Tools and Strategies for Improving Community Relations in the Housing Choice Voucher Program

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Office of Policy Development and Research

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

Preface

Have you noticed a change in community attitudes about your Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP)? For many years, the HCVP was known as Section 8 tenant-based assistance (in this publication, the term "HCVP" is used to describe the concept historically described as "Section 8"). For most communities, HCVP subsidies remain an essential and positive response to affordable housing needs. However, some PHAs have noted a general lessening of community support for their goals and activities, while others have experienced active resistance to new initiatives related to HCVP such as portability and special mobility programs.

Why has HCVP become controversial in some localities and not in others? Are such controversies:

> … the inevitable consequence of demographic and economic changes in the community?
> … a disconnect between program rules and street reality?
> … a reflection of the way PHAs operate their programs?
> … or some other, as yet unidentified, factor?

Is there anything HCVP administrators can do to prevent a decline in community support for the program or to restore confidence in the program once it has been lost? This guidebook is the end product of a study commissioned by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to look into these and other questions related to community acceptance of HCVP. Eight PHAs that volunteered to share their experiences were studied in some detail. The purpose of the study was to try to understand the factors that lead to community dissatisfaction with HCVP and to assess the effectiveness of strategies employed by PHAs to eliminate or alleviate community concerns.

Although a guidebook cannot possibly address the specific circumstances in each of the more than 2,600 PHAs that administer HCVP, we believe it can do three things:

■ Provide information about the experiences of communities and HCVP administrators that have dealt with significant resistance to HCVP;

■ Identify key factors that appear to make an HCVP vulnerable to community or neighborhood controversy; and

■ Share selected ideas and tools that have been found to be effective in preventing or resolving community concerns about the program.

Chapter One
The Housing Choice Voucher Program: A Unique and Changing Community Relationship

In most localities, the HCVP has a decades-long history of successful program implementation. Nationwide, more than 1.4 million households receive HCVP tenant-based assistance—most with little notice or fanfare in the surrounding community. With housing choice at the core of its mission, the program provides the opportunity to integrate low-income households into the fabric of the community, rather than concentrating and isolating them in specific projects.

The program has succeeded in many important respects. Studies indicate that HCVP recipients live in better quality housing than similar unassisted families. They also are less likely than public housing residents to live in high-poverty neighborhoods. While other forms of subsidized housing—particularly project-based subsidies—have languished, the HCVP tenant-based program has continued to grow, serving an ever-increasing number of households in need.

1.1   Why Has HCVP Become a Concern in Some Communities?

Have you taken the pulse of your community lately with respect to acceptance of the HCVP? Have questions and complaints increased? With such a record of success, one might ask why the HCVP tenant-based program has become the subject of controversy in some communities. Recent research suggests that there are a number of reasons why HCVP has become a point of contention.

The Program Has Become Larger and More Visible

HCVP certificates and vouchers now represent about one-third of the nation's assisted housing. As the number of households served has grown, the visibility of the program has increased in many communities, as have the challenges for program administrators.

Although the opportunity for mobility was part of the program's original design, historically a large share of assisted households used their subsidies in the units in which they already lived or within the same neighborhoods. As landlords in those neighborhoods became familiar with HCVP they also became willing to accept new families interested in moving to the neighborhoods. Now, the program has assisted so many families in some neighborhoods that significant concentrations of subsidized units are evident. In such cases, one key contribution of the program to the community—the deconcentration of assisted housing—is lost. Where serious concentrations of tenant-based assistance exist, even supporters of the program begin to express concerns.

As HUD has placed an increasing emphasis on portability, mobility, and fair housing enforcement, HCVP families also have been successful in finding housing in neighborhoods that were previously inaccessible due to high rent levels and/or landlord discrimination. In those neighborhoods, even a relatively small number of HCVP families increase the program's visibility. General uncertainty about something new, as well as concerns about "outsiders," may fuel community opposition in areas with little prior HCVP experience.

The Program's Mission Has Become More Complex

Expectations of the program also have expanded. The income targeting provision of the 1998 Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act (QHWRA), which requires that not less that 75 percent of new families admitted to the program have incomes at or below 30 percent of the area median income, makes tenant-based HCVP, rather than public housing, the program for the lowest income families. Furthermore, special allocations of tenant-based subsidies have been provided for specific purposes such as the Moving to Opportunity (MTO) program, Family Unification, opt-outs and prepayments in properties with project-based HCVP assistance, relocation under HOPE VI and other redevelopment efforts, and welfare to work initiatives. Each initiative has intensified the spotlight on the HCVP and the families it serves and in some communities raised concerns about the need for services for some of these special populations.

Perceptions Exist that HCVP Tenants are High-Risk Neighbors

In many communities in which controversies have arisen, the belief exists that the attributes of HCVP participants have changed in recent years—that today's HCVP families are proportionately much more likely to contain members with

behavioral problems, as well as more likely to need significant supportive services.

The perception that the characteristics of HCVP participants have changed may be true to some extent. The circumstances of families entering the HCVP did change, especially during the 1980s and early 1990s when federal and local preferences resulted in increasing admissions of families who were homeless or at risk of homelessness. In addition, the percentage of households headed by minorities in the HCVP has grown more quickly in the past five years than it has in the public housing program. However, in the second half of the 1990s, HUD data show that the percentage of family households (compared to elderly households) in the program has held steady or declined, while the percentage of households with wages as a primary source of income has increased significantly. Of course, none of the statistics about the characteristics of HCVP households can confirm or refute perceptions of the risks associated with these populations. PHA staff in the study sites learned that they must deal with community concerns about risk—whether or not it is possible to document the basis for these concerns.

Perceptions that the Program is Poorly Administered Have Triggered Concerns

Within this complex framework of family choices, market dynamics, and program changes, HCVP administrators are challenged to maintain positive community relationships, maximize opportunities for program participants, and run cost-effective, compliant programs. Where problems have arisen, the perception that HCVP administrators have not done all that they should has been part of the equation.

1.2 What Can and Should Be Done?—The HCVP Community Relations Study

Notions that the administration of the HCVP is simple in contrast to public housing have gone by the wayside. It doesn't "run itself" anymore (if in fact, it ever did). With the 30th anniversary of the program's creation, a reassessment of community concerns and perceptions is appropriate. In 1999, Abt Associates Inc. was asked by HUD's Office of Policy Development and Research to conduct a study of a small sample of communities that have faced local opposition to tenant-based HCVPs. The overall purpose of the HUD study was to analyze a

range of conflict situations and identify strategies that are effective in defusing community opposition and building an improved image of the HCVP.

The study sites were selected to represent both a range of local experience with community resistance to HCVP and an assortment of responses. The researchers made every effort to document the perspectives fairly and accurately. Where controversies did exist, researchers did not attempt to determine who was "right," but rather to capture the dynamics of the conflict to better understand the causes and to identify successful outcomes.

The table on the following page provides a brief overview of the characteristics of the eight study sites. Further detail on the individual communities and the nature of the conflicts that took place can be found in Appendix A of this Guidebook.

1.3   Lessons Learned from the Study

The Core Conflict Issues

◆ **Concentration vs. Choice**. One of the key dilemmas identified during the study was the tension between community concerns about concentrations of HCVP families and the fundamental premise of the program that permits families to choose where to live. Community concerns ranged from a general sense that "too many" HCVP families lived in an area, to specific suggestions that the number of HCVP families be limited when a neighborhood reaches a saturation point. Because the concept of choice is so essential to the philosophy of the HCVP, many PHAs felt both disinclined and powerless to address the concentration issue.

PHAs rightly defend housing choice as a core value of the HCVP tenant-based program. But this does not mean that the PHA is powerless to address community concerns. The study suggests several avenues of action for PHAs that are not incompatible with housing choice. First, some PHAs have now recognized that the concentration of HCVP families may reflect a lack of options, rather than a real choice by HCVP participants. When inadequate Fair Market Rents or payment standard policies limit the neighborhoods in which the use of HCVP is viable, families do not have true housing choice. Families also may be unaware of the full range of neighborhoods in which they can use their HCVP assistance and may

Basic Characteristics of the Eight Study Sites

City/Town	PHA Name (& number of HCVP vouchers administered)	Scope of Conflict	Concerns Raised
Baltimore, MD	Housing Authority of Baltimore City (approx. 11,000 housing choice vouchers citywide)	City neighborhood	• Poor upkeep of rental units • Unresponsive landlords • Disruptive tenant behavior
Camden County, NJ	New Jersey Department of Community Affairs Div. of Housing (approx. 18,000 housing choice vouchers statewide)	Suburban community	• Poor curb appeal of rental units • Disruptive tenant behavior
Cook County, IL	Housing Authority of Cook County (approx. 10,000 housing choice vouchers in suburban county)	Multiple municipalities in suburban county	• Concentration of HCVP
Fairfax County, VA	Fairfax County Redevelopment and Housing Agency (approx. 2,500 housing choice vouchers countywide)	Suburban community developed among a major highway	• Declining school scores and property values • Concentration of HCVP
Lynn, MA	Lynn Housing Authority (approx. 2,000 housing choice vouchers in Lynn City)	Citywide	• High rents in the urban core • Declining property values • Disruptive tenant behavior
Montgomery County, PA	Montgomery County Housing Authority (approx. 1,700 housing choice vouchers countywide)	Single borough in a suburban county	• Special education costs • Poor curb appeal of rental units • Disruptive tenant behavior
San Antonio, TX	San Antonio Housing Authority (approx. 12,000 housing choice vouchers in city and county)	Two neighborhoods – one in the city, the other just outside the city limits	• High crime rates • Disruptive tenant behavior • Poor curb appeal of rental units
Syracuse, NY	Syracuse Housing Authority (approx. 3,000 housing choice vouchers citywide)	Two HCVP units on one street in a city neighborhood	• Disruptive tenant behavior • Unresponsive landlords

select a known neighborhood out of habit or fear of the unknown. With improved PHA counseling, these families might well exercise their choice to move to areas with lesser concentrations of HCVP families

◆ **The Need to Address Problem Behaviors and Conditions**. Alarm about concentrations of HCVP families is often the manner in which a community's concern is first articulated. However, upon investigation the communities' concerns were actually about a concentration (or perceived increase in) particular problems or behaviors such as crime and poor housing quality—not the presence of HCVP families who live in quality housing, pay the rent, and comply with lease requirements. Once again, the interests of the community, the interests of most HCVP families, and the concept of housing choice are not incompatible on this issue. Engaging with the community in problem-solving around these issues, rather than merely defending an HCVP family's right to choose, enabled several PHAs in the study to undertake significant problem solving that benefited HCVP families as well as the community in general.

The guidebook elaborates on these important issues and other valuable lessons uncovered by the study. These lessons are highlighted below and form the framework for the remaining chapters of the guidebook.

The Role of Neighborhood or Community in HCVP Conflicts

It seems clear that PHAs should become knowledgeable about where and how HCVP is used in their jurisdictions and how the program affects and is affected by community demographic and economic trends. The findings below highlight key issues. *Chapter 2* elaborates on these issues, makes the case for greater PHA involvement in understanding neighborhood and community conditions and demographic trends and provides a model for developing and using a community profile to identify potential problem areas and to support problem solving.

■ **Neighborhoods that are experiencing economic decline, or are perceived to be "not what they used to be," are vulnerable to HCVP conflict.** Anxieties about neighborhood decline often fuel resistance to HCVP. Trends that are the result of larger economic factors, such as a drop in property values or decrease in homeownership rates, changes in the racial makeup of the neighborhood, or a downward trend in public school test scores are often attributed to the HCVP.

- **Although concentration is a dominant issue, areas with the highest concentration of poverty and/or the highest concentration of HCVP recipients may not be those that experience conflict.** Among the study sites where HCVP conflict emerged, poverty rates ranged from 6 to 41 percent, with half of the sites at or below 10 percent. The fraction of the population made up by HCVP households ranged from 2 to 14 percent, with most sites falling into the 3 to 6 percent range. Thus, it appears that what makes a community vulnerable to conflict erupting around the HCVP is not a specific degree of poverty or concentration of HCVP households; rather, it is the perception that the community is changing or that the families moving in are visibly different from existing residents in race or class.

- **Before the HCVP controversy began, the HCVP administrators in most of the sites studied did not have a firm grasp of the number and locations of HCVP recipients across their jurisdictions.** Having better information about the locational patterns of program participants and how they had changed over time might have alerted housing authorities earlier to potential problems. Improving their knowledge could have enabled program administrators to be more proactive in their dealings with neighborhood organizations.

Housing Authority Practices and HCVP Conflict

The study confirms that there is no substitute for a well-run program. Although high quality program management won't necessarily protect a PHA from controversy, it can help to establish (or restore) the community's confidence in the PHA, and thereby cause local residents to give PHAs the benefit of the doubt in moments of crisis. *Chapter 3* elaborates on the findings summarized below including making recommendations for improvements in the key areas of program management that tend to be the focus of community concerns.

- **HCVP conflict is almost always fueled by concerns that the program is being poorly administered.** Whether these concerns are accurate or not, housing authorities should address the following administrative concerns, many of which contributed to the conflict at one or more study sites: 1) insufficient efforts to assist families to move to a broad range of neighborhoods; 2) inadequate attention to rent reasonableness and housing quality standards; 3) insufficient tenant screening at admission; 4) alleged negative HCVP household behavior; and 5) unresponsiveness to community complaints.

■ **Increased coordination and collaboration is needed among PHAs and other assisted housing providers operating in the same or overlapping jurisdictions.** Community residents are unlikely to recognize differences among various types of assisted housing programs or understand which HCVP families belong to which administering agency. Different policies, procedures, and methods of communication further hinder community efforts to report or resolve problems. PHAs in overlapping jurisdictions need to collaborate to ensure that their respective programs are not working at cross-purposes. At minimum, they should exchange information about the number and location of units in adjacent jurisdictions and share strategies for communicating with the community.

Strategies for Effective Resolution of HCVP Community Conflicts

Ignoring community concerns will not make them disappear. The PHAs that were most successful in resolving community concerns were those that greatly increased communication with program participants and stakeholders and took on problem-solving roles in the community. Although taking these actions required the PHAs to devote precious resources to non-traditional activities, most felt that it was more cost effective to address community concerns proactively rather than risk them escalating into more serious political, and in some cases legal, disputes. *Chapter 4* describes the strategies that participating PHAs found most effective in strengthening community relations and addressing HCVP conflict. In summary, an effective strategy appears to be:

■ **Take Community Concerns Seriously.** Most of the housing authorities studied did not take the initial community complaints about the HCVP seriously. In addition, many reacted in a defensive way, providing information about the program and its participants that may have been factually accurate but that did nothing to engage those on the other side of the controversy in useful dialogue. In the cases where the housing authority did not take the initial complaints seriously, they did not go away. The failure to act promptly to address community concerns universally resulted in conflict escalation.

