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PUBLIC HOUSING PROJECTS IN TRANSITION: 25 CASE STUDIES

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		Page
I.	INTRODUCTION	1
II.	BACKGROUND	3
	Five Basic Management Precepts	6
III.	METHODOLOGY	8
IV.	BEHIND THE STATISTICS: THE DYNAMICS OF CHANGE	13
	People: The Heart of the Change Process	13
	Procedures: A Time of Major Change	16
	Money: Style Can't Overcome Lack of Funds	19
	A Special Note Regarding Project Security	20
V.	INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE: THE FOUNDATION FOR REAL GAINS	24
	A Word About Externalities	25
APPENDICES		
A	PROJECT PROFILES	27
	Projects that showed declines in performance 1973-1974, and then demonstrated significant improvements, 1974-1976.	27
	Projects that have demonstrated consistent improvement in change scores, 1973 to 1976	36
	Two projects with serious problems, as indicated by severe declines in scores, 1974-1976	42
	Mixed readings on five elderly projects	43
B	KEY PERFORMANCE MEASURES (20 CRITERION AND 10 MANAGEMENT VARIABLES USED FOR THIS STUDY)	47

PUBLIC HOUSING PROJECTS IN TRANSITION: 25 CASE STUDIES

I. INTRODUCTION

This study is part of a continuing analysis being conducted by The Urban Institute under contract to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. For over five years, the Institute has studied various aspects of the management of public and private housing. This study is designed to further the understanding of the dynamics of change in public housing management. Twenty-five projects from 12 large public housing agencies were selected for review, based upon changes in management performance scores from 1973 to 1976 (see "Methodology"). An investigative reporter visited each project to conduct intensive interviews aimed at delineating specific management actions that had generated apparent improvements in performance, as indicated by the change scores.

The body of work in this study complements earlier Institute work, as described in various studies of management performance in public housing and in the book, Keys to Successful Housing Management,[1] which analyzes the management of privately owned, publicly subsidized housing. In these earlier studies, the sampled housing agencies and projects were

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1. Robert Sadacca, Suzanne B. Loux, Morton L. Isler, and Margaret Drury, Management Performance in Public Housing, Paper 61000, The Urban Institute, Washington, D.C., January 1974; Morton L. Isler, Robert Sadacca, and Margaret Drury, Keys to Successful Housing Management, Paper 53000, The Urban Institute, Washington, D.C., 1974; and Jane Fong, Suzanne Loux, and Robert Sadacca, Change Processes in the Public Housing Management Improvement Program, Working Paper 209-42-1, The Urban Institute, Washington, D.C., February 1975.

treated as statistical units in analyses designed to define principles of management that applied to housing agencies in general. In this study, the individual case method was used in connection with statistics derived from more general analyses. Each of the 25 housing projects was investigated as a unique organization in its own setting. Enough individual projects were visited, however, to assure the generalizability of the main study findings.

II. BACKGROUND

Since 1973, The Urban Institute has been amassing and analyzing the most substantial body of data ever assembled about the management of subsidized housing. Most of this information has been generated through interviews with the management staff and tenants of 400 projects in 120 public housing agencies. Much of the rest of the data was taken from periodic reports made by the agencies to HUD and from other records maintained by the agencies themselves.

There have now been three major data collection periods: spring, 1973; fall, 1974; and spring, 1976. More than 21,000 structured interviews were carried out, primarily with tenants. But thousands of central office and project staff members were also interviewed. The 120 public housing agencies (PHAs) were evenly divided according to size: one-third had 1,250 or more units under management; another third had 500 to 1,249 units; and the remaining third managed from 100 to 499 units.

The sample of agencies in each size group was chosen so that it would be representative of the spread of agencies throughout HUD regions. Similarly, projects were chosen within each PHA to represent the mix of projects in each city. Random samples of residents and staff were selected at each project.[2]

Four types of questions were asked: (1) factual questions about the agency, the project, or the respondent; (2) evaluative questions,

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2. See Section II-A, in Management Performance in Public Housing, op. cit., for a fuller description of the sampling methodology used.

(e.g., condition of units, performance of agency employees); (3) questions that probed satisfaction (e.g., with an employee's job, a tenant's apartment, or agency services); and (4) questions that asked an opinion (how much agreement the respondent had with statements about tenant behavior, agency policies, etc.).

As this data was assembled, it was analyzed with the objective of understanding the dynamics of the management process, and particularly of delineating the key factors in the improvement of housing management performance. The measures that were derived through this analytical process reflected the researchers' opinion that human attitudes and perceptions are as valuable in establishing measures of performance as are enumerations of some fairly objectively quantified measures of the management process (e.g., vacancy rates). Both types of measures are obviously needed even though specific scores on both types of measures are often dependent upon conditions over which housing management exercises little control, such as general economic or local market conditions.

When the Institute began to define performance measures for sound management practice, there were diverse opinions among housing professionals as to what constituted good management. As pressures for increasingly high operating subsidies escalated during the 1970's, it became apparent that comprehensive performance measures would be useful for helping identify management practices that public housing agencies could use to improve their performance.

In its analyses of public housing management processes, the Institute assessed the relevance of over 1,000 measures derived from questionnaire data and other sources. Exhaustive work was done to eliminate measures

that either added little to further understanding of the management process or seemed redundant with other measures. Ultimately the Institute developed four basic sets of variables: (1) management variables which describe management policies and practices and attitudes of agency staff; (2) control variables measuring environmental factors and agency characteristics over which the PHA has little or no control, such as neighborhood conditions and the age of project buildings; (3) income and expense variables of the agency which delineate actual income and expenses; and (4) criterion variables which measure the overall performance of the agency. Altogether about 250 variables are used to measure these various aspects of the management process.

The criterion variables are the keys to performance measures, as they comprise such factors as tenant satisfaction with apartments, security, and maintenance, and their feelings about their neighbors. Some of the measures involve the perceptions of tenants--the consumers of public housing services--whereas others involve the observations of PHA staff and HUD regional office staff. Measures of rent delinquency and vandalism are also included in the criterion variables.

Further analysis of the variables brought forth the outlines of high management performance and pointed the way to a sounder understanding of the dynamics of change in management operations. HUD was especially concerned with the process of change and improvement of management performance through the Housing Management Improvement Program (HMIP). Under this demonstration effort, 13 PHAs (later reduced to 11) took various specific steps to upgrade their levels of project management.

