

BUILDING NEW
PARTNERSHIPS FOR
EMPLOYMENT:
COLLABORATION
AMONG AGENCIES AND
PUBLIC HOUSING RESIDENTS
IN THE JOBS-PLUS
DEMONSTRATION

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overview

BUILDING NEW PARTNERSHIPS FOR EMPLOYMENT: Collaboration Among Agencies and Public Housing Residents in the Jobs-Plus Demonstration

To combat joblessness and poverty in low-income communities, multiple organizations must work together with local residents. But productive collaboration on such complex issues is notoriously difficult to create and sustain, partly because partners often have different priorities and agendas. Learning from real-world experiences is critical if this strategy is to work.

This report provides a detailed look at a major current collaborative effort: the *Jobs-Plus Community Revitalization Initiative for Public Housing Families* (or Jobs-Plus). It shows how the seven cities in this national demonstration have attempted to build inclusive and productive partnerships to design, fund, and operate an ambitious, place-based employment initiative for residents of selected public housing developments. The lessons drawn have important practical implications for a wide range of community-building and other initiatives.

Jobs-Plus seeks to boost employment among *all* working-age residents through employment and training services, financial work incentives (especially by limiting rent increases for employed residents), neighbor-to-neighbor outreach, and other efforts to promote and support work. In each of the participating cities, selected in 1997, the partners have included the public housing authority, the welfare department, local workforce development agencies, resident leaders, and other local organizations. The chosen cities were Baltimore, Chattanooga, Cleveland, Dayton, Los Angeles, St. Paul, and Seattle. Cleveland and Seattle are no longer in the demonstration, but Seattle is still operating its Jobs-Plus program.

Among their key challenges and accomplishments to date are:

- **Collaborative governance and management.** The collaboratives' experiences point to the value of: vesting governing authority in a core group of active partners while keeping the larger group in the dialogue in other ways; establishing explicit lines of authority between the governing partners and program staff; devising better mechanisms for holding staff — and partners — accountable; and distinguishing funding and management of the collaborative from that of the program.
- **Collaboration in service delivery.** Some sites have made considerable progress in building an integrated network of services with close coordination among frontline staff. Such coordination is critical in order to serve and monitor residents effectively across a geographically dispersed network of providers. Toward this end, agencies have modified staff training procedures and expanded their interagency data-sharing efforts. Moreover, some sites have changed broader agency policies as a result of their participation in the collaboratives. Most welfare agencies, for instance, have allowed residents to meet their welfare-to-work obligations by participating in Jobs-Plus.
- **Housing authority adaptations.** Jobs-Plus challenged housing authorities' nearly exclusive focus on housing management and traditional isolation from the activities of welfare and workforce development agencies. Examples of important housing authority adaptations include efforts to: improve internal coordination (e.g., to implement the rent incentives or link employment assistance to efforts to head off evictions); "fast track" internal decisionmaking for Jobs-Plus; transfer Jobs-Plus funds to independent agencies to address procurement constraints; and permit other partners influence over key hiring decisions, even for staff on the housing authority's payroll.
- **Residents' involvement.** Residents have had a significant influence in shaping the Jobs-Plus programs, despite sometimes tense relationships between residents and housing authorities. Some sites have succeeded in reaching beyond traditional leaders in building the technical capacity of residents to assume specific leadership and staff roles in the program.

The Jobs-Plus demonstration was conceived by its two principal funders — the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and The Rockefeller Foundation — along with MDRC, which is managing and evaluating the demonstration. It is supported as well by the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and Labor; the Joyce, James Irvine, Surdna, Northwest Area, Annie E. Casey, Stuart, and Washington Mutual Foundations; and BP. Future reports will examine the program's rent incentives, residents' participation in Jobs-Plus, other implementation results, and effects on employment, welfare, and quality of life. The present report was written by Linda Y. Kato and James A. Riccio.

Preface

This report — the latest on the Jobs-Plus Community Revitalization Initiative for Public Housing Families — focuses on the local partnerships that are a cornerstone of this ambitious effort to greatly increase employment among people living in public housing. These partnerships were created to involve a host of public and private agencies in the design, operations, and oversight of the Jobs-Plus program, and — importantly — to give residents a real voice in programs that directly affect their lives. Collaboration is never easy, but the Jobs-Plus sites struggled hard with myriad challenges and experimented with a variety of approaches. Some strategies worked better than others, and the trade-offs among them became more apparent over time.

