

Learning from the City: The Midwest Regional Convening on Habitat III
Chicago, Illinois
March 31, 2016

Attended by over 200 participants with an additional 200 viewing the online webcast in real-time, *Learning from the City: The Midwest Regional Convening on Habitat III* took place on March 31, 2016 at the University of Chicago. A collaboration of HUD's Midwest Regional Office and University of Chicago Urban, along with other regional partners, the event provided practitioners and community leaders with a forum to share best practices and how they work together to address Midwest regional challenges with global implications in this "Century of Cities." Each of the four panels addressed three general themes: increasing access to opportunity, improving quality of life and the importance of place. The sessions also touched on how HUD's new Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Rule provides an opportunity for communities to think regionally and act locally to improve resident access to opportunity through housing, economic development, education and transportation planning—ultimately creating local opportunities for residents at the neighborhood level that impact and benefit the entire region. Unique to this event, a segment on the role of "Big Data" and its use to inform local decision making and to shape regional policy was added. The Midwest Regional Office also initiated an aggressive social media campaign that included the first ever [Thunderclap](#) reaching over 131,000 individuals and live tweets during the event generated more than 7.5 million impressions.

HUD Community Planning and Development Deputy Principal Assistant Secretary Harriet Tregoning's [keynote address](#) provided an excellent overview of how the Obama Administration is helping communities plan for change through investments that effectively address our rapid socio-demographic changes. She indicated that a century ago only two out of ten people lived in urban areas and the systems were set up accordingly. Today, more than 80 percent of the U.S. population resides in urban areas. That trend is expected to continue as about 90 percent of all U.S. population growth over the last decade is occurring within cities and metro areas.

Session Highlights

- The [Investing in People and Communities for Upward Mobility](#) panel emphasized the importance of place and place-making in a conscious effort to spur economic opportunity for all. Panelists identified the need for regional cooperation, underscored the importance of community engagement and planning to inform place-based economic development opportunities and strategies. Mayor Freeman-Wilson pointed out the Federal collaboration in Gary, Indiana's Strong Cities, Strong Communities initiative was invaluable in helping to reshape the economic landscape in her city. The Cook County Bureau of Economic Development provided an overview of the "Plan for Progress" which seeks to leverage creative regional assets so that one initiative's growth does not impose negative impacts on any neighboring community.
- In [Securing Housing Options for All](#), panelists highlighted the need for regional collaboration as a best practice to effectively plan and develop housing options for residents. The Chicago Regional Housing Initiative was offered as an example of how housing authorities within the Chicago Metropolitan area cooperated to provide

affordable housing for low-income residents utilizing housing choice vouchers in opportunity areas while also serving areas in need of revitalization. A fair housing discussion ensued raising the issue of the significant impact that fair housing laws in equitable housing opportunities in the U.S., versus globally where other countries may not have strong centralized laws prohibiting housing discrimination.

- In the [Responding to Shocks and Building Resilience](#) session, panelists discussed the importance of vision and long-term goal setting as important characteristics necessary for success in responding to unforeseen events. They addressed the need to make investments to be able to swiftly respond to both to natural and economic disasters and the need to plan ahead to effectively be prepared. Resilience, according to the panel, comes down to real quality of life issues in neighborhoods, not just reducing the carbon foot print and planning more resilient communities, but, in jobs, better schools and other opportunities for low income people.
- [The Role of Big Data in Shaping Regional Policy](#) panel emphasized the innovative use of large scale data to inform local decision making. Given that many jurisdictions and agencies are operating under significant budgetary constraints while facing increasingly complex problems, the effective use of “big data” can more precisely dissect the root causes of challenges faced by our cities today, and confirm what is working and guide investments accordingly. During this overview, a HUD representative shared the incredible impact and synergies created in demonstration linking federal datasets from HUD assisted households, the American Community Survey and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services data sets yielding a far more robust analysis and granular findings that would not otherwise be attained. This groundbreaking work can empower policy makers and researchers to better connect social, educational, and health outcomes tracked by federal agencies with demographic information to better target policies and programs taking into account the many factors that people face. For example, a few key findings that were shared from this analysis were:
 1. That there are approximately 290,000 veterans living in HUD-assisted housing;
 2. About 4 percent of HUD-assisted households are multigenerational, defined as three or more generations;
 3. Approximately 30 percent of HUD assisted adults smoke cigarettes.

Several local panelists also shared innovative ways they’re using data to improve people’s lives, including [Community Rx](#), which is part of a Department of Health & Human services demonstration utilizing student-sourced community data to help beneficiaries with health-related social needs better navigate access to community resources. A City of Chicago panelist also provided an overview of the new [OpenGrid](#) tool helping residents gain access to real-time neighborhood level data and available services.

The Learning from the City: Midwest Convening brought together a diverse set of governmental and civic stakeholders and provided a platform to share best practices and obtain feedback. The convening demonstrated that as we shape the new urban agenda stakeholders need to learn from

the past, engage in collaborative efforts and develop regional approaches to local issues. The highlighted successes include active collaborations from Federal, State and local governments and the inclusion of private sector, non-profit and philanthropic partners to achieve success for the new urban agenda.

Key Partners

Many thanks to event partners including the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, Habitat for Humanity Chicago, Local Initiatives Support Corporation, National Association of Housing, Metropolitan Planning Council, National League of Cities and the National Fair Housing Alliance and, to event supporters including The Kresge Foundation, The MacArthur Foundation, The Pierce Family Foundation, The Tom Owens Family Foundation, University of Chicago Kreisman Initiative on Housing Law and Policy and University of Chicago Urban.

To learn more about the Midwest regional convening co-hosted by HUD and UChicago Urban, the archived webcast can be accessed [by clicking here](#). Photos are also [available here](#).