Resident Engagement in the Context of the Rental Assistance Demonstration Program

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Abstract

Engaging residents in redevelopment efforts has become an oft-implemented requirement of many federal housing programs; however, the extent of resident participation in these efforts has varied. The Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) program, a federal housing initiative developed to address extensive capital needs in public housing, centers resident engagement by requiring housing authorities to submit a formalized plan for engagement in the application process. The present study explores a California public housing authority's efforts to create opportunities for residents to engage in planning, the barriers to engagement for residents, and the extent to which resident recommendations were incorporated in final redevelopment plans in the context of RAD. Overall, findings demonstrate that the local housing authority created opportunities to engage residents, but divergent expectations among local housing authority staff, other demands that residents had to balance, and lack of trust between stakeholders often hindered resident engagement. The study also explores recommendations for improved integration of residents' voices in RAD conversion processes.

During the past six decades, participatory planning has become a normative feature of federal housing redevelopment efforts, which privileges the input of residents in the design of programs, services, and elements of the built environment. This inclusive strategy, geared primarily toward encouraging the participation of historically marginalized group members, is intended to ensure that the design closely parallels the need—that strategy will increase both the agency and the decisionmaking authority of residents and certify the acceptability of planned programs and developments. Urban planning initiatives have increasingly included residents as a response to challenges that emerge when community need and design decisions diverge—such as the underutilization of renovated features (Crewe, 2007)—or to protect against the unintended consequences of development, such as gentrification. In effect, engaging residents in planning

efforts emphasizes the importance of equity, inclusion, and community revitalization over displacement and further marginalization of disadvantaged populations. Previous research has highlighted a broad range of resident involvement in redevelopment efforts—from the formation of robust tenant organizations to resident mentoring programs (Bennett and Reed, 1999; Keene, 2016). Although the form that resident involvement takes may differ across contexts, the core value of participatory planning—including civic engagement and collective efficacy—remains the same. Although participatory planning in housing and community development is an increasingly utilized approach, resident participation has varied significantly in both scope and intensity and has not been well studied in the academic literature.

Participatory planning practices seek to empower marginalized individuals to contribute to the planning process in significant—and not just symbolic—ways (Alexander, 2009). Both civic engagement and collective efficacy emphasize the direct benefit of participation in planning processes to the individual and, more broadly, their respective communities. Civic engagement is foundational to democratic values. Participatory planning theory harnesses this principle to facilitate nonhierarchical decisionmaking across a variety of contexts. Often, participatory planning processes are employed in communities that have historically been marginalized or otherwise excluded from other forms of civic engagement available to them; thus, participatory planning is emphasized to increase agency of marginalized populations. At the community level, collective efficacy emerges as a result of group participation in the planning process. Inclusive planning processes, in theory, empower underrepresented groups and legitimize their perspectives about changes that occur within their respective communities. The engagement of residents in planning processes spans a continuum ranging from less intensive efforts (e.g., dissemination of planning-related information) to the solicitation of more meaningful input (e.g., including residents in higher level decisionmaking on a project). Although the inclusion of residents in the decisionmaking process of redevelopment efforts has been increasingly emphasized, ensuring that such participation is meaningful is often elusive (Chaskin, Khare, and Joseph, 2012). At least some resident participation is often required in efforts at the federal level; however, such requirements often do not incentivize project leaders to ensure that resident contributions materialize in housing and community development plans.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) is the newest federal housing effort that places participatory planning at the center of its mission. RAD is designed to address the significant capital needs of the U.S. public housing stock (Finkel et al., 2010) by allowing approved public housing authorities to leverage private funds to address the issue of insufficient housing appropriations and implement much-needed repairs through financial restructuring of housing assets (Econometrica, 2016; Schwartz, 2017; Stegman and Shea, 2017). On average, each rental unit improved under RAD receives approximately $57,000 worth of capital improvements (HUD, 2018a). Although RAD originated as a program to address the extensive deferred maintenance through harnessing private-sector partnerships to fund these repairs, it also has implications for other dimensions of housing that affect health and equity (Hanlon, 2017).

The focus of RAD on improving housing quality and conditions for public housing residents is a shift toward more holistically focusing on the conditions in which low-income residents live.

Moreover, the process by which the program is planned and implemented also centers residents as active participants to encourage more ownership in the process and validate concerns and desires by those most affected by RAD-induced changes. Substandard living conditions, often the result of delayed maintenance, pose a significant challenge to the health and well-being of public housing residents (Dubbin et al., 2019; Shaw, 2004). Previous research has additionally highlighted key linkages between housing and health disparities, which can be conceptually differentiated across four pillars: housing affordability, housing conditions, residential stability, and neighborhood opportunity (Rauh, Landrigan, and Claudio, 2008; Swope and Hernández, 2019; Taylor, 2018). Low-income families, in particular, face constrained choices in finding housing that meets their needs across these dimensions, often making compromises that may have adverse implications for their health (Hernández, 2016). These associations hold true across ages; however, young children are often more affected, given the amount of time they spend in their home environments (Aratani et al., 2018; Cummins and Jackson, 2001; Leventhal and Newman, 2010; Weitzman et al., 2013). RAD attempts to mitigate many of these concerns by addressing deferred maintenance in public housing units while simultaneously supporting resident ownership.

