

Chapter 1

OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAM AND PLAN

INTRODUCTION

The HACB receives its operating subsidy for the public housing program from the Department of Housing and Urban Development. The HACB is not a federal department or agency. A public housing agency (HACB) is a governmental or public body, created and authorized by state law to develop and operate housing and housing programs for low-income families. The HACB enters into an Annual Contributions Contract with HUD to administer the public housing program. The HACB must ensure compliance with federal laws, regulations and notices and must establish policies and procedures to clarify federal requirements and to ensure consistency in program operation.

This chapter contains information about the HACB and its programs with emHACBsis on the public housing program. It also contains information about the purpose, intent and use of the plan and guide.

There are three parts to this chapter:

Part I: The Public Housing Agency (HACB). This part includes a description of the HACB, its jurisdiction, its programs, and its mission and intent.

Part II: The Public Housing Program. This part contains information about public housing operation, roles and responsibilities, and partnerships.

Part III: The Admissions and Continued Occupancy (ACOP). This part discusses the purpose and organization of the plan and its revision requirements.

PART I: THE HACB

1-I.A. OVERVIEW

This part describes the HACB's creation and authorization, the general structure of the organization, and the relationship between the HACB Board and staff.

1-I.B. ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE OF THE HACB

Public housing is funded by the federal government and administered by the **Housing Authority City of Bridgeport** for the jurisdiction of **City of Bridgeport / County of Fairfield**.

HACBs are governed by a board of officials that are generally called “commissioners.” Although some HACBs may use a different title for their officials, this document will hitherto refer to the “board of commissioners” or the “board” when discussing the board of governing officials.

Commissioners are appointed in accordance with state housing law and generally serve in the same capacity as the directors of a corporation. The board of commissioners establishes policies under which the HACB conducts business, and ensures that those policies are followed by HACB staff. The board is responsible for preserving and expanding the agency’s resources and assuring the agency’s continued viability and success.

Formal actions of the HACB are taken through written resolutions, adopted by the board and entered into the official records of the HACB.

The principal staff member of the HACB is the executive director (ED), who is selected and hired by the board. The ED oversees the day to day operations of the HACB and is directly responsible for carrying out the policies established by the commissioners. The ED’s duties include hiring, training, and supervising the HACB’s staff, as well as budgeting and financial planning for the agency. Additionally, the ED is charged with ensuring compliance with federal and state laws, and program mandates. In some HACBs, the ED is known by another title, such as chief executive officer or president.

1-I.C. HACB MISSION

The purpose of a mission statement is to communicate the purpose of the agency to people inside and outside of the agency. It provides the basis for strategy development, identification of critical success factors, resource allocation decisions, as well as ensuring client and stakeholder satisfaction.

HACB Policy

The HACB's mission is to provide safe, decent and sanitary housing conditions for very low-income families and to manage resources efficiently. The HACB is to promote personal, economic and social upward mobility to provide families the opportunity to make the transition from subsidized to non-subsidized housing.

1-I.D. THE HACB'S COMMITMENT TO ETHICS AND SERVICE

As a public service agency, the HACB is committed to providing excellent service to all public housing applicants, residents, and the public. In order to provide superior service, the HACB resolves to:

- Administer applicable federal and state laws and regulations to achieve high ratings in compliance measurement indicators while maintaining efficiency in program operation to ensure fair and consistent treatment of clients served.
- Provide decent, safe, and sanitary housing in good repair – in compliance with program uniform physical condition standards – for very low- and low-income families.
- Achieve a healthy mix of incomes in its public housing developments by attracting and retaining higher income families and by working toward deconcentration of poverty goals.
- Encourage self-sufficiency of participant families and assist in the expansion of family opportunities which address educational, socio-economic, recreational and other human services needs.
- Promote fair housing and the opportunity for very low- and low-income families of all races, ethnicities, national origins, religions, ethnic backgrounds, and with all types of disabilities, to participate in the public housing program and its services.
- Create positive public awareness and expand the level of family and community support in accomplishing the HACB's mission.
- Attain and maintain a high level of standards and professionalism in day-to-day management of all program components.
- Administer an efficient, high-performing agency through continuous improvement of the HACB's support systems and commitment to our employees and their development.

