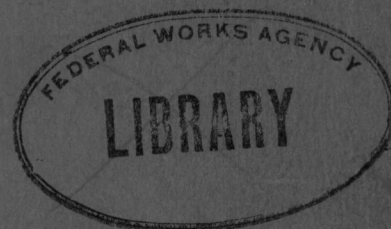


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COMMUNITY RELATIONS
in
URBAN LOW-RENT HOUSING

First Report of the Committee on
Community Relations in
Housing Developments

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
OF HOUSING OFFICIALS**



COMMUNITY RELATIONS IN URBAN LOW-RENT HOUSING,
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Committee on Community Relations
in Housing Developments

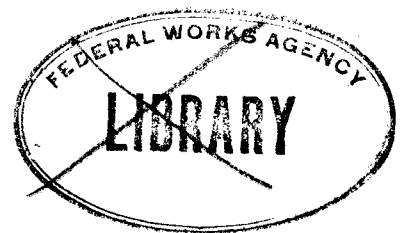


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FOREWORD

NAHO's Committee on Community Relations in Housing Developments has started intelligently and directly on one of the two or three most difficult and significant problems in modern housing. The day of the "build 'em-and-leave 'em-boys" has gone forever. All progressive housing officials now recognize the prime importance of management, including community relations, not only in public acceptance or rejection of current programs but also in their ultimate effects for good or ill on those who live in them and in the neighborhoods near them.

This first report has to do largely with the nature of community relations in low-rent housing developments and the general direction of housing authority policy in respect to them. Although the Committee has tried successfully to make its recommendations as definite as possible, the actual questions faced in housing management appear in so many forms and shapes that no report can be expected to cover all of them. Any manager or other housing official, however, who understands this report will have a solid foothold for dealing with the problems of his project on this general subject.

The Committee represents four classes of persons: housing authority executives, housing managers, specialists in various types of community activities and undertakings, and nonofficial students of housing policy and practice. The scope and balance of the report, I believe, reflect some of the experience and wisdom of each of three classes of the Committee membership.

A second report is now well along toward publication. It will deal with the problems of personnel, organization, and staffing that have to be faced by local housing authorities in making effective the community relations policies that are outlined in this report. Although no definite plans have been made for further work of the Committee, it is the hope of at least some of them that after this second report is out, attention may be given to the problems of community relations in other kinds of housing than that of urban local authorities: e.g., rural housing or large-scale, limited-dividend or cooperative developments.

Coleman Woodbury
Director, NAHO

May 21, 1940.

COMMUNITY RELATIONS IN URBAN LOW-RENT HOUSING

First Report of the
Committee on Community Relations in Housing Developments

The advent of public housing projects creates certain problems for the community the solution of which is the joint responsibility of local housing authorities with other local agencies whose normal community functions are immediately affected. This may seem strange when it is believed that housing projects will aid in the solution of many of our social problems. Although some problems will be reduced, however, new patterns of planning, new designs for living and new attitudes of thought are not easily accepted into the old scheme of things. They will produce conditions and problems that will require study, wisdom and skillful administration.

Housing projects are set up to live in. Tenants are expected to have a better opportunity to live happy and normal lives and to be citizens of the larger community. Their development and growth are influenced by opportunities for group activities and community life. With the first objective to provide decent shelter, certain amenities are regarded as important to normal, healthful, happy living. They are what might be called the "plus factors" of housing. The planning, provision and maintenance of community facilities in and near the projects, the organization of services and activities in connection with these facilities, and their use by tenants in constructive ways are what we have chosen to call "community relations in housing developments."

The problems of community relations in housing developments are perplexing ones. To the public housing administrator, they are particularly baffling since he is faced with dual responsibilities of operating projects efficiently at minimum cost, while, at the same time, endeavoring to secure and maintain adequate facilities and services necessary for developing wholesome and normal

community life of tenants within the project. Experience of housing authorities in developing community relations programs in cooperation with city and school officials is relatively new. But managers of recently built large-scale public and limited-dividend housing projects are setting a general pattern from which principles and policies may be formulated for current use.

