support services:

- Coordinate the use of local resources.
- Coordinate between local housing providers and human services agencies.
- Coordinate among the public, private and non-profit sectors.
- Coordinate between the local government and its residents.
- Coordinate within government.

Engage your citizens throughout your process:

- Get information from all the population groups regarding their needs and desires.
- Circulate questionnaires throughout the community requesting feedback.
- Hold public meetings to seek input and provide updates throughout the planning process.

Federal Resources for Linking Housing and Community Services

The Family Self-Sufficiency Program is a HUD program that encourages communities to develop local strategies to help families receiving Section 8 vouchers to obtain employment that will lead to economic independence and self-sufficiency. A separate program, the Public Housing FSS program, is available for public housing residents. In both programs, participating residents' rent increases in proportion to the increase in their earnings; however, the difference between their original rent and the rent increase is placed in an escrow account as savings. Residents receive the accrued savings upon completion of the program.

Website: <http://www.hud.gov/offices/pih/programs/hcv/fss.cfm>

Public Housing Neighborhood Networks Program enhances self-sufficiency, employability and economic self-reliance of public housing residents by providing grants for computer and job training activities. Website: <http://www.hud.gov/offices/pih/programs/ph/ross/aboutnn.cfm>

Resident Opportunity and Self-Sufficiency (ROSS) Program provides funds for job training and supportive services to help residents of public housing transition from welfare to work. ROSS also provides funding to link elderly/disabled residents to critical services that can help them continue to live independently. Website: <http://www.hud.gov/offices/pih/programs/ph/ross/about.cfm>

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) provides annual grants on a formula basis to entitlement communities and states to carry out a wide range of community development activities that benefit low- and moderate-income families; up to 15 percent of the funds can be used for public services. Website: <http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/communitydevelopment/programs/>

Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) funds help states furnish social services to individuals for the purpose of reducing dependency and achieving or maintaining self-sufficiency. These services include: daycare for children or adults, protective services for children or adults, special services to persons with disabilities, adoption, counseling, case management, family planning, health-related services, transportation, foster care for children or adults, substance-abuse counseling, legal services, housing, home-delivered meals, independent/transitional living, special services for youth, and employment services. Website: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ocs/ssbg/>

Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) was enacted with the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) to complement its

functions. CSBG provides federal funds to community-based agencies for activities designed to alleviate the causes and conditions of poverty in communities. Services typically assist with childcare, employment, education, emergency services, health care, housing, nutrition, transportation, youth development, and coordination of resources and community participation.

Website: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ocs/>

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) chiefly provides cash assistance to populations in need but states can use some of their TANF funds for supportive services, such as childcare or transportation. Website: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/>

Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) provides federal funding to states to give families subsidies to obtain childcare. This program, authorized by the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act, and Section 418 of the Social Security Act, assists low-income families, families receiving temporary public assistance, and those transitioning from public assistance in obtaining childcare so they can work or attend training/education. Website: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ccb/index.html>

The Continuum of Care is a set of competitive programs based on the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act to address the problems of homelessness in a comprehensive manner in concert with other federal agencies. <http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/homeless/programs/cont/>

- **Supportive Housing Program (SHP)**
SHP helps develop housing and related supportive services for people moving from homelessness to independent living. Eligible applicants include States, local governments, public housing agencies, private nonprofit organizations, and community mental health associations that are public nonprofit organizations.
- **Shelter Plus Care (S+C)**
Shelter Plus Care (S+C) provides rental assistance and social services for homeless people with disabilities and their families. Eligible grantees include states, local governments, and public housing agencies may apply for Shelter Plus Care grants.
- **The Single Room Occupancy (SRO) Program**
The Single Room Occupancy (SRO) Program provides Section 8 rental assistance for moderate rehabilitation of buildings. Eligible Grantees are public housing agencies and private nonprofit organizations.

EXAMPLES OF PROGRAMS

Central Falls, Rhode Island (pop. 18,000): Central Falls expanded funding sources for the Housing Authority's Family Self-Sufficiency program by spinning it off as a non-profit organization, and renaming it the Family Self-Sufficiency Foundation. As a nonprofit, the new foundation may seek funding from private sources and charitable foundations. This, in turn, allows it to offer more services to its clients. During its first four years, the foundation added four new services: tuition assistance, computer classes, counseling, and life skills training. Contact information for the Family Self-Sufficiency Foundation, (401) 727-8833.

Charlotte, North Carolina (pop. 540,000): Charlotte's Housing Authority operates two programs that link housing to community services, the Transitional Families Program (TFP) and the Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Program. Operating at three revitalized Hope VI sites and two public housing sites, TFP/FSS offers public housing residents educational opportunities, counseling, and training services for a five-year period. The program is designed to support residents as temporary tenants as they engage in the process of acquiring the skills they need to move out of public housing and into self-supported housing. Contact information for the Housing Authority Program, (704) 336-5317.

Chicago, Illinois (pop. 2,800,000): The Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) administers a program called Plan for Transformation, Economic and Social Self-Sufficiency. CHA residents have the option to work with staff of Chicago's Department of Human Services in the Service Connector System. The program is a network of social service agencies designed to provide case management, link families to resources, and assist CHA families in accessing programs and services used by the community-at-large. Families can receive referrals for a wide range of services, including job education classes, adult education programs, substance abuse programs, childcare, healthcare, and financial planning programs.

