

# **Resident Participation: A Community-Building Strategy in Low-Income Neighborhoods**

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## **Abstract**

Resident participation has been an area of community development aimed at increasing involvement of tenants in housing development, management and community-building. The precise roles and mechanisms of resident participation are not well understood, however. This paper explores the role of resident participation and its interaction with other factors that drive community revitalization. By understanding the necessary conditions, factors and other variables that strengthen resident participation, public policies can help low-income populations manifest their power and make a difference in their communities. The research presented here (1) describes the challenges and benefits of resident participation; (2) identifies examples of residents successfully contributing to the development and management of their homes; (3) details the conditions necessary for success; and (4) addresses the issue of assessing effectiveness.

For those seeking to encourage resident participation, there are three major challenges include time and money; limited options due to economics; and limited community capacity. Examples of successful resident participation are presented, such as the Demonstration Disposition in Boston — one of the most notable examples of resident participation in development in the past 10 years. Building management has also been an arena for various levels and types of resident participation, and many community development corporations have developed creative ways of involving residents in community-building efforts.

The interplay of external and internal factors together creates conditions for resident participation. This paper identifies four major factors: impetus, politics, resources and values, describing the internal and external resources affected by each. To connect these external and internal resources, bridging resources of trust, community organizing, strategic partnerships and organizational capacity are necessary. Community planning and education make up a noteworthy bridging resource that allows for the necessary learning process to take place. Community education and planning happen in three phases: building a foundation, teaching skills, and following through.

While there is general support for resident participation in housing development, management and community-building, measuring its effectiveness has received limited research attention. This paper describes the effectiveness of resident participation looking at the individual, building and community levels. These testimonials will be strengthened if hard measures of resident participation are developed and used to study its effects.

## Table of Contents

<b>About the Author</b> .....	<b>ii</b>
<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>iii</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Challenges and Benefits to Resident Participation .....	1
Examples of Successful Resident Participation .....	1
Conditions for Effective Resident Participation .....	2
Descriptions of Effectiveness .....	2
<b>Methodology</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>I. Introduction</b> .....	<b>4</b>
Research on Resident Participation .....	4
<b>II. Benefits and Challenges of Resident Participation</b> .....	<b>7</b>
Challenge One: Time and Money .....	7
Benefit: Customer satisfaction .....	7
Challenge Two: Limited Community Capacity .....	8
Benefit: Community knowledge .....	8
Challenge Three: Limited Options Due to Economics .....	8
Opportunity: Community organizing as a community-revitalization strategy.....	9
<b>III. Examples of Successful Resident Participation</b> .....	<b>10</b>
Resident Participation in Development .....	10
Resident Participation in Community-Building Efforts .....	12
<b>IV. Conditions for Successful Resident Participation</b> .....	<b>14</b>
Impetus.....	14
Politics.....	15
Values .....	17
Resources .....	17
Putting It All Together: Bridging Resources .....	18
Trust.....	18
Community Organizing.....	19
Strategic Partnerships .....	19
Organizational Capacity .....	20
Community Planning and Education.....	20
<b>V. Describing the Effectiveness of Resident Participation</b> .....	<b>24</b>
The Impact of Resident Participation in Development.....	24
The Impact of Resident Participation in Management .....	24
The Impact of Resident Participation in Community-Building.....	25
<b>Selected Sources</b> .....	<b>28</b>
<b>Web Sites</b> .....	<b>29</b>
<b>Author Interviews</b> .....	<b>30</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>32</b>
Collaborating Staff.....	32
Additional Reviewers and Contributors.....	32

## **Executive Summary**

Resident participation has been an area of community development aimed at increasing involvement of tenants in housing development, management and community-building. While resident participation is not a blanket remedy for complex problems facing the affordable-housing community today, it is an important strategy for community development. The precise roles and mechanisms of resident participation are not well understood, however. This paper explores the role of resident participation and its interaction with other factors that drive community revitalization. By understanding the necessary conditions, factors and other variables that strengthen resident participation, public policies can help low-income populations manifest their power and make a difference in their communities. The research presented here (1) describes the challenges and benefits of resident participation; (2) identifies examples of residents successfully contributing to the development and management of their homes; (3) details the conditions necessary for success; and (4) addresses the issue of assessing effectiveness.

### ***Challenges and Benefits to Resident Participation***

Resident participation has roots in both public-policy and grassroots community-organizing efforts. It invokes multiple meanings and includes such activities as coming to informational meetings about what's going on in one's building or being involved in decisions about the design and construction of one's housing. For those seeking to encourage resident participation, there are three major challenges:

***Time and money:*** While there are costs of time and money associated with resident participation, over the long run resident participation can help to increase customer satisfaction. In development and management, it can also help to save money and time over the long run.

***Limited options due to economics:*** While those who live in assisted, affordable and public housing face limited options, community organizing can be a strategy for broader community revitalization.

***Limited community capacity:*** Too often, residents of low-income communities are seen as bundles of problems that need to be fixed. Residents, however, can bring a wealth of community knowledge and skills that are vital for efforts to revitalize communities.

### ***Examples of Successful Resident Participation***

This section profiles case studies of resident participation, such as the Demonstration Disposition in Boston, one of the most notable examples of resident participation in development in the past 10 years. Building management has also been an arena for various levels and types of resident participation, and many community development corporations have developed creative ways of involving residents in community-building efforts.

### **Conditions for Effective Resident Participation**

The interplay of external and internal factors together creates conditions for resident participation. This paper identifies four major factors:

**Impetus:** What are the initial conditions under which resident participation arises? An external crisis often catalyzes resident participation. Residents' commitment is needed to start the process of resident participation.

**Politics:** The external political environment often creates the context for resident participation. Internally, leadership is needed to sustain the momentum of resident participation.

**Resources:** Resources are necessary for sustaining resident participation. Funding from outside government and foundation sources can provide the necessary financial support. Building a strong organization of residents helps to nurture the resources that residents themselves bring.

**Values:** For resident participation to be a reality, all stakeholders involved must value it as a necessary part of the process.

To connect these external and internal resources, bridging resources of trust, community organizing, strategic partnerships and organizational capacity are necessary. Community planning and education make up a noteworthy bridging resource that allows for the necessary learning process to take place. Community education and planning happen in three phases: building a foundation, teaching skills, and follow-through.

### **Descriptions of Effectiveness**

Finally, this paper asks, given what we know about resident participation, how do we describe its effectiveness? While resident participation has been difficult to measure, this paper describes the effectiveness of resident participation looking at criteria at the levels of the individual, building and community.

## **Methodology**

Research for this paper developed in several stages. The first stage involved a literature review to understand the idea of resident participation as it has played out in public policy and in practice. The second stage — data collection — involved structured interviews with 15 key informants in the field of housing, at the local, state and national levels. These conversations contributed data which provides a description of the depth and scope of resident participation. The next stage of this research sought to probe more deeply into specific experiences with resident participation from the perspective of community development corporations (CDCs). This process involved interviewing 10 staff of CDCs to understand their experience with resident participation. It also included interviews with several residents of properties owned and/or managed by these CDCs. The goal of these interviews was to describe the multiple ways in which CDCs are involved in resident participation. After collecting data from these interviews, the analysis developed common themes and lessons learned from policymakers and practitioners, and residents' experiences with tenant education.

