

OVERCOMING CONCENTRATED POVERTY AND ISOLATION



THE URBAN INSTITUTE

July 2005

Margery Austin Turner
Lynette A. Rawlings

The problems of concentrated poverty, economic isolation, and distress that MTO, Jobs-Plus, and BtW were designed to tackle all persist.

Ten Lessons for Policy and Practice

Low-income families that live in distressed, high-poverty neighborhoods face especially daunting challenges as they attempt to leave welfare, find jobs, earn an adequate living, and raise their children. In these neighborhoods, crime and violence are common, jobs are scarce, schools are often ineffective, and young people see few opportunities for success. A growing body of social science research indicates that living in these high-poverty communities undermines the long-term life chances of families and children—cutting off access to mainstream social and economic opportunities. And historically, federally subsidized rental housing projects have intensified the concentration of poor people—especially minorities—in distressed inner-city neighborhoods.

During the 1990s, the Department of Housing and Urban Development launched three rigorous research demonstrations testing alternative strategies for helping low-income families escape the isolation and distress of high-poverty, central-city communities. These initiatives reflected three prevailing views about how best to tackle the problem of concentrated poverty:

■ *Residential Relocation.* The Moving to Opportunity for Fair Housing demonstration (MTO) helped families move from high-poverty public and assisted housing developments to healthy, low-poverty neighborhoods with housing vouchers and search assistance.

■ *In-Place Services and Incentives.* The Jobs-Plus Community Revitalization Initiative (Jobs-Plus) saturated public housing developments with high-quality employment services and rent-based financial work incentives.

■ *Suburban Job Linkage.* The Bridges to Work demonstration (BtW) helped residents of high-poverty, central-city communities find and retain jobs in opportunity-rich suburban areas by recruiting employers and providing transportation assistance.

All three of these demonstrations were carefully designed to include rigorous controls and systematic data collection so that their implementation and impacts could be systematically evaluated. Table 1 summarizes basic information about their design, implementation, and findings.¹

Both markets and policies have undergone substantial changes since MTO, Jobs-Plus, and BtW were conceived a decade ago. But even though today's environment differs from that of the early 1990s, the problems of concentrated poverty, economic isolation, and distress that MTO, Jobs-Plus, and BtW were designed to tackle all persist. The experience of these experiments and results emerging from rigorous research on their impacts offer new insights for ongoing policy development and programmatic innovation. Specifically, we draw ten broad lessons—including lessons about the potential for success, lessons about the realities families face, lessons about implementing complex strategies, and lessons about obstacles to