On the other hand, most housing authorities are seeking information and suggestions on this subject. They want to know what they should be doing, beyond the renting of dwellings, about the relation of management to tenants and of tenants to one another, about tenant activities within the development and their relation to the community of which the development is a part.

This report is limited to a discussion of these problems in urban public housing projects. Community relations problems in rural projects and in projects under private ownership are somewhat different and might well merit a separate report at some later date.

PURPOSE

The Committee's assignment is to study community life and activities in housing developments and on the basis of this and other experience to formulate guides to administrative policy for owners and managers of these developments (particularly the officials of local housing authorities) and other federal and local agencies directly concerned, such as the United States Housing Authority, park and playground departments, planning boards or commissions, school boards, adult education associations, welfare agencies, etc.

DEFINITIONS

Let us assume for our purpose that community relations in housing developments include facilities, services and activities having to do with recreation, education and general welfare of the community, both inside and outside the housing project but exclusive of individual, private family activities.

It is recognized that community relations programs will affect individual family life in many ways, but we are primarily concerned with interfamily, intergroup, and interneighborhood relationships as they can be improved by the provision and use of facilities and services within or accessible to the housing development.

Other definitions: The term "local government" refers to the city or county government, "housing authority" to the local public housing agency, "housing management" to the management staff of the housing authority, "public agency" to an established agency or department of a state or local government, and "private agency" to organizations supported by private funds for the benefit of the general community or section thereof.

ADVANCE PLANNING

In the early stages of planning a housing development considerable time is given to studying the advantages and limitations of the site, the location of intersecting streets, the natural topography, the types, layout and coverage of proposed dwellings and the placing of utilities. These physical problems seem so important in themselves that their relation to plans for operation and management are often neglected. The period of planning and construction is relatively short in the life of a housing development, but unless that period is guided most skilfully by principles and policies that recognize the importance of community relations of future tenants, major objectives of the program may be lost.

The authority should seek, at the earliest possible stage, the best advice available from those in the community responsible for and concerned with the education, recreation, and community life of the city. These include city planning, school, park, recreation, health and welfare agencies and officials as well as interested private citizen organizations. It is important

that acceptable standards be adopted that will facilitate an adequate community relations program and that responsibility for its provision and direction be agreed upon. Furthermore, planning should consider all those things that tend to lessen friction between management and tenants and those that tend to reduce the amount of management control.

As a part of good housing the authority should plan for adequate space outside the dwelling, making possible outdoor living for every family and open areas for children's recreation near their own dwellings. Since maintenance costs determine rents, it is important that the layout of dwellings and their relationship to walks, streets and utilities give maximum opportunity for yard maintenance by tenants and for garden activity. It is recognized that such spaces may be more easily provided and more readily tenant maintained in projects of one- and two-family dwellings of row or group types. Although it is necessary for families to share such space in projects of multiple dwellings, it is equally important that outdoor space for this purpose be provided. Tenant maintenance can be wisely planned only when fully considered in design and layout.

No rigid standard has been fixed for the provision of indoor space for community use. This will vary according to the type and size of dwellings and to the extent of facilities provided in neighborhood centers outside or adjacent to the development. In small projects of 100 units or less, containing one-family dwellings with low coverage, it may be unnecessary to provide sheltered space for community activities, particularly if some such space is available elsewhere in the neighborhood. In larger projects up to 600 units about nine square feet of sheltered space per family has been found to be reasonable, with a minimum of 1,000 square feet per project. Any standard of this sort is a very rough guide and should be adopted in light of most informed

opinion available as to the needs of prospective tenants and their community interests. For larger developments it will be necessary to give special consideration to the amount and location of such space.