The HACB will make every effort to keep residents informed of program rules and regulations, and to advise participants of how the program rules affect them.

PART II: THE PUBLIC HOUSING PROGRAM

1-II.A. OVERVIEW AND HISTORY OF THE PROGRAM

The intent of this section is to provide the public and staff an overview of the history and operation of public housing.

The United States Housing Act of 1937 (the “Act”) is responsible for the birth of federal housing program initiatives, known as public housing. The Act was intended to provide financial assistance to states and cities for public works projects, slum clearance and the development of affordable housing for low-income residents. There have been many changes to the program since its inception in 1937.

The Housing Act of 1965 established the availability of federal assistance, administered through local public agencies, to provide rehabilitation grants for home repairs and rehabilitation. This act also created the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

The Housing Act of 1969 created an operating subsidy for the public housing program for the first time. Until that time, public housing was a self-sustaining program.

In 1998, the Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act (QHWRA) – also known as the Public Housing Reform Act or Housing Act of 1998 – was signed into law. Its purpose was to provide more private sector management guidelines to the public housing program and provide residents with greater choices. It also allowed HACBs more remedies to replace or revitalize severely distressed public housing developments. Highlights of the Reform Act include: the establishment of flat rents; the requirement for HACBs to develop five-year and annual plans; income targeting, a requirement that 40% of all new admissions in public housing during any given fiscal year be reserved for extremely low-income families; and resident self-sufficiency incentives.

1-II.B. PUBLIC HOUSING PROGRAM BASICS

HUD writes and publishes regulations in order to implement public housing laws enacted by Congress. HUD contracts with the HACB to administer programs in accordance with HUD regulations and provides an operating subsidy to the HACB. The HACB must create written policies that are consistent with HUD regulations. Among these policies is the HACB's Admissions and Continued Occupancy Policy (ACOP). The ACOP must be approved by the board of commissioners of the HACB.

The job of the HACB pursuant to HUD regulations is to provide decent, safe, and sanitary housing, in good repair, to low-income families at an affordable rent. The HACB screens applicants for public housing and, if they are determined to be eligible for the program, the HACB makes an offer of a housing unit. If the applicant accepts the offer, the HACB and the applicant will enter into a written lease agreement. At this point, the applicant becomes a tenant in the public housing program.

In the context of the public housing program, a tenant is defined as the adult person(s) (other than a live-in aide who (1) executed the lease with the HACB as lessee of the dwelling unit, or, if no such person now resides in the unit, (2) who resides in the unit, and who is the remaining head of household of the tenant family residing in the dwelling unit. [24 CFR 966.53]. The Public Housing Occupancy Guidebook refers to tenants as "residents." The terms "tenant" and "resident" are used interchangeably in this policy. Additionally, this policy uses the term "family" or "families" for residents or applicants, depending on context.

Since the HACB owns the public housing development, the HACB is the landlord. The HACB must comply with all of the legal and management responsibilities of a landlord in addition to administering the program in accordance with HUD regulations and HACB policy.

