



Housing Assistance & Models Workgroup Meeting Minutes March 9, 2009

Items Relevant to Other Workgroups

- None to report.

Attendees

- Sally Harrison, MSHDA, Co-Chair
- Stacey Vandenberg, Muskegon, Co-Chair
- Michele Wildman, MSHDA
- Christine Miller, MSHDA
- Janet Irrer, MSHDA
- Kathy French, MSHDA
- Sharon Ott, Monroe County Opportunity Program
- Holly Pomranka, Residential Services of Southwest Michigan
- Sharon Kivikko, Lutheran Social Services
- Brianne McKee, Grand Rapids Area Coalition to End Homelessness
- Suzanne Gaffney, Northwest Community Action Agency
- Christine Sickle, Serenity Center
- Joe Heaphy, Neighborhood Service Organization
- Nelson Grit, Michigan Disability Rights Coalition
- Pat Caruso, DHS
- Michael Appel, Avalon Housing
- Nicholas Armit, PPA
- Daniel Fitzpatrick, PPA

Discussion Items

Introduction

- Sally began the meeting by thanking Stacey Vandenberg for volunteering to be co-chair now that Michele Wildman has become a state employee at MSHDA.
- Nick gave an overview of the agenda for the meeting and additional handouts.
 - Nick also discussed the e-newsletter that was published on the campaign's Web site and asked team members to forward to him any ideas they may have for information that could be included in future e-newsletters.
- Sally discussed the recent meeting of the SLT.
 - The primary focus of the meeting was how to coordinate the campaign to End Homelessness (CTEH) with the Voices for Action anti-poverty initiative at the Department of Human Services (DHS).
 - Sally also stated that the workgroups' action plans were reviewed and discussed at the meeting. PPA put together a document that highlighted where the action plans were aligned and where they were not and this document helped to facilitate the SLT discussion. SLT members were impressed with the HA&M action plan and were supportive of the direction the group was headed in. Pat Caruso who was also at the meeting agreed and stated that "(the plan) sailed through without any problem."
 - Joe spoke with the City of Detroit regarding the team management representation on the workgroup and he needs to follow up with his new contact there, Tracy Patterson.

- The option of contacting the Genessee County Planning Committee was previously raised, but they have not yet been contacted.
 - ◆ It was agreed that Michelle will draft a letter to be sent out.

Action Plan Review (Stacey led the discussion of the Action Plan)

Strategy #1

1.1 – 1.1.2

- Working on developing a survey for the CoCs and should have it out in the field by the end of the month.
- A preliminary publication on some of the triage approaches that have been highlighted in the survey should be available by the May meeting; anticipate that there will be a series of surveys. (Changes to the action plan timeline to be made). Stacey, Joe Tardella and Pat Caruso will meet to finalize the survey questions.

1.1.3 – 1.1.4.2

- Holly, Michelle and Janet met the week before the HA&M meeting to discuss 1.1.3.
 - Working on the goals.
 - The biggest issue is trying to disseminate the information about the different housing models (e.g., through Web site) and then to work on strategies for teams to train people throughout the state regarding urban and rural models.
- Janet stated that they have assigned an MSU MSW graduate student to work on helping develop a good assessment tool in collaboration with some of the HA&M Workgroup members. Hopefully, the members will be able to take that tool and use it at trainings.
- Before finalizing recommendations and actions, the workgroup will look at what other communities have requested from stimulus money in an effort to evaluate the models out there.

Strategy #2

2.1. – 2.1.1.2

- Stacey said that Jim had sent out a sheet of the preliminary changes that MSHDA has made to eligibility requirements for ex-offenders. Jim is now taking that information to his committee. Therefore, the short-term and medium-term goals in this strategy are in progress.
- Sally stated that there is an upcoming meeting where she hopes they will come to an agreement on criminal screening selection criteria. Janet added that MSHDA has been doing a lot of work in this area.
- Sally commented that MSHDA needs to make sure that lead agencies in the communities are trained in this area. There is an issue with training here that needs to be added under Strategy 2.
 - Strategy 2.1.1.3 will be added to the action plan to ensure that the housing agents and all MSHDA lead agencies are trained on the referral process.
 - Stacey agreed, adding that this is integral to making the system work moving forward and will help get everybody at the local level on the same page.
 - Stacey stated that this also speaks to Strategy 1 and the triage process. It is through the triage process that these specific populations are going to be appropriately placed and also identifying the different criteria, barriers, or opportunities that lie in each one.