The HMIP has received mixed reviews, even in those cities which took part in the program. (Four of the 12 PHAs visited for this study were

involved in HMIP in some way.) For the purpose of this analysis, stressing as it does the dynamics of change in management operations, there are two relevant criticisms that emerged from the many interviews: (1) Too many of the HMIP efforts were one-shot actions, with little or no follow up and not enough attention paid to knitting them into the operational fabric of the participating agencies; and (2) too many of the innovations attempted were so custom-tailored to a specific problem of a specific agency that there appears little relevance to other PHAs with different problems. In any case, the HMIP has cast some light on the difficulty of improving management performance in the operations of a project and an agency.

FIVE BASIC MANAGEMENT PRECEPTS

Study of the effectiveness of the specific HMIP tasks underscored the Institute's earlier delineation of five basic precepts which are vital to the improvement of management. These constitute fundamental conditions of sound management practice that allow individual efforts at improvement to succeed. Where these conditions are weak or absent, it is less likely that changes in management techniques will result in improvements, as measured by the Institute's scores. This fact was apparent from the analyses of the changes at the 25 projects visited in the study described in this report. The five basic precepts are:

1. Management's strictness in enforcing rules;
2. Management's responsiveness to tenant needs;
3. Tenants' concern for the project and their positive involvement in project operations;
4. Coordination between central office and project staff;

5. Decentralization of decision-making authority to the project level.

These are the key characteristics of high performance housing management. Moreover, where these qualities are present, Institute research has shown that per-unit operating costs are actually lower. For larger housing agencies where rules were more strictly enforced, for instance, per-unit operating costs were $21 per month lower than those found in PHAs which had below median strictness scores.[3]

These five fundamental conditions of good management served as guideposts throughout the analysis described in this report. Time and again these themes were illustrated as the study proceeded--where scores had significantly improved, there was invariably clearcut evidence of increased management strictness, more management responsiveness to tenant needs, and greater concern on the part of tenants themselves for the project. Solid coordination between central office and project staff and decentralized decision-making to the project level were present in almost every instance of improvement as well.

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3. See Sadacca et al, Management Performance in Public Housing, op. cit., p. 46.

III. METHODOLOGY

The bulk of the data already assembled, and most of the analyses already completed, essentially describe what happens at projects as many conditions change through time. But the work done to date by the Institute does not explain why conditions changed at the non-HMIP PHAs in the sample, that is, the specific management actions that were actually undertaken to improve performance were not investigated. This was the major purpose of the present study.

With the collection of the 1976 data, Institute staff had three separate batches of information, covering a three-year period. The data of particular interest to this study covered 177 different projects in 39 large agencies.[4]

The first step in selecting the projects for detailed study involved analyzing change scores for the criterion and management variables which are the most important indicators of performance. These change scores were aggregated to determine where each project stood relative to all sampled projects in the larger agencies. (For a listing of the 20 criterion variables and 10 management variables used as key indicators in this study, see Appendix B.)

The Institute analysts were looking particularly for projects where management performance had improved significantly according to the

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4. The data from the Puerto Rico Housing Agency was not used due to the unrepresentativeness of that PHA.

change scores for 1974 to 1976. The largest group of projects selected (13) were those that either declined in performance scores from 1973 to 1974, or remained about even in that period, and then exhibited emphatic gains during the next 18 months. Eight other projects were selected that had shown continued performance improvement throughout the whole three-year period. And finally, four projects were chosen which had experienced declines in performance from 1974 to 1976.

In all, 25 projects were selected for detailed study from a dozen different housing agencies. These PHAs had under management anywhere from 3,000 to 16,000 units of housing and were located in seven different HUD regions. As mentioned, several had participated in the HMIP, but most had not. Six of the projects selected are now involved in the Target Projects Program (TPP). Five of the projects are occupied entirely by elderly tenants. The oldest of the projects was built in 1936--before the Act creating the Federal public housing program was passed--and the newest was built in 1970. Some of the projects have all high-rise buildings, but most were two and three stories.

The basic concept underlying the study was first to analyze the available data regarding changes in management performance during the whole three-year period, and then have a skilled investigative reporter visit each project and PHA to determine what specific actions or conditions apparently led to the changes in management performance. Interviews would be conducted with executive directors, key central office staff (e.g., directors of management and maintenance, comptrollers), and with project staff, including maintenance and clerical. Tenants would not generally be interviewed except in cases where a tenant organization was

playing an important role in some phase of management and might have been instrumental in changing performance. This was the case in several cities where tenant organizations have assumed important roles in project management.

The reporter not only reviewed intensively the key change scores and performance measures with Institute analysts, but also went back to the source of the data itself--the actual questionnaires used in the Institute's interviews. These were valuable since they contained additional detailed information about each project. In nearly every case, questionnaires of interviews with the executive director and project manager were examined from each of the three data collections. This storehouse of information became the basis upon which many of the reporters' questions were formulated.

Each agency to be visited was then notified by a HUD official of the impending visit and purpose of the study. One understandable reaction to the initial news was "Oh no, not another survey!" But once the executive staff understood the objectives of this analysis, there was a high level of cooperation at every participating agency.

At the time the basic design of the study was set, it was decided to do a dry run at a nearby public housing agency. The reporter analyzed change scores for two projects (not part of the 25 project sample chosen for the main study) and then interviewed executive staff, HUD area office staff and local project staff. The results proved an interesting preview of what was to come, and confirmed that the basic methodology was workable. These were some of the findings of the dry run:

* Management strictness scores had improved (as had many measures of tenant satisfaction) and this was traceable directly to a new project manager. The new manager was, according to his supervisors and tenants, stricter about collecting rents and enforcing rules than his predecessor.

* Maintenance scores and response times had improved, and this was traceable directly to an increase in staff. The staff increase apparently was also a factor in drastically reducing the costs attributable to vandalism.

* Tenant satisfaction scores overall had improved shortly after the stricter manager was hired, maintenance staff was increased, and security measures were tightened up.

