New Directions for Assisted Housing Mobility in America

By

Daniel Scott Rinzler

Bachelor of Arts in Urban Studies
Columbia University
New York, NY (2007)

Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master in City Planning

at the

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

June 2013

Author: _____
<div align="right">Department of Urban Studies and Planning
May 23, 2013</div>

Certified by: _____
<div align="right">Associate Professor Xavier de Souza Briggs
Department of Urban Studies and Planning
Thesis Supervisor</div>

Accepted by: _____
<div align="right">Associate Professor P. Christopher Zegras
Chair, MCP Committee
Department of Urban Studies and Planning</div>

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Abstract

Assisted housing mobility programs aim to help low-income families leverage tenant-based
rental assistance (TBRA) to move to areas that provide basic ingredients for security and
socioeconomic mobility. Although attractive in principle as a way to compensate for the uneven
geography of risk and opportunity in metropolitan housing markets, mobility programs have
proven difficult to design and implement effectively enough to deliver intended social benefits.
After two decades of experimentation, research, and shifting theories around mobility, efforts
are underway to develop a new generation of programs. In a shift in institutional context,
Public Housing Authorities (PHAs), rather than federal or nonprofit agencies, are taking the
lead. Critically, PHAs are for the first time attempting to integrate substantial mobility supports
in their TBRA programs, which comprise the largest form of federal housing aid to low-income
families. I analyze how staff at these PHAs are making program design decisions and how
effective those decisions may be. Broadly, I aim to determine what PHAs' design decisions
mean for the future of assisted housing mobility as an approach for improving the lives of the
poor, and what they suggest about mobility's viability in the context of the day-to-day political
and operating environments of those who deliver housing assistance.

I use a three-case comparative approach, including two PHAs currently developing mobility
programs – the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development and the
King County Housing Authority – and one established program in Baltimore, which emerged
as a desegregation remedy in the *Thompson v. HUD* lawsuit. Data collection for each case
included key-informant interviews, observations of program design meetings, and review of
publicly available program documents. First, I review research on assisted housing mobility,
social policy design, and trends affecting PHAs as delivery agents for federal housing policy.
Second, I outline factors that set the stage for program design at each site, including: motivation
for pursuing mobility; agency context for mobility; factors that have enabled mobility; and
problem identification and theories of change. Third, I detail each mobility effort's major design
decisions, for both the programs and the delivery systems: establishing goals and success
metrics; targeting of clients and places; and more.

On the positive side, I find that program designers *are* working to incorporate lessons of
mobility research, especially with regard to program targeting, intensity of client coaching, and
follow-ups. On the other hand, pressure to ensure program success has translated to narrowly
conceived mobility initiatives, which cuts against broad-based reforms to administering rental
assistance. Notably, both PHA-originated efforts are very focused on children's educational
outcomes, eschewing an earlier focus on helping their parents get ahead. In addition, some
innovators *are* pushing to mainstream mobility and "change the default" in how agencies
administer rental assistance. In terms of lessons for future policy and practice, current efforts
provide new examples of the range and depth of impact that is possible, particularly for
disadvantaged children. PHAs' discretion also appears to offer more room for innovation
beyond what has been possible in stand-alone mobility programs of the past. However,
mobility could easily be marginalized within these agencies, so both organizational strategy and
political management on the part of staff will be critical.

Thesis Supervisor: Xavier de Souza Briggs, Associate Professor
                       Department of Urban Studies and Planning

Thesis Reader: Lawrence Vale, Ford Professor of Urban Design and Planning
                       Department of Urban Studies and Planning

Thesis Reader: Philip Tegeler, Executive Director
                       Poverty & Race Research and Action Council

Acknowledgments

Thanks first and foremost to my advisor Xav Briggs. I am at a loss to think of a person better suited to serve as my guide, editor, resident expert – and sometimes life coach. You pushed me hard, but took time with me when I needed it. Thank you so much for everything. Working with you has been a pleasure, and I will frankly miss it.

To my readers Larry Vale and Phil Tegeler: you both urged me, in different ways, to think about what is at stake in this topic, and to make my thesis relevant. The final product is better for it.

Melissa Higbee, my berenjenita: nobody has supported me through writing this thesis, and at DUSP, more than you. We set off on this journey together, and I am so grateful that I have been able to share it with you. On to the next adventure!

To the Thesis Groupies – Christine Curella, Louise Yeung, and Melissa: we did it! I'm so proud of us. And to my other classmates at DUSP, especially those in the Housing, Community, and Economic Development group: I have learned a great deal from you, and I hope we continue to support each other and hold each other accountable in the future.

To Gretchen Weismann and my other colleagues at the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development: thank you for giving me the opportunity to contribute, and for tolerating my dual role as staffer and sometimes researcher. You are doing great work.

Thanks also to staff at the King County Housing Authority and at Metropolitan Baltimore Quadel. Learning about your organizations and efforts around assisted housing mobility was a special experience I won't soon forget.

Finally, to my family: Mom, Dad, Ari, and the other Rinzlers. Thank you for supporting me, and for taking an interest in my passions. Re-joining you all on the west coast can't come soon enough.

I dedicate this thesis to families who participate in an assisted housing mobility programs. I hope these programs help you get where you need to go, and then some.

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1.   A New Generation of Assisted Housing Mobility Programs

> This is a housing program, but this ain't a housing program where you just get a house where you can sleep. We're talking about communities of opportunity. And that's the difference between any other housing [voucher] program and our housing program. We want you to become a member of a community… You've got the opportunity and possibility to build a better life for you and your family. And that's why you're really all here, isn't it?
>
> - *Bernard Carey, trainer at Metropolitan Baltimore Quadel, speaking to families attending an orientation session to the Baltimore assisted housing mobility program, January 2013*

Assisted housing mobility programs have a simple proposition: a new location as a new lease on life. They aim to compensate for uneven geography of risk and opportunity in metropolitan housing markets by helping low-income families living in disinvested neighborhoods move to areas that provide basic ingredients for security and socioeconomic mobility, such as well funded and high-performing public schools, low crime, and a high overall quality of life. Mobility programs are one of several strategies during the post-war period that have seized on this *power of place* argument and have sought to expand the range of desirable housing location options for the poor – whether to help them escape "urban unrest" and deconcentrate poverty, enforce equal access to opportunity in the name of civil rights, or both. Mobility programs are currently enjoying a wave of experimentation and interest, for reasons outlined below.

In practice, assisted mobility programs employ a schizophrenic mix of market-driven, neoliberal principles and intensive government assistance. First, they are organized around tenant-based rental assistance,[1] which is popular with economists and many policymakers due to its emphasis on allowing poor families to choose their own housing in the private rental

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[1] This term almost always refers to the federal Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program. The HCV program, formerly known as Section 8, is the largest Federal program that supports rental affordability for very low-income households (defined as at or below 50% of area median income, though households served are usually much poorer). Public Housing Authorities typically administer the HCV program, the vast majority of which is a tenant-based subsidy that covers the difference between the affordable rent for the households (~30% of household income) and the asking rent for a unit in the private market, which can be up to between 90% and 110% of Fair Market Rent (~40% of market rent) for that region.

market. However, due to the fact that rental assistance is, on its own, a weak mechanism for expanding choices in many markets, public sector housing agencies pursuing mobility must provide a range of *additional* supports to families already in possession of mobile vouchers. Then, typically with the help of contracted nonprofit or for-profit organizations, agencies do what they can to broker the private housing market on behalf of low-income families, and try to convince reluctant landlords in more affluent sub-markets to rent to them. To boot, many of the areas that mobility programs target as receiving neighborhoods for participating families have historically been inaccessible to racial minorities and the poor, largely as a result of government actions at local, state, and federal levels.

Mobility programs also require many "threshold conditions and contingencies" to be in place in order to operationalize a theory of change that is intuitively attractive but vulnerable to being a "strong idea weakly implemented" (Briggs, Goering, and Popkin, 2010). Performance depends upon participation and buy-in from a range of actors and sectors, but program design matters, too. Research in recent years has removed some of the guesswork involved in designing an effective mobility program, but critical puzzles remain. In addition, efforts around mobility are embedded in institutions, political moments, and markets that shape program objectives, structure, and delivery in a surprising number of ways.

A New Generation

Although assisted housing mobility programs have been around since the urban unrest of the 1960s, they are not widespread. Nonetheless, a small number of current efforts mark a moment of transition and renewed energy in the field. First, the institutional and political context for mobility has changed, and there are signs that assisted housing mobility is being mainstreamed, proactively. A handful of forward-thinking Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) are spearheading development of programs in an attempt to make substantial mobility supports an ongoing and attractive option for families already receiving rental assistance via the Housing Choice Voucher program.[2] These agencies' proactive leadership contrasts with PHAs' position as defendants in numerous lawsuits, from the late 1960s through the 2000s, that gave rise to mobility programs – initially, as racial desegregation remedies for discriminatory decisions around siting public housing. The new wave of programs also differ in their intended

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[2] Other new mobility program development efforts are underway in Chicago, Philadelphia, and possibly elsewhere. However, PHAs have not taken taking the lead in designing these programs, and they thus fall outside of the particular context that is the subject of this thesis. Even more PHAs have operated mobility or mobility-like programs in a variety of other contexts, including helping families displaced by public housing redevelopment find new homes. However, this thesis is focused on cases where PHAs are creating intensive assisted housing mobility programs within existing rental assistance programs, without the impetus of a lawsuit.

longevity and relationship to administration of traditional rental assistance when compared to some past programs that were one-off pilots or experiments, such as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Moving to Opportunity program. In this way, PHAs' efforts today represent the first earnest attempts to integrate mobility into standard administration of the HCV program, which is the largest federal program for helping the poor afford housing. The program's 2012 fiscal year appropriation, carried over into 2013 through a continuing resolution, was approximately $18.9 billion, serving approximately 2.2 million low-income families and more than five million people (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2013).[3]

Second, current program design efforts are more focused on achieving specific social *outcomes* for families than were earlier programs. The latter were less sophisticated about the mechanisms for achieving powerful outcomes, and counted on relocation per se to deliver them. That is, the "better" location was the outcome, and the other benefits were assumed to follow. The field now knows better, and the lessons have been hard won. This shift in the view of "what success looks like" and what it requires is partly a function of the politics of developing new programs within resource-poor PHAs that must manage multiple priorities and constituencies; programs that demonstrate success relative to target outputs and outcomes are more likely to enjoy support in this institutional context. However, program designers today also have a better idea than ever before about whether and how mobility programs might work to help families experience gains, and what is even realistic to target as a desired outcome. And despite mixed results on outcomes among families who participated past programs, many maintain faith that the core mobility paradigm – a new and better location for a disadvantaged family – can, in fact, translate to measurable gains. The challenge is getting the conditions right to make that so.

Finally, program designers today can draw from a wealth of research and a burgeoning community of practice around assisted housing mobility that has become increasingly sophisticated in recent years (for example, see: PRRAC and Urban Institute, 2013). Furthermore, although knowledge gaps remain, there is greater consensus around a few critical program design decisions, such as providing substantial post-move support, using more sophisticated criteria for targeting receiving neighborhoods, and focusing on improving families' long-term locational trajectory – or "housing careers" – as opposed to one-time relocation. Designers today can focus on solving remaining puzzles in the mobility model, but also on experimenting beyond what past programs even attempted.

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[3] Automatic cuts from federal sequestration in spring 2013 could result in 140,000 families losing access to rental assistance (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2013)

Why Study Current PHA Mobility Program Design Efforts?

Given changes in how program designers are approaching mobility, as well as pressure from advocates and policymakers to develop effective, cost-efficient, and replicable models, PHAs' experiences developing and implementing the next generation of assisted housing mobility programs could have significant implications for both federal policy and local action. However, despite these agencies' critical role in delivering federal housing programs – and advocates' recent calls for HUD to provide more guidance to them on how to pursue mobility (PRRAC, 2013) – very little is known about PHAs' organizational strategies, and how factors such as staff interests and expertise, market conditions, and the political environment combine to shape divergent outcomes on the ground. Today, PHAs have more discretion over programmatic decisions than ever before, but they also must manage local priorities, ambiguous federal policy directives, and an increasingly austere funding environment in order to maintain organizational coherence and financial viability.

Pursuing mobility in this context thus requires that PHAs contend with their internal capacities and external "authorizing environments" – the set of actors and checks, both within and outside formal channels of authority, that hold agencies accountable and provide constituencies for particular policies (Moore, 1995). Understanding how these variables are shaping current approaches to mobility could be instructive to other agencies interested in pursuing mobility themselves, as well as to policymakers and advocates seeking to craft better policy directives and provide assistance to on-the-ground mobility efforts. Further, given remaining gaps in what we know about what it really takes to deliver on the promise of the mobility model, understanding how factors such as politics, capacity, and resources are influencing critical design decisions could serve as a needed reality check. We need to move beyond debating mobility and associated "neighborhood effects" in concept or in the context of limited demonstration programs. We now need to advance the conversation about the mobility paradigm's viability in the context of the day-to-day political and operating environments of those who deliver housing assistance programs.

Research Questions and Methodology

Questions

Considering the aforementioned reasons that it would be useful to understand PHAs' experiences designing a new generation of housing mobility programs, I will seek to answer the following questions in this thesis:

How are program designers making decisions?

Which factors are enabling, shaping, and constraining designers' efforts to respond to past research and extend the mobility model? How are these factors shaping designers' approach to mobility, as well as specific design decisions? What tradeoffs are they making as a result of these factors?

How effective are current program design efforts?

Based on what research and experience tells us about how mobility programs should work, what are current program design efforts doing well so far, and what are they finding to be difficult or even ignoring? How are they addressing remaining evidence gaps in the mobility model? How are current program design efforts extending the mobility paradigm, if at all?

Methodology

I intend to uncover the "how," and "why" of a contemporary phenomenon, so a case study approach is the logical methodology for answering my research questions (Yin, 2009). In the following section, I describe how I chose my cases, as well as how I collected and analyzed data for each of them.

Case Selection

The two PHAs currently developing assisted housing mobility programs within their rental assistance programs are the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and the King County Housing Authority (KCHA) in the Seattle metropolitan area in Washington. During the 2012-2013 academic year, I have worked as one of the program designers responsible for developing DHCD's mobility program. My access to, and involvement in, the program made it a logical case for this thesis.

To the extent possible, I also wanted to reveal what is both unique and universal about DHCD's experience developing a mobility program. This called for a comparative research approach. I initially considered the "N of one plus some" case study approach with DHCD as the primary and most in-depth case, given my participant-observer (embedded) role in the Massachusetts effort, but also with other, less detailed case studies to serve as points of comparison (Mukhija, 2008). But I was able to gain significant access to, and collect substantial data from, two more revelatory cases: 1) KCHA; and 2) The mobility program in Baltimore that grew out of the *Thompson v. HUD* lawsuit. Quadel Consulting, a national for-profit firm, administers the Baltimore program through its local office, Metropolitan Baltimore Quadel. Although this program is officially housed within the Housing Authority of Baltimore City's

larger HCV program, it practically autonomous and is so strongly identified with Quadel that I refer to it as MBQ for short.

KCHA is a worthy second case because it is an institutionally similar agency to DHCD, and its staff is also currently in the process of developing a mobility program. Although both agencies are PHAs, multiple factors have contributed to differences in their approaches to mobility. MBQ has administered the Baltimore program since 2002, but the program dates back to the 1996 partial consent decree for the *Thompson v. HUD* case. Although MBQ's institutional context is different than DHCD and KCHA, it is considered to be one of the most innovative mobility programs, and its operating model has evolved over time in response to client families' experiences as well as shifting theories among staff and other decision-makers about what it should aim to achieve. MBQ is a worthy third case because its achievements and challenges can provide lessons beyond what is available in the mobility literature.

In the chapters to come, then, and especially in chapters 3 and 4, I compare the three cases on several dimensions, corresponding to my main research questions.

Data Collection and Analysis

My primary data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews (Wildavsky and Hammer, 1993) and observations at all three sites. For the DHCD case, I interviewed four agency staff members, as well as one staff member from the Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership, the nonprofit that will contract with DHCD to administer the program. These interviews took place in January and April 2013. I was also able to draw on my experience participating in meetings related to program design, as well as on my contributions to design decisions, throughout the 2012-2013 academic year. For the KCHA case, I interviewed four agency staff, one staff member from Quadel Consulting (on contract for the program's design and early implementation phase), and two staff members from the Multi-Service Center (one of the two nonprofits that will administer portions of the program) during an in-person visit to the KCHA offices in January 2013. I also observed the first of three daylong program design meetings during this visit, and conducted a follow-up phone interview with one agency staff person in April 2013 in order to learn about program design decisions at the two subsequent design meetings I was not able to attend. For the MBQ case, I interviewed four staff members and observed one orientation session (for families new to the program) during my visit to their office in January 2013.

To provide a more complete picture of each case and corroborate my interview and observational data, I also collected and reviewed the following secondary data: publicly

available agency documents, including agency Housing Choice Voucher and Moving to Work[4] administrative plans; mobility program-related documents, including literature and forms for participating families and marketing materials for landlords, families, and others – to the extent that it was available; and federal reports on the Housing Choice Voucher and Moving to Work programs. For the MBQ case in Baltimore, I also reviewed court documents related to the *Thompson v. HUD* lawsuit.

Drawing on the literature on mobility programs, as well as on my own experience helping develop DHCD's program, I organized my interview and observational data for all three sites according to broad program design categories such as establishing neighborhood targeting criteria, deciding which families to allow to participate in the program, and deciding which supports services to provide to them. I then used an "open coding" process that helped reveal trends around decisions within each of these categories (Biber and Leavy, 2006). This data organization and analysis provided the foundation for chapter 4 of this thesis, where I describe the *what*, *how*, and *why* of critical program design decisions at each site.

Although I did not originally plan to expand the scope of my thesis beyond analyzing specific program design decisions, I found that although much of my primary and secondary data did not fit into design categories, they still implicated program design decisions. Again, using an open coding process, I organized these data into categories such as the agency context for program design, sources of motivation for pursuing mobility, and developing a theory of change. I thought it would be important for readers to first understand these "stage-setting" factors in each case before describing particular design decisions, so I decided to present this data in chapter 3 as a lead-up to the more design-focused chapter 4.

Using a "grounded theory" approach to qualitative data analysis (Biber and Leavy, 2006), I answered my research questions by weighing the primary and secondary data I collected for each case against literature on housing mobility, social policy design, program implementation, and the organizational dynamics of Public Housing Authorities – as well as current debates and movements in federal housing policy. This process of taking stock of the current "mobility moment" and extracting meaning and useful lessons from my cases formed the basis of my findings, analysis, and recommendations in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

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[4] Moving to Work is a federal demonstration program to provide more programmatic and fiscal flexibility to PHAs. KCHA and DHCD both participate in the program. For more on Moving to Work, see chapter 2.

2. Literature Review

Current efforts to chart a new path for assisted housing mobility are outgrowths of a flurry of experimentation, research, and shifting theories around mobility over the past two decades. I critically review three primary literatures here. First, recounting what researchers and practitioners learned during this period about whether and how mobility programs work (or might work) can help explain many design decisions in the current wave of programs – including how they are responding to research and lessons from past programs, as well as experimenting with new mobility models. Second, literature on social policy design (generally) provides an additional lens through which to understand the particular constraints that mobility program designers face, and the kinds of decisions they must make. Third and finally, institutional and political constraints specific to Public Housing Authorities, which have jurisdiction over the Housing Choice Voucher program, can impact program design and management decisions around mobility. Recent trends affecting PHAs as institutions and as delivery agents for federal housing policy provide the backdrop for current mobility efforts.

Assisted Housing Mobility Programs: Theory, Evidence, and Remaining Puzzles

Roots

The central argument in support of housing mobility programs draws on a steady stream of academic literature over recent decades demonstrating that *place matters* in shaping a range of developmental outcomes – including health, education, and employment – for any person (see, for example, Newburger, Birch, and Wachter's 2011 edited volume). Although recent evidence has shown that Housing Choice Voucher holders live in less violent neighborhoods, on average, than residents of publicly and privately owned housing with unit-based rental subsidies, and other poor households in general (Lens, Ellen, and O'Regan, 2011), they are no more likely to live in low-poverty areas than poor renters who do not receive rental assistance. In addition, minorities with vouchers – particularly African-Americans – are both *less* likely than white voucher holders to access low-poverty areas, and much *more* likely to live in racially segregated areas with relatively high exposure to risk factors such as crime and concentrated poverty (DeLuca et al, 2013). In sum, although there is some evidence to suggest vouchers help families escape some of the highest risk neighborhoods, free market rental assistance largely does not deliver on its promise to help low-income, minority families access areas that provide essential ingredients for socioeconomic mobility, such as good schools and career-track jobs (Galvez, 2010). Further, research has shown that, when low-income families

move, they usually do not go far, nor does the socioeconomic makeup of their neighborhoods typically improve (see, for example: Clark, 2012).

As noted in chapter 1, mobility programs are heavily tied to the federal Housing Choice Voucher program, which comprises the vast majority of rental assistance available to low-income families in the United States. In practice, mobility programs are add-ons to traditional rental assistance in that they provide counseling, financial support, and housing search assistance not typically available in standard administration of the HCV program. Indeed, current administration of the HCV program does not prioritize geographic mobility to low-risk neighborhoods; this is in part because the Section 8 Management Assessment Program regulations, which HUD uses to grade PHA performance in the HCV program, do not provide much incentive to prioritize mobility, and HUD's administrative fee system for the HCV program incentivizes serving as many households as possible rather than expending time and resources helping any one of them beyond a basic orientation to the program (HUD, 2012). As such, changing the way the voucher program is administered is the *what* and *how* of assisted housing mobility programs.

It is also worth noting that mobility programs are one of several strategies that housing policymakers, advocates, and practitioners have used in attempts to expand the range of neighborhood choices available to low-income and minority renters, and respond to the uneven geography of risk and opportunity that took hold within regional housing markets in the post-war era. Most of these other strategies, some of which date back to the 1960s, focus on expanding and preserving the *supply* of subsidized rental housing – in contrast to using demand-side, tenant-based vouchers – outside areas of concentrated poverty. For example, PHAs and private developers have used a "scattered site" approach to disperse subsidized rental units (Hogan, 1996), and in some cases – Montgomery County, Maryland, first and most famously – giving public housing agencies "first dibs" at acquisition of units in mixed-income housing complexes developed under inclusionary zoning policies. And agencies at multiple levels of government have adjusted project-scoring systems for awarding subsidies in order to support development and preservation of low-income housing outside the poorest neighborhoods. Even some mobility efforts –whose main focus is on innovating around the voucher program – have engaged on the supply side by offering predevelopment financing and operating subsidies (by "project-basing" vouchers) to housing developers and management companies that add units in programmatically defined "opportunity" areas.[5] Other initiatives to encourage mobility on the demand side have included policy changes to ease the process of

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[5] The Baltimore housing mobility program and the Inclusive Communities Project in Dallas are mobility programs that also provide predevelopment financing for developing affordable rental units in target receiving neighborhoods, while the former also "project bases" some of its vouchers in target areas. Also see the Regional Housing Initiative in northeastern Illinois: http://www.metroplanning.org/work/project/20

"porting" a voucher from one PHA jurisdiction to another, as well as HUD's current Small Area Fair Market Rent demonstration project to help payment standards reflect higher- and lower-cost submarkets. A more controversial and unrealized proposal is to regionalize administration of the HCV program and remove jurisdiction over the program from "balkanized" PHAs (Katz and Turner, 2000).

Finally, to the extent that mobility programs adhere to any theory of change, it is informal and rudimentary – that a new location will improve life chances for families. However, few programs to date have been structured around achieving specific social outcomes; instead, most have relied on relocation to deliver on these outcomes. This focus is partly due to the fact that many have had origins in civil rights lawsuits against PHAs and HUD alleging that their policies deliberately segregated minorities and thus limited their housing choices; court-ordered programs that emerged out of these lawsuits have had the frame of restoring and expanding housing choices for historically disadvantaged populations, but not – at least officially – targeting any particular developmental outcomes for children or adults (Popkin et al, 2003). Put another way, these efforts focused on removing the structural barriers facing families in the housing market rather than on what exactly it would take to convert a better location into specific, positive gains, for example in education, health and other outcome domains. And although research on Gautreaux suggested that education and employment gains might be obtainable (Rosenbaum and Popkin, 1991), assisted housing mobility is such a young field – and MTO was the first program to be rigorously evaluated – that program designers have not known with much certainty, until recently, which outcomes could be realistic to target more intentionally.

Evidence

The court-ordered Gautreaux program, which grew out of a desegregation lawsuit against the Chicago Housing Authority in 1966, and HUD's MTO experiment, which ran from the 1990s to the early 2000s, are the two assisted housing mobility programs that have provided the foundation for the current wave of learning and experimentation in the area of housing mobility. Both programs were modeled on the "power of place" argument, and focused primarily on the task of helping families with one-time relocations from high-risk neighborhoods (specifically, public housing) to low-risk ones, defined differently for each program.[6] These programs are also the only ones that have been studied in any depth, and MTO in particular comprises the vast majority of available evidence as to the efficacy of voucher-

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[6] MTO targeted census tracts with poverty rates at or below ten percent, while Gautreaux was more race-conscious and helped participant families move to whiter, more affluent suburbs.

based assisted housing mobility programs in producing improved life outcomes for families.[7] Although families' experience with MTO revealed major shortcomings in the relocation-only mobility model, research on the program still generated strong evidence for certain fixes to the model, and provided rich accounts of the way low-income and otherwise disadvantaged families experience rental housing markets – particularly in expensive and supply-restricted metropolitan areas.

Families' Experiences in Mobility Programs

First, research on MTO debunked the myth that all poor, minority families live in distressed and segregated areas because it is their preference to do so. MTO participants demonstrated a strong desire to live in safer, more racially and socioeconomically integrated neighborhoods, and fought hard to stay in them once they arrived (Briggs, Goering, and Popkin, 2010). This finding corroborates past survey data demonstrating that blacks and Hispanics on average prefer to live in racially integrated areas, despite the fact that they often do not (Charles, 2005).

Researchers also documented a litany of demand-side barriers (e.g., mental and physical health problems; limited time, money, information, transportation, and help from counselors/program operators; sources of burden and risk within family and friend networks) and supply-side barriers (e.g., discrimination; lack of landlord participation; administrative barriers in the voucher program; and availability of voucher-appropriate units in more affluent submarkets) to low-income MTO families leasing up in low-poverty areas, and note that it is an "increasingly heroic assumption" to expect these families to be able to move just *anywhere* in tight, expensive regional markets such as metro Boston (Briggs, Goering, and Popkin, 2010).

Further, researchers found that these demand- and supply-side factors combined to shape MTO families' residential trajectories over time, and often pulled them back to high-poverty, segregated neighborhoods after leasing up in low-poverty areas – despite their best efforts to remain in higher opportunity areas. Preliminary evidence from other, more recent programs have found similar challenges related to "recurrence" to high-risk areas (for example, see: Engdahl, 2009) and other research has shown that sustained, long-term exposure to high-risk neighborhoods is particularly prevalent among African-American families (Briggs and Keys, 2009; Briggs, 2005a). Indeed, MTO families, most of whom were black, experienced many

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[7] Unlike Gautreaux, MTO had an experimental design that compared outcomes among experimental compliers (who successfully moved from public housing to a low-poverty area for at least one year) and two control groups – those who remained in public housing, and those who received a mobile voucher without counseling or the requirement to move to a low-poverty area.

involuntary[8] moves after initial relocation to low-poverty areas, and were forced to make difficult, real-time tradeoffs – such as between a safer neighborhood and a more suitable unit – with limited time and information when searching for new apartments. As a result, they often settled for what they could find and managed neighborhood risks as best they could (Briggs, Goering, and Popkin, 2010). A critical detail in this story is that MTO families only had access to counseling and housing search assistance around their initial relocation to low-poverty neighborhoods, but not around any subsequent moves.

Trailing MTO research, DeLuca, Wood, and Rosenblatt's study of residential mobility among low-income black families in Baltimore and Mobile, Alabama finds that the vast majority of their study population's moves are involuntary, and from one high-risk neighborhood to another (DeLuca, Wood, and Rosenblatt, 2012). This and the MTO research highlight two things that implicate mobility program objectives and design: 1) the process through which many poor families experience residential mobility hardly involves much "choosing" at all; and 2) the major task of a housing mobility programs should not simply to help families with one-time relocations from a high-risk neighborhoods to low-risk ones, but rather to change the nature and longer-term trajectory of the mobility families experience – aiming for fewer moves overall and fewer involuntary moves in particular, as well as a larger share of moves to or within low-risk areas.

Finally, researchers found that the prospect of escaping neighborhood violence was a primary motivator for families who chose to participate in MTO, many of whom lived in distressed public housing and whose lives were shaped by "ghetto poverty" (Briggs, Goering, and Popkin, 2010). These findings clarify that there is a strong base of demand among low-income families to live economically and racially integrated neighborhoods, and that the HCV program cannot deliver on its basic promise to open up a meaningful range of location choices to them without providing additional supports and making other administrative adjustments. MTO families' frequent, involuntary moves also suggest that vouchers, without these added supports, can be a weak mechanism for achieving housing stability – a critical component to normal child cognitive and behavioral development.

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[8] There is no commonly accepted definition of what constitutes an involuntary – or "forced," or "reactive" – move, beyond obvious cases such public housing demolition, as the concept has not until recently been considered a critical factor in crafting better housing policies. Although the Census Bureau tracks a handful of "reasons for moves" in its Current Population Survey, it does not distinguish voluntary from involuntary moves. In this thesis, I use DeLuca's working definition of a *reactive* move to capture the idea of what constitutes an involuntary move: "Mobility… in response to an unforeseen, often unpredictable event" such as unit failure, HUD decisions/protocol, landlord property decisions, eviction or housing affordability crisis, romantic breakups, leaving a double-up, or wanting to escape neighborhood conditions (DeLuca, Wood, and Rosenblatt, 2012).

Evidence on Outcomes

MTO was also valuable because it generated internally valid data on long-term outcomes among participating families due to its experimental design. For experimental compliers, the most positive (and unforeseen) outcomes were the dramatic physical and psychological health improvements in adults, such as drops in rates of diabetes, extreme obesity, physical limitations, and psychological distress – some of which were at a clinically relevant magnitude (Sanbonmatsu et al., 2012). Young girls also showed positive psychological health impacts, and were found to be more successful at integrating into their new neighborhoods and schools than young boys (Gennetian et al, 2012). Beyond some health improvements, however, moving to a low-poverty neighborhood under MTO did not result in detectable improvements in educational achievement, employment, and risky behaviors among youth or grown children, nor did it result in improved economic self-sufficiency for adults (Sanbonmatsu et al, 2011; Sanbonmatsu et al, 2012; Gennetian et al, 2012).

Research on MTO thus revealed some promising results for families who moved to low-poverty neighborhoods with the help of mobility programs, but found few meaningful impacts areas in which MTO program designers had hoped to see improvement among participants. Further, it is unclear whether MTO's health impacts, found among former public housing residents living in the most distressed neighborhoods in Boston, Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, and Baltimore, would translate to the voucher-holding population, which is more geographically dispersed across a broader range of neighborhood types (Cook and Wing, 2012).

Still, researchers, policymakers, and advocates have argued that MTO's relocation-only model, its reliance on point-in-time poverty rates as a proxy for opportunity, and its short time requirement for living in low-poverty areas made it a "weak" mobility program that could be improved upon in a variety of ways in order to produce more positive educational and economic outcomes for client families, as well as further positive health impacts (Tegeler and Hankins, 2012; Briggs, Goering, and Popkin, 2010). More to the point, researchers studying MTO argue that sustained exposure to low-risk areas is a *necessary* though not *sufficient* precondition for families to experience these gains (Briggs, Goering, and Popkin, 2010).

It should be noted that researchers have not yet determined whether MTO families who were able to sustain long-term exposure to low-poverty areas had better outcomes than those who did not, let alone "which neighborhood characteristics are associated with what outcome gains and for what kinds of people" (Turner, 2012). Still, compelling proposed fixes to the MTO model have included, for example, more intensive pre-move counseling, assistance in managing landlord and unit challenges, and second or N[th]-move housing search assistance – all of which aim to help families sustain access and exposure to low-risk areas and avoid recurrence to high-risk neighborhoods after initial relocation (see, for example: Briggs, Goering, and Popkin; 2010;

DeLuca and Dayton, 2009; Briggs and Turner, 2008). Indeed, charging program staff to essentially "broker the market" on behalf of client families, in order to improve their "housing careers" or locational trajectories over time, has become an increasing focus for the handful of mobility programs operating today; it reflects lessons of MTO operation, too, wherein, for example, about one quarter of all MTO-Boston placements in the experimental group were made by private rental agents, not by PHAs. None of these more recent innovations has been formally evaluated, but preliminary evidence suggests that incorporating a range of intensive housing-specific services beyond initial relocation assistance can increase the likelihood that families will both *move to* and *stay in* lower-risk, higher opportunity neighborhoods for extended periods (Engdahl, 2009). Assuming that this sustained exposure will increase the chance that families will reap benefits from their new environments, increasing the intensity and range of housing-specific services appears to be minimally necessary to help many disadvantaged families translate their new locations into economic and educational gains.

Remaining Puzzles

In addition to more and better housing-specific services, much evidence suggests that disadvantaged families often need a variety of additional supports to help them adjust to their new surroundings. Researchers and advocates also argue that mobility programs should also consider more precise targeting, both when screening income-eligible client families, and when selecting receiving neighborhoods. The task of matching client families with the *right* neighborhoods, as well as helping them build successful and manageable lives post-move, remains a puzzle and an area for experimentation in mobility programs. Challenges abound in this realm.

For example, although some studies have shown promising results for long-term positive impacts of attending high performing schools for academic achievement among low-income students (Schwartz, 2010; Cowen et al, 2012), as well as a potential link between test scores and exposure to community violence (Burdick-Will et al, 2010), children who moved to low-poverty neighborhoods under MTO did not make academic gains, and other city-to-suburb busing programs have shown that disadvantaged children often need a range of additional supports when making the transition to a new school and a new neighborhood. Receiving school districts also often need coaching and added resources to provide sufficient supports for these students (Eaton and Chirichigno, 2011; Kruckenberg, Small, Tegeler, and Arcaya, 2009). And beyond providing direct serves for families, it is worth noting that a common critique of MTO's model is that its neighborhood targeting did not account for school quality, and screening for poverty rates usually did not help families access higher performing schools. As

such, MTO was not well designed to test for the impact on low-income children of attending better schools (Briggs, Ferryman, Popkin, and Rendón, 2008).

Further, researchers found that most former public housing residents participating in MTO were "information poor" when it came to learning about school options, and they often employed cultural logic borne out of managing risks and "avoiding ghetto behavior" in their old neighborhoods that did not translate well to identifying and accessing better schools and other supports in low-poverty neighborhoods (Briggs, Ferryman, Popkin, and Rendón, 2008). Indeed, other researchers have found that very low-income parents accustomed to managing risks in dangerous neighborhoods often seek to gain control over their environments by leading insular lives in their apartments that "shut the door" on outside dangers, noting that "we don't live outside, we live in here" (DeLuca, Wood, and Rosenblatt, 2012). In addition, relocating to low-poverty areas also seldom yielded new social connections that might have helped lead MTO families to better information about schools, jobs, and services (Briggs, Ferryman, Popkin, and Rendón, 2008).

Variation among families can also help explain the range of successes and challenges they have faced in the context of mobility programs. A three-city study of MTO found that families who remained in low-poverty neighborhoods for long periods post-relocation had low overall mobility rates, experienced more luck in finding units in desirable neighborhoods, were less likely to have strong and expansive social ties and obligations in their old neighborhoods, and were more motivated to center their lives in their new neighborhoods. In other words, "their social lives moved with them." Families who reverted to moderate- or high-poverty areas after initial relocation to low-poverty areas from public housing had stronger kin attachments and obligations in inner-city neighborhoods, but also experienced more involuntary moves – whether simply via a "bad break" in the rental market, or because of family shocks such as needing to attend to a sick or needy family member. These reverting families also appeared to be less likely to have access to reliable vehicles (Briggs, Weismann, and Comey, 2010). Other researchers have argued that economically stable households with employed adults are more likely to make successful moves under mobility programs (Cunningham and Sawyer, 2005), and that some MTO participants were not ready for the stresses of relocation due to chronic and debilitating health problems, and were more suited to supportive housing environments (Briggs, Popkin, and Goering, 2010).