Today, “collaboration” is a concept permeating efforts to deal with a multitude of intransigent, complex social problems that are beyond the capacity of any individual agency to address effectively. It is therefore critical to learn as much as possible about how best to structure, operate, and sustain these partnerships. The problems are too urgent and the resources too limited to allow for reinventing the wheel with each new initiative. We hope that the lessons from this pioneering work help guide future efforts to build inclusive and productive partnerships.

We are grateful to the sponsors who helped conceive and develop this initiative, and to all those striving to make it real and successful on the ground — especially the participating residents, who have the greatest stake of all in the transformation of their communities into places where employment is the norm.

Judith M. Gueron
President

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The following field researchers spent many hours chronicling the Jobs-Plus collaboratives and programs; some of them also reviewed and critiqued earlier drafts with much care and insight: Stan Bowie, Crystal Dunson, Jim Fraser, Armando Garcia, Sandy Gerber, Earl Johnson, Linda Kaljee, Carolina Katz, Ed Liebow, George Mitchell, Theresa Myadze, Linda Persse, and Susan Phillips. Mary Valmont coordinated the first round of data collection for this report, with Gail Quets and Seble Tareke assisting in the initial data management and analysis. Patricia Auspos wrote Appendix A, which briefly reviews attempts at collaboration in other initiatives. Maryke Ribeiro assisted on numerous production tasks, with help from Crystal Ganges-Reid and Bridgette Richard. Deborah Baker and Deborah Greenberger helped prepare tables and verify information and citations. Robert Weber edited the manuscript, which was prepared for publication by Stephanie Cowell.

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The Authors

Executive Summary

Collaboration, in which agencies and sometimes local residents work together in pursuit of common goals, is an increasingly popular public management strategy in a wide variety of fields including public health, environmental regulation, social services, and community revitalization. Yet many of the potential benefits of collaboration remain unrealized — or undemonstrated — and many questions remain about how partnerships can best be structured and about the procedures and policies that can best facilitate their efforts.

This study takes an in-depth look at the experiences of interagency and resident partnerships that were formed in seven cities in 1997 to design and implement an ambitious place-based employment intervention: *the Jobs-Plus Community Revitalization Initiative for Public Housing Families* (“Jobs-Plus” for short). At the time, these cities (or “sites”) included Baltimore, Chattanooga, Cleveland, Dayton, Los Angeles, Seattle, and St. Paul.¹ Each operated a Jobs-Plus program in one (or two, in the case of Los Angeles) of their public housing developments. The study explores the ways in which the sites approached the challenges of collaboration. Although these partnerships were created to address the problem of unemployment among public housing residents, lessons from the sites’ experiences may inform collaborative efforts aimed at other pressing public policy issues in other fields.

The present study is part of a multi-year evaluation of Jobs-Plus, a project developed by The Rockefeller Foundation, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC).² Other public agencies and private foundations (acknowledged at the front of this report) are providing the initiative with additional financial support.

What Is Jobs-Plus?

Jobs-Plus seeks to make dramatic improvements in a variety of employment outcomes for residents of public housing developments suffering from low rates of steady employment and high rates of welfare use. The initiative uses a three-pronged strategy that combines (1) *employment-related services* to help residents prepare for and find jobs; (2) *financial work incentives* to “make work pay” by reducing the extent to which a family’s rent rises with increased earnings; and (3) a *community support for work* component to strengthen and develop social ties that support residents’ work efforts. By offering these services, incentives, and social supports to *all* working-age residents (a “saturation” approach), it is

¹Two of these cities — Cleveland and Seattle — have since left the demonstration for reasons discussed in the body of the report. Although they are no longer part of the national evaluation, their experiences during the period of their participation remain relevant and are included in this analysis.

²The broader evaluation is assessing the feasibility, implementation, and effectiveness of the initiative and will continue through at least 2003.

hoped that a substantial majority of public housing residents will become steadily employed.

Why Collaboration?