RAD has become an attractive option for an increasing number of housing authorities to address these capital needs. RAD represents a shift from incremental housing policy reforms to a more comprehensive overhaul of the existing public housing structure and funding mechanisms (Costigan, 2019). Given this increase in the popularity of the program since its inception, it is imperative to examine how this process affects the tenants of RAD conversion sites in a variety of ways—engagement in the process being one key dimension. As of 2016, 185 housing developments were approved for a RAD conversion (Econometrica, 2016); however, little is known about the resident participation component of this federal housing program. Previous research has not simultaneously examined resident engagement in the RAD conversion process through the lenses of various stakeholders—including housing authority management staff, front-line and maintenance staff members, and tenants—who are involved in the process. The present analysis seeks to expand the knowledge base about resident engagement in participatory planning processes and identify the barriers that may prevent residents from meaningfully engaging within the context of RAD. This paper fills a significant knowledge gap that is important to understand, given the rise in interest in the RAD program and participatory planning techniques over recent years.

Resident Engagement in Federal Redevelopment Efforts

Resident engagement in RAD is a key component of the program that is explicitly required of all participants. RAD mandates that housing authorities must ensure residents' rights and attempt to engage residents throughout the conversion process. Prior to receiving approval for RAD conversion, public housing authorities are required to have at least two resident meetings (HUD, 2018b). The goals of these resident meetings are twofold: (1) housing providers can thoroughly explain the conversion process and provide details about how the process will affect current residents, and (2) residents have the opportunity to ask questions about the conversion process, share concerns about the conversion, and make general comments about the plan. Housing authorities are required to submit resident comments about the renovation plan and their responses to these comments to HUD as a component of their RAD application.

Although RAD is the most recent housing demonstration that requires an element of resident participation in the process, it is not the first. Other notable housing demonstration projects (such as HOPE VI) have also incorporated resident participation mandates. To some extent, lessons learned from these previous federal housing demonstration projects have informed RAD's resident engagement strategy. Both successes and challenges experienced in previous resident engagement efforts have informed many of the tenant protections and rights outlined in RAD guidelines, such as residents' right to return after renovation and residents' right to be engaged by the housing authority during the conversion process (Econometrica, 2016).

The most notable of these efforts, HOPE VI, marked a pivotal shift for participatory planning in federal redevelopment projects. The funding guidelines of HOPE VI included mechanisms that ensured that all stakeholders involved in or affected by redevelopment efforts participated in the planning process (Chaskin, Khare, and Joseph, 2012). Additionally, HOPE VI presented the first instance of meaningful resident engagement in redevelopment efforts. Several examples of active efforts on the part of housing authorities to engage residents in creative and significant ways became clear in many HOPE VI developments. In a HOPE VI development in Atlanta, for example, intergenerational resident participation was encouraged through the organization of resident task forces, which included youth and adult residents in decisionmaking processes (Jourdan, 2009). Another HOPE VI development in Oakland, California, harnessed the insight of residents and other community members to develop creative solutions during the planning process to combat gang activity (Naparstek et al., 2000). Collectively, resident involvement models developed in the age of HOPE VI have set the stage for participatory planning efforts in subsequent housing redevelopment initiatives at the federal level. Although HOPE VI presented models for resident engagement, an exact replication of such models can prove difficult, given that they often draw heavily on local community context to guide the goals and structure of engagement.

Previous housing redevelopment efforts have highlighted best practices and lessons learned about effective resident engagement strategies. Similar to RAD, the extent of resident engagement efforts in HOPE VI varied by site, largely due to vague language around what resident participation actually entailed. Despite the nonspecific nature of the mandate, HOPE VI found success in using a range of mechanisms to involve residents in redevelopment efforts; those efforts included upgrading the physical infrastructure of developments and integrating social supports into redevelopment efforts. Some HOPE VI sites implemented resident-run community development corporations—organizations designed to provide supportive services to residents of HOPE VI communities (Popkin et al., 2004). Other HOPE VI sites sought not just to engage residents in the redevelopment of their residential communities but also to provide the opportunity to engage in local community planning (Turbov and Piper, 2005). Although many of these foundation elements from HOPE VI have guided RAD in resident engagement, the two programs differ in important ways.

Although other housing demonstration projects that HUD initiated have required residents to permanently move out of their living quarters without a guarantee of return, RAD attempts to preserve the continuity of the living environment as much as possible while improving housing conditions, with the notable exception of a temporary relocation period during renovation. Moreover, in previous demonstration programs, the conversion of public housing developments

to mixed-income communities often resulted in the displacement of low-income residents (Joseph and Chaskin, 2012). Low rates of residents returning to housing communities provided the momentum for a shift in focus to residents' rights when considering plans for housing redevelopment. This focus was a driving force in the inclusion of an explicit provision guaranteeing residents temporarily displaced by renovation efforts a return to housing once the renovation was completed in RAD, which stands in contrast to HOPE VI. Unlike RAD, HOPE VI was not a one-to-one replacement program, which left many residents vulnerable to the potential loss of their housing once the project was completed. Ultimately, these shortcomings in previous housing demonstrations gave way to a focus on residents' rights and protections (notably, on residents' right to return) in contemporary public housing redevelopment efforts (Burrowes and Ladet, 2018).