It should be noted that due to time and travel constraints, this paper focuses primarily on residents who are inhabitants of assisted, affordable or public housing in major urban areas, including Boston; Washington, D.C.; and Gilroy, San Diego and Sacramento, California. These findings may be less relevant to nonurban areas, or communities outside the East or West Coasts.

## **I. Introduction**

Resident participation, including activities such as meeting with developers to provide input on design, serving on boards responsible for managing property, and working with neighbors on policing or maintaining property, has been seen as an important strategy for the preservation of affordable housing. The thinking behind resident participation is that through participation, residents will have a greater stake in the property in which they live. Because of this investment, they will take a more active role in preserving the quality of life at the site. Not only will they devote greater attention to taking care of the property, they will also contribute to improving the overall life of the community, such as participating in public safety.

Through their participation, residents may gain skills that help them in other areas of their life, such as education and employment opportunities. This can then potentially lead to self-sufficiency (Gray 2000).

The genesis of resident participation was in the antipoverty programs that called for “maximum feasible participation” of citizens in community-revitalization efforts. Over the last 20 years, two of the most significant pieces of legislation to promote resident participation in housing include the Housing and Community Development Act of 1987 and the HOPE VI program. According to Chandler (1991), “The enactment of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1987 solidified the emergence of resident management as the major alternative to conventional management of public housing developments. The act gives resident management statutory standing and financial support and provides for the conversion of public housing units to low-income ownership through resident management organizations” (p. 136). Almost 10 years later, the Multifamily Assisted Housing Reform and Affordability Act of 1997 continued to include tenant participation as part of the restructuring process. Specifically, tenants are to be involved in the mortgage restructuring and rental assistance sufficiency plans, proposed transfer of the project, and rental assistance assessment plans.

In 1992 HOPE VI (also known as the Urban Revitalization Demonstration) attempted to transform the landscape of public housing. The goals of HOPE VI were threefold: to transform the dilapidated structures that much public housing had deteriorated into; to increase resident self-sufficiency; and to promote a sense of community-mindedness among residents. The HOPE VI housing legislation required resident involvement in the design of the funding request, resident training, and implementation and monitoring.

### ***Research on Resident Participation***

Resident participation has not been extensively analyzed by researchers, but a few studies have examined its effects. One area that has received considerable attention in the literature is that of resident management. Resident participation in management has been used as an alternative to management by the public housing authority. The focus on resident management started in the 1970s in Boston and St. Louis. Chandler (1991) conducted a review of the literature and found that resident management councils “produce greater degrees of resident satisfaction and more employment opportunities,... reduce the incidence of social problems,... allow for a higher degree of resident involvement and cost more than conventional management to operate” (p. 141). Monti (1993) studied resident management corporations (RMCs) and found that “a good RMC likely will be viewed as doing more on the site and

being stricter than the local housing authority. People also will say they generally have more knowledge of what occurs on the site because of information coming from the tenant organization” (p. 192). One challenge that Monti found was that “their degree of involvement may not be sustained over long periods of time” (p.192). At the time of Monti’s study, there were fewer than a dozen resident management corporations. Manpower Demonstration and Research Corporation (1981) conducted a longitudinal study of tenant management of public housing buildings and found that tenant management performed as well as the management of the local housing authority.

Peterman (1994, 1996) cautions, however, against a blind acceptance of resident participation in management. First, he argues that resident management should not be a substitute for federal government support for public housing. He cautions that, “As a public policy, it has become entangled with conservative ideology that promotes less government, more home-ownership, and less public housing — goals that are likely to benefit few, if any, low-income public housing residents” (Peterman 1994, p. 15). Second, he argues that resident participation does not necessarily lead to empowerment. He argues, “The deciding factor should always be whether management provides the basis for a livable, healthy community” (Peterman 1996, p. 486). In conclusion, he advocates that resident management should not always be the goal of public housing, arguing that this diverts attention away from government responsibility over public housing.

Another form of resident participation in management is that of resident-owned cooperatives. Cooperative housing is owned by a corporation that is run by residents. They do not own their individual units; rather they own shares in the corporation. Proponents argue that cooperatives give residents increased emotional and financial stake in their housing. Opponents argue that residents do not have the skills or desire to maintain their cooperatives. Rohe (1995) did a study of cooperatives and found that cooperatives face at least three challenges: lack of adequate training for board members, lack of communication between board members and residents, and lack of participation by residents in the cooperative.

In terms of community-building, Saegert, Winkel and Swartz (2002) did a study of resident participation in public safety. The authors found that crime was lower in buildings that were tenant-owned or -managed or managed by community groups than buildings managed and owned by the city of New York. Buildings in which tenants participated in tenant associations had less in-building crime. Buildings in which there were prosocial norms as well as strong leadership also had less crime. Thus this study found that neighborhood organizations and resident relationships may be the vehicle through which collective efficacy is formed in a neighborhood.

Can participating in property management empower residents? Empowerment, according to Somerville (1998), can take several forms. First, there is empowerment through knowledge. Having information, education and training about one’s situation, however, does not necessarily lead to empowerment unless residents stay connected to the grassroots and advocate for a more democratic tenant education. Second, there is empowerment through stature. This, Somerville argues, can be more effective than information or education. Finally, there is empowerment through agreement and power transfer. This comes about when owners and land-

lords look at residents as equals. It is also important “that the transfer of power is not monopolized by an elite group of tenants, it is important that appropriate arrangements are made for democratic tenant representation and for the diffusion of the transferred power to all minorities within the tenant body” (p. 251). Somerville cautions us that participation does not necessarily mean empowerment, because participation can be used by those in power to serve their own, self-interested ends.

These examples show that resident participation has been both a matter of public policy as well as part of a grassroots movement to revitalize and stabilize neighborhoods. While there is general support for resident participation, it requires greater scrutiny. While these studies speak to the effects of resident participation, less is said about the process of resident participation. This study, therefore, seeks to both build on the literature and fill in this gap.

## **II. Benefits and Challenges of Resident Participation**

The definition of resident participation is not standardized. Disagreements over the efficacy of resident participation as a useful community-development strategy are often rooted in what it is believed to be. This section outlines many of the major arguments for and against resident participation in housing development, management and community-building.

<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Benefit</b>
Time and money	Customer satisfaction
Limited community capacity	Community knowledge
Limited options due to economics	Community organizing as a community-building strategy

### ***Challenge One: Time and Money***

Probably the most often cited argument against resident participation is that it is too costly and takes too much time. Developers are wary of involving residents because the time involved with community participation can extend the time frame for a project. An extended time frame means additional costs. Getting residents involved may mean going to meeting with residents, often at night and possibly on weekends. There is no guarantee that these community meetings with residents will add value to the development process from the developer's point of view. As an example on the development side, with HOPE VI projects, one estimate suggested that resident participation adds an additional 12 to 14 months to the overall timeline and 6 to 7 percent to the total budget.<sup>1</sup>

### ***Benefit: Customer satisfaction***

Resident participation can be a useful vehicle for ensuring customer satisfaction with the product. Residents bring knowledge of what works in their community as well as what will work for their household. In this way, resident participation functions as a type of market survey for developers who must figure out what customers in the area want if they are to produce a good product that meets residents' needs. Resident participation can, for example answer important questions about paint color, design and room layout, and materials to use in the construction of new housing. By involving residents up front in the development process, the developer can save valuable time in the long run because there will be less need for retrofitting.