Another important aspect was the effect of outside factors that were only indirectly (or not at all) a function of management initiatives. For instance, in the projects involved in the dry run, tenant satisfaction scores regarding recreation facilities and certain social services had improved markedly. The reasons proved to have nothing to do with direct actions of the PHA, but rather to actions taken by other city agencies. In one case, a major recreational facility was built adjacent to the project, and then two social service agencies moved their facilities closer to the project to serve the tenants more effectively. This proved an example of a situation that was repeated throughout the study involving 25 projects. In almost every case, there was some change outside the project itself--in the neighborhood, in the city or even the region--which impacted upon performance scores, sometimes negatively.

With the dry run completed, and after further discussions with staff at HUD and the Institute, interviews started the week of July 19 and continued through September 30. The reporter prepared special reports on each project visit, containing detailed information resulting from interviews and his own observations. A synopsis of each report in the form of a project profile is given in Appendix A.

IV. BEHIND THE STATISTICS: THE DYNAMICS OF CHANGE

Intensive interviews at the 25 projects in 12 different cities emphatically confirmed the major findings of the Institute's earlier analysis: where change scores had significantly improved, there was clear evidence of greater management strictness and greater emphasis upon responding to tenants' service requirements. There was increased tenant involvement in positive aspects of management in these cases of performance gains, and a higher level of support by central office staff for project staff. Finally, in every case of a striking improvement in management performance, decision-making was a project level responsibility.

These aspects of management were woven constantly through the fabric of change at projects which had experienced performance gains. The change process was generated by three factors: people, procedures, and money.

PEOPLE: THE HEART OF THE CHANGE PROCESS

People in this sense includes not only central office and project staff, but the tenants themselves and the effectiveness of their organizations. In every case of measurable management improvement, some or all of these people factors were at work. Changes in project staff seemed especially important, and emphatic improvements in rent collection and strictness scores could frequently be traced directly back to firmer management policies on the part of project staff.

Staff character and its adherence to policies and procedures clearly laid out and strictly enforced seemed more important than the number of staff. Four of the six projects that showed consistent performance gains for three years had the same size staff throughout. But each had experienced substantial changes in overall policies, especially stricter enforcement of procedures for rent collection and supervision of personnel. Only six of the 13 projects that showed performance gains after an earlier decline did so with the benefit of significant additions to project staff.

Although the project manager usually is the key to performance gains at the project level, sometimes it is a change of personnel at the level of area supervisor or maintenance chief that leads to change. Where gains in performance showed up in all projects of a single PHA, there were usually changes right along the line, including the executive director and key PHA personnel. Interviews at these agencies continually emphasized the importance of central office support for project level decisions.

Where it was obvious that an agency needed to improve its overall performance, increasing the competence of staff was a top priority. Training programs were undertaken--for management as well as maintenance staff--and a widespread search for talented staff from outside was conducted. Consultants were used in a few key positions, or to act as generators of new ideas or systems. But where performance gains were most dramatic, there was also a realization that the work of consultants had to be absorbed into the work-a-day operations of the agency to be truly effective.

Performance gains were so closely related to the character of key personnel that it was obvious that top staff was looking for certain characteristics--knowledge of the critical factors in management, firmness in attitude about making and enforcing rules, and sensitivity to tenant concerns. These characteristics were sometimes found in highly trained, recent college graduates, but just as often in some veteran staffers given an opportunity to exercise judgment and authority. In the latter instance, support from the central office was a must--without it, performance was weak.

It appears that many of the best managers have come from the maintenance ranks. Their knowledge of the maintenance function often invests them with special insights into project problems. However, the larger PHAs in the sample continue to seek younger, more highly trained staffers, usually college graduates, for key management positions. Several respondents indicated that relatively low pay scales and civil service regulations hamper an upgrading of management staff.

The most important people involved in public housing are the residents themselves, and the study showed that where tenants are getting positively involved in various aspects of improving their own environment, scores usually rise. In almost every case of project improvement that was studied, the tenant organization had been strengthened, either through more energetic leadership or more active participation, or both. In one large agency with a history of bitter rent strikes, scores uniformly rose after tenant organizations became more active in many aspects of the projects. (Although two of the projects in the sample will be part of a HUD-sponsored demonstration of Tenant Management Corporation [TMC], neither had yet gotten out of the orientation stage at the time of the study.)

One very obvious way to involve residents is to employ them in various jobs at the project. The Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA) and other Federal programs have made hiring increasingly possible and a number of PHAs are doing it. However, the experience in this study was that turnover is high among tenant-employees, (usually higher than for nontenants) and most need considerable training for anything but menial jobs. More experience with the TMCs and other demonstrations of how tenants can be directly involved in management jobs is needed.

PROCEDURES: A TIME OF MAJOR CHANGE

The character of staff can sometimes overcome antiquated and poorly devised systems (it appeared to do so at several of the projects visited), but truly significant gains appear to occur only where management has also initiated more effective procedures. The three-year period during which the Institute's analysis has taken place has been a critical one for most housing agencies. A time when both HUD and Congressional policies toward public housing have been in flux. As operating subsidies from the Federal government rose sharply, there was increased pressure to maximize rent collections and generally to inject more cost-conscious and businesslike systems into the management of public housing.

The Housing Management Improvement Program (HMIP) was the most notable recent effort to introduce innovative measures into the management process. The eleven PHAs that participated initiated a number of significant changes. Two of the dozen agencies in this study were emphatic that real benefits have accrued from that process of HUD-supported change.

Important procedural changes have been initiated at the Federal level, namely the new lease and grievance procedures. Several of the PHAs visited have worked with management consultants and generated their own system changes, with varying degrees of impact upon management at the project level, as reflected in change scores.

Aside from major changes in lease and grievance procedures, the key changes occurred principally in the areas of tenant accounts and maintenance supervision.

The tenant account records have been a problem in public housing management for many years. Today, many projects still rely upon a box of index cards in the project manager's office as the only record of the status of tenant accounts. But in the past several years, and given the impetus of HMIP demonstrations, more modern systems of accounting have been instituted. While the effectiveness of various systems can be debated, it seems clear from the review of a dozen large PHAs that improvements in change scores at some projects were closely related to better tenant accounts.

With information provided on a current month basis, project managers have been able to move on the problem of rent delinquencies with much more certainty. An important corollary system is the monthly billing statement which provides a detailed statement of rents and charges for the tenants and provides a mailer for rental payment. Although it is not clear that a system of rent payment via mail to a central location is definitely an improvement over other systems, it does seem to allow more current analysis.