Simple relocation out of high-risk areas also appears to be an insufficient mechanism to help adults achieve employment and earnings gains, as *proximity* to jobs does not necessarily translate to *accessing* them. "Institutional density" and the presence of workforce intermediaries, as opposed to job density, appears to be a better indicator of whether a new location will translate to economic gains for low-income families (Chapple, 2006); in this sense,

intermediaries and other employment programs serve a similar purpose in brokering the labor market for disadvantaged families as assisted mobility programs do in brokering the housing market for them. In addition, MTO parents often faced challenges to pursuing employment upon relocating to low-poverty areas due to the difficulty of aligning their desire to work with their transportation, housing, and childcare needs (Briggs, Weismann, and Comey, 2010).

Finally, limited availability of low-cost and convenient after-school and summer activities for children in low-risk neighborhoods can pose significant challenges for very low-income families in relocation-focused mobility programs. A study of the Gautreaux Two program in the Chicago area revealed that access to these services declined for participating families after they moved out of public housing, due in part to high costs for these services in suburban neighborhoods, as well as transportation challenges. Children's exposure to their new neighborhoods and social environments was limited as a result, and families often continued to rely on supports available in their old neighborhoods, which ultimately contributed to moves back to high-risk areas (Zuberi, 2010).

Mobility Today

Although MTO and related research has delivered a huge amount of information to housing practitioners, advocates, and researchers, a 2010 survey of currently operating housing mobility programs still found that very little is known about them, including how and whether they work, which design components are most effective, and how much different kinds of interventions cost (Cunningham et al, 2010). Although some of these programs have expanded and probably improved upon the MTO model, they have not been formally evaluated or studied in any depth. Further, performance management is a nascent practice for mobility programs, and program operators still do not know with much certainty what works and what does not. HUD attempted to create a funding source for testing different mobility program models as part of its Transforming Rental Assistance proposal for fiscal year 2011, but the initiative stalled (HUD, 2010). In the current moment, the most fruitful source of fine-grained information about design issues available to mobility program designers and operators is their peers. To this end, the Poverty and Race Research & Action Council, based in Washington, DC, has helped facilitated a burgeoning community of practice by hosting several housing mobility conferences over the past decade plus. PRRAC and the Urban Institute also co-published a housing mobility "toolkit" in March 2013 to help guide practitioners through the process of designing and implementing effective mobility programs.

Designing Assisted Housing Mobility Programs

In the final chapter of their book on MTO, Briggs, Goering, and Popkin present the following logic model for "understanding the strengths and weaknesses of assisted housing mobility as a tool for (a) improving the quality of life of the poor or (b) helping them escape poverty":
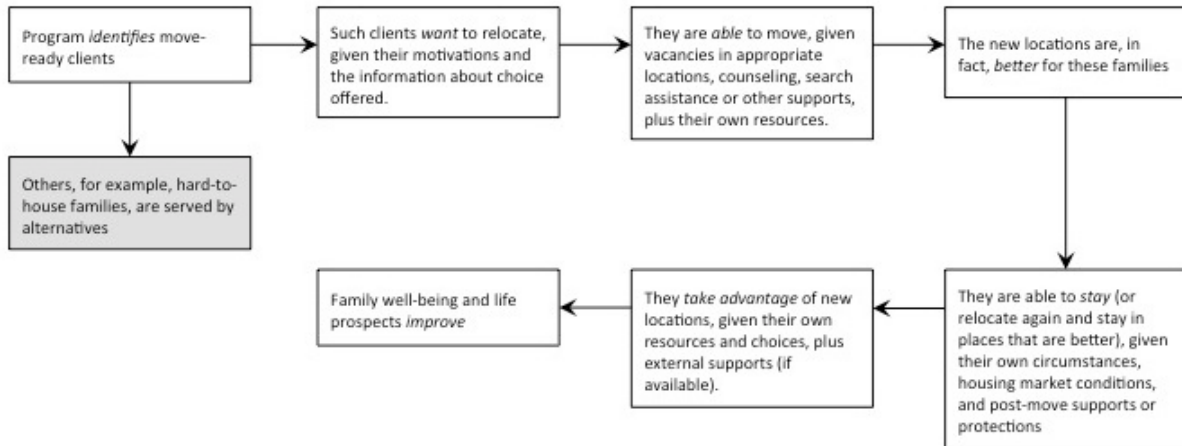
Source: Briggs, Goering, and Popkin, 2010

The model is a sobering reminder of how many "threshold conditions and contingencies" need to be in place in order to operationalize a theory of change – a new location as a new lease on life – that is intuitively attractive but vulnerable to being what the authors term a *strong idea weakly implemented*. Considering the experiences of MTO families, the authors recommend that mobility practitioners pay particularly close attention to the following factors in making design decisions around programs and delivery systems: 1) choosing which families to participate, and focusing on the "ready to move"; 2) targeting receiving neighborhoods based on availability of "concrete opportunities" for families, even though little is known about how to do this; 3) helping families stay in receiving neighborhoods long-term, not just via one-time relocation assistance; and 4) helping families find value in their new locations, and manage risks while taking advantage of new resources available to them (Briggs, Goering, and Popkin, 2010).

In the following section, I discuss how mobility program designers might think about these design decisions. Due to the fact that some of these decisions are typical of social policy design in general, I reference the literature in this area where it can be provide a broader framework for understanding a particular decision category. It is also worth noting that there is

basically no literature on fine-grained design considerations of housing mobility programs, nor are there accounts – beyond the retrospective look at MTO's design and launch by Briggs, Goering, and Popkin – of the *process* of designing a housing mobility program.

Targeting Families

Past and ongoing mobility efforts have shown that not all families are well suited for intensive assisted housing mobility programs that require significant pre-move counseling and remedial work, as well as relocation to locations that are both physically distant and culturally alien. In a universe of limited public resources and wavering political support, Schuck and Zeckhauser argue that social programs such as assisted housing mobility programs should seek to achieve "targeting efficiency," where program resources are allocated to the individuals for whom and the purposes for which they will do the most good ("good bets"), thus maximizing both public benefit and efficient use of public resources, as well as helping secure political support. This approach requires targeting good bets and avoiding "bad bets," which comprise both "bad draws" who will not benefit much from a particular program, and "bad apples" who are defined as being undesirable or undeserving (Schuck and Zeckhauser, 2006).

Targeting within the HCV program would constitute a change of direction from its current broad targeting that only screens for income. In addition, distinguishing between good bets and bad draws in the context of a mobility program is difficult at this point because few programs have done it, and little evidence exists demonstrating which qualities determine whether low-income people will derive the most benefits from moving to better neighborhoods – not to mention whether the program is designed well enough, or with enough precision, to benefit any particular group over another.

Even in cases where evidence points to a potential way to screen for "good bets" for a mobility program, the path to target efficiency and developing the right program model remains unclear. For example, forthcoming research suggests that MTO women who had experienced prior trauma were less likely to reap psychological benefits of moving to a low-poverty neighborhood than those who had not experienced trauma (Acevedo, 2012). Does this mean that women who have experienced trauma are bad bets, and should be screened out of mobility programs? Most would say no, and it would be difficult and perhaps inappropriate to screen for this kind of information in the first place. Further, defining who is a bad or good bet requires clear goals and pre-established target outcomes, which few programs to date have employed to date. Finally, implementation considerations such as ensuring program viability and political support could constrain program designers' efforts to limit participation only to certain households, even if it is desirable.

Still, research suggests that basic "ready to move" screening criteria would be appropriate for just about any relocation-focused mobility program. For example, it appears that economically stable households with employed adults are more likely to make successful moves under mobility programs (Cunningham and Sawyer, 2005). Further, MTO researchers found that some program participants were not ready for the stresses of relocation due to chronic and debilitating health problems, and suggest that such clients were more suited to service-rich supportive housing environments (Briggs, Popkin, and Goering, 2010). In addition, a survey of eight mobility programs that emerged out of consent decrees from desegregation lawsuits against PHAs and HUD found that many families had little interest in moving, particularly if mobility counseling only became available in conjunction with public housing demolition and forced relocation (Popkin et al, 2003). These experiences, among many other instances of forced relocation of minority populations, have spurred advocates to call for mobility programs to "opt in" in the spirit of expanding choices, as opposed to being compulsory (see, for example: Crowley and Pelletiere, 2012). From the limited perspective of program performance, it only makes sense for families to participate if they are interested in relocating.

But in cases where programs seek to define a narrower set of target outcomes, screening beyond "ready to move" criteria might be desirable in order to achieve target efficiency – even no programs to date have done this, and evidence for what works is limited. For example, a program might limit participation to families with school-age children if the focus is on improving educational attainment among a given voucher population. Another approach could be for programs to prioritize certain populations – such as children and adults with chronic conditions that are "likely to be improved by a move to a lower poverty neighborhood… such as depression, obesity, diabetes, hypertension, PTSD, and asthma" – but still welcome a wider universe of families to participate should resources permit (Tegeler and Hankins, 2012).

Targeting Places

The literature on mobility programs also suggests that better targeting of receiving neighborhoods – beyond what MTO and many court-ordered desegregation programs have tried – is likely to improve the experiences of participating families, and perhaps increase their chances at reaping educational and economic gains. For example, mobility programs might screen out neighborhoods in low-performing school districts on behalf of their clients, thereby removing some of the choice involved in selecting schools but increasing the likelihood that participating families' children actually gain access to better school environments. Still, it should be noted that the evidence for *how* to identify schools that would be beneficial to low-income children participating in a mobility program is extremely limited.

In addition, program designers need to understand other variables that determine whether low-risk areas are actually a good "fit" for very low-income families – or at least acknowledge the limits that a new location alone can provide without additional supports. To this end, designers and program operators could screen potential receiving neighborhoods according to whether they are well-served by workforce intermediaries, whether they are easily navigable via public transportation, whether low-cost childcare is available, and whether school districts or other organizations provide free or low-cost after-school and summer activities for children. Finally, looking beyond point-in-time poverty rates and school performance indicators and tracking indicators *over time* can help prevent programs from directing client families to declining or "tipping" areas under transition (see, for example: Galster, 2005; and Galster, Cutsinger, and Lim, 2007).

Helping Families Stay and Gain

Families' experiences in relocation-only mobility programs suggest that it is a weak approach to operationalizing the logic model above, but the literature points to a few obvious fixes. As noted in detail earlier in this chapter, very low-income families often need intense and varied housing-specific supports to both reach and sustain access to low-risk, higher opportunity areas. However, mobility programs must look beyond these fixes in order to solve the puzzle of how to help families better adjust to their new surroundings and translate their new locations into educational and economic gains. To this end, programs could provide a broader range of pre-move counseling or "coaching" to help fill information gaps and introduce new logic models – for example, to help families understand how to judge whether a school is a good fit, advocate on their child's behalf to their new school's administration, or manage conflicts with landlords. A few ongoing mobility programs have already taken steps in this direction. Further, "mobility plus" models could bolster internal program capacity around specific issues, such as education or workforce development, or connect client families to partnering agencies who can provide those services (Briggs, Popkin, and Goering, 2010).

In the realm of education, for example, the Project Choice busing program in metro Hartford demonstrates the extent to which programs can work to support low-income children in their new school environments, and the degree to which this support is needed; program staff support and counsel students and their families, but also work on the "supply side" with receiving school staff to ensure that necessary supports are available on-site, and maintains an after-school center (Kruckenberg, Small, Tegeler, and Arcaya, 2009). Developing this kind of specialization would require housing-centric mobility designers and operators to cultivate new partnerships, expand internal capacity and expertise, and get creative with program mechanics.

This level of experimentation is new territory for mobility programs, and only a few have had the resources and capacity to try new approaches. In addition, the type of supports available to families in a mobility program, when coupled with neighborhood targeting criteria and family screening, would only make sense if they are organized around achieving the program's goals and target outcomes (if any). But generally, if mobility programs seek to expand their programmatic focus to capture the range of challenges that families face post-move, they must learn to help their clients broker and target within – for example – educational and employment markets, *in addition to* housing markets. This is a difficult task in the context of underfunded PHAs, which have jurisdiction over the HCV program but lack capacity and expertise in areas other than housing, and are generally resistant to any programmatic change that could potentially result in serving fewer families (even if this has not *proven* to be the case with mobility programs).[9]

What Does Success Look Like? And How Might It Be Tracked?

As noted earlier in this chapter, few mobility programs to date have been structured around achieving specific social outcomes for families, as most have relied on relocation to deliver on a range of outcomes. Indeed, any targeting around outcomes – and measuring program performance relative to those outcomes – has been rare in low-income housing programs in general. In addition, mixed results on outcomes for families who participated in MTO have clouded previous held notions about what mobility programs should aim to achieve in the first place. Although there is rough consensus among researchers and advocates that programs need to do a better job of helping families settle long-term in receiving neighborhoods and reaping some kind of benefit from their new locations, there is less agreement about what success ultimately should look like in the context of a mobility program; since these programs seek to capture the multi-dimensional aspects of what housing provides as a *location*, they could understandably serve as a vehicle for a range of policy priorities.

The literature on social policy design does not point to any clear answers, but it provides some models that could be used for measuring a mobility program's success. For example,

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[9] Assuming flat funding, if a PHA increases its payment standard (the maximum rent it is willing to cover beyond what the family is able to pay) to encourage and allow for moves to higher-rent areas, it might need to take fewer families off its waiting list, in which case it would eventually serve fewer families overall as other families drop out of the program and are replaced by ones with higher Housing Assistance Payment contracts (agreements that establish PHA payment obligations to landlords who rent to voucher holders). Increased staff time for mobility counseling and housing search assistance would also decrease the amount of funding available for HAP contracts, and indirectly decrease the number of families served. However, it is also possible that families who move to better neighborhoods with the help of mobility programs will earn more money over time, resulting in lower HAP and potential savings to the agency. In addition, cost savings could accrue in realms outside the PHA, and it is unclear whether higher HAP would even be required in some programmatically defined "opportunity areas." Again, this debate is currently unresolved, but PHAs typically perceive mobility programs as increasing both administrative expenses and HAP. See my discussion of program costs in chapters 3 and 4.

Crane argues that social programs should be judged to "work" if they have substantial and long-lasting effects on the treatment group, they are cost-efficient relative to alternatives, they have undergone a quality evaluation, they are internally consistent, they are unique, and they can be scaled (Crane, 1998). However, a more pragmatic measure of a "good" policy is there is consensus on the policy itself – and not necessarily on the values that might underlie it (Lindblom, 1958).

Finally, given current uncertainty about the effectiveness and cost-efficiency of different program components, the next wave of mobility programs that seek to expand both housing-specific services and non-housing supports for families will need to track and analyze an even more complicated set of variables in order to determine what works. To this end, mobility programs would benefit from monitoring program performance over time in order to track use of resources and evaluate effectiveness (Winter, 2006; Turner and Briggs, 2008). At a moment when the assisted housing mobility field appears to be increasing its focus on specific social outcomes (e.g., educational improvement) and not just on locations assumed to deliver them (e.g., desegregation measured by place of residence alone), performance management will be critical to developing mobility models that are effective, replicable, and reasonably priced.

The Design Process

The literature on mobility programs includes only one account of a program's design *process*. This retrospective of MTO's design and launch describes the process as being marked by critical compromises, reliance on previous models that turned out to be limited, an unrealistic sense of client population needs, and uneven capacity to implement the program across all five sites (Briggs, Goering, and Popkin, 2010).

However, extensive scholarship on policy design in general has offered many models for understanding these processes. For example, although design might be "a game of failure and disappointment," designers in theory have a number of strategies available to craft effective and efficient policies and programs, as well as develop useful range of alternatives. These include, but are not limited to *minimum necessary conditions* strategies, incorporating *safeguards*, *oppositional analysis*, and *backward-* and *forward-mapping* (Bobrow, 2006). These strategies often depend on first identifying "problems" and developing "problem statements" (Weimer, 1993).

However, the practice of policy design usually does not resemble this theoretical ideal. For example, designers rarely operate with the benefit of clear objectives before engaging in the design process, nor do they gather all available evidence or entertain a meaningful range of alternatives that extend beyond tinkering at the margins of existing policies and programs (Lindblom, 1958). Indeed, the fact that policy design processes are embedded in institutions and rarely follow a linear or rational model begs the question whether it is worth distinguishing

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policy design as happening in a "separate space" as policy implementation (Weimer, 1993). This distinction would be understandably fuzzy for PHA staff developing mobility programs designed to operate as initiatives within larger existing voucher programs.

Designing and Implementing Programs in Public Housing Authorities

A small group of PHAs is developing the next generation of mobility programs. The literature on implementing programs and managing change in the context of public and mission-oriented agencies highlights some challenges that mobility program designers could face working within PHAs, as well as potential strategies they could use. Further, recent trends in PHAs as delivery agents for federal housing policy provide a backdrop for current mobility efforts, and present unique constraints that could influence program design and management decisions around mobility.

Recent Trends in Public Housing Authorities

Public Housing Authorities are city- or county-based agencies (though a few are state-level) created and charged to administer federal housing programs. Until President Nixon placed a moratorium on new public housing construction in 1973, these agencies' primary responsibility was to develop and maintain physical housing stock for low-income families. By the time of the moratorium, and due to federal and local policies to allocate units to the poorest, public housing had become the housing of "last resort" for such households. This had not always been the case (Vale and Freemark, 2012), and the degree to which it became the norm has varied substantially between PHAs. It was much more true of Chicago than New York City, for example, thanks to deliberate efforts in the latter to maintain a degree of income and population mix in each housing development (Bloom, 2008).

The 1980s, however, marked the beginning of a period of change in PHAs' authorizing environments, missions, and behaviors. Trends during this more recent period have included increasing devolution of federal policymaking and agenda-setting to PHAs, flat or decreasing funding for low-income housing programs, and increasing "hybridity" – a shift from a purely public model of housing delivery for the poor to a public-private-nonprofit model serving a wider range of incomes, with expanded and sometimes conflicting programmatic mandates, and often requiring collaboration between multiple agencies. Overall, these changes are emblematic of the increasing popularity of neoliberal views of how housing should be delivered to the poor – namely, "greater individual autonomy, reliance on market mechanisms, and less state intervention in the delivery of goods and services" (Nguyen, Rohe, and Cowan, 2012). For example, the 1998 Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act, which brought significant

reforms to federal public housing and rental assistance programs, explicitly aimed to "deregulate PHAs" (HUD, 1998).

In contrast to the pre-moratorium era, PHAs' programmatic oversight today includes administering rental assistance, helping low-income families become more economically self-sufficient, redeveloping distressed housing stock, attracting private investment and residents of all incomes, and managing public housing stock as a financial asset, among other areas. In addition, PHAs and other actors now have access to a wider range of financing tools and capacity to deliver housing to low- and moderate-income families, and specialized programs such as Moving to Work, HOPE VI, and Choice Neighborhoods have granted PHAs more control over use of funds and in establishing programmatic agendas that respond to local factors. However, increasing tools and authority over programmatic agendas has come amidst major funding cuts and administrative changes, particularly in the late 1990s and early 2000s, which has prompted many PHAs cut back on the number of extremely low-income families they serve.

In combination, these trends – along with often conflicting and ambiguous policy directives from the federal government – have made it difficult for PHAs to serve the most needy households, and they have also resulted in divergent policy implementation on the ground. Kleit and Page's study of twelve PHAs in the Pacific Northwest found that factors such as the entrepreneurial and professional capabilities of staff, market conditions, agency priorities, state and local statutes, and other political factors have influenced PHAs' programmatic agendas (Kleit and Page, 2010). Despite considerable implications for federal policy, there is very little scholarship on how these factors interact to shape PHAs' organizational strategies and, most importantly, outcomes for the families they serve.

Assisted Housing Mobility in an Era of Devolution and Hybridity

In the context of PHAs, assisted housing mobility is emblematic of recent trends towards federal devolution of policymaking decisions to agencies, as well as of inter-sector, inter-agency, intra-agency, and programmatic hybridity.

Devolution and Ambiguous Mandates

As described in more detail in chapter 3, PHAs' current efforts to pursue mobility are enabled in large part by the Moving to Work (MTW) demonstration program, enacted in 1996, which grants a small number of agencies significant programmatic oversight and control of funds with the goal of using housing assistance as a platform for helping low-income families achieve broader goals, such as socioeconomic mobility and higher quality of life. Considering

capacity and resource constraints, MTW all but requires PHAs to collaborate with outside agencies in order to meet program goals.

MTW has three broadly stated statutory objectives under which all program-related activities must fall: increasing efficient use of federal dollars, helping families become more economically self-sufficient, and increasing housing choices for low-income families. However, these objectives are so broadly defined that PHAs have diverged significantly in how they have used their authority. Unsurprisingly, although the program has spurred innovation in some areas, criticisms have included lax oversight and the potential for abuse (Office of Inspector General, 2004; CBPP, 2011), demands for a stronger focus on evaluation and learning (Lubell and Baron, 2007), and the charge that agencies "cream" in order to report more successful outcomes (Nguyen, Rohe, and Cowan, 2012). Advocates have also called for HUD to provide more guidance to PHAs on how to develop programs that meet the objective of expanding housing choices for families, which few agencies have pursued in earnest (PRRAC, 2013).

Design of (Hybrid) Delivery

Assisted housing mobility is also emblematic of recent trends in federal policy in that it requires PHAs to partner with outside organizations (e.g., inter-organizational hybridity) in order to help families already receiving rental assistance achieve a secondary goal of relocating to better-resourced areas with higher quality of life (e.g., programmatic hybridity) (Nguyen, Rohe, and Cowan, 2012). A critical component of mobility program design is *designing the delivery system* – particularly in the way labor is organized within and between collaborating agencies.

For example, in choosing an outside agency to deliver some aspect of a mobility program, designers must negotiate potentially conflicting missions, organizational identities, capacity, and power dynamics and hopefully seek out partnerships with high "interagency collaborative capacity" and perhaps even "create value on the cheap" by working with the agencies they already trust and with whom already have programmatic partnerships (Bardach, 1998). Indeed, contracting out can pose substantial risks to both parties (or more than two, in some cases) such as a tarnished reputation, unforeseen or high costs of managing the program, or insufficient personnel to carry it out (Smith and Lipsky, 1993; Briggs, Goering, and Popkin, 2010). Neither PHAs nor contracted agencies should assume that they can effectively carry out their roles in mobility programs in their spare time, but operating capacity in the universe of affordable housing programs is inevitably subject to limits in personnel, expertise, and funding.

In addition, designers must consider how to align incentives in order to allow frontline staff some flexibility to make judgments and learn from client families, but not so much as to compromise the integrity of the program and jeopardize its ability to achieve target outcomes.

Lipsky argues that frontline staff in government and missions-oriented programs are forced to negotiate a competing set of incentives from above (such as program mandates) and below (such as variable client needs), and their resulting day-to-day decisions about how to serve clients as "street level bureaucrats" amount to policymaking in their own right (Lipsky, 1980).

Further, mobility program designers must account for a broader set of factors that enable, complicate, and constrain program implementation. It is common for government programs to require coordinated action on the part of a range of governmental actors (sometimes from multiple agencies, or from different levels of government), courts, interest groups, private firms, politicians, and media in order to be effective (Winter, 2006). Both direct and indirect participation by these actors – each of which has a different perspective on its purpose and priority – can distort a program's intended operating structure and jeopardize its effectiveness in achieving target outcomes. For example, political opposition in receiving neighborhoods is a common challenge that mobility program designers and implementers must take into account (Briggs, Goering, and Popkin, 2010; Popkin et al, 2003). Pressman and Wildavsky call the challenge of managing these actors around successful program implementation as the "complexity of joint action" (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1979).

Finally, mission-oriented organizations are most effective when internal capacity and staffing is oriented around core *processes*, and does not divide job functions into silos that preclude easy and effective collaboration across those functions (Ostroff, 1999). Ensuring that organizations have the right *kinds* of capacity *where* needed, and at the right *time*, is particularly important for trouble-shooting and adjusting operating structure over time. Mobility programs need this kind of nimble operating structure, especially during their start-up phase. As a companion piece to organizational strategy, mobility programs would also benefit from monitoring program performance over time in order to track use of limited resources, motivate staff, and evaluate effectiveness (Winter, 2006; Turner and Briggs, 2008). Put differently, performance management can and should be part of strategy – making it, executing on it, and remaking it over time as implementers learn new things.

Although each of the previously discussed decisions around design of delivery and implementation are not program design decisions in the traditional sense, they could be included as additional "threshold conditions and contingencies" that need to be in place in order to operationalize the theory of change outlined earlier in this chapter.

Program Development and Political Management

Mobility programs represent a considerable shift in approach to administering the HCV program, and as such carry political risks. For example, the appetite for experimentation among PHA leadership, politicians, advocacy groups, could shift. In addition, PHAs considering

whether to pursue mobility under their MTW authority must weigh mobility against other priorities – each of which has its own constituency – when allocating limited available funding (e.g., intra-agency hybridity).

Political opposition both within and outside the agency could also be an obstacle due to the common perception that mobility programs translate to serving fewer needy households via the voucher program. Because a mobility program would shift the voucher program's policy objectives and thus constitute an attempt to create new "public value," mobility designers and implementers must strategically align an agency's internal capacity and authorizing environment around this new value proposition (Moore, 1995) but perhaps also build political support for the program by demonstrating success as a smaller pilot before scaling up. Further, they might need to exercise leadership in pursuit of "adaptive change" within their agencies, which could involve helping their colleagues see a positive tradeoff in serving families *better* according to a new HCV program model, even if this model could translate to awarding fewer vouchers overall if brought to scale (Goleman, 2000).

In an era of when PHAs must negotiate competing federal directives, local priorities, and funding cuts, they have struggled to maintain organizational coherence and financial viability while delivering on their core mission of serving the most needy households. Pursuing mobility in this context could be perilous if it is not implemented as part of a larger organizational strategy (Kleit and Page, 2008).

3. Motives, Context, Problem Formulation, and Theories of Change: Setting the Stage for Program Design

As described in chapter 2, an agency's institutional and environmental context – as expressed through its internal and external politics, capacity (e.g., staffing, funding, information, workflows), and its broader task and policy environment – can shape design and implementation decisions around specific programs. Evaluating these decisions in a vacuum thus misses a big part of how and why programs ultimately the form they do. Considering how little is known about both organizational strategy in Public Housing Authorities *and* the process of developing assisted housing mobility programs, understanding the broader context for each current program design effort is critical if outsiders are to have any chance of extracting useful lessons from them.

For each of the three cases I profile in this thesis, it is possible to trace the cascading influence of institutional and environmental factors on intermediate and framing steps – such as problem formulation and developing a theory of change – and then on specific design decisions. Analyzing the cases through this more comprehensive lens – and comparing the relative influence and different ways that institutional and environmental factors have shaped design decisions across the three cases – allows for a more complete evaluation of those decisions, and can inform future efforts around mobility.

Comparisons across cases can be particularly helpful in an area such as assisted housing mobility, where evidence gaps abound and room for experimentation remains. It can be telling if program designers at different sites take similar or divergent approaches to solving the mobility puzzle – and why. For example, of the three efforts I have chosen to profile, the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development and the King County Housing Authority have similar institutional contexts because both are Public Housing Authorities with Moving to Work authority. However, as I describe in this chapter and the next, critical differences between their organizational dynamics and broader environments, including DHCD's role as a state agency, have translated to mobility programs with divergent goals, design features, and approaches to program delivery.

In addition, considering these two PHAs' central role in developing the new wave of mobility programs, comparing their efforts to the Baltimore program – designed and operated wholly by an outside, for-profit consulting firm, as a remedy to a desegregation lawsuit against HUD and the Baltimore City Housing Authority – can reveal challenges specific to integrating mobility into standard administration of the HCV program. Indeed, comparing the DHCD and KCHA cases to Baltimore's program is a way of contrasting one of a handful of new

institutional paradigms for mobility – in this case, voluntary and PHA-directed – against a previous generation of programs that were compulsory, and which emerged out of desegregation lawsuits *against* PHAs.

In short: context matters. In this chapter, I first overview each case study site, and then examine how institutional and environmental factors have enabled, shaped, and constrained each mobility effort's motives, problem formulation, and theory of change. As part of this analysis, I also profile where mobility fits within the context of each agency, and how this context – for example, whether mobility has competed with other policy priorities for staff resources – has influenced the way in which mobility has emerged as a viable option worthy of the agency's resources and support. These elements are easy to overlook, but I argue that they represent a kind of embodiment of an agency (including the actions and motives of individual staff) and its context in action, and they form the arena – and establish the terms of engagement – in which design and implementation decisions are made.

Case Study Site Overview

Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development

Calling the DHCD a Public Housing Authority is a bit misleading. DHCD is a sprawling organization whose state-wide coverage and influence over housing markets is unique for a single agency, and whose programmatic oversight extends far beyond the purview typical of a PHA. Massachusetts is also unique among states in its involvement in developing physical public housing through local authorities (as opposed to relying totally on federal programs), which began with the Chapter 200 program in 1948 (Vale, 2000). Specifically, DHCD oversees a state public housing program, state and federal rental assistance programs, state and federal housing production subsidy programs such as the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit program, and a handful of community development, local and regional planning, and energy conservation programs. PHAs typically oversee physical public housing and rental assistance programs only, so DHCD's functionality as a PHA is embedded in a larger agency with much broader programmatic oversight. In addition, DHCD's governing structure contrasts with typical PHAs in that it does not have its own board of commissions; the governor appoints an undersecretary of Housing and Community Development to lead DHCD, but the agency's expansive size and programmatic reach are such that the undersecretary must navigate and rely on a maze of divisions and managers who have purview over a broad range of activities.

The Bureau of Rental Assistance is a division within DHCD that oversees state and federal rental assistance programs, of which there are several varieties and sub-programs. Massachusetts is one of the only states that funds and operates its own rental assistance

program (in contrast to the federal Housing Choice Voucher program), and over the decades the relative size of state and federal rental assistance programs have changed in part due to popularity with the governor and state legislature, and in part due to federal policy. The federal HCV program currently outnumbers state vouchers by a ratio of approximately three to one, but Governor Patrick has spearheaded a recent expansion of State rental assistance so this ratio could decline in the coming years.

Both state and federal voucher programs are administered on a regional basis by nine Regional Administering Agencies (RAAs) whose jurisdictions together cover the entire state. RAAs act as regional voucher agencies whose jurisdiction is overlaid onto other cities and towns, some of which have their own PHAs. For example, the Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership (MBHP) is the RAA that administers DHCD's voucher program in Metro Boston, which itself contains dozens of housing authorities. However, RAAs are not sub-departments within DHCD; they are contracted nonprofit agencies that typically operate a range of housing programs in contract with both DHCD and with local agencies. For example, MBHP administers housing programs for both DHCD and the City of Boston. Each RAA operates a different set of programs, has its own organizational mission, and is both responsive to and rooted in the region that it serves. In addition, each RAA contracted with DHCD to administer its HCV program at different times. However, most have held these contracts for decades; MBHP has administered rental assistance programs for DHCD since the early 1980s.

In 1999, HUD granted Moving to Work authority to DHCD to cover a 183-household economic self-sufficiency pilot program administered in Metro Boston and Worcester County. This program is commonly referred to as the agency's "Little MTW" program. On June 19, 2008, DHCD expanded its MTW contract with HUD via an Amended and Restated Moving to Work Demonstration Agreement to cover its entire federal Housing Choice Voucher program (with a few of exceptions for small, targeted programs) through the end of fiscal year 2018. The agency's leasing projection for its HCV program for fiscal year 2014 is approximately 19,000 vouchers, but only 15,000 or so of them are unrestricted, mobile vouchers not already assigned to a targeted program (DHCD, 2013a). DHCD is also one of the only PHAs whose MTW authority covers *only* a voucher program, and does not include jurisdiction over physical public housing units.

King County Housing Authority

The King County Housing Authority (KCHA) is a PHA in the Seattle metropolitan area whose jurisdiction includes 37 suburban cities and towns (but not Seattle itself). The agency was granted MTW authority over its entire public housing and voucher programs in 2003, with a few exceptions for small, targeted programs. Since this time, its public housing stock has shrunk

from nearly 4,000 units to around 2,000, but it has replaced this amount with an equal number of project-based HCVs; its mobile HCV amount has remained roughly constant during this period, at around 8,000 vouchers, including project-based vouchers (KCHA, 2012). KCHA has also used LIHTCs and tax-exempt bonds to finance an additional 4,500 units that technically fall outside the agency's public housing program.

Baltimore Mobility Program / Metropolitan Baltimore Quadel

The Baltimore mobility program is a court-ordered program originally enacted as a remedy in the partial consent decree for the *Thompson v HUD* lawsuit, which the Maryland American Civil Liberties Union filed against HUD, the Housing Authority of Baltimore City, and the City of Baltimore on behalf of African-American plaintiffs in 1995. In this lawsuit, the plaintiffs charged that HUD, HABC, and the City deliberately segregated black residents and applicants for both public housing and mobile vouchers because of their race, in violation of the U.S. Constitution, the Fair Housing Act, and other civil rights laws (HUD, 2012). Like other desegregation lawsuits against PHAs in the 1990s, *Thompson* was triggered by public housing demolition and plans to relocate families to equally segregated, disinvested areas of Baltimore (PRRAC, 2005).

The 1996 *Thompson* partial consent decree created and provided funding for the mobility program, which was to be made available for up to 1,988 families[10] named in the lawsuit's plaintiff class, and will continue under the 2012 settlement (which authorized funding for an additional 2,600 vouchers). Eligible families can choose whether to enroll, and participation requires leasing up outside "impacted areas," defined as census tracts in the Baltimore region with high concentrations of assisted units or with high minority populations. Impacted areas primarily comprise nearly all of Baltimore City and portions of Baltimore County, and "non-impacted" areas include large swaths of several suburban counties in the Baltimore region.[11] However, it should be noted that the program is currently in the process of updating its targeting criteria for receiving neighborhoods, per the requirements of the recent settlement.

Quadel Consulting, a for-profit consulting firm, secured the contract to administer the Baltimore mobility program in 2002, after six years of underperformance on the part of prior nonprofit contractors (see "Dividing and Coordinating labor" in chapter 4 for further detail on the history of the program's administration). Quadel did not have a presence in Baltimore

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[10] Of this total, 646 are project-based vouchers, which – as in any HCV program – are not portable but can be used to ensure long-term affordability in physical housing units. The Baltimore mobility program also includes an affordable homeownership component. However, in this thesis I focus on the tenant-based mobility portion of the program, which covers 1,342 vouchers of the total 1,988 vouchers made available in the partial consent decree.
[11] In the *Thompson* partial consent decree and settlement, the Baltimore region is defined as Baltimore City and the City of Annapolis, as well as Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Carroll, Harford, and Howard Counties.

before being awarded the contract, and created Metropolitan Baltimore Quadel (MBQ) specifically to operate the program. As noted in chapter 2, although it is technically housed within the Housing Authority of Baltimore City's larger HCV program, the Baltimore mobility program is so strongly identified with Quadel that I refer to it as MBQ for short.

Motivation For Pursuing Mobility

DHCD

DHCD enjoys agency-wide support for using scarce housing resources as a platform for addressing a range of challenges facing low-income families and individuals in Massachusetts – challenges that are expressed, in Associate Director for Public Housing and Rental Assistance Lizbeth Heyer's words, in a widening "structural gap" between their incomes and housing costs in the state, particularly in Metro Boston (interview). To help close this gap, senior staff understand that the agency must take advantage of its broad oversight and programmatic muscle to devise new ways to impact the housing and economic landscape for low-income people, and support them beyond merely providing safe and affordable shelter.

