

# Can Diverse Activities Have a Combined Impact? Examining the Effects of the Moving to Work Demonstration on Housing Choice and Self-Sufficiency Outcomes

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## Abstract

*Public housing agencies (PHAs) participating in the Moving to Work (MTW) demonstration can use funding and policy flexibilities to further the three statutory objectives of the demonstration—to (1) reduce cost and achieve greater cost-effectiveness, (2) promote family self-sufficiency, and (3) increase housing choice. This report examines the success that MTW agencies had in meeting the housing choice and self-sufficiency objectives. Using longitudinal HUD administrative data and a database of publicly available MTW Annual Plans, we conduct comparative interrupted time series (CITS) analysis to compare MTW groups with traditional PHAs to identify whether MTW status or policies are associated with progress toward meeting the second and third statutory objectives. Results indicate some signs of a positive relationship between MTW and outcomes of interest. Of the three indicators we detail in this paper, we find that MTW status and activity are associated with an increased share of new households, not associated with the share of tenant-based vouchers in low-poverty tracts, and may be associated with an increase in the share of households with incomes higher than when they entered housing.*

## Introduction

The Moving to Work (MTW) demonstration gives participating public housing agencies (PHAs) funding and policy flexibility not available to traditional PHAs. MTW agencies can use flexibilities to implement activities that further the three statutory objectives of the demonstration, which are

to (1) reduce cost and achieve greater cost-effectiveness in federal expenditures; (2) give incentives to families with children when the head of household is working, seeking work, or preparing for work by participating in job training; and (3) increase housing choices for low-income families.<sup>1</sup> This study examines the success that MTW agencies had in meeting the statutory objectives to increase housing choice and encourage self-sufficiency (see Stacy et al., 2020, for an analysis of the cost-effectiveness objective).

HUD does not explicitly define those statutory objectives, and agencies may define them in their own ways (Government Accountability Office, 2018; GAO, 2012). Agencies are expected to experiment with policy reforms or housing assistance models that respond to local contexts and needs. Further, MTW agencies vary widely in terms of the year they received MTW designation, total households served, local housing market characteristics, the mix of housing assistance provided, the characteristics of assisted households, the context in which they received the MTW designation, and their goals.

Our review of agency MTW plans showed that as of 2015, three or more MTW PHAs included 20 distinct housing choice initiative types that were currently active and 14 distinct and active self-sufficiency initiative types (Treskon, Gerken, and Galvez, forthcoming). For housing choice, common initiatives were non-traditional programs (involving rental subsidy, housing development, or service provision); comprehensive, project-based voucher programs; expedited acquisition of public housing; housing mobility programs; local payment standards; and revised waitlist policies. For self-sufficiency, local non-traditional service provisions were, again, prevalent; so were policies changing how income was used to calculate rent, alternate Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) programs, minimum rent, and work requirements.

Given the wide variety of goals and initiatives across the MTW agencies, this study analyzes the effects of MTW on outcomes for two differently defined treatment groups: an “MTW status” group to measure the effect of MTW designation itself, and an “MTW activity-specific group” to measure the effect of activities directly related to self-sufficiency and choice. Our data come from a combination of longitudinal HUD administrative data and a unique database of publicly available MTW annual plans.

To reflect the diversity of potential effects from MTW status or initiatives, we posed seven research questions—three about housing choice and four about self-sufficiency:

- Do MTW agencies promote housing choice?
  1. Do MTW agencies create more housing opportunities relative to traditional agencies?
  2. To what extent are households served by MTW agencies reaching lower poverty, higher opportunity neighborhoods than households served by traditional agencies?

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<sup>1</sup> See Public Law Section 204 C(3) (A-E): <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-104publ134/pdf/PLAW-104publ134.pdf> (p. 283). Agencies participating in MTW are also required to have at least 75 percent of admitted families be very low income, create a rent policy encouraging self-sufficiency and employment, assist “substantially” the same number of low-income families and maintain a similar family mix as they would have otherwise, and ensure that housing meets quality standards determined by HUD.

3. To what extent are households served by MTW housing agencies living in higher quality public housing<sup>2</sup> dwellings relative to households in traditional agencies?
- Do MTW agencies promote self-sufficiency?
4. How do incomes of existing work-able households served by MTW agencies compare with those served by traditional agencies?
5. How does the use of escrow accounts as a tool for promoting self-sufficiency differ between MTW and traditional agencies?
6. Are existing work-able households in MTW agencies moving to minimal housing subsidy at greater rates than households at traditional agencies?
7. Are existing work-able households in MTW agencies making positive exits from housing assistance at greater rates than households at traditional agencies?

After providing an overview of the literature on housing choice and self-sufficiency, this report presents the study goals, methods, and findings related to MTW activities and outcomes of interest, followed by a discussion and conclusions. This article provides an overview of a longer report, “Housing Choice and Self-Sufficiency Outcomes at Moving to Work Agencies” (Treskon, Gerken, and Galvez, forthcoming), which discusses the methodology and findings in more detail and includes results from an analysis of the outcomes of individual MTW agencies.

## **Literature Review**

This section situates the present study in the context of the existing work on how MTW agencies approach the housing choice and self-sufficiency statutory requirements.

### **Housing Choice**

With one exception, studies of MTW and housing choice are primarily descriptive. Those studies show that most MTW agencies have pursued the housing choice objective but with wide variation in how housing choice is defined and what the efforts entail (Buron et al., 2017; Galvez et al., forthcoming; Galvez, Gourevitch, and Docter, forthcoming; Galvez, Simington, and Treskon, 2017; Khadduri et al., 2014; Oppenheimer, Haberle, and Tegeler, 2013; and Webb, Frescoln, and Rohe, 2015). One study that went beyond a descriptive approach assessed the effect of MTW on housing choice and found that MTW agencies generally performed better than comparable PHAs in their public housing and affordable housing programs—as measured by Real Estate Assessment Center (REAC) physical inspection scores and number of rental units preserved—but had lower voucher utilization rates (Buron et al., 2017).

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<sup>2</sup> Using a measure of housing quality for the housing choice voucher (HCV) program was not feasible because of data limitations.

## What is “Housing Choice”?

HUD does not define what *housing choice* is, so MTW agencies and researchers have defined it in a wide variety of ways. In a study of MTW innovations, Khadduri et al. (2014) identified three types of initiatives relevant to housing choice: increasing the quantity and quality of affordable housing, promoting residential stability, and improving geographical choice. They described several categories of activities within each initiative, which informed the performance measure outcomes examined separately by Buron et al. (2017). Buron et al. (2017), in turn, found that MTW agencies have lower voucher utilization rates, higher public housing physical inspection scores, a smaller share of public housing units with unmet capital needs, and a higher share of project-based units. MTW agencies have found success in areas that cannot be compared well to traditional agencies, such as the use by MTW agencies of local, non-traditional assistance to stabilize hard-to-serve populations.

In one of the first comprehensive efforts to describe MTW activities related to statutory objectives, Webb, Frescoln, and Rohe (2015) found diverse categories of the efforts that MTW agencies made to increase housing choice: broadening supportive housing options, improving access to high-opportunity neighborhoods, administering assistance to households at risk of foreclosure, project-basing units, improving access to housing, using landlord outreach, and promoting homeownership programs.

Galvez, Simington, and Treskon (2017) examined the 2015 annual plans for all 39 MTW agencies. The researchers identified 187 ongoing activities from 37 MTW agencies that indicated increasing housing choice as an objective—with 45 of those activities (from 24 agencies) related to neighborhood mobility. Those activities included some that restricted moves (by limiting the ability of households to move to a different PHA jurisdiction), and some activities intended to encourage moves to low-poverty areas. In their investigation of the extent to which MTW agencies promoted neighborhood mobility, Oppenheimer, Haberle, and Tegeler (2013) found that some MTW agencies defined neighborhood mobility to include self-sufficiency efforts that could indirectly affect movement to new neighborhoods through economic mobility and redevelopment of assisted housing in high-poverty areas that might improve housing quality but could also reinforce existing residential segregation.

## Measuring MTW Housing Choice Outcomes

Buron et al. (2017) developed performance measures to assess agency-level outcomes for MTW agencies in 2014 compared with those of a subset of traditional PHAs. They created five measures of housing choice, defined as increasing the quantity and quality of affordable housing: voucher utilization and public housing occupancy; public housing physical inspection scores; unmet public housing capital needs; the amount of affordable housing preserved; and the amount of local, non-traditional assistance that MTW agencies provide.<sup>3</sup> Those researchers also looked at measures of neighborhood mobility, including portability, project-basing of voucher assistance, and census tract poverty rates. Looking at data for one point in time, using fiscal years 2013 and 2014 Voucher

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<sup>3</sup> As described in PIH Notice 2011-45, MTW agencies can implement local, non-traditional activities that fall outside the HCV and public housing programs, provided those activities target low-income households and meet one of the three MTW statutory objectives.