- Nick will draft some language for this (tied to the triage approach in Strategy 1 but placed as 2.1.1.3) and send it to Stacey for review.
- We may need to modify some of the timelines for Strategy 2, but the dates are far enough out that those changes can be made at later meetings.
 - If the timeline for this is October, than it can be discussed over the summer and maybe something that can be discussed at the homelessness summit.

2.1.2

- The group working on 2.1.2 has not met yet.
- Janet stated that they did just complete a big Notice of Funds Availability (NOFA) and awards for Tenant Based Rental Assistance (TBRA)
 - Stacey and the other members of the group agreed to schedule a meeting; they will establish timelines before the next meeting.
- Michele asked for some clarification. Does this action speak to MSHDA doing TBRA or does it refer to encouraging it to be done. Sally stated that on a previous call it was stated that in some counties they were considering using some of their dollars that are usually to be used for homeownership may now go towards TBRA because there is less liability. There is not a whole lot of ongoing compliance responsibility in the TBRA program, unlike if you do construction and acquisition. So this is an opportunity to get some of those counties onboard that may not have done so in the past, especially with the present foreclosure crisis.
- Stacey added that the workgroup will probably also need to add level of training to this strategy to help these folks understand how they can take their current dollars and transform them into TBRA and what that means on the local level.
 - Sally pointed out there is a MSHDA internal manual on administering that program with all of the forms (etc.) that has been approved by HUD. We can just use that.
 - What should be done to promote that at the local level?
 - We may want PHAs to work on this, administer the program.

2.2

- Strategy 2.2 is tabled until next time; the assigned workgroup members are not present.
 - Nick will follow up with the people assigned to 2.2.

2.3 – 2.3.1.3

- Pat Caruso pointed out that stronger language has already been added to the DHS policy as it relates to the Campaign, HARP, TBRA and any HUD-funded supportive housing vouchers. This includes local DHS offices, but the presence in the policy language does not necessarily mean that anything will happen quickly. It did go out to all county offices and districts.
 - Sally asked for the new language to be distributed to the group.
- 2.3.1: Pat stated that they are still going to do a survey that will piggyback on Action 1. Will also be convening a meeting of some DHS staff, some providers, some service agencies and shelters who, along with DHS policy analysts and managers, can sit down and discuss what the barriers, issues, and problems are. Pat is confident that the meeting will be very useful.
 - Hoping that this meeting can take place by June, but the problem is that “BRIDGES” is coming up everywhere in the local offices and this is their priority.
- Stacey believed that outside agencies cannot access the database.
 - Pat believes that no outside agencies are allowed access to the DHS database, but can get information from a DHS employee. She needs to verify this.

Strategy #3

3.1.1 - 3.1.2

- Janet said she has had three Americorps workers compiling the information on the HARP program into a binder. This will enable the Americorps worker to know about the program, and who to contact in their area, etc. This was one action used for this strategy
 - Also e-mailed the Section 8 agents and let them know who the Americorps workers are. A lot of the work that the Americorps workers are doing is around helping people to find apartments, creating a list of landlords, etc. The goal is to create a link here, and minimize duplication of effort. These will be used and replicated by other staff members for future training.
 - Beyond that, they still need to meet with staff to move the process along.
- Stacey asked if a model has emerged from this process.
 - Yes, and the Americorp workers have been trained in the process. There is also a packet so that they can access the HARP information.
- Sally asked if we should spread that information (perhaps via internet-based training) to the local CoCs and other organizations that would be interested., since not everyone has access to an Americorp worker
 - Yes and there has been some trainings done around the state already. The MSHDA specialist staff have taken these packets to the CoCs etc and done a quick one-on-one training on HARP, but it would not hurt to have it out on the Web site as well.
- Stacey was asked if there was anybody on her staff that would be able to work with Janet on this action.
 - Stacey stated that her name can be added for now, but that she will speak to Jennifer and/or Stacy Marine.
- Christine added that she had one suggestion. In her area there were a lot of vacant convent buildings which are available for lease, has anyone thought about contacting them?
 - There are significant roadblocks to this (e.g., they're just bedrooms, therefore there are no kitchens) so utilizing them as housing might require monetary input.
 - However, this does have potential, especially as an emergency shelter. There are communities that are working on this; in Detroit, for instance.
 - Sally added that supportive housing has to have a private bath and kitchen facilities for permanent housing and one thing MSHDA is looking into, with ESG money that's coming into the state, is how to keep people in their own housing or to help people transition to renting for themselves. Essentially, there are efforts to make positive things happen as a result of the bad economy. There is a lot of vacant housing stock and a lot of people who need that housing; so it is about matching up the two of them and this is probably the quickest way to do it.
- The housing locator has been a very helpful tool in some areas.
 - One good goal is having more landlords enter their property into that tool.