Lizbeth says the Bureau of Rental Assistance's intent is to use its MTW authority to develop new initiatives that specifically assist "working and work-able" low-income families and individuals, as opposed to homeless, the elderly, or other special needs populations[12] (interview). However, current Bureau director Tom Graham noted that DHCD's HCV population is hardly homogenous in regards to being suitable for work; approximately 40 to 45 percent of households in the program have adults who are working, work-able, or attending some kind of school or training, but the majority have either elderly or disabled heads of household. In addition, only slightly more than half of households in the HCV population are families with children. Nevertheless, the agency's first major experimental effort began in 1999 as a 183-household "Little MTW" economic self-sufficiency pilot program. Later, DHCD's move in 2008 to expand its MTW authority to encompass its entire HCV program, save for a few small initiatives, was a sign of its desire to develop additional models for providing rental assistance, and to impact a larger number of families.

Within the MTW program, the primary motivation for pursuing assisted housing mobility in particular rests with Gretchen Weismann, Manager of Targeted Programs in the Bureau of Rental Assistance. Prior to beginning her position in September 2008, Gretchen was a doctoral student in the Department of Urban Studies and Planning at MIT, where she spent five years studying HUD's Moving to Opportunity experiment – both as a research assistant for

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[12] Special needs populations are typically defined as those who have physical or mental disabilities that require specialized support services, and who are often better suited to supportive housing environments.

Professor Xavier de Souza Briggs on his book on the program (Briggs, Goering, and Popkin, 2010), and as a researcher in her own right, publishing articles and completing a dissertation on the role of kin networks and parental monitoring on adolescents' engagement in risky and delinquent behavior in the context of MTO. Due to her background, which also includes prior work as an advocate for homeless families, she possesses an unusual amount of academic knowledge for a government housing official. In addition, her experience researching and evaluating MTO emboldened her to pursue new and improved mobility models that could make use of lessons she and her colleagues helped generate about how mobility programs could better serve families. Gretchen described the origins of her interest in housing mobility in this way:

> I spent five years working on MTO. That's what I did day in and day out for five years. I feel like I read a lot about the issue and thought a lot about the issue for a long time. And I didn't just stumble across MTO. It's a personal interest. One of my favorite little sayings, which an old colleague said to me at one point, is that *all research is me-search*. Meaning that you're driven to do something out of self-interest. Something about it is interesting to you. Now, I have lots of explanations for why I'm interested in inequality, but that's what it is. I'm interested in in equality and places, and that comes from how I grew up (interview).

Considering Gretchen's interest and knowledge in housing mobility, accepting a position at DHCD was well timed in a sense because it coincided with the agency's expansion of its MTW authority to cover its entire HCV program – thus signaling a desire to engage in programmatic experimentation around how it administers rental assistance. Although concrete opportunities for her to develop new programs have been limited due to agency dynamics beyond her control, she has made a concerted effort over the past two years to pursue mobility, which she believed would meet the MTW program's statutory objective to "increase housing choices for low-income families"; her interpretation of this objective was, and continues to be, that DHCD is "already supposed to be doing [mobility]" (interview). It is worth noting that more senior staff within the agency, whose authority over policy decisions supersedes Gretchen's, do not see as obvious a connection between mobility and the MTW program. However, some consider it an option worth exploring (see "Agency Context for Mobility" below for more on mobility's place within DHCD's MTW program) (interviews).

In particular, Gretchen hopes to help the agency address the forces that she sees as contributing to a lack of "real choice" of location for families in the HCV program. Further, she believes that DHCD needs to be proactive about addressing these barriers – by providing

counseling, cultivating relationships with landlords in more expensive sub-markets, and making other administrative adjustments to be more conscious of location – in order to overcome entrenched institutional relationships and professional norms that dominate the agency's administration of its HCV program (interview).

According to Bureau staff, the agency has not moved forward with the MTW program – mobility or otherwise – as quickly, with as much dedicated staff, or with as clear a policy vision as many had originally anticipated or would have preferred (interviews). My discussion later in this chapter ("Agency Context for Mobility") describes the reasons for this slow progress, and its impact on efforts specifically around mobility, which is embedded within the MTW program. In its current stage, it appears that support for mobility among senior staff in the Bureau and beyond in DHCD is temperate, possibly because most do not yet understand exactly how the program would work.

However, other incremental efforts to address the geographic distribution of affordable housing in DHCD's supply-side housing production programs demonstrate some support within the larger agency for assisted housing mobility programs' basic objective to expand the quality of housing choices available for low-income people. For example, DHCD awarded extra points for projects located "areas of opportunity" in its scoring system for awarding Low-Income Housing Tax Credits in its second funding round of 2012 (LIHTCs are awarded on a biannual basis) (DHCD, 2012). In its 2013 Qualified Allocation Plan, DHCD identifies projects in "areas of opportunity" as a "priority funding category" and proposes specific metrics for measuring opportunity – based on a public school system's performance, access to employment, access to higher education, and access to health care – that had not appeared in the 2012 plan. In addition, projects must be located in census tracts with poverty rates below 15 percent, and must include a minimum percentage of family-sized units to qualify for points in the opportunity area category. However, racial composition is not included as a measure of opportunity (DHCD, 2013b). Although incorporating neighborhood opportunity indicators to its LIHTC scoring system is an important step for expanding housing choices for low-income renters, at the moment the number of points a project can achieve in this category is small; as such, this change hardly constitutes a major effort on the part of the agency to alter the geography of assisted housing in Massachusetts.

Another current initiative within DHCD that seeks to better acknowledge the importance of housing *location* is a collaboration between the Bureau of Rental Assistance and housing production staff to use project-based HCVs as a preservation tool. Specifically, the program will incorporate "opportunity"-related criteria for selecting sites to receive these operating subsidies. However, this level of collaboration is atypical in the project-based HCV program (approximately 12 percent of the agency's HCVs are project-based, as of May 2013);

DHCD staff who administer production subsidy programs such as LIHTC typically take the lead over Bureau staff on establishing policy priorities for using project-based HCVs (interview). Further, policy priorities are not often coordinated or articulated across program areas within DHCD partly due to the size and complexity of the agency (interviews). In any case, despite some isolated efforts, DHCD has not identified expanding quality housing choices for low-income people as an agency-wide priority.

In sum, agency-wide priorities have not driven or motivated the Bureau's efforts around mobility within its MTW program or otherwise. Other than the MTW program's loosely enforced statutory objective to "increase choices for low-income families" – which DHCD, like other PHAs with MTW authority, are not *required* to pursue[13] – Gretchen's personal interest in the topic, and her authority as a program development manager in the Bureau to pursue it, has to date provided the primary motivation for DHCD's efforts around developing a mobility program.

KCHA

In comparison to DHCD, KCHA's agency-wide priorities are a much larger motivating factor in its decision to pursue mobility than the interests and motivations of particular staff members. According to Executive Director Stephen Norman, the agency has made a "long set of policy decisions and resources commitments" over the past 15 years to expand housing opportunities for low-income families, particularly in the inner-eastern part of the County – a suburban area to the east of Seattle that is wealthier and better resourced than the southern part of the County, where low-income and minority populations are concentrated (interview). As such, KCHA has long supported mobility's basic objective of expanding quality housing choices for families receiving rental assistance.

For example, KCHA has, during this 15-year period, purchased several multifamily properties on the east side and operated them primarily as workforce housing while making some units available to very- and extremely low-income households either by project-basing HCVs or by accepting families with mobile HCVs. The agency has also worked with A Regional Coalition for Housing (ARCH) to direct project-based HCVs to the affluent east side as a subsidy to developers seeking to build new affordable housing in this more expensive area.[14]

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[13] Perhaps due to the fact that pursuing this statutory objective is not required, no PHAs with MTW authority have, until now – in the case of DHCD and KCHA – pursued assisted housing mobility in earnest.

[14] Project-based HCVs act as an operating subsidy to affordable properties because the rent that owners can collect on these units is typically higher than what they can charge on a rent-restricted unit for a low-income family. The resultant higher net operating incomes allows developers to take out larger loans to finance properties, thus making projects more feasible.

KCHA has also used its MTW authority to take incremental steps to expand housing choices for its population with mobile, tenant-based vouchers. For example, KCHA's first action when it was granted MTW authority in 2003 was to use its newfound programmatic flexibility to sever its payment standard from Fair Market Rent[15] and create a two-tiered rent structure that allowed a higher payment standard in the eastern part of the County, which is significantly more expensive than the rest of the County. The agency is currently working, in conjunction with its effort around assisted housing mobility, to further sub-divide its rent structure into four geographic tiers in order to better reflect the relative cost of different submarkets within the County; this adjustment will raise the highest of the four tiers to exceed the agency's current payment standard for the eastern part of the County, which the agency hopes will further open up this area to its voucher population.

Although assisted housing mobility represents a logical continuation of KCHA's efforts over the past two decades to expand housing choices for its voucher population into better-resourced parts of the County, the agency's other primary motivator for pursuing mobility is its current focus – a "larger agenda" put forth by the board of directors, with significant buy-in among senior staff (interview) – on improving children's educational outcomes in both the public housing and voucher populations. In his opening remarks in convening the first multi-stakeholder mobility program design session in January, Norman set the stage by stressing education as providing the main thrust for the agency's involvement in mobility:

> What's really important are *outcomes* – for the families, and particularly for the children who live in our housing – for preventing or breaking multigenerational cycles of poverty. It's really what we're about. If we do nothing but raise the next generation of public housing applicants in good, affordable surroundings, we're going to fail, because *we can't build our way out of this*. The intent is to really say: what is the game changer? And the answer is academic success for the kids (emphasis added).

In recent years, KCHA has formed data sharing and programmatic partnerships with three school districts operating within the County (with hopes to expand this list in the future), and is currently engaged in several place-based initiatives – such as coordinating services with school districts, outreach to parents, and developing rapid re-housing strategies for youth at risk of homelessness – specifically aimed at improving educational performance among children who live in the agency's public housing.

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[15] Fair Market Rent is a HUD-generated figure that falls at approximately 40 percent of market rent in a given *regional* housing market. PHAs are required to cap the rents in apartments where HCV-holding families are permitted to lease up at between 90 and 110 percent of FMR. In many resource-rich submarkets, this cap makes it difficult or impossible for HCV-holders to be competitive rental applicants in the private rental market. By comparison, DHCD still ties its payment standard to FMR, and caps allowable rents at 110 percent of FMR.

Norman believes the agency's current effort around assisted housing mobility should be "seen within the context of an array of initiatives that KCHA is doing around education," and that mobility is "an educational tool" that can extend the agency's efforts to improve educational outcomes beyond the public housing population, and to children in families with mobile vouchers (interview). Specifically, KCHA staff hope to address the detrimental impacts of mid-school year moves on child behavioral and cognitive development, as well as the quality of schools to which low-income children in the agency's voucher program have access. These two motivators have led the agency to label its mobility program a "stability/mobility" program, since it will aim to both reduce the number mid-year moves among HCV-holding families regardless of where those moves are located, as well as provide support to families who wish to move from low-performing school districts to higher-performing ones. Both efforts will seek to impact the way families experience mobility, broadly defined, with the specific objective of improving educational outcomes (interview).

Overall, agency-wide priorities – providing a better and broader range of locational choices to low-income families, and improving educational performance among their children – are the primary motivation for KCHA in pursuing assisted housing mobility. This is not to say that the actions or motivations of individual staff within the agency have not played a part in establishing these objectives. Indeed, senior staff feel that the agency's board of commissioners and Executive Director are "committed" to these priorities and have provided strong leadership in developing programmatic solutions to address them (interview). However, the agency's cohesive policy agenda across its programmatic areas is clearly driving its efforts around mobility.

MBQ

As noted earlier in this chapter, the Baltimore mobility program grew out of the *Thompson v. HUD* partial consent decree resulting from a civil rights lawsuit that then-current and former African American public housing residents filed against HUD, the Housing Authority of Baltimore City, and the City of Baltimore in 1995. The partial consent decree in 1996 created and provided funding for the mobility program, which was a desegregation remedy for families named in the lawsuit's plaintiff class. As such, the terms and requirement of the case's partial consent decree, and its settlement in 2012, provide the impetus and motivation for the Baltimore mobility program's creation and continued performance. Seeing that the mobility program is *required* to be made available to eligible families, should they choose to participate, MBQ trainer Bernard Carey's playful entreaty to a room of during their orientation to the program was apt: "We're here as long as you wanna dance with us… we wanna dance with you" (observation).

Agency Context for Mobility

DHCD

As of May 2013, few DHCD staff members have contributed to the development of its mobility program, and staff within the Bureau of Rental Assistance have not provided leadership around the program or made it a priority. Factors such as limited capacity among staff to work on mobility (and the MTW program as a whole), turnover in leadership within the Bureau, and lack of consensus on the direction of the agency's MTW program, beyond implementing administrative efficiencies, have contributed to tepid support and limited engagement around mobility, and have combined to shape the way in which it has emerged as a potential option at DHCD.

Limited Staff Resources

Staff resources are at a premium in the Bureau of Rental Assistance due to hiring freezes and staffing caps imposed on all state agencies as cost-cutting measures since the recession struck several years ago. Whether and to what extent Governor Deval Patrick has successfully trimmed the state's bureaucracy during this period has been an ongoing point of contention among both detractors and supporters, resulting in newspaper headlines such as, "Patrick's Job Cut Record Affirmed, Assailed" (Boston Globe, 2010). Lost in the public debate about the size of the state's government – which retiring Bureau Fiscal Director Bob Cohen considers to be largely about "visuals" rather than actual cost savings – is the fact that many programs run through DHCD and other state agencies are federal programs with dedicated funding streams that do not impact state coffers. Even if an agency has sufficient federal resources under its purview to hire new staff, it is not permitted to do so if it would result in exceeding its state-imposed cap.

The Bureau of Rental Assistance is an example of this kind of hybrid agency, as its staff oversees both federal and state voucher programs. As a result of staffing caps and freezes on new hiring, the Bureau has struggled to staff its programs at sufficient levels, and it has been forced to make tradeoffs and get "resourceful" in how it allocates staff resources in order to "get our job done" (interview). MTW-related activities have thus have competed for staff time with other agency priorities in recent years and largely lost out to initiatives that have enjoyed more political backing from the governor, such as overhauling the state's homelessness programs. Although many staff were supportive of this particular initiative, Bob Cohen recalled the Bureau's inability to staff its full catalog of state and federal programs at the time:

We're given this huge mandate and limited staff. That's where you get the real
disconnect with government. There's a sense that, magically, things can happen just
because they're willed. But it's magical thinking (interview).

The Bureau's struggle to perform with constraints on staff resources demonstrates the agency's particular vulnerability to the political and policy agendas of elected officials, at least when compared to other PHAs whose staffing decisions take place in a more defined arena of federal funding streams.

Due to mobility's embeddedness within the agency's larger MTW program, the slowdown in MTW activities in recent years – beyond implementing administrative efficiencies – has directly resulted in reduced staff time available for developing a mobility program. In response, Gretchen has chosen to work primarily on her own, and with the help of others outside DHCD, to design the program. Describing her reason for taking this ad-hoc approach outside formal channels, she said, "Given that context (the agency's focus on homelessness), it's been difficult… I've been wary of creating a whole new process around housing choice" (interview).

Specifically, Gretchen engaged the help of interns from the Harvard Kennedy School of Government in researching best practices and developing a basic design and cost model for the program during the 2011-2012 academic year, and in the following year she solicited help from a graduate student from the MIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning (this author) to more fully articulate the program's design and develop an approach for implementing it. Her role has been primarily to manage the work of her interns and ensure continual progress, while engaging in political management to build support for it. However, Gretchen's obligations to assist with other agency priorities has limited her own ability to work on the program, and her maternity leave from November 2012 to late March 2013 also temporarily slowed its progress.

Overall, constraints on staff resources within the Bureau have retarded development of its mobility program, and have prevented both mid- and senior-level staff in engaging in the effort. As a result, few within the agency have been exposed to mobility, and most are still not familiar with how the program would work (interviews). Still, according to one senior manager, mobility likely would have fallen off Bureau's radar at some point over the past two years were it not for Gretchen's decisions to keep program development activities moving despite these constraints (interviews). However, staffing caps and hiring freezes could continue challenge the agency's ability to provide adequate management oversight for the program, should it be implemented in the future.

Sporadic Leadership

Turnover in senior-level staff positions in the Bureau in recent years is another root cause of slow progress around mobility, and the MTW program in general. The Bureau director position has been a particular source of instability. After Mary Anne Morrison retired as director in April 2011 after holding the position since the 1970s, it remained vacant for one year before Sheila Dillon was hired April 2012. Sheila's stay at the agency was short-lived, as she left after only six months to head the City of Boston's Department of Neighborhood Development in September. The Bureau's new director, Tom Graham, began his post in January of this year.[16] Aside from the director position, other Bureau staff who had been key drivers around the initial planning and launch of DHCD's MTW program have since left the agency.

Although each successive Bureau director has made some attempt to better define the agency's goals within its MTW program, most of these efforts were ad hoc, and few had lasting impacts. Due to the fact that mobility is programmatically and fiscally embedded in the agency's larger MTW program, the sporadic nature of leadership around MTW has slowed mobility's development and acceptance within the agency.

To the extent that the mobility program has continued to take form, it has happened with little involvement or buy-in among senior staff. Still, in order to ensure some progress, Gretchen has educated each new Bureau director and gain preliminary approvals when possible. For example, then-director Sheila Dillon and fiscal director Bob Cohen approved a preliminary budget for the program in the spring of 2012. However, Sheila has since left the agency and Bob retired in January (although he remains a part-time consultant to the agency), and their approval was not binding. In order to secure required subsequent approvals from newer senior agency staff – such as the new Bureau director – who, as of May 2013, remain mostly unfamiliar with the program's design and objectives, Gretchen will need to continue practice leadership in pursuit of "adaptive change" by rallying her superiors around this new value proposition (Goleman, 2000).

It remains to be seen whether Gretchen's entrepreneurial response to the Bureau's intermittent leadership around MTW will lead it to implement a mobility program, since senior staff with more direct control and *authority* over the MTW program have not yet endorsed mobility, nor do they so much as understand how it would work. Further, even if the mobility program does move forward, senior officials could impact its design. Retiring fiscal director Bob Cohen has come to call Bureau-originated programs "blooming flowers" because of the way

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[16] Tom Graham came to DHCD from the Cambridge Housing Authority, but he previously worked in DHCD's Bureau of Rental Assistance helping maintain and update its internal software. As such, he is a familiar face around the office.

they grow and take on new forms once higher-level staff, up to the undersecretary, weigh in on their designs (interview).

Vision for DHCD's MTW Program?

Due in large part to previously described staff constraints and turnover in senior positions at the Bureau in recent years, the agency does not have a single vision for how to deploy the flexibility and additional funding that its MTW authority provides. Although staff engaged in planning efforts around the program three years ago, most initiatives implemented under the MTW umbrella since then, other than administrative adjustments, have been ad hoc and absent of greater agency buy-in around a cohesive direction for the program. Bureau staff speak of its MTW program as if the best is yet to come.

The agency's primary focus on administrative efficiencies to date has influenced the way in which its mobility program has developed – largely as a result of one change agent within the Bureau, with minimal involvement on the part of other staff, and without any connection to a greater agenda for the agency's MTW program. This approach, while largely borne out of necessity, does not guarantee that the program will be implemented, and it certainly does not preclude involvement on the part of senior staff in the future. However, it is worth first describing the agency's MTW program activities to date in order to provide context for how an assisted housing mobility program has come to emerge as a realistic option at DHCD.

Early Focus on Efficiency. Since expanding its MTW authority in 2008, the Bureau's primary focus within its MTW program has been to increase administrative efficiency in its HCV program. Current director Tom Graham, who helped implement efficiency measures in his previous role maintaining internal software at the Bureau, contrasted the immediacy and political palatability of pursuing the MTW statutory objective of increasing efficient use of federal dollars with the tougher task of developing initiatives pursuant to the program's other two objectives: "Dealing with administrative efficiencies was easy. You could see it, you experience it yourself" (interview).

Indeed, the efficiencies the agency has implemented thus far – overhauling the internal documentation and client-tracking system, simplifying the utility allowance schedule, changing protocols around the project-based voucher waiting list management system, and allowing more infrequent tenant recertifications and unit inspections – are typical of what most PHAs with MTW authority have put into place, and are considered to be standard practice under the program. Still, staff at DHCD believed these measures were important first steps that needed to be in place prior to implementing programs pursuant to the other two MTW statutory objectives. In combination with the particularities of the agency's MTW contract with HUD, they have also had the intended effect of allowing the agency to accumulate reserves, which

staff decided early on to set aside for future programmatic experimentation (see "Uncertain Fiscal Environment" below for a more detailed description of the agency's MTW contract with HUD). Finally, new efficiencies in DHCD's HCV program have provided some relief to both client families and administrators around processes that can often be quite burdensome.

Planning for Broader Use. In spring 2010, DHCD initiated a multi-stakeholder planning process that marked the first and last time it attempted to develop a collective vision for how it should deploy its reserves for experimental programs. The consensus at the time was to focus on administrative efficiencies in the near future, but the effort also generated proposals for a handful of smaller initiatives that the Bureau has since implemented – for example, a pilot to provide additional services for youth aging out of foster care and the project-based HCV preservation effort mentioned earlier in this chapter. The agency also declared its intention to expand its efforts around self-sufficiency beyond its "Little MTW" pilot in Boston and Worcester, as well as to develop an assisted housing mobility program – what it termed an "opportunity neighborhood" program.[17]

Almost immediately after the planning process ended, Amy Schectman, Associate Director for Public Housing and Rental Assistance (Lizbeth Heyer's predecessor), left the agency. Since then, the agency has expended significant time and energy around implementing administrative efficiencies, but it has not had the staff capacity or leadership around its MTW program to design or implement an expanded self-sufficiency program. The "opportunity neighborhood" program has only continued to develop due to Gretchen's decision to solicit help from outside the agency.

Lack of Cohesion in the Context of Devolution. Today, aside from a handful of small initiatives, DHCD's MTW program still has not advanced much beyond implementing administrative efficiencies, and it endures without a clear plan for how to deploy its reserves towards broader programs. The agency's annual MTW administrative plans continue to identify the "opportunity neighborhood" program as an intended future initiative, but its appearance in this document does not guarantee that it will be implemented. Although Gretchen believes MTW's statutory objective to expand housing choices means the agency "should" have an assisted housing mobility program (interview), senior staff do not agree that

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[17] Gretchen was actually not involved in developing the initial proposal for the opportunity neighborhood program. Two other Bureau staffers at the time, neither of whom was familiar with assisted housing mobility, drew from a study that the Kirwan Institute had completed for DHCD's public housing division to develop the basic idea for the program because they thought it could fall in line with the MTW statutory objective of expanding housing choices for low-income families. Although these staff left the agency shortly after the 2010 MTW planning effort ended, the brief, two-paragraph proposal has continued to appear in each of DHCD's MTW admin plans since then as an intended initiative. When Gretchen decided to take it upon herself to develop her own version of an assisted housing mobility program in late 2011, she was able to do so under the auspices of the original opportunity neighborhoods proposal. Thus, a happy accident of aspirational agency planning and bureaucratic inertia provide a vehicle for Gretchen – the agency staffer probably best suited to develop the program in the first place – to move assisted housing mobility forward at DHCD.

this is necessarily the case. For example, retiring Bureau Fiscal Director Bob Cohen believes that while senior staff in the Bureau and at DHCD are on the whole supportive of experimental efforts that support families beyond basic housing assistance, the Bureau has yet articulated its goals within the MTW program (interview). Further, Lizbeth Heyer, who supervises the Bureau director, thinks "there's no question that the policy objective [within the MTW program] is supporting more economic self-sufficiency," and that the agency's goal in the near term is to develop a model for a "self-sufficiency program" – which, it should be noted, would at least by definition meet only one of the three MTW statutory objectives (interview). Bureau Director Tom Graham likewise considers MTW to be a tool to help families achieve economic independence (interview).

Lizbeth, in turn, believes an assisted mobility program *could* be part of the agency's broader experimentation around self-sufficiency in that connecting children from low-income families to better schools could help break intergenerational cycles of poverty. However, she and other senior staff hope to partner with a local service provider to develop a larger program that explicitly focuses on helping the agency's voucher population increase employment and earnings in the short term – in other words, a self-sufficiency program (interview). It is also worth noting that DHCD could in theory implement both program types – self-sufficiency and mobility. However, the current funding environment cuts against the grain of this broader agenda. For example, as noted later in this chapter ("Uncertain Fiscal Environment"), federal sequestration has forced the agency to pull from its MTW reserves to maintain existing commitments to families in its standard HCV program.

Differing viewpoints of MTW's purpose among DHCD staff point to the fact that the agency has significant discretion in interpreting the program's three statutory objectives. As noted in chapter 2, this discretion is by design; the freedom that the MTW program affords to PHAs in determining programmatic agendas that respond to local circumstances is demonstrative of federal "devolution" of policymaking to these agencies over the past few decades (Kleit and Page, 2008). In addition, the logistical and political complications of inter-agency and inter-sector hybridity required to implement major programs pursuant to the MTW program's objectives are typical of challenges facing PHAs in the current era (Nguyen, Rohe, and Cowan, 2012).

From an organizational perspective, one potential result of being a "deregulated" agency with authority over developing programs is to arrange one or a suite of initiatives around a clearly defined agenda, as has been the case with the King County Housing Authority. However, DHCD has yet to define such an agenda five years after expanding its MTW authority to cover its entire HCV program, in large part because its functionality as a PHA is embedded in a larger, more complicated state bureaucracy with a range of programmatic

agendas and competing priorities. Each of the smaller initiatives DHCD has implemented under its MTW authority during this time has related in some way to one of the program's three statutory objectives, but they have not added up to – or been part of – a cohesive direction for the program.

MTW Moving Forward With or Without Mobility? Bureau staff recognize that the agency has been slow to move its MTW program beyond administrative efficiencies, and hope to revive planning around the program in the near future in order to define a clearer direction for using MTW flexibility and reserves. To this end, Lizbeth hopes that the agency can develop a "service delivery model [for an economic self-sufficiency program] in the next twelve to twenty-four months" (interview). Similarly, Tom's priority is to partner with an outside service provider with a "proven model" that poses low risk to the agency and presents a high probability of success for participating families, whatever the program's objectives (interview).

Depending on the course the agency's near-term planning around the MTW program takes, it could enable, retard, or derail implementation of a mobility program. Although this latter scenario is unlikely, senior staff could decide not to support mobility because it does not fit within whatever emerges as the larger agenda for how to deploy the agency's MTW reserves. Lizbeth noted that agency could also choose to delay mobility's implementation in order to spend the time to develop other pilot models, probably around economic self-sufficiency, to implement in conjunction with mobility (interview). Gretchen has attempted to pre-empt such a scenario by spending two years articulating the program's design – with buy-in from the Regional Administering Agency that would be responsible for its operation – to the point where it could be easily implemented without much further planning. From a timing perspective, her efforts have ensured that, at least as of May 2013, there are not other programs currently competing with mobility for funding from the agency's MTW reserves.

However, Gretchen's strategy of developing the program with little input from her DHCD colleagues, though borne out of necessity, is apparently atypical at the Bureau, which, according to Lizbeth, "tends to be a very interactive and engaged division when it comes to planning" (interview). Indeed, Bureau director Tom Graham expects to be "very involved" in any program moving through the agency under its MTW program (interview). In the tradition of the previously described "blooming flower" process of program development, senior staff will eventually have a chance to weigh in on the program's objectives, design, and approach to implementation – a process, Gretchen noted, that she will welcome. However, multiple staff noted that the program could also change or be derailed at the level of the undersecretary – a position that is not typically involved in program-level planning, but which has full authority to unilaterally reject initiatives, and has done so in the past (interviews).

In sum, even though senior staff within the Bureau and DHCD as a whole have not been involved in efforts around mobility to date, nor have they provided leadership around developing a vision for the agency's MTW program in approximately than three years, they will still have the final say as to whether – and in what form – the agency will implement the mobility program. Organizational dynamics around the agency's MTW program leave cast uncertainty as to the ultimate fate of mobility at DHCD. Still, as of May 2013, Gretchen is "very confident" that the agency will implement a mobility program, even though her immediate supervisor has suggested that it could "absolutely" get derailed (interviews).

Uncertain Fiscal Environment

As noted in chapter 2, the net cost impacts of assisted housing mobility programs remain uncertain, and undocumented. Although administrative costs would likely exceed those in the standard HCV program due to increased staffing needs, it is unclear whether encouraging families to rent in "high opportunity" would actually increase an agency's subsidy obligations.[18] Further, a broader perspective of program costs could account for *savings* in areas outside PHA budgets – for example, to the health care system due to reductions in diabetes treatments and hospital visits – and thus frame mobility as a "preventive expenditure" (Arcaya and Briggs, 2011) in a similar way that many now understand supportive housing for homeless with severe mental disabilities to be a wise investment of taxpayer dollars due to considerable savings to the health care and criminal justice systems (Culhane et al, 2002). However, solving the "wrong pocket problem" requires a political strategy that PHAs today have seldom attempted, with DHCD's current experiment with "social impact bonds" around homelessness and youth recidivism being a notable exception. When compared to "housing first" strategies address prevent homelessness, the cost savings from a mobility program are not as obvious or well documented, and program designers at both DHCD and KCHA are thus framing mobility as a net increase in costs, requiring contributions from each agency's MTW reserves.

This more siloed approach to accounting for the budgetary impact of mobility programs makes agencies vulnerable to fiscal decisions at the federal level around discretionary housing programs that require annual appropriations from Congress, including MTW. Flat or declining funding for HUD programs in recent years, combined with uncertain future funding levels, have made it increasingly risky for the agency to pursue experimental initiatives without imperiling its ability to meet commitments to families participating in both new programs and in the standard HCV program. Senior staff at DHCD will need to weigh fiscal risks against

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[18] HUD is currently engaged in a demonstration program to determine budget impacts of using Small Area Fair Market Rents, which are more fine-grained payment standards that reflect the varying costs of different submarkets within metropolitan regions (HUD, 2012).

supporting mobility or any other effort that *could* require substantial use of MTW reserves. This consideration has come to a head this spring due to federal sequestration's cuts in the HCV program, when these reserves have served as an emergency fund to maintain commitments to families already receiving rental assistance.

Taking a step back: funding for the standard HCV program is based on a formula amount the number of vouchers under a given PHA's purview. Funding for MTW, however, is based on a formula that each PHA negotiates in its contract with HUD. DHCD's funding formula is based on an agreed-upon base for how much subsidy HUD should provide per unit, to be updated each year. If the agency's HAP payments in a given year are less than the amount HUD provided to them, it can deposit the balance into a reserves account (under the standard HCV program, HUD would retrieve this balance). As a result, DHCD has two sources of funding: its annual appropriation from Congress, and its accumulated reserves. To date, the agency has not deployed most of its MTW reserves, which number in the millions.

As under the standard HCV program, funding for PHAs with MTW authority is dependent on annual Congressional appropriations. However, the combined effect of the timing of annual appropriations with the continued potential for funding cuts complicates agencies' efforts to dedicate resources to new programs. For example, the federal government typically relies on funding MTW block grants through a continuing resolution at the beginning of the Congressional fiscal year (October 1) based on the prior year's funding levels, and only several months later – after month-to-month payouts to the agency – does Congress finally determine the *actual* funding amount for the current fiscal year. Because this actual funding level has often involved cuts in recent years, an agency spending based on its budget from the prior year can be forced to make mid-year cuts. Dedicating funding to *new* programs in this uncertain fiscal environment is even more risky, for agencies with MTW authority could be required to expend their reserves to cover prior commitments if they do not anticipate cuts in the appropriations process. This exact scenario has played out this spring at DHCD and other MTW agencies in their reaction to federal sequestration. PHAs without MTW authority – and thus very limited reserves, if any – have been less fortunate, and many plan devastating pullbacks of rental assistance from families who already depend on it.

Considering the recent trend of flat or declining funding for HUD programs – not to mention occasional shocks, such as sequestration – DHCD must proceed with caution when expanding its programmatic agenda under MTW. To this end, outgoing Bureau fiscal director Bob Cohen believes the agency must carefully consider the fiscal implications of various program proposals, and build a "fiscal model" into any new agenda for expending the agency's MTW reserves (interview). Achieving this kind of discipline will require that DHCD account for Washington's politics and budget process in determining how much it is willing to expend out

of its reserves account each year, as well as how it can rebuild its reserves over time so that it can maintain prior commitments while funding new initiatives to last longer than just a few years – or even grow over time.

KCHA

In comparison to DHCD, KCHA is a smaller PHA with fewer programs and a governing structure less exposed to influence from elected officials. Nonetheless, the agency context for KCHA's efforts around mobility contrasts with DHCD in multiple dimensions – from the level of senior staff involvement and leadership in developing an approach to mobility, to the range of agency staff and external stakeholders that have participated in the design process, to the institutional legitimacy that mobility enjoys as a vehicle for advancing larger agency priorities.

While DHCD's mobility program has depended upon the resourcefulness of one manager to stay on the table as a legitimate option within the agency's MTW program, KCHA's board of commissions and senior staff – particularly its Executive Director, Stephen Norman – originally spearheaded its efforts around mobility two years ago, and have provided continual leadership around the initiative. In turn, multiple senior staff members have participated in an 18-month pre-design process that has involved data collection, reviewing research, consultation with academics and industry experts in mobility, and attendance at a national conference on assisted housing mobility in June 2012. Norman also decided to invite a wider range of stakeholders to participate in the program's design process, including agency staff responsible for the day-to-day operation of the HCV program, outside service providers that will ultimately be responsible for key aspects of the program's implementation, and a housing mobility industry expert. Overall, KCHA's efforts around mobility have not competed to a significant degree with other agency priorities for staff resources, and senior staff have made a conscious decision to ensure quality over expediency in the program's development. Industry expert and mobility veteran Jennifer O'Neil of Quadel Consulting, whom the agency hired to help with the program's design and early implementation, remarked that she had never seen an agency so committed to gathering data and stakeholder input in the design of a mobility program as KCHA (interview).

As noted earlier in this chapter, the agency has prioritized both improving the range of locational choices available to low-income families, as well as educational outcomes among their children. Although mobility might not have been the *only* logical choice for KCHA to expend its MTW reserves, its basic objectives of expanding housing choices for low-income families are in line with the agency's recent history of policy and resource commitments, both within its MTW program and beyond – notably in its supply-side strategy over the past 15 years to purchase multifamily properties in the more prosperous east side of the county and rent a

portion of those units to families in its voucher program, but also in its numerous programs focused on youth educational outcomes and partnerships with local school districts.

In sum, mobility enjoys institutional legitimacy at KCHA and is almost certain to be implemented in the near future – even with cuts resulting from federal sequestration – due to involvement and leadership on the part of senior staff, and also because the agency sees it as a critical strategy for achieving larger objectives across program areas.

MBQ

Quadel Consulting did not have a Baltimore presence before it secured the contract to implement the mobility program there in 2002, and it established the Metropolitan Baltimore Quadel office for the sole purpose of operating this program. Due to the fact that MBQ's staffing model and organizational structure is based around the firm's strategy for effective operation of the mobility program, other priorities do not compete for staff resources or institutional legitimacy in the way that they do at DHCD, or even KCHA.

Factors That Have Enabled Mobility

DHCD

As described earlier in this chapter, multiple institutional and environmental factors have constrained and shaped DHCD's efforts around mobility. However, mobility would not be possible were it not for a few key enabling factors specific to the agency including: the programmatic flexibility and resources that MTW authority provides; the agency's administrative and jurisdictional structure; and, potentially, the timing of the mobility program's development relative to the agency's other MTW activities.[19]

MTW Authority: Funds and Discretion

In contrast with most PHAs, agencies with MTW authority have considerable discretion in establishing their own programmatic agendas, and are encouraged to experiment with new programs so long as they are in line with MTW's three statutory objectives of expanding housing choices, increasing self-sufficiency, increasing efficient use of federal resources. As previously noted, these objectives are broadly defined so that agencies can pursue number of strategies and remain compliant with the MTW program requirements. However, assisted housing mobility programs are, at least by definition, very much in line with the objective to expand housing choices for voucher-holding families. As such, the programmatic flexibility that

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[19] I do not account for the origins of an agency's interest in mobility in this section; please see "Motivation for Pursuing Mobility" earlier in this chapter for a discussion of this topic.