Management System reports and 2014 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, they found mixed results.

Specifically, in relation to comparison PHAs, Buron et al. (2017) found that MTW agencies had lower average voucher utilization rates but comparable outcomes for some measures (public housing occupancy rates) and better outcomes on others (physical inspection scores, public housing units with unmet capital needs, and the number of units preserved). They also assessed how well MTW agencies expanded the geographic scope of assisted housing, considering portability, project-basing of units, and neighborhood poverty rates. They found that MTW agencies, with respect to comparison PHAs, ported out a smaller share of vouchers, had a higher share of project-based units, and had comparable neighborhood poverty rates for voucher holders.

Two studies that compared MTW agencies to comparably sized traditional PHAs found that location patterns for MTW-assisted households resembled those of households assisted by traditional PHAs. MTW-assisted households lived in neighborhoods with an average poverty rate that was almost identical to that of households served through comparably sized traditional agencies. Results were consistent across the tenant-based voucher (TBV), project-based voucher (PBV), and public housing programs (Galvez, Gourevitch, and Docter, forthcoming; Galvez et al., forthcoming).<sup>4</sup> Galvez et al. (forthcoming) compared PBV location outcomes using measures adjusting for regional differences and found that, relative to the average neighborhood in their jurisdictions (approximated as primary counties), MTW-assisted PBV units were in neighborhoods with a greater concentration of poverty than were PBV units at traditional PHAs, although the difference was not statistically significant.

Finally, Galvez, Gourevitch, and Docter (forthcoming) found that MTW agencies added relatively more households between 2008 and 2016 compared with traditional agencies, whose assistance remained fairly flat over the same time period. The rigorous study of cost effectiveness in the MTW retrospective evaluation also found that MTW agencies added relatively more households than did comparable traditional PHAs (Stacy et al., 2020). Both studies also documented increased funding for MTW agencies relative to traditional agencies.

## **Self-Sufficiency**

Six published studies explored MTW efforts to encourage self-sufficiency (Buron et al., 2017; Castells, 2020; Khadduri et al., 2014; McClure, 2017; Rohe, Webb, and Frescoln, 2015; and Webb, Frescoln, and Rohe, 2015). Four of those studies assessed MTW agencies as a group, whereas Rohe, Webb, and Frescoln (2015) and Castells (2020) evaluated the effects of self-sufficiency-related efforts at individual MTW agencies. The studies measured self-sufficiency primarily in terms of MTW agency efforts to increase employment and income over time and to transition households off housing assistance, such as through case management and self-sufficiency programming, escrow accounts, and time limits. The studies considering MTW agencies as a group found that the

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<sup>4</sup> An abundance of literature documents the locations of PBV-assisted units—particularly in relation to the Housing Choice Voucher program—but those studies do not break out MTW agencies specifically to determine if MTW agencies have improved location outcomes. See, for example, national and state housing data fact sheets and similar ongoing analysis by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (<http://www.cbpp.org/research/national-and-state-housing-data-fact-sheets>), Devine et al. (2003), and McClure, Schwartz, and Taghavi (2015).

earnings of households were more likely to increase at MTW agencies than at comparable agencies and found conflicting evidence on length of stay. A study of the Charlotte Housing Authority found a higher likelihood of employment for public housing residents with a work requirement and case management and self-sufficiency programming, compared with residents at the PHA not subject to the work requirement (Rohe, Webb, and Frescoln, 2015). A study of the Santa Clara County Housing Authority found its rent reform program had no significant effects on the relationship between increased rent and employment and earnings (Castells, 2020).

### **Defining Self-Sufficiency**

As with housing choice, Webb, Frescoln, and Rohe (2015) categorized activities found in MTW annual reports that sought to promote self-sufficiency. They found that self-sufficiency efforts at MTW agencies included case management and self-sufficiency programming (such as through Family Self-Sufficiency programs and similar models), escrow accounts and other incentives to promote work through work requirements, time limits on housing assistance, training and vocational programming, and initiatives to improve educational and health outcomes.

Khadduri et al. (2014) defined self-sufficiency as increased earnings of work-able assisted households and focused on initiatives supporting, incentivizing, or requiring work. As with the housing choice performance measures, analyses by Buron et al. (2017) built off the Khadduri et al. (2014) assessment to develop performance measures for agencywide outcomes related to self-sufficiency for MTW agencies in 2014. Buron et al. (2017) identified three measures of increasing self-sufficiency: earnings growth among nonelderly and nondisabled households,<sup>5</sup> the share of households without reported earnings, and the length of stay in assisted housing.

### **Measuring MTW Self-Sufficiency Outcomes**

An evaluation of the effort by the Charlotte Housing Authority to promote self-sufficiency by requiring public housing residents to work and offering them case management and supportive services found that those subject to the work requirement were more likely to be employed. Case management alone, when not coupled with work requirements, did not have any statistically significant effect on employment. The authors did not find evidence that work requirements led to more evictions or other types of negative move-outs (Rohe, Webb, and Frescoln, 2015).

Buron et al. (2017) found that household earnings at MTW agencies were more likely to increase than were household earnings at comparable agencies and had a smaller share of households with no earnings than did comparable agencies. They also found that HCV households, on average, had a shorter length of stay at MTW agencies than at comparison agencies. MTW agencies, however, also had a higher share of households with decreasing earnings than at comparison agencies.

Length of stay is one measure of self-sufficiency that considers how long households use housing assistance. McClure (2017) examined the length of time that cohorts of assisted households stay in assisted housing across several categories of housing assistance using household dates of admission and exit. He found that the average length of stay had increased over time for all programs, including HCV-assisted households at MTW agencies. When calculating the average and median

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<sup>5</sup> All residents of working age not identified as elderly or disabled were defined as work-able.

lengths of stay by admission year, he found, in contrast to Buron et al. (2017), that HCV-assisted households at MTW agencies had a higher average and median length of stay than did both HCV-assisted and public housing households at traditional agencies.

Castells (2020) assessed the effects of the Santa Clara County Housing Authority rent reform initiative that increased the percentage of income that tenants paid toward rent. Specifically, Santa Clara increased the rent contribution required of tenants from 30 percent of adjusted income to 35 percent of gross income in September 2013 and then decreased that percentage of gross income from 35 percent to 32 percent in September 2014. The rent increase did not affect average employment and earnings of work-able HCV households in the 4 years following the rent reform. HCV households increased their employment and earnings on average during that time, but that increase was similar to the increase that households from surrounding comparison communities saw who were not subject to rent reform. The study found that a subset of families who were affected by a changed bedroom standard in addition to rent reform may have reduced their earnings, suggesting families affected by both policy changes may have decreased their level of employment.

## **Goals of the Present Study**

Although existing studies of the activities intended to promote housing choice and self-sufficiency among MTW agencies have documented a broad range of definitions for those objectives and of activities intended to achieve them, only one study to date, Buron et al. (2017), has attempted to assess the effect of the MTW demonstration on housing choice and self-sufficiency outcomes among MTW agencies as a group. Although two impact studies have examined specific MTW initiatives (Castells, 2020; Rohe, Webb, and Frescoln, 2015), much is still unknown about the overall effects that MTW has had in helping PHAs meet their statutory objectives.

This study builds on previous work by systematically examining both the diversity of ways in which housing choice and self-sufficiency could be understood and measured and by analyzing the effects of MTW in two ways: through MTW status and through MTW-specific activities. The root question of this study is, are MTW agencies more effective at increasing housing choice and self-sufficiency than comparable traditional PHAs?

## **Methods**

Our analysis examines the effect of MTW by considering whether posttreatment outcomes for groups of MTW agencies diverge in a statistically significant manner from those of matched comparison groups of traditional agencies. We use comparative interrupted time series (CITS) analysis, which is a type of multivariate regression that uses longitudinal data to compare changes over time in an outcome measure for a group that experienced a treatment to changes for a matched comparison group that did not receive the treatment.<sup>6</sup> CITS tests for a change in differences in an outcome between two groups at two points in time (level differences), and it tests for differences in trends during two time periods (slope or trend differences). CITS relies on multiple years of pre- and posttreatment data. Pretreatment data provide a baseline for analysis

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<sup>6</sup> See Bloom (2001), Bloom et al. (2005), Linden (2015), Somers et al. (2013), and St. Clair, Cook, and Hallberg (2014) for examples of CITS analysis and methodological discussion.

and for identifying a comparison group. Posttreatment data identify any significant divergence in outcomes between the treatment and comparison groups.

## **Treatment**

Given the substantial diversity in how MTW agencies interpret and approach the statutory objectives, we selected the MTW groups for analysis in two different ways. First, we selected one group of MTW agencies on the basis of when they received the MTW designation. Second, we identified groups of MTW agencies on the basis of their engagement in broadly defined efforts to increase housing choice or to encourage self-sufficiency. In separate analysis steps, each type of MTW agency group is compared with a matched group of traditional PHAs for a set of seven research questions.