The creation of employment opportunities for residents in redevelopment efforts also serves as a best practice in resident engagement efforts. Such employment opportunities allow residents to actively participate in the redevelopment efforts in their respective communities while also increasing economic stability for participating residents. The HUD Act of 1968 established Section 3, a policy requiring recipients of HUD housing or community development funds to create economic opportunities for residents and local businesses. Although Section 3 is not unique to RAD, housing authorities that undergo RAD conversion are held to this policy. Some HOPE VI sites found success in Section 3 efforts through apprenticeship programs where residents could shadow skilled workers to acquire requisite skills (Denver Housing Authority), requiring contractors and subcontractors to have explicit Section 3 goals outlined in their contracts (King County Housing Authority), and providing interview preparation for residents (King County Housing Authority; HUD, n.d.a, n.d.b). Although this is a requirement of redevelopment efforts such as HOPE VI and RAD, dedicated funding to ensure that these requirements are effectively met is not available to housing authorities through Section 3.

Although some have criticized the extent to which HOPE VI meaningfully engaged residents in redevelopment efforts (Turbov and Piper, 2005), valuable lessons from these engagement efforts have been learned. Subsequent analyses of HOPE VI resident engagement efforts have largely suggested that for these strategies to be maximally impactful, residents who assume these leadership responsibilities must receive adequate support. Furthermore, litigation that resulted from HOPE VI highlighted the need to involve a wide range of residents in the participatory process. Some HOPE VI sites faced lawsuits from tenants who expressed concerns over decisions made with the input of a small proportion of tenants who assumed leadership roles, arguing that it was not representative of the entirety of residents at the site (Popkin et al., 2004).

The present study is novel in that the authors can examine the extent to which resident participation guidelines were actualized in a contemporary housing demonstration project. Specifically, this analysis explores the barriers to engagement for families living at RAD sites and the extent to which resident voices were incorporated in the renovation design and implementation process through interviews with residents (n=30) and public housing authority staff (n=23). The present study provides valuable information on how closely, if at all, experiences with the participatory planning process align across stakeholder groups that include housing authority administrators, staff, and residents. Such information could be used to inform future participatory

planning processes that aim to elicit meaningful involvement from residents affected by the RAD conversion process. Furthermore, as learned from evaluations of previous housing demonstrations such as HOPE VI, investigating RAD program components indepth could highlight best practices and challenges in implementation. Such information could inform RAD expansion and future housing interventions.

Through key informant interviews with residents, front-line staff, maintenance staff, and management-level employees, the authors seek to answer the following: What is the nature of resident engagement in a RAD redevelopment site? Additionally, what are some barriers or incentives to participation in the renovation process for residents? Lastly, to what extent are resident suggestions implemented in redevelopment plans? With these questions in mind, the authors also importantly distinguish between participation and resident engagement—the latter resulting in more meaningful involvement of residents in the participatory planning process.

Methods

RAD Conversion Process and Timeline in California's Central Valley

The RAD conversion process at the sites examined in this study was an endeavor that spanned from 2012 to 2015. Planning for the conversion began in 2012. During the planning process, resident meetings were held in 2012 before submission of the application. Once the plan was approved, residents began moving out of their residences to allow for renovation beginning in December 2013. Depending on the site, residents began to move back into their renovated spaces between February 2014 and August 2015. The implementation of RAD concluded at these sites in mid- to late 2015. Additional resident meetings were held in 2015 (i.e., after renovation was completed at each site) to solicit feedback from residents.

Data Collection and Sample Characteristics

The present exploratory study is based on indepth interviews with residents, housing authority administrators, upper management, and front-line staff across three RAD sites in Central California. Interviews began in fall 2013 and were conducted at three points during the implementation process, concluding in spring 2015. Two trained researchers conducted in-person and telephone-based interviews using a semi-structured interview guide tailored to the respondent type. These interviews spanned a wide range of topics related to the RAD process, including questions about resident participation in the RAD implementation process. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Interviews were audio-recorded and professionally transcribed verbatim.

Residents. The authors conducted in-person interviews with 30 heads-of-household (10 per site) in the renovated homes of participants following the completion of the RAD conversion process. All interviewees were female, ranging in age from 25–55 years old, and were also parents/guardians with an average of 3.3 children in each household. Respondents were primarily Hispanic (94 percent) and were either native English (50 percent) or Spanish speakers (50 percent). The interviews were conducted in their preferred language by a pair of interviewers that included a bilingual, native Spanish speaker. Most resident respondents indicated that their highest level

of education was high school (60 percent), one-half of the sample did not work, and most respondents (90 percent) reported a household income of $20,000 or less. Most participants had been living in their renovated unit for between 2 weeks and 6 months at the time of the interview.

Administrators and Upper Management. In addition to interviewing residents, the authors interviewed 16 management-level housing authority staff by phone and in person. Upper management staff roles ranged from project managers to the CEO of the local housing authority. Of the 16 respondents, 4 had prior experience working in public housing or as a property manager.