Recognizing that no single agency could craft, fund, and operate such a comprehensive initiative, the national designers of Jobs-Plus called for the creation of new local partnerships (or “collaboratives”) in the seven cities. Each site’s housing authority, resident representatives, local welfare department, and workforce development agency (that is, the agency operating since 1998 under the Workforce Investment Act, or WIA) were mandatory partners on these collaboratives. The housing authorities had access to HUD resources and controlled many policies affecting housing developments and their tenants, but they needed the experience and resources of the welfare department and the workforce development agency in providing employment and social services. At the same time, these agencies had little knowledge of the circumstances of public housing residents, who formed a sizable percentage of their caseloads. Furthermore, resident representatives on the collaboratives could bring an in-depth awareness of their communities and service needs and could foster community trust and “buy-in” for the program. Finally, other local organizations were expected to join as a source of services, expertise, and other resources that would help advance Jobs-Plus’s employment mission.

Key Findings

Programmatic Accomplishments

- **The collaboratives succeeded in implementing a Jobs-Plus program in each site, although progress has been slower than had been hoped.**

The collaboratives have made significant progress in getting fully functioning Jobs-Plus programs in place. By the beginning of 2001, residents had access to a range of on-site and off-site employment related-services, and the program’s financial incentives were available after a long delay (in part due to delays in obtaining HUD funding for this component). However, significant progress has only recently been made in instituting the community support for work component. And such implementation difficulties as staff turnover and an unstable funding base at times left the programs in some sites in a fragile state. But all appear to be growing stronger and more stable as they mature into the multi-component intervention originally envisioned. According to data supplied by the programs themselves, approximately 2,300 residents have been enrolled in Jobs-Plus since its inception.

Enduring Partnerships

- **Driven by shared interests and the promise that Jobs-Plus holds, the local partners continue to work together despite numerous difficulties.**

Collaboration for Jobs-Plus has been a long and bumpy journey, with many challenges and setbacks. Early on, some partners left the collaboratives, seeing no concrete role for their organizations. Others continued on but expressed frustration at the slow pace of progress. Moreover, as a relatively small demonstration project, Jobs-Plus has had difficulty competing in some cities for the attention of senior agency officials who also have to contend with other local policy and administrative priorities. Nonetheless, the collaboratives have persevered and have made important (if uneven) progress both in jointly funding and shaping the Jobs-Plus program and in coordinating services across agencies. The partners' enduring commitment to this initiative can be traced largely to their converging interests in helping to increase employment among low-income people — many of whom live in public housing — particularly in the wake of welfare reform that ended the entitlement to cash assistance.

Collective Decisionmaking

- **The collaboratives continue to influence the design and operation of Jobs-Plus through a variety of formal and informal channels.**

The collaboratives initially structured themselves as formal governance bodies for making authoritative decisions over Jobs-Plus. In practice, the degree to which this occurred depended on the local housing authority's willingness to share decisionmaking, the other partners' desire to play a governing role, and the project director's commitment to shared decisionmaking. Particularly during the program's design phase, formal governance was important in giving "low-power" stakeholders like the residents and community-based organizations an authoritative voice alongside large public agencies in developing key aspects of the program, such as the rent incentives component. As the emphasis shifted from design to implementation and ongoing development issues, strategic and operational decisions for Jobs-Plus increasingly shifted from the collaborative to the project director and staff in each site. The extent to which the partners now play a formal governance role varies across the sites. But even where this role has been curtailed, the partners in all sites have continued to exert influence over Jobs-Plus in other ways, such as by providing ideas, expertise, and strategic advice through collaborative meetings that have come to be used as opportunities for interagency networking and information-sharing; through staff contributed by partner agencies to Jobs-Plus; and through informal interactions with the project director.

Collaboration in the Delivery of Services

- **A number of sites improved interagency service coordination for Jobs-Plus through a variety of institutional adaptations.**

The collaboratives in a number of sites took actions that improved the ways in which many different agencies worked together to deliver their services to residents of public housing. Although interagency service coordination for Jobs-Plus falls short of constituting a seamless, well-integrated network of services, the collaboratives have helped to make

changes in standard intake procedures and have restructured the roles of frontline workers in key agencies to generate a more sensible division of labor among staff in jointly serving Jobs-Plus participants. The goal is to avoid placing duplicative — and even contradictory — demands on residents. Joint staff training, better data-sharing, and building direct relationships among frontline staff across agencies have also helped to coordinate services, construct sensible service plans, and monitor residents' progress across services provided by a network of agencies.