■ **Get at the Real Issue(s).** Understanding and resolving HCVP conflict requires probing for the issues that underlie the surface complaints. HCVP controversies often appear at first to be about relatively minor, "nuisance" issues. These initial complaints, however, are often symptomatic of deeper concerns about which people feel very strongly—such as fears about

economic losses or resentment about apparent unfairness. To reach a solution that works, the actions taken must address the underlying issues.

■ **Make it Your Problem.** Resolving community conflict over the HCVP requires that the housing authority "take ownership" of the problem, regardless of whom is at fault. Taking ownership of the problem generally means making both practical changes—such as improving compliance—and cultural changes, such as viewing whole neighborhoods, not just assisted families, as customers.

■ **Be Part of the Solution.** In most cases, the housing authority will not be able single-handedly to turn the neighborhood around, but it can take steps to ensure that HCVP is perceived as part of the solution, not part of the problem. In many instances, the housing authority is not in a position to solve the underlying problem, but a prompt and collaborative response (particularly collaborations with the police department and other housing and service organizations) can go a long way toward calming community fears and addressing those issues that focused opposition on the HCVP.

■ **Broaden Your Perspective.** As HCVP becomes a more visible presence in a growing number of neighborhoods, housing authorities must begin to take on broader, non-traditional roles. If housing authorities want to improve the image and acceptance of the HCVP over the long term, they should reconsider their role with respect to the larger community. This includes getting involved in neighborhood revitalization activities and taking leadership positions in community-building initiatives.

Checklist 1: Five Steps to Effective Resolution of HCVP Conflict

✔ **Take it Seriously**

Ignoring community complaints does not make them go away. In fact, it almost always makes things worse

✔ **Get at the Real Issues**

HCVP conflict is usually about something deeper than noisy neighbors or unkempt lawns. Understanding the root cause of community concerns will help you to identify long-term solutions.

✔ **Make it Your Problem**

In order to resolve community conflict, you will need to take ownership of the problem, regardless of who is at fault. This will likely involve making practical changes to your program, developing new local partnerships, and viewing whole neighborhoods, not just HCVP participants, as your customers.

✔ **Be Part of the Solution**

In most cases, you won't be able to turn the problem around on your own, but responding quickly to community concerns and being willing to partner with others to address the issues can take you a long way toward an effective solution.

✔ **Broaden Your Perspective**

As HCVP becomes a visible presence in a growing number of neighborhoods, you may need to take on a broader, nontraditional role in the community. Getting involved in neighborhood revitalization activities and taking leadership positions in community-building initiatives will help improve the image and acceptance of the HCVP.

Chapter Two
Understanding Your Community

Most of the housing authorities in this study were taken by surprise when they found themselves embroiled in controversy over the HCVP. As a result, in many cases they were not able to head the controversy off or plan for an appropriate response.

One of the reasons that the controversy generally came as such a surprise is that the agencies were accustomed to thinking about their program and jurisdiction in a particular way. They believed that households make their own choices about where to live and that those decisions are not the program administrator's concern. They therefore did not make it a priority to understand which neighborhoods were becoming more accessible to the program and what that might mean for changing patterns of HCVP use. As a result, they often found themselves "in the dark" when community members voiced concerns about the effect of HCVP on particular housing markets and neighborhoods.

Although each community is unique and each housing agency's relationship with the community is different, it *is* possible to anticipate where controversies about HCVP might arise and prepare to respond to them. In order to do so, housing agencies need to: (1) understand the circumstances that can fuel community concerns about HCVP; and (2) determine which neighborhoods within their jurisdiction may be vulnerable to HCVP conflict.

Based on the eight study sites, it appears that concerns about HCVP often develop in the presence of larger economic trends and certain specific market dynamics. In particular, neighborhoods may be vulnerable to HCVP controversy if they are experiencing or have recently experienced the following kinds of changes:

- **Changes in Economic Conditions and Prospects**. Controversies tend to develop in communities where residents are feeling economically vulnerable. For example, residents of Syracuse's Westcott neighborhood felt their property values were threatened when enrollment fell at Syracuse University and the student rental market shrank. During an economic downturn, residents may attribute falling house values and an increase in rental properties to the presence of families receiving subsidies or the presence of assisted housing.

■ **Changes in Neighborhood Demographics.** This may include both upward and downward trends. For example, a rapid increase in population can create one kind of strain for a neighborhood such as intense competition for housing or school overcrowding. Rapid population decreases may create other problems such as a decline in property values or an increase in vacant units. Changes in the racial and ethnic composition of a neighborhood can further increase the sense of uncertainty and focus attention on the HCVP. In Baltimore's Patterson Park neighborhood, for example, many residents attributed racial transition and a growth in the rental market, both of which reflected long-term economic and demographic changes, to the HCVP.

■ **Changes in Concentrations of HCVP Tenant-Based Housing**. When subsidized housing begins to dominate a neighborhood, it is often a sign of other market dynamics at work. In San Antonio's "Creek" neighborhood, for example, the downsizing of a nearby Air Force base led to a growth in absentee owners, many of whom rented their properties through the HCVP. Despite the presence of underlying causes, however, if the community perceives the concentration of HCVP participants to be excessive or rapidly growing, controversy is likely to ensue. In Lynn, for example, residents complained that Lynn had done "more than its share" in assisting the region's low-income households, and some charged that HCVP participants were being steered to Lynn. When Lynn Housing Authority investigated the issue, they were surprised to learn that the concentration of HCVP housing in Lynn was in part the result of a Boston-based mobility program administered by a separate entity.

■ **Real or Perceived Changes in Neighborhood "Quality of Life."** Communities that perceive a decline in quality of life issues such as public safety, education, and the physical appearance of the neighborhood may attribute these changes to the HCVP. In the Route 1 Corridor of Fairfax County, for example, some residents believed that a new immigrant population, presumed to be living in the County because of HCVP assistance, was creating a burden on the local school system by increasing the number of children with special needs. The HCVP (and the perceived concentration of HCVP in the Route 1 corridor) thus became the focus of the community's concerns about declining school scores.

■ **Relative Differences among Neighborhoods.** In addition to changes within a neighborhood that may be perceived as negative, controversies often develop when residents perceive marked differences in the circumstances of their neighborhood relative to surrounding areas. This is especially true of issues related to financial status and quality of life. For example, when a neighborhood includes a greater share of HCVP participants than surrounding neighborhoods, concerns about "dumping" or steering tend to arise. This was the case in Montgomery County, where residents of Norristown Borough were upset that their community, which is significantly poorer than the County as a whole, was housing almost half of the County's HCVP households.

The above examples suggest some of the ways that communities can become vulnerable to HCVP controversy. A common theme in all of the examples is that change, even when positive, creates some level of anxiety for people. When change involves one's home or financial prospects, the anxiety can be particularly intense. Furthermore, misinformation or the absence of information can play a role in creating a climate of confusion and mistrust, in which perceptions may become reality.

Given that there are ways to anticipate and prepare for HCVP controversy and that ignoring the warning signs almost always makes the situation worse, it makes sense for PHAs to invest some time and resources in understanding the community contexts in which their HCVPs operate. Getting started can be a challenge – there is so much information, so many ways to look at it, and so little time! However, there are a number of rich data sources and analytical tools that HCVP administrators can draw upon to improve their understanding of community dynamics, and some simple guidelines to follow in packaging the information.

The remainder of this chapter focuses on the three elements of community dynamics that are most important for anticipating HCVP controversy. These are:

◆ Understanding demographic, economic, and housing market trends in the jurisdiction as a whole and particularly in neighborhoods with a significant number of HCVP participants;

◆ Understanding the whole picture of subsidized housing in the jurisdiction and particular neighborhoods—including programs other than tenant-based HCVP, and other PHAs that may be administering subsidized housing in the jurisdiction; and

◆ Understanding other trends that may be affecting particular neighborhoods—such as crime rates, school scores, political conflicts—and that may be attributed to the HCVP.

The first step that a PHA can take toward better understanding each of these areas is to develop a ***community profile.*** The goal of the community profile is to develop and maintain information that can shed light on program operations, market dynamics, and community relationships, without creating an overwhelming workload or an intimidating collection of statistics that confuse rather than clarify. Community profiles typically build upon a set of core components—basic demographic, economic, and housing market data—to provide a picture of the community at a given point in time or to track changes over time. Depending on local circumstances, PHAs may also want to add other dimensions to their profiles—such as school scores or crime statistics. Furthermore, PHAs may develop community profiles to cover a range of geographic areas—the PHA's entire jurisdiction, a particular neighborhood, or an individual census tract. Finally, the community profile can be presented as tables, charts, maps, or, usually most effectively, some combination of all of these.

> ### What Can A Community Profile Do For My PHA?
>
> A community profile enables people inside and outside the PHA to…
> ◆ Gain a better understanding of community conditions and the role that HCVP plays in the community
> ◆ Identify trends that may call for program or strategy adjustments
> ◆ Evaluate community concerns in the light of "hard data" about local trends
> ◆ Anticipate issues over which controversy might occur and plan for an appropriate response

The following discussions provide an introduction to some of the key elements of the community profile, as well as the sources of data available to create its various components. In addition, Appendix B to this Guidebook provides a detailed description of how to prepare a community profile using readily available data sources and analytical tools.

Analyzing Demographic, Economic, and Housing Market Trends

In most of the HCVP controversies studied, community residents voiced concerns about the effect of the HCVP on the local economy, housing market, or racial/ethnic composition of the neighborhood. Although the PHAs in question usually felt strongly that HCVP was not to blame for all the changes in the neighborhood, they usually did not have a clear sense of what the neighborhood's problems were, nor how the HCVP might have played a role in those problems.

Using Tables to Analyze Trends and Relative Differences

Creating a community profile that tracks basic demographic and economic information such as: population; percent of population below the poverty line; percent of households receiving public assistance; and racial/ethnic composition is a first step that PHAs can take toward identifying neighborhoods under stress and anticipating community concerns. The table below provides an example of what this kind of analysis revealed about Fairfax County's Route 1 Corridor, which was the site of HCVP controversy in the mid 1990s.

Trends in Fairfax County and the Route 1 Corridor, 1970-1990			
	1970	**1980**	**1990**
Population			
Fairfax County	454,275	596,901	818,584
Route 1 Corridor	59,196	64,213	69,928
Percent of Population below Poverty Line			
Fairfax County	3.5%	3.9%	3.5%
Route 1 Corridor	4.8%	9.2%	5.8%
Percent of Households on Public Assistance			
Fairfax County	0.1%	2.4%	2.1%
Route 1 Corridor	1.0%	4.6%	3.5%

	1970		**1980**		**1990**	
Race/Ethnicity	Fairfax	Rte. 1	Fairfax	Rte. 1	Fairfax	Rte. 1
White	96%	95%	89%	81%	81%	69%
Black	4%	4%	6%	15%	8%	21%
Amer. Ind./ Eskimo/Aleut.	n/a	n/a	0.2%	0.2%	0.3%	0.4%
Asian/ Pacific Islander	n/a	n/a	4%	3%	8%	6%
Other Race	n/a	n/a	0.9%	1%	2%	3%
Hispanic origin	n/a	n/a	0.9%	3%	6%	7%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 1990, 1980, 1970 Census.

At the start of the HCVP controversy, community leaders in Fairfax County's Route 1 Corridor expressed concern about the concentration of lower-income families living there. Looking at the table above, we might conclude that poverty rates in Fairfax County—as indicated by the percentage of families under the poverty line and the percentage of receiving public assistance—are quite low relative to many urban areas. However, the table also shows that the percentage of families living in poverty in 1990 was almost two thirds higher in the Route 1 Corridor (5.8 percent) than it was in the County as a whole (3.5 percent). Moreover, while overall population growth in the Route 1 Corridor was slower between 1970 and 1990 than it was for the County as a whole, the percentage of lower-income families and minority populations increased at a faster rate.

Key Sources of Economic, Demographic, and Housing Data

- **U.S. Census Data –** available online for 1990, in libraries for 1970 and 1980
- **American Housing Survey Data –** available on line through U.S. Census web site
- **Local Planning Data**

These observations highlight two of the points made above about the circumstances that can make a community vulnerable to HCVP conflict. First, community concern is often triggered by *change*. Many urban communities would be well pleased with a poverty rate below 10 percent, but for the Route 1 Corridor a twenty percent increase in the percentage of families in poverty created a concern. Second, perceptions of *differences* may trigger concern. Again, although the incidence of poverty in absolute numbers could be considered low, the rate is higher than for the rest of the county. This fact, combined with (1) the development of large numbers of project-based assisted housing units in the area, and (2) a perceived lack of investment to improve the area economically, helped strengthen concerns that Route 1 was being neglected (at best) and perhaps deliberately targeted as a low-income area.

Racial and ethnic changes are also evident. Over the period from 1970 to 1990, African American households increased from 4 percent to 8 percent for the county as a whole and from 4 percent to 21 percent for the Route 1 Corridor. Data for Hispanic households were not available in 1970, but from 1980 to 1990 Hispanic households moved into the county in significant numbers. In this case, the percentage increase in Hispanic households was greater for the county as a whole (from 0.9 percent to 6 percent) than for the Route 1 Corridor (from 3 percent to 7 percent).

Adding a Spatial Perspective through Mapping

Creating a table like the one for Fairfax County is the first step in developing a community profile. In addition to the demographic and economic data shown on that table, we might have included housing market indicators available from the U.S. Census and American Housing Survey such as homeownership and rental rates, average home prices, and the average length of tenure among homeowners. Although creating the table is a necessary starting point, it is often more effective to map the data rather than present them in numerical form. Maps can enhance a PHA's understanding of community dynamics by adding the perspective of location. Generating maps based on census tract level data allows the PHA to understand trends and patterns that are taking place within the neighborhood. This kind of analysis is especially useful for understanding community dynamics in neighborhoods such as Baltimore's Patterson Park, which vary almost on a block by block basis and certain parts of which have experienced much more rapid change than others.

The map below shows rental rates in 1970, 1980, and 1990 for the ten census tracts that make up the Patterson Park neighborhood.