The Chicago Housing Authority is also collaborating with the Mayor's Office of Workforce Development and The Partnership for New Communities to provide services such as work readiness preparation literacy, adult basic education programs and transitional jobs programs. Program contact, (312) 742-8500

Florence, Alabama (pop. 36,000): The "Pathways to Success Program" is a partnership between the Florence

Housing Authority's Family Self-Sufficiency Program and the Community Action Agency of Northwest Alabama. It provides educational, job training, and housing opportunities to those in need. It also provides a variety of support services such as childcare, transportation, counseling, and life skills training. Contact information for the Florence Housing Authority, (256) 740-5200.

Greenbelt, Maryland (pop. 21,000): Greenbelt's Assistance in Living Program provides information and support that enables senior citizens to remain in their homes. The program is staffed by a Community Resource Advocate, who coordinates and provides information about, and referrals to, appropriate agencies and community resources for adult residents, caregivers, or family members of elderly residents. The advocate also assists clients in making informed choices about their health and wellness options; serves as a liaison between the resident and service provider; evaluates the social service needs of each client; and provides support and training resources to caregivers. It is jointly managed by the city and Greenbelt Homes, Inc., and is funded through a grant from the Naturally Occurring Retirement Community Supportive Services Center. Contact: Christal Parker Batey, Community Resource Advocate (301) 474-8000, ext. 2012. Email: cbatey@ci.greenbelt.md.us

Keene, New Hampshire (pop. 23,000): In 1997, the Housing Authority in Keene, New Hampshire, was selected as one of 22 housing authorities nation-wide to be one of HUD's "Moving to Work" demonstration programs. Keene's Housing Authority runs the Spectrum Program, which helps prepare residents for self-sufficiency. Participation in the program is required for all public housing and Section 8 residents except the elderly and special needs persons. Benefits of the program include rents that are calculated according to a graduated step system; community resources and support in areas such as employment, education, homeownership finances and life skills. The Spectrum program also has a Safety Net program that offers a temporary means of meeting rent requirements by performing work in return for rent credit. Contact: Julia Davenson, Keene Housing Authority, (603) 352-6161.

Linn County, Oregon (pop. 110,000): Cottage Creek, a development of the Linn-Benton Housing Authority provides suitable housing for low-income physically and

(Examples continued on back)

EXAMPLES OF PROGRAMS *(continued)*

mentally disabled persons and the elderly of Linn County. The tenants have access to services such as outreach programs, evaluations, ongoing case management, advocacy, housekeeping services, life skills training, money management, transportation assistance and supported employment services. Contact information for the Linn-Benton Housing Authority, (541) 926-4497

Los Angeles, California (pop. 3,600,000): The Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles (HACLA) integrates self-sufficiency programs into the administration of all housing programs. HACLA works with citywide resident groups to develop, publicize, and improve employment, job training, education, and business development opportunities. The city has pursued a number of strategies, including: creating internal subsidiary companies that train and employ residents for maintenance jobs; forming joint ventures between Resident Management Corporations and private construction companies; creating a Joint Apprenticeship and Training Committee made up of representatives from HACLA and local unions to develop, implement, and coordinate maintenance apprenticeship programs for residents; and opening Community Service Centers to help meet the training and support services needs of residents and their families. Contact the Resident Relations Department (213) 252-6100.

Milwaukee, Wisconsin (pop. 596,000): The Lapham Park Venture in Milwaukee is a synergy of public, private, and nonprofit investment. The project draws on the contributions of experts and practitioners in housing, medicine, social service, gerontology, and architecture and design to assist residents of Lapham Park, a nine-story public housing facility in the city. On-site services for residents include prescription drug refills, hospice care, dentistry, home health care, physical therapy, and podiatry services. The city housing authority raised \$1.3 million from corporations and foundations to renovate the basement of the building and \$600,000 for services. The founding partners of this venture include the Housing Authority of the City of Milwaukee, the Milwaukee County Department on Aging, Service Empowerment Transformation Ministry Inc., the Lapham Park Residents Organization, and Community Care Organization, a local care provider for

the elderly and disabled. Contact: Susan July, Managing Director (414) 286-2177. Email: sjuly@hacm.org. This project received a 2007 Gold Award for Municipal Excellence from the National League of Cities.

Montgomery County, Maryland (pop. 930,000): Montgomery County converted a local motel into the Seneca Heights Apartments for formerly homeless families and individuals. The program offers additional resources such as case managers who organize groups around various issues such as health, parenting, and finances. Children may take advantage of the twice-weekly tutoring provided by county schoolteachers. The \$8.5 million in project funding came from various state and county agencies. Contact: Stephanie Killian, Multifamily Housing Manager (240) 777-3693. Email: stephanie.killian@montgomerycountymd.gov

Santa Barbara, California (pop. 92,000): Santa Barbara's Casa Esperanza is a year-round day center that provides food, shelter, and social services to the homeless. The center provides an environment where one can sit, read, receive mail, shower, use the phone to schedule job interviews, and do laundry. There are counselors, case managers, literacy aides, and other experts available on site. Casa Esperanza addresses physical and emotional needs and works to enable homeless clients to re-establish their lives. This program received the League of California Cities 2004 Helen Putnam Award for Excellence in the Housing Programs and Innovations Category. Contact: Hal Onserud, Executive Director, Casa Esperanza (805) 884-8481

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