Table 1. Three HUD Demonstration Initiatives

	Moving to Opportunity	Jobs-Plus	Bridges to Work
Theory of change, initial vision	MTO tests the vision that if families can escape from distressed, high-poverty communities by moving to healthy, low-poverty neighborhoods, their long-term employment, income, and educational outcomes will improve.	Jobs-Plus tests the vision that intensive, saturation-level, place-based employment initiatives can dramatically increase work and earnings among public housing residents, reducing their reliance on welfare, improving their quality of life, and creating spillovers that improve the quality of life for the entire development.	Bridges to Work implemented a reverse commuting strategy that was intended to connect the presumed surplus of “work ready” applicants in the central city to existing jobs in the suburbs.
Design and intervention mechanism	<p>MTO sites were selected from the nation’s most troubled public housing developments.</p> <p>Eligible volunteer families were randomly assigned to one of three groups:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Experimental group: received Section 8 certificates or vouchers usable only in low-poverty census tracts (under 10% poverty in 1990), plus assistance in finding a unit and moving. (2) Comparison group: received regular Section 8 certificates or vouchers (geographically unrestricted). (3) Control group: continued to receive project-based assistance. 	<p>Jobs-Plus targeted large public housing developments with high rates of joblessness and welfare receipt.</p> <p>Because a goal of the demonstration was development-wide change and it targeted all working-age, non-disabled residents, the design randomly assigned housing developments in a given city to one of two groups:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Experimental group: all working-age residents were offered three broad program components: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) employment-related services, b) rent-based financial work incentives, and c) enhanced community supports for work. (2) Control group: could seek any available services within public housing or the local community, such as the welfare and workforce development systems. 	<p>BtW sites were selected from low-income communities where there was substantial spatial mismatch.</p> <p>Adult volunteers were randomly assigned to one of two groups:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Experimental group: received metropolitan job placement services, targeted commuting services, and limited supportive services to assist with suburban commute. Each experimental group member was eligible for up to 18 months of BtW services. (2) Control group: could seek services from other agencies or programs, and could reapply for BtW services 18 months after their first random assignment.
Implementation sites and partners	<p>Sites: Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles.</p> <p>MTO was implemented by central-city public housing agencies (PHAs) working in partnership with local nonprofit counseling organizations.</p> <p>HUD provided these PHAs with special allocations of Section 8 certificates/vouchers.</p> <p>The local nonprofit partners received special-purpose funding to provide mobility counseling and assistance exclusively to families that were assigned to the experimental group.</p>	<p>Sites: Baltimore, Chattanooga, Dayton, Los Angeles, St. Paul, and Seattle.</p> <p>In 1999, the Seattle site received a federal HOPE VI grant and had to withdraw from the demonstration. Chattanooga mainly implemented the financial incentives component of the design.</p> <p>The implementation collaboratives included members from the local PHA, the welfare department, the workforce development agency, other local service agencies, and residents.</p>	<p>Sites: Baltimore, Denver, Milwaukee, and St. Louis employed random assignment.</p> <p>Chicago attempted to conduct the demonstration “at scale,” and therefore did not use random assignment.</p> <p>BtW was implemented by metropolitan-wide partnerships among city and suburban service delivery areas and private industry councils, community organizations, employer representatives, transportation providers, and state and local human service providers.</p>
Implementation dates	<p>MTO was authorized by Congress in 1992.</p> <p>Between 1994 and 1998, 4,608 families volunteered for MTO and were randomly assigned.</p> <p>Baseline data on families in all three treatment groups were collected prior to random assignment, and all families are being tracked over ten years.</p>	<p>Local programs began offering employment-related services in 1998. The financial incentives component was not fully implemented until mid-2000. The community support for work component was last to be launched.</p> <p>Baseline surveys of residents were conducted from 1998 through 1999, near the start of the intervention, and a follow-up survey was conducted in 2003.</p> <p>Administrative data on job earnings and welfare receipt were collected from 1992 (before Jobs-Plus) through 2003 to construct trends of up to 12 years.</p>	<p>The four experimental sites operated BtW programs from mid-1997 through early 2001.</p> <p>The Chicago “scale” site started implementation in 1996 and ended in early 2001.</p>

TABLE 1. Three HUD Demonstration Initiatives (Continued)

	Moving to Opportunity	Jobs-Plus	Bridges to Work
Target populations	<p>The PHAs participating in MTO targeted very low income families with children under 18 living in public and assisted housing developments in census tracts with poverty rates above 40 percent.</p> <p>The families living in the targeted developments were mostly black or Hispanic, single-mother families with two or three children.</p> <p>About half were receiving welfare and 30 percent were working.</p> <p>The PHAs screened out families with criminal records and poor rent histories.</p>	<p>Sites were selected from large public housing developments in which no more than 30 percent of families had an employed member and at least 40 percent were receiving welfare.</p> <p>All able-bodied, working-age residents in the selected public housing developments were eligible to participate in the program.</p> <p>The Jobs-Plus sites were all overwhelmingly minority, some almost entirely African-American; others had a more diverse racial/ethnic mix. Sites also varied by percentage of females (65 to 91 percent) and by the percentage of two-parent families (14 to 74 percent).</p> <p>Most heads of households in the developments had worked before (69 percent) but not steadily, just over half (51 percent) relied on AFDC/TANF or General Assistance, and 68 percent had used food stamps.</p>	<p>BtW programs targeted all “work ready” residents in high-poverty, inner-city neighborhoods with strong suburban employment growth.</p> <p>Applicants had to be 18 or older, reside in the targeted zip codes, and have a household income of less than 200 percent of the federal poverty threshold.</p> <p>Fifty-four percent of BtW participants were female and nearly all participants were members of a minority group.</p> <p>Fifty-eight percent of participants’ households had income from work in the previous month, just over one-third (38 percent) received food stamps, and 21 percent received welfare or cash assistance.</p> <p>About 30 percent of participants reported having a prior criminal conviction.</p>
Research findings	<p>MTO dramatically improved the condition of the neighborhoods in which participating families lived.</p> <p>Adults receiving the MTO treatment experienced significant improvements in both mental and physical health.</p> <p>Girls in the MTO families experienced significant mental health improvements and engaged in less risky behavior. The boys may be experiencing worse mental and behavioral outcomes.</p> <p>MTO had significant but small effects on the characteristics of the schools children attended, although most families remained within the same, central-city school district.</p> <p>The interim evaluation found no significant impacts across the five sites in employment, earnings, or welfare reciprocity relative to the comparison groups.</p>	<p>Jobs-Plus had substantial statistically significant positive effects on residents’ earnings, above gains achieved by residents in comparison developments.</p> <p>The program appears to have had positive effects on residents’ quarterly employment rates (which rose dramatically for both research groups even before Jobs-Plus), but these gains were small and not statistically significant.</p> <p>Two-thirds of Jobs-Plus’s earnings effects are attributable to increased employment. One-third is attributable to some combination of increased work hours and increased wages.</p> <p>Jobs-Plus appears to have had no impact on welfare reciprocity, which fell dramatically for both the program and comparison groups.</p> <p>The increased individual earnings did not translate into positive effects on “community quality of life” or community well-being.</p>	<p>BtW sites encountered major difficulties in recruiting work-ready participants, and therefore had to expand their service areas and scale back support services. Commute times for many participants were long, and few participants remained in the program for more than three months.</p> <p>Bridges to Work services did not improve the employment or earnings of inner-city job seekers.</p> <p>While they did not work any more consistently, welfare recipients did access jobs with better pay and benefits than did those without access to Bridges to Work services.</p>