Rental Rates in the Patterson Park Neighborhood, 1970-1990

1970   1980   1990

Percent Renter Units
- 50 to 100%
- 25 to 50%
- 0 to 25%
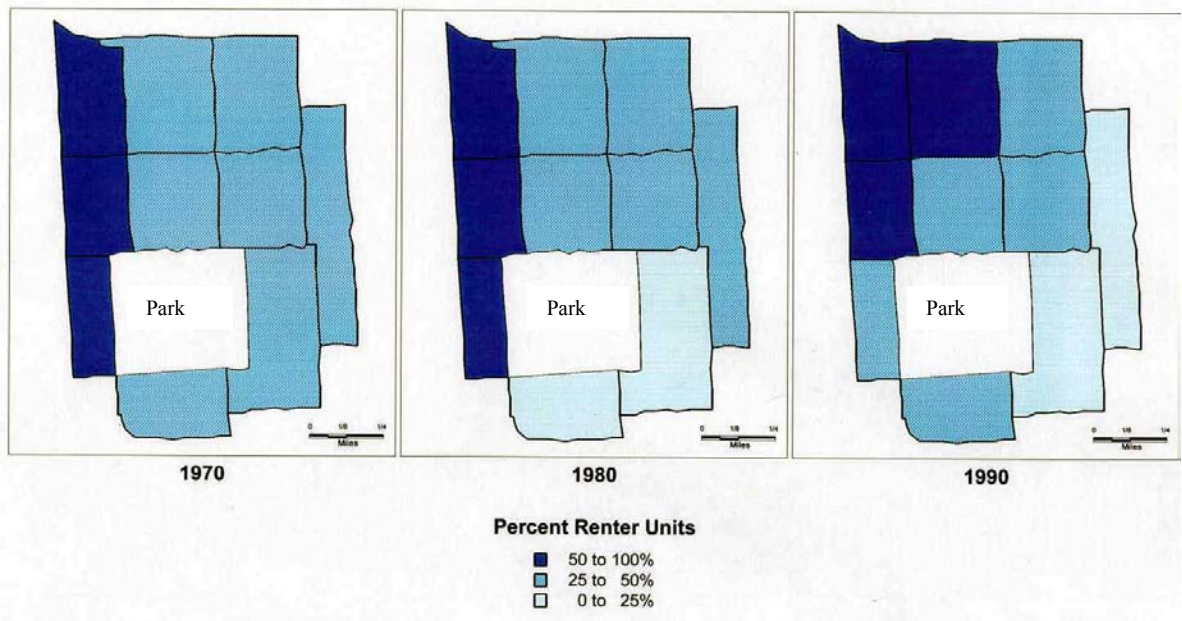
Contrary to the claims of many residents, mapping rental rates in Patterson Park over time reveals only modest growth in the proportion of units occupied by renters versus homeowners. This growth is indicated by the spread of the areas shaded in dark or medium blue. More striking is the changing distribution of rental units across the neighborhood. The census tracts in the northwest part of the neighborhood have long had a high proportion of rental properties relative to other census tracts. However, it appears that between 1980 and 1990, the rental market became more concentrated in this area. Comparing these maps to maps of poverty rates and concentrations of assisted housing by census tract provides a richer understanding of economic trends *within* the neighborhood and a stronger basis from which to evaluate community concerns.

An increase in rental rates can reflect a decline in homeownership, a decrease in vacancy rates, or some combination of the two. Having used the map to identify parts of the neighborhood that are becoming increasingly renter-occupied, look at the Census data on homeownership and vacancy rates to understand where the additional rental units are coming from. If homeownership rates are stable and vacancy rates are dropping, the increase in rentals may be a sign of neighborhood revitalization. If the rental market is growing at the expense of homeownership, this may be a cause of community concern. If this is the case, it may also be helpful to track the growth of the HCVP in these areas.

Food for Thought

■ **How would these tables and maps look if they were produced for your jurisdiction?** Are you aware of demographic trends in your locality? Are there significant differences in the trends by sub-area? How has the utilization of HCVP been affected by these trends? Do community residents perceive that HCVP participation is affecting these trends?

■ **What else would you like to see?** Would it be helpful for your community to have a map that shows where within the jurisdiction lower-income and minority families live—and the distribution of HCVP families?

■ **Creating the map**. The data needed for creating maps like the one above are available from the Census and can be incorporated into HUD's Community 2020 mapping software. This software is discussed in more detail in Appendix B.

Analyzing Subsidized Housing in the Community

Many of the PHAs that experienced HCVP conflict were charged with allowing, or, in some cases, encouraging, an "excessive" concentration of HCVP housing to develop in some neighborhoods versus others. PHAs have little control over the basic market forces that drive neighborhood transitions and cannot interfere with participant choice. However, they can assure that their program administration does not exacerbate a concentration problem—for example, by payment standard policies that severely limit neighborhood access. As a first step, PHAs should map the location of HCVP tenant-based households in their jurisdictions and neighborhoods. The data and tools needed to create this kind of map are available through HUD's Community 2020 software, discussed in detail in Appendix B.

> **Key Sources of Data on Subsidized Housing**
>
> - **MTCS Data –** available online through HUD's web site and in HUD's Community 2020 software.
> - **HUD's A Picture of Subsidized Households Database –** available online through HUD's web site.
> - **PHA Records/Databases**

Mapping the Distribution of HCVP Tenant-Based Housing within a Jurisdiction or Neighborhood

Creating a map that shows the distribution of HCVP tenant-based housing within a jurisdiction or compares that distribution with the surrounding jurisdictions can illustrate significant market conditions at a glance. The map below shows the concentration of HCVP tenant-based assistance in Lynn, Massachusetts, the jurisdiction of the Lynn Housing Authority (LHA), and compares it to other communities in the county.

- **HCVP tenant-based households**

Note: The pink shaded area represents LHA's jurisdiction; Boston is approximately 15 miles south of Lynn.
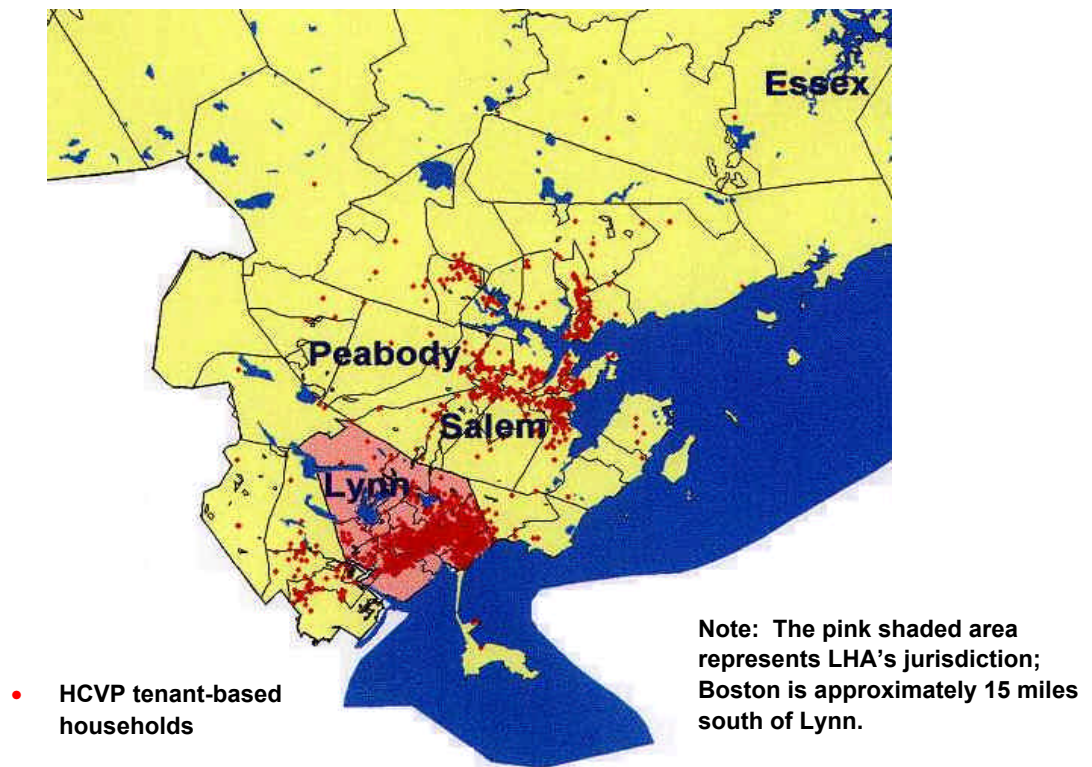
A picture can focus attention on an issue in a very graphic way. Creating a map similar to this one gave LHA a framework from which to evaluate the various concerns that they were hearing from the community, such as:

■ The concern that Lynn had done "more than its share" in assisting the region's low-income households;

■ The concern that HCVP participants were being steered to Lynn; and

■ The assumption by police that when they got a call from Lynn's urban core, an HCVP family was involved.

A map of subsidized housing can also suggest areas for further study or research. Such a map raised a range of questions for LHA staff and local elected officials related to:

- The proportions of owners to renters in the region and the distribution of affordable rental housing;

- The relationship between Fair Market Rents and PHA payment standards to housing costs in the unsubsidized market;

- Landlord outreach efforts and mobility initiatives to encourage program participation in areas of less concentration;

- The income, racial, and ethnic distributions of the population as related to the distribution of subsidized housing; and

- Employment opportunities and public transportation available to lower-income households in the region.

In order to address these issues and other questions raised by the map, the City of Lynn commissioned a more extensive market survey that has since been used as the starting point for the development of a new housing and economic development strategy.

Adding Perspective to a Map of HCVP Housing

The HCVP doesn't operate in a vacuum. In many cases, PHAs can benefit from creating a map that incorporates the full range of subsidized housing programs—not just tenant-based HCVP—and takes into account programs administered by other PHAs or state agencies. At several of the sites studied for this Guidebook, what the community (and PHA) originally believed to be a conflict over HCVP, in fact turned out to be a broader issue about the concentration of subsidized housing overall. HUD's Community 2020 software, described in Appendix B, gives PHAs the ability to create maps that show concentrations of subsidized housing overall and by housing program and administering agency. PHAs may also choose to partner with their local planning agencies to develop mapping expertise. The data needed to create maps of subsidized housing are available through the Community 2020 software or through HUD's "A Picture of Subsidized Households" database, which can be downloaded from HUD's web site.

> **K Not a High Tech Person?**
>
> You can take a simpler route by charting HCVP and other subsidized housing locations using a detailed city map and pushpins.

Tracking Changes in Subsidized Housing over Time

Sometimes an HCVP controversy arises because community members perceive that there has been a rapid increase in the number of HCVP families. Maps showing the locations of HCVP families over a several year period can demonstrate whether this perception is in fact true. If the question is a relatively simple one—how has the HCVP grown in one part of the PHA's jurisdiction versus another—the information can often be easily presented as a table or chart.

As an illustration, the table below provides a simple summary of the growth in HCVP participants living in the south suburbs of Cook County, as compared to the suburban County as a whole.

Concentration of HCVP Participants in South Suburban Cook County, 1980-2000

	1980	1995	1998	2000
Active Contracts in South Suburbs	969	4,405	4,949	5,637
	40%	57%	55%	56%
Active Contracts in Remainder of Suburban Cook County	1,442	3,353	4,054	4,374
	60%	43%	45%	44%
All Active HACC Active Contracts	2,411	7,758	9,003	10,001
	100%	100%	100%	100%

Sources: Housing Authority of Cook County.

This table could help to address one of the ongoing concerns in the HCVP controversy in Cook County, Illinois, which is the concentration of HCVP participants in the southern part of the suburban County. The table was created based on data that the Housing Authority of Cook County (HACC) had collected over the past two decades. However, the aggregated data shown in the table mask significant variation in the growth of HCVP among the towns that make up the south suburbs. Looking at these same data for individual towns, we would find that some towns with substantial numbers of HCVP participants prior to 1995 grew substantially between 1995 and 2000. In other towns—where relatively few HCVP participants had previously located—the program grew in smaller, but nonetheless significant, increments during this period. This more detailed analysis might better be captured on a map than a table.

Food for Thought

■ **Exercise caution in interpreting pictures and maps.** Pictures—both maps and statistical analyses—can be valuable tools, but they are only a piece of the puzzle. It is important not to jump to conclusions on the basis of a single illustration. For example, an aggressive mobility program might be one answer to the concentration of HCVP units in Lynn. But there is more to the story. At least some of the assisted housing concentration in Lynn has been attributed to an aggressive mobility program that resulted in many families moving *from* Boston, just 15 miles to the south, *to* Lynn! A single "snap shot" can often tell *what* is happening, but understanding *why* and what actions should be taken will generally take additional work.

Analyzing Other Trends that Contribute to HCVP Community Conflict

Community perceptions about the HCVP are often linked to other indicators of community well being. Two that are frequently mentioned are school scores and crime rates. Becoming knowledgeable about community issues that are linked to the HCVP will help PHAs prepare to respond to program criticism, identify and clarify misconceptions about the program, and garner resources for addressing community problems.

Tracking School Test Scores

In Fairfax County, Virginia, critics of the HCVP charged that school test scores in the Route 1 corridor, an area with a high concentration of assisted housing, were lower than those of the county as a whole. Moreover, many homeowners in the Route 1 Corridor believed that lower test scores translated directly into lower sales prices for their homes and reflected a high number of special needs children who lived in the school district, assumed to be receiving HCVP.

The table below compares SAT scores for Fairfax County as a whole, the high school servicing the Route 1 corridor (Mt. Vernon High School), and the state and nation. The table reveals that although the scores for Mt. Vernon High School are lower than for the rest of the county, they remain near and sometimes above the state and national norms. While the table provides objective statistics, different conclusions were drawn by various segments of the community—some saw a picture of strong performance while others saw a serious vulnerability that threatened neighborhood viability.

Average SAT Scores for Fairfax County Public Schools, Mt. Vernon High School, Virginia and the Nation							
Verbal				**Math**			
Fairfax All HS	**Mt. Vernon HS**	**Virginia All HS**	**Nation All HS**	**Fairfax All HS**	**Mt. Vernon HS**	**Virginia All HS**	**Nation All HS**
1997 538	499	506	505	550	501	497	511
1998 540	505	507	505	555	522	499	512
1999 541	489	508	505	553	498	499	511
Source: Fairfax County Public School System							

Tracking Crime Rates by Neighborhood and HCVP Status

In addition to school test scores, people often look to crime rates as a measure of community well being. In many people's minds, crime and assisted housing are inextricably linked, and the HCVP is no exception.

For example, at the start of the HCVP conflict in Montgomery County, there was a strong perception among residents of Norristown Borough, where most of the county's HCVP recipients live, that assisted households were responsible for much of the crime in the community. Some claimed that HCVP participants accounted for 50 to 60 percent of all police calls. In order to respond to these claims, the Montgomery County Housing Authority (MCHA) worked with the local police department to generate crime statistics for Norristown that break out the police calls generated from addresses where HCVP families live. Using these data, MCHA was able to prepare a table, similar to the one below, that challenged the community's perceptions.

Public Safety Dispatched Fire and Police Calls for the Borough of Norristown, 1996-1999

	1996	1997	1998	1999
Total Dispatched Police and Fire Calls	42,250	57,434	56,151	63,045
Total Calls Related to HCVP Units	5,791	6,744	6,424	5,869
Percent of Calls Related to HCVP Units	14%	12%	11%	9%
Breakdown of HCVP-Related Calls (%)				
Drug related	3%	3%	4%	3%
Disturbances	5%	6%	9%	6%
Domestic disturbances	9%	8%	8%	9%
Fights/Assaults	5%	4%	4%	4%
Medical emergencies	13%	13%	15%	16%
Psychiatric emergencies	1%	1%	1%	1%
Armed subjects/shots fired	1%	2%	2%	2%
911 Hang-ups	4%	5%	4%	5%
Miscellaneous	59%	59%	54%	55%

Sources: Montgomery County Housing Authority (Montgomery County, PA).