The newer tenant accounting systems also give the central office more control over the whole spectrum of projects under management, and this is particularly important as the mix of projects becomes complicated with leased units, Section 8, etc. Every project manager interviewed who is involved with one of the newer accounting systems credited the system with some measure of project performance gains.

The other major target for newer systems of data collection is maintenance which had, if anything, been even more of a jumble than tenant accounting in many agencies. But those PHAs which have consistently had high performance gains appear to have overhauled their maintenance and inventory systems to give them better operational control over those vital aspects of management. An increasing number of PHAs (and all of the largest PHAs with project performance gains in the sample for this study) have instituted systems which report at least monthly (and sometimes twice a month) on the status of all work orders in process throughout the agency, as well as providing current information on the use of equipment and materials.

This information is not only useful in itself, but it is providing the basis for the development of performance criteria for all of the many jobs involved in project maintenance. Several of the large PHAs have specific guidelines for how long a job should take, and how much it should cost. While these guidelines encounter some union antagonism, they are becoming valuable tools for upgrading performance.

While new maintenance information systems provide the opportunity for centralizing data and controlling costs, the visited PHAs using these systems almost uniformly believe in keeping decisions on utilization of

manpower and materials for daily operations at the project level. This finding is consistent with earlier Institute results which have emphasized the importance of project-level control over maintenance.

MONEY: STYLE CAN'T OVERCOME LACK OF FUNDS

One of the executive directors interviewed for this study has read much of the Institute's work stressing the importance of management style. Granting the importance of the basics of sound management style, he adds, "But style cannot overcome lack of funds."

This is undoubtedly true, and certainly none of the projects reviewed showed significant performance gains in the face of serious cutbacks in the project budget. But, on the other hand, money without the basics of good management doesn't necessarily mean better performance either. One of the projects reviewed (see III.B. in Appendix A) has been the subject of both major modernization and a multi-million dollar TPP, yet performance scores have consistently declined since 1973.

While an adequate operating budget for each project is obviously essential for continued and sustained service at levels needed to serve the tenants, many projects have needed massive one-shot injections of funds, usually for modernization of physical plant, or in some cases to overcome past neglect and deferred maintenance. Moreover, there appeared to be direct relationships between programs of major modernization and improved change scores in all but two examples in the sample.

Ten of the 18 projects that showed strong gains in performance have had, or are undergoing, some form of modernization during the data collection

period. Two that did not are relatively modern projects and two others had been extremely well maintained, and are smaller than average.

Six of the 25 projects reviewed are in various stages of the Target Projects Program (TPP) involving not only major modernization but also augmented staff and special service programs. Four of the six showed strong gains in performance, especially from 1974 to 1976, despite a great number of other problems (e.g., high crime, vandalism, high levels of rent delinquencies) at the projects. The two projects that showed no gains seem special cases. One has already been mentioned (above) and it appears a case of too little, too late with not enough attention paid to the vital precepts of sound management. The other has suffered a start-and-stop history with TPP and, while the major modernization work is now underway, tenants were completely disaffected when the data was collected earlier in 1976. They had by then suffered through 15 months of continued promises from the PHA but no action at the project.

In any case, it seems clear that TPP, or any program of major physical improvement, cannot dramatically raise project performance by itself. The knowledgeable housing professionals who were interviewed, including those that are administering TPP programs, expressed their strong feeling that major structural and staff changes are also necessary to produce significant and enduring gains.

A SPECIAL NOTE REGARDING PROJECT SECURITY

Some public housing administrators tend to play down security as a major concern. At the project level, however, it is frequently the problem about which tenants express the most concern, for they are usually the

victims. Project staff also frequently express concern over the possibility of being victimized. Previous Institute research corroborated by this study indicates, however, that project security is closely related to project management--effective management and concerned tenants are strong antidotes to crime.

Achieving better security, like achieving better management, is a problem that defies simplistic solutions. Some agencies hire their own police forces. Some permit their project staff to be armed--two of the projects visited had armed staff. (Performance scores for security have declined for both these projects since 1973.)

The purpose of this study was to analyze instances of apparent gains (or occasional losses) in performance and try to find out what led to the change. In one case, a dramatic increase in security scores (based upon tenant perceptions) could be directly attributed to the hiring of tenants as security aides under the TPP program. A special force was also created at the project under the supervision of a top officer of the city police department. The police department provided training for the whole staff.

In two cases, at different LHAs, project managers have taken the initiative and requested more protection from city police. Apparently this worked, as change scores at both projects had improved markedly.

One large PHA hires off-duty city policemen who use their police radios to summon assistance as needed from regular police on duty. While this system satisfies the PHA, scores at the projects did not reflect much improvement over the past three years.

One agency has used CETA funds to hire unarmed guards to patrol from 4 p.m. to midnight at most of its family projects. Scores at one of

the projects in the sample have improved consistently since 1973, when this service was started, but the headquarters for the guard force is at this project, and therefore there is much more activity there. The scores at the other project in the sample showed little change in three years.

Three of the PHAs in the sample have had their own security forces for some years. In all cases, the size of these forces has shrunk in the past three years. In only one of these PHAs has there been any marked improvement in security, according to the scores derived from tenants since 1973. This one is difficult to explain--the force is actually smaller, and project staff feel that protection is generally poorer, and that there are more burglaries, vandalism and assaults than there were three years ago.

Obviously there is no single solution to security. In one agency the project staff worked to evict families who were believed to be the cause of security problems. After this was done, tenants expressed greater satisfaction, as reflected in performance scores. But this particular project is quite isolated, in an almost rural setting. Most urban housing projects are in densely populated areas, and crime and vandalism are frequently imported into the project from the surrounding neighborhood.

One result of the survey is that every housing agency would do well to improve its relations with the city police department. Where this has been done, conditions almost always improve. Where this has been successful, too, executive directors have refused to believe that the city police cannot, or will not, cooperate.

One of the most distressing comments heard too often is that "these projects are a jungle and city police just won't go into them." That attitude may be one of the biggest single obstacles to improving

project conditions. Much work is being done to prove that it is possible to improve security at many projects, where it was once considered out of the question. One of the key ingredients appears to be enlisting tenants themselves in working to improve security. Some of the TPP experience is already showing that this works.

Most important, security can best be upgraded within the context of a general improvement in all aspects of project management. Where that is happening, performance scores for security have risen in every case.

V. INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE: THE FOUNDATION FOR REAL GAINS

This study of projects having recent substantial performance changes revealed that there is no single step, no innovative magic, that by itself can guarantee measureable improvements in public housing projects. The most forceful concept that emerges from the survey of a dozen large agencies is this: the surest way to raise management performance is through a program of systemic change that raises the levels of performance throughout the whole agency.

Five of the six PHAs in the sample with projects that improved significantly in performance have been undergoing such institutional change. The other one is relatively new to public housing, and has no projects older than eight years, and thereby is somewhat immune to the afflictions of older, much larger PHAs.

Three of these five agencies have had severe difficulties in managing pubic housing for years, and until they undertook major changes in their systems, including the character of key personnel, they appeared to be going irreversibly downhill. They still have many serious problems today, but they have demonstrated conclusively that adherence to management principles, coupled with more effective data systems--and strategic infusions of money--can indeed upgrade performance at the project level. None of these factors alone could have done it, according to the men who are currently operating these PHAs, but putting them all together--the right people, effective management systems, and money where it is needed most--they are making a sizeable dent in a most complex and difficult problem.

Something should be said about one of these PHAs that has embraced management science through a number of means. It is an agency where performance gains were much lower than in the other agencies that are undergoing the same process. There is poor communication (i.e., people don't talk with each other) despite new "systems" of communication. There is little support from the central office for project personnel, and poor coordination between project management and maintenance (which is highly centralized and admittedly badly understaffed). Few of the PHA's projects have on-site managers, and some area offices are four to five miles from the projects.

These and other problems within the PHA show up in the change scores for the projects reviewed, although both did show some small gains. (Project staff were generally dismayed to learn that the projects had "gained" as they uniformly felt that conditions had worsened in the past three years, particularly in the area of management responsiveness.) The lesson appears to be clear in this case: institutional change must be more than paper deep. It has to reach out to where the residents live, and change the basic nature of the management process if it is to result in any substantial change for the better.

A WORD ABOUT EXTERNALITIES

In developing its measures of management performance, The Urban Institute realized it had to have some way of handling what the social scientists call "externalities"--those forces that impact upon management conditions but over which the managers have little or no control. Climate is perhaps the most obvious of these, and the age of a project's

buildings is another. High-rise buildings in cold places are much more costly to maintain than two-story buildings in warm places. And buildings with common hallways demand more attention than those with individual entries directly to the outside, because of problems of litter and possible vandalism, as well as security.

Neighborhood conditions impact the scores, as does the city's and region's economy. In most of the projects reviewed, the number of welfare mothers is rising. Where this is not the case, it is usually a younger city with a growing economy. The condition of the regional economy impacts directly upon the composition of the tenants. An increasing number of residents are on public assistance. There are "problem" projects full of "problem" families, and the PHA is at a loss to know what to do. Several of the projects in the study are just such problem projects, however, and it has been demonstrated that they can be turned around, too. One of these is considered to be one of the toughest problem projects in an agency with few easy projects to manage. Yet that project has improved dramatically since 1974, and is now undergoing still further changes.

The externalities are always there, and must be accounted for, as the Institute's measures attempt to do. But they are no excuse for not doing anything. If it proved anything, the review of these 25 projects showed conclusively that there is no such thing as a hopeless project.

APPENDIX A: PROJECT PROFILES

I. Projects that showed declines in performance 1973-1974, and then demonstrated significant improvements, 1974-1976.

A. Project size: 600 units
PHA size: 5000+ units

The project is about 30 years old, with two- and three-story buildings, about half with common hallways. It is considered the city's "problem project." Change scores turned up significantly from 1974 to 1976 and rent losses declined somewhat. Based upon interviews at the agency and project, the main reasons for the upturn appear to be these:

1. Decentralization of maintenance, putting the project manager in charge of all crews.

2. Strong central office pressure for stricter policies regarding rent delinquencies, backed up by firmer court actions. Management staff believes this is a major factor in the project upturn.

3. More project staff, paid for largely via CETA. A net increase of nine workers, bring total project staff to 24.

B. Project size: 110 units
PHA size: 4000 units

Relatively new (eight years old),the project comprises a collection of two-story buildings clustered on a hillside. Scores showed small declines from 1973 to 1974, and a solid upturn since then. Reasons:

1. Stricter management--previous project manager was replaced about six months before 1976 data was collected. Immediate result was cutback in receivables, stronger maintenance response (the new manager had once been a maintenance supervisor) and an upturn in tenant satisfaction.

2. More project staff--there are now two maintenance personnel on site, whereas in 1974 there was only a cashier in the office.

3. New community center--since data was collected in 1974, a new community center (a large meeting room) has been built adjacent to the manager's office, and is now used by tenants and for day care.

C. Project size: 190 units
PHA size: 4000 units (same as above)

Scores improved markedly from 1974 to 1976, and rent collection losses declined, evidently for the following reasons:

1. Agency-wide tightening of rent collection procedures--although the manager is the same as in 1973, and staff size the same, there has been a stronger effort to curb rent delinquencies and to initiate eviction proceedings (under stricter lease and grievance procedures) and follow them through. Manager says security has improved as a result of evicting some "problem" families.

2. Stronger tenants' organization--the current Tenant Organization (TO) president is actively involved in many

activities at the project, and tries to help families in grievance proceedings. Manager says this is helpful, and feels the TO is now functioning more effectively than it was three years ago.

D. Project size: 300 units
PHA size: 15,000+ units

This PHA, which has undergone sweeping changes since 1973, introducing new personnel and new management systems simultaneously. Conditions generally were bad in 1974, for public housing and the city itself, and now there is marked improvement. For all three projects that follow, there has been a general upgrading of staff capability (and staff size) as well as vastly improved reporting systems. There has also been an emphasis upon strictness, in rent collection and in staff supervision, and this is reflected in better rent collections and better response times to requests for maintenance. Reasons cited for improvements at this project include:

1. More project staff--up from 7 to 10, has been coupled with stronger supervision and monitoring of maintenance. Project staff is strongly aided by a new maintenance information system that produces data twice a month on all work orders and materials in use. The result is improved response times.

2. New project manager--stronger supervision is provided by the new PM, who is in turn backed up by an area supervisor, appointed during the shift to decentralized management and maintenance in mid-1974. The PM now is in full charge of all aspects of management and maintenance.