## **Timeframe**

Our analysis timeframe is broken into three periods: one pretreatment period and two posttreatment periods. The time up to 2009 is the pretreatment period, 2010–2012 is the initial posttreatment period, and 2013–2016 is the second posttreatment period. Those periods were chosen in part due to data and analysis issues. We had access to data through 2016, so working backward to obtain at least 3 years of data for each posttreatment analysis period resulted in the 2013–2016 and 2010–2012 period definitions. The pretreatment periods also vary depending on data quality and availability. For agencies that joined MTW in 2008 or later, Public and Indian Housing (PIH) Information Center (PIC) data are reliable back to at least 2001; however, agencies that joined MTW before 2008 had limited reporting requirements before that year (Galvez, Gourevitch, and Docter, forthcoming),<sup>7</sup> so the exact pretreatment period analyzed depends on the MTW agencies we included in a given analysis group.

Posttreatment Period 1 (2010–2012) reflects an initial posttreatment period when effects may begin to emerge following the date that MTW-status group agencies first joined the program (from 2008 to 2011) or the MTW activity-specific groups first enacted relevant activities (from 2009 to 2012). In the CITS analysis, we measured changes and differences in outcome levels and trends. The level difference compares the change from 2009 (the last pretreatment year) to 2010 for the MTW group to that of the comparison group. The trend difference compares the 2010–2012 trend for the MTW group with that of the comparison group.

Posttreatment Period 2 (2013–2016) reflects the period when MTW-status group agencies had MTW status for at least 1 year, and activities started by agencies in the MTW activity-specific groups had all been implemented for at least 1 year. In the CITS analysis, the level difference compares the change from 2012 (the last year of the initial implementation treatment period) to 2013 for the MTW group with the change for the comparison group. The trend difference compares the 2013–2016 trend for the MTW group versus the comparison group.

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<sup>7</sup> Although MTW agency data are generally poor before 2008 (when reporting requirements changed for MTW agencies), we assessed data coverage and quality for 2007 for the agencies in our MTW activity-specific group and found them to be reliable for that year.

## Sampling

The goal of sampling was to create a group of MTW agencies chosen solely for having received MTW designation and groups composed of MTW agencies engaged in activities expected to affect selected indicators of housing choice and self-sufficiency. The MTW-status group includes the nine MTW agencies that signed an MTW agreement between 2008 and 2011.<sup>8</sup> MTW agencies in that study may belong to one or more groups (see exhibit 1).

## MTW Activity-Specific Groups

To identify MTW agency activities expected to affect our selected indicators of housing choice and self-sufficiency, we reviewed the MTW evaluation database and MTW plans and reports. The review identified 143 activities implemented between 2009 and 2012 related to either housing choice or self-sufficiency and active as of 2015, and we determined that 42 activities were likely to affect assisted households agencywide and across housing programs. Through that review, we identified for analysis 15 MTW agencies that undertook significant housing choice activities and 18 MTW agencies that undertook significant self-sufficiency activities. Agencies may be in multiple groups (exhibit 1).

### Exhibit 1

Moving to Work Agencies by Analysis Group (1 of 2)

PHA	State	MTW Status	MTW Activity-specific: New Housing Choice, 2009-2012			MTW Activity-specific: New Self-Sufficiency, 2009-2012		
			New Household Share	Poverty	Quality	Income Increasing	Escrow	HAP
Alaska	AK	✓	✓					
Oakland	CA		✓					✓
San Mateo	CA		✓		✓			✓
San Bernardino	CA	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
Tulare	CA		✓			✓		✓
Santa Clara/ San Jose	CA	✓	✓			✓		✓
San Diego	CA		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Boulder	CO	✓						
Orlando	FL	✓				✓		✓
Chicago	IL					✓		✓
Champaign	IL	✓					✓	✓
Louisville	KY					✓		✓

<sup>8</sup> We exclude one agency (Baltimore) from the MTW-status group due to data quality issues and its early participation in MTW as part of the Jobs Plus program. Restricting our MTW-status sample to those agencies also coincides with the implementation of MTW standard agreements in 2008, which standardized reporting requirements; before that implementation, reporting consistency and completeness varied for agencies already participating in MTW.

**Exhibit 1**

Moving to Work Agencies by Analysis Group (2 of 2)

PHA	State	MTW Status	MTW Activity-specific: New Housing Choice, 2009-2012			MTW Activity-specific: New Self-Sufficiency, 2009-2012		
			New Household Share	Poverty	Quality	Income Increasing	Escrow	HAP
Lexington	KY	✓						
Massachusetts	MA					✓		✓
Minneapolis	MN					✓		✓
Charlotte	NC	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lincoln	NE			✓				
Portage	OH		✓			✓		✓
Portland	OR		✓	✓				
Pittsburgh	PA					✓	✓	✓
San Antonio	TX		✓					
King County	WA			✓		✓		✓
Tacoma	WA	✓	✓			✓		✓
Vancouver	WA		✓			✓		✓

MTW = Moving to Work; HAP = housing assistance payments; PHA = public housing agencies

Notes: Although initially selected for MTW in 1999, we include Charlotte in the MTW Status Group because it did not sign an MTW agreement until December 2007 and has been actively in MTW for a similar length of time as others in this group. Jurisdiction names are used for MTW agencies; official agency names may be different. The housing authority of Portland and Multnomah Count, OR, for example, is named Home Forward.

Source: Analysis by the authors of activities related to statutory objectives identified through MTW agency annual plans

**Comparison Groups**

For each MTW agency group, we identified a separate comparison group. We began by limiting our comparison group selection to traditional PHAs with more than 500 households to exclude small PHAs (which differ from the MTW agencies).<sup>9</sup> To ensure that comparison groups are similar in ways appropriate for CITS analysis, we selected agencies whose pretreatment levels and trends for each outcome measure of interest closely resembled those of the average MTW group. We used a Stata protocol that selects a matched comparison group on the basis of pretreatment levels and trends, discussed in more detail in Treskon, Gerken, and Galvez (forthcoming).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Galvez, Gourevitch, and Docter (forthcoming) document that MTW agencies tend to be larger than traditional comparison PHAs and that larger PHAs tend to more closely resemble MTW agencies than smaller traditional agencies in terms of program mix and local housing market characteristics.

<sup>10</sup> We use the Stata protocol “itsamatch.”

## **Data**

This study uses five data sources:

### **HUD Public and Indian Housing (PIH) Information Center (PIC) data**

PHA staff regularly report detailed information on every assisted household to HUD through the PIC data system using forms HUD-50058 and HUD-50058 MTW.<sup>11</sup> We used household-level PIC data for MTW agencies and traditional PHAs for 2001 through 2016 to identify total household counts and shares of households in each assistance program (HCV and public housing) and to identify household characteristics and locations. Unique household identifiers allowed us to track movement across assistance programs, exits from assistance over time, and movement across census tracts over time. Data for MTW agencies are not available before 2007 (see Treskon, Gerken, and Galvez, forthcoming, for further discussion).<sup>12</sup>

### **PHA Performance Measure Indicators**

We use Physical Assessment Subsystem (PASS) scores as indicators of public housing agency performance for analysis of housing quality and standards. PASS scores only apply to the public housing stock in a PHA and are determined by an inspection satisfying the HUD Uniform Physical Condition Standards. A PHA can receive a maximum PASS score of 40 points. The PASS score is one component of a larger Public Housing Assessment System, or PHAS score, which HUD uses to assess how well PHAs manage their public housing programs.

### **Supplemental HUD-Assisted Unit Counts**

The HUD Moving to Work office provided data on the number of households assisted through MTW local, non-traditional housing assistance programs. Those units are not included in PIC data and are added to the total household counts for each MTW agency.

### **Decennial Census and American Community Survey (ACS)**

We used publicly available tract-level census data to assign poverty rates to the census tract location for each household to identify the number and percentage of assisted households living in lower-poverty neighborhoods. We used 2011–2015 ACS 5-year estimates to identify tract poverty rates.

### **Database of MTW Activities**

For the MTW retrospective evaluation, we created an agency-level database of MTW activities and flexibilities based on information reported in the 2015 and previous MTW annual plans and reports. The MTW plans and reports include information on all MTW activities implemented, such as activity name, activity status, year proposed, implementation year, the authorization(s) involved, activity description, and the statutory objectives that the activity addresses. We use

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<sup>11</sup> Form HUD-50058 for traditional agencies can be found here: <https://www.hud.gov/sites/documents/50058.PDF>. Form HUD-50058 MTW can be found here: [https://www.hud.gov/sites/documents/DOC\\_10236.PDF](https://www.hud.gov/sites/documents/DOC_10236.PDF).

<sup>12</sup> MTW agencies did not consistently report household information into HUD's PIC system before 2007 (for some, 2008), resulting in significant gaps in the administrative data available for agencies that received MTW designation in the first 10 years of the demonstration.

this information to identify significant housing choice and self-sufficiency activities implemented between 2009 and 2012.