The table shows that in reality, between 1996 and 1999, HCVP households were responsible for somewhere between 9 and 14 percent of all police calls, and that this figure has been steadily decreasing. Moreover, the percentage of calls related to drugs (a common attribution about HCVP households) is relatively small and has not been increasing. For a number of reasons, there may be a correlation between

neighborhoods with high crime rates and neighborhoods with large numbers of HCVP-assisted households, but it is a large and unfounded leap to conclude that HCVP households are the perpetrators, rather than potential victims of those crimes.

The Montgomery County Housing Authority was able to obtain the above data by developing a working relationship with the local police department. PHAs should contact their local police department to determine if crime data for specific neighborhoods are available. Some police departments may have developed their own mapping systems, or may have information that can be downloaded into Community 2020 software to enable the PHA to overlay crime data and concentrations of HCVP assistance.

Food For Thought

- **Besides school scores and crime, other "quality of life" issues can shape the community's perspective of the HCVP.** In several of the study sites, for example, the HCVP became part of a larger debate about the concentration of social services in the community, and the impact that this had on local taxes and property values. In a community where residents have recently opposed a major public welfare project, such as the opening of a homeless shelter or free health clinic, controversy over HCVP may more accurately reflect concerns about the provision of social services to low-income families in general rather than problems with the program itself.

Checklist 2: Understanding Your Community

Determining Which Communities in Your Jurisdiction May Be Vulnerable To HCVP Controversy

✔ Are there areas that have undergone recent economic, demographic, or housing market changes and where residents may feel economically vulnerable?

✔ Are there notable differences between one part of the jurisdiction and other parts?

✔ Are there areas where the concentration of HCVP participants appears high relative to other parts of the jurisdiction, or is rapidly growing?

✔ Are you listening and trying to understand the concerns and perspectives of community representatives whether or not you see the situation in the same light?

Creating an Informative and Effective Community Profile

✔ **Identify what information to present:** Economic, demographic, and housing market data? Distribution of HCVP tenant-based and other subsidized housing? Crime rates, school scores, and other indicators of neighborhood "quality of life"?

✔ **Decide how to present the information:** A current "snapshot" or change over time? The whole jurisdiction, specific neighborhoods, or individual census tracts? Maps, charts, tables, or some combination of all three? Think about the "audience" for such information in your community—PHA staff, community organizations and advocates, elected officials, and the press. What format(s) do you think would be most effective in communicating with each?

✔ **Practice your analytic skills:** Put yourself in the position of another stakeholder in the community. How might an HCVP participant or landlord react to the information? What concerns would you expect to be raised by the public? Identify your concerns about sharing the information. Would you be concerned to have any of these maps or charts for your community appear on the front page of the local newspaper? If yes, why would that be so? What actions might that suggest?

Chapter Three
Quality Program Administration
Makes a Difference!

Ultimately, the success of an HCVP will be judged not only by its SEMAP score, but also by how well it works in, and for, the local community.

At virtually every study site, one aspect of the community's concern was the perception that the program was poorly run—that inappropriate rents were paid, that housing quality was poor, and that there were no consequences for inappropriate behavior by tenants or landlords. Although the current culture makes distrust of government a common phenomenon, PHAs that have stepped back to look at how they are doing business have realized that it is possible to make changes that will both improve compliance with HUD requirements and better respond to community interests.

High quality program management won't necessarily protect a PHA from controversy, but it can help to establish (or restore) the community's confidence in the PHA. Over time, a mindset that supports continuous improvement will increase community confidence and cause the residents to give the agency the "benefit of the doubt" as new issues arise.

The most frequently cited community concerns about PHA administration of the HCVP include:

- Faulty screening practices by landlords and the PHA;

- Inappropriate application of payment standards and rent reasonableness procedures;

- Poor quality housing and lax enforcement of housing quality standards;

- PHA unwillingness or inability to take action against program applicants, participants, and landlords who fail to meet program requirements or to behave as responsible members of the community; and

- PHA practices that create concentrations of assisted tenants in some neighborhoods and send other assisted families to new neighborhoods without adequate orientation and support.

This chapter looks at each of these areas as they relate to the larger issue of community acceptance. The chapter makes recommendations about how a PHA can fine-tune its program *and* bring it in line with community standards—abide by the rules *and* be responsive to community residents.

3.1 Focusing on Prevention—PHA and Landlord Screening

Although community residents are often only marginally involved in the PHA's broader policy discussions regarding who *should* receive HCVP assistance, they are generally quite articulate and sometimes passionate about who *should not* receive assistance. For example, the presence of HCVP participants who engage in—or are believed to be engaging in—criminal activity is one of the major causes of complaints about the program. Many times complaints about the behavior of HCVP tenants are unfounded, or the problem families turn out not to be HCVP families at all. But in other instances, community leaders have been justifiably concerned about the HCVP "revolving door," in which a family evicted from one HCVP unit for inappropriate behavior moves down the street, merely to create a problem in another HCVP unit.

Do you screen applicants for each of the following?

- Violating family obligations under the program

- Eviction from public housing or prior termination from the HCVP

- Participating in violent or drug-related criminal activity

- Commission of fraud, bribery, or other corrupt or criminal act in connection with a federal housing program

- Owing rent or other reimbursement to a PHA

- Breaching an agreement to pay amounts owed to a PHA

Rightly or wrongly, neighbors, community groups, and ultimately elected officials will hold the PHA responsible for the negative behavior of HCVP families. Until recently, HUD rules limited a PHA's ability to take preemptive action by screening out families with known behavioral problems. Traditionally, the PHA role has been to determine applicant families' *eligibility* for participation in the HCVP, while landlords were responsible for determining the families' *suitability* as tenants. More recently, and particularly with the passage of the Public Housing Reform Act (PHRA) in 1998, PHAs have the right not only to determine which families are eligible for assistance, but also to screen out otherwise eligible

applicants on the basis of prior criminal activity and prior behavior in assisted housing. Exercising this authority to the fullest, in addition to educating landlords about how they can select good tenants, can help PHAs *avoid* problems before they begin.

PHAs are required to develop their own policies and procedures for applicant screening. The goal of these policies should be the exclusion of known "bad actors" from the program before they become a liability to the PHA and the community.

Screening for Past Behavior in Assisted Housing is Worth the Effort

Each PHA must determine what level of effort is appropriate and what screening measures are most effective for the locality. At a minimum, PHAs should crosscheck applicant names with their own records of public housing evictions, HCVP terminations for cause, and public housing and HCVP tenant accounts receivable. Although this seems obvious, a surprising number of PHAs have so far failed to implement systems for checking their own records or enforcing their own policies.

A PHA's application form can request information about the applicants' prior experience with assisted housing in other localities. Even though it is difficult for the PHA to uncover information about evictions, terminations, and debts if the applicant does not provide accurate information, requesting the information is still a good idea. Should such information come to light later, the PHA would have grounds for terminating the participant for failing to provide the information. In addition, PHAs should consider establishing cooperative agreements with nearby PHAs for the exchange of information about past tenant behavior.

Criminal Background Checks Provide Multiple Benefits

PHAs can deny assistance to applicants as a result of past criminal history. Using criminal history checks to screen applicants can be effective in reducing the likelihood that seriously disruptive families will be admitted to the program. In addition, PHAs that have worked with local and state police to access information and develop screening procedures have established productive relationships with far-reaching effects. As the public—and particularly current and prospective HCVP participants—learn that families have been denied assistance based upon past criminal history, PHA policies and expectations about appropriate behavior are reinforced.

Many Landlords Need Training and Encouragement to Screen Effectively

Owners should thoroughly screen applicant families with respect to their prior history as tenants, but the actual practices of landlords vary widely. In soft housing markets, some landlords do not screen at all, on the theory that a unit occupied by anyone is better than a vacancy. Even landlords who may be interested in screening tenants may be confused about what they can and should ask, as well as what the PHA may already have done in the way of screening. This is especially true in the case of smaller, less experienced owners. An essential job of the PHA is to encourage responsible behavior among participating owners through training and technical assistance.

> **What Can You Tell the Owner About a Prospective Tenant?**
>
> PHAs *must* provide the owner with:
> ♦ Current and prior addresses as shown in PHA records
> ♦ The name and address of the family's current and prior landlord

PHAs can also serve as a source of screening information for prospective landlords. The PHA must give all applicant and participant families a statement of its policies on providing tenant information to owners of rental housing and must include the statement in its HCVP administrative plan. The policy must indicate that the same types of information will be provided to all owners.

In the interest of encouraging owners to screen prospective tenants properly, PHAs should provide owners with as much information on prospective tenants as they can, consistent with their own policies and with the tenants' right to privacy. PHAs should not, however, allow themselves to slip into the practice of substituting poor tenant references (or innuendo) for direct actions the agency should take to terminate the participation of non-compliant families.

Let the Community Know about Your Screening Procedures

Implementing effective screening policies and procedures is step one. Equally important is making sure that these PHA policies are widely known. PHAs have found that informing the public about both screening and termination policies helps to counteract the perception that the PHA sees its role only as an advocate for HCVP families and is not concerned with enforcing community laws and standards.

3.2   Improving Program Compliance

Problem behavior by particular tenants and the housing authority's failure to take action related to this behavior have been at the center of numerous HCVP conflicts. Following right behind this concern is the perception that no penalties are imposed when HCVP landlords charge premium rents for mediocre quality housing and substandard service. Community acceptance of the HCVP depends heavily on the PHA's reputation for fair program administration.

Consider Developing a Tenant Integrity Program

In response to community concerns about these issues, an increasing number of PHAs have implemented "tenant integrity" strategies in some form. The goals of these programs generally are to:

- reduce the likelihood that ineligible families are admitted to the program;

- improve reporting of family composition, income, and assets;

- eliminate landlord fraud and program abuse; and

- address a variety of complaints about specific units or households.

Typical elements of tenant integrity programs include:

Improving the intake and reexamination process. The intake process is the PHA's opportunity to start off on the right foot with applicant families, to get full and accurate information from the family, and to explain program rules in an unambiguous way. PHAs have enhanced the effectiveness of their intake process—and their process for annual participant recertifications—by improving employees' interviewing skills, developing effective forms, and conducting thorough verifications.

Improving scrutiny of participant information. A key element of any tenant integrity program is formalizing the PHA's procedures for handling complaints and tips. Some PHAs have opened complaint hot lines that enable community members to pass on information about suspected program violations. Others have hired investigative staff to follow up on complaints. PHAs have found it helpful to develop forms to document complaints and obtain as much specific

information as possible. Many PHAs also train staff on how to spot inconsistencies and questionable answers from tenants.

Focusing on owner as well as participant compliance. PHAs should train owners as carefully as they train program participants, to ensure that they do not unintentionally violate program rules. Leasing and inspection staff should also be trained to recognize signs that there may be intentional fraudulent activity by owners. Pay particular attention to the potential for "side payments," owners' failure to pay for utilities for which they are responsible, presence of unauthorized tenants, and owner failure to report tenant move-outs.

Expanding fact-finding capabilities. PHAs that have implemented tenant integrity programs have found that it is unwise to take action against tenants unless they have fully documented evidence of wrongdoing. Familiarize yourself with the laws in your state defining public information, and find out where public records are kept. Some examples of potentially useful public records are: marriage and divorce records; birth and death records; adoption and foster child records; judgments and bankruptcies; Uniform Commercial Code records of secured loans; voter registration records; and real estate and tax rolls. With a signed release, information can also be obtained from some private sources, such as financial institutions, utility companies, and educational institutions. Detailed information about information sources in the community is available in the HUD Tenant Integrity Program training guide (OIG (6) 3/92).

Developing procedures for administrative action. When the PHA has compelling evidence that an applicant or participant family has given incomplete or inaccurate information, it has several remedies available under program regulations. These include counseling the family, issuing a written warning, denying or terminating housing assistance, arranging for voluntary repayment of overpayments made on behalf of the family, and taking the family to court. The PHA's administrative plan should state unambiguously its policies regarding a family's obligation to provide complete and accurate information, the penalties for non-compliance, and the process by which an applicant or participant can appeal the PHA's decision to impose sanctions.

Pursuing prosecutions. Local prosecutions for housing fraud are not common, but even one or two successful prosecutions can serve as a deterrent to other participants who can see that violators are being caught and punished. PHAs that uncover clear-cut instances of intentional fraud should discuss the procedures for obtaining local prosecutions with the local prosecutor, District Attorney, or

State's Attorney. PHAs are entitled to retain 50 percent of any repayment resulting from prosecutions and/or repayment agreements.

The Privacy Dilemma

One of the harder issues facing PHAs is how to respond to community complaints without violating the confidentiality of program applicants and participants. This problem arises when community residents or organizations identify problem properties in the community and request relief from the PHA. If the issue is the behavior of a particular family, the PHA may be asked to disclose whether the family is receiving HCVP, as well as other information about the family. When concentration is the issue, the PHA may be asked to provide the names or addresses of all HCVP recipients or landlords in a particular development or neighborhood.

At many of the study sites, a common complaint was that PHA staff seemed uninterested in addressing the problems that were raised (and in fact, some PHAs admitted that they "hid behind" the privacy issue to avoid dealing with community concerns). At first glance, the competing interests of the community and the individual HCVP participant seem irreconcilable. However, many PHAs have discovered that this may not be the case. It is important to remember that the fundamental interest of the complaining party is to *get the problem solved*, not to find out personal details about a particular individual. This means that by demonstrating a genuine concern about a problem and taking action to correct problem situations, the PHA may well be able to diffuse community concerns *and* maintain privacy.

State law may limit a PHA's ability to respond to public inquiries. In many circumstances it is possible to provide the critical information needed to restore community confidence. However, PHAs must decide on a case-by-case basis what level of disclosure is appropriate, taking care to consider the recipient of the information. For example, sharing information about HCVP recipients with the police department or other service organizations is different from making the names of HCVP recipients generally known. Some PHAs have elected to identify HCVP units by address (though not family name) to homeowners' associations or community groups. The New Jersey Department of Community Affairs took this step, after consulting with the State's Attorney, and felt that it was effective in addressing community complaints about particular housing units and encouraging communication between neighbors and landlords. Other PHAs have attempted to be responsive by noting when the inquiries are about units that are *not* assisted under the HCVP.

Public Inquiries and Privacy Concerns: One PHA's Approach

A PHA receives a call complaining about the behavior of a family at a particular address. The PHA is asked: (1) whether the family receives HCVP assistance and (2) who is permitted to be living in the apartment. The PHA responds: "We're sorry, but for privacy reasons we are not allowed to provide that kind of information."

This response, though technically accurate, neither acknowledges the complainant's concerns nor suggests any possible hope of remedy. It certainly does nothing to help the community believe that the PHA is concerned about the community.