3. Stronger working relations with the tenants' organization--the new PM has made a concerted effort to get the TO involved in various aspects of project management. There is now a TO office adjacent to the PM's. The TO is active in social service referrals and maintenance oversight.

E. Project size: 630 units
PHA size: Same as D.

Many of the same factors are at work, particularly the agency-wide improvements in reporting systems for tenant accounts and maintenance. This project also showed marked improvements in change scores, 1974-76, evidently for these reasons:

1. New staff in a decentralized system--two years ago, a new project manager and a new area supervisor were appointed, as well as a new area maintenance supervisor. All are regarded as more competent and stricter then their predecessors. Tighter supervision is directly reflected in tenant satisfaction scores, all of which rose in the 1974-76 period.

2. Stronger tenant organization leadership--given more opportunities to be involved in aspects of project management, the TO has responded and now works closely with the PM and area chiefs.

3. Special maintenance crews--although the size of the regular maintenance crew has stayed constant, special crews have been assigned to the project both for cyclical painting and in readying vacant units for

reoccupancy. This has resulted in faster turnaround of units, less vandalism and decreased loss of rental income.

F. Project size: 1530 units
PHA size: same as D. and E.

This project consists of a dozen high-rise, elevator structures. The PHA's new management and maintenance systems have obviously made a big impact on this project. This is reflected in positive change scores for 1974-1976 particularly in tenant satisfaction. But there appear to be other reasons, too:

1. A reduction in occupied units--more than 700 units have been kept vacant, anticipating major modernization. The maintenance staff size has been maintained, so occupied units are receiving more attention.

2. Major modernization--long in planning, work is now underway involving the installation of new kitchens, appliances, baths, floors, and painting, etc. Tenants have been actively involved in the planning, under the TPP.

3. Better staff in key positions--the PHA has shifted some top staff to this project, resulting in a new project manager and maintenance crew. Backed up by the new reporting systems and tighter central office supervision, these persons' effectiveness has noticeably increased.

4. Strengthened TO--the project tenants' organization has been measurably strengthened, with a new president (who is also a HA commissioner). Management responsibilities

under the TPP and participation in the new Tenant Management Corporation program are just getting underway.

5. Special note re: maintenance--One of the strongest examples of the importance of tight management control was seen at this project, in the maintenance department. A new area supervisor was appointed in an effort to upgrade maintenance performance at the project. He fired more than 20 "unproductive" workers, replacing them with men he judged better. He provided close supervision of the whole staff, using his own performance criteria based upon 25 years in project maintenance. The results show up strongly in the vast improvement in scores for maintenance and tenant satisfaction with service.

G. Project size: 200 units
PHA size: 3300 units

The PHA has attempted to inject new systems into the management process, with some success. Projects are generally smaller (around 200 units) and two-three stories. The PHA operates with very centralized maintenance, and few on-site managers. Scores had declined for both projects from 1973-74, but since then have improved. Reasons:

1. Better data collection regarding tenant accounts--This has made it possible to upgrade rent collections somewhat, although it is still a problem. Top staff feels courts are still too lenient about evictions, and this weakens tougher lease procedures.

2. Personnel shifts--in the centralized system, one person is now assigned to a project. (Neither of the projects

reviewed have a manager on site.) Maintenance staff has been reduced somewhat overall and, although area management staff feels it is inadequate, the Executive Director feels it is doing the job. (Maintenance scores, registering tenants' satisfaction with service, rose at both projects.)

H. Project size: 350 units
PHA size: 7500 units

This PHA has a highly centralized maintenance and management staff. Change scores improved only slightly from 1974 to 1976 after a severe decline, 1973-74. The PHA has been buffeted by strikes and severe staff cutbacks plus other forced economies. But there are a couple of reasons why this project has demonstrated some improvement:

1. Major modernization--a TPP is underway, involving major renovation of all units. Planning with tenants is completed, and the planning process probably influenced scores.

2. Better data re: tenant accounts--although rent collection is still a serious problem, at least project supervisors (there are none on-site here) now know each month exactly what each tenant owes or has paid. Previously, a manager had to call into the central office for this information, and then usually could not get it on a current basis.

I. Project size: 150 units
PHA size: 2000 units

The PHA operates with a fully centralized staff for all functions. Change scores had declined sharply, 1973-74, then improved during the next 18 months. The main reasons for improvement appear to be:

1. More experienced project supervision--it appears evident in this case that the manager has matured over the past three years (he is under 30) and has become more knowledgeable with experience.

2. More strictness in enforcing leases--backed up by the central office, the project manager has become stricter about rent collection and charges for tenant abuse.

3. More central maintenance staff and quicker turnaround on vacant units--the PHA's maintenance crew has been increased from 17 to 23 persons. The men are generally more competent than the previous crew, due partly to a fall-off in private construction in the area, which has led more capable workmen available to work for the PHA.

J. Project size: 390 units
PHA size: 1700 units

Located in an aging, industrial city, this project had scores which declined sharply, 1973-74, then improved, including nearly all measures of tenant satisfaction. Major reasons:

1. Major modernization--new kitchens, floors, and many other improvements, starting in 1974.

2. Stricter supervision over maintenance--since the modernization program got underway, there has been a companion effort to upgrade the grounds, parking areas and other aspects of the project. Trash collection and litter conditions have also improved with the enthusiastic help of the tenants' organization.

3. Cutbacks in vacancies, vandalism--a target of the modernization program and increased maintenance efforts has been to reduce vacancies and turnover time. A concomitant reduction in the costs attributable to vandalism has resulted.

K. Project size: 600 units
PHA size: 3000 units

This is one of several projects in the sample that had special features underlying apparent improvement. Scores have improved emphatically from 1974-76. A major area of improvement is maintenance, despite the fact that the PHA has a tightly centralized maintenance section. But the maintenance headquarters is located at this particular project, and therefore response times are much better for the project than for most others. Other reasons for improvements in scores include:

1. Major modernization--new kitchens and baths, door frames, security features, painting, etc. Most of this work was completed during 1974-76 and may have been reflected in the improved scores.

2. Stronger project supervision--a new project manager was appointed. In this case, a man with a background in maintenance at this very project. Using his knowledge of the project and its tenants, the new PM undertook a vigorous campaign to collect back rents (which had piled up), reduce vacancies and attendant vandalism, and improve maintenance response. Evidently, he succeeded at all three.