It is highly important that local authorities, many of which have had no management experience and the most fortunate of which have had very little, should have access to a central source of facts, research results, and experience. Inasmuch as USHA is collecting this material constantly for its own use, all or nearly all of it could be made available to responsible local officials and organizations. When this is done, the materials should be presented not only with USHA interpretations, but (with whatever safeguards may be necessary to avoid embarrassment to individual local officials) in their original form so that local officials can analyze and interpret them.

PRINCIPLES

Important principles underlying community relations may be stated as follows:

1. In every neighborhood of which the housing project is a part, certain essential community facilities should be provided by either public or private agencies other than the housing authority.
2. In general, it should be the aim of the housing authority to utilize existing facilities wherever obtainable. Only as a last resort, where no provision can be made otherwise, should facilities, services and supervision be provided by the housing authority. Public interest in housing developments should be used to improve standards and to extend community facilities and services provided by other public and private agencies.
3. Modern housing should be more than good shelter, but provision of good shelter should be the primary purpose. It should be designed and

managed as a means of making possible a fuller and more satisfactory life for those who occupy it. However, if additional services and facilities must be provided by the housing authority, they should be kept to a minimum. The cost should be as low as possible so as not to burden rents nor detract from the essential quality of the housing.

4. Except in most general terms, community life in a housing development cannot be determined in advance. It depends on the interests, aptitudes and wishes of tenant families, the character of the leadership available within the group, the degree of organization of community life in the surrounding neighborhood, standards of public and private facilities and services provided by the agencies operating in the larger community, and the opportunities and facilities made available by the project.
5. Community activities should be developed by the tenants themselves with the encouragement and advice of the management. Control by the management should be avoided because it is certain to result in the tenants feeling that the management is responsible for the continued support of activities, with the result that such activities will not be sustained by genuine tenant participation and leadership.
6. The management should recognize the place of existing institutions and agencies in the surrounding community and not try to usurp nor compete with them. Any services provided by the authority project are supplemental and should be coordinated with those of the surrounding community in such a way that gradually the two communities will become knit together and eventually serve better the combined population.
7. Associations of tenants may develop and may well prove to be a useful tenant activity. The sphere of activities of such associations, however, should be clearly understood by tenants and management so that there will be no confusion as to lines of responsibility and authority. It

should be clear that, although managers must always be willing to discuss problems and practices with tenants, tenants and tenant organizations cannot assume management responsibility. The interpretation of major policies is in the hands of the manager who is responsible to the local housing authority's executive officer who in turn is responsible to the authority board. In the last analysis responsibility for decisions on management problems in public housing rests with the authority and in other types of housing with the owning agency.

8. As housing programs go ahead, what might be called "executive direction," including management and, as a part of it, community relations, in contrast to the work of construction, steadily grows in importance. A given volume of construction work could be kept going over a period of years by the same, or by a slightly smaller, force than was necessary at the beginning. But the proportion of management and community relations personnel to that of technical construction, increases as new projects are added to the program. Thus management responsibilities tend to be cumulative.
9. These facts must be kept in mind by local authority officials in general planning and in setting up administrative personnel. They suggest also that false economy only can result from petty savings achieved by shaving management salaries and postponing the selection of the management personnel until the last moment. Not only will good management, including sensible and effective community relations within the project enable local officials to achieve the real objectives of their program, but it will also be essential to continued support both in public relations and in finances.
10. One of the primary responsibilities of management is maintenance of the property. The program of community relations should include in its

development the idea of keeping maintenance costs low and of securing active tenant cooperation with management in this effort.

- (a) The present trend is all toward design and management practices to encourage tenant maintenance, both of buildings and grounds, to as great an extent as possible.
- (b) This emphasis is justified both by its possible effects on rents and on the sense of responsibility that it ought to engender among tenants.
- (c) No tenant maintenance campaign can be really successful without some little organization and a high quality of morale among tenants.
- (d) Developing and maintaining morale is a definite part of management-tenant relations.
- (e) In developing these relations the personnel responsible for other phases of the community relations program ought to play a prominent and useful part.