Modifying TANF Rules for Jobs-Plus

- **Welfare agencies have modified the rules governing Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) to allow participation in Jobs-Plus to satisfy welfare-to-work participation requirements.**

As an employment program, Jobs-Plus must operate within the broader policy context set by the local welfare and workforce development systems, requiring special efforts to coordinate Jobs-Plus with those systems. Among the most important of these modifications has been the project's success in getting welfare agencies to count participation in Jobs-Plus as satisfying TANF welfare-to-work participation requirements. This permits public housing residents who are TANF recipients to take part in Jobs-Plus activities without risking financial sanctions for not participating in TANF activities.

Connecting Jobs-Plus to WIA One-Stop Centers

- **Coordinating the provision of Jobs-Plus services with that of a local one-stop career center may not negate the need to offer some on-site services at the housing development.**

The one-stop career centers established by the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) are becoming a central feature of local workforce development systems nationwide and aim to provide centralized access to a variety of work-related programs and services. In Dayton, the collaborative looked to Jobs-Plus to refer residents to the city's highly developed one-stop center and to help those residents make better use of the center's programs. Special liaison workers at the center were assigned to help residents navigate the maze of offerings. However, the response from residents was disappointing. Residents preferred the convenience of on-site services at the housing development. As a result, Jobs-Plus expanded services there as a kind of satellite one-stop, making use of the main one-stop center to complement the program's services.

Engaging Residents as Collaborative Partners

- **Residents were much more than “token partners,” but ensuring that they were involved in productive ways was a complex effort.**

Resident leaders had an important role as partners on the collaborative in identifying the service needs of their community and proposing useful service approaches that were

not obvious to professional staff operating under agency views of “what can be done.” Such leaders’ active support was critical in fostering residents’ trust and participation in the program. Involving residents effectively, however, challenged the collaboratives to overcome considerable social and political obstacles. The barriers that residents faced to their broad, productive engagement varied across sites and included such factors as the exclusive professional culture of the agency representatives on the collaborative, entrenched resident leadership, adversarial relations with the housing authority, and the residents’ need for greater technical expertise in order to advise an employment program. Thus, while it is feasible and critical to engage residents as collaborative partners, making that happen requires the support of the institutional partners, certain skills and values on the part of the project director, and resident capacity-building efforts that develop specific leadership and management skills for performing well-defined roles in the program.

Holding the Program and the Partners Accountable

- **The collaboratives generally lacked adequate structures for ensuring that the programs were accountable for their progress and performance and that collaborative partners were accountable for their commitments.**

The Jobs-Plus collaboratives will ultimately be judged by their success in getting programs on-line that help residents secure and retain jobs. But most of the collaboratives lacked adequate accountability mechanisms for ensuring that Jobs-Plus staff met the program’s employment goals. They also lacked adequate accountability mechanisms for ensuring that partner agencies fulfilled their resource and service commitments to Jobs-Plus. Instead, the collaboratives relied heavily on the personal dedication of the agency representatives to ensure their agencies’ cooperation. These limitations may have weakened the overall performance of the Jobs-Plus programs — and also the opportunity for residents to use the collaboratives to hold agencies accountable for services provided to their communities.

The collaboratives needed to establish clearer lines and instruments of authority between their governing body and the site’s project director (the most critical staff position) and between the project director and the line staff contributed to Jobs-Plus by the partner agencies. Furthermore, because a site’s housing authority controls many Jobs-Plus resources and staff, its willingness to set and enforce high standards of performance is especially critical for the program’s successful administration and operations.

Institutional Adaptations for Jobs-Plus Within the Housing Authority

- **Operating Jobs-Plus well requires that the housing authority transcend its traditional mission of housing management.**

Given the nature of Jobs-Plus as a place-based employment intervention in public housing, each collaborative relies on the local housing authority to provide facilities, equipment, and program staff and to manage the rent incentives component and the funds allocated to Jobs-Plus. This has required the housing authority to take on a broader social

service role that challenges its traditional priorities of property maintenance and security, rent collection, and lease enforcement. This, in turn, has required a change in organizational culture within the housing authority and the willingness of senior-level officials to support institutional adaptations that facilitate program implementation and responsiveness to residents' needs. Examples of such adaptations include senior-level interventions to "fast-track" the agency's procurement and staffing decisions for Jobs-Plus, to promote cooperation across relevant agency divisions, and, in some cases, to transfer Jobs-Plus funds and management from the housing authority to a nonprofit outside agency that has less complex procurement and personnel regulations.