MTW provides is a clear enabling factor in DHCD's efforts around mobility. Further, the agency's MTW program is one of the few that only covers an HCV program, and does not include public housing; in this sense, Lizbeth Heyer suspects it is easier for the agency to focus its MTW activities on pursuing programmatic innovations within the voucher program than it might be for a PHA that also must account for a public housing population (interview).

Beyond programmatic flexibility, MTW also allows DHCD to accumulate reserves of sufficient amounts to pursue innovative programs. Indeed, Gretchen believes that the availability of reserves is "maybe the key factor" in enabling the agency to pursue mobility (interview). To be sure, without the benefit of MTW resources the agency could not pursue mobility at even a modest scale without reducing the size of its voucher population.

Still, MTW reserves are not limitless, nor or they necessarily sustainable. As noted earlier in this chapter, the agency must weigh expansions to its programmatic agenda under MTW with the reality of flat or reduced Congressional appropriations for housing programs over time, and develop a fiscal model for expending and rebuilding its reserves that does not pose too much of a risk to the agency's prior commitments to families within the HCV program. In the words of the retiring Bureau Fiscal Director, "we can talk about all these wonderful ideas of what's the best way to provide housing, and unless [we] put a fiscal structure into it, [we] don't know if it's doable" (interview).

In addition, the size of DHCD's MTW reserves account will not allow the agency to pursue a mobility program that is as ambitious and supportive of participating families as the Baltimore mobility program or some other court-ordered programs that have arisen out of litigation, and which have benefited from generous, ongoing funding from partial consent decrees and settlements resulting from civil rights lawsuits against PHAs and HUD. In chapter 4, I describe in more detail how resource *constraints* have impacted specific design decisions in DHCD's mobility program.

Existing HCV Program Structure

At their core, mobility programs seek to account for geographic stratification of opportunity within regional housing markets, which are typically comprised of many jurisdictions. For example, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, which is responsible for planning in Metro Boston, covers 101 cities and towns. The national landscape of over 3,300 PHAs responsible for administering the federal HCV program is extremely fragmented, and few agencies cover entire metropolitan regions or even large portions of them; the vast majority of PHAs have jurisdiction over single cities, although some are county-based and a handful, including DHCD, operate at the state level.

Jurisdictional fragmentation among PHAs operating in the same housing market can function as a barrier to geographic mobility for families receiving rental assistance through the HCV program. If a voucher-holding family wishes to move out of the jurisdiction of the PHA that originally issued the voucher, then it must "port" to the jurisdiction of another PHA. This receiving agency can then choose to either administer this family's voucher, for which it can earn a fee, or fully absorb the family into its own voucher program, which is more costly and potentially problematic for the receiving agency and allows the sending agency to issue a new voucher in its own program. Although some PHAs have initiated agreements with neighboring agencies to make porting less burdensome for families, porting can still be time- and labor-intensive for both families and for administering agencies. In addition, porting can be politically charged and complicated by local migration patterns. For example, a receiving PHA's decision whether to absorb or administer porting families has funding implications for both agencies, particularly in cases where many low-income families are moving from one jurisdiction to another.

DHCD's HCV program lends itself to mobility because it is already administered on a regional basis throughout the state via locally based nonprofit Regional Administering Agencies, and porting between RAAs jurisdictions has a relatively streamlined process. As described in further detail in chapter 4, the program would be limited to Metro Boston, which mostly which mostly falls under the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership, a nonprofit RAA, with whom agency staff have a positive working relationship (interviews). Further, because DHCD's jurisdiction includes the entire state, families receiving rental assistance from the agency are not limited to leasing up in cities that have their own PHAs, as is typically the case in other states. By comparison, it would be much more administratively burdensome and politically challenging for the Boston Housing Authority to implement a regional mobility program in Metro Boston; in addition to helping participating families port out of Boston into smaller jurisdictions with their own PHAs and voucher programs, it would need to negotiate an agreement with DHCD to absorb or administer vouchers for participating families moving into suburban cities and towns that are not served by locally based PHAs.

Finally, Metro Boston is itself well suited for mobility program because many of the basic ingredients that could make a location valuable to a family with children – high-performing and well-resourced schools, low crime rates, low poverty rates, and the like – are geographically concentrated within particular sub-markets. According to Gretchen, mobility is intuitively attractive in Metro Boston because of the apparent potential for a family to benefit from a new location in a region characterized by stark differences between affluent suburbs and poorer cities and inner-ring suburbs (interview).

Timing: Mobility is the Only Game in Town

Gretchen's efforts around mobility have been the agency's only planning activities around major new MTW programs in the past two years. As described earlier in this chapter, it is possible that senior staff could choose to delay the program's implementation to allow staff time to develop other initiatives. However, the timing of the mobility program's development in the context of a long-term spell of inactivity in the MTW program, aside from implementing administrative efficiencies, means that mobility does not, as of May 2013, face direct competition for MTW reserves. It remains to be seen whether the program's timing during a quiet period before the agency renews its planning efforts around MTW will delay or imperil its implementation, or whether it will prove to have enabled it.

KCHA

The factors that have enabled KCHA to pursue mobility are similar to DHCD's. In the Executive Director's words, MTW accounts for "the first three factors" (interview). As with DHCD, KCHA would not be able to pursue a mobility program without the benefit of having accumulated reserves as a result of its MTW contract with HUD, nor would it be able to use those reserves for a mobility program without the flexibility and encouragement that the MTW program provides to pursue innovative pilots within its HCV program.

Further, KCHA's jurisdiction is similarly well suited for a mobility program because, according to senior staff, it includes both "very high and very low opportunity areas" (interview). Although Seattle proper is not included in the agency's territory, the poorest and most diverse neighborhoods in the region are located in the southern portion of the County (including some areas in the southern portion of Seattle), while some of the most affluent areas are to the east and north of Seattle. As such, KCHA is similar to DHCD in that it could administer a mobility program within its own jurisdiction, and for the most part avoid the potential barrier that porting relationships with other PHAs can present.

Senior KCHA staff also point to the agency's strong reputation among landlords in the eastern portion of the county as a key factor that will allow it to incrementally increase its presence in the area via an assisted housing mobility program (interview). Finally, the agency's consultant helping design and implement its mobility program believes that KCHA's leadership organizational culture and leadership are well suited to developing innovative programs (interview).

MBQ

While DHCD's and KCHA's efforts around mobility have been voluntary, the Baltimore mobility program is a required desegregation remedy named in the *Thompson* partial consent

decree and later settlement. Although the program is technically housed within the Housing Authority of Baltimore City's HCV program, MBQ is administratively similar to an RAA in DHCD's voucher program in that it operates as a regional HCV program that is overlaid onto several counties, some of which themselves contain PHAs with either local- or count-level jurisdiction. MBQ's regional jurisdiction is a deliberate compensation for HABC's otherwise limited control over housing development outside Baltimore city limits – a factor that contributed to past discriminatory public housing siting decisions (PRRAC, 2005).

Problem Identification and Theories of Change

DHCD

Gretchen is primarily responsible for shaping DHCD's approach to mobility much in the same way that she has been central to helping mobility survive as a viable option within the agency's MTW program during a period where it has enjoyed little time in the spotlight. Although she would have preferred to develop the program with more input from agency staff and outside stakeholders such as receiving school districts (interview), Gretchen's experience as a doctoral student and housing policy researcher – particularly her contributions to formative research on HUD's Moving to Opportunity mobility experiment – makes her uniquely qualified to lead an initiative around mobility.

Indeed, Gretchen's big-picture problem definition that there "isn't real choice" of location for families in DHCD's HCV program has roots in her time interviewing families who participated in MTO and analyzing troves of data from the experiment, during which she also familiarized herself with much of the literature that I summarize in chapter 2 of this thesis. In line with both her own and others' research on the topic, she believes MTO's program design failed on two major fronts – in helping "experimental compliers" access better schools, and in assisting these families' efforts to set roots in their new environments and take advantage of the resources newly available to them in these locations. In internal staff meetings, she has frequently referred to this latter challenge as the "problem of integration" in mobility programs. As such, DHCD's program is in a sense building on findings from MTO, and will attempt to do a better job of targeting high-performing school districts, but also of providing sufficient post-move support to families so that they are able to settle long-term in their new neighborhoods – or at least in a similarly high-opportunity area, if not the first place they move.

Beyond an idealized model, Gretchen's graduate student interns have also helped better define particular challenges present in DHCD's HCV program. During the 2011-2012 academic year two students from the Harvard Kennedy School of Government analyzed administrative data and demonstrated that approximately 90 percent of Metro Boston families receiving

federal rental assistance through DHCD lived in census tracts with both relatively high poverty rates (above ten percent) and lower-performing public school districts (below the top 30 percent of districts in the state according to fourth and fifth grade standardized test scores). During the current academic year, I have met with HCV program staff at MBHP in order to better understand the ways that low-income families experience housing mobility in the Metro Boston housing market, such as sources of frequent moves (e.g., involuntary moves due to changes in family composition and problems with unit compliance) and locational trajectory over time (e.g., frequent moves within relatively high-poverty Boston neighborhoods such as Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan). In May 2013, we also held a focus group with a handful of current voucher holders potentially interested in a mobility program so that DHCD staff could better understand which supports are most critical to provide to families who ultimately participate.

DHCD's program is focused primarily on improving educational outcomes among children of families in the voucher program, and its ability to deliver on this outcome premised on the transformative power of "high performing" schools, however defined, to benefit low-income children in voucher-holding families once they enroll, ideally for an extended period (several years). As noted in chapter 2, MTO was not well designed to test whether better school environments can improve educational outcomes for children in participating families, and DHCD staff responsible for designing and implementing the agency's mobility program – including this author – are not aware of literature that builds a strong case for *how* and *why* low-income children's educational performance will improve after switching school environments, other than studies on first-wave metropolitan-level busing programs that have demonstrated non-academic long-term benefits such as the ability to navigate between cultures, and expanded social networks that could lead to better jobs and college prospects (Eaton, 2001; Wells, 2009). Gretchen admits that the schools-based theory of change is "an assumption which may or may not be right," (interview). In addition, Schwartz's Montgomery County study provides some basis for believing that if families relocate and stay in low-poverty neighborhoods with well-resourced and high performing schools for more than a few years, children might ultimately do better in school (Schwartz, 2010).

Finally, it is worth noting that, unlike MTO, DHCD's mobility program does not explicitly attempt to address labor market challenges for adults in participating families, nor does it hypothesize that changing locations will improve self-sufficiency among them. As noted in chapter 2, evidence in this area is weak; MTO families did not on average experience better labor market outcomes, and other research has pointed to "institutional density" of workforce intermediaries as a better proxy for whether a location can have this effect than indicators mobility programs have traditionally used to identify "high opportunity" areas, such as poverty rates, racial and ethnic composition, and public school performance (Chapple, 2006).

As a result of past experiences designing and monitoring programs at DHCD, Gretchen is ambivalent about expanding the mobility program's scope beyond targeting improvements in educational performance among children to include addressing adult self-sufficiency – even, as I proposed to her in fall 2012, if DHCD were to partner with an outside service provider to provide these specific services. Gretchen's experiences with programs that have relied on referral services has been that coordination demands have been too high, accountability to DHCD on the part of service providers has been low, and program staff have not have the capacity to adequately monitor client families' progress in an area beyond their expertise (interview).

Instead, Gretchen has framed the program's perspective on the issue of employment outcomes and earnings as "accommodating [client families] in their current jobs" rather than helping them find new jobs. She has repeated on multiple occasions that DHCD's mobility program "is not a jobs program" or a self-sufficiency program (interview). Recall that Lizbeth Heyer, Gretchen's superior at DHCD, has stated that the agency's unquestionable overall goal within its MTW program is to develop a model for a "self-sufficiency program," which she thinks could include a mobility component (interview). Although Gretchen and Lizbeth's perspectives do not necessarily translate to incompatible programmatic agendas, differences in their language are symptomatic of the fact that the agency has not yet defined its goals within the MTW program, and that its activities under the MTW umbrella, other than implementing administrative efficiencies, remain fragmented. In this context, the agency's approach to mobility, including developing a problem statement and theory of change, has been most closely aligned with only one staff person's views.

KCHA

In comparison to DHCD, KCHA is even more focused on improving educational outcomes among children in its voucher population. Its staff are familiar with many of the basic research findings on MTO, but due to the agency's institutional focus on education – and the data-sharing and programmatic partnerships it has established with school districts in recent years – it has developed an approach to mobility that differs from DHCD's in some key respects.

Specifically, KCHA staff have drawn from two distinct strains of evidence related to educational performance in order to define the problem that it ultimately hopes to address with a mobility program. First, they hope to attend to the detrimental impacts of mid-school year moves on child behavioral and cognitive development, noting that children on average "lose a year, academically" in these cases (interview). The agency has confirmed, with the help of data

sharing agreements with schools, that many families with children in its voucher population make mid-year moves.[20]

Perhaps even more than DHCD staff, KCHA staff believe there is strong evidence supplying the theory that switching school contexts will translate to better educational and life outcomes for children. They are primarily drawing on a recent study demonstrating these findings in the case of low-income children growing up and attending schools in different areas of Montgomery County, Maryland with different neighborhood and school poverty levels due to the County's inclusionary housing policy (Schwartz, 2010). However, it should be noted that this study was not designed not test whether *switching* from a school in a poor neighborhood to one in a more affluent area results in an improvement in educational performance – which would be the case in a mobility problem.

These two motivators have led the agency to label its mobility program a "stability/mobility" program, since it will be two-pronged: it will aim to both reduce the number mid-year moves among HCV-holding families regardless of where those moves are located, as well as provide support to families who wish to move from low-performing school districts to higher-performing ones. Staff anticipates that families will, at least at first, either fall into one camp or the other, and that the overall mobility program will administratively function as two separate initiatives even if they are programmatically related. The factor uniting the two is the shared objective of changing the way families *experience* housing mobility, broadly defined, with the ultimate objective of improving educational outcomes, and breaking intergenerational poverty cycles among the voucher population over the long term (interview).

In comparison to DHCD, KCHA has more institutional support and agreement among staff about the program's basic problem statement and theory of change. According to mobility veteran Jennifer O'Neil of Quadel Consulting, no prior mobility effort has had such a singular focus on educational outcomes, nor has any mobility program incorporated a "stability" component in the way that KCHA plans to do: "I've never seen anything like it" (interview).

MBQ

In the *Thompson v. HUD* lawsuit, the plaintiffs alleged that HUD and HABC discriminated against black residents and applicants for both public housing and mobile vouchers because of their race, resulting in restrictions on their housing choices. As a result, the mobility program mandated as part of the lawsuit's partial consent decree and ultimate settlement requires that participating families – who must be named as part of the eligible class

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[20] During my visit to KCHA's offices in January 2013, I found senior staff's fluency with terminology and regulations around accessing school data among its voucher population to be dizzying – and unusual, based on my experienced conversing with housing officials elsewhere around the country.

in the lawsuit – lease up in "non-impacted areas," defined as census in the Baltimore region with low concentrations of assisted units or with low minority populations. The Baltimore mobility program's official purpose is thus to compensate for past housing discrimination by expanding housing choices – via *mandated* moves for families who choose to participate in the program to "non-impacted" areas almost exclusively outside Baltimore City limits – for the eligible class of families.

However, in the time since MBQ was awarded the contract to administer the program in 2002 (after multiple nonprofit firms failed to serve a client volume nearly at the level required by the partial consent decree), staff has collaborated with the program's policy panel – which operates as an engaged board of directors and is comprised of representatives from the Maryland ACLU, HABC, and HUD – to steer the program's focus to a more sophisticated vision of family well-being and outcomes, post-move. For example, program has focused on child educational attainment by becoming more scrupulous in targeting receiving school districts within the list of eligible "non-impacted" areas (see chapter 4 for a detailed discussion of how the program's design has evolved over time).

Although the Baltimore program's official policy objective remains officially limited to expanding housing choices for the lawsuit's class of families – as outlined in its annual administrative plan, the partial consent decree, and the 2012 settlement – staff and the program's panel, particularly Barbara Samuels of the ACLU, have expanded its scope of objectives and incorporated new strategies over the past decade, in response to both new research findings (such as MTO) as well as successes and challenges families have faced in participating in the program.

Summary and Implications

Unless compelled by court order, Public Housing Authorities are not required to pursue mobility. Given how little is known about organizational strategy at PHAs, two current agency-originated efforts to develop mobility programs can provide insights into *why* and *how* PHAs might consider pursuing mobility without the impetus of a desegregation lawsuit.

A few critical variables emerge: first, structural opportunities must be in place. Regional jurisdiction that includes both high- and low-opportunity areas – however defined – can ease some of the logistical and political challenges of pursuing mobility.[21] In addition, agency leadership needs to believe it has sufficient resources and programmatic flexibility. Moving to

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[21] This finding supports past arguments in favor of regional administration of low-income housing programs. For example, see: Katz and Turner, 2000.

Work authority is thus a key enabler for mobility and other programmatic experimentation in PHAs, particularly in the resources it provides.

Further, informal aspects of an agency's organizational culture and beliefs can either reinforce or impede mobility's institutional legitimacy. Under more favorable circumstances, demonstrated at KCHA, mobility reflects agency-wide goals, and senior staff galvanize efforts around mobility. However, DHCD's case suggests that so long as senior staff are broadly supportive of using housing assistance as a platform for helping families in other realms such as employment and education, the impact of one entrepreneurial staff member *might* be enough, when combined with the structural opportunities outlined above, for an agency to implement a mobility program.[22]

However, the two PHA cases demonstrate that an agency's internal policy cohesion, leadership, and work norms can influence its basic approach to mobility – for example, the degree to which the program's basic problem statement and theory of change reflect the opinions of a few staff, as is the case at DHCD, or agency-wide priorities, as with KCHA. Internal politics, agency size and complexity, and capacity constraints can also determine who is involved in program development, and at what points in time.

In the next chapter, I describe how the day-to-day political and operating environments at all three sites have influenced specific program design decisions – including efforts to improve upon past mobility program models, as well as to integrate substantial mobility supports into standard rental assistance programs.

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[22] Even if the conditions outlined in this paragraph and the one prior are not *minimally necessary* for pursuing mobility, it is worth noting that the number of PHAs that meet each of them is, as of today, quite small.

4.   Critical Decisions: Designing Programs and Delivery Systems

I'm picking the path where the program gets done… There's the way you want
things to be, and there's the way that they are.

- *Gretchen Weismann, MA Department of Housing and Community Development*

In this chapter, I describe each mobility effort's major design decisions, including both program design and design of delivery. As in chapter 3, I treat DHCD as the primary case, and use KCHA and the Baltimore program (again, MBQ for short) as comparison cases, each of which serves a distinct purpose – KCHA as an institutionally similar agency also currently in the design process, and MBQ as an established program that whose lessons extend beyond what the literature provides. The chapter is organized into design decision categories, which allows for easy comparison between the sites. In contrast to chapter 3, I begin most sections in this chapter by profiling MBQ's decisions and experiences for the purpose of providing context for DHCD's and KCHA's decisions in the same realm (e.g., which criteria to use for screening receiving neighborhoods). In many ways, the Baltimore program's evolution over time represents a transition from the previous generation of mobility programs to the current one in which DHCD and KCHA are in the vanguard.

I begin with an overview of the design process for each mobility effort. In the subsequent sections, I profile the following *program design* decisions at each site: establishing goals and success metrics; targeting of clients (which families to make eligible and recruit for participation); targeting of places (which types of areas to target as receiving or "destination" neighborhoods); and which supports to provide to participating families. The *delivery system design* decisions I profile in this chapter are around division and coordination of labor within the program. I also briefly describe implementation decisions at each site, including: marketing the program to eligible families, landlords, and other potential stakeholders; timing program implementation; and funding considerations.

For each decision category, I argue first why it should be considered a critical decision in the context of a mobility program, and then focus my description of on the following aspects of each site's decision: 1) the decision itself; 2) which factors influenced the decision, and how; 3) who was involved in making the decision; and 4) how this decision relates to what research and experience, as detailed in chapter 2, tells us about how mobility programs should work – the

"policy ideal." Due to the fact that both DHCD's and KCHA's design and early implementation efforts are mid-process as of May 2013, I indicate where decisions are tentative or forthcoming.

Design Process Overview

The form that a program ultimately takes depends on who is involved in making design decisions, as well as the institutional context of those decisions (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1979; Briggs, Goering, and Popkin, 2010). In this section I provide a brief overview of the design process at each site, starting with DHCD and then moving on to KCHA and MBQ.[23] Overall, when compared to HUD's process of designing and implementing MTO, design processes at all three sites have been remarkably collaborative – particularly in incorporating input from service providers – albeit in the less complicated context of single-site programs instead of a multi-site experiment.

DHCD

Gretchen Weismann, Manager of Targeted Programs in the Bureau of Rental Assistance at DHCD, has led a program design process that has involved few other staff at the agency. As described in chapter 3, this has partly been out of necessity, due to major constraints on staff capacity and limited institutional support for mobility. However, Gretchen's strategy has also been a political calculation resulting from her desire to maintain control over the program's direction, and present a mostly finished product to senior staff. Her past experiences developing programs at DHCD, as well as her suspicion of how certain people and groups might react to her proposal, have made her ambivalent about involving many others before the program's design has been largely determined. In her words, "the process can sometimes weigh down the progress" (interview). In addition, she was hesitant to engage her colleagues around a mobility program planning process at a time when they have been stretched to adequately staff their full portfolio of state and federal rental assistance programs. This strategy has traded off speed for quality and control; the design process has been low-key and largely ad hoc and has taken place over the course of two years in staff's spare time. To date, there has not been a formalized design process, although this could change once higher-level agency staff become involved.

Others who have been involved in designing the program, called MA Mobility, have included: two graduate student interns from the Harvard Kennedy School during the 2011-2012 academic year; one graduate student intern (this author) from the MIT Department of Urban

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[23] This order is in contrast to the design categories I cover in the rest of the chapter, where I begin with MBQ and then move on to DHCD and KCHA.

Studies and Planning during the current academic year; one other Bureau staff member, in a more limited capacity; as well as occasional contact with staff at the Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership, which will implement the program. However, in the young tradition of "blooming flowers" at DHCD, senior staff as well as the undersecretary will have the opportunity to alter or eliminate aspects of the program, perhaps without the input of Gretchen or other staff who have worked on developing the program. In addition, other stakeholders will have the opportunity to have input into the program's design during a required public comment period.

KCHA

In contrast to DHCD, KCHA's design process has been formalized and deliberate, largely as a result of the institutional legitimacy that mobility, as a policy goal, enjoys at the agency. After senior-level agency staff spent approximately 18 months conducting background research, studying other PHAs' mobility programs, and holding preliminary meetings, KCHA conducted a formal, three-meeting multi-stakeholder design process this spring, with each meeting spaced apart by approximately three weeks to allow time for staff to complete interim assignments and collect additional information as needed. Most design decisions were made over the course of these meetings, although a few loose ends remain as of May 2013.

KCHA's design process has also differed from DHCD's in who has been involved in making critical decisions. First, agency staff at all levels, from the Executive Director down to HCV program staff who interact with families on a daily basis, were at the table during the formal design process. KCHA also decided to have the two nonprofit service providers that will help administer the program on hand during the design process, after bringing them on board through a request-for-qualifications process earlier in the fall. Finally, the agency hired senior-level Quadel staff involved in running the Baltimore mobility program to facilitate KCHA's design process and provide other value-adds such as process mapping and an early evaluation of the program during its start-up phase.

MBQ

Design decisions around the Baltimore mobility program have rested so far primarily with the program's policy panel,[24] which includes representatives from the American Civil Liberties Union (which brought the *Thompson* lawsuit), the Housing Authority of the City of Baltimore (HABC), and HUD. According to MBQ staff, HUD's presence on the panel has largely

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[24] Throughout this chapter, I refer to the Baltimore program's policy panel. However, due to the *Thompson v. HUD* settlement in 2012, the program's governing structure will shift to a Regional Administrator that will play a similar role as the panel, and include some of the same players, such as the ACLU. Since the Regional Administrator is still in the process of transitioning into this role, I refer only to the policy panel in this thesis.

been a formality, and the dominant voices have been the ACLU and HABC – two parties with opposing views of what the program should seek to achieve. In addition to regularly reporting on program performance to the panel, MBQ's role has primarily been to help devise program design solutions that strike a practical balance between the ACLU's demands to serve eligible families in the program with the highest possible level of support, and the HABC's desire to serve as many families as possible at the lowest cost (interviews). Although many MBQ staff share some version of the ACLU's perspective, HABC has funded the program[25] and MBQ is contractually obligated to serve a minimum number of families per year. However, MBQ has worked to establish the panel's trust, and senior staff have been able to provide substantial input on changes to the program's design, a few of which I profile in this chapter.

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[25] The *Thompson v. HUD* settlement found only HUD guilty, even though ACLU brought the lawsuit against both HABC and HUD. For this reason, HABC no longer has to fund the mobility program, and HUD will assume full responsibility for covering its costs.

Establishing Goals and Measuring Success

A mobility program's goals establish the overall direction for the effort, and influence multiple design decisions described later in this chapter, such as deciding which families should participate, which areas to target as receiving neighborhoods, and which supports to provide to families. In addition, more than any other program design variable, program goals are a function of institutional context. For example, the Baltimore program's goals are stated in the *Thompson v. HUD* lawsuit's partial consent decree and settlement, but the program's policy panel has worked with MBQ to shift and expand the program's objectives over time. By contrast, staff at DHCD and KCHA have had greater autonomy in establishing program goals – a programmatic freedom, as described in chapter 2, that is emblematic of increased devolution of federal policymaking to PHAs in recent years.

As noted in chapter 2, since mobility programs seek to capture the multi-dimensional aspects of what housing provides as a *location*, they could understandably serve as a vehicle for a range of policy priorities. However, PHA staff currently engaged in planning new mobility programs have been careful to establish narrow and specific goals in order to ensure focus and cohesion through all aspects of the program, but also as a way to be able to measure progress and demonstrate performance in constrained funding environment where mobility programs must compete for scarce agency resources with other priorities and constituencies.

Even if a program's goals are clearly stated, deciding which inputs, processes, outputs, and outcomes to track – and at what cost, and with what impact on staff time – has presented an additional puzzle for program designers. No mobility program to date has fully incorporated performance management, but MBQ has been on the forefront of the field in terms of learning from outputs and outcomes and adjusting the program's operating design over time. Program designers at DHCD and KCHA are conscious of the inherent uncertainty of the effectiveness and cost-efficiency of many of their program design decisions, and for this reason plan to incorporate performance management into daily operation of their programs, in addition to having them formally evaluated by outside consultants. However, even deciding "what success looks like" in an assisted housing mobility program, and establishing benchmarks for performance, is still something of an art in a field that is still learning which outcomes are reasonable to expect from participating families.

MBQ

In the strict sense, the Baltimore program does not have specified *goals* – only *requirements* for how many families MBQ is contractually obligated to serve, as well as what minimally constitutes serving them (i.e., activity and output thresholds and benchmarks).

However, the program's policy panel – primarily Barbara Samuels of the ACLU, which brought the *Thompson* lawsuit – has worked with MBQ to establish informal goals over time that have translated to changes in the program's design, and have helped the program move from a one-time relocation-oriented model to an updated approach that seeks to impact the long-term "housing careers" of participating families. This latter model reflects the most recent research, described in chapter 2, that disadvantaged families often face difficulty in achieving long-term residential stability in opportunity areas – a condition that is minimally necessary if they are to reap gains from their new environments.

Official Program Goals and Measures of Success

According to the Baltimore program's administrative plan for fiscal year 2013, its goals are: 1) to provide rental and homeownership assistance for families to move outside "impacted areas," defined by the partial consent decree and settlement as census tracts in the Baltimore region with high concentrations of assisted units or with high minority populations; and 2) to provide "mobility counseling" to eligible families participating in the mobile voucher portion of the overall Special Mobility Program (HABC, 2012). Due to the way that non-impacted areas are defined, the program's most basic goal is racial desegregation. However, it should be noted that *Thompson* settlement calls for taking a more multi-dimensional approach to defining a "community of opportunity" (Civil Action No. MJG 95-309).

Participating families are initially permitted to lease up only in non-impacted areas, and they must remain in non-impacted areas for at least two years as of January 1, 2013 (the requirement was previously one year); however, they continue to have access to housing search assistance and post-move counseling beyond these two years. MBQ is contractually obligated to ensure that a minimal number of eligible families move through the mobility counseling program and lease up in non-impacted areas each year. The program has no other official measures of success.

Entrepreneurial Goals and Measures

Although the program's official goals and performance measures are limited, both the program's policy panel and MBQ staff have played critical roles in establishing informal program goals and performance measures that have moved beyond its official objectives and target *outputs*, and towards a broader view of success that accounts for a set of specific social *outcomes* for families. According to multiple MBQ staff, Barbara Samuels has played a critical role in establishing these informal goals and measures, often using her position on the policy panel to advocate for a more holistic view of a family's success in the program that accounts for children's school performance, adult labor market outcomes, and families' long-term housing

trajectory – whether they move back to Baltimore City after living in non-impacted areas for the minimum amount of time required by the program, or stay in non-impacted areas long-term. As I describe later in this chapter, Samuels once reacted to reports of high rates of reversion back to the city by threatening to remove MBQ from the contract if it did not develop a strategy to improve family retention in non-impacted areas. Her urging resulted in MBQ re-organizing its counseling services to increase the range and intensity of post-move supports (interview).

Relationship to Policy Ideal

Due to the fact that the Baltimore program's official goals and performance measures will were tied for so long to the *Thompson v. HUD* partial consent decree, any other goals, theories of change, or notions of success have been informal, and subject to the politics of the program's governing structure – namely, the ACLU's ability to exert influence over the program's direction, and MBQ's ability to balance the ACLU's demands to serve families as well as possible (many of which MBQ staff share) and its contractual obligation to move a minimum number of families through the program each year. Although the Baltimore program still does not resemble the ideal of a cohesive social program with clearly defined, outcome-oriented goals, design features specifically organized around those goals, and measures to track performance relative to those goals, its governing arrangement does allow pursuance of a wider set of goals beyond desegregation – a trend that will continue in the post-settlement era. Further, in contrast with programs at DHCD and KCHA, the Baltimore program (at least informally) targets outcomes among both children and adults in participating families.

DHCD

In contrast to the Baltimore program, staff at DHCD have had the freedom to establish program goals and measures of performance without the constricting influence of a lawsuit. As described in chapter 2, the major thrust of DHCD's mobility program is to connect low-income children to better schools, with hope that this change in environment will improve their educational attainment; the program's goals and measures of success, though not finalized, reflect this outcome-domain focus on education. In addition, due to the fact that only a few staff at DHCD have participated in its efforts around mobility, the program's goals do not reflect a larger agency objectives, but rather what a few dedicated employees – most of all Gretchen – believe a mobility program should aim to achieve.

Official Goals and Target Outcomes

As of May 2013, MA Mobility's program goals are: 1) to help participating families move to and stay in safe and resource-rich Metro Boston neighborhoods with high-performing

schools, low poverty rates, and high quality of life; 2) to improve access to high-performing and well resourced schools for children in participating families; and 3) to create a model search and counseling process to improve choice in voucher programs. The program's target outcomes – its vision of what success should look like – include: 1) improved educational performance for children in participating families; 2) long-term housing stability in target neighborhoods for participating families; and 3) higher housing and neighborhood satisfaction for participating families.

These draft goals and target outcomes reflect a programmatic focus on education, and a theory that helping low-income children access higher-performing schools, combined with integrating into social and cultural life in receiving neighborhoods – if sustained over a multi-year period – will translate into the desired outcome of higher educational achievement for these children. They emerged out of a process where Gretchen, one other DHCD staff person, and I exchanged ideas throughout the course of the 2012-2013 academic year. During this process, Gretchen pushed to focus program goals and target outcomes specifically around education, and to avoid other potential outcomes, such as adult wage increases or improved health, if it was unlikely that the program could actually provide services in these areas or put forth a solid theory for how they could be achieved. Staff participating in this process also agreed that the program should not state racial or socioeconomic integration as a target outcome, even if program staff will track the racial composition of receiving neighborhoods as a nice-to-know measure; eschewing any official goals or outcomes related to race and segregation marks a stark departure from the previous generation of mobility programs, many of which have origins in civil rights desegregation lawsuits against PHAs.

It should be noted that MA Mobility's goals and target outcomes could still change, particularly once higher-level agency staff weigh in on the program's design and viability within the agency. In addition, staff has yet to establish particular benchmarks for success – for example, improving standardized test scores by a certain percentage. Without prior models to serve as reference points, DHCD program designers frankly do not know what kind of improvement would be reasonable to expect. As such, they hope the program could produce new lessons in this area – both so that program staff can adjust its operating model over time, as well as for the purpose of disseminating new knowledge to the field of assisted housing mobility.

Pressure to Demonstrate Success

Their own knowledge gaps notwithstanding, staff still feel pressure from within the agency to reasonably ensure "success" in the program's design, and incorporate mechanisms to track and correct for performance. As described in chapter 3, mobility currently does not enjoy

much institutional support at DHCD, and agency leadership would prefer to dedicate scarce MTW reserves to "proven models" for service delivery (interview). DHCD program designers' pressure to perform is thus different than MBQ's in that it is not rooted in a contractual obligation; instead, it is a function of developing a new program in a resource-poor agency that must manage multiple priorities.

In addition, Gretchen hopes that demonstrating success with a "tight" and replicable operating structure will increase the likelihood of the agency scaling up some form of mobility services to its entire HCV program (interview). As an intermediate step, it would be helpful if MBHP, which administers the agency's HCV program in Metro Boston and will implement MA Mobility, finds that the program works well for the families it serves; in this sense, Gretchen recognizes that MBHP and other RAAs hold some sway with state policymakers in determining the directions of DHCD's programs, despite the fact that they are contracted agencies (see "Dividing and Coordinating Labor" later in this chapter for a discussion of the political environment around RAAs). Finally, DHCD staff hope to demonstrate success because it would be a sign that the program is likely providing a valuable service to participating families.

Performance Management and Evaluation

DHCD plans to track a number of indicators during daily operation of its mobility program in order to ensure performance and monitor costs and staff resources. Due to the inherent uncertainty around many of the agency's program design decisions, agency staff recognize that they must learn to adjust over time, and use data effectively as a management tool.

Categories of performance measures include *processes* (e.g., number of families attending the program's orientation, rate of completion of pre-move counseling among families who enrolled in the program, number and location of landlords briefed on MA Mobility), *outputs* (e.g., rate of lease-up success of families that completed pre-move counseling, distribution of target neighborhood lease-up locations, locational trajectory over time for families who initially lease up in a target neighborhood), and *outcomes* (e.g., self-reported children's educational performance, satisfaction with new neighborhood). Staff is still in the process of finalizing which measures it will track, and will likely consult with staff at MBHP, the Regional Administering Agency that will implement the program, in finalizing this list.

Formal Evaluation. Gretchen also plans to contract with an outside consultant to formally evaluate MA Mobility based on its performance over multiple years. In her experience, DHCD's programs have not undergone formal evaluations, so doing so would represent a break in standard practice at the agency. Similar to performance management, Gretchen hopes that an evaluation could help staff learn about how to improve the program's operating model: "I

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would hope that the evaluation would present strategies to improve the program, and not just that the program is failing or not" (interview).

In weighing how to bring an evaluator into the fold, Gretchen considered whether to first the design and implement program and then present it to an evaluator, or to have one at the table during the program's design. She instead chose a third option, which was to call a meeting in October 2012 with two evaluators and quiz them on how they might design the program. Both evaluators recommended a formal experiment with a control group, but – considering the prospect of turning interested families away, and uncertainty about the level of interest among voucher-holding families in mobility in the first place – both Gretchen and I chafed at the idea. Months later, Gretchen reflected on the idea that MA Mobility could be carried according to the evaluators' wishes: "Do you want to get it done, or do you want a perfect experiment?" (interview). However, eschewing a control group means that any evaluation will not produce "gold standard" level impacts, and will instead rely on less meaningful before-and-after measures or comparing to constructed counterfactuals.