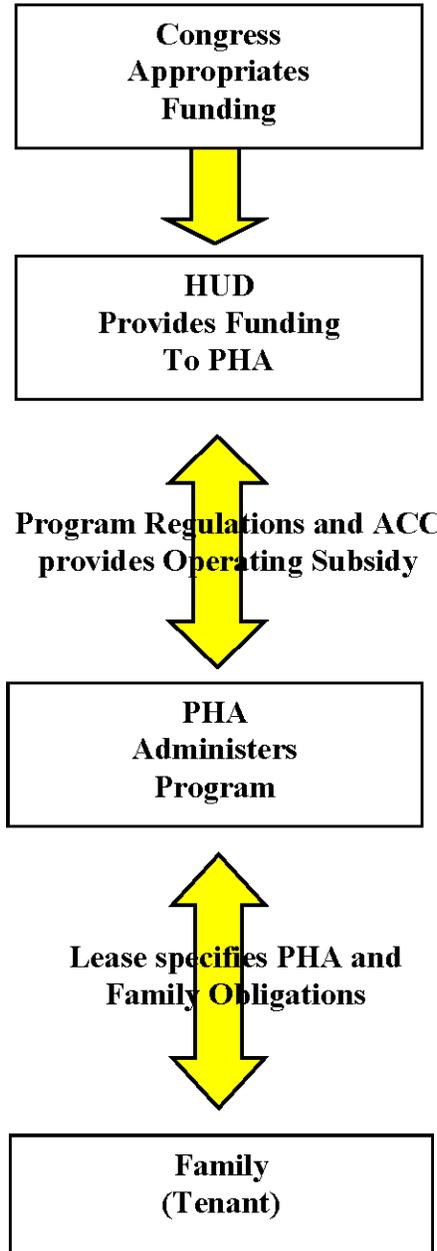
1-II.C. PUBLIC HOUSING PARTNERSHIPS

To administer the public housing program, the HACB must enter into an Annual Contributions Contract (ACC) with HUD. The HACB also enters into a contractual relationship with the tenant through the public housing lease. These contracts define and describe the roles and responsibilities of each party.

In addition to the ACC, the HACB and family must also comply with federal regulations and other HUD publications and directives. For the program to work and be successful, all parties involved – HUD, the HACB, and the tenant – play an important role.

The chart on the following page illustrates key aspects of these relationships.

The Public Housing Relationships



What does HUD do?

Federal law is the source of HUD responsibilities. HUD has the following major responsibilities:

- Develop regulations, requirements, handbooks, notices and other guidance to implement housing legislation passed by Congress
- Allocate operating subsidies to HACBs
- Allocate capital funding to HACBs
- Provide technical assistance to HACBs on interpreting and applying program requirements
- Monitor HACB compliance with program requirements and HACB performance in program administration.

What does the HACB do?

The HACB's responsibilities originate in federal regulations and the ACC. The HACB owns and manages public housing developments, administers the program under contract with HUD and has the following major responsibilities:

- Ensure compliance with all non-discrimination, equal opportunity, and fair housing laws, and ensure that the program is accessible to persons with disabilities
- Establish local policies and procedures for operating the program
- Accept applications from interested applicant families and determine whether they are income eligible for the program
- Maintain waiting list and select families for admission
- Screen applicant families for suitability as renters
- Maintain housing units by making any necessary repairs in a timely manner
- Make unit offers to families (minimize vacancies without overcrowding)
- Maintain properties to the standard of decent, safe, sanitary, and in good repair (including assuring compliance with uniform physical conditions standards)
- Make sure the HACB has adequate financial resources to maintain its housing stock
- Perform regular reexaminations of family income and composition in accordance with HUD requirements
- Collect rent due from the assisted family and comply with and enforce provisions of the lease
- Ensure that families comply with program rules
- Provide families with prompt and professional service
- Comply with HUD regulations and requirements, the Annual Contributions Contract, HUD-approved applications for funding, the HACB's ACOP, and other applicable federal, state and local laws.

What does the tenant do?

The tenant's responsibilities are articulated in the public housing lease. The tenant has the following broad responsibilities:

- Comply with the terms of the lease and HACB house rules, as applicable
- Provide the HACB with complete and accurate information, determined by the HACB to be necessary for administration of the program
- Cooperate in attending all appointments scheduled by the HACB
- Allow the HACB to inspect the unit at reasonable times and after reasonable notice
- Take responsibility for care of the housing unit, including any violations of uniform physical condition standards caused by the family
- Not engage in drug-related or violent criminal activity
- Notify the HACB before moving or termination of the lease
- Use the assisted unit only for residence and as the sole residence of the family. Not sublet the unit or assign the lease
- Promptly notify the HACB of any changes in family composition
- Not commit fraud, bribery, or any other corrupt or criminal act in connection with any housing programs
- Take care of the housing unit and report maintenance problems to the HACB promptly

If all parties fulfill their obligations in a professional and timely manner, the program responsibilities will be fulfilled in an effective manner.