Knowing what works is particularly useful in multifamily housing. In multifamily housing, the use of space is critical because it is generally a smaller space relative to the number of people living in the household compared to a single-family unit.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, it is particularly important for housing to be constructed creatively to meet the needs and demands of large families.

Customer satisfaction also has a political element. There are developers who involve residents merely for the sake of satisfying government requirements for doing so. There are

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with George Caruso, Edgewood Management Corporation.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Leroy Stoddard, Urban Edge.

developers and owners who involve residents so that residents will not have the leverage to complain later on in the process. As customers, residents must be knowledgeable about their rights, roles and responsibilities.

### ***Challenge Two: Limited Community Capacity***

Sometimes, residents are seen as having little to offer the process of housing. They are seen as “amateurs.” Residents are not typically professionally trained in housing development or management. Developers, managers and consultants, therefore, must spend time working with residents to train them in the business of development and management. This can be a frustrating process both for the developer and consultant, as well as for the residents.

#### *Benefit: Community knowledge*

Sometimes residents feel as though outsiders look at their community in a deficit framework and assume that because they are poor and people of color, that they have little to offer the process. Several residents acknowledged that they experienced subtle and overt racism. While most residents lack formal knowledge of housing development and management, they bring knowledge of their communities and families. In addition, some residents, though not professionally trained in housing development or management, can bring these skills if they have learned them on their own or through their jobs. James Stockard, a former housing consultant, therefore looks at the relationship between residents and the developer as a “meeting of experts.” He reflected on resident participation in the following way:

If I go to a meeting with a bunch of residents, I bring with me my skills and knowledge around finance, zoning, design and the political process. They ought to listen, test me, and ask [me] to explain things in a way they understand. They have expertise in the neighborhood, what will make a difference for them, what they can afford. They know much more about that than I do. If I can engage them in a process and communicate their wisdom, then we benefit and they benefit. The housing is better because it matches their desire.

If developers, managers and community builders tap into the knowledge that residents bring, they will gain insight into how to create housing that truly responds to residents’ needs.

### ***Challenge Three: Limited Options Due to Economics***

Residents of low-income communities face many social, political and economic challenges. For many of them, they are “lifelong community members”<sup>3</sup> who have lived in a particular community for many years. Many stay in housing in poor condition because they have few other options. With poverty often comes skepticism. Low-income residents who have lived in deplorable conditions and felt neglected by government will be ambivalent when the government comes in and promises new opportunity. They will be skeptical of developers whom they may perceive as just wanting to make a profit. Residents will be wary of developers whom they do not see as having their best interest at heart. They can even be distrustful of community organizers coming in because they are seen as outsiders. Even if a community

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Penny Meredith, Brand New Day.

organizer has the same race, language and/or culture of the residents, the residents can be skeptical if they see the community organizer as merely fulfilling a job.<sup>4</sup>

Underlying much of this skepticism is the disbelief that residents can change their situation. Gloria Robinson, a community organizer for Manna Community Development Corporation in Washington, D.C., describes the dynamics in this way:

We are working with a population that has generally felt that nothing they could do can make a difference. Development in this city is controlled by the politicians and the developers and those with money. I hear a lot of times, “There’s nothing I can do about it. We don’t have money.”

Because of this view, residents may be hesitant to get involved and articulate an agenda for change.

If these communities are immigrant communities, they face additional barriers to participation. Immigrant communities face language and cultural isolation from the larger society. This isolation often translates into a lack of understanding and awareness of how mainstream institutions work. Some may fear getting involved for fear of putting themselves or their families in jeopardy.

*Opportunity: Community organizing as a community-revitalization strategy*

Community organizing is an often misunderstood and underutilized strategy for community revitalization. Many CDCs have shied away from community organizing as they have attempted to forge relationships with mainstream organizations, such as banks, developers and some foundations.<sup>5</sup> However, organizing residents can help to counter some of the ill effects of poverty. Community organizing can help to harness the power inherent in the community and open up opportunities for mobilization and action.

Foremost, community organizing helps low-income residents recognize the power that they have. They have power in their numbers and collective voice.<sup>6</sup> By engaging in the process of organizing, residents become more politically savvy and learn the “rules of the game.” Through the process of resident participation, then, residents learn how to navigate the system and advocate for their own rights. They come to realize that they are real stakeholders with real rights. Through their involvement, they can help to keep the government accountable to their needs.

In recognizing their power, residents work to save their homes and build a better future for their children. Many of them are aware of the ill effects of gentrification, which has often meant the displacement of low-income persons. Many are involved because they want to build a better future for their children.

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Jacquelyn Davis, Nuestra Comunidad Development Corporation.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Anne Pasmanick, National Neighborhood Coalition.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Michael Brown, Jewish Organizing Initiative.

### **III. Examples of Successful Resident Participation**

Given the challenges and benefits outlined in the previous section, how are we to understand resident participation in practice? There are three key areas of housing and community development in which resident participation has played a part:

- Participation in development;
- Participation in management; and
- Community-building.

This section sketches out case studies of resident participation in these three areas.

#### ***Resident Participation in Development***

One notable example of resident participation in development was the Demonstration Disposition program in Boston. The following section is a brief description of the project. While it is likely that a program of this magnitude will not be funded again in the near future, there are important lessons to be learned about resident participation. Lessons learned from this project will be integrated into the remaining sections of this paper.

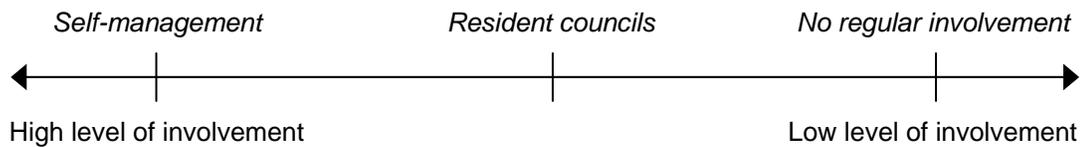
The Demonstration Disposition (Demo Dispo) program in Boston was one of the largest federal programs to date focusing on housing rehabilitation in the country. The mission of the program was to rehabilitate nearly 2,000 housing units that had been owned by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Central to this project was a focus on resident participation. After the rehabilitation and construction, it was hoped that residents would take over ownership of the buildings. Robert Pyne, who worked for Massachusetts Finance Agency (Mass Housing), the state finance agency that administered Demo Dispo, recalls the thinking behind resident participation: “Mass Housing felt that if tenants had an ownership role and some help, properties would have a greater change of staying feasible over the long term.”

According to some residents, the focus on resident participation started as “resident ownership” then moved to “resident-centered” and finally ended as “resident participation.” When this happened, the “dynamic changed,” according to Danny Violi, a consultant for Demo Dispo. He recalls that tenant associations became more like partners in the process. He remembers, “The tenant associations had approval rights, but it was a different dynamic than being the actual developer.” Some tenants involved as leaders in this process recalled that this shift in language motivated their participation and vigilance about the process of ensuring that residents had a say in the program. For them, resident-ownership symbolized control over decision-making. Their concern was that the move to a resident-centered approach would take away their decision-making power. This shift in language galvanized the involvement of several of the residents to ensure their input into the development process.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Focus group with Shirley Rose, Patricia Mayo, Juanita Pitts, Daphne Lopes, Jacquelyn Davis, Nilsa Rivera and Dumas LaFontant.