Technology and Politics. Due to Gretchen's long-term desire to scale up some version of mobility in order to make DHCD's HCV program more location-conscious, she has pushed for MA Mobility to work within the agency's existing management information system (MIS), and avoid procuring a new MIS provider for the sole purpose of administering a relatively small mobility program. However, the agency's current MIS is not well suited to track the full range of indicators that program designers hope to measure as part of ongoing performance management. Without a new MIS, it is possible that staff's use of data to track performance and adjust the program's design over time will be limited to a significant degree.

More Than Just A Good Idea: Making Performance Management Work. Although MA Mobility's performance management activities might fall short of what staff would hope for under ideal circumstances, it is a break in standard DHCD practice to include data tracking as an ongoing management tool into the design of the program, as expressed in its administrative plan. Sue Nohl, Deputy Director at MBHP – an RAA that administers several DHCD programs, including its HCV program, and will administer MA Mobility – noted that DHCD staff have not typically, in her experience, established performance measure ahead of time, nor have they explained to MBHP how these measures should be used (interview).

Still, incorporating performance management as an ongoing evaluative tool in the operation of a program presents considerable logistical and even political challenges, particularly when a program is contracted out to an outside organization. Data tracking and reporting takes time, requires considerable staff capacity, and can be wasteful if not used for the purpose of actual program management. Sue recounted a recent frustrating experience with reporting for a DHCD program:

So I'm at a meeting back in November (with the seven other RAAs), and we're going through the reports, and I finally realized that not everybody's running the same reports that I'm running. Every month I sent these eight reports to DHCD. Does anybody else send these eight reports? Not another agency in the room sends the same eight. We all send one or two that are the same… I've been doing this for six years, sending all these reports (to DHCD). Obviously they're not comparing us to each other, because we're not sending them the same reports. And no one's saying to me: oh Sue, you sent the wrong reports. So my whole thing is: who's looking at it? The one thing that I have a problem is: we're all really really busy… I'm giving you (DHCD) this report because I'm under the understanding that I have to give this to you. If it's not something that you're using and you don't need anymore, just tell me. Because it's taking valuable time that I could be spending on something else. I want to give you want you need but obvious if you're only getting two of the same reports from all eight of us (RAAs), you don't need the other six that I'm sending you. That's part of the frustration.

That's what we're moving towards this year… really saying to them (DHCD): what reports do you want? What information are you looking for? What would indicate to you that we're doing this well or not so well, or successfully or not so successfully, because we also want to be able to monitor *ourselves*. I want to have the tools to be able to know that I'm meeting my contractual requirements, that I'm running a good program, that I'm doing everything that I need to do, before DHCD comes out and says: you're not doing it right, or you're messing something up. So having something very clear that could then just kind of continue regardless of who's there could be a way to address that issue, too, so no one can forget about us (interview).

Clearly the success of DHCD's *planned* performance management system in its mobility program will be contingent upon frequent communication and understanding of reporting requirements between agency and RAA staff, as well as availability of staff resources on both ends. For more on how labor will be divided and coordinated between the multiple agencies that will be involved in administering MA Mobility, see "Dividing and Coordinating Labor" later in this chapter.

Relationship to Policy Ideal

DHCD's draft program goals and target outcomes are in line with the program's general focus within its efforts around mobility to improve educational outcomes among children in its voucher program. In contrast to the Baltimore program, DHCD staff are using these goals and target outcomes to frame other design decisions, such as deciding which families should participate, in order to ensure programmatic cohesion and to provide a base against which to

measure success – critical in the context of DHCD's MTW program, where mobility must contend with other programs for limited funding and political support. To this end, staff's plan to incorporate substantial data collection as a management tool into the program's ongoing operation will reflect best practices for social program design in general, and help ensure that MA Mobility will avoid prior mobility programs' fate as strong ideas weakly implemented.

KCHA

Similar to DHCD, KCHA staff have had the freedom to establish program goals, target outcomes, and performance measures without the influence of a lawsuit. But in contrast to DHCD, KCHA's goals and measure reflect an agency-wide programmatic focus on both improving educational outcomes among children and expanding the geographic range of housing choices available to families. In addition, due to the fact that KCHA is incorporating a "stability" component into its mobility program, its framing goals and target outcomes do not reflect a theory of change solely based on relocation from one school and neighborhood to another.

Official Goals and Target Outcomes

As of April 2013, the program goals for KCHA's mobility program are: 1) to "boost the academic performance of children by assisting families to make informed decisions about neighborhood and school quality when deciding to move"; and 2) to "reduce the number of moves during the school year that disrupt learning by helping families plan the timing of their relocation" (KCHA, 2013). On the surface, these goals reflect the two-pronged nature of KCHA's mobility program. However, they also reflect a view on the part of the agency that moving locations is not a necessary component – or the *only* necessary component – of a mobility program, as well as a practical judgment that, in order to have a broader impact on educational outcomes among children in KCHA's voucher program, it should not limit the program only to those few families who are willing and able to move from the south side of the County to the east side. Finally, it is worth noting that KCHA's program goals do not mention either socioeconomic or racial integration, even if it is a likely byproduct of the relocation-oriented portion of the program.

The program's draft target outcomes for both the relocation and stability portions of the program – staff's vision of "what success will look like" – are at the level of children students (attendance, performance, graduation rates, enrollment) and schools (classroom stability), as well as adults (health, safety, satisfaction) and whole families (length of tenure in receiving neighborhoods, level of engagement with community). With the help of their consultant from

Quadel, KCHA program designers have also establish draft benchmarks against which to measure success – for example, 60 percent retention in receiving neighborhoods after five years.

Establishing success measures is just one instance of where having an experienced practitioner on hand has added value to KCHA's design process. Mobility program designers today do not have access to many off-the-shelf tools to help them, for example, estimate what might be a reasonable rate of retention to expect. Further, given the range of variables that could impact program performance from site to site – not to mention fundamental differences in goals and target objectives – assuming similar success rates across all mobility programs could be unwise. Still, in a field so young, and in an institutional context where demonstrating success is paramount – particularly in the context of PHAs – KCHA staff have attempted to safeguard against program failure by tapping into a burgeoning community of practice and enlisting the help of professionals whose practical knowledge around mobility far exceeds their own. However, given the absence of precedents for the stability portion of the program, staff have been forced to improvise success benchmarks on their own.

Performance Management and Evaluation

Like DHCD, KCHA plans to incorporate performance management into its mobility program's operating design. However, instead of solely relying on program staff for data collection reporting, the agency has contracted with Quadel Consulting to evaluate the program's performance after six months, and to make recommendations for how to alter the program's design in order to increase performance and cost-effectiveness.

KCHA also plans to have its mobility program formally evaluated over the course of its five year projected life, after which the agency will consider whether to continue the program, expand it, or alter it in some way. In contrast to DHCD, KCHA has most of its programs evaluated; as of April 2013, the agency simply needs to choose one of several available options (interview).

Relationship to Policy Ideal

KCHA's draft program goals and target outcomes are clearly in line with – and an outgrowth of – the agency's programmatic focus on improving educational outcomes, as well as expanding housing choices for its voucher population. Similar to DHCD and in contrast to the Baltimore program, staff have used the program's overarching goals to frame specific design decisions, such as which areas to target as receiving neighborhoods. Finally, the agency's planned use of performance management – and its use of an outside expert to provide a short-term evaluation during the program's start-up phase – will help staff understand which steps are needed to improve performance after its initial launch.

Targeting Families: Who Should Participate?

Past and ongoing mobility initiatives have shown that not all families are well suited for intensive assisted housing mobility programs that require significant pre-move counseling and remedial work, as well as relocation to locations that are both physically distant and culturally alien. As noted in chapter 2, some predictors of a family's success include its economic stability, its motivation, its family and social ties, and individual family members' physical and mental health. Even owning a car can influence success. Of course, these family characteristics combine with other aspects of the program's design, program staff capacity and competency, and housing market dynamics to influence whether a family thrives in a program or not. Further, program goals can limit family eligibility – for instance, if a primary objective is to improve educational attainment among children, families without children might be screened out from participating.

There is also consensus in policy circles that mobility programs should expand choices rather than restrict them (NLIHC, 2012; PRRAC and Urban Institute, 2013). For example, forced relocation due to public housing redevelopment should not be mischaracterized as a mobility program in the strict sense, even if this has been the case with several mobility programs that have emerged as desegregation remedies to lawsuits against PHAs. In cases of involuntary displacement, something like the "responsible relocation" efforts in Baltimore (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2008) or the HOPE VI program in Tucson are better examples of helping families transition to new locations. Overall, most agree that mobility programs should in principle be "opt in" and not mandatory for families to receive housing assistance.

Further, mobility efforts must weigh a desire to serve as many families as possible with the reality of limited funding, and an uncertain fiscal environment defined by flat or declining funding for federal housing programs dependent upon Congressional appropriations. Families participating in mobility programs will inevitably demand different levels of assistance and expense on the part of the program and its staff, but a program's cost-per-family cannot be so high as to threaten a its integrity, or limit its size so that its impact is not meaningful.

Finally, mobility programs will not likely attract new funding and political support from policymakers if they are unable to demonstrate success at a reasonable cost per family served. What is "reasonable" is still unclear, but the Baltimore program's costs are beyond what any PHA could afford, even with the benefit of MTW authority. To date, no mobility program has demonstrated clear success in a mobility program within what federal policymakers and advocates consider to be a reasonable and replicable cost model. In addition, PHAs – who are driving the next wave of mobility programs, and will continue to play a central role in any mobility effort – will always be reluctant to expend significant resources on a handful of

families at the expense of maintaining or expanding its client base of families, particularly in tight markets where the need for rental assistance far exceeds its supply. In sum, the field is searching for cost-efficient mobility models that are also effective at achieving target outcomes. These considerations play heavily into how and why agencies target particular families decide who should participate in mobility programs.

MBQ

As a condition of receiving a voucher through the Baltimore mobility program, eligible families must complete pre-move counseling and lease up in a "non-impacted" area in the Baltimore region. However, most, if not all, eligible families do not already have access to rental assistance. The program is thus not voluntary or "opt in" in the sense that families can choose either traditional rental assistance or the mobility option. As a result, some MBQ staff believe that many families enter the program with the primary motive of obtaining rental assistance – but not necessarily to relocate – and, as a result, MBQ has incorporated several steps to screen the families whose motives and are least in line with the program's objective of helping eligible families relocate outside of "impacted" areas within and around Baltimore City (interviews).

In addition, MBQ's contract with HABC to implement the program specifies the number of families that it must serve each year – whether these families are motivated by the program's goals or not. As such, MBQ has an incentive to serve some families who, according to staff, would be more inclined to obtain traditional rental assistance rather than put themselves through an intensive, relocation-focused mobility program (interviews).

Who Can Participate

The lawsuit's 1996 partial consent decree and settlement establish which families are eligible to participate in the Baltimore mobility program. Eligible families include specific groups of former public housing residents, including displaced or relocated residents from particular developments, as well as families on the waiting list for public housing or the HCV program as of certain date. Although the program is officially housed within HABC's larger Section 8/Housing Choice Voucher program, it maintains its own waiting list only open to eligible families.

In order to receive a voucher through the mobility program, however, families must reach a series of pre-move milestones and demonstrate to program staff that they are ready for relocation, and they must then lease up for at least two years in a non-impacted area, as defined by the settlement. Many eligible families choose not participate in the program at all, and even more do not reach the point of obtaining a voucher due to the considerable requirements the program places on participating families.

The Consequences of Not Being "Opt In"

Despite its successes, some of Baltimore mobility program's experiences resulting from not being an "opt in" program could serve as a cautionary tale for future mobility efforts. As previously noted, eligible families can choose whether to enroll in the mobility program, but the program is not strictly "opt in" because receiving rental assistance is contingent upon completing an often lengthy (a year or more) pre-move process, not including the requirement of living in an area outside Baltimore for at least two years. On the other hand, eligible families have the incentive of enrolling in the program in order to obtain rental assistance even if they are not particularly motivated by the prospect of moving to a non-impacted area outside their home neighborhood and city. This dynamic has resulted in a number of challenges to the program's performance, reputation, and cost.

Lower Performance. The program's official performance measures are those included in MBQ's contract with HABC, and are limited primarily to the requirements of the partial consent decree and settlement – that MBQ help a certain number of eligible families relocate to non-impacted areas each year. However, staff tracks a broader set of indicators of family well being, and by these measures the program is on the whole high-performing. For example, a 2008 survey of participating families found that the majority reported that their new neighborhoods were "much better" than their neighborhoods of origin (Engdahl, 2009). However, due to the fact that, according to MBQ counseling staff, a sizable percentage of enrolled families are motivated primarily by the prospect of receiving rental assistance and not by relocating long-term to a non-impacted area, the program underperforms in improving family well being relative its potential due to the fact that its does not serve a clientele that on the whole shares its goals (interviews).

For example, despite the fact that the program is commonly referred to as the "Cadillac" of mobility programs, many participating families have moved back to Baltimore after living in a "non-impacted" area for the minimally required time period (previously one year, now two years). Staff have observed that many families "go through the motions" and see the time requirement to live in a non-impacted area as "doing their year" for the sake of receiving rental assistance. One counselor who has frequent contact with participating families estimates, offhand, that the vast majority of participating families share this perspective (interview). In 2012, the program increased the minimum time requirement of living in a non-impacted to two years in large part as a disincentive to families whose personal motivation for enrolling in the program do not align with the program's informal goals of helping families settle long-term in more opportunity-rich, racially integrated areas of the Baltimore region. Still, it should be noted that, similar to many families who participated in MTO, MBQ staff have observed that families

who "revert" back to high-risk areas often do so as a result of lack of access to affordable child care and other supports (interview).

Finally, staff often dedicate a significant amount of time both in the pre- and post-move phase of the program tending to the remedial requirements, needs, and conflicts (e.g., with neighbors in receiving neighborhoods) of families whose primary interest is receiving rental assistance, and not settling long-term outside Baltimore City and other impacted areas. As a result, staff resources are often expended on landlord mediation and other trouble-shooting around these families, as opposed to those families who are motivated to relocate to non-impacted areas and are otherwise, in one MBQ counselor's words, "trying to make it work" (interview).

All the same, staff have found that a sizable minority of families who revert to Baltimore after living in non-impacted areas for one year return to the program, often due to their dissatisfaction with city life after having experienced a different quality of life in non-impacted areas. One counselor said these families are often more motivated and successful in their second time through the program (interview). Cases such as these where families' preferences change as a result of new information and experiences demonstrate the fluidity of choice – that choosing to enroll in a mobility program over traditional rental assistance often requires a significant leap of faith on the part of the family, and that families understandably most often choose based on what they know, within narrow "choice sets." Still, not being an opt-in program that also offers participants the option of traditional rental assistance likely has an overall negative impact on the Baltimore program's performance, at least relative to informal measures put forth by MBQ staff and the program's policy panel.

Stigmatized Reputation. Many participating families – particularly those who are not interested in staying long-term in non-impacted areas – often are not prepared for social and cultural challenges they will face in their new environments, even after passing through the program's pre-move counseling and workshops. Challenges range from proper unit maintenance to a handful even engaging in criminal activity. As previously noted, staff often expend significant time and effort addressing problems with families who, by their estimate, would likely choose standard rental assistance option families if it were more easily available to them. This effort comes in the form of responding to calls from landlords, neighbors, homeowners associations, and local police about these families' behavior, and providing mediation assistance in some cases (interview). According to staff, these families' actions stigmatize the program, and make it difficult to convince landlords to take on even the most qualified and motivated families. One counselor confessed: "Just to be frank, [families who do not want to be in the program but enroll to receive housing assistance] are really bringing the program down" (interview). Clearly, a few "bad apples" can negatively impact an entire

program that is already vulnerable stigmatization due to the fact that it serves a mostly black former public housing population (Schuck and Zeckhauser, 2006).

Higher Costs. As previously noted, participating families must meet a series of pre-move milestones before staff deems them ready for relocation and permits them to find an apartment. The amount of pre-move counseling and remedial work (e.g., credit repair) required in the Baltimore program is substantial compared to most past and ongoing mobility programs, in part due to the fact that many families who enter the program are quite disadvantaged. However, the program's requirements also serve as a deterrent to the most unprepared and unmotivated eligible families who would likely not fare well in the program.

Due to the fact that many families who would otherwise choose traditional rental assistance often require the most substantial staff effort to help them get to the point of being deemed "ready to move," the average cost per family served in the Baltimore program is quite high. In a sense, not being opt in results in a costly arms race in the amount of services and required activities during the pre-move period; requirements are substantial in order to deter unmotivated families, but they are also in place in order to serve those families who enter the program only because they have no other way of obtaining rental assistance in the near term.

Relationship to Policy Ideal

The Baltimore mobility program's origins in the *Thompson v. HUD* lawsuit have the unfortunate effect of making relocation and mobility services a requirement, rather than an option, for eligible families seeking rental assistance. Although the program expands the geographic range of choices to areas of the Baltimore region for a population that has traditionally had few of them – and goes to great lengths to accommodate even those families who are less motivated or prepared for moving out of Baltimore City and other impacted areas – it is not, in the strict sense, an "opt in" program, and it does not provide eligible families a route to obtaining traditional rental assistance without the substantial requirements of a mobility program.

DHCD

In contrast to the Baltimore program, enrollment in DHCD's mobility program will be an option for families already (or imminently) receiving rental assistance via the agency's HCV program. This characteristic has origins both in staff's belief that participation should be a choice – not a requirement – for families, as well as due to its institutional origins. In contrast to the Baltimore program, DHCD's mobility program is an initiative conceived under the agency's MTW authority, and within its federal HCV program.

Who Can Participate

In order to be eligible to participate in MA Mobility, families must: 1) live in Metro Boston, as defined by MA Mobility, but not in a programmatically defined "target neighborhood" – areas in Metro Boston that staff have identified as being desirable receiving neighborhoods for its client families (see "Defining Opportunity: Which Places to Target?" for its definition of a target neighborhood); 2) either possess an HCV or be coming off the HCV waiting list for the first time. However, participation in MA Mobility does not allow a family to jump ahead of its place on the waiting list; and 3) have at least one child at or below middle-school age as of the date of enrollment in the program. These eligibility requirements are still in draft form, as of May 2013.

The program will also be opt-in, meaning that eligible families will not be required to participate and their default option will be to receive standard rental assistance via DHCD's HCV program. In addition, although MA Mobility's pre-move counseling program is not finalized (see "Which Supports to Provide?" later in this chapter for further description), it will be similar to the Baltimore program's in that participating families will be required to meet a number of pre-move milestones and take necessary remedial steps in order to receive further assistance from program staff, such as housing search assistance. Further, families will be required to live in target neighborhoods for two years in order to remain in the program and continue receiving staff's assistance and counseling, although DHCD will grant hardship exemptions in some cases.

Attempting to Target "Good Bets"

Staff hope that the combination of the program being opt in, along with multiple pre-move requirements, will serve to screen out the least motivated and prepared families who are not well suited for the program (but to whom the program will be available in the future).

Staff initially planned to restrict the program to families already in the HCV program. They thought these families would fare better in the program because they have already experienced using a voucher in the private market, and – perhaps out of frustration with standard rental assistance – would be willing to take the considerable time and effort to go through an intensive pre-move process in order to be able to settle in an area that is more beneficial for their children. However, Gretchen's concern that the program might not attract a sufficient number of families currently in the HCV program to make MA Mobility viable led her to decide to also provide it as an option to families receiving a voucher for the first time (interview). Countering her plans, DHCD has, as of May 2013, frozen issuance of new vouchers to families on its waiting list in response to federal sequestration. Should funding be restored, either fully or in part, the agency will likely resume issuing new vouchers.

Finally, restricting enrollment to families with children is in line with the program's objective of improving access to high-performing and well-resourced schools for low-income children in the agency's HCV program. However, staff's decision to further restrict the program specifically to families with at least one child at or below middle school age was not based on hard evidence. Instead, staff based this decision on its own intuition that older children will not fare well in a program that transitions them to a drastically different social and educational environment, as well as on conversations with industry professionals – essentially, that younger children are more likely to be "good bets" in the language of targeting efficiency in social programs (Schuck and Zeckhauser, 2006). For example, I sought the input of the EDCO Collaborative, a nonprofit that works with relatively affluent suburban school districts in Metro Boston to develop more inclusive curriculums, as well as support minority students who attend schools in these districts. EDCO senior staff relayed anecdotal evidence that minority children from Boston who matriculate in EDCO's member districts through the METCO suburban busing program fare better in the long run if they begin the program before they begin middle school.

DHCD program designers' efforts to achieve some level of targeting efficiency in its client base is also a response to pressure from within the agency to reasonably ensure success for families who participate in the program. As described earlier in this chapter, improved child educational attainment will be one of the key indicators of success.

Impact of Unknown Demand: If You Build It, They Will (Hopefully) Come

DHCD staff have little sense of the level of interest in mobility among families currently receiving rental assistance via the agency's standard HCV program. In order to gauge interest, DHCD staff have engaged in conversations with staff at MBHP (which administers the state's HCV program in Metro Boston, and will administer MA Mobility), and held focus group with families in the HCV program in May. Even after conducting this outreach – and despite the fact that MTO and other research demonstrates that many low-income families are interested, in principle, in relocating from high-poverty neighborhoods – unknown demand has led DHCD staff to open up MA Mobility to families receiving vouchers for the first time (even if, for now, the agency's freeze on issuing new vouchers due to sequestration will limit the program to families already receiving rental assistance). Constraints on staff resources, as described in chapter 2, have limited staff's ability to deepen its efforts to estimate demand – for example, by conducting a more systematic phone or mail-in survey of eligible families in DHCD's HCV program.

Having little sense of demand for MA Mobility also impacts the agency's ability to estimate the program's funding and staffing needs. Unlike the Baltimore program, in which

MBQ can staff its office according to a contract that specifies the amount of families it is required to serve, DHCD's program will not be mandated to serve any particular number of families. Still, the agency must attract enough families for the program to be viable, and staff it at a level that does not significantly underestimate or overestimate demand; for precautionary reasons, it will likely err on the side of underestimating demand and increase staffing if needed. Much guesswork is involved in estimating funding and staffing levels (see "Dividing and Coordinating Labor" in this chapter for a further discussion of the agency's staffing decisions).

Finally, it is likely that the effectiveness of the agency's efforts to market the program to eligible families will impact enrollment, beyond these families' baseline interest in mobility. Due to the fact that families in DHCD's HCV program will have the choice whether to enroll in MA Mobility without jeopardizing their access to rental assistance, the agency is in the position of needing create a value proposition for families to make the program's demands worth their time and effort. This programmatic and institutional context is entirely different than the Baltimore program (and other mobility programs that have emerged out of lawsuits), where families must enroll in the program and complete substantial requirements in order to obtain rental assistance. For example, Gretchen is hoping that marketing the program to families as a way to improve their children's educational opportunities will be enough to generate interest in MA Mobility, and that presenting the program as a way to escape poverty or violence will not resonate as much with the agency's families despite research demonstrating that the "escape" narrative was a primary motivator for families that enrolled in MTO (interview).

Relationship to Policy Ideal

MA Mobility will be an initiative within DHCD's HCV program (and under its MTW authority), which allows the agency to make it an option – rather than a requirement – for families receiving rental assistance. In this sense, the program is in line with consensus thinking that mobility services should serve to expand housing choices for families rather than restrict them. The institutional setting for MA Mobility allows the agency to ensure that this is the case. However, the agency has taken the additional step of restricting eligibility to families with children of a certain age – a move intended to target "good bets" in line with program objectives, but which could serve to screen out portions of the agency's voucher population interested in accessing mobility services.

KCHA

KCHA's approach to targeting is similar in many ways to DHCD's due to a shared philosophical perspective that mobility should be an option for families rather than a requirement, and because the context for implementation is roughly parallel – a PHA pursuing

mobility under the umbrella of its MTW authority, within its HCV program. However, KCHA's unprecedented dual-approach to mobility, which includes a "stability" component for families who do not choose to relocate out of areas not programmatically defined as target opportunity areas, greatly expands the number of families potentially affected by the agency's efforts around mobility.

Who Can Participate

As with DHCD's program, families already receiving rental assistance through KCHA's HCV program that do not live in programmatically defined "High Educational Opportunity Neighborhoods" will be able to opt into the relocation portion of the mobility program. However, the agency does not plan to make the program available to families coming off the wait list and receiving vouchers for the first time, due to its observation that these families are often in "crisis mode" and less concerned with an apartment's location than leasing up within the allowed search period (interview). In addition, families must be in good standing with the HCV program.

Eligible families in KCHA's program will be required to have at least one child between the age of four and ten years old as of the date of enrollment in the program. This target range stems first from anecdotal evidence that educational gains will be greater for children below middle school age, due to middle school being a period of transition (interview). Second, KCHA will contract to have the program formally evaluated after five years, and – drawing on advice from Quadel Consulting and from the Century Foundation study of Montgomery County – they believe that educational gains will only show after five years; because the agency hopes to demonstrate the largest possible gains among children participating in the program, it has decided to limit target children who are attending school at the time the program begins (interview). In addition, staff will have the discretion to account for a child's school attendance record and performance in deciding whether to allow a family to participate in the program.

However, KCHA's program will have a categorically broader client base than DHCD's because it also will include families in its HCV program who do not opt into the relocation portion of the mobility program. In fact, staff will target these families for intervention without their having opted into the program or not. In this sense, the "stability" portion of KCHA's program will involve a program-wide change in practice – albeit in a geographically confined pilot, to start – to how the agency administers its HCV program.

Finally, although KCHA's pre-move counseling program is not finalized (see "Which Supports to Provide?" later in this chapter for further description), it will be similar to both the Baltimore and DHCD programs in that participating families will be required to meet pre-move

milestones in order to receive further assistance from staff, such as housing search assistance and post-move counseling.

Jurisdictional Puzzles: the Politics of Porting

Agency staff decided not to allow port-ins from the Seattle Housing Authority's HCV program to participate in the relocation portion of KCHA's mobility program. As noted in chapter 2, the southern portion of King County combines with Seattle's southern neighborhoods to comprise the most diverse and low-income area in the metropolitan region. Due to housing market pressures, a large number of families receiving rental assistance from SHA port into the County. KCHA's porting agreement with SHA is that it administers these families' vouchers (and thus earn an administrative fee), but SHA continues to be financially responsible for their rental assistance payments. Due to the fact that KCHA's rent structure – currently a two-tiered payment standard, soon to expand to four tiers – is different than SHA's, allowing SHA port-ins to participate in the relocation portion of KCHA's mobility program could cause SHA's financial obligation to these families to increase. KCHA staff decided that limiting the relocation portion of its mobility program to families in its own HCV program would remove risks of straining what is currently a positive working relationship with SHA (interview).

Unknown Demand

Similar to DHCD, KCHA staff currently do not have a good sense of the level of interest in the relocation portion of its mobility program among families currently receiving rental assistance via the agency's standard HCV program. Not knowing the size of its relocation cohort means that staffing and funding the program involves more guesswork (interview). As with DHCD, marketing will likely play an integral role in enrollment families into the program.

Relationship to Policy Ideal

Similar to DHCD's program, the agency will make relocation portion of KCHA's program an option for families already receiving rental assistance in the agency's HCV program. In this sense, the agency's efforts are in line with general consensus that relocation-focused mobility programs should be an option for added service, but not a requirement, when receiving rental assistance.

However, the "stability" portion of KCHA's program represents an innovation in the realm of assisted housing mobility because it expands the mobility paradigm to include serving families who are not willing or able to move to a dramatically different location. The agency's efforts to impact the way *all* families with children (of a certain age, and living within the pilot's geographical boundaries) experience housing mobility reflects a more comprehensive view of

what constitutes mobility – emphasizing that rental assistance programs should not only concern themselves with the location of families' moves, but also their frequency and timing. In a sense, KCHA is applying the lesson of MTO to track families' "housing careers" to include families who, at least in the meantime, are not ready to leave low-income neighborhoods. The stability initiative also accounts for growing evidence that rental assistance programs could do more to prevent *involuntary* moves, and encourage stability – no matter the location – in pursuit of improved social outcomes for families, particularly children's cognitive and behavioral development (DeLuca, Wood, and Rosenblatt, 2012). Finally, KCHA's efforts around improving housing stability among "stayers" in low-income neighborhoods extends the mobility model to include accounting for *impacts on places*, seeking to slow harmful churning in these areas – particularly in the classroom.

Defining Opportunity Neighborhoods: Which Places Should Programs Target?

Current expansions to the mobility paradigm notwithstanding, mobility programs are most commonly understood to be efforts to leverage the *power of place*, and to help disadvantaged families access better resourced areas that might lead to better developmental, educational, and economic outcomes for families. However, as described in chapter 2, past mobility efforts have struggled to connect participating families to concrete opportunities, such as high-performing schools, due to the fact that they relied primarily on race and income as proxies for opportunity, and did not account for school quality or other factors such as crime rates, or accesses to necessities such as public transportation and affordable child care.

Both current and ongoing mobility efforts seek to better account for the essential ingredients of socioeconomic mobility – and particularly child cognitive and behavioral development – in the way that they target receiving neighborhoods for participating families. However, different institutional context for these efforts, combined with divergent program objectives, have impacted the way each has approached targeting receiving neighborhoods.

In addition, despite evidence that race and income probably are not on their own sufficient proxies for opportunity, research has not provided practitioners with specific criteria to use in order to improve outcomes for families. For this reason, staff at all three sites have had to improvise with incomplete or unavailable evidence, and often rely on their intuition and personal experiences for establishing targeting criteria. MBQ staff and the policy panel in Baltimore have changed their program's targeting criteria over time due to shifting theories and evidence from participating families about what works best, and staff at DHCD and KCHA are relying on blunt and borrowed measures for school performance without clear cause-and-effect evidence for how they will translate in each of their program's target improvements in educational attainment among children in participating families.

Still, staff at all three sites are applying lessons from MTO and other programs in their experimentations with new approaches to neighborhood targeting, which clearly represent a movement toward better alignment between neighborhood screening and a program's target outcomes for participating families.

MBQ

In recent years, the Baltimore program's neighborhood targeting criteria has informally expanded beyond that specified in the *Thompson v. HUD* partial consent decree due to evolving theories among both MBQ staff and the program's policy panel – particularly Barbara Samuels, the ACLU representative – about how to best serve participating families. A more expansive notion of what qualifies as a "community of opportunity" will endure in the program's post-

settlement era. In addition, MBQ has found that, in the broader universe of non-impacted areas, its counselors play a critical role in helping broker the housing market on behalf of client families with variable needs and preferences who have never lived outside segregated neighborhoods in Baltimore City. Finally, staff have needed to be sensitive to political responses to its neighborhood targeting.

Trying to Locate Opportunity: "A Moving Target"

The *Thompson v. HUD* partial consent decree and settlement define non-impacted neighborhoods as census tracts in the Baltimore region with low concentrations of assisted units or with low minority populations. In practice, non-impacted areas include most of the Baltimore region, minus the majority of Baltimore City and portions of surroundings counties. This definition of non-impacted areas is in line with the prior generation of mobility programs' use of race and income concentration rates as proxies for "opportunity."

However, Barbara Samuels has used her position on the policy panel to push MBQ to develop an additional, informal set of neighborhood targeting criteria that might better respond to the needs of participating families, and to reduce the rate of reversion to impacted areas after living in non-impacted areas for the minimum time period required by the program. As the theory went, according to multiple MBQ staff, there was such variability within programmatically defined non-impacted areas that families were not moving to the *right* non-impacted neighborhoods, and that failing to distinguish between neighborhoods of different quality had negatively impacted families' ability to thrive in the program (interview). Recall that the Baltimore program does not have official objectives or target outcomes beyond helping eligible families move to non-impacted areas, and so a family's success in the context of the program is open to interpretation. Multiple MBQ staff observed that HABC's interpretation of success has been to serve as many eligible families as possible, as cheaply as possible (interview). However, Samuels and many MBQ staff have more holistic notions of success having to do with children's educational advancement, adult employment, and social integration, among other indicators. Still Development Manager and long-time MBQ staffer Tom Gunn noted that, "as the program evolved, Barbara Samuels developed her idea of what an opportunity neighborhood is" and that "opportunity neighborhoods" have been something of "a moving target" for program staff (interview).

As a result of Samuels's urging and their own experience with clients, MBQ engaged in a major data collection and mapping effort to identify locations within the larger universe of non-impacted areas in the Baltimore region that have the following characteristics: high public school test scores for math and reading; recreation, parks, and open space; employment opportunities; services such as hospitals, libraries, and shopping areas; and public

transportation. Today, the program uses this more multi-dimensional understanding of what a new *location* can offer a participating family in the way that it guides families through the housing search process. According to Gunn, HABC has agreed to updates to the program's approach to targeting neighborhoods so long as MBQ has been able to meet its contractual obligation within its given budget (interview).

Overall, the program's shift in neighborhood targeting criteria reflects an evolution from relying on one-time relocation and desegregation alone to deliver powerful social outcomes, to a more sophisticated perspective on which neighborhood targeting criteria and other supports might actually help families achieve them. This trend will likely continue, given the settlement's requirement that MBQ continue to expand its knowledge base and data capabilities around identifying "communities of opportunity" in the Baltimore region (Civil Action No. MJG 95-309, 2012).

Choosing Within Target Areas: Counselors' Role in Brokering the Market on Behalf of Families

Even with the benefit of more nuanced neighborhood targeting criteria, MBQ staff have also found that a family's success also depends on counselors' ability to locate apartments in locations that match each family's particular needs and preferences – essentially, to customize each family's housing search within the larger universe of neighborhoods that the program considers to possess the qualities of an opportunity area.

MBQ Counselor Maurice Gladsden has this prescription for mobility programs: "If you understand the client and you understand the area [housing market], then you can be successful" (interview). Further, Gunn considers counselors to be in a position of considerable power when assisting client families whose housing market information gaps are considerable: "It's like steering" (interview).

Thus, MBQ's experience has shown that the success of a mobility program whose primary objective is to expand housing choices for a population whose choices have historically been restricted depends on its staff's ability to make critical choices on behalf of its clients. Counselors must have detailed knowledge of a wide range of sub-markets within a metropolitan region, and must have the experience and social skills to judge whether a family's particular needs would be met in a given area. Families have veto and executive power in making the final decision about whether to lease up in a particular unit, and MBQ counselors typically present client families with handful of options, much in the way a real estate agent would. Further, many families who move out of Baltimore City via through the program find housing on their own by using other information sources such as online listings.

However, in assisting the majority of participating families who rely on the program to find housing in areas of opportunity, and who do not have housing market knowledge or

experience outside of Baltimore City, MBQ counselors have found that they must engage in *smart steering* and broker the market on their behalf in order to ensure their success in the program.

Constraint: Political Responses to Neighborhood Targeting

A mitigating factor to how MBQ targets receiving neighborhoods is resistance to the program from a range of stakeholders, including homeowners associations and other neighbors, politicians, landlords, and other PHAs. Although MBQ staff have not encountered the level of racist vitriol that MTO implementers did in an infamous incident in Baltimore County in the mid-1990s, they still must manage and adjust to resistance to the program's efforts to house poor, black families – the vast majority of which are single mothers with children – in middle-class and affluent areas that are predominantly white or mixed. Further, some participating families, particularly those whose primary motivation is to receive rental assistance, and who are not interested in staying in non-impacted areas long-term, behave in ways that MBQ staff consider to be inappropriate, and negatively impact the program's reputation (interview).