## Variables

We examine seven main outcome variables of interest—three related to housing choice and four related to self-sufficiency (exhibit 2).

### Exhibit 2

Outcome Variables			
	Outcome Variable	Data Source	Outcome Definition
Housing Choice	Newly admitted households as a share of all households	PIC: all program types	Share of households with 50058 Field 2a action codes 1, 4, or 14 <sup>13</sup>
	Share of tenant-based voucher households in low-poverty census tracts	PIC: tenant-based vouchers	Percentage of tenant-based voucher households in census tracts with poverty rates no higher than 10 percent
	Physical Assessment Subsystem (PASS) scores	PIC/ REAC: public housing and multifamily assisted	Average PASS score per agency per year
Self-Sufficiency	Share of existing work-able households with rising income over time (annualized rate of change)	PIC	Percentage of existing work-able households in a given year with total annual incomes higher than at their year of entry into housing assistance (in 2016 dollars—adjusted for inflation). Includes only households assisted at the point of designation of the PHA as MTW.
	Percentage of work-able households reported to have an escrow account	PIC	Percentage of existing work-able households with a non-zero FSS program escrow account balance. Includes only households assisted at the point of designation of the PHA as MTW.
	Share of existing work-able households with housing assistance payment (HAP) less than \$50	PIC	Percentage of existing work-able households with a HAP less than \$50. Includes only households assisted at the point of designation of the PHA as MTW.
	Share of existing work-able households leaving PHA in year after attaining minimal HAP	PIC	Percentage of work-able households who reach a HAP less than \$50 and who exit in the following year (exit defined as having exit code or household missing in subsequent year). Includes only households assisted at the point of designation of the PHA as MTW.

*FSS = Family Self-Sufficiency. HAP = Housing Assistance Payment. MTW = Moving to Work. PASS = Physical Assessment Subsystem. PHA = public housing agency. PIC = PIH Information Center. PIH= Public and Indian Housing. REAC = Real Estate Assessment Center.*

*Note: "Existing" households are households that are not new entrants to housing assistance in a given year.*

### Housing Choice Variables

The housing choice measures used reflect three approaches to interpret the objective, including increasing the number of households served, expanding access to low-poverty neighborhoods, and improving the quality of public housing. PHAs may view expanding housing availability and the number of low-income households served as expanding housing choice. Housing choice also may

<sup>13</sup> We used annual extracts of PIC data. Households completing an interim recertification in their first year of housing assistance may not be counted as new because the record in our extracts would have an action code that would identify them as an existing household rather than a new household.

be interpreted as expanding the range of neighborhood locations that are accessible to low-income households—particularly low-poverty neighborhoods. Finally, agencies may define expanding choice as improving the quality of public housing units.

We identify newly admitted households as the share of all households served by an MTW agency that had an action code in PIC data (Form HUD-50058, Field 2a) associated with a new admission.<sup>14</sup> We focus on new admissions as an indicator of the ability of agencies to expand the pool of households they serve over time. Agencies with a higher share of their total assistance going to newly admitted households are arguably expanding opportunities for low-income households to benefit from housing assistance.

To examine the share of tenant-based voucher households in low-poverty census tracts, we define low-poverty neighborhoods as census tracts with poverty rates below 10 percent. That threshold is commonly used to approximate neighborhood quality in the neighborhood effects and assisted housing location literature (Galvez, 2010). The relationships between poverty rates and health and economic outcomes are well documented, and census tract poverty rates are commonly relied on as a proxy for overall neighborhood quality—particularly at very low and very high levels (Galster, 2012).

We measure public housing quality using PHA average PASS scores, which are based on physical inspections to determine if public housing units are decent, safe, sanitary, and in good repair. PASS scores use a 40-point scale. Inspections are conducted in accordance with the HUD Uniform Physical Condition Standards, or UPCS, on a sample of units within a given development; scores are rolled into a composite PHA-level score.

### **Self-Sufficiency Variables**

The self-sufficiency measures in this study are limited to work-able households and include the share with increasing incomes, the share with a Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program escrow account,<sup>15</sup> the share with housing assistance payment less than \$50, and the share of those households who leave PHA assistance. Those measures reflect common goals for the self-sufficiency of assisted households. PHAs may encourage self-sufficiency by promoting work and through increases in wage income. They may also promote household savings, incentivize employment, and prepare households for independence through FSS programs.

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<sup>14</sup> We consider a household as having entered PHA assistance in a year if they have an action code that denotes a new admission (action code 1), a portability move-in (action code 4), or (in cases where no entry code exists for a household) a historical readjustment (action code 14). We consider cases in which the household's first appearance in the dataset does not have an action code associated with an entry to be newly assisted in that year.

<sup>15</sup> Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) programs are designed to enable assisted families to increase earned income and reduce dependency on welfare and housing assistance. These programs include an interest-bearing escrow account established by the PHA for each participating family. If participating households increase their income through wages, the resulting additional rent payments due to the PHA are instead credited to the family's escrow account, which is available to the family upon graduation from the FSS program. HUD staff noted that households in agencies participating in Jobs Plus may opt out of FSS escrow accounts to make use of the Jobs Plus Earned Income Disregard. Although we did not formally verify that assertion, Charlotte, an MTW agency that participates in Jobs Plus, had increases in escrow utilization during the analysis period.

To measure the potential effects of MTW status or activities on resident incomes, we measured the percentage of existing work-able households in a given year with total annual incomes higher than at their year of entry into housing assistance (in 2016 dollars—adjusted for inflation).

To measure the extent to which households are participating in Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) programming, we measured the percentage of existing work-able households with a non-zero FSS program escrow account balance. That indicator measures the effect of MTW status or activities on FSS participation rather than longer-term effects of FSS participation.

We inferred positive exits from housing assistance from two indicators. First, we considered the share of existing work-able households who approach minimal HAP to determine whether existing work-able households at MTW agencies are moving to minimal housing subsidy at greater rates than households at traditional agencies. We define *minimal* as a HAP of less than \$50, based on our analysis of HAP amounts for assisted households as reported in PIC. We identify exits as cases where there is no recertification record for at least 1 year after attaining minimal HAP; that is, for our purposes, if a household reaches minimal HAP and does not have another record in PIC for at least 1 year, we count that household as having exited.<sup>16</sup>

## Analysis

CITS analysis is designed to measure divergence between a treatment group and comparison group after the introduction of an intervention. To be valid, CITS requires both groups to have similar pretreatment levels and trends. Because we have two posttreatment periods of analysis, group averages could diverge in four ways:

- **The first posttreatment period (2010–2012):**
  - The 2009–2010 1-year level change.
  - The 2010–2012 trend.
- **The second posttreatment period (2013–2016):**
  - The 2012–2013 1-year level change.
  - The 2013–2016 trend.

Below, we present topline findings for the seven indicators of interest and include comparative graphs for three: the share of households that are new, the share of households in low-poverty tracts, and the share of existing work-able households with total annual incomes higher than they were at entry. For more detailed findings on all indicators (including regression tables) and details on the analysis approach used for this research, see Treskon, Gerken, and Galvez, forthcoming.

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<sup>16</sup> We defined exits in that way to account for how MTW agencies can use their MTW flexibilities to use biennial or triennial recertifications instead of annual recertifications. Based on internal analysis, MTW agencies that have revised their recertification schedules for work-able households have moved to a biennial calendar. Our approach may overestimate positive exits for households at MTW agencies who were not recertified within a 2-year window.

## Results

### Identification of Activities

Our review of MTW plans identified a range of activities that had the potential to lead to significant effects on housing choice or self-sufficiency indicators. Exhibits 3 and 4 indicate the specific activities used to identify the housing choice and self-sufficiency groups, respectively.

We identified 17 MTW agencies implementing one or more activities related to housing choice and potentially producing measurable effects (we excluded two of these agencies, Lexington and Minneapolis, from our final analysis due to data limitations).

#### Exhibit 3

##### Housing Choice Initiatives Used To Select Activity-Specific Groups

PHA	Activity Name
Alaska	Simplification of Utility Allowance Schedules (2011) HCV Maximum Family Contribution at Lease Up Raised to 50 Percent (2012)
Charlotte	Increase of Acquisition and Rehabilitation of Existing Multifamily Properties (2009-7) Land Acquisition for Future Use (2009-8) Community-Based Rental Assistance (2009-4)
King County	Community Choice Program (2012)*
Lexington**	HCV Tenant-Based Special Partners Programs (2012)
Lincoln	RentWise Tenant Education (2012)
Minneapolis**	Section 8 HCV Mobility Voucher Program (2010/2009-6)
Oakland	Elimination of Caps on PBV Allocations (2012)
Portage	Maximum Rent (2009)*
Portland	Measures to Improve the Rate of Voucher Holder Lease Up (2010)
San Antonio	Preservation and Expansion of Affordable Housing (2011)
San Bernardino	Local PBV Program (2010) Local Payment Standards (2012)
San Diego	Acquisition of affordable units (2010) Development of public housing units using combination of funds (2010) Choice Communities Component (2010)
San Mateo	MTW Funds for Leveraging Additional Affordable Housing (2012)
Santa Clara/ San Jose	Creation of Affordable Housing Acquisition and Development Fund (2012-3); Creation of Affordable Housing Preservation Fund for HACSC and Affiliate-Owned Properties (2012-4)
Tacoma	Creation and Preservation of Affordable Housing (2012)
Tulare	Development of Additional Affordable Housing (2009)
Vancouver	Renter Education Required for Applicants (2009)* Simplified Utility Allowance Schedule in HCV (2009)*

\* Indicates initiative potentially affecting both housing choice and self-sufficiency.

