



Moving Closer to Evidence-Based Policy

In January 2009, when Shaun Donovan was confirmed as the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), he faced overwhelming challenges: the economic recession, an unprecedented number of foreclosures, a slowly crumbling public housing stock, and rapidly disappearing affordable apartments in the private market, all contributing to a rising number of homeless families. Not only were the challenges immense, but the tools to respond to these crises were missing from HUD's tool box. A few months before Secretary Donovan was confirmed, a report, written by a panel of academics and policy experts, noted the following about HUD's Office of Policy Development and Research (PD&R), the office responsible for providing analytic support to the secretary and HUD's program offices: "despite its important accomplishments, PD&R's resources have significantly eroded over the past decade, and its capacity to perform effectively is deteriorating." After years of budget cuts and declining staffing levels, PD&R was ill equipped to respond to the policy development and research needs of its new secretary. The report concluded that without adequate resources, "PD&R cannot achieve its potential, leaving policymakers and the public uninformed—or misinformed...." The lack of research capacity left a huge gap in HUD's ability to address its current demands.

The *What Works Collaborative* was conceived to fill this gap.

A group of forward thinking foundations—the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Ford Foundation, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Kresge Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, and Surdna Foundation; a handful of research partners—the Brookings Institution, Harvard University's Joint Center for Housing Studies, New York University's Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy, and the Urban Institute; and staff from the new administration at HUD—came together to form a research collaborative that focuses on housing and urban policy issues confronting the nation.

The goal of the collaborative is simple: conduct timely, independent, and objective research to help inform an evidence-based housing and urban policy agenda.

During the past year, the collaborative, along with other selected experts and academics representing universities and nonprofits from across the country, has undertaken more than two dozen research studies focusing on the issues that face the nation. The questions span policy, covering five HUD priority areas: (1) respond to the mortgage crisis, (2) promote affordable housing, (3) invest in rural and metropolitan communities, (4) create sustainable communities, and (5) transform the way HUD does business.

The reports highlighted in this newsletter flowed from the work of the collaborative. This body of work provides findings and insights that will help HUD make informed decisions about how to confront the nation's housing and urban policy challenges.