Creating the environment for resident participation proved to be a challenging task. Skepticism and suspicion characterized the initial phase of the project. Some residents had had negative experiences with government-sponsored programs. Others found the government a neglectful landlord. In essence, many residents did not believe that the government had their best interests at heart. Residents were even skeptical of the community organizers who were hired to organize them. Organizers who tried to bring together residents from different properties often found that there were “turf” issues, and so residents were skeptical of one another. It did not matter that one of the lead community organizers was the same race as most of the residents; distrust pervaded the initial stages of Demo Dispo. Therefore, building trust proved to be a critical first step in this process. Trust had to be built with the residents on multiple levels. Community organizers hired to work with the residents had to build trust. Consultants had to build trust. Government representatives had to build trust. Over the 10-year process that it took for Demo Dispo to be finished, organizing and leadership proved vital to maintaining resident participation in the process.



The day-to-day workings of building management can seem mundane to the average resident. From the perspective of one manager, though, resident participation in management is often inversely related to how well management is doing. If residents are not involved in a consistent manner, an unhealthy relationship may develop between residents and management, creating an adversarial environment that gets in the way of productive problem-solving. Sandra Henriquez, administrator and CEO of the Boston Public Housing Authority, explains her perspective on resident involvement in management in the following way:

The ultimate goal is to have my properties operate well and have residents call it a home. That’s my goal as a landlord. A resident’s goal is to live in a place that is well managed and not be embarrassed about it. A landlord needs active tenants to hold our feet to the fire, to share with us their ideas about where they live.

Similarly, Susan Stockard, who works for Maloney Properties Inc., a private management company in Boston, says, “resident services help people have successful tenancies and have the housing be part of an empowered lifestyle.”

There are different levels of resident participation in management. Different levels determine the amount of say residents have in the process and whether their role is as advisors or as those making the actual decisions. Residents can be involved by providing feedback to management through such venues as surveys. For properties that have more active residents, resident councils often include management as part of their regular agenda. Some resident councils have managers come to the meetings periodically to talk to residents. In some properties, residents are involved with day-to-day management.

Brand New Day, a community development corporation in Elizabeth, New Jersey, utilizes the system of a “building captain.” A resident of each building, the building captain is the first person that residents are supposed to go to when they have a problem. The building captain also is a vehicle for communicating to management the “pulse” of the residents. Higher levels of participation in management issues help to build bridges between residents and management.

One less frequently chosen, but viable, option for some residents has been to transform their residences into self-managed cooperatives. Marksdale Gardens in Boston’s Roxbury neighborhood is one example of this. In 1987 Marksdale Gardens became a self-managed property. The residents had become tired of being managed by outside companies that one resident termed “mean-spirited.” One of the residents, Minnie Clark, decided to take things into her own hands and knew that ownership was the answer to their problems. Turning Marksdale Gardens into cooperative ownership proved to be a formidable task, however. Between 1975 and 1984, Minnie and another tenant knocked on the doors of everyone in the building repeatedly to convince them of the benefits of turning to ownership. They did this until they got 90 percent of the residents to agree to make the move to turn into a cooperative. They have been successfully self-managed for almost 20 years.

### ***Resident Participation in Community-Building Efforts***

Neighborhood residents are often trying to reclaim a lost sense of “community” where they live. They organize activities to decrease the sense of isolation and build a sense of connectedness among residents. Some of the primary motivations for residents to come together include promoting public safety, building bridges across racial and ethnic differences, and forging stronger relationships between youth and adults.

Public safety is a common reason that residents come together. Community meetings that include frank discussions with the police can yield a turnout of 60 percent to 70 percent of building residents. For many communities, working on public safety is about reclaiming their community. In San Diego, residents of the properties managed by Community Housing-Works joined together across properties to sponsor a “Say Yes to Safe Neighborhoods” event. This was their way to reclaim their neighborhood from drug dealers and “clean up our neighborhood.”

Communities across the country are grappling with the issues engendered by growing ethnic and racial diversity. As an example, community organizers in Boston are working with neighborhoods that are increasingly Cape Verdean, Latino and African-American, while community organizers in Sacramento work with neighborhoods that are African-American, Vietnamese, Mien and Hmong. Oftentimes, racial and ethnic diversity has meant that tensions have flared as communities struggle to communicate across language and culture. Community organizers in both these cities have spent time working with residents to build a common definition of community.

In addition to growing racial and ethnic diversity in neighborhoods nationwide, we are seeing an increased emphasis on reaching young people. Marcos Beleche, director of community organizing at Codman Square Community Development Corporation in Boston, advocates

that, “Youth are the hope. The older population is overwhelmed by some of their life necessities or very disillusioned...I think youth are looking for opportunities to be engaged.” Codman Square CDC initiated its STARS (Smart and Talented Adolescents Reaching for Success) program, through which staff have trained youth living in their properties in leadership development and community organizing.

In Gilroy, California, South County Housing engaged its residents in an intergenerational project. In one of its properties that had multifamily and senior housing, there was an intergenerational mural project. A muralist from a local community college came and did mural classes with the youth. The youth interviewed seniors about their hopes and wishes. The end product was a two-part mural. One section had a young girl blowing dandelion seeds. The other section of the mural had an elderly woman catching the dandelion seeds in her hands. On the dandelion seeds were painted the wishes of the seniors in the property. This mural has been placed in the community room of the property.

#### **IV. Conditions for Successful Resident Participation**

Demonstration Disposition, as well as the other examples of resident participation in management and community-building described in the preceding section, demonstrate that certain conditions lead to successful resident participation. While there are some conditions that are specific to each area, there are factors that cut across all three areas: impetus, politics, values and resources. For each of these factors, there are external and internal conditions which make for effective resident participation. Finally, to bring together these resources together, bridging resources are necessary.

<b>FACTOR</b>	<b>External</b>	<b>Internal</b>
Impetus	Crisis Moment	Commitment
Politics	Political Environment	Leadership
Values	Ethos of Participation	Community Orientation
Resources	Public Subsidy for Development	Organizational Capacity

##### ***Impetus***

Often, it is an outside crisis that sets resident participation in motion. In housing, this crisis often takes some form of the following: residents wake up in the morning to find a notice of “building for sale” tacked onto their doors by the owner. Sometimes, residents find out about the selling of their building by reading about it in the newspaper. The threat of losing their homes acts as a catalyst and compels residents to mobilize for action.

For example, Camfield Gardens (now Camfield Estates) was one of the properties participating in the Demo Dispo project in Boston. Paulette Ford, a key resident leader at Camfield Gardens, acknowledges that residents got involved when HUD made its intentions known to foreclose on the property and sell to the highest bidder. HUD acted as a catalyst and set into motion the conditions for resident participation.<sup>8</sup> Camfield Gardens was the only housing development that was to be totally demolished and rebuilt. For this to happen, residents had to be completely relocated off-site for the demolition and construction to happen as quickly as possible. Even with this threat, it was difficult to sustain resident involvement over the entire process of the disposition. Ford notes that it practically took the appearance of moving trucks coming to relocate residents for resident participation to jump from 55 percent to 100 percent. During the relocation, residents of Camfield Gardens continued to meet to ensure that they would not in fact be displaced, but be able to move back into Camfield. During the relocation process residents continued to meet, and Ford observes that participation was between 80 percent and 90 percent during the relocation process. The threat of being displaced from their homes kept residents motivated to consistently come to meetings.