Sources: For MTO, see John Goering and Judith D. Feins, eds., *Choosing a Better Life? Evaluating the Moving to Opportunity Social Experiment*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press, 2003; and Larry Orr, Judith D. Feins, Robin Jacob, Erik Beecroft, Lisa Sanbonmatsu, Lawrence F. Katz, Jeffrey B. Liebman, and Jeffrey R. Kling, “Moving to Opportunity Interim Impacts Evaluation.” Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2003.

For Jobs-Plus, see Howard S. Bloom, James A. Riccio, and Nandita Verma, “Promoting Work in Public Housing: The Effectiveness of Jobs-Plus—Final Report.” New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, 2005; and Linda Yuriko Kato, “Participating in a Place-Based Employment Initiative: Lessons from the Jobs-Plus Demonstration in Public Housing.” New York: MDRC, 2003.

For BtW, see Roder et al., “Seeking a Sustainable Journey to Work: Findings from the National Bridges to Work Demonstration.” Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures, 2005; Christopher Reardon, ed., “In the Driver’s Seat.” Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 2001; and Mark Elliot, Beth Palubinsky, and Joseph Tierney, “Overcoming Roadblocks on the Way to Work: Bridges to Work Field Report.” Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 1999.

success—each of which offers concrete implications for policy and practice.

Lessons: The Potential for Success

Taken together, the findings from Moving to Opportunity, Jobs-Plus, and Bridges to Work provide reason for optimism. Thoughtfully designed interventions that seriously address the problems of neighborhood distress and isolation can enable families to dramatically improve their well-being and life chances.

1 *Place-conscious interventions can make a big difference for families and children—they are worth the effort and the cost.* Results from Moving to Opportunity and Jobs-Plus demonstrate that focusing on place—directly addressing the challenges of concentrated poverty and isolation—can significantly improve the lives of low-income families. Even though these demonstrations did not produce all of the positive outcomes originally envisioned, MTO provides compelling evidence that enabling families to escape from high-poverty neighborhoods yields dramatic improvements in safety and security, in the physical and mental health of women and girls, and in girls' adolescent behavior. It seems plausible that these gains may translate into sustained improvements in the life chances of women and girls if families are able to remain in their new neighborhoods. Jobs-Plus provides equally compelling evidence that saturating a distressed housing development with work supports and financial incentives can result in substantial income gains—gains that are as big or bigger than any other successful employment intervention tested recently.

Implications for Action

- Implement on-site employment programs (like Jobs-Plus) in HOPE VI properties or other public housing developments with high unemployment rates.
- Launch new state or local programs that target employment assistance and supports to low-income housing developments.
- Help housing choice voucher recipients and HOPE VI relocatees move to (and remain in) safe, opportunity-rich neighborhoods.
- Create state or local voucher programs targeted to families that want to move.
- Fund organizations that provide mobility assistance to voucher recipients and other low-income movers.
- Give priority to safe, opportunity-rich neighborhoods for the preservation and development of assisted housing.