The authors conducted in-person interviews with seven front-line staff members that interfaced more directly with residents through programs and services. These front-line staff members had roles that ranged from office assistants to maintenance workers. All front-line staff had at least 2 years of experience working with the local housing authority.

Data Analysis

For this analysis, the authors obtained information regarding resident participation from the perspectives of residents, front-line staff, and upper management. The analysis was based on all 53 interviews segmented by stakeholder designation. Interview transcripts were systematically coded for emergent themes using a thematic analytical approach to understand the nature of resident engagement across RAD conversion sites.

Transcripts were coded for emergent themes in the data collected. Three researchers independently coded and analyzed interview transcripts using MaxQDA (versions 11 and 12) software for qualitative data analyses. Using this software, researchers coded, categorized coding, and identified emergent themes from the textual data. Three coders verified that codes were applied consistently by all and discussed any discrepancies. Discrepant codes were modified accordingly. Following coding, data were thematically analyzed to generate thematic domains relevant to the experience of all stakeholders interviewed. To ensure reliability, coders reached a minimum of 80-percent agreement in thematic coding.

Results

The authors examined the scope of resident engagement from the perspectives of housing authority staff and residents during both the planning and the implementation phases of the RAD conversion process. The planning phase presented an opportunity for housing authorities to engage residents prior to submitting their RAD conversion plans. Housing authorities were tasked with informing residents of their intention to convert, explaining the process and tenant rights under RAD, and engaging residents to provide input into conversion plans as they are developed. Housing authorities have a great deal of autonomy in the ways they choose to engage with residents during this phase; however, all are required to host at least two resident meetings. Implementation represents the phase of the conversion process after housing authorities receive approval of their conversion plan through the completion of renovations. Although RAD does not have specific guidelines for engagement in this phase of conversion, the housing authorities in the present analysis expressed a desire to continue engagement beyond just the planning phase of RAD.

Examining these two phases allows for an analysis of the incentives and barriers to engagement across phases, continuity, and change in engagement strategies at various points in the conversion process.

The analysis centered on three core themes across the planning and implementation phases of the conversion process: the nature of RAD engagement, any barriers or incentives to resident engagement, and the extent to which resident input was incorporated in the renovation plan. Exhibit 1 summarizes the findings of this analysis, highlighting exemplary quotes from resident and staff interviews related to these themes. Overall, the extent of resident engagement varied across the conversion phase, with more successful engagement efforts identified in the planning phase. Barriers to engagement were often related to residents' other familial and work responsibilities, which staff attempted to address proactively (through the provision of childcare at some meetings, varying meeting times, etc.). Lastly, staff and residents alike agreed that there was a divergence between input shared by residents during the planning phase and renovations that were actualized in the implementation phase.

Exhibit 1

Summary of Study Findings with Supporting Resident and Staff Quotes (1 of 2)

Research Question	Overall Findings	Exemplary Statements
What is the nature of resident engagement in a RAD redevelopment site?	• High rates of meeting attendance • Effective conveyance of general RAD process knowledge • Resident input in selection of renovation team members (i.e., architects)	Resident: "They explained everything very well because even the architects who were going to do the job—there was a meeting where they came to explain everything step by step. There were various meetings where they explained step by step what they were going to do." Staff: "We don't tend to get a lot of input but we know we would get quite bit of attendance at our meetings."
What are some barriers or incentives to participation in the renovation process for residents?	**Barriers:** • Resident work responsibilities • Childcare responsibilities • Competing life demands • RAD administrative demands **Incentives:** • Flexible meeting times • Childcare provision • Resident outreach outside of formal meetings	**Barriers:** Resident: "Because I had really young kids and it would be inconvenient and sometimes the meetings were in the afternoon, kind of late and I didn't have anyone to watch them. That's why I never went. I did want to go and I said at the end, 'but why didn't I go?'" Staff: "Their biggest concern at each meeting was, 'When do I have to move out?'… for the most part, I think we had too many meetings per site prior to, … I think they kind of got discouraged and the attendance started decreasing after that." **Incentives:** Resident: "[I] heard about what was going on through neighbors, and they [staff] left notes on the door and letters through the mail." Staff: "And in order to incentivize them—at many of our community meetings we of course had some of them—meetings were during the evening so we had some refreshments and childcare so that they would feel comfortable bringing their children."

Exhibit 1

Summary of Study Findings with Supporting Resident and Staff Quotes (2 of 2)

Research Question	Overall Findings	Exemplary Statements
To what extent are resident suggestions implemented in redevelopment plans?	• High rates of meeting attendance • Effective conveyance of general RAD process knowledge • Resident input in selection of renovation team members (i.e., architects)	Resident: "They explained everything very well because even the architects who were going to do the job—there was a meeting where they came to explain everything step by step. There were various meetings where they explained step by step what they were going to do." Staff: "We don't tend to get a lot of input but we know we would get quite bit of attendance at our meetings."

RAD = rental assistance demonstration.