For Camfield Estates, now that the threat of displacement is over, what does resident participation look like? Ford acknowledges that it was easier to get residents involved around the relocation issue than it is around day-to-day management issues.<sup>9</sup> She observes, “It’s easier

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with James Drazen, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

<sup>9</sup> Not all the current residents at Camfield are the same residents who were involved during Demo Dispo.

to organize residents around an issue, like loss of housing, than it is to say that your building needs work. There's no immediacy to it. It has to be right at their door."

Others in the housing field have similarly commented that it is easier to organize residents around development issues than it is around day-to-day management issues. James Stockard of the Harvard Graduate School of Design explains this dynamic in the following way:

In the property-management world, you do not have events. A lot of your goal in property management is synonymous with flying under the radar. It's harder to attract people to that kind of function.

For many residents, the day-to-day workings of management may seem mundane. It does not have noticeable payoffs the way that development does. Those working in management, however, have similarly commented that a crisis in the building does bring residents out in large numbers. Residents often get involved when they are angry around management issues, such as the raising of rents.

Averting the threat of a housing crisis does not mean that there are no opportunities for which residents will mobilize. Dalia Ward, lead organizer for the Sacramento Mutual Housing Association, observes, "We work with mostly poor people, some extremely poor, but there is always a crisis in the community. If we don't know that there is a crisis brewing, we haven't done our jobs." Good organizers try to identify salient issues that residents are willing to organize around.

To deal with different crises, there must be commitment. There must be commitment on the part of all involved, not just the residents. Demo Dispo, for example, took over 10 years to complete. Needless to say, it took countless meetings between all stakeholders — residents, government representatives, organizers, consultants, developers, architects, managers and others. Commitment sustains people over the long run.

### ***Politics***

To sustain residents' commitment over the long term, it takes strong, politically savvy leadership. Leaders keep people informed, fuel residents' motivations, and help residents articulate and fight for a common vision. When residents first come to the table, they are not necessarily a united force, though they may have common concerns. They are often as distrustful of one another as they are of outsiders. Good leadership helps to build community as it builds trust over time. Leadership is necessary not just to sustain people's interest and commitment; it is also often necessary to fight obstacles such as racism and government bureaucracy. It often takes someone who is "gutsy," who can fight the battle over and over again. Leaders do not just fight external forces; they often find themselves fighting internal ones as well. In-fighting breaking out between residents is common and there is a need for the leader to be a "peacemaker."

It is particularly common in the management world to hear of the need for a leader to be a peacemaker.<sup>10</sup> It is not surprising to observe that the relationship between management and resident can be fraught with tension. Resident leadership is often needed to serve as a kind of translator between management and resident, helping to build the ongoing relationships with management. Open dialogue that is consistent helps to foster this. One person involved in management said, “The important thing is to not have people wait until they are mad. Have open and regular communication with residents. It builds the trust and understanding. When things go wrong, you blame them because you don’t know them.” Resident leadership helps to build an environment of trust and open communication between residents and management.

Leadership must often be nurtured. Residents will not always immediately look at themselves as leaders. Jacquelyn Davis, a lead organizer in the Demo Dispo projects, remembers that she wanted the residents — not the community organizers — to take the lead in the project. Patricia Mayo, one of the resident leaders, remembers, “The key for me was when Jackie stood up and said ‘you need to organize yourselves. I’m not going to do the work.’ Jackie started working people. At the time, I would only help out when I could. Next thing I knew, Jackie had reeled me in as vice president.” Residents often begin their involvement in ways that they feel comfortable, whether it is handing out flyers, making phone calls or going to talk to government agencies. It is important, therefore, to identify the different ways in which residents show leadership in their community. Shirley Rosa, a resident leader in the Demo Dispo project, advocates, “When you have people who want to help, never tell them there’s nothing they can do.”

Those who work with residents often point out that it is important to identify “nontraditional” leaders. Penny Meredith, a community organizer for Brand New Day, pointed out that “my greatest asset is the crossing guard.” Leaders are those people whom others in the community trust. Identifying nontraditional leaders acknowledges the multiple skills, resources and talents that all residents bring to the process.

Leadership, however, does not happen in a vacuum. The local political environment can determine the type of resident participation that manifests itself. In the case of Demo Dispo, the government supported resident participation. Prior to Demo Dispo, HUD had had other experiences with resident participation in turning around buildings that had fallen into disrepair.<sup>11</sup> To indicate their support, the government provided the necessary resources (described below) to make the project a reality. The government also provided the necessary support for the lengthy process of resident participation, which involved countless meetings and negotiations between residents, government agencies, developers and consultants.

While a favorable political environment can help to foster resident participation, an adversarial political environment can do the same. For example, in a city where low-income residents are not able to access formal channels to be heard by the local government, it is possible that they will turn to community organizing and protest to be heard.<sup>12</sup> In such an

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with Susan Stockard, Malony Properties.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with James Drazen, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Sal Steven-Hubbard, NeighborWorks America.

environment, community organizing and protest acts as a resource for low-income communities.

### **Values**

Resident participation, even if it is imposed by government policy, will not necessarily take hold unless those in power value it and are truly willing to listen and consider acting upon residents' requests or demands. It can be the case that a developer or owner will have a meeting to solicit resident participation, but do it merely for the sake of saying that they had resident participation in the development process. In cases such as this, what residents say will have little bearing on the outcome. Instead, residents must have a "real say" and there must be an "ethos of participation."<sup>13</sup> For residents to have a real say, developers, managers and others must be actually willing to listen to residents, even if it contradicts what they may believe is the "right" thing to do. There must be the desire to really hear and respond to residents' concerns. Ultimately, developers and managers must respect what residents have to say and not see it as "whining." There must be respect for resident's time and the knowledge and skills that they bring to the table. James Stockard expresses this sentiment when he calls resident participation a "meeting of experts." Similarly, residents must really value the process of involvement as well as have a strong sense of community-mindedness. This often means they must be willing to think about their individual self-interest within a community context.

### **Resources**

It is often the case that resident participation cannot happen without support. External support such as financing is often necessary. In the Demo Dispo project, for example, the prolonged support of community organizers was funded with government support. Resident participation that uses the support of community organizers raises the question of funding support. It is increasingly difficult for organizers to find external sources of financial support, even from foundations.<sup>14</sup> Having the government fund community organizing raises questions because it then makes it difficult for community organizers to struggle against the government if necessary.

Internal support often comes in the form of organized residents. Residents who are organized can speak with one voice and leverage their collective power. Anne Pasmanick, director of the National Neighborhood Coalition, comments on the need for organized residents:

If they are not organized, they can be self-interested and treat each other really badly. I have seen tenants who are at each other's throats. Things get ugly when things feel high-stake. Tenants start to worry about what will happen to them. If they are not working with good organizations, they will start to think about the "bad guys" in my building and it becomes a self-preservation, self-interest drive.