\*\* Not included in our final housing choice activity-specific analysis group due to data limitations.

HACSC = Housing Authority of the County of Santa Clara; HCV = housing choice voucher; MTW = Moving to Work; PBV = project-based voucher; PHA = public housing agency

In our review of 2015 (and previous) annual plans, we identified 18 MTW agencies implementing one or more activities related to self-sufficiency and potentially producing measurable effects.

**Exhibit 4**

Self-Sufficiency Initiatives Used To Select Activity-Specific Groups	
PHA	Initiative Name
Champaign County	Mandatory Local Family Self-Sufficiency Program (2011) Tiered Flat Rents and Minimum Rents by Bedroom Size (2011)
Charlotte	Rent Reform and Work Requirement (2010)
Chicago	Public Housing Work Requirement (2009-2)
King County	Community Choice Program (2012)*
Louisville	Mandatory Case Management (2010)
Massachusetts	Rent Simplification (2012)
Minneapolis	Public Housing Works Family Incentive (2011/2010-1)
Oakland	Program Extension for Households Receiving \$0 HAP (2010) \$225 Rent Floor for Nonelderly and Nondisabled Households (2012)
Orlando	Increase of Minimum Rent for Work-Able Households (2012)
Pittsburgh	Modified Rent Policy for Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program (2011)
Portage	Maximum Rent (2009)*
San Bernardino	Minimum Rent (2010); 5-Year Lease Assistance Program (2012)
San Diego	Adopt a Local Interim Certification Policy (2011)
San Mateo	Change Automatic Termination of HAP Contact from 180 to 90 Days (2012)
Santa Clara/San Jose	Expand Tenant Services at HACSC/Affiliate Properties (2012-5)
Tacoma	Local Policies for Work-Able Households (2012)
Tulare County	Encourage Self-Sufficiency/Transition Pre-1999 Families to MTW (2009)
Vancouver	Renter Education Required for Applicants (2009)* Simplified Utility Allowance Schedule in HCV (2009)*

*\* Indicates initiative potentially affecting both housing choice and self-sufficiency.  
HAP = housing assistance payment; HCV = housing choice voucher; HACSC = Housing Authority of the County of Santa Clara; MTW = Moving to Work*

## Comparative Interrupted Time Series Analysis

### Detailed Findings

#### Housing Choice

##### Do MTW Agencies Create More Housing Opportunities Relative to Traditional Agencies?

- **Outcome measure:** the share of MTW agency-assisted households that are new admissions into an assisted housing program

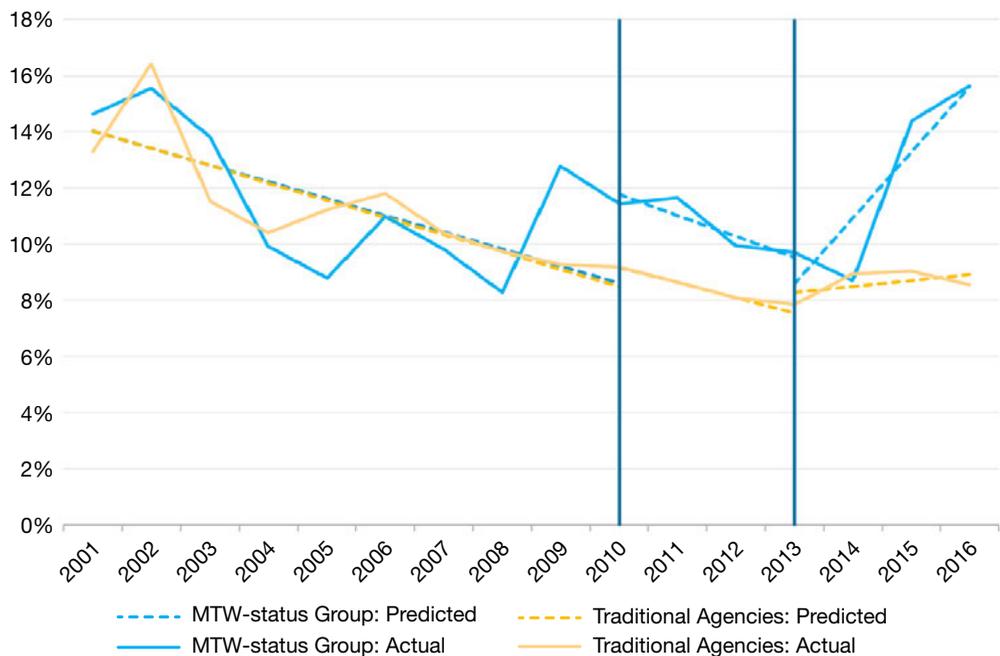
This measure is an indicator of the capacity of an agency to serve more households over time through either growth or increased turnover. Rather than count the new households served, we

examined the share of households that were new admissions each year—to control for the size of a PHA. MTW agencies have received additional funding relative to traditional agencies, so that can also be seen as an examination of the extent to which MTW agencies are using additional funding to assist additional households (see Galvez, Gourevitch, and Docter, forthcoming; Stacy et al., 2020).

During the pretreatment period and the initial posttreatment period (2010–2012), differences between the MTW-status group (N = 9) and the comparison group (N = 18) were small (see exhibit 5) and not statistically significant. During the 2013–2016 posttreatment period, however, the share of new households in MTW agencies increased from 10 percent to more than 15 percent (with most of the increase between 2014 and 2015), whereas the comparison group share did not increase. That divergence was statistically significant.

### Exhibit 5

Share of Households That Are New: MTW-Status Group and Comparison Group



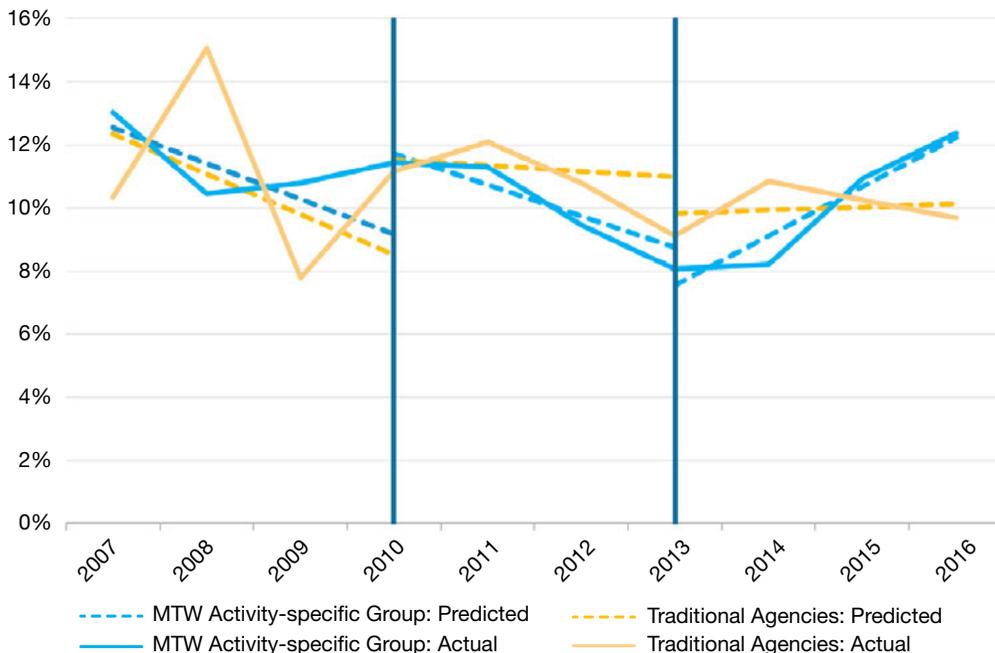
MTW = Moving to Work.

Source: Analysis of HUD Public and Indian Housing Information Center data

Results for the group of MTW agencies selected, based on their implementation of activities expected to increase the share of new households, are similar to findings for the MTW-status group (see exhibit 6). For that group, the share of new households grew from 8 percent to 12 percent between 2013 and 2016, whereas during that period, the average share of new households at the comparison group remained roughly stable at 10 percent.