3. Additional project staff--since 1974, the new PM has hired a deputy and two management aides, all paid for via CETA funds.

4. Increased security--burglaries and personal assaults have been drastically reduced since a contract was made between the PHA and the city police department to provide special patrol service to the project.

II. Projects that have demonstrated consistent improvement in change scores, 1973 to 1976:

Besides those projects that have turned around in management performance from 1973 to 1976, there are others which have shown consistent gains during the period. In order to learn why, the following six projects were visited and analyzed:

A. The two projects in this agency (which manages over 15,000 units) benefited from an agency-wide program of major management improvements, touching upon every aspect of operations. New systems of tenant accounts and maintenance

supervision were instituted in this period, and the agency placed decision-making for most aspects of management at the project level. The PHA started training programs for management and maintenance personnel in conjunction with a local training institute. The quality of personnel has been upgraded through an ambitious program of hiring from outside as well. Besides the agency-wide improvements which might have affected change scores, each project has some special factors at work:

1. This large (over 1000 units) project had a natural disaster last year, which destroyed more than 60 units. One beneficial result however was a reduction in density (which was was needed) and a site for a new community center (including a gym, swimming pool and new maintenance headquarters) now under construction. Other factors of change:

   a. Major modernization--a TPP is underway, and this follows up nearly $3 million of earlier modernization.
   b. Stricter project superision--a new project manager, backed up by a capable area supervisor, has turned around the rent delinquency picture at the project, and worked to improve maintenance response.
   c. Better coordination with tenants--TPP has obviously been a factor in this regard. Now the TO is actively involved in the operations of expanded social services for tenants, as well as continued planning of the community center and other aspects of the modernization program.

d. Additional staff--for the past year, and largely with TPP funds, staff has been enlarged, and is now nearly double its 1973 size. Maintenance staff alone has doubled, and a number of tenants are now working in maintenance positions.

2. The other project in this agency is smaller (350 units), newer and generally neater. It has benefited from agency-wide management improvements, as is reflected in change scores that have risen substantially from 1974 to 1976. Size and composition of the staff is about the same as it was in 1973 but policy changes have resulted in change score improvements.

   a. Major effort to improve maintenance--although regular staff is the same size, nine CETA workers were assigned to the project. They have proved invaluable in reducing maintenance response time, and helping with the everlasting problems of ground litter.

   b. Stronger coordination with central office--the project manager feels that she is getting stronger back-up from the central office, primarily via the new area supervisor for management.

B. Another agency in the sample (over 7,000 units) showed the same strong pattern of performance for several projects, and further review proved that it, too, had undergone a comprehensive overhauling, with new management systems and

stronger personnel coming on the scene between 1973 and 1976. The new executive director initiated stronger rent collection procedures, and reduced receivables from nearly $120,000 to less than $50,000 in the first year. He credits better information plus firmer actions by project staff with this improvement. He also zeroed in on the vacancy problem, and trimmed turn around time down to five days, in most cases. A new director of maintenance was hired from the private sector. He has dramatically improved response times and tenant satisfaction with maintenance through tighter supervision and the use of modern data processing system. The two projects that were visited both reflected these changes.

1. The larger of the two projects has 450 units and a project staff of seven, the same size it was three years ago. Besides the agency-wide improvements described above, the following factors appear to have been at work in improving scores:

   a. Stronger maintenance supervision--a new maintenance foreman at the project is now supported by a stricter, more experienced area supervisor.
   b. Major modernization--in the past three years, new kitchens, appliances and cabinets have been installed.

2. The other project at this agency is smaller (320 units) and quite a bit newer than the one previously described. Like it, there have been solid gains in management performance from 1973 to 1976. In this case, most of the credit for the gains is given to better management and maintenance procedures. Size and composition of staff is

about the same as it was in 1973, but the stricter procedures regarding rent collection and maintenance response were put into effect energetically at this project. The results, predictably, have been measurably higher tenant satisfaction scores and response measures.

C. Another project in the same agency as (I-A) showed consistent gains throughout the 1973-1976 period. This pattern stems at least partially from a major agency-wide effort to upgrade procedures, although the change was not as wide-ranging as the experience at either of the two agencies discussed immediately above. But this project is also very attractive, with many of the units having pleasant gardens at front and back doors of the two-story apartments. It is nearly 40 years old, solidly built, and considered the best project in the city. There are some key reasons for the general improvement in change scores:

1. Decentralization to project-level of decision-making authority--in mid-1973, the decentralization program was put into effect. At the same time a new on-site manager and an area supervisor, considered to be the best manager in the city, were hired. The two evidently work well as a team, and immediately began to clean up a backlog of rent delinquencies, and to improving maintenance services. Although the latter task had to be done with an admittedly small crew (only four regulars for 580 units), response times had improved until a recent spate of water pipe problems, resulting from a changeover in heating systems.

D. Another project that has gained consistently is part of a medium-sized authority (2,400 units) in an industrial setting. The reasons underlying consistent improvement in scores provide almost a classic case of good housing management:

1. Stricter management--a new manager, considered the best in the PHA, was assigned to the project, considered one of the worst in the city, shortly before the first data was collected. The project was ridden with rent delinquencies, poor maintenance practices and was a hotbed of tenant complaints when he took over. His three top priorities became rent collection, improvement of maintenance service, and organizing tenants on a hall-captain basis to pitch in with project problems, especially litter and cleaning common areas.

2. Major modernization--in the past two years kitchens and bathrooms have been renovated and elevators improved. There have been many other exterior as well as interior improvements.

3. Better security--while the modernization program provided new locks and doors, a new project security patrol was also instituted.

4. Stronger tenant-management relations--while the hall captain program is still having some problems, the

manager has succeeded in getting the tenants' organization to assist with cleaning up the project (on a paid basis) and feels this has been a success. The TO is a stronger organization than it was three years ago, according to the PM.