FACILITIES AND SERVICES

The following are the principal facilities and services involved in community relations in the broad sense: (1) Education: schools, libraries; (2) Recreation; (3) Health and Medical Services; (4) Social Services; (5) Churches; (6) Safety Protection: police, fire; (7) Special Services, such as Cooperatives.

1. Educational Facilities and Services

- (a) A proper function of the housing authority is to advocate good school standards. Provision for schools, however, is the definite responsibility of the public school authorities. In the planning of housing projects, careful account should be taken of available school buildings and their capacity and the possible additional

needs required by the future tenants of the housing project. Consultation with school authorities should be among the primary planning steps.

- (b) A housing authority may find it desirable to provide equipment and space for preschool education (such as nursery schools), which is not yet recognized as a responsibility by some school authorities, and where no other agency is providing such service. In these cases it may be desirable to include children from the outside neighborhoods and make plans from the beginning for eventual public support. A disadvantage of such a step is that temporary provision often becomes permanent. This does not build up community responsibility for such service and tends to load the project with extra costs and increased rents.
- (c) It may be necessary to provide library facilities in the project. In many communities an extension service of the public library may supply books and supervision which can be developed as needs arise, the project providing the space only. Tenants may set up their own reading and library clubs with the aid of the nearest public library.

2. Recreational Facilities and Services

- (a) Provision for recreation space, equipment and supervision is the primary responsibility of the local public recreation departments, schools and private agencies. They should provide indoor and outdoor facilities for various age groups. In some communities these will be provided in connection with schools, in others by departments of parks or playgrounds. Public recreation should be planned so as to serve population needs on a broad community basis. Quite often public recreation programs are supplemented by private

agencies such as settlements, boys' and girls' clubs, community houses and sometimes churches.

- (b) In order to meet the need of tenants, the housing authority is responsible for planning its projects with relation to existing recreation facilities and leadership, for encouraging improvement where standards are low, for urging needed extensions and helping to work out a coordinated plan with all recreational agencies involved. In this connection, organizations, both public and private, serving the area in which the housing project is to be located should be encouraged to develop or replan their programs by working through the appropriate coordinating agency in cooperation with the housing authority. This step should be taken in the early stages of planning before site plans have crystallized. The authority should have available all data on any facilities it may be able to provide within the project, data on population and appropriate age grouping of prospective tenants and any other information helpful to developing the plan for community recreation needs.
- (c) One of the primary interests of the housing authority is to raise living standards and improve the moral and physical tone of the neighborhood in the sphere of influence outside the housing project. The supervision of community recreation programs by agencies other than the housing authority should effect a desirable interplay of social forces across the physical border of housing projects. The broader community attitudes thus developed may increase the chances for successful management.
- (d) While it is advisable for the major recreation facilities to be provided by the community and not by the housing project, it is a desirable and proper function of the project to provide play space for

small children. Open spaces for small children's games, places where wheel toys can be used in safety should be located near all dwellings so that preschool children may play within sight of their mothers. When it is necessary to provide play equipment, it should be of the type that is least dangerous, least expensive to maintain and it should be concentrated in areas where there can be regular supervision.

- (e) The housing project may provide space for club rooms easily accessible to tenants. But it is highly desirable that such rooms not be located in the same building with dwelling facilities. Such space may be planned as a part of the management office building, in other buildings in the project, or in a community building on or near the site.
- (f) A community building or its equivalent should be provided near the project by an agency other than the housing authority whenever possible. This facility may be available as a part of the local school or settlement or be owned and operated by the recreation department of the local government. When no other agency will make the provision, it is considered to be within the function of the housing authority to provide for a properly sized community building (or its equivalent) with space for tenant activities, such as indoor games, group social functions, camera clubs, furniture repair shops, children's play rooms, etc. Space in community buildings should be as flexible as possible so that activities can be expanded or contracted as interests demand. Small assembly rooms which may be subdivided by movable partitions or folding doors have certain advantages over community rooms with fixed limitations on size. If

the authority must provide a community building, it should preferably not contain an auditorium.