**Exhibit 6**

Share of Households That Are New: MTW-Activity Group and Comparison Group



MTW = Moving to Work.

Source: Analysis of HUD Public and Indian Housing Information Center data

**To What Extent are Households Served by MTW Agencies Reaching Lower Poverty, Higher Opportunity Neighborhoods Than Households Served by Traditional Agencies?**

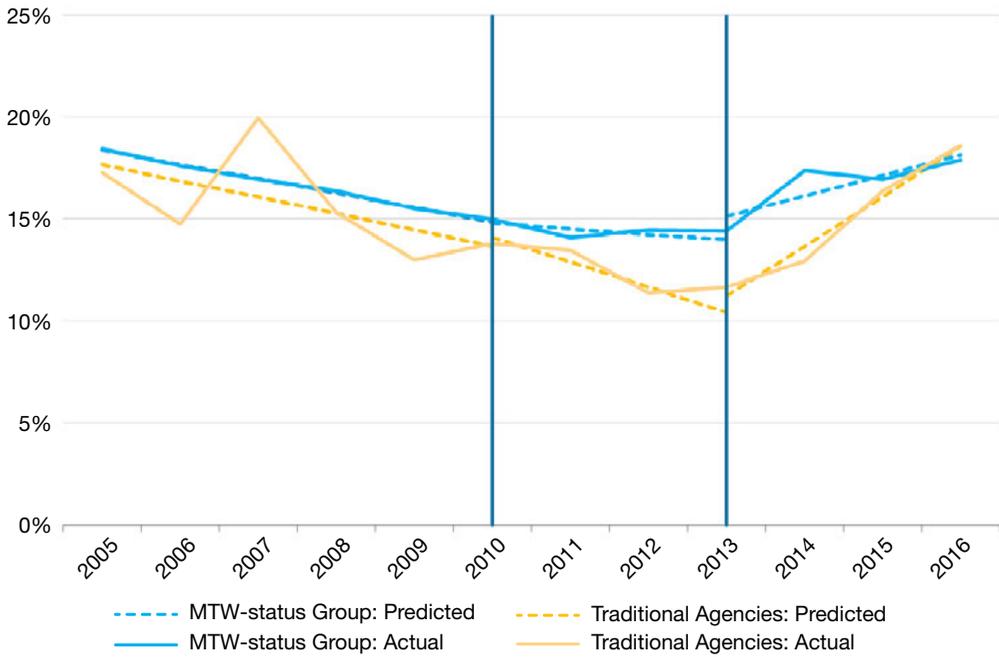
- **Outcome measure:** the share of tenant-based voucher households in low-poverty census tracts

For the MTW-status group (N=8; comparison group of 6 traditional agencies), the share of households in low-poverty census tracts dipped somewhat between 2005 and 2011 before increasing again through 2016 (see exhibit 7). The comparison group followed a similar pathway, dropping during the 2010–2013 period but increasing more quickly relative to the MTW group between 2013 and 2016. Those differences were not statistically significant.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Results of an outlier sensitivity analysis were consistent. Removing Boulder, Colorado, produced some significant results, but results from a secondary outlier sensitivity analysis (excluding Boulder and then removing remaining PHAs one at a time) resulted in no significant findings.

**Exhibit 7**

Share of Tenant-Based Voucher Households in Low-Poverty Tracts: MTW-Status Group and Comparison Group



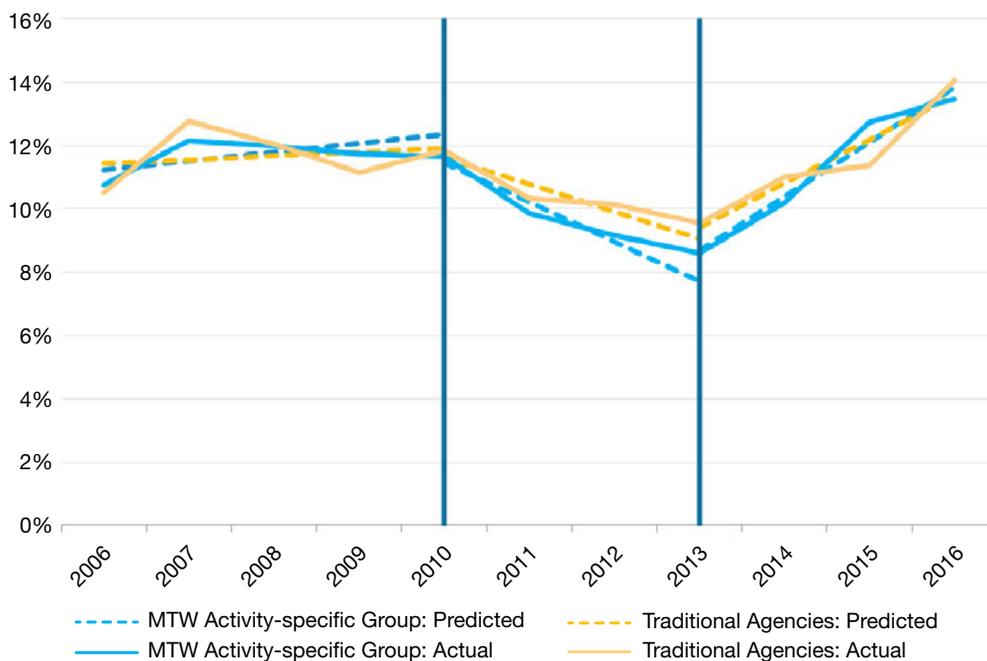
MTW = Moving to Work.

Source: Analysis of HUD Public and Indian Housing Information Center data

The MTW activity-specific group analysis (N=6; comparison group of 16 traditional agencies) showed no significant divergence in levels or trends from the comparison group during the study period (see exhibit 8).

**Exhibit 8**

Share of Tenant-Based Voucher Households in Low-Poverty Tracts: MTW Activity-Specific Group and Comparison Group



MTW = Moving to Work.  
 Source: Analysis of HUD Public and Indian Housing Information Center Data

**To What Extent are Households Served by MTW Housing Agencies Living in Higher Quality Public Housing Dwellings Relative to Households in Traditional Agencies?**

- **Outcome measure:** public housing physical assessment subsystem scores

We explored public housing PASS scores to understand the extent to which households served by MTW agencies are living in higher quality public housing dwellings relative to households at traditional agencies. Only three MTW agencies had implemented initiatives related to public housing quality, so we did the CITS analysis for the MTW-status group only. PASS scores for the MTW-status group and the comparison group generally remained aligned throughout the analysis period: steady at about 25 (out of a maximum of 40 points) before 2010, rising to about 34 from 2010 to 2013, and remaining between 32 and 34 from 2013 to 2016. The only statistically significant result was when the average PASS score for the MTW group increased from about 30 to 34 between 2012 and 2013, whereas the average for the comparison group remained unchanged. The substantive meaning of this result is minimal, however, because the average comparison group score had simply risen from 30 to 34 sooner (with most of the increase between 2010 and 2011).

## Self-Sufficiency

### How Do Incomes of Work-Able Households Served by MTW Agencies Compare With Those Served by Traditional Agencies?

- **Outcome measure:** the share of assisted existing work-able households that have total annual incomes higher than they were at housing assistance entry<sup>18</sup>

We measured whether households worked more after agencies joined MTW by identifying the share of work-able (nonelderly and nondisabled) households that have total annual incomes higher than they did in their first year of housing assistance (their year of admission recorded in PIC). Because MTW status could possibly be associated with changes in the overall composition of newly admitted households, we included only existing households in this analysis.

We dropped two agencies from our MTW-status group due to missing or anomalous income data.<sup>19</sup> Of the seven MTW agencies analyzed here (comparison group of 21 traditional agencies), the share of households with income greater than at housing assistance entry remained between 50 and 60 percent during the 2001–2009 pretreatment period for both the MTW-status group and the comparison group. Between 2010 and 2012, the two groups diverged somewhat: both saw a decrease in that measure between 2010 and 2011, but the drop was more pronounced and statistically significant for the MTW group (see exhibit 9).

After 2013, the share of households with incomes higher than their baseline year increased for both groups. That increase for the MTW group was larger than it was for the comparison group, and that difference was statistically significant. The increase allowed MTW agencies to regain the losses of the previous period and catch up to and converge with the level of the traditional public housing agencies (PHAs) by 2016.