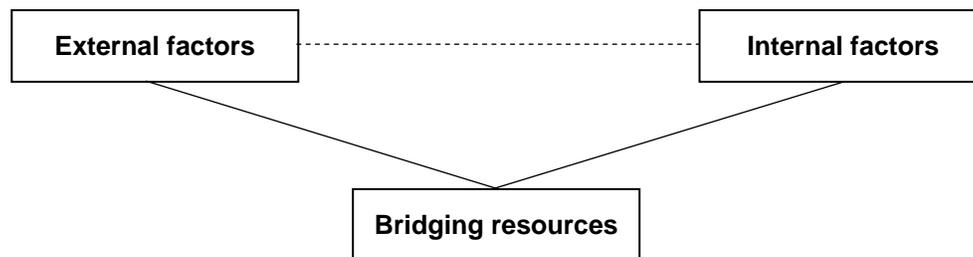
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<sup>13</sup> Interview with Conrad Egan, National Housing Conference.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Anne Pasmanick, National Neighborhood Coalition.

As an example of this, Michael Brown, a community organizer in the Demo Dispo project, remembers that his main task was helping the residents build a strong, viable resident organization. This meant that residents received training in areas like how to form a board of directors, how to write financial statements and how to write bylaws. In forming this organization, Brown tried to teach residents that they were their own greatest assets. He tried to convey, “Their clout comes from numbers. Their power comes not from money but from information and numbers and relationships with some of the political forces that oversaw HUD and MHFA.”<sup>15</sup> For residents of low-income communities, who do not have access to financial capital, building a strong organization is a vehicle to express their collective power.

### ***Putting It All Together: Bridging Resources***



Given these conditions for resident participation, what makes for effective and sustained resident participation? While a crisis can motivate action initially, having leadership and organized residents help to sustain the momentum. External and internal resources must work in cooperation. Bridging resources, therefore, help to bring together the external and internal factors in a dynamic relationship by helping to make needed connections. These bridging resources include:

- Trust,
- Community organizing,
- Strategic partnerships,
- Organizational capacity, and
- Community planning and education.

#### *Trust*

The first bridging resource that must be in place is trust. There must be trust on many different levels: between residents and developer, between residents and management, between residents and government, between residents and their resident leader, and between residents and the community organizer. Oftentimes, it is distrust, suspicion and skepticism that govern these relationships. While building trust is one of the most important and often hardest things to do, it is often quite simple in reality. It takes honesty, consistency and a good-faith effort. It also takes a willingness to see life from the residents’ perspective. Patricia Mayo, the resident leader in Demo Dispo, remembers that a key moment for her was when members of the

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<sup>15</sup> MHFA is the acronym for the Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency.

government agencies were willing to leave their downtown offices and come into the neighborhood for a meeting. This signified that the government was willing to learn about the real conditions of residents' lives and make a good-faith effort to remedy some of their problems.

### *Community Organizing*

Community organizing is another key bridging resource. Community organizers are committed to maintaining housing not just as physical assets, but as social ones as well. Dalia Ward, lead organizer at Sacramento Mutual Housing Association, identifies this importance of community organizing when she reflected:

There are housing developers who think organizing is a distraction. For us, it's motivated by a deep understanding that it's not just bricks and mortar. It's also the people. To stabilize a neighborhood, there needs to be leaders working on issues. We see our role bigger than providing low rents. We see ourselves as having a role in transforming neighborhoods. That doesn't happen in one neighborhood complex. It happens through people living there, speaking up and helping them navigate a system based on money and power.

Ward elaborates on the process of organizing and describes it as, "Organizers go out and meet folks and get their stories and try to motivate what makes this person tick. We find that if we build good relationships and have good conversations and are open and honest ourselves, people will talk to use about what concerns them about their health, jobs and kids."

In talking to residents, community organizers build relationships with residents and identify their needs. In this process, community organizers also try to identify and nourish organic leadership in the community. They help to build key connections in the community and create a network of support. Good community organizers do not bring in their own agenda and impose it on the community. Rather, they teach residents self-sufficiency skills so they can do the work themselves. Community organizers in the Demo Dispo project were also crucial in getting and sustaining resident involvement and helping them navigate the political terrain. Community organizers act as a support system for residents, to encourage them and help them troubleshoot.

### *Strategic Partnerships*

Community organizing often helps people to build strategic partnerships, another bridging resource. Dalia Ward comments on the need for strategic partnerships when she notes, "We bring in other institutions that are trying to support the residents." Her organization does this so that "it's not our residents against the world. The goal is not to set them up for failure." Similarly, residents in Demo Dispo found that they had to make allies, including housing consultants and government agencies. Though the government had let them down in the past, they had to make a leap of faith and trust both Mass Housing and HUD. Housing consultants helped them navigate the financial and technical terrains. Danny Violi, a housing consultant during this time, remembers:

A lot of it was very technical and it took a long time to filter the technical language into something that was understandable [to the residents]. We got to the

same page through a process of talking it through. Whenever an issue was presented to us, my job was to consider the issue and present it to the residents, both the advantages and disadvantages. Generally, we always came to consensus about what was the best strategy and how to position us strategically.

Strategic partnerships help residents navigate unfamiliar terrain and come up with options and alternatives.

### *Organizational Capacity*

For community development corporations working with residents, there must also be organizational capacity to respond to their needs. First, resident participation must be part of the mission. This can play out in various ways — allocating part of the budget to focus on resident services or hiring community organizers to work with residents. CDCs must know the community and “meet residents where they are at.” South County Housing in Gilroy, California, surveyed residents across the properties they manage and started resident services with 10 of their properties. Resident services at each property took a different form. Aida Zaldivar-Perez, director of neighborhood development at South County Housing, recognized, “Because we have a diverse community, we can’t duplicate programs. Depending on the demographics or the development, it will differ.”

In organizing the community, it helps to build on the strengths of the organization. Marcos Beleche, director of community organizing at Codman Square CDC, reflects on the thinking behind its youth organizing program:

I thought it would be important for the program to take advantage of the expertise of the CDC. We had organizers and planners who could help to interest youth in community issues. We didn’t want to build a technology center. The community already had that. We thought that given our limited resources, we shouldn’t try to create something that we ourselves don’t have expertise in. The focus was on working on and connecting youth to issues we’re focusing on.

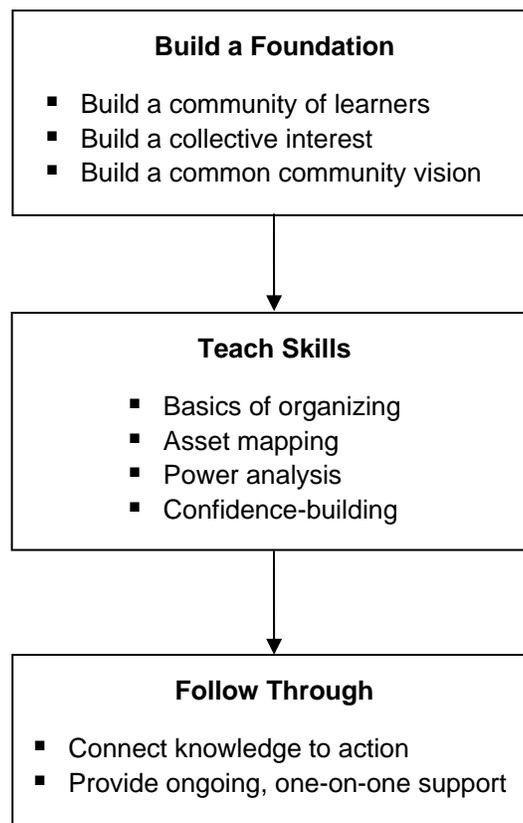
Finally, there must be staff who are sensitive to residents’ needs. It is important, therefore, to hire staff who have the commitment and compassion to work with residents.