The Nature of Resident Engagement at RAD Sites

Planning Phase

Housing authority staff made efforts to increase residents' understanding of the Rental Assistance Demonstration conversion process primarily by facilitating resident meetings and through individual engagement with affected residents. Most of these efforts took place during the planning phase of the project. Of the respondents interviewed, 21 (70 percent) indicated that they attended at least one resident planning meeting. Most residents who were interviewed (76.7 percent) expressed at least a general understanding of what the RAD process entailed, characterized by knowledge of the basic processes associated with a RAD conversion (i.e., residents understood that apartment unit renovation and temporary relocation were scheduled to occur).

To reach a higher proportion of residents, housing authority staff hosted more than the requisite number of meetings, with some sites hosting as many as five meetings during the planning process. Several residents who were interviewed discussed the utility of the meetings. They described multifaceted efforts on the part of staff members to convey the information effectively. The staff shared information with residents both verbally and visually (i.e., pictures of expected renovations, creation of boards that had renovations plans displayed). Notably, in addition to staff-led efforts to educate residents about the conversion plan, upper management invited the project's architect to a meeting to highlight the planned updates and respond directly to resident questions and concerns.

A key tension between stakeholder perceptions of engagement became clear. Residents perceived their attendance at meetings as engagement but also expressed a desire for residents' involvement to include indepth forms of participation, leadership, and ownership of the process. Interviews from all stakeholder groups acknowledged that participation beyond attendance was not universally achieved. From the resident perspective, although two residents who were interviewed acknowledged that housing authority staff created a space for residents to share their priorities in the renovation, most residents communicated that they primarily viewed meetings as an opportunity to receive information about the forthcoming renovation plans.

> *"Well, we would go to learn about what the changes were going to be, what they were going to do with the apartments … to find out more about what was going to happen." (Resident)*

Although meetings primarily served as spaces for information to be communicated to residents, staff respondents discussed offering alternative opportunities for residents to provide input outside of meetings. The staff made efforts to institute an "open-door" policy, facilitate focus groups, and involve residents in some direct decisionmaking responsibilities, such as selecting the project's architect.

> *"RAD requires two resident meetings, and the requirements of those resident meetings were not very stringent. I think we had to go in and say—'You won't have to-you won't be relocated—it was something—don't worry, you are protected basically.' We took it much further, we wanted residents to be engaged through the process. We had residents help us select the architects. We had residents that checked the relocation entity. While doing the relocation implementation, we really wanted to make sure that the residents got to know who's going to be giving them advice and counsel. So they didn't feel like we were forcing them to make choices, that this was an outside party that they trusted ... We did focus groups with youth, getting youth involved in the design process and really getting the parents in the process." (Upper management staff)*

Implementation Phase

Housing authority staff expressed a desire to drive resident engagement efforts beyond the planning phase through hiring efforts. Engagement through employment ideally provides hired residents with tangible ownership in the physical renovations within their community.

At the management level, efforts were made to facilitate the creation of opportunities for resident employment, specifically by working with subcontractors.

> *"[W]e were really trying to figure out if we could achieve more in Section 3, and so we worked a bit on more clear guidelines for our general contractors on what we wanted them to do on Section 3." (Upper management staff)*

> *"We actually had a meeting geared toward working with the contractors and what were the skill sets there, and if anyone could be matched up or paired, we had a team with our resident services who focused solely on helping the residents to participate however they could with the job opportunities." (Upper management staff)*

Although housing authority management staff made intentional efforts to use Section 3 as a tool for the economic development of their residents, the staff also identified challenges faced in doing so.

> *"The biggest challenge is that we probably don't have a lot of residents that are really qualified to do this type of work…we have to think creatively about how to—we don't get any special funding [for training and workforce development]. Yeah, to implement this mandate in a way that will be successful, so we're just trying our best…you have to provide training—you have to provide training on job interviewing and putting together a resume and a lot of support." (Upper management staff)*

Section 3 is intended to create economic opportunities for residents and community businesses; however, as staff noted, the support is insufficient to realistically ensure that residents can take advantage of these opportunities. Staff identified the need for funding for job training or other programs that would better align resident skill sets with job qualifications. Staff further shared that

HUD loosely enforces this mandate, rendering it a less effective mechanism to generate resident engagement through the renovation's workforce.

> *"We don't reach that goal [of Section 3], but we try. You don't have to reach it, you just have to explain that you tried. Really, really poorly written kind of thing." (Upper management staff)*

Incorporation of Resident Input

Housing authorities are required to host resident meetings and submit a summary of resident input and their response to resident comments before HUD can review a RAD proposal (HUD, 2017). After the RAD plan was approved, implementation of the plan was the next phase of the conversion process. From renovation summaries provided by the local housing authority, the three sites included in the study underwent extensive aesthetic (e.g., exterior and interior painting, expansion of apartment square footage), structural (e.g., updating heating and cooling systems, replacing plumbing systems), and safety (e.g., smoke and carbon monoxide detector updates, hardwiring of smoke detectors in bedrooms) renovations. These renovations were conducted for both individual units and communal spaces.

Staff and residents interviewed expressed a disconnect between redevelopment plans and the renovation itself. One-half of resident respondents expressed a concern that recommendations they made during the planning phase were not incorporated into the conversion plan, and approximately one-fourth of resident respondents (26 percent) reported a difference between the plan shared by staff during resident meetings and what the renovations looked like after implementation was complete.