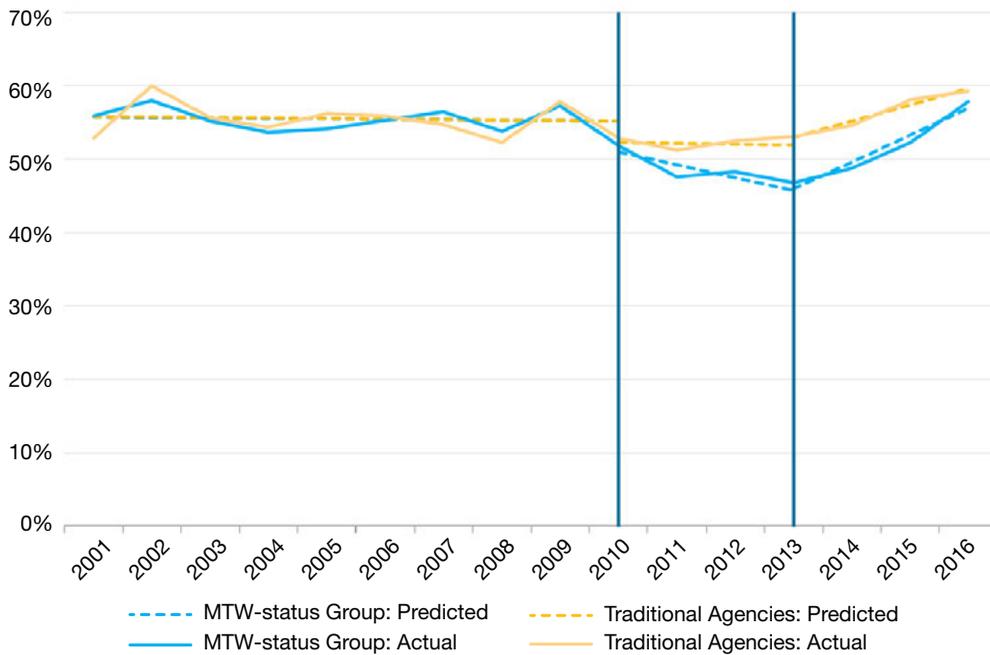
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<sup>18</sup> Households that exited in a given year are classified as an existing household for that year.

<sup>19</sup> We removed Champaign because of missing income data for some of the analysis period years, and we removed Charlotte because our outlier sensitivity analysis determined that an anomalous 1-year drop in 2011 (from 51 percent of households with incomes higher than at entry in 2010, to 35 percent in 2010, and back to 50 percent in 2012) skewed the group results.

**Exhibit 9**

Share of Existing Work-Able Households With Total Annual Incomes Higher Than at Housing Assistance Entry: MTW-Status Group and Comparison Group



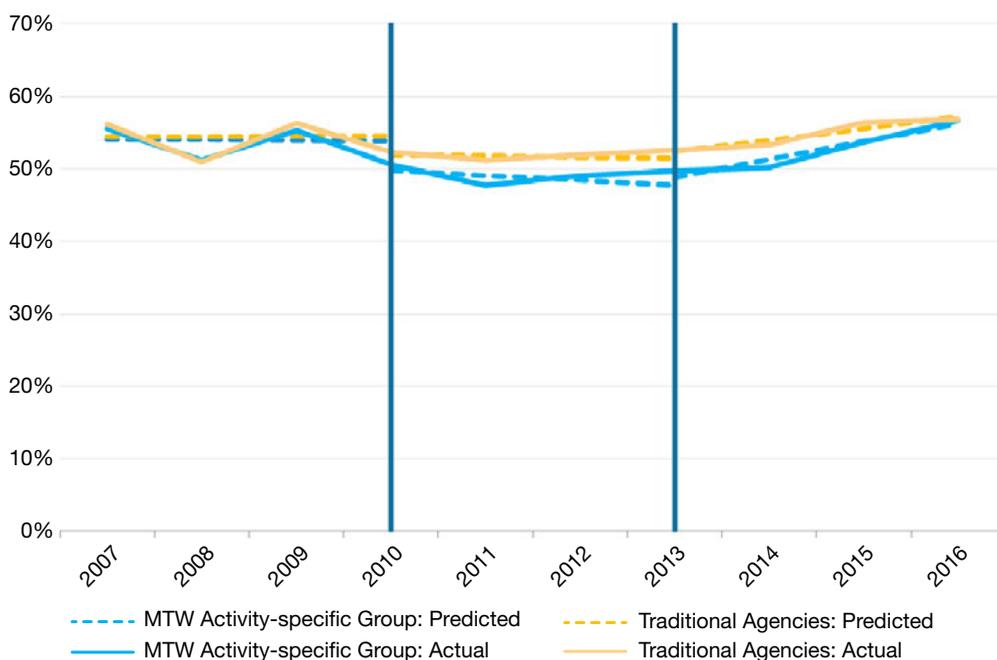
MTW = Moving to Work.  
 Source: Analysis of HUD Public and Indian Housing Information Center data

Our activity-specific group compared 14 MTW agencies to a group of 77 traditional agencies.<sup>20</sup> The only significant divergence was in the 2013–2016 trend, when the MTW group share increased relative to that of the comparison group; however, as with the MTW-status group, the result was that the MTW group “caught up” to the comparison group rather than overtaking it (see exhibit 10).

<sup>20</sup> We excluded Chicago from the analysis. An outlier sensitivity analysis found that the agency had a significant effect on the grouped results, leading the 2013–2016 trend findings to no longer be significant. A secondary sensitivity analysis found that after excluding Chicago, rerunning the grouped analyses by sequentially removing each of the remaining PHAs one at a time produced consistently significant and positive results.

## Exhibit 10

Share of Existing Work-Able Households With Total Annual Incomes Higher Than They Were at Housing Assistance Entry: MTW-Activity Group and Comparison Group



MTW = Moving to Work.

Source: Analysis of HUD Public and Indian Housing Information Center data

### How Does the Use of Escrow Accounts as a Tool for Promoting Self-Sufficiency Differ Between MTW and Traditional Agencies?

- **Outcome measure:** the share of existing work-able households with Family Self-Sufficiency program escrow accounts (a proxy for FSS program participation)

The share of existing work-able households with a positive FSS program escrow account balance—a proxy for FSS program participation—indicates whether the use of escrow accounts as a tool for promoting self-sufficiency differs between MTW and traditional agencies. Only three MTW agencies reported activities with the potential to influence escrow use during our study period, so we did CITS analysis only for the MTW-status group. We found no evidence that MTW agencies are more likely to use escrow accounts than traditional agencies. The one statistically significant divergence between the MTW group and the comparison group was that, between 2009 and 2010, the share of work-able households with escrow accounts remained steady for the MTW-status group but increased for the comparison group, which resulted in a statistically significant decrease for the MTW group relative to the comparison group. Subsequently, the share of work-able households with escrow accounts increased for both groups in the same way. Findings were robust to sensitivity analyses. The share of households with escrow accounts was small: for the

MTW-status group, it remained between roughly 2 and 5 percent, and for the comparison group, it remained between 2 and 7 percent. The share has varied over time, with peaks for both the MTW-status group and the comparison group in 2005 and again in 2016.

### **Are Existing Work-Able Households in MTW Agencies Moving to Minimal Housing Subsidy and Making Positive Exits From Housing Assistance at Greater Rates Than Households at Traditional Agencies?**

- **Outcome measures:** the share of existing work-able households who approached minimal HAP (less than \$50); the share of households who left assisted housing in the year after reaching minimal HAP

Starting with the MTW-status group and its comparison group, we found that the share of existing households at minimal HAP was small, generally remaining below 2 percent before 2010 for both groups. Between 2010 and 2016, the share increased to nearly 7 percent for the MTW-status group and nearly 3 percent for the comparison group, a difference that was not statistically significant. For the MTW activity-specific group, the share of existing households with minimal HAP also remained relatively small during the analysis period, exceeding 6 percent in 2008 and again in 2016. Many MTW agencies and traditional PHAs reported a 1-year spike in 2008, which may reflect a data reporting or quality issue for that year (see Galvez, Gourevitch, and Docter, forthcoming, for a discussion of data challenges). The share of existing households with minimal HAP increased between 2012 and 2013 for the MTW activity-specific group while staying stable for the comparison group; that difference was statistically significant. That result should be treated with caution for several reasons, however, because the difference between groups was quite small, and, for both groups, the total number of households included in this measure tended to be very small.

Our second measure for positive exits was the share of existing work-able households who left assisted housing in the year after reaching minimal HAP. Households in the MTW-status group were more likely to subsequently exit assistance than were similar households in the comparison group—but there was no significant divergence between the MTW group and its comparison group for the share of existing work-able households achieving minimal HAP in the first place. Households in the MTW activity-specific group saw statistically significant increases relative to households in comparison groups for both the share of households reaching minimal HAP and those subsequently exiting housing assistance. For both traditional and MTW agencies, however, households achieving minimal HAP represented a very small portion of their assisted populations (7 percent or less). That means that the measure of those with minimal HAP who left assistance must be interpreted cautiously, as it is based on few households and therefore is sensitive to year-over-year random variation.

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

The root question of this study is, are MTW agencies more effective at increasing housing choice and self-sufficiency than comparable traditional PHAs? Our findings indicate that for some measures (adding new households, increasing earnings, and positive exits from housing assistance), MTW agencies are undertaking activities that are helping them meet those goals.