A Better Response…

Acknowledge the concern. Take down the address of the unit involved. Ask the caller to explain in detail what the problem is (e.g., noise or other nuisance behavior, housing condition). If inappropriate behavior appears to be a problem, acknowledge the caller's frustration. Explain the relevant tenant and landlord obligations and the actions the PHA will take if those obligations are violated.

Further explain that, although the PHA may not disclose information about a family to individual members of the public, the PHA will investigate the problem, and take the appropriate action. If there is an obvious next step that the caller should take (such as calling the police in the case of suspected drug activity) recommend it to the caller, *but don't use referrals as a way to "pass the buck."*

What To Do After the Phone Call

♦ **Investigate the issue**. PHAs that have an active tenant integrity program should refer such calls to staff assigned to that activity. Because investigation can be time consuming, make a judgment call about how much investigation is appropriate. Spend more time on serious issues and those that suggest systemic problems.

♦ **Follow up with the caller**. Initially, it may be helpful to follow up with individual callers. When a significant volume of calls comes from a particular area or source, use meetings with community organizations to provide feedback on problem solving activities. For example, the PHA can publish statistics on the number of complaints received, how they were resolved, how many families or landlords have been terminated. In cases where the object of the complaint is not an HCVP participant, the PHA may offer information and referrals on how to pursue the problem. Yes, these steps are time consuming, but PHAs who have invested time and energy to interact with the community have enhanced their credibility.

♦ **Develop systemic ways of dealing with the most common problems**. Keep track of the nature of complaints and determine which are appropriate for a systemic solution. For example, if there are frequent complaints about tenant behavior, training for landlords on their responsibilities and local eviction procedures would be appropriate. Similarly, if complaints about drug activity persist in a particular development or neighborhood, work with the local police department and community groups to address the problem.

3.3 Assuring that HCVP Reflects Rather than Drives the Market

One key challenge for PHAs is managing the HCVP so that program participants are able to compete for housing without negatively affecting the housing market. The major tools available to address these challenges are the rent reasonableness procedures and payment standard policies.

Reconsidering Rent Reasonableness

Approving rents that are too high or too low can create problems. If approved rents are too high, HCVP participants may "outbid" unassisted renters, inflating area rents and contributing to an increase in the concentration of HCVP participants. Also, when PHA rents are higher than market conditions warrant, there is no financial incentive for owners to improve properties beyond HQS. Conversely, if rents approved by the PHA are too low, owners may not be interested in participating in the program, or the range of units and neighborhoods to which families will have access may be severely limited.

RENT REASONABLENESS CHECK-UP

U Have community residents expressed concerns about the rents paid for HCVP units?

U Are you having difficulty convincing owners to upgrade their properties to meet local quality standards?

U Are success rates for the program declining?

U Have mobility efforts met with limited success?

If so, it may be time to take a fresh look at the process you are using to determine rent reasonableness.

In several of the areas where community resistance surfaced, PHAs found it helpful to, or were required to, improve the processes by which they determined the reasonableness of proposed rents. A high-quality rent reasonableness process requires that the PHA:

- **Obtain timely and accurate data on a wide range of unassisted rents in the community.** The PHA's database should provide information on rents for standard units of various sizes, types, locations, age, and condition, and on the utilities, maintenance, services and amenities provided by the owners. Sources for the data required include classified advertisements and apartment rental newsletters, owner and manager surveys, licensing and rent control agencies, and professional market survey firms.

- **Get the geography right, using nearby units in the same neighborhood as comparables.** The collected data should be organized by market areas, consistent with the variation in housing costs among identifiable sub-areas within the jurisdiction. The PHA should make sure to gather enough data to allow good coverage of different neighborhoods.

- **Organize the data into a system that is usable and used by program staff to reliably determine reasonable rents for proposed units**. The system should allow staff to compare units of the same size and type, and provide enough information about the comparison units that staff can make

reasonable adjustments for unit quality and amenities—supporting the payment of higher rents for units in above-average condition and lower rents for units in marginal condition. Comparison should be made between gross rents—the total cost of the housing "package," including utilities. For comparison units with one or more tenant-paid utilities, the PHA must determine the type of utilities the tenant must pay and calculate the utility cost using its utility allowance schedule. PHA staff should be trained to handle the subjective aspects of rent determinations, such as making adjustments for relative condition and differences in amenities.

> **K** Historically, rent reasonableness has been a weakness for many PHAs. Consider whether your procedures need improvement and whether an investment in training for your staff, landlords, and perhaps key community leaders would reduce controversy in this area.

- ■ **Communicate effectively with the public about rent determination requirements and methodology.** Despite the best efforts of PHAs to determine and approve reasonable rents, homeowners in many areas still complain that program rents in their neighborhoods are excessive. In many instances, they are found to be comparing today's rents with their payments on housing purchased years earlier. If the PHA can provide good information about current rents in a variety of neighborhoods, and discuss similarities and differences between neighborhoods and building types that affect rents, residents are more likely to accept the PHA's valuation of rental units in their neighborhoods.

Setting Payment Standards that Work

The levels at which PHA payment standards are set also exert a powerful influence on where program participants choose to live. If you are facing community concerns about concentrations of assisted housing, consider whether you are making the best use of your authority to set payment standards. This would be a good time to map the current use of HCVP in your community and to evaluate how many additional neighborhoods could be made accessible to program participants by increasing payment standards to the highest level permitted under the PHA's authority. Then consider whether additional neighborhoods could be accessed through the use of HUD Field Office and Headquarters discretionary authority for permitting "exception rents." Let voucher holders know that their vouchers are worth more in some neighborhoods than others.

Some PHAs resist implementing higher payment standards because they fear this will encourage owners to charge higher rents. That concern should be addressed

through the rent reasonableness process, *not* by keeping payment standards artificially low. If rents vary widely by neighborhood, consider the use of separate payment standards within the basic range for designated parts of your jurisdiction.

Remember also that skimping on payment standards no longer enables a housing authority to assist more families, because renewal funding now is based solely on the number of units originally allocated and on actual per-unit costs for housing assistance payments in the preceding year.

3.4   Enforcing Housing Quality Standards

A PHA's failure to ensure that program units are maintained in compliance with neighborhood standards is probably the biggest single complaint that communities have about the HCVP. A number of common weaknesses in HQS enforcement procedures have been identified, including failure to follow up when complaints are received and excessively liberal policies regarding extensions for the correction of HQS deficiencies.

Before considering changes to PHA standards or inspection procedures, it would be wise to confirm the nature of the community's concern. Complaints that units are in poor and unsafe condition are the most serious, but these seem less likely to be the focus of community (as opposed to tenant) complaints. More often, the need for improvement rests with performance—the time lapsed between inspection and re-inspection of deficient properties, the number of extensions approved, the number of units on abate status (and how long they remain before the repairs are made or the unit is terminated), and sanctions imposed on owners and tenants who have failed to comply.

It is important to develop clear guidelines for addressing community complaints related to HQS that can be circulated among PHA staff and the broader public. In San Antonio, for example, where HQS-related complaints played a major role in the HCVP controversy, the housing authority restructured its inspection procedures to emphasize follow-through and closure. Typically, when the agency receives a complaint about the condition of an HCVP unit, the inspector assigned to that neighborhood inspects the unit the next day. If the complaint is valid, the inspector follows up immediately with a written notice to the landlord and, if appropriate, to the tenant.

One of the more challenging community concerns to address is the perception that agency standards do not meet community expectations and norms. A number of strategies may be employed when the bare-bones HUD housing quality standards fall short of the local community's desires. The PHA can consider expanding HQS to include items of particular concern to the community, *if* this step does not have the effect of seriously limiting the availability of housing for voucher holders. For example, the Fairfax County Redevelopment and Housing Authority adopted the maintenance section of the Building Officials and Code Administrators (BOCA) code as the housing quality standard for its HCVP.

Alternatively, some PHAs incorporate localized standards informally, by way of recommendations to the owner through "Pass with Comment" remarks, or by coupling the discussion of desirable upgrades with the discussion of allowable rents. A PHA that has adopted adequate payment standards and a rigorous rent reasonableness process will be able to back up appeals for conscientious property management with financial incentives to owners who agree to make desirable—albeit voluntary—improvements.

Terminating a HAP contract for a violation of HQS may force the family to locate other housing. However, most PHAs agree that the costs of poor property management in a vulnerable neighborhood outweigh the benefit of keeping the unit under contract.

A number of PHAs have enlisted the support of their tenants in maintaining program units in good condition. These PHAs have upgraded the portion of their applicant briefing that deals with housing quality standards so that families with vouchers will know what to look for initially and will also be aware of their responsibility to report maintenance needs to the owner and, if necessary, to the PHA. They stress the families' responsibility for housekeeping and maintenance of exterior areas and warn families that they will lose their assistance if their HAP contract is terminated for a breach of HQS caused by family members or guests. A few agencies have also developed formal training programs that focus on being a good tenant and neighbor.

3.5   The Double-Edged Sword: Concerns about Concentrations of Assisted Housing and Mobility Initiatives

Ironically, the existence of concentrations of assisted housing *and* PHA mobility initiatives to reduce those concentrations often generate controversies in the same

locality. The solution to a problem in neighborhood "A" is perceived as the beginning of a problem in neighborhood "B." In Chapter 2, we discussed the process by which a PHA can track community trends and anticipate where concentrations of assisted families are likely to develop. The same analyses can assist a PHA to identify neighborhoods that represent better opportunities for families receiving HCVP assistance to live outside areas of concentration. But what should a PHA do then?

Since the inception of the HCVP, the notion of "finders keepers"—the right of program participants to use their assistance anywhere they can find a willing landlord—has been a distinguishing feature of the program and one that is popular among families seeking assisted housing. But, if families in the program make their own decisions about where they will live, how can the PHA avoid the voluntary concentration of families in certain areas? How can it respond to communities that have experienced a concentration of assisted families? And, how can it encourage families to seek potentially better housing opportunities in less familiar neighborhoods?

Addressing Concerns about Concentrations of Assisted Housing.

Many PHAs believe that concentrations of assisted housing "just happen." After all, families are free to choose where to live, and PHAs have little control over the outcomes of a family's search. But voucher holders report that their choices are often significantly constrained by forces beyond their control and that their decisions are driven less by choice than by necessity. Community groups often attribute concentrations of assisted housing to formal PHA policy or to less formal "steering" by the agency.

The HCVP Community Relations study suggests a three-part strategy for dealing with community concerns about concentrations of assisted housing.

First, acknowledge and assess the validity of community concerns. In many of the study sites, community residents expressed support for the goals of affordable housing programs even while expressing concerns about the concentrations of assisted housing in their neighborhoods. It would be easy (and undoubtedly accurate in some localities) to attribute this disparity between general support and specific opposition to the NIMBY (not in my back yard) syndrome or to racial bias. However, it would be irresponsible to dismiss the concerns without taking a deeper look. Concentrations of assisted housing do have the potential to affect the character of a neighborhood, especially in the absence of a strong PHA compliance focus. Concentrations in declining

neighborhoods may also be a sign that participants have not had meaningful opportunities in other neighborhoods.

Start by researching thoroughly the amount and type of assisted housing that exists in the area. The myriad federal and state housing programs that sometimes overwhelm even those individuals who work with them on a daily basis can be mind-boggling to the ordinary citizen. The community profile described in Chapter 2, completed on a neighborhood basis, would be an effective tool for starting the dialogue with community representatives—and it might provide some surprising information. For example, it is not unusual to discover that "voucher units" that are the focus of concern are actually public housing or privately owned project-based developments.

> **K** When the Fairfax County housing authority first encountered resistance to HCVP, they were surprised at the intensity of the concern, given that vouchers and certificates represented a relatively low proportion of the units in the neighborhood.   But when they developed an inventory of all of their programs, they found that assisted housing represented a very high percentage of the rental units in several key census tracts.

Acknowledging concentrations where they do exist, as well as the stress that such concentrations may place on the community, is important. PHAs that have done so have discovered that this step can enhance the PHA's credibility—and perhaps make it possible to engage the community's energies in problem-solving activities rather than resistance.

Second, look for and address the problems that made concentration an issue. Looking for the issues "behind" the complaint can enable a PHA to take action to relieve tensions in the short term while economic development and long-term mobility initiatives work to lessen the concentrations. For example, if HCVP units are poorly maintained, even a few HCVP families in a neighborhood may feel like too many. In such a situation, reducing the number of assisted units in the area is probably less of a concern than improving the PHA's enforcement of HQS.

Similarly, if the concern is families whose behavior is inconsistent with neighborhood norms, explain the actions the owner and PHA can take (and more importantly *are* taking) to resolve non-compliance and behavioral problems. Frequently, the behavioral issues that are raised may not reach the level of lease non-compliance. Many fall in a lesser "nuisance" category, such as loud music at night, people hanging out in the street, or children cutting through others' yards.   For these circumstances, consider working with a community or homeowners' association to provide positive guidance to neighborhood newcomers.

If a large number of new families, particularly families that differ visibly from the area's long-term residents, are moving into an area with HCVP assistance, residents may conclude that the program is precipitating changes in the neighborhood, whether the families are causing problems or not. Some neighborhoods have developed elaborate formulations of the community's "fair share" of low-income or HCVP families and argue that there are too many HCVP families if that number is exceeded. An appropriate response may be to increase ongoing communication with community representatives, including a discussion of the notion of housing choice, coupled with some good information on actions the PHA is taking to expand the choices available to program participants.

Third, make a commitment to providing mobility opportunities for HCVP participants. Families admitted to the HCVP are, for the most part, the families with the lowest incomes in the community. Left to their own devices, most of these families will use their assistance to lease units in neighborhoods that are familiar to them—generally neighborhoods with high concentrations of families like themselves. A PHA can help families to consider other neighborhoods if it is willing to:

■ Provide families with information about various neighborhoods—particularly "opportunity" neighborhoods with low concentrations of poor and minority families in and near the PHA's jurisdiction. For example, the Fairfax County Redevelopment and Housing Authority has produced a brochure for new program participants that highlights the employment opportunities, transportation services, housing, and community amenities that are available in five distinct areas of the county.

■ Conduct outreach to ensure a sufficient pool of landlords in "opportunity" neighborhoods. Make sure that these landlords know that the PHA will be available if there is a problem.

■ Set payment standards at levels that help families to afford housing in neighborhoods throughout the jurisdiction.

■ Approve higher rents for units in better neighborhoods.

■ Help families make connections with agencies and organizations that will provide short- and long-term assistance in unfamiliar neighborhoods. Be prepared to provide staff support to families making mobility moves.

■ Work continuously to educate all HCVP participants about housing, employment, and educational opportunities in non-traditional areas.

Implementing Mobility Initiatives

As more HCVP families are successful in moving to non-traditional neighborhoods, the potential for controversy grows. Strategies for preventing and resolving controversies related to mobility moves are similar to those dealing with concentration because the underlying fears and prejudices are the same.