> *"That they didn't, well, do the things they were going to do and promised, well they didn't do them because they promised, they said it, and they haven't been done; they haven't been seen." (Resident)*

Residents were asked to rank their renovation priorities during at least one planning meeting. Safety emerged as the primary issue residents wanted the renovation to address. Residents requested safety features such as gates during the planning phase; however, these measures were not incorporated into the final design. Additional frustration emerged from residents when features that were not identified as priorities by residents were included in the final renovation plan.

The disconnect between planning and implementation emerged as a source of dissatisfaction for some residents. Features both outside and inside of their unit differed from what was described to residents during the planning phase meetings. One resident highlighted the difference in kitchen features observed in the renovated unit and how they differed from what was conveyed during the planning phase.

> *"Like, for example, they had all these kitchens and everything they were going to do. They said that they were going to put a bar. I don't see a bar, but that's okay…and the floor they did, but like they did it, the restroom. And they did a master bedroom a little better. But they didn't tell us about the yard— that it was going to be open. We had a private yard and we had more safety." (Resident)*

This disconnect is further highlighted when comparing requests residents made for changes to community and outdoor spaces to actualized renovations that were made to those spaces. Exhibit 2 presents a summary of these requests, as put forth by residents during planning meetings. The findings presented in the exhibit were derived from meeting notes that housing authority staff took at resident meetings. Resident renovation requests that were implemented during the RAD renovation process are included in the exhibit. Of the renovation ideas presented by residents during meetings, only three of those renovations were improved upon or newly constructed during implementation. It is also worth noting that additional requests may have been implemented after data collection efforts concluded.

Exhibit 2

Comparison of Resident Recommendations and Implemented Requests in Final Renovation Plan

Resident-Requested Amenity	Implementation of Requested Amenity at Residential Sites
Art space for children	No
Barbecue pits (either built in or portable)	No
Car washing and maintenance space	No
Community garden	No
Fitness center	No
Flexible computer room with additional table space	Yes
Library	No
Multi-purpose room available for reservation (for parties, meetings, family gatherings, etc.)	Yes
Music classes for children	No
Outdoor tables and chairs	No
Play fields and play structures for all ages	No
Play structures for young children	Yes
Sewing room	No

From the front-line staff perspective, resource constraints were a primary cause for the divergence between planning and actual renovations; however, upper management staff also detailed what they perceived as a lack of trust in an open, participatory planning process that relies heavily on the insight of residents to guide design and serve as partners in the decisionmaking process.

> *"We definitely struggled at doing the resident engagement process. As a team, we're not really all on the same page as to why we are doing resident engagement and what we're trying to get out of it ... we have people on our RAD team here in the agency who are actually scared to engage residents in decisionmaking." (Upper management)*

Achieving staff-level buy-in is key to ensuring that the principles of participatory planning are kept at the center of the process and that resident suggestions are considered, valued, and incorporated.

Barriers to Resident Engagement

From interviews with residents, front-line staff, and upper management, five primary barriers to engagement emerged: (1) inconvenient timing, (2) childcare responsibilities, (3) competing work commitments, (4) information oversaturation, and (5) planning disillusionment. Although the staff made efforts to make participation opportunities accessible to residents, some residents still found it difficult to attend and participate.

Residents and staff alike described the complexity of life and competing responsibilities as core reasons for the lack of attendance and participation in the RAD conversion process. Work and childcare responsibilities often impeded residents' ability to engage, which was further complicated by the timing of meetings:

> *"Because I had really young kids, and it would be inconvenient, and sometimes the meetings were in the afternoon, kind of late, and I didn't have anyone to watch them. That's why I never went. I did want to go, and I said at the end, 'But why didn't I go?'" (Resident)*

Upper management staff also identified an oversaturation of information as a barrier to resident engagement. During the planning phase, meetings were held frequently; simultaneously, residents were managing administrative tasks associated with the certification process and their impending relocation.

> *"I think there were too many meetings that it overwhelmed them a little bit … Their biggest concern at each meeting was, 'When do I have to move out?' For the most part, I think we had too many meetings per site prior to … I think they kind of got discouraged, and the attendance started decreasing after that." (Upper management)*

Although some residents expressed frustration with the lack of implementation of their suggestions, some of this disillusionment with the process emerged before renovations began. During the planning phase, staff informed residents of the plan that was going to be submitted to HUD; however, submitted plans did not fully incorporate resident suggestions and proved to be a source of significant frustration and sometimes anger with residents.

> *"Yeah and you know, and the pain and anger that it caused with the residents, some of them at the meetings we had where we announced what we're going to do and what we're not going to do—one lady stood, and she was extremely—extremely vocal and extremely passionate about what she was saying, and she said through like tears in her eyes—tears of anger—because 'Why do you bring us together and ask what we want, then turnaround and tell us we're wrong? Next time, don't ask us.'" (Upper management)*

From the staff perspective, residents began to distrust the process when their suggestions were seemingly ignored. Residents expressed frustration with the divergence between what they suggested and wanted and what was ultimately included in the plans, thus serving to disincentivize residents from further engaging in the process.