First, recall that the Baltimore program operates like a regional PHA whose jurisdiction overlays a large and balkanized metropolitan area that contains several additional city- and count-based PHAs, each with their own voucher programs. MBQ staff have found that these other PHAs are protective of their jurisdictions in large part because they face many of the same kinds of resistance as MBQ. Further, they fear that MBQ will crowd its market and "tip" neighborhoods towards being havens for poor families. MBQ staff have had to build trust with these jurisdictions via monthly meetings and continual reporting, but they have had to pull back from sending families to certain submarkets in response to resistance from PHAs in particular (interview).

Beyond managing resistance from PHAs, due to the fact that the Baltimore program is large and has to date helped approximately 1,800 families lease up in non-impacted areas (and the 2012 settlement will provide resources to assist 2,600 more), MBQ staff and the program's policy panel have to continually monitor locational outcomes and ensure that the program is not overcrowding any submarkets to the point of generating backlash or "tipping" neighborhoods. For example, the program decided at one point to stop sending families to Columbia, Maryland because it had – in the view of local stakeholders – saturated that market (interview).

In the eyes of MBQ staff, negative responses to the program on the part of homeowners associations and other neighbors is a mix of valid claims (e.g., when a family trashes a property) and blanket resistance to anything the smells like subsidized housing. In these latter cases, MBQ oftentimes has to roll with the punches and pull out of a market for the sake of the program's

reputation and the quality of life for the families. One MBQ counselor remarked that, "there are certain pockets that we just can't get into, even if we give them (landlords) the best of the best, because they don't want Section 8… that's a major thing we constantly battle with on a day-to-day basis" (interview).

Relationship to Policy Ideal

The Baltimore program's origin in a desegregation lawsuit has shaped its approach to neighborhood targeting – mostly in the way that its policy panel and program staff have responded to families' experience in the program by improvising additional criteria that seek to locate the "moving target" of opportunity within the too-broad universe of non-impacted areas. In this way, the program has attempted to move beyond its origins and eschew the previous wave of mobility programs' use of criteria such as race and income as proxies for opportunity.

However, due to the fact that the program's only *official* objective is racial desegregation, its neighborhood targeting criteria has not benefited from more specific, outcome-oriented objectives – such as improving children's educational attainment – for guidance. Still, the program's apparent flexibility to evolve over time has allowed it to incorporate a broader set of informally enforced objectives, and to develop an accompanying informal set of neighborhood screening tools. In this way, the Baltimore program has, over the course of its operating life, moved from the older mobility paradigm of desegregation and one-time relocation to the newer paradigm of helping families settle long-term in receiving neighborhoods screened for a range of factors beyond race and poverty levels.

DHCD

DHCD's mobility efforts do not have origins in a desegregation lawsuit, and the agency's staff have thus had freedom to define program objectives and develop neighborhood targeting criteria in accordance with those objectives, particularly around improving educational outcomes for children. However, staff acknowledge some uncertainty about whether it is using the "right" school targeting criteria, for example, and what specific mechanisms will lead to educational improvement. In addition, constraints on staff capacity and lack of prior institutional relationships between DHCD and school districts has made school-related data collection difficult.

Basic Neighborhood Targeting Criteria

As of May 2013, the program defines a "target neighborhood" as a census tract in Metro Boston that is within MBHP's jurisdiction, is served by a high-performing public school district, and has a low poverty rate. Specifically, the school district must place in the top 30 percent of

districts in the state, based on Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) scores for both math and reading/English language arts for grades three through five, and its poverty rate must be at or below 10 percent. However, as described later in this section, the agency's targeting criteria could change to incorporate additional school-based measures.

In an attempt to account for MTO's important "quality of life" findings, DHCD program designers also considered incorporating violent crime rates into its screening criteria, but found that doing so did not ultimately change its list of target neighborhoods. In fact, staff discovered that, in creating a percentage ranked list of the state's cities and towns according to violent crime rates and then screening out the bottom half, it actually eliminated some of the most affluent towns with the highest-performing public schools. For example, Brookline and Arlington are transit-accessible towns close to Boston that both have very low poverty rates and some of the highest performing public schools in the state according to test scores. However, Brookline ranks in the 34th percentile in the state according to violent crime, and Arlington is not much better (38th percentile). Ultimately, staff found that percentile ranking was not particularly meaningful due to the fact that violent crime is extremely concentrated in a few cities and towns in the state. Despite Brookline and Arlington's low percentage ranks, their violent crime rates are still approximately one fourth Boston's citywide rate (Massachusetts State Police, 2012).

Finally, although DHCD staff fully acknowledge Boston's troubled racial history, and the region's racialized geography of risk and opportunity, they did not incorporate race into neighborhood screening criteria. This was mostly a decision of convenience; after narrowing the list of potential target neighborhoods according to school- and poverty-based measures, they found that school districts in these cities and towns were overwhelmingly white – so much so that staff began to identify those low-poverty, high-performing districts that benefited from *some* amount of racial and ethnic diversity, and could serve as more socially inviting environments for what will likely be a predominantly minority client base.[26]

Whither Schools?

DHCD's mobility program has had a clear focus on improving educational outcomes throughout its design process. In the context of a relocation-focused housing mobility program, achieving this outcome is reliant on a change in environments – most importantly the school environment.

DHCD staff are well versed in the mobility literature, and are aware that, as noted in chapter 2 of this paper, although children in MTO's "experimental complier" families did not fare better in school than children in the control groups, the program was not well designed to

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[26] As of January 1, 2013, only 31 percent of families on DHCD's HCV waiting list identify as "White/Non-Hispanic" (DHCD, 2013a).

test for the impact of a change in school environments because its neighborhood targeting criteria did not account for school quality and performance; children in experimental complier families usually attended high-needs schools, often in the same districts as they did before they moved. Further, some researchers found that MTO families often employed mental models about what constituted a "good" school borne out of their experiences seeking to avoid disruptive and risky environments that did not translate well to identifying high-performing schools as opposed to merely orderly ones – both when choosing a housing location in the first place, as well as in choosing a school when it was not assigned based on home address. Finally, research on MTO revealed that many low-income families choose schools based on often incomplete or false information obtained via friend and kin networks.

In light of these research findings, DHCD staff have maintained faith that changes in school environments can still translate to improved educational attainment among children who participate in housing mobility programs, particularly if exposure to better resourced schools is sustained for a multi-year period. However, they believe that mobility programs must engage in stricter neighborhood screening based on school quality. In essence, they have decided that MA Mobility must remove some of the locational choice from the hands of participating families and even program staff, and instead build these choices into the design of the program by screening out districts and schools that do not meet some minimum criteria for quality, however defined. Instead, the choice available to the family will be first whether to enroll in MA Mobility or not – knowing full well that the program's primary purpose is to connect low-income children to better schools via relocation to a different school district – and then to choose within the restricted universe of areas in Metro Boston that are programmatically defined as being served by quality schools, and that meet other basic criteria such as low poverty rates. Further, both the program's marketing and pre-move counseling will focus on helping families understand how to choose the best and most appropriate schools for their children, as well as the critical role that school quality can play in improving child developmental outcomes – not to mention long-term educational and employment prospects.

Will This Work? Despite staff's hopes about the transformative power of changes in school environments, they have run into gaps – both in their own knowledge, and in the literature – in available evidence for this mechanism. Gretchen admits that she's "making an assumption which *may or may not be right*, that [changing to a different school] will ultimately benefit the kids… that their achievement will be enhanced by being enrolled in better schools. I'm assuming that they will get something positive out of it" (interview). Staff have consulted a handful of studies that provide suggestive evidence that changing school environments could benefit children of families participating in MA Mobility – for example, the Montgomery County, Maryland study demonstrating that low-income students fare better in low-poverty

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schools than their peers attending higher-poverty schools. In addition, staff consulted ethnographic studies of former students who participated in metropolitan busing programs, which revealed evidence of gains in life skills among lower-income, minority students, such as the ability to negotiate between cultures, as well as expanded social networks that have led to higher quality jobs than would have likely been available to them in their old neighborhoods (Eaton, 2001; Wells, 2009). However, they have not come across experimental studies that – unlike MTO – have tested the effect of *changes* in school environments, particularly from schools in low-income areas to higher-income areas, on low-income or minority students.

Ultimately, DHCD staff feel that relying primarily on a such a change in environment to deliver improved educational achievement among children in families participating in MA Mobility is a leap of faith, but one based on their own intuition, personal experiences, and some suggestive evidence from academic research and other mobility programs. Indeed, MBQ staff have noted that it takes several years to see a positive educational impact on children in the Baltimore mobility program whose families stay for this long in non-impacted areas. DHCD staff estimate that children's educational attainment will improve the longer families stay in their new schools and neighborhoods, and to this end they hope their program's range of housing-specific and other counseling supports will be sufficient to help families settle long-term in low-poverty areas served by better schools.

Which Indicators to Use? Still, the question remained: which schools to target, and why? Staff's first impulse was to seek the most easily accessible measure of school performance – standardized test scores. This data is available on the Massachusetts Department of Education website, and it is what Gretchen's graduate student interns from the Kennedy School used to take a rough cut at narrowing the universe of low-poverty areas in Metro Boston into a list of potential target receiving neighborhoods in the spring of 2012.

Staff participating in the program's design all agreed that test scores were likely an incomplete measure of whether a given school or district possesses the qualities that could help increase educational attainment in low-income and likely minority children in families participating in MA Mobility. A range of other potentially useful school data are available on the DOE website, such as the student body's racial and ethnic composition, percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced cost meals, and percentage of low-income students graduating and attending four-year colleges. However, staff were unsure, as of winter 2012, what other indicators to use to screen out schools or districts – or whether this data was available – due to lack of available evidence about which qualities would lead to program's target outcomes.

Further, DHCD staff knew that the program would not have sufficient funding to staff the program to a level where contracted agencies implementing MA Mobility could provide the

type and intensity of counseling and academic supports that children would need in their new school environments – as is the case, for example, in the Project Choice regional busing program in Hartford described in chapter 2. In essence, due to resource constraints and DHCD's lack of institutional relationships with service providers in receiving neighborhoods, MA Mobility will primarily rely on receiving school districts to provide the necessary supports in order for children in the program to excel in their new school environments. Could the level and quality of social services available at schools somehow be measured, and incorporated into MA Mobility's neighborhood targeting? Staff wanted to know, but were unsure where to look or how to measure this factor without spending long hours on the phone calling each school district and asking about its counseling services.

In an attempt to address its evidence and data gaps, staff theorized that districts that voluntarily participate in the region's long-standing METCO busing program – which helps mostly black and Hispanic students from Boston attend schools in more affluent and predominantly white suburban districts in the Metro West area – might naturally be more supportive of low-income and minority students. Further, each school in participating districts has a coordinator position that provides direct support to METCO students, and DHCD staff wondered if children from MA Mobility could also take advantage of this supportive infrastructure. However, DHCD staff have to date been unable to connect with METCO staff, so they are unsure whether this kind of arrangement will even be possible. Still, DHCD program designers have confirmed via anecdotal evidence and via consultations with other professionals that districts participating in METCO are generally supportive of low-income and minority students.

DHCD staff's other efforts to move beyond relying on test scores as proxies for school quality include reaching out to the EDCO Collaborative, as well as to researchers. Unfortunately, these research efforts did not yield clear answers to how to target schools for children in a mobility program. For example, Stefanie DeLuca, a professor at Johns Hopkins University whose recent research has focused on the nexus of child and family development, housing, and schools, told me that she is currently engaged in a research project attempting to answer this very question, based on the experiences of children in the Baltimore housing mobility program. Though heartened that we at DHCD were on the right track, we realized ultimately that we just did not know which screening criteria to use when targeting school districts – or at least which were the most important indicators.

Settling, Temporarily, On Test Scores. After a period of exploration, DHCD staff decided to return to using standardized test scores as a blunt instrument for screening school districts as part of its neighborhood targeting strategy. This decision came as a result of a few factors. First, the cause-and-effect *mechanisms* for how a change in school environment might benefit children

in the program are unclear, and could include multiple factors such as classroom size, availability of counseling, or even developing a personal connection with a particularly supportive teacher. Second, due to the fact that DHCD will not be able to *control* the availability and dosage of many of these potential factors in its district and school targeting, it is a futile exercise to attempt to screen for them. Finally, the program will depend upon the ability of its staff to learn over time, based on data collection and anecdotal evidence, which districts and particular school qualities families find beneficial and possibly lead to the program's target outcomes.

If the program would rely solely on poverty rates and school test scores as neighborhood screening criteria, staff decided that they would also need to collect additional information on each receiving school district using DOE website and other internet resources and make them available to program staff and participating families to have on hand during the housing search process. As previously noted, DHCD hope that program staff will, over time, develop enough institutional knowledge and relationships to supplement the baseline research provided to them, and learn which schools are the most supportive of children in participating families.

In addition, the task still remained to settle which standardized test score percentile rank to use to screen receiving school districts. As previously noted, its plan has been to screen according to the top 30 percent of districts in the state, based scores for both math and reading/English language arts for grades three through five. However, this cut-off could change due to the fact that, for example, the Lincoln school district is ranked in the 69th percentile – just one percent outside of the current, admittedly arbitrary cut-off – but it is a generally high-performing district in a relatively affluent area, and the district voluntarily participates in the METCO busing program.

Learning From Peers. In an instance of cross-site learning,[27] DHCD program designers are, as of May 2013, re-evaluating whether to expand school-based criteria to include similar criteria to what KCHA is planning to use in its mobility program (described later in this chapter). Specifically, staff are considering including screens for the performance of low-income students – say, their high school graduation rate within a district – as well as the DOE-tracked "achievement gap" between low-income students and the rest of the student body. The idea would be to identify schools that are supportive of low-income students, and screen out those where these students fall far behind their peers. Establishing the particular cut-offs for each screening category, like with test scores, will be an iterative process, but staff hopes to get to a point where it feels that it has adequately screened for school quality while still targeting

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[27] Full disclosure: I facilitated this flow of information from KCHA to DHCD, with permission from KCHA staff.

receiving neighborhoods that actually have a supply of reasonably priced rental units where participating families could move.

Limited Staff Capacity and Prior Institutional Relationships

To date, staff has not done the more fine-grained work of mapping school catchment areas for districts that use neighborhood school assignment, and then screening out areas where students are assigned to schools that do not meet the program's cut-off for school performance based on standardized test scores. This is due in large part to limits on staff capacity, and reliance on interns' limited time to complete much of the work to move the program forward over the past two years.

Further, due to the fact that DHCD does not have existing data sharing or programmatic relationships with either the state DOE or with school districts serving target neighborhoods, planning around MA Mobility has moved forward at without the benefit of data, reports, or institutional relationships generated as a result of prior efforts around the nexus of housing and education among low-income children. This institutional context for DHCD's effort to design a mobility program with a heavy focus on education is markedly different than KCHA's, as noted later in this chapter.

Narrowing the Field

Even if DHCD's neighborhood targeting criteria are successful in identifying the particular locations in Metro Boston that would be the best fit and provide most benefit for participating families in line with the program's target outcomes, a number of intervening factors can limit the program's ability to help families move into these locations. For example, many of these locations are some of the most expensive in a state known for soaring housing prices, and it remains to be seen whether DHCD's payment standard exception for the program (planned to be 115 percent of Fair Market Rent, as of May 2013) and other supports for families will be enough to make them competitive applicants. Further, many towns with high-performing school districts have a limited supply of rental housing, and thus provide few opportunities for new renting households. Political resistance to "Section 8" among landlords and neighbors could also be a factor. Finally, funding constraints will dictate the amount of staff resources that DHCD will be able to dedicate to locating units on behalf of families. Due to the fact that contracted agencies charged with implementing MA Mobility have few contacts and little experience in most of the programmatically defined opportunity areas, staff will likely not be able to cultivate relationships with landlords across the entire universe of Metro Boston target neighborhoods on behalf of client families.

Given these constraints, in fall 2012 DHCD staff engaged in a data collection and market research process to narrow the list of programmatically defined opportunity areas to a smaller group of – according to staff's estimation – highly *desirable* but also *accessible* towns that could provide a reasonable starting point for staff and the first cohort of families that it will serve. To this end, staff identified those opportunity areas that contain – according to online listings services such as Craigslist, Zotero, and the Multiple Listings Service – at least a moderate supply of rental units within range of the agency's payment standard, are served by school districts that participate in METCO, and are served by transit that easily connects with downtown Boston. Staff made a number of assumptions in narrowing this list about which would be desirable to families, but it considered the exercise to be a necessary step considering likely future constraints on staff capacity, particularly during the program's start-up phase.

Relationship to Policy Ideal

The mobility literature has emphasized the failure of past programs, such as MTO, to connect families to areas that present concrete opportunities for them, such as schools of better quality than what is available in their neighborhoods of origin. DHCD's approach to neighborhood targeting takes on this challenge by attempting to ensure that receiving neighborhoods are located within the catchment area of schools of some minimum quality. Further, staff's attempt to align its neighborhood targeting criteria with its goal of improving student educational outcomes represents a step towards programmatic cohesion and clarity of purpose when compared to past efforts – particularly programs that emerged out of civil rights lawsuits – whose services and neighborhood targeting relied on racial desegregation to deliver social outcomes for families.

However, DHCD staff's initial reliance on standardized test scores as a proxy for school quality demonstrates their own information gaps, as well as lack of available evidence about which mechanisms or indicators practitioners should use to screen schools in the context of a mobility program that will rely on the transformational quality of new school environments to positively impact low-income, minority students' educational attainment. Further, the agency's lack of institutional relationships with school districts or the state Department of Education has forced staff designing the program to essentially start from scratch in building data and forming theories around the nexus of low-income children and schools. Still, since targeting schools so deliberately is new territory for mobility programs, DHCD program designers hope that families' experiences in MA Mobility will more clearly reveal specific mechanisms for how switching educational environments can translate to gains for children – and thus provide new lessons for the field.

KCHA

Similar to DHCD, KCHA's programmatic focus on improving children's educational outcomes has guided its approach to targeting receiving neighborhoods for the relocation portion of its mobility program.[28] However, KCHA is using several school-related criteria to narrow in on the schools within King County that staff believe will provide the most benefit to children in participating families, and it is eschewing poverty rates and other measures employed by past mobility programs as proxies for opportunity. Further, KCHA's institutional commitment to education – as expressed in the staff and resources it has dedicated to the effort, along with its ongoing programmatic partnerships with school districts within the County and staff's basic familiarity with educational concepts and data issues – have made school-related data collection easier than in the case of DHCD.

Basic Screening Criteria

KCHA is using Washington Achievement Index data to screen for what staff are calling "High Educational Opportunity Neighborhoods," according to the catchment areas for schools with following characteristics: 1) elementary school overall index rating for low-income students: Exemplary, Very Good or Good (4.0-7.0); 2) Free and reduced lunch eligibility <30%; 3) Elementary school achievement gap <3.0; and 4) High school graduation rate for low-income students >85%. These criteria are in draft form as of April 2013.

Theories and Pragmatic Reasons for Using Schools As Proxies for Opportunity

Early in its design process, KCHA considered using a broader set of indicators to screen target neighborhoods. These criteria included school characteristics, as well as measures of health, housing and neighborhood conditions, transportation, and environmental health. The agency had borrowed some of this criteria from the Kirwan Institute, a research and technical assistance organization at Ohio State University, which had mapped the entire metropolitan area according to a broad set of opportunity indicators as part of a recent regional planning effort led by the Puget Sound Regional Council. However, after overlaying maps using all of these indicators and others, KCHA staff found that school-based criteria served as an adequate proxy for most of the other indicators (with the exception of public transportation service, which is generally poor outside Seattle). In addition, reconciling small differences between, say, maps of areas with low poverty with maps of enrollment catchment areas for high-performing schools seemed inconsequential in many cases, and more trouble than it was worth for staff. For

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[28] This section does not include a discussion of the "stability" portion of KCHA's mobility program, which will target families in all areas *not* identified as "High Educational Opportunity Neighborhoods" according to the program's neighborhood targeting criteria.

this reason, the agency has decided to rely wholly on school-related indicators of performance – including indicators that could suggest whether a school is a supportive environment for low-income students, such as their graduation rate and the achievement gap between low-income students and the rest of the student body – to select receiving neighborhoods for families participating in the relocation-oriented portion of the agency's mobility program. As of May 2013, the agency plans to bring in a local graduate student to complete another round of mapping.

Intervening Factors

According to Norman, the agency's highest-level payment standard – which, as noted in chapter 3, is scheduled to increase when the agency moves to a four-tiered rent structure – is "close to market" in many of the high opportunity areas in the eastern portion of the County, and that "with the right amount of outreach and counseling," it will likely be enough for families to be able to move to some of the more affluent portions of the county (interview). However, staff acknowledge that its payment standard likely will not be high enough to open up some of the most expensive submarkets, which, by their estimation, likely do not contain much rental housing anyway.

In addition, as described in further detail in "Dividing and Coordinating Labor Out" later in this chapter, KCHA will lean heavily on a contracted nonprofit based on the east side of the county to provide local housing market knowledge and locate available rental units for families moving from the south side of the county via the relocation portion of the mobility program – essentially to help provide the kind of housing market knowledge and housing options to allow staff to engage in the kind of *smart steering* that MBQ staff have found to be critical to the Baltimore program's success. This east-side agency's services and prior relationships will likely be a considerable value-add to KCHA, given that the vast majority of its public housing and voucher population live in the county's southern neighborhoods. KCHA's contracting strategy contrasts with DHCD's in that the latter agency will rely on nonprofits to build new relationships in suburban areas where they have limited experience and professional contacts.

The intervening considerations described in this section can impact the KCHA's neighborhood targeting criteria because even if staff can identify the most desirable locations for participating families to move on the east side, it needs the right set of tools, institutional legitimacy, and local knowledge – in this case, largely via a contracted nonprofit based there – to make those areas available to families, and to ease administration of the program.

Relationship to Policy Ideal

KCHA's approach to neighborhood targeting represents an even further departure from the previous generation of housing mobility programs than DHCD, mainly in that it does not account for neighborhood poverty levels or racial/ethnic composition, and focuses explicitly on school-based measures of quality. The agency's decision to focus only on educational criteria is in part due to its institutional focus on improving educational outcomes among children in its public housing and voucher programs. In addition, due to the fact that the program did not originate in a desegregation lawsuit, it is not required to include racial or ethnic integration as a program objective, even if it might do so by proxy. Indeed, staff discovered via data collection and mapping exercises that school-based measures capture many other aspects of quality of life, including demographic composition. Further, agency staff believe that economic integration is a more salient issue in the Seattle metropolitan area than racial or ethnic integration. Due to the fact that many affluent areas in east King County are home to many South Asian immigrants who work in the tech industry, targeting whiter districts might not result in locating the best school environments for children in participating families (interview).

Which Supports to Provide?

When low-income families move, they usually do not go far, nor does the socioeconomic makeup of their neighborhoods typically improve, at least by much. Moving from a low-income, urban neighborhood to a whiter, more affluent suburban area is unusual, and participating in a relocation-focused mobility program is thus a major decision for a family. Further, those who participate in mobility programs often have little experience traveling outside their home cities and neighborhoods, and, as described in chapter 2, face a litany of barriers to successfully leasing up and settling long-term in areas that provide many of the basic ingredients for socioeconomic mobility, such as high quality schools. One longtime MBQ staffer likened driving a van of African-American former public housing residents on a tour of a suburban area outside Baltimore to "steering the Mayflower" into a new world where everything is strange and foreign – especially the deer that roam suburban streets (interview). Mobility program designers today are savvier about the deep and varied needs of disadvantaged families than were HUD planners during implementation of MTO, but they have already faced similar pushback from service providers lobbying for more intensive supports for families that what agencies can reasonably afford (interviews).

The supports that agencies directly provide to families are the *what* and *how* of mobility programs. These supports can include credit repair and housing search assistance, but they can also come in the form of empowering families to take charge of this dramatic transformation in their lives. As an example of the softer side of mobility counseling, MBQ trainer Bernard Carey began the January 7, 2013 Baltimore mobility program orientation session – the first time eligible families directly interact with MBQ staff – by asking the room full of African-American women (and one man), mostly former public housing residents, to begin their housing mobility journey by visualizing their end goal:

> I'm going to take you on a visualization exercise… I can't do the work for you. If you want your voucher, if you want to change your life, if you're tired of your situation, you gotta *work*. But I want you to get a *feeling* of what it would look like to you to have your voucher. So if you could just bear with Mr. Carey for a moment, close your eyes…
>
> You're driving up, let's say in Columbia [Maryland]… you got both kids with you… You go on up, park in front of the house, put your key in the door, ok? You look at that bad boy, you're walking on in, go into to the kitchen and one thing you notice in the kitchen – a ha! – you got a dishwasher! (*Mm hmms* from crowd)…

You go outside in the backyard, and it's *quiet*. You can let your kids play outside. Isn't that a wonderful thing? You ain't gotta worry about them getting shot, somebody doin' stuff, them seein' things. You know because there's a whole bunch of mothers in here that don't let your kids play outside, because it's not safe (*Mm hmms* from the crowd)...

And then you get into your car and you drive all around. You see the schools, how nice the schools look. You see the markets that are close by. You see the neighborhood places where your kids can play ball…you can just see that. And you feel it, that you're part of the community…

You can open your eyes. I took you through that visualization because I need you – MBQ needs you – to internalize that vision of what it looks like to you to have your voucher…. Now, I'm going to show you how you going to do it, but I need you to *trust the process*. The tools, the things that you need to get through the program… we will take care of each and every one of you (observation, emphasis added).

As described in chapter 2, much is known based on research and past experience with mobility programs about which basic categories of support are minimally *necessary* for families to be successful in a mobility program – namely, a range of housing-specific counseling services, housing search assistance, and some form of post-move assistance. Higher payment standards and other forms of financial assistance to families and landlords can also help, particularly in tight, expensive rental markets.

Less is known about which supports, and in what doses, are *sufficient* for families to succeed in mobility programs, particularly to settle long-term in higher opportunity areas and convert their new locations into the kind of value that programs target, such as educational gains for children. Having little evidence or off-the-shelf guides to use when making fine-grained resource allocation decisions about which supports to provide can lead to considerable guesswork – like HUD did in basing MTO, rather naively, on the Gautreaux model – but also experimentation that could lead to new findings and successful models.

Finally, the supports that a program offers to its client families must adapt to the particular needs of the families themselves, local housing market dynamics, and other institutional factors. Unfortunately, agencies typically have few tools to estimate ahead of time which supports will be most critical to success, and which will be redundant or superfluous. For this reason, a trial-by-error approach is usually unavoidable, and performance management can help agencies learn, over time, which services are the most important and which could be reduced or cut.

The mobility efforts that I profile demonstrate variability in emphasis, experimentation beyond past models, and in ways to divide and coordinate labor between agencies. This variation depends on the institutional context for the program, the families the program serves, the resources available, housing market dynamics, and the program's objectives. Overall, considering the above variables and evidence gaps about what supports are required, basic approach in current program design efforts has been to arrange services largely on established precedent and then assume they will make adjustments to their operating models over time.

I should also note that mobility programs are complex and multifaceted, and I could not possibly detail all of the supports each one provides in the space available in this thesis. For this reason, I do my best to summarize the type, scale, and intensity of supports available to participating families – and other mobility program stakeholders, such as landlords – in each program.

MBQ

The Baltimore mobility program is commonly referred to as the "Cadillac" of mobility programs due to the amount and range of support it provides to participating families. This level of service is possible mainly because of the relatively generous funding available from the *Thompson v. HUD* partial consent decree and settlement, but also due to a number of additional factors – the additional resources it has garnered among local foundations, the particular clientele the program serves and the challenges they have faced, and the players who have been involved in decision-making around the program's operating design over time.

Supports for Families

The Baltimore mobility program provides a range of services for participating families, landlords, and developers. Assistance to developers comes via the program's ability to project-base some vouchers as operating subsidies, as well as provide predevelopment lending for properties located in non-impacted areas. However, I focus here on the supports available to families and landlords participating in the tenant-based rental assistance portion of the program, which serves the majority of eligible families.

Supports for families include pre- and post-move counseling, housing search assistance, and financial assistance (in addition to basic rental assistance). Pre-move counseling includes credit repair assistance, information about non-impacted areas, group workshops in topics such as household budgeting (attendance at least two group workshops are required), and one-on-one case management. Supports related to the housing search include tours of non-impacted areas, direct housing search assistance, security deposit assistance. Post-move support includes regular check-ins with staff, transportation assistance (e.g., car vouchers and transit passes), and

a range of supports and referrals to help families take advantage of resources available to them in their new surroundings. In addition to the value proposition of guaranteed rent from the government, support for landlords includes additional cash incentives to take on participating families as tenants in their properties.

Changes To Supports Over Time

MBQ has altered the type, scale, and intensity of supports available to participating families over time in response to challenges that many of them have faced in their new environments, and due to the fact that many do not settle long-term in non-impacted areas. The ACLU, which sits on the program's policy panel, has played a key role in driving these changes.

For example, the program has increased its emphasis in recent years on post-move supports in response to the large number of families who moved back to Baltimore City after living for the minimum required amount of time (or less, in some cases) in non-impacted areas, or who have faced a range of other challenges, such as moving out of their units without realizing they were breaking their leases or not paying their bills on time (interview). As one longtime staffer recalled, Barbara Samuels of the ACLU – who sits on the program's policy panel – threatened to void MBQ's contract to administer the program if it did not address the reversion problem. In response, MBQ increased the range and intensity of its post-move counseling support, and created a "retention specialist" position to coordinate these services.

In addition, the program recently transitioned its pre-move counseling supports from a one-on-one case management model to a hybrid model with both group workshops and limited one-on-one time with counselors. This shift was due to pressure to cut costs and standardize counseling, as well as – according to one senior staff person – MBQ's realization that there is only so much a housing agency can do to help extremely disadvantaged families in the context of a mobility program, despite the intuitive logic that one-on-one counseling would result in better service (interview). The switch to a group format was perhaps risky due to its unknown effectiveness, but staff have universally praised the change and note that it is perhaps even more effective than the one-on-one counseling model, not to mention much cheaper (interviews).

Foundation Support

The Baltimore mobility program has benefited from its high visibility and origins in a prominent civil rights lawsuit – as well as from the ACLU's position on its policy panel – in its efforts to attract additional funding from local foundations to supplement the services it is able to provide to families out of the budget provided by the partial consent decree, and now the settlement. For example, the ACLU secured a grant from the Krieger Fund to bolster the

program's education-specific supports available to families, as well as train MBQ staff to increase its knowledge base around school- and education-related issues. In addition, the Abel Foundation has assisted MBQ in creating a summer camp fund for participating families, and another private foundations capitalized a revolving loan fund to help families cover the cost of security deposits.

"You Need To Be A Referral Agency"

Although MBQ provides more direct counseling and financial support to participating families than probably any other mobility program has to date, it does not have the resources or staff capacity to address *all* of its client families' needs, which extend far beyond securing housing. Still, many families come to rely on MBQ, and often call its staff seeking help with a range of requests, such as help finding a job or a reliable car (interviews). For this reason, according to MBQ Director Jim Evans, "You need to be a referral agency." To this end, MBQ has established a number of institutional partnerships with service providers to which it can refer families participating in the mobility program – for example, with an organization called Vehicles for Change that refurbishes donated cars and sells them at a steep discount to low-income families. Counselors also help families apply for academic scholarships for their children, and MBQ sometimes makes official job referrals to the temp agency that it employs within its own office.

However, not all referrals occur through formal channels such as institutional partnerships between MBQ and other service providers. Counselors often make job referrals on behalf of participating families through their own contacts, and otherwise help out where they can, and when they have the time (interviews).

Pre-Move Counseling as a Screening Tool

From perspective of many families who participate in the Baltimore program, the most valuable support the program provides is rental assistance itself. Recall that eligible families are required to meet a number of pre-move milestones and lease up in a non-impacted area for two years in order to secure a long-term voucher. Multiple staff noted that the program's heavy pre- and post-move supports are in place in part due to the fact that many participating families are quite disadvantaged, but also because having multiple requirements and milestones in place has the additional effect of screening out the least motivated families who will not likely succeed in the program, and whose personal goals are least in line with the program's (interviews). The program's recent move to require families to live in non-impacted areas for two years, rather than one, is intended to have a similar effect.

Relationship to Policy Ideal

MBQ's increasing emphasis on post-move support, coming in response to its own struggle with many families reverting to Baltimore City and other impacted areas, is in line with a growing realization that mobility programs should look beyond one-time relocation (as was the case with MTO) to tracking the long-term trajectory or "housing careers" of families – organizing supports not just around the first move, but around the long-term trajectory of a family's moves, increasing their *quality* (e.g., moving to and within opportunity areas) and lowering their *frequency* to ensure family stability.

In addition, MBQ's experience continually expanding the services it provides to participating families demonstrates the extent to which mobility programs must be responsive to families' needs – particularly, as is the case of the Baltimore program, if a program attracts families with a wide range of capabilities, needs, and motivations, particularly in light of the incentive the program provides of obtaining rental assistance – and also how agency staff must scan the universe of complementary service providers and develop both institutional and informal partnerships where necessary.

Still, although one longtime staffer opined that "we're here to house," MBQ's experience providing a considerable range of non-housing supports demonstrates the tension that mobility programs can face between wanting to help families improve their lives however possible and the more limited mandate of helping families secure housing in particular locations. Often, these two outcomes are interdependent. This tension is expressed internally at MBQ through the competing priorities of, and occasional disagreements between, its HCV department and its counseling department. One MBQ staffer described the former as the "rule followers" and the latter as the "soft touch" (interview). Communication between the departments is critical, as HCV staff might identify trends but counselors must develop strategies to address them in the ways they interact with clients.

However, MBQ has shown that implementing the kind of "mobility plus" programs that some advocates and researchers have proposed (Briggs and Turner, 2008) can be difficult and result in strains on staff and resources without considerable effort on the agency's part to secure foundation grants and build relationships with outside agencies that provide complementary supports – something MBQ has been able to with some success, but which less well resourced PHAs might find to be more difficult without the visibility and political impetus of a lawsuit to help a class of disadvantaged families. Without these additional resources and institutional partnerships, mobility programs will continue to focus primarily on providing housing-specific supports, and families will only have access to additional services on an informal and irregular basis via the good graces and personal contacts of program staff.

DHCD

       As of May 2013, DHCD's support plan for families in its mobility program is not finalized. However, a rough plan is in place, and its overall emphasis is to provide services that help families settle long-term in target neighborhoods – addressing what Gretchen calls the "problem of integration." The program's supports will be scaled back when compared to the Baltimore program's mostly due to the fact that the portion of the agency's MTW reserves available for mobility do not compare to what is available to MBQ, but also because mobility does not enjoy much institutional legitimacy and it is not yet visible to foundations or other potential sources of additional support. As such, program planners have moved forward in designing the program with the assumption that a portion of the agency's MTW reserves will be its only funding source.

Supports for Families

       DHCD's current approach to supporting families in MA Mobility is to provide pre- and post-move counseling, housing search assistance, and small amounts of financial assistance (in addition to rental assistance). A basic flow chart for how families will move through the program and take advantage of its supports is included in Figure 1.

       Pre-Move Counseling. DHCD's current plan for pre-move counseling resembles MBQ's in that it involves three required group workshops supplemented by one-on-one sessions with counselors to establish personal goals and develop personalized criteria for the housing search process. Staff is hoping that by making the program an option within the larger HCV program, only the most motivated and capable families will opt in, and major remedial work will not be required as often as with the Baltimore program.