Interestingly, the results tend to show up for both the MTW status group and the MTW activity-specific group, which indicates that MTW status itself may be a pathway to making progress on statutory objectives. Because this particular study focuses on MTW agencies as a group, it cannot tease out the exact pathways that individual agencies are taking, but it does indicate that future analyses should examine the suite of policies and programs that MTW agencies undertake and how the sum total of MTW activities may be driving outcomes.

## **Housing Choice**

Of the three main housing choice themes we studied—amount of housing, location of housing, and quality of housing—we found the greatest indication of an effect from MTW in the first. Between 2013 and 2016, newly assisted households represented a larger share of assisted households in MTW agencies compared with traditional PHAs. That outcome had the most consistent and substantive effects in our analyses and held for both the MTW-status group and the activity-specific group. Results are also consistent with the descriptive findings by Galvez, Gourevitch, and Docter (forthcoming) that the 39 MTW agencies added more new households to their assisted housing portfolios between 2008 and 2016, whereas the number added by traditional PHAs remained flat (Stacy et al., 2020, have similar findings). Given the increased funding that MTW agencies have received relative to traditional agencies, this is not entirely unexpected; however, it does indicate that at least some additional funding has been used to expand access to new households rather than being fully allocated to programming or other purposes.

We found no evidence that MTW agencies differed from traditional comparison agencies in the share of tenant-based voucher households in low-poverty census tracts. For both the MTW groups and the traditional agency groups, the share of households in low-poverty neighborhoods dropped between 2010 and 2012 before increasing between 2013 and 2016. Given the housing market recovery and economic expansion across the 2010–2016 period, that inflection merits closer attention.

We also found no substantially significant finding in terms of public housing quality as measured by PASS scores: the one statistically significant divergence seems to be more of a lagging trend between the trajectory of the MTW-status group and the comparison group rather than an indicator of an MTW-specific effect. Also, participation in the Rental Assistance Demonstration program during our study time period—which allows housing authorities to convert public housing to project-based vouchers or project-based rental assistance—may have removed the most distressed public housing units from the portfolios of some of the MTW agencies. If so, that could have resulted in an apparent improvement in our PASS score measure for remaining units. Galvez et al. (forthcoming) find that MTW agencies are more likely than comparison PHAs to convert public housing units through RAD. The relationship between RAD conversions and public housing quality merits future research.

## **Self-Sufficiency**

Results for outcome measures related to improving self-sufficiency (income gains over time for assisted households and two measures related to positive exits from assistance) are positive but preliminary, particularly regarding income. Specifically, for the share of households with income

gains over time, the MTW agencies initially lagged behind the traditional PHAs before catching up to the comparison PHAs by the end of 2016. Achieving parity with traditional PHAs may itself be a positive outcome. Updating the current analyses with additional years of HUD administrative data will help determine whether the promising trend has continued, and MTW agencies have begun to outpace the comparison group, whether they have remained in parity or whether they have again fallen behind.

The share of work-able households with escrow accounts increased after 2009 for the comparison group but only after 2012 for the MTW group. That circumstance resulted in a statistically significant divergence during the initial posttreatment period, but since 2012, the trend for both groups has increased at a similar rate. Although that means that the MTW group has not “caught up” to comparison groups, and given the relatively low share of households with escrows (in 2016, the average was 4.8 percent for the MTW group and 6.8 percent for the comparison group), the substantive implication of that finding is limited.

Finally, MTW-assisted households were more likely to exit assistance after obtaining a low level of subsidy—but that finding is weak, and there is no difference between MTW agencies and comparison agencies in the share of households that reach minimal housing subsidy. Given the small numbers of households reaching minimal HAP and subsequently exiting housing assistance, those outcome measures must be treated cautiously, as they can be sensitive to small changes. Additional tracking over a longer time period can help clarify whether positive trends have continued. In-depth analyses of the individual agencies included in our MTW activity-specific sample would also be useful to assess what might be happening on the ground.

## **Implications for Research**

This study is the most exhaustive effort to date to examine the effects of MTW across agencies on housing choice and self-sufficiency outcomes. A challenge of this work was that assessing aggregate effects can be at odds with the inherent diversity of MTW agencies, activities, and local contexts. We adjusted for the complexity of the MTW program by selecting outcome measures that seem relevant to a wide range of MTW agencies and selecting two types of treatment groups of agencies—one group of agencies that received MTW designation at roughly the same time and another group of agencies engaged in specific activities relevant to our outcomes of interest. That approach provides several implications for future research examining the effects of MTW.

First, we found both commonalities and differences between the two MTW agency grouping approaches. Both approaches may be useful in different contexts, and some measures are more appropriate for status versus activity-specific treatment group approaches. For example, measures of Family Self-Sufficiency program participation or public housing quality improvements may benefit from activity-specific analyses because they require MTW agencies to be engaged in narrowly focused efforts or programs. Other outcome measures, such as positive exits from assisted housing or income gains over time, may be more appropriate for a status group approach because they speak to common MTW agency objectives and changes that may be triggered through a variety of MTW agency efforts. Future research using the status group approach could incorporate the 100 agencies that are expected to be designated through the MTW expansion (although the

funding formula for agencies in that expansion group is not yet known and must be incorporated into any review and analysis of their activities).

Second, this work provides a useful starting point for additional research examining the findings documented in this report. That research could include qualitative work examining what MTW agencies consider to be the most relevant flexibilities, policy reforms, or initiatives for meeting their statutory objectives. This descriptive work can help identify practices that may be useful to test rigorously at other PHAs and lay the foundation for more rigorous, targeted MTW agency-level or grouped impact analyses. Likewise, additional quantitative analysis of the measures found to have promising results can help shed light on whether the positive trends have continued since 2016 (the last year of data to which we had access for this study). Similarly, our assessment of MTW agency activities provides a starting point for more comprehensive agency-level analyses. Our grouped analysis approach could not be as closely tailored to the diversity of MTW agency contexts as an agency-by-agency analysis. A rigorous assessment of outcomes for the individual agencies in our activity-specific samples would require an indepth accounting of local agency contexts, goals, and programs—both to measure outcomes precisely and to select appropriate traditional comparison PHAs.

Third, this study and others clearly show that MTW agencies are undertaking many varied and experimental activities, using a range of approaches and in diverse local contexts. Considerable work has been done through the MTW retrospective evaluation and other research to emphasize the breadth of activities, partnerships, and goals in which the MTW agencies are engaged. Even when care is taken to adjust for the diversity of agencies and approaches, however, an aggregate approach sheds little light on which innovative practices might be taken to scale. Additional rigorous research is needed on individual MTW agency initiatives to tease out promising activities or uses of MTW flexibilities that hold the most promise to help achieve the housing choice or self-sufficiency goals of the MTW program. Examples of such research include the study of the Santa Clara Housing Authority conducted through the retrospective MTW evaluation (Castells, 2020); the study of work requirements at the Charlotte Housing Authority by Webb, Frescoln, and Rohe (2015); and the randomized control trial study currently in progress at the neighborhood mobility program in Seattle and King County, Washington.<sup>21</sup> Other future work should highlight promising Moving to Work agency practices through mixed-methods research, case studies of individual agency efforts, or analyses of common approaches.

Finally, improved data and reporting requirements and the use of randomized control trials will greatly improve knowledge about new agencies included in the MTW expansion. Similar rigor should be applied to current MTW agencies.

## **Conclusion**

This study found some signs that MTW positively affects some housing choice and self-sufficiency related outcomes and discovered no evidence of negative effects on any of our outcomes of interest. Specifically, both the MTW-status group and the MTW activity-specific group increased the share

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<sup>21</sup> For information on the Creating Moves to Opportunity program and research, see: <http://creatingmoves.org/research/>.

of new households served relative to the traditional PHA comparison groups. That finding may be driven at least in part by the additional funding MTW agencies have received compared with traditional agencies, but it may also relate to the use of MTW flexibilities for cost-savings efforts. We also found some evidence indicating modest positive effects from MTW on the share of MTW-assisted households with income gains after entry into assisted housing, the share of workable households reaching minimal housing assistance payments (HAP), and the share of those households who subsequently leave assistance. We found no evidence, however, of differences between MTW and traditional PHAs for tenant-based voucher (TBV) neighborhood locations, public housing quality, or use of Family Self-Sufficiency program escrow accounts.

This study did not examine the specific MTW activities that may be driving those outcomes or the specific MTW flexibilities that may allow agencies to pursue successful initiatives. Future research should focus on identifying the MTW flexibilities that are the most useful for pursuing initiatives that positively affect choice and self-sufficiency outcomes, including the ways in which agencies use any additional federal funding they receive from HUD. A more robust understanding of the MTW flexibilities with the most effect would shed light on how best to apply MTW practices to traditional PHAs.

## Acknowledgments

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