Here are some strategies for implementing a successful mobility program:

Acknowledge the valid concerns of landlords, prospective movers, and neighborhood residents. Fear of the unknown is a common reaction. Encouraging families to consider new areas and attracting new landlords into the program are two very challenging tasks. Providing support and assurance to the community is another basic element of a success mobility strategy. While racial and ethnic prejudices should not and cannot be tolerated, the stress caused by contrasts in expectations and cultural norms can be acknowledged and addressed.

For example, community representatives at several study sites explained that people who—under other circumstances—would have tried to deal personally with a problem, such as the behavior of a neighbor's child, felt at a loss about how to do so when the neighbor spoke a different language or was of a different race. Miscommunications related to cultural norms were also identified. Acknowledging these tensions can make it possible to take constructive action. In Lynn, Massachusetts, for example, neighborhood fairs, diversity training, and tenant/landlord and tenant/tenant mediation services all work to enhance the success of the very diverse neighborhoods in that city.

Work toward long-term mobility solutions. It is important to recognize that mobility for most families is a long-term process. It doesn't happen overnight. Several housing authorities have observed that families relocating from public housing (and presumably other families as well) often achieve mobility in stages. By tracking the moves of families over time, PHAs have found that each move tends to take the families to progressively better neighborhoods, with lower concentrations of low-income families. This observation suggests that providing mobility information to participant families on an ongoing basis may be as important, if not more important, than providing the same information to families being admitted to HCVP for the first time.

The scarcity of affordable units in more affluent urban and suburban communities is one of the most obvious reasons for the concentration of HCVP families in areas with higher concentrations of poor families. Despite the best efforts of the PHA to set payment standards that will allow participant families access to all parts of their jurisdiction, some areas remain out of reach because of a shortage of rental housing or because the existing rental housing is simply too expensive. It makes sense, then, for PHAs that are serious about reducing concentrations of assisted families to work with other agencies and organizations around the expansion of affordable and assisted housing in these areas.

The most obvious means of increasing housing opportunities is the use of project-based voucher assistance to support the development of affordable units in areas with low concentrations of poor families. The commitment of project-based rents alone is not generally adequate to support new construction or substantial rehabilitation of units in these areas. Nevertheless, project-based vouchers in combination with funding from other sources (tax credit units, HOME units, and others) can provide a deep subsidy—based on the family's income—for the lowest-income families, allowing them to occupy newly built or rehabilitated below-market rental housing in significantly better neighborhoods. PHAs may also wish to consider the use of their bond-issuing capacity to generate revenue for the development of affordable housing in non-concentrated areas.

PHAs should also take advantage of every opportunity to work with other PHAs in surrounding areas to identify and inform program participants about housing opportunities across, and beyond, metropolitan areas. PHAs should also ensure that procedures are in place to make the transition from one jurisdiction to another as simple as possible.

Checklist 3: Promoting Quality Program Administration

Focusing on Prevention

✔ Screen tenants for past behavior.

✔ Criminal background checks provide multiple benefits.

✔ Encourage and train landlords to screen prospective tenants effectively.

Improving Program Compliance

✔ Consider developing a Tenant Integrity Program .

✔ Sharpen your rent reasonableness procedures and set payment standards that work.

✔ Enforce Housing Quality Standards.

Address Concerns about Concentrations of Assisted Housing

✔ Acknowledge and assess the validity of community concerns.

✔ Look for and address the problems that made concentration an issue.

✔ Make a commitment to providing mobility opportunities for HCVP participants.

Chapter Four
Engaging Productively with Your Community

While an awareness of community dynamics and careful program administration may have a major bearing on community acceptance of the HCVP, they may not be enough to ensure good community relations. This is true both for PHAs who are facing outright community opposition and for those who have identified a potential conflict and wish to head off problems before they escalate. In order to restore or simply to maintain the community's trust, *PHAs must also be prepared to increase both the quality and quantity of communication with program participants and stakeholders and to take on non-traditional, problem-solving roles in the community.*

The amount of time needed to deal with community concerns can be burdensome for PHA staff. However, avoiding dealing with conflicts does not appear to be an alternative. The Community Relations study found that:

- **Controversy around the HCVP rarely improves (and often deteriorates) when nothing is done.** PHAs adopting an "ignore it and it will go away" strategy will not succeed in the long run.

- **Denying the legitimacy of community concerns—with facts or otherwise—rarely makes them disappear.** The PHAs in the study found that the problems did not go away by telling community residents that it wasn't true or wasn't as bad as the residents thought. Instead, PHAs that were committed to resolving community conflict generally had to acknowledge local concerns and try to address them.

- **If a PHA does not "take ownership" of an issue, someone else will**. In most instances, concerns about the HCVP come first to housing authority officials. If they are unwilling or unable to respond, the community will take their concerns elsewhere—often to elected officials and, in some cases, to the courts. When this happens, the PHA may lose control of the issue—and ultimately its program.

Taking ownership means several things. First and foremost, taking ownership means holding on to the proverbial "hot potato" and seeking the best possible result for all parties, rather than an expedient ending to the conflict. It requires PHA staff to maintain a perspective that is community- rather than agency-based

and a proactive, rather than reactive, approach. This chapter offers a number of strategies for improving problem solving skills and illustrates the practices of PHAs that have taken ownership and successfully resolved community controversies.

4.1   From Talk to Effective Communication

PHAs who have successfully addressed community resistance to the HCVP have discovered the necessity of improving the nature and the quality of their communications with key community stakeholders as well as the general public. Although some of these agencies were forced into the spotlight, once there they have recognized the necessity and value of increased communications with the public.

An updated communications strategy for the HCVP in these new times requires that HCVP administrators:

■ *Accept that the workings of the HCVP are a legitimate area of community interest and concern.*

■ *Avoid assuming that the relationship between the HCVP and the community will always be adversarial.*

■ *Reject the notion that the privacy rights of program participants prevent the PHA from talking candidly and productively with the community about problems.*

In the long run, a PHA doesn't have to choose between protecting the interests of the HCVP and program participants and the well being of the community because the goals of each are quite similar—good quality housing, located in viable neighborhoods, occupied by good neighbors. PHAs that have taken community objections seriously have found room for improvement in their programs. When these weaknesses were addressed, not only was resistance to HCVP significantly reduced, but service to the program's clients and customers were enhanced as well.

Identify the Issues Behind the Issues

The first step to understanding why community engagement makes sense—despite the hard work it entails—is understanding that most HCVP community conflicts are

not simply about people being unwilling to tolerate newcomers to the neighborhood or those who resist the concept of housing subsidies. Rather, they reflect much deeper anxieties about control over resources and community values. Recognizing the "issues behind the issues" helps to put community concerns in perspective and to suggest the most effective strategies for resolving them.

Most community conflicts over the HCVP are, at heart, conflicts over the control of resources. Opposition to HCVP often arises in places that are perceived to be in decline. When the danger of loss seems immediate or there is a perception that a true shortage of resources exists, conflicts may become particularly intense and difficult to resolve. For example, in Fairfax County (VA), the perception that a relative decline in school test scores in certain districts was hurting property values made it seem to people in those districts that the county could not afford to provide housing assistance to additional low-income families. This view prevailed temporarily when the Board of Supervisors rejected the housing authority's request to apply for additional family HCVP units. But this denial spurred additional controversy, initiated by low-income housing advocates who objected to action by the county to limit the amount of HCVP assistance when there was a clear need for affordable housing.

Many HCVP conflicts are also about conflicting values. Values conflicts relate to ideas of fairness and equity—what "should" be. When a "live and let live" approach is possible, people or institutions with differing values can co-exist without conflict. However, if the value-holders or circumstances operate to force one set of views or values on others who do not hold them, conflict is the result. Conflicts that involve values may be particularly difficult to resolve, because the parties to the conflict often see the situation in terms of "right and wrong," "good and bad," or "should or should not."

A value held by some communities is that HCVP households should be distributed equally across the PHA's jurisdiction, with each part of the jurisdiction housing its "fair share." This idea flies directly in the face of the PHAs' strongly held value—that HCVP participants should be free to look for housing wherever they choose. This philosophical conflict can make HCVP controversy especially difficult to resolve, particularly in places where the PHA has a difficult time encouraging tenant mobility or where the PHA's view of "over-concentration" differs significantly from that of the community.

Accept the Need to Deal with Perceptions as well as Facts

At each of the study sites, claims such as "HCVP is responsible for the increase in crime" and "the influx of HCVP tenants is ruining our neighborhoods" were made on the basis of strongly held beliefs, but on sometimes limited hard data. In the absence of facts (and sometimes despite the availability of facts), perceptions take on the weight of reality during a conflict situation.

It might be expected that sharing accurate information could easily clear up these kinds of conflicts. Sometimes this is true. In Montgomery County (PA), at the start of the HCVP controversy there was a strong perception that HCVP-assisted households generated a significant number of police calls. When the true figure was found to be much lower, and roughly in line with the proportion of the population receiving HCVP assistance, crime was no longer an issue in the conflict.

At the same time, despite the old saying "seeing is believing," parties often "see what they believe" in spite of the facts presented. This is particularly true in cases where disagreement over "the facts" is a symptom of a deeper conflict over values. In Cook County (IL), for example, the PHA shared information with the community about the growing concentration of HCVP households in some

Strategies for Addressing False Perceptions

♦ Bring the facts to the table.
♦ Investigate the bigger issues underlying the perceptions.
♦ Think creatively about how underlying issues can be addressed.

localities, but attempted to ease their concerns by pointing out that most families were already living in the area when they received an HCVP voucher. The opponents of HCVP, however, were really concerned with limiting the concentration of HCVP households overall, and did not find the housing authority's explanation compelling.

Modifying perceptions can be a tedious, but necessary process. Two strategies appear to be effective in dealing with issues of perception. First, the PHA can provide the important service of bringing facts to the table. This means of course that a significant amount of "homework" may be necessary both to collect the needed information and to provide it in a meaningful way to all parties. A number of PHAs in the study acknowledged a resistance to sharing information—for fear of violating privacy rules or of further fueling the controversy. In the long run, sharing information is likely to be an essential ingredient to the resolution

process. The exhibit on the following page uses a fictitious example to illustrate a technique used by some PHAs to put the basic facts on the table.

A second strategy that is helpful (especially when fact-finding has reached its limit or has been reduced to a process of "dueling statistics"), is to engage in an investigation of *why* it is so important to the parties to hold on to their perceptions and determine whether the concern can be addressed from another angle.   The answer may be a simple one.   For example, a homeowners' association, concerned with diminishing property values, might suggest limiting the influx of HCVP families. However, there may be other solutions to the root problem that offer a better answer than attempting immediately to change perceptions.   For example, low interest loans may be available to assist homeowners to upgrade properties that are now undervalued in the market place.

An Example of How Factual Responses
Can Be Used to Change Perceptions

Perception	PHA Response
All people receiving housing assistance are on welfare!	Only 54 percent of our community's subsidized families receive public assistance. Over 40 percent of the families assisted by our HCVP have employment income and 20 percent are enrolled in job training or self-sufficiency programs.

Perception	PHA Response
The HCVP is bringing large numbers of outsiders to our community!	More than 80 percent of the families participating in the HCVP have lived in the community for at least three years.

Perception	PHA Response
HCVP families live free while the rest of us pay for our housing!	HCVP recipients pay at least 30 percent of their adjusted income for rent and utilities. On average, families in our program are currently paying 34 percent of adjusted income for housing costs.

4.2   Moving from Effective Communication to Collaboration and Problem Solving

Address Nuisance Concerns to Facilitate Consensus on the Big Picture

Most HCVP conflicts begin with complaints about HCVP landlords or tenants disturbing the peace or not keeping their homes up to neighborhood standards. These kinds of "nuisance" concerns are often prominent at the start of the conflict, galvanizing neighborhoods against HCVP. As the conflict escalates, however, nuisance issues tend to give way to more fundamental conflicts over values and resources. The first step to managing the conflict should include addressing the nuisance concerns. Even small improvements can enhance the credibility of the housing authority as a problem solver and, at a minimum, "buy time" for dealing with the larger issues.

Why the Big Picture is Important

Ultimately, in order to reach a long-term solution, PHAs must also work to obtain consensus with the community on "big picture" issues of resource allocation and community goals. Issues of concern to the community are rarely one-dimensional and the solutions to those problems seldom rest within the power of a single individual or agency. Most PHAs are well aware of the steps that must be taken to assure program compliance and take prompt action to resolve problems at that level. However, increasingly PHA staff are beginning to understand the difference between program compliance and true problem solving.

For example, a neighbor may complain that an HCVP unit is an eyesore. Upon investigation, some improvements need to be made by a landlord with limited resources who is reluctant to make additional investments in the property given the condition of other properties in the neighborhood. Other aspects of the problem are the result of poor housekeeping practices of the family or the behavior of family visitors, and still others the result of vandalism or littering caused by passersby. The short-range obligation of the housing authority is clear. If the unit fails HQS, either the tenant or the owner (or both) can be cited and the HAP contract terminated if the unit does not quickly come into compliance.

In another common situation, a family faces eviction from the unit and termination from the program because of drug abuse by a family member. Once again, the obligations of each party are clear. The family, if it wishes to maintain

HCVP, must remove the offending family member from the household. If this does not happen, the owner and the PHA are not only well within their rights, but obliged to take corrective action.

Assuring program compliance outside a larger problem-solving context can lead to a churning of problem families and landlords within the program and the community without any actual improvement being made. A landlord without sufficient resources or incentive to improve a property may sell the unit to another owner who becomes a non-compliant HCVP landlord or, at worst, may "walk away" from the building, creating a hazardous vacant unit in the neighborhood. Similarly, a drug abusing family member banished from one unit may become an unauthorized tenant in another unit.

In yet another situation, a community group complains about conditions at a particular HCVP address. Upon investigation, the PHA determines that the unit is not subsidized under their HCVP. Perhaps the occupants receive subsidy under another HCVP or a rental subsidy administered through the HOME program. The PHA reports back to the community group that the unit is not an HCVP unit. Compliance achieved? Yes. Problem solved? No! The community's opinion of or confidence in the housing authority enhanced? Probably not.

In the course of the HCVP Community Relations study, we identified a number of situations similar to those described here. In every case, the housing authority first responded by treating the initial complaint as a program compliance issue. In most cases, this response could not completely solve the community's concern. The more effective agencies recognized the need to reach out to other agencies in order to address the problems comprehensively. Some examples are noted below.

Harness local resources. In Lynn, Massachusetts, the housing authority became the recipient of numerous complaints about conditions of properties that were presumed to be occupied by HCVP households. At one point the executive director invited city council representatives to take an evening tour and to point out the ten most troublesome addresses in the city. As it turned out, none of the properties identified were HCVP units. Although this was a moment of education for the city council and relief for the housing authority, it was not the end of the discussion. The community continued to look to the housing authority for answers.