1-II.D. APPLICABLE REGULATIONS

Applicable regulations include:

- 24 CFR Part 5: General Program Requirements
- 24 CFR Part 8: Nondiscrimination
- 24 CFR Part 35: Lead-Based Paint
- 24 CFR Part 902: Public Housing Assessment System
- 24 CFR Part 903: Public Housing Agency Plans
- 24 CFR Part 945: Designated Housing
- 24 CFR Part 960: Admission and Occupancy Policies
- 24 CFR Part 965: HACB-Owned or Leased Projects – General Provisions
- 24 CFR Part 966: Lease and Grievance Procedures

PART III: THE ADMISSIONS AND CONTINUED OCCUPANCY POLICIES

1-III.A. OVERVIEW AND PURPOSE OF THE POLICY

The ACOP is the HACB's written statement of policies used to carry out the housing program in accordance with federal law and regulations, and HUD requirements. The ACOP is required by HUD and it must be available for public review [CFR 24 Part 903]. The ACOP also contains policies that support the objectives contained in the HACB's Agency Plan.

All issues related to public housing not addressed in this ACOP are governed by federal regulations, HUD handbooks and guidebooks, notices and applicable state and local laws. The policies in this ACOP have been designed to ensure compliance with the consolidated ACC and all HUD-approved applications for program funding. The HACB is responsible for complying with all changes in HUD regulations pertaining to public housing. If such changes conflict with this plan, HUD regulations will have precedence.

1-III.B. CONTENTS OF THE POLICY

Unlike the housing choice voucher program, HUD regulations for public housing do not contain a list of what must be included in the ACOP. However, individual regulations contain requirements of inclusion in the HACB's written policy. At a minimum, the ACOP plan should cover HACB policies on these subjects:

- The organization of the waiting list and how families are selected and offered available units, including any HACB admission preferences, procedures for removing applicant names from the waiting list, and procedures for closing and reopening the HACB waiting list (Chapters 4 and 5)
- Transfer policies and the circumstances under which a transfer would take precedence over an admission (Chapter 12)
- Standards for determining eligibility, suitability for tenancy, and the size and type of the unit needed (Chapters 3 and 5)
- Procedures for verifying the information the family has provided (Chapter 7)
- The method for achieving deconcentration of poverty and income-mixing of public housing developments (Chapter 4)
- Grievance procedures (Chapter 14)
- Policies concerning payment by a family to the HACB of amounts the family owes the HACB (Chapter 15 and 16)
- Interim redeterminations of family income and composition (Chapter 9)
- Policies regarding community service requirements; (Chapter 11)
- Policies and rules about safety and ownership of pets in public housing (Chapter 10).

New Approach to Policy Development

HUD has developed an approach to monitoring HACBs that emphasizes the importance of consistency in operation and decision-making. The ACOP supports that goal by clearly setting forth the HACB's operating policies.

A primary focus of HUD's Rental Integrity Monitoring (RIM) program has been consistency in how HACBs conduct their business and in how HUD monitors HACB activities. Referring to and following the ACOP is essential to maintaining consistency in applying HACB policy.

HUD makes a distinction between mandatory policies and non-mandatory policies:

- Mandatory policies: those driven by legislation, regulations, current handbooks, current PIH notices, and legal opinions from the Office of General Counsel
- Optional, non-binding guidance: includes guidebooks, FAQs, PIH notices that have expired, and recommendations from individual HUD staff.

HUD expects HACBs to develop policies and procedures that are consistent with mandatory policies and to make clear the optional policies the HACB has adopted. The ACOP is comprised of mandatory policies and optional HACB policy. HUD's new direction emphasizes the need for a clearly written and comprehensive ACOP to guide staff in the clear and consistent application of policy.

HUD suggestions, recommendations, written issuances, and guidance are consistent with mandatory federal policy. Therefore, using HUD guidance in the preparation of HACB policy, even though it is not mandatory, provides a HACB with a "safe harbor." If a HACB adopts its own optional policy, it must make its own determination that such policy is consistent with legislation, regulations, and other mandatory requirements. There may be very good reasons for adopting a policy or procedure that is different than that suggested by HUD, but HACBs should carefully think through those decisions and be able to articulate how their policy is consistent with federal laws, regulations and mandatory policy.

1-III.C. UPDATING AND REVISING THE POLICY

The HACB will revise this ACOP as needed to comply with changes in HUD regulations. The original policy and any changes must be approved by the board of commissioners of the HACB, the pertinent sections included in the Agency Plan, and a copy provided to HUD.

HACB Policy

The HACB will review and update the ACOP as needed to reflect changes in regulations, HACB operations, or when needed to ensure staff consistency in operation.