       Housing Search Assistance. Current plans for supports related to the housing search process include: 1) referrals to available units in target neighborhoods that meet a family's individualized preferences; 2) maps and information about families' preferred target neighborhoods, including facts about schools, public transportation, available supports (e.g., health care centers), local congregations, and other basics such as park and grocery store locations; and 3) tips on where to find units, such as websites and newspaper listings, for families who wish to search on their own. However, all families are required to verify with program staff that potential units are located in target neighborhoods. To the extent possible, staff will provide additional housing search assistance to families who need or request it. Examples of such assistance can include providing transportation to view available units, facilitating meetings with potential landlords, speaking or negotiating with landlords on behalf

Figure 1: MA Mobility – Family Supports Flow Chart (Draft, May 2013)
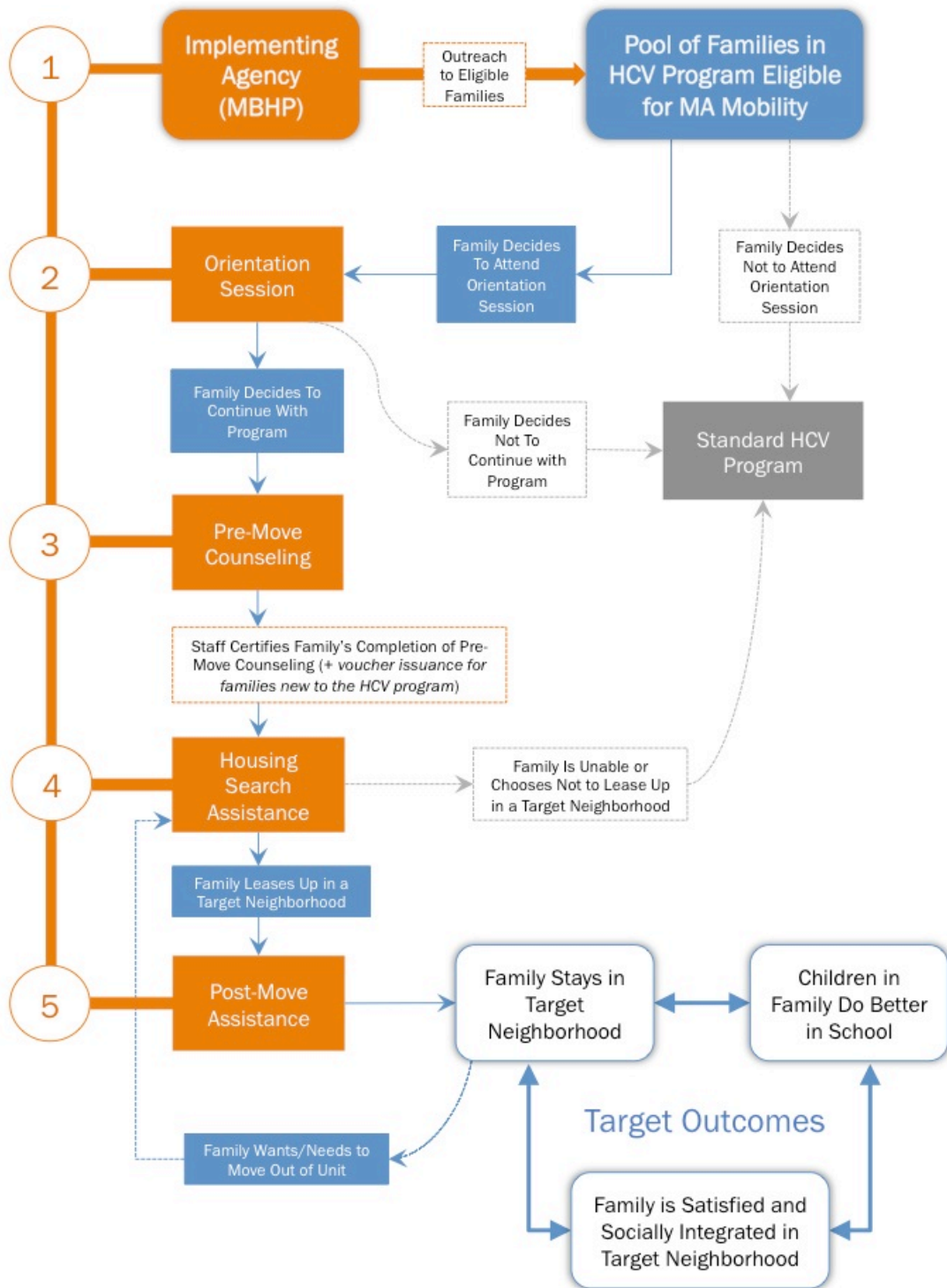
of families, and organizing meet-and-greet events with families, realtors, and landlords with units in target neighborhoods.

Housing search assistance will also be available to families for subsequent moves, and not only for the first move. Counselors will maintain close contact with families as they near the end of their first lease in a target neighborhood. If a family decides that its current unit is untenable and it must move, that family's counselor will provide the same level of housing search assistance that it did for the family's initial move to a target neighborhood. Housing search assistance will be available to participating families for three years after their initial moves.

Post-Move Counseling. In addition to Nth move housing search assistance, families will have access to post-move counseling. Staff hope that the combination of both forms of post-move assistance will help families achieve long-term housing stability and social integration in target neighborhoods. On the counseling front, staff will at minimum connect with families by scheduling a home visit approximately one week after a family moves into its new unit, and every three months after during the first year. Visits will be less frequent during the second year. However, counselors will maintain an open-door policy that will permit families to contact them as needed when issues arise.

To the extent possible, counselors will provide a range of additional supports beyond the handful of required visits. Examples of these supports could include: accompanying families to community events and introducing them to their neighbors; facilitating peer networks among participating families living in the same geographic area; helping families negotiate their children's school environments, including facilitating meetings with teachers and school officials; and referring families to other service providers. Counselors will also help families manage landlord conflicts, by providing advice and speaking on their behalf when necessary.

Other Assistance. Resources permitting, DHCD plans to provide small amounts (e.g., a few hundred dollars or less) in security deposit assistance, as well as assistance paying for last month's rent should landlords require it up front. As of May 2013, the agency would plan to raise the maximum allowable rent to 115 percent of fair market rent for families participating in the program (by comparison, the limit for the standard HCV program is 110 percent of fair market rent). Finally, the program is planning to allow families to search for housing for a to-be-determined longer period than is currently standard practice in DHCD's HCV program (60 days, with two possible 30-day extensions).

Limited Input on Design Process

Recall that DHCD's support plan for families is currently in draft form. In the coming months, agency staff will work with staff at MBHP, the implementing Regional Administrating Agency currently slated implement the program, in order to finalize the support plan and other aspects of the program's design. And as noted in chapter 3, senior DHCD staff and other stakeholders will also weigh in on the program's design. To date, only a few DHCD staff have had a role in developing the program.

Uncertainty About What Will And Won't Work

Due to the lack of off-the-shelf guides to use when making fine-grained resource allocation decisions about which supports to provide, DHCD staff have primarily relied on models from other mobility programs, such as the Baltimore program, to create a plan for how it will support families. Given uncertainty about its client families' particular needs, as well as other factors such as housing market dynamics, DHCD will incorporate performance management that – particularly during the program's start-up phase during its first year – will help staff determine which supports are the most important, and which could be reduced, altered, or eliminated.

Dealing with Limited Capacity

As noted in chapter 3, Gretchen's past experience designing and monitoring programs at DHCD has made her ambivalent about relying on providing effective referrals in order to meet program objectives. For this reason, DHCD's mobility program will likely have narrower objectives and provide fewer referrals to outside agencies than MBQ does in Baltimore. However, if MBQ's experience is to be any guide, families in DHCD's program will likely lean on staff to help them locate needed supports in their new environments; if the program is going to be effective in helping solve the "problem of integration" in mobility programs, staff will need to be adept at locating and building relationships with service providers in receiving target neighborhoods. Given limits on the amount of positions DHCD will likely be able to fund, staff might find themselves strained to provide the level of post-move counseling support that many families will need in order to remain in target neighborhoods for longer periods than programmatically required (two years, as of May 2013).

Relationship to Policy Ideal

DHCD's planned emphasis on post-move counseling and provision of Nth move housing search assistance represent a clear break with the old relocation-only mobility model, and an attempt to respond to researchers' calls to track and improve families' "housing careers." In this

sense, the agency's support plan for families is in line with current thinking on how mobility programs should help client families settle long-term in opportunity neighborhoods – and achieve target objectives. However, due to DHCD's limited funding for mobility when compared to the Baltimore program, including no anticipated support from foundations or other providers in the short term, it is possible that staff resources will be constrained to provide the level of post-move counseling, referrals, and general hand-holding necessary to solve "the problem of integration."

KCHA

Similar to DHCD, staff at KCHA are relying on past models – and the ability of program staff to learn from performance and adjust over time – to determine which supports it will provide families in its mobility program. However, KCHA differs from DHCD in that has had the benefit of bringing service providers as well as outside consultants to the table with HCV program and senior-level staff to participate in a formal program design process to decide which supports to provide, and why. KCHA also has the added challenge of designing what is probably the first ever "stability" component of a mobility program, with apparently no precedents to serve as their guide. It should be noted that the type and intensity of supports that KCHA's mobility program will provide to families is still in development as of May 2013.

Supports for Families

Supports for families in the relocation portion of KCHA's mobility program will resemble both DHCD's and MBQ's support plans. Intensive pre- and post-move counseling, housing search assistance, and small amounts of financial assistance for moving expenses and security deposits will be available to families. However, as of May 2013, supports for families in the stability portion of the mobility program are less certain. They will likely include providing counseling to families at the time they submit move requests to KCHA, as well as year-round messaging via contact with HCV program staff, newsletters, and schools. The agency's approach to improving the frequency and timing of families' moves focuses on impacting a their decision-making process with information and counseling, and does not currently include supply-side or regulatory approaches to impact potential root causes of involuntary moves, such as changing unit inspection standards or reaching out to better landlords.

Collaborative Design Process

KCHA's design process for its mobility program was deliberately collaborative. According to Executive Director Stephen Norman, the typical procurement process is to "half-bake" a program, procure a nonprofit, and "tell them what they're going to do." In this case,

KCHA published a request-for-qualifications in October 2012 to "identify the best nonprofits [to provide counseling to families] for this program, and then invite them in to work with us to move from a concept to a fully articulated approach" (interview). Although the selected service providers, the Multi-Service Center and Hopelink, have not administered mobility programs in the past, their experience providing a range of housing-specific services to low-income families in King County provides an important perspective that would be missing were design decisions limited to KCHA staff. In addition, KCHA staff have benefited from having these providers close at hand during the design process so that they could understand these organization's capabilities and blind spots, as well as the services they already provide. KCHA also hired senior staff from Quadel Consulting, which runs the Baltimore mobility program, to facilitate KCHA's design process, provide input where necessary, and create process maps so that staff can understand work flows of different family support options. Overall, KCHA's process of designing the supports it will provide differs from DHCD in how formalized its design process has been, which stakeholders have participated, and how much prior experience with mobility programs was represented at the table.

Uncertainty About What Will Work

Despite the collaborative nature of the support system design process, KCHA faces the same uncertainties as DHCD about which supports will be more most critical. This is particularly true with the stability portion of the program, which apparently has no precedent. Anticipating that their design decisions would involved some guesswork, KCHA asked Quadel to monitor the program's performance during the first six months of operation, and then make recommendations about how its design could be changed.

Relationship to Policy Ideal

KCHA's planned provision of post-move supports represents a clear break with the old relocation-only mobility model. However, KCHA's program includes a wider range of support types available to a larger universe of families than will DHCD's program, or any mobility program to date. Not only will KCHA's program provide supports specifically focused on improving the *quality* (e.g., location) and *frequency* of families' moves, but it will also attempt to improve the *timing* of moves for the specific purpose of improving children's educational outcomes.

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Dividing and Coordinating Labor

A critical component of designing program delivery systems is deciding how to divide and coordinate labor. From a practical perspective, program designers seeking to integrate mobility supports into administration of rental assistance programs must contend with the particularities of each agency's existing service delivery model. For example, administration of standard HCV programs is already hybridized at most PHAs, but in different ways; DHCD's program is entirely contracted out to nonprofit Regional Administering Agencies, and KCHA contracts out the task of developing and maintaining a list of landlords interested in renting to families with vouchers. Different operating environments on the ground are translating to divergent mobility delivery models and divisions of labor between PHAs and contracted agencies – each model which, in turn, could present unique challenges related to control and communication during programs' operating phases.

Further, in an era of intra-agency hybridity where PHAs themselves rarely provide direct services to families beyond the standard touch points of voucher administration, the task of supporting families enrolled in mobility programs falls on outside agencies – both nonprofits and for-profits – that win contracts to provide those services via procurement processes. In some cases, contracting out can work well, such as in the Baltimore program where an outside agency, MBQ, is entirely organized around carrying out the contract, has no competing priorities, and has the capacity and an organizational culture that is well-attuned to carrying out complicated tasks. And as KCHA's program demonstrates, a PHA can stand to benefit from an outside organization's local knowledge and legitimacy in the public eye. However, program designers at both DHCD and KCHA have, similar to HUD planners implementing MTO, encountered difficulty in identifying service providers experienced in helping low-income families move to areas of "opportunity."

However, contracting out can pose substantial risks to both parties (or more than two, in the case of KCHA's program), such as a tarnished reputation, unforeseen or high costs of managing the program, or insufficient personnel to carry it out (Smith and Lipsky, 1993). Neither PHAs nor contracted agencies should assume that they can effectively carry out their roles in mobility programs in their spare time, but operating capacity in the universe of affordable housing programs is inevitably subject to limits in personnel, expertise, and funding. Further, a program's political context can make contracting and collaboration difficult, as several PHAs found when attempting to forge new partnerships with nonprofits and other government agencies to implement court-ordered remedies to desegregation lawsuits against them (Popkin et al, 2003). Although the circumstances around current PHA-originated efforts

are comparatively less contentious, DHCD's decisions around selecting a service provider demonstrates the inherently political nature of contracting out.

MBQ

The Baltimore mobility program is unique in that, although MBQ is a contracted agency to HABC, MBQ administers all essential mobility functions in-house, including counseling and other direct services for families (e.g., housing search assistance, tours of non-impacted areas), voucher administration, waiting list maintenance, and other activities such as landlord recruitment. Although the program is technically a subset of HABC's larger Section 8/HCV program, MBQ essentially operates as an autonomous regional PHA. The only major activity that that does not fall under MBQ's authority is high level decision making for the program, which rests with the program's policy panel; however, as noted in earlier sections of this chapter, MBQ helps shape many of these decisions.

Consolidation by Design

MBQ was not the first outside agency to hold the contract to administer the Baltimore mobility program. Between 1996, when the partial consent decree created the program, to 2002 when MBQ took over, HABC contracted with a series of nonprofits to provide mobility counseling services for eligible families, although it kept voucher administration functions within the housing authority. However, each of these nonprofits failed to serve a client volume nearly at the level required by the partial consent decree. When MBQ took over the contract, it worked with HABC to rearrange the program so that voucher administration would be moved into the same office as mobility counseling, and MBQ could become a "one stop shop" for client families as well as landlords. This decision proved to be valuable to all parties involved, as the program became much more efficient and user-friendly, communication between the HCV and counseling departments improved, and MBQ was able to serve the number of families required in its contract with HABC, and in the partial consent decree (interview).

Achieving this level of consolidation and focus around one program was in part a function of Quadel Consulting's demonstrated capacity running voucher programs elsewhere in the country, but also due to the fact that it did not have a presence in Baltimore prior to running the mobility program there. In other words, Quadel built the MBQ office from scratch specifically to carry out this contract. MBQ thus has no competing priorities that might draw its attention away from the mobility program, impose constraints on staff resources, or cause its mission to drift into other areas due to funding constraints.

Relationship to Policy Ideal

The literature on mobility programs has little to say about labor and core processes in mobility programs should be organized, or which types of agencies should carry out which functions. Assisted housing mobility is a young field, and many organizational arrangements are possible and even desirable, depending on the program's political, institutional, and market context (PRRAC and Urban Institute, 2013). Still, using organizational management literature as a guide, the decision to house all essential program activities at MBQ appears to have increased efficiency and cross-function communication (between voucher administration, counseling, and landlord outreach staff), and has made the program more user friendly from the perspective of client families and landlords.

Although the relatively generous funding available to the program has played a role in its success, MBQ has also honed its operating design as a result of years of learning and adjustments. However, the political and organizational factors that gave birth to the Baltimore mobility program, and ultimately to MBQ's arrangement as a one-stop mobility shop, were context-specific and would not necessarily translate to other sites. For example, a PHA interested in making mobility an option for families within its standard HCV program – as opposed to creating the program specifically for an eligible class of families coming off of a separate wait list, as is the case in Baltimore – would not likely hand off voucher administration to an outside agency if it does not do this already.

DHCD

DHCD's HCV program is already contracted out to eight Regional Administering Agencies located throughout the state, and some of these contracts are long-standing. For example, the Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership, the RAA with jurisdiction over most of Metro Boston, has administered DHCD's voucher programs since the early 1980s. MA Mobility will run through MBHP for political reasons, to capitalize on existing relationships, and because the program is intended to be an option for families within DHCD's larger HCV program, not an entirely separate initiative in the vein of the Baltimore program.

Program Administration

MA Mobility's administrative structure will be divided between DHCD and MBHP. DHCD will provide high-level management and oversight, while the RAAs will house the rest of the program's main activities. As of May 2013, the plan is to divide work functions between the agencies according to the following breakdown:

DHCD. Staff at DHCD will responsible for the following activities: 1) monitoring program performance; 2) making major decisions about the program, including adjustments to

its operating design based on program performance (e.g., increasing the amount of allowable security deposit assistance for families); 3) technical assistance, particularly during the start-up phase; and 4) identifying partnership opportunities at state and local levels to facilitate program administration.

MBHP. Staff at MBHP will be responsible for administering all other major MA Mobility activities, including: 1) pre- and post-move counseling; 2) housing search assistance; 3) marketing the program to eligible families and recruiting participation, including running the orientation session; 3) landlord outreach and recruitment, including: developing marketing materials, holding events and meetings, and lining up units in target neighborhoods for participating families; 4) data collection and reporting; and 5) program management, including hiring staff.

Staffing. The staffing arrangement for MA Mobility is still in draft form. As of May 2013, the plan is for DHCD to dedicate one staff person to act as a program coordinator and perform these tasks (most likely in a part-time role), but other staff could be involved around major decisions concerning the program. In addition, MBHP will create three new positions: two housing counselors to provide counseling, housing search assistance, and marketing to eligible families, as well as contributing to data collection; and one landlord outreach specialist to perform all duties related to landlord outreach and recruitment, as described above.

Strong Existing Relationships

Gretchen decided to run MA Mobility through MBHP in part due to her positive working relationships with its staff. She has collaborated with senior staff at MBHP on developing and implementing multiple programs in recent years, and noted that, "They're very comfortable pushing back when they don't agree with something or don't want to implement something, and so I feel that they wouldn't take it on if they couldn't do it, and weren't interested in doing it" (interview). Likewise, MBHP Deputy Director Sue Nohl – who has a list of direct phone lines for DHCD staff posted on the wall directly above her office phone at MBHP – describes having, "a comfort level with the folks there [at DHCD]… we're able to have that conversation [about program trouble-shooting] and kind of work it out" (interview). Considering Gretchen's desire to maintain control over the program's direction, she was attracted to the option of working with an agency whose staff she already knows and trusts.

Convenience and Continuity

DHCD staff intend for MA Mobility to be a convenient and desirable option for families already in the agency's HCV program, and hope to avoid placing additional burden on families – for example, by requiring that they work with one agency around issues related to voucher

administration, and with another agency for supports specifically related to mobility – if this situation can be avoided. Making MBHP a "one stop shop" for both voucher administration and mobility supports would be the most convenient arrangement for families and landlords alike. Considering that MBHP already offers various counseling and support services, it is well attuned to balancing traditional rental assistance with a wider range of housing-related supports. Further, co-locating essential MA Mobility activities could make marketing the program to voucher-holding families convenient for MBHP; it will have a captive audience, and HCV staff will be able to easily refer families to a mobility program offered within the agency. Finally, housing all of MA Mobility's administrative activities in one agency is attractive from the perspective of organizational efficiency and encouraging communication between staff serving different functions within the program, similar to MBQ's approach in Baltimore.

Questions About MBHP's Capacity

Despite the apparent attractiveness of running MA Mobility through MBHP, the fact remains that Gretchen believes that there is not "real choice" in DHCD's HCV program, in part due to the way that this agency and other RAAs administer the program. For example, most of MBHP's landlord relationships are concentrated in poorer, urban submarkets despite the fact that it is a regional agency whose jurisdiction includes many affluent suburban areas. In some ways, MBHP faces the same challenges as low-income families in making headway in more affluent suburbs. In Gretchen's words, "MBHP has been working as hard as they can to make the Section 8 program work for years and years, so they've cultivated relationships with landlords that will accept Section 8" (interview). Although MBHP is technically a regional agency, its office is in Boston, most of the families it serves live in Boston, and most of its landlord relationships are in Boston. For these reasons, Deputy Director Sue Nohl believes the agency is, "perceived by people outside of Boston as a Boston agency… we're both – a Boston agency and a regional agency" (interview).

For MBHP, lining up units in programmatically defined target neighborhoods for families participating in MA Mobility would represent a break in practice from how it currently administers DHCD's HCV program. Securing a wide enough range of units to provide participating families with a meaningful range of locational choices within the broader universe of target neighborhoods – and to enable counselors to practice *smart steering* on families' behalf – will likely require significant up-front work and relationship-building with landlords.

Still, Gretchen believes MBHP is as qualified to do this work – and other essential MA Mobility activities such as pre- and post-move counseling – as any other agency in Metro Boston, and that hiring new staff specifically for this purpose could help the program avoid being "entrenched in the old way" (interview). Further, given Gretchen's long-term hope that

mobility might be scaled up in some form throughout DHCD's voucher program, running MA Mobility through MBHP, and perhaps other RAAs eventually, could be seen as a capacity-building exercise, and a way to build support for mobility. As noted later in this section, RAAs are entrenched in DHCD's programs and hold some political sway; Gretchen believes that gaining their support for mobility could be critical to its long-term viability within DHCD (interview).

However, given uncertainty about the level of interest in mobility among families in DHCD's HCV population, limited supply of rental units in target neighborhoods, and other housing market dynamics, Sue believes that too-large caseloads could impair program performance (interview). DHCD and MBHP staff will work together in the coming months to establish targets, and perhaps limits, for appropriate per-counselor caseloads – as well as determine exactly how MA Mobility will fit within MBHP's administrative and managerial structure.

Questions About DHCD's Capacity

Given ongoing constraints on staff capacity in the Bureau of Rental Assistance at DHCD, the agency's ability and commitment to adequately staff MA Mobility, monitor its performance, and provide policy oversight and trouble-shooting assistance to MBHP over time is uncertain. Although Sue has a positive working relationship with DHCD staff and she understands that their time is limited, she knows that MBHP will need help at times: "I want DHCD to be there if questions come up… they need to make sure there's someone who wants to know about how the program's doing." In addition, perhaps sensing that Gretchen is primarily responsible for mobility even being on the table as an option for DHCD's MTW program, Sue fears that staff turnover during the program's operating phase could result in DHCD "forgetting about them [MBHP]" and the program (interview).

Politics Around Choosing Contracted Agencies

Although MBHP is an understandable choice to carry out MA Mobility for the reasons previously described, it is also likely the only politically tenable choice because it is so entrenched in DHCD's programs. Gretchen did not even consider soliciting bids to administer the program because, "the politics of having an outside group (other than RAAs) do it would probably make the program untenable. It wouldn't go forward. I'm picking the path where the program gets done… There's the way you want things to be and there's the way that they are" (interview). Otherwise, hiring caps on the Bureau would prevent the agency from keeping some MA Mobility activities in-house.

A Late Change of Course

Gretchen had originally planned to run MA Mobility through two RAAs – MBHP and another agency that administers DHCD's HCV program in greater Boston, but outside of MBHP's jurisdiction. However, due to concerns about this agency's capacity to take on a new program, senior Bureau staff decided that the program should only run through MBHP if it moves forward, at least at first. Although limiting the program to MBHP addressed program designers' apparent challenge of coordinating capacity between multiple RAAs – for instance, in the task of landlord recruitment or outreach to school districts – the decision to rule out the second RAA significantly narrowed the universe of possible receiving neighborhoods, as well as families eligible to participate.[29]

Relationship to Policy Ideal

As with MBQ in Baltimore, housing all major program activities within MBHP makes sense from the perspective of keeping the program user friendly for client families and landlords, as well as for making administration, marketing, and internal communication as efficient as possible. In addition, given that MBHP already administers the agency's HCV program in Metro Boston, running the program through this organization makes sense given the overall framing of mobility as an option for families with children within the larger voucher program. However, given funding constraints and unknowns about how staff-intensive and expensive running the program will be, serious questions remain about both MBHP's and DHCD's capacity to carry out the program in effective partnership.

KCHA

KCHA contracts out the task of developing and maintaining a list of landlords willing to rent to families with vouchers

KCHA administers most of its standard HCV program in-house, but contracts out the tasks of developing and maintaining lists of available units. It also outsources certain functions for specialized programs, such as negotiating placements for "hard to house" populations such as those at risk of homelessness. In keeping with this general approach, the agency decided to contact out counseling, housing search assistance, and landlord outreach services for the relocation portion of its mobility program to *two* nonprofits – one of which (the Multi-Service Center) is based in the more diverse and lower-income southern portion of King County, and the other of which (Hopelink) is based in the more affluent east side of the county. The stability

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[29] In order to ensure that families maintain post-relocation contact with the same counseling staff that helped it prepare for its move, DHCD program designers plan to restrict families participating in MA Mobility from porting outside the jurisdiction of the RAA that administered their voucher.

portion of the program will remain in-house, as its scale, cost, and required staff time will be substantially lower than for the relocation portion of the program.

Contracting Out, But Contracting Early

As noted earlier in this chapter, KCHA's timing in contracting out for its mobility program was unusual. Rather than develop the program and then procure a nonprofit to implement it, the agency opted to first select nonprofits that have the capability to provide a range of mobility-related services via a request-for-qualifications process in fall 2012, and then invite them to the table during the agency's formalized design process in spring 2013 to help decide which services to provide and how to divide and coordinate labor, as well as to ensure that they understand the program's larger objectives. Due to the fact that KCHA does not have a recent working relationship with either nonprofit selected via the RFQ process, having them at the table during the design meetings was also a way for staff from all three agencies to begin to develop a positive rapport and familiarity with one another.

KCHA first selected only the Multi-Service Center, a Community Action Program (CAP)[30] agency based in the southern portion of King County that administers a range of housing, economic development, educational, and energy efficiency programs. However, after MSC's interview with KCHA, it recommended bringing Hopelink, another CAP agency based in the more affluent eastern portion of the County, on board as a subcontractor to MSC.

Neither agency knew its particular role in the program prior to the formalized design process. According to Manuela Ginnett, Housing Program Director at MSC, "that's intentionally how [KCHA Executive Director] Stephen Norman wanted it" (interview). In addition, due to the fact that program goals were not finalized until the design meetings, MSC did not have a strong idea of what the problem would even hope to achieve. "We had thought about other issues [KCHA staff mentioned in the interview]… better health, employment opportunities. But the goal is just education. And that's ok" (interview).

Although KCHA's role in the program will clearly be to provide oversight and continue to administer vouchers for participating families, specific roles for both the relocation and stability portions of the mobility program are yet to be finalized as of May 2013. KCHA and the two contracted nonprofits will work to finalize these roles and relationships over the coming months with the help of process maps that Quadel Consulting – another contracted agency, though only during the design and early implementation process – will create to be used as guides, and to provide a range of possible alternatives.

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[30] CAP is a federal anti-poverty program created in 1964 as part of the War on Poverty. CAP agencies, also called Community Action Agencies, are officially designated agencies that receive funding from the Community Services Block Grant to implement anti-poverty programs.

One Program, Three Agencies

Performance in the relocation portion of KCHA's mobility program will depend upon three agencies – KCHA, MSC, and Hopelink – working together. Unlike DHCD's program or the Baltimore program, the voucher administration will be housed in a separate agency as counseling, landlord outreach, housing search assistance, and other services – which themselves will be divided between two agencies located in different parts of the county. This could be present logistical challenges for participating families, and Manuela noted that MSC's relationship with families as a service provider is, typically, "different than [KCHA] HCV staff's relationship with them" (interview). However, MSC and Hopelink have forged programmatic partnerships with each other over the past year outside of the mobility program, and Stephen Norman sees the "strong collegial relationship between these two agencies" as a strength (interview). Still, coordination between the three agencies could present an additional challenge to effective and efficient implementation of the program.

Contracting Legitimacy and Local Knowledge

The majority of KCHA's public housing and voucher population live in the southern portion of the county, and for this reason the agency hopes to benefit from Hopelink's existing relationships and political capital in the eastern portion of the county, where many programmatically defined "High Educational Opportunity Neighborhoods" are located. Stephen noted that the nonprofit's "interconnectedness" with landlords, politicians, and the social services community will be a major "value add" for the program (interview). Unlike in DHCD's program, which will depend upon a center-city agency to develop new relationships with landlords and service providers in high-cost submarkets, KCHA will benefit from a contracted nonprofit's existing connections and public standing in order to keep up-front costs down and otherwise remain "under the radar" – a critical element for mobility programs, which Stephen Norman noted have historically faced political opposition and NIMBYism in receiving neighborhoods (interview).

Relationship to Policy Ideal

Although the relocation portion of KCHA's mobility program will not be as administratively cohesive as DHCD's or Baltimore's and could encounter challenges coordinating three agencies around one program, it will likely benefit from one of those agencies' existing relationships, local knowledge, and political capital because it is based in a location with many receiving neighborhoods – possibly a first for a contracted agency in a mobility program.

A Brief Note on Implementation

Beyond designing programs and delivery systems, mobility program planners at DHCD and KCHA also face additional decisions related to implementation that are old hat to operators at MBQ. Examples of these decisions include how to market to eligible families and other stakeholders (e.g., landlords, school districts, homeowners associations), timing a program's launch, and securing program funding. Perhaps easy for outsiders to overlook, these areas are critical program performance and longevity. Similar to program design, decisions around implementation also reflect each site's approach to mobility, including assumptions by staff, as well as the program's institutional and market context. Although program developers at DHCD and KCHA have not yet implemented their respective mobility programs as of May 2013, they have already begun to think through a range of implementation issues. In this section, I include a brief discussion of a few of them.

Marketing

Assisted mobility programs act to broker housing markets on behalf of both families and landlords, and these two audiences are thus the primary targets for marketing efforts. However, depending on the context, additional audiences could include neighborhood associations, school administrators, potential funders, and even fellow agency staff. In deciding how to market mobility programs, planners must consider what value the program could bring to each audience, and incorporate sensitive messaging; for example, families could react negatively to the term "mobility," while many landlords in more affluent areas might shirk at any mention of "affordable housing" (PRRAC and Urban Institute, 2013). In the worst cases, opposition to mobility programs can reach the scale of neighborhoods and towns, which is what MTO implementers faced in attempting to help African-American families move to east Baltimore County in the 1990s. Further, internal marketing can be a critical component of political management around mobility programs in PHAs, where many staff could be skeptical of mobility's basic premise, and where other priorities abound (Moore, 1995). Even at KCHA, where senior staff are leading the agency's mobility planning process, the task of internal messaging is specifically called out on its draft implementation timeline (KCHA, 2013). Clearly, marketing is critical to effective program implementation.

Despite the important finding from MTO that escaping neighborhood violence was a primary motivator for families to seek relocation from distressed public housing, program designers at both DHCD and KCHA are assuming that this escape narrative will not be as salient among their voucher populations and potential mobility program client bases. Despite the presence of concentrated poverty and minority populations in southern King County,

Stephen Norman of KCHA believes that, "the impetus of trying to get out of central city hellholes where kids sleep in bathtubs to escape sniper fire is not an issue in the Pacific Northwest" (interview). Similarly, Gretchen believes that low-income families in Metro Boston will be motivated to relocate by the prospect of improved school environments for their children, and has pushed her colleagues at DHCD to think about the program as primarily being about education – and to message it as such to each audience.

Further, although rental assistance operators already conduct landlord outreach as standard practice, neither DHCD nor KCHA (or their contracted agencies that provide unit lists to families) currently has many relationships with landlords in the areas their programs will target as receiving neighborhoods. For this reason, a landlord marketing strategy will be critical at both sites, and could involve a range of activities – from cold calls to arranging meet-and-greets with families. Indeed, MBQ dedicates a large section of its website to landlords and property owners, and its staff constantly works to recruit new participation. In addition, unique operating environments have resulted in divergent divisions of labor when it comes to landlord marketing. For example, DHCD will rely on the agency (MBHP) that currently administers its HCV program in Metro Boston to beef up its capacity to recruit sufficient landlord participation in target receiving neighborhoods, while KCHA will instead look to a newly contracted nonprofit (Hopelink) based in an area that comprises many programmatically defined "High Educational Opportunity Neighborhoods" to capitalize on existing landlord relationships and political capital. Overall, private landlords are critical stakeholders in making assisted housing mobility programs work.

Timing Program Launch

Launching an assisted housing mobility program involves a range of activities that require considerable time and effort – from recruiting families, to training staff, developing marketing materials, creating program forms and IT infrastructure, and recruiting landlords. Then, after establishing a base upon which to provide mobility services to families, helping even a small number of them prepare to relocate and then finally lease up in target receiving neighborhoods can be a protracted process. "It's like a slow-moving train," said Jennifer O'Neil of Quadel (observation). Further, in order to demonstrate a program's viability, MBQ director Jim Evans said it's important for the first cohort of participating families to have a high lease-up success rate on a short time scale. For this reason, he suggested to KCHA that it should aim to recruit the most motivated and high-capacity families for early participation (observation).

Program objectives can also influence the timing of a program's launch. Since both DHCD's and KCHA's mobility programs will aim to help low-income children access better school environments – and, in KCHA's case, improve mid-school year stability – they must

work backwards from the summer to allow sufficient time for pre-move counseling and other critical tasks outlined above. In addition, they must be careful not to provide pre-move counseling in the summer or fall, and then force families to wait several months before relocating to target receiving neighborhoods. Although MBQ has found that the pre-move counseling phase can take many families in Baltimore more than a year, program developers at DHCD and KCHA are counting on a shorter average timeline.

Funding

Limits on resources have influenced a range of program design decisions at DHCD and KCHA, but funding will be an ongoing concern post-launch – particularly if these agencies hope to scale up their programs over time, or more fully integrate mobility supports into standard administration of their rental assistance programs. Although both programs will be able to draw on their respective agencies' MTW reserves despite recent federal sequestration, a number of factors could cause these resources to diminish over time, such as continued cuts to HUD programs, competition from other agency priorities, and changes in the local rental market.

Absent advanced funding structures reflecting mobility as a "preventive investment," implementers often must resort to securing grants in order to maintain sufficient resources to run effective programs. To this end, Jennifer O'Neil of Quadel suggested to KCHA that it follow MBQ's lead in looking to foundations for additional resources – such as the Gates Foundation, which is based in Seattle and has already engaged with KCHA and other PHAs in the area around data sharing and educational initiatives (interview). However, KCHA, and particularly DHCD, will not benefit from the kind of exposure MBQ has enjoyed due to its association with the highly visible *Thompson* lawsuit. Implementers at DHCD, in particular, must first focus on convincing the agency's senior staff to support the program before looking to outside funding sources.

Summary and Implications

Program designers at all three sites are working to incorporate lessons of mobility research, especially with regard to program targeting, intensity of client coaching, and post-move follow-ups. However, critical differences between the operating environments of PHAs, and of a stand-alone, court-ordered program in Baltimore, have resulted in divergent program designs on the ground.

On the one hand, devolution of federal policymaking to PHAs has allowed program designers to customize mobility program objectives and delivery systems that respond to agency priorities and local conditions – as opposed to the terms of a lawsuit. This flexibility has translated to greater particularism across a range of design decisions, and mobility programs that are not uniformly recognizable as next generation MTO models. However, limited resources at PHAs, in combination with internal pressure to reasonably ensure success relative to narrow objectives, have, for the most part, cut against the grain of "change the default" aspirations for agencies' larger voucher programs. One exception is the stability component of KCHA's mobility initiative, which expands the mobility paradigm to include serving families who are not willing or able to move to a dramatically different location.

Current PHA mobility design efforts are also very focused on children's outcomes, eschewing prior programs' emphasis on helping their parents get ahead. This focus is in part a response to pressure to demonstrate success, but other factors include agency policy priorities and the personal values or theories of change of program designers. However, while staff at all three sites hope that access to better school environments will lead to better outcomes for children, they are flying blind on the specifics of that cause-and-effect.