### *Community Planning and Education*

Those interviewees who believe in resident participation frequently noted that the process of getting to resident participation is a significant contributor to its success. This process often entails community planning and education. Community planning and education are significant bridging resources that warrant deeper elaboration. Ongoing training and education, for example, were pivotal in acclimating residents to the technical matters inherent to Demo Dispo. Residents had to learn about things like water infiltration in windows and how to understand financial statements. Jacquelyn Davis, one of the lead community organizers for Demo Dispo, remembers, “By the time we were finished, they could read a blueprint and ask questions to the lawyer.”

Training was also provided to residents on how to establish an effective and viable organization that had political clout. This involved the basics of running an organization, such as how to run a meeting well and how to put together an agenda. Education and training are also central to creating productive relationships with residents and management. For example, if residents want additional amenities in their building, it helps for them to understand how it will impact rents and, therefore, the trade-offs they must make.

Community planning and education provide principles for working with low-income communities that seek to build on and value the knowledge and skills that residents bring. Community education and planning produces the following framework for action:



### *Build a Foundation*

Bringing residents together is often the initial step in creating an effective resident-participation effort. Doing so has multiple effects. This process first helps to build synergy. Michael Brown, community organizer with Demo Dispo, commented on the value of bringing people together when he reflected, “When you bring these groups together, it’s an affirming experience that people are on the right track. It reinforces the residents being engaged.” Building communities creates a mutual, shared learning space. People can network and learn from one another. In this space, people can take risks in their learning. Community-building is especially important in communities where there is racial and ethnic diversity and groups may have misperceptions of one another because of differences in language and culture.

In coming together, residents realize there can be mutual and shared self-interest. LeeAnn Velasquez, a resident leader with the Sacramento Mutual Housing Association, comments, “Find out what each resident’s goal is. It usually ties into an overall goal. For me, it’s safety for my children. Others also want safety and peace of mind.” Oftentimes, people are motivated by their own individual self-interest. In talking about their concerns for their building or neighborhood, residents come to find that they have common interests around issues like public safety or education for their children. Gloria Robinson, a community organizer for Manna CDC in Washington D.C., describes this process in the following way:

It’s part of the education process. We work with them on the consciousness level. The philosophy that it’s not just about you and your children. It’s about the generation that will come behind you. It’s a challenge sometimes to get people to look beyond their own immediate self-interest. It’s a challenge that we slowly lead people towards.

Once residents come together and see that they have common ground, it is then helpful to build a common, collective vision. When people come together, they can begin to construct a vision for what they would like their community to look like. Buildings are not just places where they live but are part of the larger community on which they have the power to make an impact. Knowledge of how to leverage political, economic and social resources gives them the power to begin to make changes in their communities. This all helps to build a larger sense of community; according to Carmen Amigon, leadership development manager at Community HousingWorks in San Diego, “it helps to develop social capital.”

These different processes together help residents learn to see the larger picture. Seeing the larger picture helps them think outside their own experiences and circumstances and see their connections to something greater. In this framework, change is possible.

### *Teach Skills*

Once the foundation is set, then it is necessary to build on residents’ skills. Community planning and education need not be a one-way process, with the trainer disseminating knowledge for the residents to take in. Rather, Carmen Amigon of Community HousingWorks, for example, takes a “popular education” approach to working with residents. Popular education involves two-way learning and it values that “individuals bring experience, talents, skills and interest despite their level education.” When Amigon does trainings, she asks open-ended questions and does not impose her own agenda. She uses this approach because she believes “the solution is within the individual” and “we encourage them to think outside the box.”

Oftentimes, residents of low-income communities feel as though they do not have power because they have little political, economic or social capital. Many residents are not accustomed to having mainstream institutions take their needs seriously. Residents are often used to being acted upon instead of holding these institutions accountable. Community organizers, therefore, work with residents to recognize that they have power, “the ability to get something done.”<sup>16</sup> Community organizers work with residents to help them understand that they

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with Brandon Kitagawa, Sacramento Mutual Housing Association.

have power in their numbers and collective voice. In reflecting on Demo Dispo, Michael Brown, community organizer, remembers, “I tried to help them know that their clout comes from numbers. Their power comes not from money, but from information and numbers and relationships with some of the political forces.” Shirley Rosa, resident leader in Demo Dispo, acknowledged that residents learned about their power. She reflects, “We accomplished a lot more by coming together as a group. In any war, there’s conflict. Divided, we fall. We stood up to HUD and let them know we were not going to be divided.” Through this process, residents learn to have confidence in their power.

To manifest their power, residents learn the importance and potential of organizing. Skill-building involves learning the basics of organizing. These skills include how to run meetings, do outreach, understand stakeholders, write and conduct a survey, do door-knocking, schedule a meeting, and speak in public. Similarly, residents learn how to build a viable resident organization. This includes many of the above skills as well as how to run an election, read financial statements, keep financial records, and build shared goals among residents.

In the process of learning about organizing, residents learn how to view issues in their community as assets, not as problems. Asset mapping helps people look at the good things happening in their community. According to Dalia Ward at Sacramento Mutual Housing Association, asset mapping helps residents to “look at an issue strategically, lay out the resources and assets in our community.” This process also helps to identify what assets individuals can bring to a community.

### *Follow Through*

For learning to make a difference, it must be connected to action. The most effective resident-education programs were ones that encouraged action. Sandra Hernandez, who went through the resident-leadership training program at Community HousingWorks, remembered the following:

I learned about planning an event. We had to write an action plan and indicate by when we would do things. Then we went to the event and implemented what we planned in the training. I learned how to work with people, plan, and collaborate and connect residents. These trainings taught me to work with my neighbors and how to get effective results.

In Demo Dispo, community organizer Michael Brown recalled that it helped to give people specific roles to focus on. This made their training more tangible and concrete.

Resident participation is an ongoing process. Residents often need continued support in their efforts. Resident leader LeeAnn Velasquez believes that the community organizer at Sacramento Mutual Housing Association has been key to her success. She says, “He tells me to get out there and send out flyers. He gives us ideas...and things that residents could participate in, things we would not otherwise hear of unless they gave us the information.” Support includes providing encouragement as well as troubleshooting when things do not go as planned.

## **V. Describing the Effectiveness of Resident Participation**

One of the challenges encountered in this paper was how to measure the difference that resident participation makes. Articulating measures proved to be a challenge for many of those interviewed. They can provide stories that attest to its effect, though these stories are difficult to measure in a traditional sense. Their stories, however, lay the groundwork for future studies around the outcomes associated with resident participation.