Incentives and Facilitating Factors for Engagement

Participants described various strategies they employed to become more engaged in the process. Residents relied on each other to get and share information. Although some residents were unable to engage formally and consistently, interviews highlighted how social connections between neighbors served as information conduits for residents who missed formal meetings. Additionally, staff highlighted the value of recruiting neighbors to disseminate information to those who may not be able to formally engage through meetings.

> *"No, I was too busy working. I never went to either of them … and heard about what was going on through neighbors, and they left notes on the door and letters through the mail." (Resident)*

The staff took the initiative to directly address barriers to participation and facilitate resident engagement. Upper management and front-line staff generally assessed and attended the meetings and discussed the provision of childcare as a key strategy used to encourage attendance.

> *"I would go to the tenant meetings; I was mainly with the kids. Because a lot of times they didn't want to go because of their kids, so we let them know. I would babysit the children, just games and coloring and stuff like that, activities during the meetings, that way the parents were able to pay closer attention to what had to be said or the information that was given I think to them." (Front-line staff)*

Furthermore, the staff attempted to proactively address these barriers with flexible outreach. Four staff members who were interviewed mentioned having an "open-door" policy for residents, allowing for resident contribution outside of formal meeting spaces. Additionally, residents shared that Spanish translation offered in the meetings helped to increase the understanding for Spanish-speaking residents.

Discussion

Participatory planning projects have historically seen low levels of involvement from disadvantaged groups (Smith, 2009), despite efforts to ensure their voices are heard in redevelopment efforts. The present study identifies key challenges public housing authorities faced as they endeavored to include residents in the RAD conversion process; the study also identifies the challenges residents who were directly affected by the process faced. Collectively, these insights further inform best practices that can be adopted by housing authorities as they attempt to engage residents in meaningful ways and ensure that resident needs are addressed in the process. Four key recommendations to promote meaningful resident engagement emerged through the present analysis: (1) address caretaking or work-related barriers to engagement through creative outreach, (2) increase the clarity of expectations and parameters for all stakeholders from the beginning of the planning process, (3) strengthen accountability measures at the federal level to ensure that resident feedback is thoughtfully considered and incorporated, and (4) be intentional about sustaining engagement—both during the conversion process and after completion.

Adequately addressing barriers to participation could increase the levels of meaningful resident engagement in participatory planning processes. In the present study, the housing authorities preemptively addressed anticipated barriers to participation by providing services such as staff

babysitting for residents during meeting times. The expansion of efforts such as this are low cost or cost neutral, easy to implement, and very useful services for residents who wish to attend the meetings but are limited by time or household obligations. Additionally, creating less onerous ways to become engaged in the process could yield rich contributions from residents who are unable to dedicate a significant amount of time to redevelopment efforts. Such efforts could be as simple as sending a paper survey to hard-to-reach tenants that asks them to list and rank their desired community changes, recruiting more active tenants to reach out to neighbors who are not as involved, or arranging for individual meetings with these residents at times that are more convenient than the group meetings scheduled. Collectively, these strategies represent a best practice of thinking innovatively about resident engagement and outreach given community-specific needs.

A fundamental issue highlighted through these interviews was a clear divergence of expectations. Findings from this study highlight the ambiguity of what constitutes "resident engagement"—a challenge that was also observed in HOPE VI due to ambiguous resident engagement requirements. In the present study, the operationalization of the term differed among stakeholders interviewed. The residents who were interviewed largely perceived themselves as being engaged, given that they attended meetings; however, front-line and upper management staff expressed disappointment in the level of engagement of residents, stating that the levels of input received from residents were often low, and the efforts made to engage residents outside of the resident meetings (such as focus groups) were poorly attended. In many ways, staff conceptions of the nature and extent of "ideal" resident engagement closely mirrored the extant academic literature on participatory planning; however, in practice, staff-led efforts fell short of meaningful and sustained engagement of residents. The barriers to engagement identified in the present study likely affected the housing authority's ability to foster resident engagement in more meaningful ways beyond meeting attendance. Staff-led efforts to better structure and facilitate meetings could be a significant first step toward engaging residents more meaningfully. Additionally, more clearly framing meetings as opportunities for residents to provide input rather than solely receive information would give the residents a clearer understanding of what to expect prior to attending the meeting; perhaps they would then come to meeting spaces more prepared to share thoughts. All stakeholders involved stand to benefit when expectations of those involved are collaboratively established and clearly articulated.

Although resident engagement fell short of staff expectations, the contributions of residents should still be acknowledged and valued. Although developers and staff are key stakeholders in planning efforts, the stakeholder group that the conversion process most significantly affects is composed of residents. In addition to being involved in the planning process, residents were also tasked with navigating new administrative requirements associated with the conversion, preparing for the temporary relocation that was required for the renovation, and addressing how the conversion process would affect their respective households. These newly introduced demands presented barriers that in many ways hindered their level of engagement from matching those of staff expectations. To better align the expectations of stakeholder groups, it is most important to strike a balance between encouraging engagement and having an empathetic understanding of what realistic engagement may look like for the population the process affects the most. Staff and

developers should exercise caution when conceptualizing their expectations of residents to ensure that engagement feels like a benefit rather than a burden.