5.   Findings, Implications, and Recommendations

After two decades of experimentation and research, efforts are underway to develop a new generation of assisted housing mobility programs. In a shift in institutional context, Public Housing Authorities are taking the lead, and, critically, they are for the first time attempting to integrate substantial mobility supports into tenant-based rental assistance programs, which comprise the largest form of federal housing aid to low-income households. At a time when advocates are calling for more of these agencies to pursue mobility, and for HUD to provide guidance to them on how to do it (PRRAC, 2013), examining two current PHA-originated mobility program design efforts – and comparing their decisions to decisions at an established program in Baltimore, as well as to other past programs – offers an opportunity to explore the mobility paradigm's viability in the context of the day-to-day political and operating environments of agencies that deliver housing assistance programs. As I argued in the introduction, the field needs to build on but – at least in some ways – move beyond the Gautreaux-MTO model.

Given how little is known about organizational strategy at PHAs, these cases first provide insights into *why* and *how* PHAs might consider pursuing mobility without the impetus of a desegregation lawsuit or federal demonstration program (largely structured by Washington). As described in chapter 3, structural opportunities such as regional jurisdiction, programmatic flexibility, and availability of resources are key. Informal aspects of an agency's organizational culture and beliefs are also critical to providing institutional legitimacy to mobility. Under more favorable circumstances, demonstrated at KCHA, mobility reflects agency-wide goals, and senior staff galvanize efforts around mobility. However, DHCD's case suggests that so long as agency decision-makers are generally supportive of innovative housing programs, the efforts of one entrepreneurial manager might be enough, when combined with structural opportunities, for an agency to implement a mobility program.

Even with these conditions in place, mobility program developers at both sites have faced distinct challenges particular to their authorizing environments (Moore, 1995) that have shaped their program design decisions in a few key ways. I discuss these findings in the following section.

<u>Findings</u>

In order to understand the viability of the mobility paradigm in the context of PHAs' political end operating environments, we must first understand *how program designers are making*

decisions. In other words, how are factors specific to their authorizing environments shaping their approaches to mobility, as well as specific decisions around designing programs and delivery systems? Understanding the answer to this question is critical if outsiders are to have any chance of extracting useful lessons from current PHA-originated efforts around mobility.

On the positive side, program designers *are* working to incorporate lessons of mobility research, especially with regard to program targeting, intensity of client coaching, and follow-ups.

First, program designers understand that the old relocation-only model is unlikely to work for many disadvantaged families. As a result, staff at both DHCD and KCHA are – like MBQ in Baltimore – incorporating a range of supports to help families establish long-term housing stability in receiving neighborhoods, with the hope that multi-year exposure to better environments will translate to improved social outcomes for them. Program designers are also being more careful about targeting both participants and receiving neighborhoods, aiming to help connect families who are well suited for mobility programs access new environments with concrete opportunities, such attendance at high performing schools.

Aware of the many "threshold conditions and contingencies" that must be in place in order to operationalize the mobility model (Briggs, Goering, and Popkin, 2010), program designers are also incorporating safeguards against weak implementation. Examples include incorporating the input of service providers early in the design process (to encourage communication, understanding, and buy-in), as well as integrating performance management into program designs. This latter step is also related to designers' acknowledgment of uncertainty around the efficacy of some of their design decisions.

On the other hand, pressure to ensure program success has translated to narrowly conceived programs, which cuts against the grain of any aspirations for broad-based reforms to how agencies administer rental assistance.

Pressure to demonstrate success relative to pre-established target outputs and outcomes has influenced program design decisions across the board, from establishing narrow objectives to incorporating performance management, limiting which families can participate, establishing strict criteria for which areas to target as receiving neighborhoods, and designing intensive and specialized support services to participants. The net effect is that, for the most part, PHAs are treating assisted housing mobility programs as narrowly conceived, experiment-type initiatives that will likely serve small client bases. This approach contrasts with more broad-based

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approaches, which could include introducing a new service infrastructure and "changing the default"[31] around voucher administration in a way that impacts more families, but whose scale – and, perhaps, less targeted services – could pit program performance (i.e., delivering powerful social outcomes for families) against limited resources.

In part, this pressure to reasonably ensure success is a function of the politics of developing new programs within agencies that must manage multiple priorities and constituencies when allocating scarce resources and staff; programs that demonstrate success relative to target outputs and outcomes are more likely to enjoy support in this institutional context. Given mixed results on outcomes among families who participated in past programs, program designers today – even if they maintain faith in the core mobility paradigm of a new location translating to measurable gains for disadvantaged families – realize that getting the conditions right to deliver these outcomes is still something of an art. At DHCD, for example, mobility proponents must convince senior managers seeking "proven models" for service delivery to accept a mobility model they think will work, even if, for example, the evidence for new school environments translating to educational gains for low-income children is still limited. General hesitancy about the efficacy of mobility programs has contributed to staff at both DHCD and KCHA framing their initiatives as pilot-like experiments, which could perhaps be scaled up once they have been proven to work. By comparison, although court-ordered mobility programs such as the one in Baltimore are required to perform relative to both formal and informal benchmarks established in settlements and consent decrees, they do not have to jockey for funding and staff resources nearly to the same extent.[32]

PHAs' focus on demonstrating success is also a result of program designers' reluctance to enlist families to participate in a program that is either not well suited for them, or that is not sufficiently resourced or designed in such a way that it will actually help them. Staff are understandably risk-averse when it comes to the potential for causing harm to families in their voucher programs. Especially for staff unfamiliar with assisted housing mobility, the number of moving pieces and contingencies required to be in place for mobility programs to work can

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[31] In contrast to voucher-holding families opting *in* to receive mobility supports to help them move to more resource-rich communities, a "change the default" approach would alter the choice infrastructure of the voucher program and require families to opt *out* of receiving these services if they do not want them. The intended (and likely) result would be a higher participation rate. Changing the default would be most effective if it also includes broad-based changes to expand the choices available to voucher holders in the first place – for instance, altering standard practice in voucher administration (e.g., more intensive landlord outreach outside poor neighborhoods) as well as regulatory reforms (e.g., shift incentives for landlords, streamline porting rules and procedures). For additional examples of such changes, see Barbara Sard's 2008 testimony before the National Commission on Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity, "How to Promote Housing Integration and Choice Through the Section 8 Voucher Program" (Sard, 2008).

[32] Although MTW authority allows agencies to accumulate reserves over time, these resources are quite limited when compared to what have been available to some court-ordered mobility programs that have emerged out of desegregation lawsuits. The Baltimore program, for example, has many more resources available to it than either KCHA and DHCD will be able to dedicate to their mobility programs out of their MTW reserves. Due to the fact that PHAs have not yet pursued innovative funding arrangement around mobility as a preventive investment that could induce cost savings in other areas, program designers are limited to MTW reserves for budgeting purposes.

seem daunting. Finally, not to be discounted, some program designers are partly motivated by more prideful desire to demonstrate results – to develop a mobility program that finally delivers powerful social outcomes for families.

Overall, unique aspects of agencies' internal dynamics, as well as their political and operating environments, are generating mixed effects and divergent program designs that are not uniformly recognizable as comparable next generation MTO models.

PHA staff designing mobility programs today are operating in environments that are at once liberating and constraining. On the one hand, devolution of certain federal policymaking to PHAs has allowed program designers to customize mobility program objectives and delivery systems that respond to agency priorities and local conditions – as opposed to the terms of a lawsuit. One result is that, in a break from most mobility efforts of the past, neither DHCD nor KCHA is including racial integration as a program objective, nor are they accounting for racial composition in their neighborhood targeting efforts – even if these decisions are race-conscious, and staff are considering tracking racial indicators behind the scenes.[33] Flexibility has also translated into greater particularism; as described in more detail later in this chapter, KCHA has used agency priorities around education as a basis to extend the mobility paradigm to include serving families who are not ready or willing to move to a dramatically different location.

However, the cases demonstrate a flipside to this flexibility, which is that an agency's internal policy cohesion, leadership, and work norms can influence its most basic approach to mobility – for example, the degree to which the program's problem statement and theory of change reflect the opinions of a few staff, as is the case at DHCD, or agency-wide priorities, as with KCHA. Internal politics, agency size and complexity, and capacity constraints can also determine who is involved in program development, and at what points in time. Agency dynamics – and the values and capabilities of individual staff – clearly contribute to the forms that programs ultimately take.

Finally, practical differences in agencies' operating environments have also translated to divergent service delivery models. Voucher administration is already hybridized at DHCD and KCHA, but in different ways. Overlaying mobility supports onto these systems has resulted in slightly different mobility models and divisions of labor between PHAs and contracted agencies – each model which could, in turn, present unique challenges related to control, communication, and capacity during programs' operating phases.

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[33] This particular finding corroborates a recent survey by the Poverty & Race Research Action Council which found that, among PHAs with MTW authority that have implemented programs pursuant to MTW's statutory objective to "increase housing choices for low-income families," none have identified racial desegregation as an explicit goal, and most are focused on poverty deconcentration (PRRAC, 2013).

Beyond analyzing decision-making processes around program design, assessing mobility's viability in the context of PHAs must also account for the *effectiveness of program design efforts* – what they're doing well (or not) based on what research tells us about how mobility programs should work, including how they're addressing remaining evidence gaps and extending the mobility paradigm, if at all.

Mobility efforts are very focused on children's educational outcomes, eschewing an earlier focus on helping their parents get ahead.

This focus is in part due to pressure to demonstrate success – the evidence says that younger movers will tend to benefit most, for developmental reasons – but other factors include agency priorities, as with KCHA, and the personal values or theories of change of staff members. Further, although program designers see helping children as a long-term strategy to combat intergenerational poverty, in the short term some PHA staff feel do not feel they have the capability and resources to adequately account for both child educational outcomes and, for example, adult labor market outcomes, in the same mobility program. The net effect is that, although moving is of course a family affair, reliant on adult decision-making and resulting in changes to all family members' lives, programs are mostly targeting outcomes for children and adolescents.

However, while staff at all three sites hope that accessing better school environments will, over the long term, lead to better outcomes for children, they are flying blind on the specifics of that cause-and-effect. Further, there is little evidence for which types of schools, and which school attributes – such as classroom size and quality of counseling – make the best fit for children in housing mobility programs. The evidence for how to target schools is thus weak, and designers are mostly using intuition and anecdotes as their guides, as opposed to means-tested tools or rules of thumb.

However, some innovators *are* pushing to mainstream mobility and "change the default" in how agencies administer rental assistance.

In particular, KCHA is extending the mobility paradigm by leveraging rental assistance as a platform to influence the way *all* families with children (of a certain age, within a pilot's geographical boundaries) experience housing mobility in the private market, and not just the small minority who are ready and willing to make a dramatic move to a very different location. This initiative reflects a more comprehensive view of what constitutes mobility, emphasizing not only the location of moves, but also their frequency and timing.

KCHA's stability initiative also acknowledges growing evidence that rental assistance programs could do more to prevent *involuntary* moves, and encourage stability – no matter the location – in pursuit of improved social outcomes for families, particularly children's cognitive and behavioral development. Finally, this effort to improve housing stability among "stayers" in low-income neighborhoods extends the mobility model to account for *impacts on places*, seeking to slow harmful churning in these areas – particularly in the classroom.

Implications and Recommendations

Public Housing Authorities' jurisdiction over tenant-based rental assistance programs makes them uniquely positioned to impact how low-income families experience mobility in the private rental market. In a sense, these agencies already do so in choosing how to implement federal regulations or in developing policies of their own, through their professional norms and organizational cultures, and in their approaches to landlord recruitment and client interaction.

If assisted housing mobility programs have the goal of improving families' mobility trajectories toward social outcomes in this particular regulatory, institutional, and market context, then policies regulating PHAs need to support mobility. The vast majority of agencies unfortunately do not benefit from the same structural opportunities as DHCD and KCHA, but policymakers can and should do more to both enable PHAs to pursue mobility, and provide incentives for them to do so. Expanding the MTW program (or some version of it) could be one approach, although in doing so HUD should proceed with caution due to past instances of agency abuse in the program, and weigh the political risk of "block-granting" funding for public housing and rental assistance, which can leave it more vulnerable to further Congressional cuts (CBPP, 2011). Further, for those agencies that are fortunate enough to have MTW authority, HUD could transmit clearer directives, provide more training, and do more to disseminate best practices around mobility (PRRAC, 2013).

Regionalizing PHAs could be another approach, as the current Massachusetts governor has proposed, but the political obstacles are considerable. On their own, PHAs could form regional partnerships to pool their resources and others (e.g., LIHTC) with the aim of diminishing the influence of municipal boundaries and operating more as a collaborative regional unit.[34] Further, DHCD's case shows the ease with which state agencies can operate across municipal boundaries and administer regionally focused housing programs; if eventually implemented, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities' recent proposal for a federal "renters' tax credit" routed through states (as is currently the case with LIHTCs) could provide a new

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[34] A particularly good example of this approach is the Regional Housing Initiative in metropolitan Chicago. For more on RHI, see its website: http://www.metroplanning.org/work/project/20

vehicle for these agencies to become further involved in administering programs on the scale of metropolitan housing markets (CBPP, 2012). At the level of more fine-grained policy, a number of federal regulations around rental assistance could be improved to support mobility; as Barbara Sard (2008) has proposed, HUD could further localize but also raise the Fair Market Rents upon which rental assistance subsidies are based, streamline portability procedures and regulations, allow longer search periods until lease-up, and overhaul the Section 8 Management Assessment Program to provide stronger incentives to PHAs to expand housing choices for families.

Absent significant changes to the regulatory environment around PHAs, the number of agencies that could reasonably implement regional housing mobility programs will remain limited to a handful out of more than three thousand, and the extent to which mobility could be "mainstreamed" will thus remain small. The two PHAs I profile in this thesis are among the fortunate few that are blessed with the right set of enablers to implement regional mobility programs. Still, their experiences developing these programs can provide lessons about the viability of assisted housing mobility in the context of PHAs, and the direction of assisted mobility in general.

As I discuss in more detail below, my findings point to a few implications for future policy and practice. First, current efforts provide new example of the range and depth of impact that is possible in assisted housing mobility programs, particularly for disadvantaged children. PHAs' discretion, and jurisdiction over federal rental assistance programs, also appears to offer more room for innovation beyond what has been possible in stand-alone mobility programs of the past. However, mobility could easily be marginalized within these agencies. Both organizational strategy and political management on the part of staff will be critical to ensuring that substantial mobility supports are accessible to the many voucher-holding families who want and need them.

What Current Program Design Efforts Mean For Assisted Housing Mobility

The power of place argument that supplies the primary thrust for mobility programs seeks to capture the multi-dimensional aspects of what housing provides as a *location*. Mobility programs could thus serve as a vehicle for a range of policy priorities, so some divergence in local approaches to mobility is to be expected. Our growing understanding of the range of factors that contribute to constrained housing choices for low-income families points to even further possibilities for what mobility programs might be able to achieve. As noted earlier in this chapter, the two current PHA-originated mobility program design efforts are narrowly focused on improving educational attainment among children, but some innovators are extending the mobility model to include serving families not well suited for relocation. In the

following section, I discuss these program design decisions' implications for assisted housing mobility's progress as an ever-evolving approach for improving the lives of the poor, as well as for mobility's viability and potential in the context of PHAs' rental assistance programs.

Mobility as a Tool to Create Educational "Trajectories of Opportunity" for Disadvantaged Children

Design decisions at all three sites demonstrate the extent to which housing officials are attempting to break down policy silos between housing and education, and are taking on the charge that, as one researcher has put it, "housing policy is school policy" (Schwartz, 2010). For instance, decision-makers in Baltimore are incorporating school quality into the program's working definition of "communities of opportunity," used for neighborhood targeting, and MBQ has secured grants to train staff around child educational issues with the aim of better assisting families in this realm. The two PHA-originated programs have taken this focus on education even further – by only allowing families with children to participate, by narrowing the range of eligible receiving neighborhoods to only include those that meet strict criteria for school quality and appropriateness for these families, and by framing the entire program around improving educational outcomes among children.

These additional steps are significant, first, because they appear to go beyond what any previous effort in either the housing or education policy worlds have attempted in deliberately linking low-income families' housing choices to their school choices – thus seeking to close the "achievement gap" in educational attainment by narrowing the "opportunity gap" in school quality. By taking this approach to assisted housing mobility, DHCD and KCHA are at once expanding low-income families' "choice sets," for both schools and housing, as well as providing new resources, and, potentially, cultural logics for choosing both.

Impacting choices is important, but linking housing mobility so closely to educational outcomes also points to a larger role that PHAs can play in the realm of education – broadly, in helping disadvantaged children experience what some education experts have called "trajectories of opportunity" – a set of experiences and critical transitions dependent on both high-performing schools as well as opportunities, supports, and stability outside the classroom (McKoy, Vincent, and Bierbaum, 2011). Assisted housing mobility programs that help families choose housing and schools together, and settle long-term in supportive neighborhoods, are particularly well aligned to achieve this outcome. However, a broader impact requires coordinated investments across a range of sectors and institutions – in housing, community development, transportation, education, and social services – each of which have their own budgetary processes, jurisdictional boundaries, planning horizons, and performance measures.

In order to align their policies and investments towards increasing "trajectories of opportunity" for disadvantaged children, PHAs must first understand basic policies and

procedures in their "educational landscape." Next steps include engaging in programmatic partnerships with educators, establishing shared visions and performance metrics, and aligning housing investments with educational institutions (McKoy, Vincent, and Bierbaum, 2011). At the federal level, this kind of collaboration is already happening with HUD and Department of Education partnerships around the Promise Neighborhoods and Full Service Community Schools initiatives. And although focusing on education is new for DHCD, KCHA is well along this path. The latter agency's staff already speaks the language of using mobility, among other housing resources, as "an educational tool" that can produce new learning about how PHAs can realize "shared outcomes" with schools around attainment and the well being of disadvantaged children (interview). This perspective has led KCHA to expand the mobility paradigm to include promoting housing stability, and reduction of mid-year moves, among all low-income families with children, whether they live in "opportunity areas" or not.

PHAs' specific design decisions linking housing and education represent further innovation in the realm of assisted housing mobility, and their framing of mobility as educational initiatives thus offers a window into a larger role these agencies can play in creating trajectories of opportunity for disadvantaged children.

Extending the Mobility Paradigm: Tackling Constrained Choice

To date, the dominant approach to assisted housing mobility has been to serve families that are willing and able to move to a dramatically different location. This paradigm's lineage includes Gautreaux, MTO, and – at least in terms of design, if not context – stand-alone, court-ordered programs that emerged out of desegregation lawsuits, such as *Thompson* in Baltimore. The relocation-centered mobility model has been the subject of several intensive empirical studies in recent years, and many believe that practitioners will eventually get the conditions right for delivering powerful social outcomes for families within this approach, beyond what the extensively studied MTO program, in particular, achieved in the realm of physical and mental health improvements.

Considering the political and fiscal challenges to scaling up the this approach to mobility within PHAs' rental assistance programs, a potentially fruitful – and less costly – area of experimentation could involve providing mobility-like supports to voucher-holding families who are not well suited for relocation. This approach would necessarily apply a broader view of what constitutes mobility – learned from recent research on how poor families experience rental markets – that accounts not only for *where* families move, but also *how often*, *at what moment*, and *under what circumstances* they move. It thus acknowledges that, while mobility supports should expand the geographic range of housing choices for the poor, they should also address other factors that constrain housing choices and can produce negative outcomes for families no

matter where they live. The stability component to KCHA's mobility program is the one component of the current wave of programs that forays into this area.

Although little is known about how to leverage rental assistance to positively impact how a broader set of families experiences housing mobility, mounting evidence on the challenges that many of them face in securing what the Housing Act of 1949 famously called "a decent home and a suitable living environment," suggests that a policy response is in order. For instance, as described in chapter 2, recent studies have shown that demand-side rental assistance can often be a weak mechanism for achieving housing stability, especially in tight housing markets, not just for achieving particular locational outcomes (gaining access to desired neighborhoods). Further, low-income families with vouchers often experience frequent involuntary moves, and either move within high-risk neighborhoods, or from one to another. This was the case with many families who participated in MTO, for example. My conversations with MBHP staff who administer DHCD rental assistance programs confirmed this churning effect among voucher holders in Boston's poorest neighborhoods. Instability has been shown to have negative social outcomes for families – for example, inhibiting child cognitive and behavioral development, particularly if moves are mid-year and require uprooting from one school setting to another.

If relocation-oriented mobility programs have found that helicoptering families into new locations is an insufficient approach to operationalizing the power of place, surely some of the lessons learned on how to help families find value in their environments and experience positive gains – focusing on housing careers, establishing stability, and avoiding frequent and involuntary moves – can also be applied to supporting families who are not yet prepared for such a dramatic change in environment. This is not to say that agencies should not seek to expand the geographical range of housing choices for low-income families. Instead, an expanded approach to mobility could include addressing challenges that appear to be common across all low-income families.

Finally, this approach to mobility can open the door to thinking creatively about under-explored impacts and leverage points in demand-side rental assistance programs. For example, although vouchers in theory emphasize individual preferences and choice, the way voucher-holding families experience housing markets can have impacts on *places*. KCHA's stability initiative is thus an attempt to leverage the agency's points of contact with families – such as annual re-certifications, or when families submit move requests – to positively influence both family mobility patterns *and* school environments. Overall, family stability, as well as the circumstances and timing of their moves, should be a continued area of experimentation, emphasis, and evaluation within PHA-originated mobility programs.

What is Missing in Current Program Design Efforts?

In the current age of federal policy devolution to PHAs, agencies can decide for themselves how to approach mobility. Although current PHA-originated mobility program development efforts are innovating in their *design decisions* around the connection of housing and education, their intense programmatic *focus* on education might blind them other dimensions of how families experience mobility programs, and why they might choose to participate in the first place.

As noted earlier in this chapter, mobility programs could conceivably be structured around achieving a range of social outcomes beyond educational attainment for children. For example, in light of the findings that many among MTO's "experimental compliers" experienced dramatic physical and mental health improvements, mobility programs could be targeted to individuals and families whose health is most likely to improve due to relocation, or who perhaps stand to risk the most by staying in their neighborhoods of origin; some advocates have framed this health-focused approach to mobility as a "prescription for a new neighborhood" (Tegeler and Hankins, 2012). More broadly, program operators could be conscious of the need to help those who want to escape urban violence and other traumas associated with concentrated poverty at least achieve a higher quality of life. Programs could also build off of successful housing-and-employment models, such as HUD's Jobs-Plus demonstration, to link relocation supports to job training and placement.

Although targeting this full range of outcomes might be unreasonable within individual mobility programs, designers and operators should remain aware of families' range of needs and motivations for participating beyond their children's educational future. As MBQ staff have learned in Baltimore, relocation is a full family affair, and participating adults often lean on program staff for help in a range of areas beyond housing and schools, including with help finding a job – despite the fact that the program is not designed to provide this particular service. Even if the DHCD and KCHA programs do not target adult labor market outcomes for families, and even if their client base is less disadvantaged than for Baltimore's program or MTO, staff at these agencies would still be wise to take MBQ Director Jim Evans's advice to be a referral agency. Further, addressing parental decision-making around moves can be challenging in the context of a mobility program, as not all family members experience relocation in the same way. For example, MBQ staff have faced difficult situations where parents have chosen to move back to Baltimore even though their children had been doing better in school after relocation to "non-impacted" areas (interview).

Even if programs are designed to deliver better educational outcomes for children, they or their parents might be motivated to participate for other reasons – and could benefit in other ways as well. Recall that escaping neighborhood violence was the primary motivator for many

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families to participate in MTO. Although violent crime in American cities has decreased since MTO launched in the 1990s, and voucher populations have been shown to live in less poor and violent areas, on average, than public housing residents, it is still conceivable that families will be motivated to participate in DHCD's and KCHA's programs in order to achieve better quality of life, and escape violence and other risks associated with concentrated poverty. Children in these families could still benefit from long-term exposure to better-resourced school environments, but program operators should be prepared to accommodate families' range of needs and preferences beyond accessing better schools – particularly in cases where relocation could serve as a escape route from imminent danger.

Further, if MTO is to serve as a lesson for mobility program designers, operators, and evaluators, it is that the most profound impacts on families might not be the expected ones. For all DHCD's and KCHA's efforts around education, it is possible that their programs' greatest impacts could be in other realms, such as household earnings or improved mental health. And given uncertainty about the specific mechanisms for how new school environments will help low-income children, programs should be sure to track a variety of family and neighborhood characteristics in order to account for both in-classroom and out-of-classroom factors.

Finally, there is reason to worry that assisted housing mobility's promise as a corrective to uneven access to "opportunity" in metropolitan regions might be diluted and morphed in the context of PHAs' rental assistance programs, considering the discretion agencies have in designing and framing mobility initiatives. Responding to local context and political pressures is understandable to an extent, but – for example – not accounting for race in targeting within a program's pool of eligible voucher-holding families could result in unequal access to a valuable service, which, if history is to serve as a predictor, many low-income families will find valuable. As noted in chapter 2, race is inextricably tied to regional patterns in access to opportunity, and exposure to the harms of concentrated poverty, particularly in the case of African-Americans.

If families within PHAs' rental assistance programs will be required to "opt in" to access mobility supports, marketing and outreach will be critical to ensuring that racial and ethnic minorities – and more disadvantaged populations in general – have equal access to these services. The thrust to these efforts would be similar to the Affirmative Fair Housing Marketing requirements for federally assisted properties, but program operators might need to get creative in order to recruit participation among certain populations. In some cases, this could mean intensive marketing efforts in languages other than English, or soliciting the help of families who have experienced prior success in mobility programs to act as spokespersons. Reaching some families could involve soliciting the help of community institutions and service providers in identifying those who experience high rates of exposure to the harms of concentrated poverty and urban violence, and who could perhaps benefit more than most from a relocation program.

Recruitment strategies could also involve identifying families who are not yet ready for relocation, but who could be with the help of upstream support, such as in securing stable housing with a responsive landlord in a quality unit, even if not located in a programmatically defined "opportunity" neighborhood. Overall, in order to avoid the perils of devolution, mobility program operators' marketing and recruitment efforts will need to be targeted to different racial and ethnic sub-groups within agencies' voucher populations – even if staff feel that incorporating racial targeting into a program's official design is not politically tenable.

Assisted Housing Mobility's Future in Public Housing Authorities

PHAs blessed with structural opportunities to pursue mobility have multiple options for how to incorporate substantial mobility supports into rental assistance programs.[35] One approach could be to pursue targeted mobility programs, which is the current trend. Targeting ensures more efficient use of scarce dollars, and can be appropriate for pursuing specific policy priorities beyond providing affordable shelter, such as education or self-sufficiency. Typically, targeted approaches in the realm of mobility have meant relocation-focused programs. However, KCHA has shown that targeted efforts could also include new approaches to addressing constrained housing choices, such as providing stability-oriented supports for families with children who are "stayers" in low-income neighborhoods.

A second approach could be to incorporate new service infrastructure around administration of the voucher program, or perhaps "change the default" in order to increase the likelihood that families will access mobility supports. As noted earlier in this chapter, a more broad-based approach intended to impact a larger percentage of voucher-holding families could pit program performance against limited resources that even the most fortunate PHAs have to dedicate to higher admin costs, and – potentially – higher HAP due to families leasing up in more expensive sub-markets. One unintended consequence of this approach could also be lower quality, intensity, and appropriateness of services for families with different needs and preferences.

Which approach is best? The research says that most low-income families could benefit from additional supports to address constrained choice, but not all families are good fits for every flavor of mobility program. From the perspective of fairness, innovations within the voucher program should resist only rewarding the "deserving poor," which has been the case

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[35] Although PHAs with MTW authority have implemented a range of initiatives pursuant to the statutory objective of "increasing housing choices for low-income families," none have been as substantial and deliberate – outside the context of a desegregation lawsuit – as current initiatives at DHCD and KCHA. I thus use the term "substantial" to loosely distinguish piecemeal efforts, such as allowing payment standards exceptions in more expensive submarkets, from more concerted programmatic initiatives that require the resources and staff time needed to significantly impact how families experience housing mobility.

with many public housing redevelopment projects in recent years (Vale, 2013). Further, the advantage of having jurisdiction over entire rental assistance programs is that PHAs can impact the way families with varying capabilities, preferences, and needs experience mobility, and improve both the circumstances and locational outcomes of their housing choices. The most desirable approach to incorporating mobility services in rental assistance programs, then, is a *hybrid* model that includes a basic level of mobility-oriented services for all families in voucher programs – perhaps a combination of higher payment standards, up-to-date literature on a wide range of neighborhoods, and some help identifying available units in the areas of their choice – with more targeted programs, as described above. This approach could provide an arena for a continuum of targeted mobility services, and would demonstrate an agency's depth of commitment to mobility – in trying new models, providing *all* families with a basic level of mobility-like supports (unless they opt out of these services), and in building on what is known to already work in the realm of mobility.

From a logistical perspective, a hybrid approach would, on the one hand, require program operators to identify those families who might be well suited for particular targeted initiatives, and leverage points of contact with them to suggest enrollment or, in some cases, provide mobility-oriented services on the spot. Administrators might need new resources and training to fulfill this case manager-like role. However, given the critical importance of *smart steering* to the success of relocation-focused mobility programs, this investment would likely be worthwhile.

On the other hand, while researchers have called for continued inquiry into how the poor experience housing mobility (DeLuca, Wood, and Rosenblatt, 2012), practitioners need to get to work testing new models. Drawing on what has been learned from relocation-oriented programs and applying these lessons to "stayers" could be one idea, and partnering with school districts to develop joint programs around shared goals could be another. This kind of broadly defined mobility program is under-explored, and agencies should be sure to evaluate each new initiative in order to see what works for participating families.

Further, a hybrid approach would be designed meet families where they are, and, potentially, help some reach the point of readiness for a relocation-oriented mobility supports. Indeed, PHAs should be heartened from the finding that, according to one MBQ counselor, families who cycle through the Baltimore program for a *second* time are more likely to be successful; if agencies can work upstream to help families achieve stable living environments, for example, there is reason to believe they could at a later time be ready for a more dramatic relocation to an "opportunity area," should they so choose.

Finally, extending this bold strategy around expanding housing choices to PHAs' other investments around developing and preserving subsidized housing stock could translate to a

considerable positive impact for assisted housing populations. KCHA and DHCD have both moved in this direction, but DHCD in particular could do more to align its policies for deploying supply-side subsidies – namely Low-Income Housing Tax Credits – with its efforts around mobility.

The Importance of Organizational Strategy and Political Management

Implementing the hybrid approach, as outlined above, would require a high degree of policy consensus within an agency around dedicating limited resources to expanding housing choices for low-income families, and improving how they experience mobility in private rental markets. This agenda also requires adopting a "system of innovation," which includes willingness to try new models, evaluate performance, jettison what does not work, and build on what does (Arcaya and Briggs, 2011).

Differences between KCHA's and DHCD's internal dynamics reveal the extent to which the current era of flat or declining funding, hybridity, and federal policy devolution to PHAs places a premium on implementing new programs that are connected to larger organizational strategies. A relatively high level of programmatic cohesion is present at KCHA, where expanding housing choices and improving educational outcomes for children are agency-wide priorities expressed across multiple programs. In addition, KCHA's stability component gives its mobility program a more universal reach than DHCD's, and represents a step toward establishing a continuum of mobility services, if not the full hybrid model where all families have access to some mobility supports.

By contrast, DHCD's mobility program, should it be implemented, will not be part of a larger policy agenda – unless, as Gretchen hopes, demonstrating success is part of a long-term strategy to garner support for scaling up mobility in the future. However, DHCD staff appear to have less control over their agency's policy direction than do officials at more typical – and smaller – city- and county-based PHAs; being a state agency requires that they work around each successive gubernatorial administration's priorities, and establishing their own direction can be difficult in this context without strong leadership and staff continuity.

Given resource constraints and pressure to demonstrate success, pursuing a hybrid approach could also require considerable political management on the part of senior PHA staff around the value proposition of expanding the location and circumstances of housing choices for low-income families (Moore, 1995). Officials must pursue an inside-outside game to garner support both among agency colleagues and leading officials (unless they're on board already), while cultivating an outside "constituency for change" to create a favorable authorizing environment around this policy agenda. Potential partners around an agenda for expanded

housing choices could include the usual suspects, such as other housing agencies and service providers, but also school districts, employers, unions, and faith communities (Briggs, 2005b).

Adopting a system of innovation could be particularly challenging, as PHAs are understandably risk averse in the current fiscal environment around HUD programs. However, learning from the current wave of experimental efforts around mobility will be critical to advancement of the field. For example, little is known about which supports, and at what doses, are sufficient for helping families succeed in relocation-oriented mobility programs, and both DHCD and KCHA can help generate new lessons about which school qualities are most important for helping low-income children gain from switching educational contexts. Luckily, implementers at both sites plan to have their programs evaluated. If agencies expand into the under-explored realm of providing mobility-oriented services to families not well suited for relocation-focused programs, evaluative components will be critical for both internal learning and disseminating new knowledge. HUD can play a more active facilitative role to this end, and leading organizations that are committed to advancing mobility, such as the Poverty & Race Research Action Council, can continue to disseminate lessons and help grow the community of practice.

In the current moment, the level of organizational cohesion and political management required of PHA officials to achieve internal and external policy consensus around pursuing the hybrid mobility model – including provision of multiple targeted supports – as well as in adopting systems of innovation, lies in the outer reaches of aspiration even for those agencies most able to pursue mobility. It is possible that federally supplied resources for housing programs are plainly insufficient for pursuing such a bold agency agenda. Although the case for mobility as an approach for helping low-income families not only *get by* but also *get ahead* is strong, the level of need for housing assistance[36] is enough to give even the most innovative PHA officials pause about investing scarce resources for such a bold agenda that does not increase the number served. Still, absent organizational strategies around removing constraints to housing choice, mobility efforts within PHAs will likely remain ineffective and under-funded, or as boutique initiatives, consigned to the margins and impacting few.

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[36] Approximately one in four families that qualify for rental assistance receive it, and this ratio is much higher in coastal housing markets – one in ten in Los Angeles, for example – where economic growth and inequality is concentrated. Further, as of 2011, 44 percent of very low-income households experience "worst-case needs," defined by HUD as instances where households at or below 50 percent of area median income who do not housing assistance spend more than half their income on rent, live in severely inadequate conditions, or both. In practice, the term serves as a proxy for severe rent burden, due to the fact that severely inadequate housing accounts for a tiny fraction of worst case needs households (HUD, 2013).

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Interviews

Case 1: Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development
- Gretchen Weismann, Manager of Targeted Programs, Bureau of Rental Assistance, DHCD (January 17, January 18, January 21, and April 18, 2013)
- Bob Cohen, Fiscal Director, Bureau of Rental Assistance, DHCD (January 14 and February 7, 2013)
- Lizbeth Heyer, Associate Director for Public Housing and Rental Assistance, DHCD (February 4, 2013)
- Tom Graham, Director, Bureau of Rental Assistance, DHCD (April 18, 2013)
- Sue Nohl, Deputy Director, Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership (January 22, 2013)

Case 2: King County Housing Authority
- Elizabeth Westburg, Resident Services Development Manager, KCHA (February 1, 2013)
- Linda Weedman, Director of Resident Services, KCHA (February 1, 2013)
- Megan Hyla, Director of Policy, KCHA (February 1, 2013)
- Stephen Norman, Executive Director, KCHA (February 1, 2013)
- Jennifer O'Neil, Director, Quadel Consulting (February 1, 2013)
- Manuela Ginnett, Housing Director, Multi-Service Center (February 1, 2013)
- Tammy Money, Multi-Service Center (February 1, 2013)

Case 3: Metropolitan Baltimore Quadel
- Bernard Carey, Trainer, MBQ (January 7, 2013)
- Maurice Gadsden, Housing Counselor, MBQ (January 8, 2013)
- Tom Gunn, Development Manager, MBQ (January 7, 2013)
- Anonymous interview, housing official (January 7, 2013)