3.2 – 3.2.5

- Holly stated that the survey for 3.2.1 is almost ready to go out, and should go out soon (to find out what the barriers are for house at-risk or difficult to serve populations from the perspective of the local PHAs and landlords).
 - Next step is getting the survey out and then analyzing the data.

- The list of property managers is gleaned from the housing locator. The PHA information is from the HUD housing Web site. There is also the information for all of the USDA offices.
- Michele asked if they were going to be surveying property owners who already had a demonstrated history of serving these populations or a broader audience.
 - The intent is to survey a broad set of people; and we should distinguish between people who already have, and people who have not rented to at-risk tenants.
- A possible question to add to the survey is: Do you currently operate supportive housing?
 - That question will address the issue of people who have multiple locations; who perhaps do not have at-risk people at one location but do at others.
 - Another possible question is: Are you a landlord that stays local with your housing, or do you rent property far from where you live? Those are a different set of landlords that would have a different set of answers.
- Nick asked if the focus groups, which are a short-term outcome, are still going to happen.
 - The answer is yes, but not until after the survey is completed.

Strategy #4

- Michelle stated that steps have not yet been taken to survey people regarding the strategies' action items. Some internal questions need to be worked out. As worded, the strategy may have a broader meaning than may have been intended.
- The survey will probably go out later than March, but some long-term results (such as placement) have already started happening.
 - 4.1.1 action item timeline to be the end of the second quarter.
- We need to get people to take the first step and try housing some of the people for whom this workgroup is advocating. There have been a number of previous instances where landlords were highly resistant, but were very pleased with the results and wanted to rent to more at-risk individuals once they actually attempted it.
- Michele stated that she had done some live surveying, but nothing is written at this point.
 - Stacey requested that Michele provide Nick with some preliminary findings, in bullet-points, of what she has learned so far. Michele agreed she could do that, but reminded everyone that the sample is very small at this point.
- Christine commented that there are no available housing units in Dearborn; and asked if this could be used to encourage developers.
 - Sally answered that the city has to be willing to take steps to encourage developers; she can talk to Christine about it later.
- Sally added that the workgroup should think about utilizing techniques from cities (Traverse City, Ann Arbor, Detroit, Grand Rapids) that have better models: they are more welcoming, more aware of encouraging affordable housing.
 - The message to communities needs to be clear.
 - It is also very important to make sure that resources are available so that this succeeds. It is highly detrimental to have people move in and then be evicted.

Strategy #5

- This strategy has been done. Nick will move it to the completed section.

Strategy #6

- 6.1.1 is completed.

- There was discussion of putting this strategy into toolkits which hasn't been done yet. Is there a bigger umbrella of where to locate this information?
 - On the Web site; multiple toolkits should be combined. It is important to keep in mind that once things are online they need to be kept updated.
- Stacey asked that Nick help out with informing the workgroup of when other statewide workgroups get to the point of developing toolkits. This will become action item 6.1.1.4.
- Christina would like to move the deadline for 6.1.1 past March, so that it can be completed after the information regarding the federal stimulus package (and other resources) is known.
 - The timeline for both 6.1.1 and 6.2.1 are to be moved to June.

Concluding Comments

- The e-newsletter now includes what has been discussed in each of the groups. Any of the members of this workgroup are welcome to contribute to that.
- There was some discussion around the May 7th sit-down meeting.
 - At the April 13th meeting, the group will need to establish what should be accomplished at the May meeting.
 - There shouldn't be any cost for this meeting.
 - Members do need to pre-register for the meeting.
 - A member asked how long the meeting might go; it is not a fixed time, but the last in-person meeting ended around 2 PM. *PPA believes that the meeting will last all day.*

Tasks Completed

- Reviewed Strategies 1-6.
 - Some of the strategies are already completed.
 - The outcomes for many of the tasks were discussed by the team.

Next Meeting

- The next meeting will be on Monday, April 13th at 1.00 PM.
 - This will be a conference call, number to be provided later.
 - Nick will send out handouts by e-mail.
 - If you know you will be unable to make the call please let Nick know beforehand, (narmit@publicpolicy.com).
- The next meeting will focus on what the workgroup will discuss at the next face-to-face meeting to be held on May 7th. Please think of items you wish to discuss and bring those ideas to the April 13th conference call.