Mutual trust is a core tenet of effective partnership building (Mitchell, 2005). Given that participatory planning efforts are predicated on strong partnerships developed between stakeholders, this form of planning necessitates trust. Similar to many HOPE VI developments, housing authorities are faced with making tradeoffs, which often come at the expense of the integration of resident-generated suggestions (Naparstek et al., 2000). In the present study, residents' frustration at feeling as though the housing authority did not incorporate their recommendations was a barrier to further participation. Future housing authorities implementing RAD can potentially avoid this issue of resident disillusionment with the process by emphasizing clear, streamlined communication and framing the participatory planning process in a way that manages resident expectations, given a variety of logistical constraints (e.g., cost, legal, time). Moreover, the residents noted the importance of programming elements that could be implemented at a later time, further emphasizing the importance of continued engagement beyond the relocation and renovation phases. In this particular RAD conversion, housing authority staff prioritized property rehabilitations that were identified as high priority through capital needs assessments that a third-party consulting firm conducted; the staff thus relied less on residents' articulated needs. Stronger accountability mechanisms could be instituted at the federal level to ensure that resident perspectives materialize in the implementation phase of the redevelopment process.

Efforts made at the federal level could strengthen engagement efforts housing authorities made. Although the vague language regarding resident engagement allows for housing authorities to interpret the mandate and tailor efforts to the local populations they serve, it also leaves housing authorities without the necessary guidance and structure on which to scaffold their efforts. The housing authority in this study went beyond the basic engagement requirements as explicitly stated in federal guidelines; however, engagement efforts could be strengthened across all RAD sites if federal requirements for resident engagement were made more robust. Additionally, funding from the federal level to support engagement efforts would assist housing authorities in their efforts. RAD does not explicitly provide federal dollars for resident engagement efforts. Similarly, efforts to harness the potential of Section 3 could be strengthened if federal funds and more detailed guidelines were provided. Section 3 could be used as a powerful tool for tenant engagement and economic development for low-income residents if actualized in a meaningful way. Housing authority staff sought to create economic opportunities for residents but were constrained by the lack of resources for services that would help residents to qualify for such jobs. Although data on the number of residents hired through Section 3 as a result of RAD conversion are unavailable for this housing authority, implementing resident hiring quotas and funding for job training are two ways in which the federal government could support Section 3 efforts being made at the local housing authority level.

Conclusion

Contemporary models of resident engagement in housing development efforts have highlighted both the need to engage community members in the most nascent stages of the project and to do

so with intentionality. The city of Seattle has recently introduced a new requirement for housing developers to engage the community in which the development is situated prior to drafting design plans. Additionally, for areas with a higher proportion of underrepresented residents (i.e., Equity Areas), the city requires a more detailed plan of how to tailor outreach efforts in a way to generate meaningful participation from residents about a development (City of Seattle, 2018). Although this requirement in Seattle is not exclusive to public housing, its core principles can inform future RAD efforts. RAD requires the early engagement of residents; however, HUD does not require housing authorities to conduct a tailored outreach to elicit meaningful engagement in the process. Adopting such a mandate would require local housing authorities to consider their target resident population's needs in more intentional ways.

Resident engagement should not end at the point of construction. Although the authors have data about resident engagement in the planning and implementation phases, whether engagement was sustained post-implementation at these RAD sites remains unexplored. The HOPE VI efforts identified that relying heavily on the community context to tailor an engagement approach was a key best practice in sustaining engagement efforts. Community-specific efforts to build on the momentum generated during the planning phase and maintain resident engagement after redevelopment have been seen in several HOPE VI communities. Such an approach could be particularly effective across RAD study sites to address community safety concerns—one of the largest points of divergence between residents' articulated needs and the resulting design. HOPE VI yielded several models of continued resident engagement (e.g., Lockwood Gardens Apartments in Oakland, CA; Kennedy Brothers Memorial Apartments in El Paso, TX). These models serve as useful examples of successful resident engagement after redevelopment has taken place. Engagement must be practiced consistently and throughout the residential experience to achieve thriving, empowered communities. Those practices can be achieved through a variety of means, such as tenant associations, parent groups, and youth leadership organizations. Such forms of continuous engagement can encourage and sustain resident engagement so that the next time decisions need to be made, residents are equipped and ready to respond. The opportunity for continued engagement also allows residents that the renovation did not directly affect to address concerns.

Compared with other federal housing programs, RAD is still in its earliest stages, and much can be learned about its impact on tenants and the public housing stock in the long term. Although the program is heralded as a critical tool that underfunded housing authorities can use to address capital needs, a more indepth understanding of the program's impact on residents is critical to ensure equity in the context of the residential experience and remove barriers to engagement for the often-marginalized public housing tenant population. The present analysis highlights barriers to engagement from the perspective of staff and tenants and identifies practical solutions that housing authorities can implement. Future research should examine the realities of resident engagement at other RAD implementation sites to provide more representative insight into the program's overall impact on the lives of tenants.

Acknowledgments

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