Conclusion

To the extent that various organizations strive to improve the economic self-sufficiency of a community — through Jobs-Plus or other types of employment initiatives — in a comprehensive, sustainable manner with broad community support, they will undoubtedly need to turn to other public and private agencies and resident leaders for help. Indeed, it is unlikely that Jobs-Plus could have been operated well *without* some form of collaboration among the housing authority, local agencies, and residents. But any attempts to form such partnerships are likely to confront a common set of challenges. The experiences of the Jobs-Plus sites illustrate different approaches to collaboration and various efforts to address its challenges effectively. Building on the lessons of these experiences, this report identifies a number of practical steps that local partners might take to shorten the learning curve in working together to design and operate a Jobs-Plus program — or to undertake other kinds of employment or social interventions that can benefit from cooperation among multiple agencies and their shared clients. The following selected recommendations for improving collaborative efforts are described fully in Chapter 7.

Selected Recommendations for Improving Collaboration for Jobs-Plus

COLLECTIVE DECISIONMAKING

- ✓ Responsibility for formal governance should be restricted to a small governing board or executive committee of core partners and should include senior officials of participating agencies.
- ✓ Most partners can contribute to decisionmaking for Jobs-Plus in a variety of ways that do not involve a formal governance role, such as by participating on formal advisory bodies, serving as program staff, and communicating informally with each other and with the project director. These forms of engagement should be promoted.

COORDINATING SERVICE DELIVERY

- ✓ The responsibilities of some frontline workers (for example, those with responsibilities for case management and employment counseling) may need to be restructured so that

residents who are affiliated with multiple systems do not receive duplicative or even contradictory guidance.

- ✓ Joint training should be conducted for Jobs-Plus staff and the frontline workers of partner agencies to allow them to coordinate their efforts better and take full advantage of the complementary kinds of support that they can offer to residents.
- ✓ TANF rules should be modified to permit welfare recipients who live in public housing to fulfill their welfare-to-work participation requirements by participating in Jobs-Plus.
- ✓ Jobs-Plus can serve as a public housing-based recruitment source for services provided largely at a WIA one-stop career center or as a satellite to it. Jobs-Plus should also take advantage of one-stops as a way to assist people who are not on a lease but who have relationships with legal residents of the public housing development.

THE ROLE OF THE HOUSING AUTHORITY

- ✓ Senior housing authority officials should consider ways to “fast-track” procurement requests for Jobs-Plus or ways of using other agencies to circumvent the housing authority’s own bureaucratic constraints (if such constraints are likely to undermine program operations).
- ✓ On-site housing authority managers should be involved in the design and oversight of the program to foster broader housing authority support and better coordination.

INVOLVING RESIDENTS AS PARTNERS

- ✓ The project director and other collaborative leaders must champion and promote the involvement and input of residents as influential partners.
- ✓ Efforts should be made to reach beyond traditional, narrow resident leadership and to cultivate input from a broader cross-section of the population over time.
- ✓ Technical assistance should be provided to build residents’ capacity for governance, management, and line staff roles, and it should be tailored to the specific functions those roles entail.

LEADERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- ✓ The project director should be a person who values collaboration, is a skilled diplomat, and possesses the technical knowledge and managerial acumen suited to the particular nature and goals of Jobs-Plus.
- ✓ The project director’s dual roles of leading the collaborative and managing the program may be untenable without additional partner or staff support.
- ✓ In the absence of legislative or contractual requirements, governing partners must hold themselves and other agencies accountable by capitalizing on informal relationships as well as formal interagency agreements that specify the contributions and levels of performance expected of each agency.

- ✓ The diffusion of responsibility inherent in collaborative structures makes it imperative that clear lines of authority and accountability be established between the project director and the governing board.
- ✓ The project director should also be granted significant authority over the colocated staff from various agencies in order to foster better interagency coordination of service delivery and accountability for line staff performance.

COLLABORATIVE FUNDING

- ✓ TANF funds should be considered as a possible source of much-needed flexible case resources for Jobs-Plus.
- ✓ To enhance the ability of Jobs-Plus to serve all working-age residents, interagency agreements should be negotiated to allow colocated TANF, WIA, and other agency staff to serve public housing residents who are not clients of their systems (in addition to those who are).