### ***The Impact of Resident Participation in Development***

Since much of this paper has focused on the story of Demo Dispo in Boston, it is important to discuss whether resident participation made a difference in this project. Critics may be quick to judge that it did not make a difference, since the project went over budget and took longer than anticipated. This, however, cannot solely be attributed to the involvement of the residents.<sup>17</sup> While it is difficult to quantify the impact of resident participation, several of those involved believe that it made a difference. Foremost, it made residents stakeholders in the process and gave them voice. Exercising voice is important given that low-income communities are often the object, rather than the subject, of public policy debates. From the perspective of residents, they believed that resident participation ensured the accountability of involved government agencies, architects and developers. It also ensured customer satisfaction with the product. Resident participation also helped to build a sense of community that can be observed from an outsider's perspective. James Drazen of HUD observed the impact of resident participation in the following way:

I think it had a beneficial impact on the community. It brought people together. It brought them together across property lines. They collaborated. They came together to lobby, counsel and help each other. There's a whole social fabric that was created. Children were happier. They got rid of the drug dealers. Residents were no longer afraid to talk to each other anymore.

Resident participation also had an impact on the individual level. The process was a learning process for all involved. Paulette Ford, a resident leader at Camfield Estates, observes, "I can see subtle changes in some of the residents. They are starting to see beyond tomorrow. They are starting to see that there are possibilities. With the kids, it's been extremely important because they have a better feeling about where they live and how they live."

### ***The Impact of Resident Participation in Management***

In terms of management, resident participation helps to build a strong, vibrant, healthy community. Susan Stockard, of Maloney Properties Inc., observes, "It creates an ownership-like property. We have their buy-in. They help maintain the property as a physical and social asset in the community."

Management is often seen as those "holding the strings," and resident participation helps to break down that wall of intimidation. Managers and residents argue that active participation

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with James Drazen, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

helps to instill pride and ownership in the building. This is demonstrated by cleaner units and buildings and more participation in resident-service programs. Having residents involved helps property management because involved residents are more knowledgeable residents and it increases their level of community-mindedness. They know, for example, why leases are written the way they are and what necessitates increases in rents. They have greater satisfaction in the place they live.

Minnie Clark, president of the tenants association at Marksdale Gardens, reflects on the difference that self-management has made there. She says:

The difference is we are sensitive to the people. We don't terminate without good reason. We do have a retirement plan in place. They pay into it and we give a small portion. Our carrying charge is lower than other places. We're way down under the market level for this area. We try to operate as economically as possible without interfering with the integrity of the development.

Clark also observed that self-management has helped to build a stronger sense of community. People are more willing to stay in the property and make it their home.

Resident participation can also have a financial impact on the property. Janet Maccubbin, with the city of Frisco, California, comments on this impact:

In properties where folks spend their lives or generations, if you are going to help them break out of that cycle, you have to understand their needs. Understanding their needs means knowing their lives. Otherwise, the property will not succeed. It makes a difference when residents talk about community needs and management addresses those needs. That has a positive financial impact on the property. These self-sufficiency programs make a positive financial difference in a place where you don't have market forces.

### ***The Impact of Resident Participation in Community-Building***

In terms of community-building efforts, resident participation has an impact on both the individual and community levels. At the individual level, many residents express greater confidence in their ability to get things done. For many residents, there is an "I can do it" attitude of self-growth. This confidence has a ripple effect as people begin to take more control over their lives and expand their involvement. Residents start to see the assets, not just the problems, in their community, and to believe that they can do something to improve it. Residents become more community-minded and begin to have a vision for their community. Residents start to look at their house as a "home" — a place of which they can be proud. For example, Sandra Hernandez, who came to Community HousingWorks as a resident and has now been hired as a staff member, reflects on the following:

I attended the first training. I was working in my neighborhood. The training helped me evolve as an individual. I learned how to run meetings and do action and event planning. How to effectively listen was very important. At the beginning, I was pessimistic. Then, I started bringing other people. I learned how to be

a resident leader. These things do work, but you must go through and implement them.

Similarly, Elba Amador, a resident who has gone through the training at Community HousingWorks, remarks on the following:

It's made me more assertive. I can make things happen. You want to do something. You are given the tools and other people. Training made me more willing to take a chance. It's a learning process. Four years ago, I didn't read a budget. I always learn something new.

Individuals who see the impact of individual and collective power may also get involved in wider struggles beyond housing.

There are different ways to think about measures of resident participation. Both "hard" and "soft" measures of resident participation are important for public-policy debates about this issue. This paper has focused on people's testimonies as one way to assess the impact of resident participation. Their stories provide insight into the myriad ways that resident participation can make a difference in housing development, management and community-building. People's stories are also important to know how their lives were affected by resident participation. Their stories will be strengthened if hard measures of resident participation are developed and used to study its effects.

## **Conclusion**

How do we make sense of this vast terrain of resident participation? In general, there is support for resident participation in housing development, management and community-building. There is also growing evidence for its effectiveness. There are stories from the world of development, management and community-building which attest to the importance of resident participation.

Resident participation is a politically charged topic that few are willing to express strong sentiments against. While there is general support for resident participation, it is less clear how much participation people believe residents should have. Developers and managers can attest to the importance of resident participation, but it is unclear how much power they want residents to have. They may want residents to have a say, but be less involved in decision-making.

Resident participation is a partnership, and like any partnership, roles and expectations must be clear and explicit for the partnership to work. In defining these roles, the partners exercise power and influence over the outcome of the partnership. Oftentimes, how much power each partner has must be negotiated. When the stakes are high, it is not easy to negotiate power. For low-income residents who have few other options and cannot easily leave the situation, organizing often offers one viable strategy for building power. Good organizing necessitates good community planning, which means facilitating people through a process of learning.

Resident participation is critical in providing the opportunity for residents to be actors, and not just acted upon by outside forces. Participation means something to the residents themselves. For residents of low-income communities, many of whom are people of color, participation means that they have a voice in the process about decisions that affect their daily lives. Voice is an important asset for those who do not have access to other kinds of capital that they can leverage. For those living in low-income communities, their choices around housing are often limited; therefore, resident participation can ensure that they have voice in a complex environment.

Additional research on resident participation is necessary in order to more fully capture its potential as well as its parameters. This calls for a study with multiple indicators and variables that can capture the complex picture of resident participation. For example, measures of the impact of resident participation in Demo Dispo must take into account not just the impact it had on the redevelopment of the housing stock, but also the impact it had on community-building and individual lives. Comprehensive studies such as this one will continue to contribute to our knowledge base on resident participation.

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## **Web Sites**

The following are Web sites of the community development corporations profiled in this report.

Brand New Day: [www.brandnewdaycdc.org](http://www.brandnewdaycdc.org)

Codman Square Neighborhood Development Corporation: [www.csndc.com](http://www.csndc.com)

Community HousingWorks: [www.chworks.org](http://www.chworks.org)

Manna, Inc.: [www.mannadc.org](http://www.mannadc.org)

Sacramento Mutual Housing Association: [www.mutualhousing.com](http://www.mutualhousing.com)

South County Housing: [www.scounty.com](http://www.scounty.com)

Urban Edge Housing Corporation: [www.urbanedge.org](http://www.urbanedge.org)

## **Author Interviews**

All interviews were conducted by the author between June 15 and August 31, 2005. Persons participating in focus groups are indicated with an asterisk.

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