III. Two projects with serious problems, as indicated by severe declines in scores, 1974-1976:

A. The first of these is a large (nearly 500 units) project managed by a PHA noted for its generally good management performance (two of the projects for the elderly mentioned in the next section are in the same PHA). The project had severe problems, and the PHA instituted a TPP. It appears that the single most important reason for the steep decline in scores has been the start-and-stop progression of the project's TPP. The program went through the usual planning stage with tenants deeply involved. Work commenced on nearly 150 units, involving not only kitchens, baths, appliances, etc. but also major overhaul of exteriors and a new community-recreation facility. In the late fall of 1974, however, work stopped due to a lack of TPP funds, and was not started again until the spring of this year (1976). At the same time, maintenance services had been curtailed because of TPP. The combination of events created understandable disaffection among tenants--all of which was reflected in drastically lower scores in all areas of tenant satisfaction. The TPP program is now in full swing, and any new data collection effort should reflect these improved conditions.

B. Another TPP project that has resisted performance improvement is in an older industrial city where the PHA manages about 1700 units. The 300-unit project has long been regarded as the city's problem project and performance has failed to respond to every improvement effort including major modernization and other measures under TPP. Every measure of tenant satisfaction has declined, some precipitously, from 1974 to 1976. The social service improvement effort under TPP was a bust. And in fact the expenditure of several millions of dollars has made little apparent change in the project's interior or exterior appearance. Despite this expenditure, tenants are obviously less satisfied now than they were before the TPP. At the core of the problem appears to be a deep-seated animosity between top agency staff and tenants, exacerbated by racial problems.

IV. Mixed readings on five elderly projects

All of the 20 projects described above are family projects. There were five elderly projects visited. These showed varying patterns of management performance. While it is generally assumed in most agencies that elderly projects are considerably easier to manage than family projects, this does not mean that there are no difficulties with such projects.

A. Two of the projects for the elderly are part of the same PHA. One is an attractive high-rise with 185 units, and the other is a 66-unit building that had once been a clothing factory. Both projects have exhibited consistent

gains in performance scores since 1973. The larger project is adjacent to the PHA's central office, and benefits thereby in terms of quick maintenance response times (although it has its own custodial staff). The building is attractively designed, with well-maintained grounds, and is regarded as a showpiece of the PHA. The other project is in the heart of the city's downtown, and thereby considered most desirable among those oldsters who want the amenities downtown can offer. Scores have been maintained at high levels from 1973 to 1976.

B. Another project for the elderly is located in the same city as the project described in (I-H). Scores had declined somewhat from 1973 to 1974, a period when the PHA had severe budget and staff cutbacks and labor problems. But then scores improved considerably from 1974 to 1976, although little appears to have happened throughout the PHA to have made this happen. But the project is an attractive, high-rise building, near downtown and considered especially desirable. Interviews on the site indicated that a major reason for the betterment of performance scores probably resulted from a change in on-site custodians. Tenants had been unhappy with the previous custodian, who was replaced two years ago. The new couple on-site obviously has the respect and affection of the tenants.

C. Two of the elderly projects declined from 1974 to 1976, for very different reasons, evidently, but for reasons which illustrate some of the problems involved in the management of such housing. The first of these is an attractive, 15-story tower with 112 apartments in an older, middle-sized industrial city. There are no vacancies and a long waiting list.

Performance measures indicate that conditions worsened somewhat from 1974 to 1976 after slight improvements in the earlier 18-month period. In the case of such a well-tended building, it is difficult to find reasons for any "declines," but in this case there was a reason: The project has no on-site manager, only a custodian who accepts little responsibility for anything but cleaning and repairs based upon work orders written in the central office. The person formally assigned as "project manager" apparently pays little attention to the project, and tenant complaints get scant attention.

The other project is actually four separate buildings that are managed as one, by a project supervisor who also manages four other buildings. Management and maintenance in this PHA are centralized to a high degree. In the case of this project, security and maintenance measures had declined sharply from 1974 to 1976. But a visit to the buildings showed that security appeared to be very tight--elaborate systems of outer door locks, even closed circuit TV hooked directly into each tenant's set so that he or she could see who was ringing the door buzzer. The problem with security appeared to be in the area around the buildings, rather than inside. There had been, in the previous two years, several incidents wherein older people had been assaulted or robbed, and these had prompted demands for better "security" which the tenants did not feel had been properly seen to. The maintenance question was more difficult to nail down until the relatively recent centralized system was examined carefully. Prior to its institution, tenants at these buildings had been able to request maintenance service directly from the custodian, particularly for small jobs, and usually got service immediately. Under the new system, the custodians were instructed to tell tenants to call a central number, where their request

would be translated into a work order, which then had to find its way back to the custodian. Older people found that procedure considerably more difficult and more depersonalized and expressed their dissatisfactions in the Institute's survey.

APPENDIX B: KEY PERFORMANCE MEASURES (20 CRITERION AND 10 MANAGEMENT VARIABLES USED FOR THIS STUDY)

I. Criterion variables (20):

A. Tenant perceptions:

1. Satisfaction with services
2. Satisfaction with neighbors
3. Satisfaction with apartment conditions
4. Satisfaction with overall management
5. Satisfaction with maintenance
6. Satisfaction with cleanliness of buildings and grounds
7. Satisfaction with safety and security
8. Satisfaction with provision of heat and hot water

B. Staff perceptions:

9. Agency staff evaluation of how well PHA meets its objectives
10. Agency staff perception of community acceptance
11. Agency staff satisfaction with supervision
12. Agency satisfaction with their jobs
13. Project managers satisfaction with job
14. Project staff evaluation of the authority
15. Project managers evaluation of effects of deferred maintenance
16. Project managers evaluation of building conditions

C. HUD Area Office perceptions:

17. How well agency meets its own objectives

D. Other measures:

18. Rent loss per unit (for each project)
19. Percentage of rent delinquent units
20. Estimated cost of vandalism per unit

II. Management variables (10):

There are two measures selected for each of the five key areas of management performance: strictness, management responsiveness, tenant concern for the project, staff coordination, and decentralization of decision-making.

A. Strictness:

1. Project staff's perceptions of management strictness
2. Residents' perceptions of management strictness

B. Responsiveness of management:

3. Number of hours to respond to emergency maintenance requests
4. Number of days to respond to routine emergency requests

C. Tenant concern for project:

5. Percent of residents wanting more say in project management
6. Residents belief that many people help keep up project

D. Staff interaction and participation in decision-making:

7. Agency staff opinion of their influence on policy and decision-making
8. Speed in getting answers from supervisor on policy matters

E. Decentralization of decision-making to project level:

9. Maintenance procedures organized on project basis
10. Percent of residents believing project staff is best point of contact in getting action on a complaint

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Public housing projects in transition.

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