- (g) Every opportunity should be made to inform tenants of recreation possibilities available in and near the project, but "pressure" and "dictation" on the part of the staff consultant should be scrupulously avoided. Groups formed by tenants will need help and some guidance in initial steps and, therefore, should have the assistance of a well-qualified person. It is a wise policy of management not to conduct any activities for the tenants.

3. Health Facilities and Medical Services

- (a) Since the purpose of the housing project is to provide more healthful living conditions, management is interested in maintaining a high standard of health. Reasonable safety and sanitation precautions are necessary, especially in the play areas where numbers of children may congregate. The project should be a healthful and a safe place in which to live.
- (b) Some families will have special health problems and others occasional ailments needing the services of a physician, a clinic, or a public health nurse. Information about health resources in the community should be available in the management office and tenants informed of this fact. Interference with an existing patient-physician relationship should be avoided.
- (c) Group activities may turn to health interests, such as nursing and first-aid instruction, plans for hospital or medical insurance, or the establishment of needed clinic facilities in the community. Information, when requested, should be available from management, and outside help, when desired, may be brought in to supervise and help direct the group interest. The local department of health,

the public health nursing association, and the Red Cross are among the resources available.

4. Social Services

- (a) Management will find it advantageous to be informed of appropriate social services available in the community. The community relations counsellor should be prepared to refer residents to proper agencies for assistance and advice, and tenants should know that such information is available. It is not the responsibility of management, however, to solve individual social problems.
- (b) The management will find it advisable to know of employment resources and vocational services. These services are best provided by a recognized and responsible agency, such as the state employment office. In some projects a "job exchange" is a tenant activity.

5. Churches

The management should be willing to cooperate with church groups in the community but should avoid even the semblance of favoritism to any particular sect. If a church property has been eliminated in land acquisition and the congregation desires to rebuild near the project, the authority should cooperate in securing another site for a church building.

6. Safety

- (a) Every precaution to safeguard the property and the tenants living therein is a natural function of management. Normal or special police protection should be available from or through the local government. Streets and pedestrian ways should be planned so as to provide maximum safety for tenant access to all parts of the project, to recreation areas, schools and other points in the community.
- (b) The correct design of stairways and installation of sturdy handrails are important in reducing the chances of injuries due to falls.

The placement of windows, height of sills above floors and methods of cleaning the outside of windows should be studied for the purpose of reducing to a minimum the number of possible accidents due to faulty window installation.

- (c) Special safety precautions should be taken by the management whenever groups of people congregate. Play areas, especially those with equipment, constitute potential safety hazards. Management should make every effort to guard against accidents which might be caused by the use of facilities. Design and layout of playgrounds should take safety considerations into account.
- (d) Most of the public projects now planned or completed are of fire resistive or slow burning construction. Nevertheless the management must see that no hazards develop due to careless housekeeping, or in the use of storage space, laundry facilities or social rooms. In these potentially dangerous places, fire extinguishers and tenant instruction in fire safety at regular intervals are advised. The management should request periodic inspection by local fire officials. It should not be necessary for the authority to provide special fire apparatus unless the project is built in outlying or rural areas where established fire-fighting equipment is not available from the community.
- (e) Safety education may be a natural interest of some tenants, but this is one place where management should take definite leadership. A manual on safety should be developed in cooperation with tenants and be made a part of the tenants' handbook.

7. Special Services, such as Cooperatives

Tenants who desire a special kind of self-help service may become interested in the various types of cooperatives. Credit unions have proved successful wherever they have been established in housing projects. It is possible that cooperatives would help economically weak tenant families to receive some essential goods and services that they otherwise would be unable to secure. Management, of course, should not be responsible for organizing or directing cooperatives but it should see that interested tenant groups are acquainted with the expert help that is available from official regulatory bodies, credit union leagues, etc.

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