Part of the housing authority's response was to provide leadership for and participate in a citywide Neighborhood Intervention Program to focus community attention and resources on the most blighted buildings and problem neighborhoods. Under this

initiative, when a problem property is identified, a task force consisting of representatives of the city police, fire, inspections, codes and health departments as well as the housing authority descends on the property as a team to work with the property owner. The resulting intervention need not be punitive. Resources might be identified to assist a property owner to correct physical deficiencies or to improve property management. Community services could be offered to occupants with problems. Whenever possible, ongoing revitalization activities are coordinated with these interventions. For example, if the owner of a problem property receives funds to improve the property, similar funding may be offered to other property owners in the same block to reinforce the impact of the investments. However, if the party is unwilling to take corrective action, the full force of the city's enforcement powers can be brought to the problem.

Improve Relationships with the Police Department. The housing authority in Montgomery County (PA) was successful in developing a positive relationship with local police following complaints that HCVP residents were largely responsible for an increase in crime in the borough of Norristown. The housing authority first implemented a process for cross-referencing HCVP addresses with police department records to identify instances of criminal behavior or unauthorized occupants. This has sometimes led to terminations of assistance. In other cases, it has led to a warning.

The housing authority in Fairfax County implemented a similar process. In addition, during the course of the controversy around the Route 1 corridor, the police department converted to a community policing model that was viewed by many as helping to relieve tensions. Community policing brought bicycle patrols to the Route 1 Corridor and a designated police contact for each homeowners' association. Complaints about crime and HCVP tenant behaviors diminished considerably.

In Syracuse, the HCVP conflict dragged on for several years as neighbors tried unsuccessfully to have HCVP residents removed for disruptive, sometimes criminal behavior. Countless police incidents and several arrests over a three year period ultimately led the police to declare one duplex a nuisance property and subject to confiscation by the City. This step effectively ended the controversy and potentially could have done so sooner had the residents and housing authority been able to engage the police in problem-solving early on.

Partnerships that Focus on and Garner Resources for Community Problems.

No single agency or organization alone can address the myriad problems that exist in urban communities today. But, it is clear that progress can be made on seemingly intractable issues when priorities are established and resources are focused. Collaborative efforts are the key to making progress on those issues that so directly affect a community's acceptance of HCVP, yet remain so much larger than can be dealt with by the resources a housing agency can provide on its own.

An example of this kind of collaboration is illustrated by the City of Lynn's *Reclaim Our City* (ROC) initiative. This initiative began with a grant that focused specifically on substance abuse prevention. The three-part strategy for this grant (neighborhood organizing, coordination of agencies to enhance service delivery, and public education) set in motion a partnership that brought government and community agencies to a new level of cooperation.

The grant generated resources for a wide variety of new activities that reached into virtually every neighborhood. Services included a variety of programs for youth such as: recreation, tutoring, and multicultural awareness programs; neighborhood anti-crime initiatives to support community policing activities; community development projects such as neighborhood clean-ups, safety programs, and tenant-landlord relations training; and outreach activities that included citizenship classes and diversity training. More important than any of these individual initiatives or events, ROC provided a model for collaboration that soon became a way of doing business in Lynn. Organizations became more knowledgeable about each other's programs and ultimately more adept at combining resources to solve community problems. Lynn Housing Authority has been instrumental in assisting other city departments and organizations to obtain funding.

4.3   A Changing Role for Changing Times

The successful practices identified in this Guidebook suggest a new role for HCVP administrators, one that is unquestionably challenging and filled with both uncertainty and opportunity. The overall lesson from the HCVP Community Relations study is that although there is no "magic bullet" strategy that will quickly resolve citizen concerns, there is much that PHAs can do. As this Guidebook has suggested, improving the image and acceptance of HCVP in your community requires a long term effort that involves developing a greater understanding of local housing markets, reassessing current administrative

practices, and collaborating with other stakeholders to resolve community-wide problems. Most importantly, the leadership and creativity already displayed by many PHAs demonstrate that success is possible.

Checklist 4: Engaging Productively with Your Community

Communicating Effectively

✔ **Identify the Issues behind the Issues.** Do you understand the underlying community concerns that may have prompted opposition to the HCVP?

✔ **Deal with Perceptions as well as Facts.** Have you done your homework and brought all of the facts to the table? If presenting the facts isn't enough, are you prepared to suggest solutions to address community concerns?

Collaborating and Problem Solving

✔ **Address Nuisance Concerns.** Are you prepared to make program improvements to address nuisance concerns? Even small improvements can enhance your credibility as a problem solver in the community.

✔ **Improve Relationships with Local Police.** What is your relationship with the local police department? Do you currently share information about problem HCVP tenants? How can you increase coordination with local police in order to improve HCVP administration and improve community relations?

✔ **Develop Partnerships and Garner Resources.** Are you working with other organizations to address community-wide problems? What resources can your agency bring to the table?

Appendix A
Study Site Summaries

Presented below is a brief description of each of the eight communities studied and the conflict that they experienced over the HCVP. Information on the research methodology used to study these communities, as well as on the communities themselves, is presented in the 2001 Final Report of the original HUD study, entitled *Strategies That Enhance Community Relations in Tenant-Based Section 8 Programs*, copies of which are available from HUD USER (see www.huduser.org).

Baltimore, Maryland

Patterson Park is an historic neighborhood in southeast Baltimore. Over the past thirty years, the profile of Patterson Park residents has experienced dramatic shifts in race, age, income, and homeownership. Once a thriving immigrant community, Patterson Park lost population through the 1970s and 1980s as elderly residents died and the younger generation opted to leave the neighborhood. In the late 1980s, absentee landlords and investment companies moved aggressively into Patterson Park's rental market to provide cheap rentals to a new generation of low-income residents, many of them HCVP participants. In the 1990s, vacancy rates, drug trafficking, and crime worsened, and community leaders attributed these problems, in part, to the HCVP.

- HABC administers approx. 11,000 HCVP vouchers in Baltimore City.
- The controversy centered on the Patterson Park neighborhood, pop. 32,000.
- Major issues in the conflict were poor upkeep of rental units, unresponsive landlords, and disruptive tenant behavior.

Patterson Park's neighborhood associations began to raise complaints about negative tenant behavior, unresponsive landlords, and poor HCVP administration in the early 1990s. Neighborhood leaders met with the Housing Authority of Baltimore City (HABC) to discuss their concerns, and ultimately engaged a citywide effort to address the problems they attributed to the HCVP. HUD was alerted to the situation and conducted a review of HABC's administration of the HCVP in 1996. While some changes resulted from this review, community groups remain concerned about an over-concentration of HCVP residents in Patterson Park.

Camden County, New Jersey

Camden County is a largely urban county in southern New Jersey. The focus of the HCVP conflict was a suburban community of housing developments first developed in the 1970s. The community is similar to the rest of the suburban county in terms of wealth and income growth, but is racially more diverse.

- New Jersey DCA administers approx. 18,000 HCVP vouchers statewide.
- The controversy centered on the Avandale community, pop. 19,000.
- Major issues in the conflict were the poor curb appeal of rental properties believed to be HCVP, as well as disruptive tenant behavior.

The HCVP controversy arose in 1999 in an older development made up of a mix of single-family homes and rented duplexes. Many of the duplexes were owned by absentee landlords and were in worse shape than the single-family homes. The homeowners' association complained about the condition of the duplexes and their impact on property values. They believed that the landlords and tenants participating in the program were those responsible for the problem properties. At the time of the conflict, 17 families in the development were receiving HCVP assistance through the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs Division of Housing and Community Resources (DCA), the agency that administers the HCVP statewide.

South Suburban Cook County, Illinois

Forty municipalities make up the southern suburbs of Chicago, also known as south suburban Cook County. These municipalities vary greatly in income, educational attainment, homeownership, and racial composition. Racial transformations evident in many localities between 1970 and 1990 reflect the ongoing movement of white middle-class families out of the areas closest to Chicago. South suburban Cook County reflects a nationwide pattern of increased diversity and expanding poverty in suburban areas.

- HACC administers approx. 10,000 HCVP vouchers in suburban Cook County.
- The controversy centered on the south suburban localities, pop. 32,000.
- Major issues in the conflict were the concentration of HCVP recipients in the south suburban area and its effect on the racial and income mix of individual communities.

Local leaders began raising concerns about the proportion of HCVP participants living in the south suburban Cook County municipalities in the late 1970s, when the tenant-based subsidy program was quite new. They alleged that the

concentrations of HCVP families brought with them increasing needs and demands for public services and would contribute to accelerated racial change and re-segregation of the area. In the early 1990s, the south suburban localities threatened litigation against HUD and the Housing Authority of Cook County (HACC) for raising discriminatory barriers to HCVP in the remainder of the County. They commissioned a study that furthered their cause by confirming a pattern of high concentration living in the south suburbs relative to the proportion of affordable rental units located there. In the late 1990s, the controversy resurfaced over a Chicago relocation plan that had the potential to increase HCVP concentrations in south suburban localities. The south suburban communities sought a HUD moratorium on HCVP lease-ups in south suburban Cook County.

Fairfax County, Virginia

Fairfax County is Virginia's most populous and wealthiest county and is located close to Washington DC. The county as a whole has experienced growth in the 1990s, but an area in the southeast section of the county, known as the Route 1 Corridor, has not fared as well. The Route 1 Corridor has experienced slower growth than the rest of the county and has higher rates of poverty. In addition, two census tracts within the Route 1 corridor have particularly high concentrations of subsidized housing.

In the early 1990s, vacancies and lower rents in the Route 1 corridor attracted low-income and immigrant families to the area. Some residents believed that this new population, presumed to be living in Fairfax County because of HCVP assistance, was creating a burden on the local school system by increasing the number of children with special needs. The HCVP (and the perceived concentration of HCVP in the Route 1 corridor) became the focus of the community's concerns about school scores and property values. At the height of the controversy, the Board of Supervisors rejected a request by the Fairfax County Redevelopment and Housing Authority (FCRHA) to apply for 50 additional units of HCVP assistance.

- FCRHA administers approx. 2,500 HCVP vouchers in Fairfax County.
- The controversy in Fairfax County focused on the "Route 1 Corridor" area, pop. 70,000.
- Major issues in the conflict were declining property values and school scores and a perceived concentration of HCVP families in the Route 1 Corridor.

Lynn, Massachusetts

A small New England city located 15 miles north of Boston, Lynn was once a thriving center for shoe manufacturing and a popular landing ground for waves of immigrants seeking affordable housing. Between 1970 and 1980, the population declined and the percentage of persons living below the poverty line increased.

- LHA administers approx. 2,000 HCVP vouchers in Lynn City.
- The controversy centered on the urban core of Lynn City, pop. 80,000.
- Major issues in the conflict were rising rents, declining property values, and disruptive tenant behavior.

There has been some improvement since 1980, but still today more than half of Lynn's households is eligible for assisted housing and over one third of its rental housing is subsidized through a federal or state programs.

In the mid-1980s, the lack of affordable rental housing in the surrounding areas brought new families to Lynn's HCVP. Residents complained that the growth in HCVP had led to an increase in private-market rents, and that the concentration of subsidized units made the city vulnerable to a downward spiral in which more and more low-income families would be attracted there. During the same period that increased numbers of "outsiders" came in search of affordable housing, Lynn experienced increases in crime, drug trafficking, and general neighborhood nuisances. Many blamed the HCVP and the Lynn Housing Authority (LHA) for these problems.

Montgomery County, Pennsylvania

Montgomery County is a prosperous county northwest of Philadelphia. The borough of Norristown, the focus of the HCVP controversy, is the county seat

- MCHA administers approx. 1,700 HCVP vouchers in Montgomery County.
- The controversy centered on the borough of Norristown, pop. 30,000.
- Major issues in the conflict were rising special education costs, declining property values, poor curb appeal of rental units, and HCVP tenant and landlord behavior.

and home to most of the county's social service agencies. Norristown is significantly poorer and more racially diverse than other parts of the county. The current demographics represent a significant shift from years past when Norristown, once a prosperous transportation crossroads, was primarily a small middle-class city.

The conflict over the HCVP began in 1998 when the school superintendent attributed the district's high special education costs to the HCVP. This report and the press coverage that

it received fueled complaints from homeowners' associations to the Montgomery County Housing Authority (MCHA) about the concentration of HCVP recipients in Norristown and the perceived effect that this was having on property values, the rental market, crime, and overall quality of life.

San Antonio, Texas

HCVP controversies took place in the 1990s in two San Antonio neighborhoods. The first neighborhood, "The Creek," developed in the 1970s to support a local Air Force base, fell on hard times in the mid-1980s due to a flat housing market. In the midst of this slump, vacant homes began to be purchased by investors and leased through the HCVP. However, a large number of vacant homes that remained and the neighborhood suffered significant drug and gang problems. The second neighborhood, Montgomery, also went through a number of changes in the 1980s and 1990s that resulted in its transformation from a middle-class community of homeowners to a lower-income community with high numbers of rental properties.

The HCVP controversy in The Creek received widespread press coverage and centered on neighborhood crime— attributed largely to HCVP recipients— and community frustration with the lack of response from local agencies, including the San Antonio Housing Authority (SAHA). In Montgomery, complaints about property conditions and crime led to

> - SAHA administers approx. 12,000 HCVP vouchers in San Antonio and Bexar County.
> - The controversy centered on two neighborhoods, with a combined population of 33,000.
> - Major issues in the conflict were neighborhood crime and disruptive behavior associated with HCVP recipients.

a high-profile police intervention in 1993 and large-scale community policing effort. Residents saw improvements, but continued to press SAHA to enforce tenant and landlord compliance with HCVP regulations.

Syracuse, New York

The HCVP controversy in Syracuse, New York, took place in a residential neighborhood located near Syracuse University, the city's largest employer. Between 1985 and 1998, when the University downsized, the student population in the neighborhood decreased

> - SHA administers approx. 3,000 HCVP vouchers in the City of Syracuse.
> - The controversy centered on a particular landlord who rented three units through the HCVP on a particular street.
> - Major issues in the conflict were tenant behavior and landlord lease enforcement.

and a number of new families moved into the area with HCVP assistance. During this period, local property values declined and the demographic makeup of the neighborhood changed.

The HCVP controversy began in 1996 and centered on one landlord who owned three HCVP-assisted units on a particular block. Residents on the block complained about the behavior of the HCVP tenants and the failure of that landlord to take action against them. When the Syracuse Housing Authority attempted to suspend the landlord, a protracted lawsuit ensued that included charges of Fair Housing violations on the part of SHA. The problem tenants were eventually evicted in 1999, but in 2000 one of the lawsuits remained on appeal.

Appendix B
Developing a Community Profile

As discussed in Chapter 2, there are three steps to building an effective community profile:

Step 1:   Develop a set of core issues to track over time and sources for the data.

Step 2:   Decide what information is needed for specific sub-areas within the jurisdiction, for regional areas larger than the jurisdiction, and for specific time periods.

Step 3:   Decide which formats (maps, charts, graphs) most effectively display and communicate the information you want to track.

This appendix describes each of these steps in detail and provides an introduction to two key tools available to PHAs seeking a better understanding of the social and economic dynamics of their communities: HUD's Community 2020 mapping software and the Multifamily Tenant Characteristics System (MTCS).

Step 1:   Develop a Set of Core Issues and Sources for Data

The issues that a community will want to track over time will differ depending upon local circumstances. However, most communities share a set of core issues that are useful to track. These include:

■ Basic demographic data: population size, income and income source data; employment and poverty rates; race and ethnicity data;

■ Housing market data: ownership and renter rates, vacancy rates, and the amount and type of subsidized housing; and

■ Crime statistics.

Exhibit 1 presents a sample community profile generated using these core data.

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Depending upon local circumstances, you may choose to add to the core profile by expanding the detail on specific items of concern or gathering additional information about other issues such as:

■ Indicators of school success including test scores, truancy rates, dropout rates; and

■ Social indicators such as information about special needs populations.

Fortunately, once the baseline data are collected, much of the information remains stable for long periods—for example, Census data is collected every ten years. Other data may need to be updated quarterly, while most PHAs look at program-level data on a monthly basis.

Before developing a community profile, look for existing data sources. Much of the information that you are likely to want may already be assembled in the jurisdiction's consolidated plan, market studies, or other reports. The next section of this Guidebook discusses the two key data sources and analysis tools noted earlier: HUD's Community 2020 mapping software and the Multifamily Tenant Characteristics System (MTCS).

Step 2:   Decide What Information Is Needed

The next step to creating a community profile is deciding what information you need for specific sub-areas within the jurisdiction and for areas larger than the jurisdiction. At this time, you may also decide to track selected data over time.

Exhibits 2a and 2b break down the demographic profile by year and by geographic area.

Exhibit 2a Excerpt from Community Profile Showing Time Analyses				
DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE	**1980**	**1990**	**1997**	**2002**
Population				
Number of Households				
Median Income				
% Below Poverty Line				
% Employed				
% Receiving Public Assistance				
% Female-headed Household				
% Elderly				

Profiles over time enable the PHA to identify trends that may suggest the need for program or strategy adjustments.

1990 Census data, 1997 updates, and projections for 2002 and 2007 are in HUD's Community 2020 software. If you wish to include 1980 data, a trip to the library may be needed.

| Exhibit 2b Excerpt from Community Profile Showing Geographic Area Analyses				
DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE	**Central City**	**East Side**	**West Side**	**South Side**
Population				
Number of Households				
Median Income				
% Below Poverty Line				
% Employed				
% Receiving Public Assistance				
% Female-headed Household				
% Elderly				

Geographic breakdowns may be shown by census tract, neighborhood (by combining census tracts), or political jurisdictions.

Note: Neighborhoods do not always follow census tract boundaries, so you may have to approximate.

Step 3:   Decide Which Formats (Maps, Charts, Graphs) Most Effectively Display and Communicate the Information

We live in a time when more information than we can easily use is readily available. The challenge comes in selecting the appropriate information and in presenting it in a way that works for the intended audience. You may decide to display information one way for in-house purposes and the same information in a somewhat different format for public consumption. Consider the following ways of graphically showing the demographic information used in the table on page 20. Poverty rates over time in Fairfax County (VA) and the Route 1 corridor are presented as a bar chart below. These data may also be shown on a map to illustrate the spatial dimensions of changes, as in the map of rental rates in Patterson Park.

Percent of Population Below Poverty Line, Fairfax County and Route 1 Corridor, 1970-1990
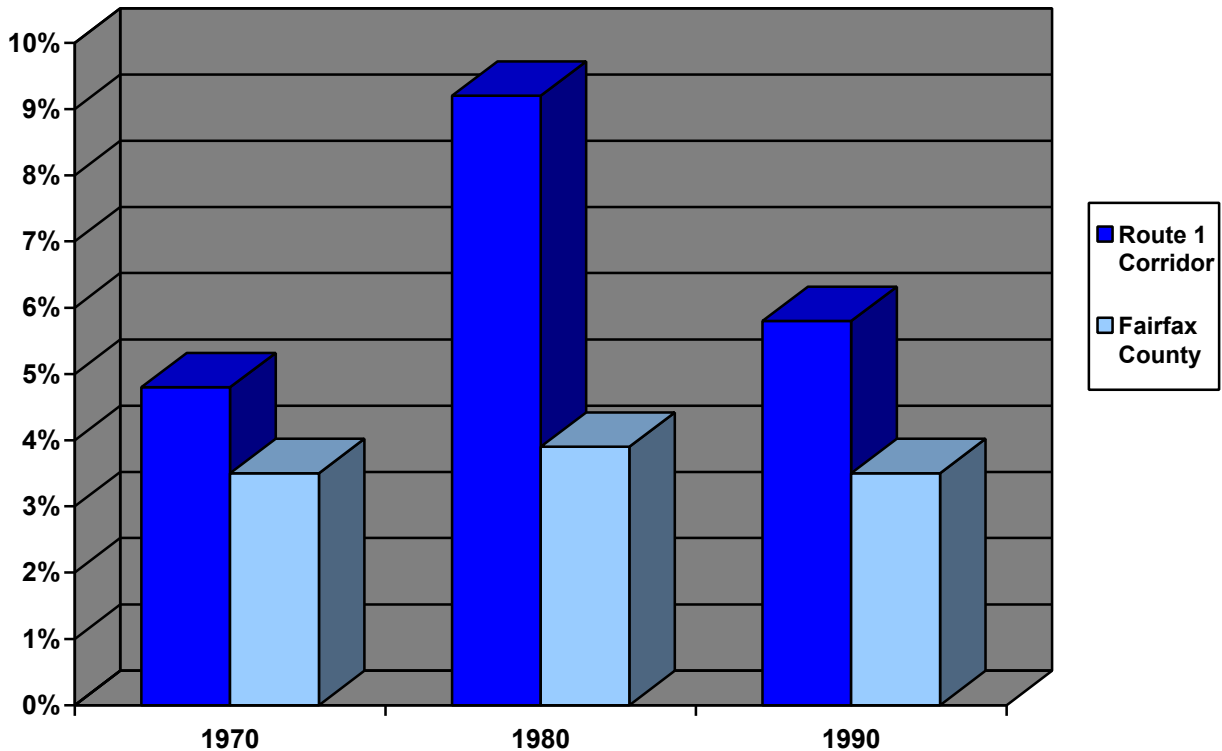
The following section highlights the capabilities of HUD's Community 2020 mapping software and the reporting tools available in the Multifamily Tenant Characteristics System (MTCS). These two resources offer a wealth of information about population characteristics and housing programs in your community. Although learning to work with any new system presents some challenges, the investment in developing staff expertise with these resources is well worth the effort.

Community 2020—Mapping and Data Made Easy

What is Community 2020?

Community 2020 mapping software can help PHAs to develop community profiles and to present demographic and HUD program information in a clear and easy-to-follow format. Using Community 2020 you can:

- Examine maps that show the distribution of the population in your community by race, gender, income, and more.

- See the distribution of housing locations and conditions in your neighborhood, town, city, or region.

- Map HUD program activities, and access and browse detailed program descriptions.

- Map the locations of households assisted by HUD's major rental assistance programs: public housing, the housing choice voucher program, and the HCVP project-based program.

- Understand the relationship between HUD-supported programs and the physical and demographic characteristics of your neighborhood.

Community 2020 can be used to produce a variety of maps to address specific issues or to answer questions about your community. For example, in some communities there have been misperceptions about the number of HCVP units in certain neighborhoods. Using Community 2020 software, you can map the actual location and concentration of HCVP units.

What Information is Available in Community 2020?

Community 2020 contains over 600 data elements derived from the U.S. Census. This includes 1990 Census data, 1997 estimates, and demographic projections for 2002 and 2007. Users of the software have the ability to refresh data on a regular basis through the Community 2020 home page on the HUD web site (www.hud.gov/cio/c2020). Exhibit 3 below summarizes the Census information that is available from Community 2020.

Exhibit 3 **U.S. Census Data Available in Community 2020**	
About Households	**About Housing Stock**
♦ Population (totals, density) ♦ Household Size/Composition ♦ Age ♦ Marital Status ♦ Race/Ethnicity ♦ Education ♦ Employment Status ♦ Occupation/Industry ♦ Income Ranges ♦ Disability Status ♦ Sources of Income ♦ Receive Welfare/TANF	♦ Units Occupied by Owners, Renters ♦ Units Vacant, Occupied ♦ Type of Housing (e.g., SF, MF) ♦ Utilities (phone, water source, sewage, plumbing, heating fuel) ♦ Rent/Mortgage (median, percent of household income) ♦ Housing Unit Density

Community 2020 also contains extensive HUD program data for funding years back to 1992 (although some program data does not go back that far). The software gives you several ways to define a search area and ask for information about HUD program activities in that area. You can view information about those activities and see the locations of activities on a map. You can choose to query a single year, a range of years, or all years. The program information available in Community 2020 from various HUD databases is described in Exhibit 4.

Exhibit 4	
HUD Program Data Available in Community 2020	
PHA Programs	**Community Planning and Development Programs**
♦ Household-level data for HCVP Certificates, Vouchers, Moderate Rehabilitation, and Public Housing	♦ Project activities, locations, and funding levels for:
♦ Information on public housing development characteristics and funding	▪ CDBG, HOME, HOPWA, and ESG programs
♦ HOPE VI grantees and funding	▪ States/Small Cities Program
	▪ Section 108/Economic Development Initiative (EDI)
Office of Housing	▪ Empowerment Zones/Enterprise Communities (EZ/EC) activities
♦ Household-level data for Multifamily Housing Programs	▪ SNAPS (homeless programs)
♦ Information on development characteristics and funding	▪ Youthbuild
	▪ Home Ownership Zones
Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity	
♦ Fair Housing Initiative Program (FHIP) grant information	
♦ Fair Housing Assistance Program (FHAP) grant information	

Community 2020 is available in four regional editions—Eastern, Southern, Central, or Western. Each regional edition has a separate CD-ROM disc, and contains everything you need to work with HUD and Census data in that region. In addition, a deluxe edition of Community 2020 contains all four regional CD-ROM discs.

Can I Use My Own Data in Community 2020?

Yes, but doing so requires more expertise from the user than accessing the standard reports and maps. Community 2020 can open most tables stored in data files created with a spreadsheet or database manager.

How Do I Obtain Community 2020?

The Community 2020 software is available to PHAs from HUD Headquarters. The basic software package for one region costs about $250. Further details and ordering information can be found on the Community 2020 web site at www.hud.gov/cio/c2020. In addition, HUD's Office of Policy, Development, and Research plans to release a new, upgraded version of Community 2020 in Spring 2001. While the new version may have slightly different commands, the principles behind it will remain the same.

How Do I Get Started?

You don't need to be an expert in computer mapping to begin using Community 2020. First, it is easy to install. All you have to do is answer a few questions about where program and data files should be installed, and where the "default markers" are located. These default markers define locations you will use regularly as you create your maps (e.g., local neighborhood, towns, cities, counties). Once you have installed the program, you are ready to begin exploring the capabilities of Community 2020.

This guidebook only highlights the potential of Community 2020. For more information on its capabilities and more detailed mapping instructions see the Community 2020 HUD Community Planning User's Guide or visit the Community 2020 web site at www.hud.gov/cio/c2020.

MTCS—More than a Report to HUD

What is MTCS?

Many housing agencies tend to think of MTCS only in terms of its burden on the PHA—a monthly reporting requirement that primarily serves HUD needs. Although this was true of the system initially, in recent years the system has become much more. MTCS now provides valuable information to PHAs as well as to HUD and can be a valuable tool in developing a community profile and in describing PHA programs to the public.

The MTCS system collects, stores, and generates reports on families who participate in public housing or HCVP rental subsidy programs. This information is collected from public housing agencies nationwide through Form HUD-50058 and is used for HCVP and public housing program management. The information gathered through MTCS is also used to generate a range of

reports that PHAs can access to learn more about the characteristics of the housing programs that they administer. These reports, available through the MTCS web site (www.hud.gov/pih/systems/mtcs/pihmtcs.html) fall into three categories: summary reports, historical reports, and ad hoc reports.

The summary reports, which are the easiest to access, can be created for individual programs or for all programs combined, and can be aggregated up from the PHA-level to a statewide or national level. The exhibit on the following page provides an overview of the key reports that the MTCS generates and makes accessible to PHAs. One of these reports, the Resident Characteristics Report, is also available to the general public.

Information Sharing and Problem Solving Using MTCS

MTCS can be an important fact finding tool that helps to clarify issues and suggest avenues for problem solving. For example, if community concerns center around the perception of overcrowding in HCVP units, the ***Resident Characteristics Report*** can quickly provide a factual basis for discussion. The report provides information about household size and bedroom size for the units being rented that can determine whether the existing rental stock is meeting the needs of program participants. Similarly, PHAs can use the ***Rent and Rent Burden Report*** to address the common claims that HCVP subsidy inflates rents in the housing market or that rent reasonableness determinations are not being done correctly.

Each of the standard reports identified above support problem solving and the development of a community profile. The ***Resident Characteristic Report*** is the only MTCS report that is available to the general public through HUD's web site. For this reason, if for no other, PHA staff should familiarize themselves with this report and be able to answer questions about the information that it provides.

An Overview of Key MTCS Reports

Standard Reports

■ **Resident Characteristics Report:** provides basic demographic information about participating households including income amounts and sources; race and ethnicity; family size and characteristics; total tenant payment amounts; and length of time on the program.

■ **New Admissions:** provides the same demographic data for those families who have moved in within the last 12 months.

■ **Families Ending Participation**: provides the same demographic information for families who have stopped receiving assistance in the last 12 months.

■ **Rent and Rent Burden:** summarizes information about unit rents in relation to Fair Market Rents and each family's rent in relation to their income.

■ **Budget Related Averages:** provides averages by unit size for gross rents, total tenant payment, and assistance payments.

■ **HCVP Deconcentration Analysis:** shows the number of current and new families moving into each area and the distribution of these families by poverty rate.

Historical Reports

MTCS now includes the ability to view five standard reports on a quarterly basis from September 1998 to the present. This capability permits PHAs to track tenant characteristics and other program indicators over time. The reports for which historical data are available include:

◆　**Resident Characteristics**

◆　**Key Management Indicators**

◆　**New Admissions**

◆　**Budget Related Averages**

◆　**Rent and Rent Burden**

Ad Hoc Reports

PHAs can download any of the data that have been entered into MTCS and create special ad hoc reports, but this requires more expertise from the user than accessing the standard reports. Ultimately, most PHAs will want to develop the expertise to download and manipulate MTCS data. However, the standard reports alone can provide a great deal of useful information about tenant and program characteristics.