2 *Families will respond to real opportunities and choice—programs don't have to be mandatory to have an impact.* All three demonstrations focused on very low income residents of distressed central-city neighborhoods. Many (though not all) families in these neighborhoods face multiple barriers to employment and are considered “hard to reach” or “hard to serve” by conventional welfare-to-work programs. The people who volunteered to participate in MTO, Jobs-Plus, and BtW were generally typical of other residents in their communities, and both MTO and Jobs-Plus evoked high rates of participation, despite initial skepticism in some communities. BtW had difficulty recruiting eligible participants, in part because the benefits offered were not valuable enough to the target population of work-ready adults to overcome the program's “hassle factors.”

Implications for Action

- Use the flexibility of HUD's Moving to Work (MTW) program to design rent rules and housing subsidy formulas that encourage and support work.
- Provide residents of high-poverty neighborhoods with opportunities to choose either on-site assistance or mobility assistance.
- When families are moving—due to HOPE VI relocation or receipt of a housing voucher—provide meaningful information about their options and about the pros and cons of different neighborhoods.
- Design commuting assistance and other supports for work to effectively reduce the costs of finding and keeping a job.
- Consider individual cars as a commuting solution as well as transit options.

3 *Achieving meaningful change requires sustained effort over several years.*

Many public sector initiatives are launched under intense time pressures, deliver services to participating families for only a limited time, and expect to document results in as little as a year or two. But the experience of Moving to Opportunity, Jobs-Plus, and Bridges to Work all suggest that ambitious initiatives should be much more patient about the implementation process, the duration of assistance or services, and the measurement of impacts. It is unrealistic to think that the goal of empowering poor families to take advantage of new opportunities and improve their economic circumstances can be achieved overnight. Families may need to receive services and supports over an extended period. Some may need more than one “dose” of assistance, and measurable changes in economic well-being may not occur in the short term.

Implications for Action

- Provide sufficient time and funding for the design and start-up of new programs.
- Provide technical assistance and training to help programs learn from one another and to facilitate the start-up of new programs.
- Make assistance available to families over an extended period.
- Help participants who get jobs keep them and participants who move to better neighborhoods stay there.
- Monitor outcomes for participating families over an extended period.
- Develop and collect meaningful performance measures over time and conduct ongoing research on “what works.”

Lessons: The Realities Families Face

Research on the three demonstrations provides new insights about the realities facing low-income families, realities that may limit the impacts of place-based interventions. None of these lessons comes as a complete surprise. But their significance for families—and for programs that attempt to help families improve their lives—is highlighted by the demonstration results.

4 *Most low-income families work—at least intermittently.* MTO, Jobs-Plus,

and BtW were all designed in part to address high rates of joblessness in distressed communities. But all three found that during the 1990s, when the economy was booming, employment rates increased dramatically for both treatment and control groups. In fact, residents of the target neighborhoods were not as disconnected from the labor market as had been hypothesized. Many had worked in the

It is unreasonable to think that empowering poor families to take advantage of new opportunities and improve their economic circumstances can be achieved overnight.

recent past and when employment opportunities expanded, they went back to work. Thus, employment initiatives should focus not only on helping people get jobs, but also on the challenges of job retention and advancement.

Implications for Action

- Help low-income workers with retention and advancement rather than just getting a job.
- Sustain employment assistance over time in case people lose their jobs and need help again.
- Provide assistance with the problems that make it difficult for people to keep jobs—including commuting costs and child care.
- Design rent rules and housing subsidy formulas that encourage and support work and earning.
- Inform the public that most low-income families are working.

5 *People move a lot, but not necessarily to better neighborhoods or because they want to move.* Two-thirds of the MTO families that succeeded in moving to low-poverty neighborhoods had moved again within two to three years, with fewer than one in five remaining in neighborhoods with very low poverty rates. Tight housing market conditions, rising rents, and landlords' unwillingness to continue renting to voucher recipients all made it difficult for families to remain in their new neighborhoods. The potential benefits of moving to a low-poverty community may be undermined if families cannot stay in these communities very long. In addition, more residents of Jobs-Plus developments moved than originally anticipated, with nearly one-third of adults leaving the targeted projects within two years. This helps explain why increases in individual earn-

ings did not translate into development-wide gains.

Implications for Action

- Provide ongoing support to help families that move to new neighborhoods stay there.
- If families must move a second time, provide assistance to help them find another safe, opportunity-rich location.
- Help families that are receiving place-based services and supports remain in place, if they want to.

6 *Neighborhood crime and violence inflict horrible damage on children and families.* The primary reason families gave for applying to participate in the Moving to Opportunity demonstration was that they wanted to escape from the crime, violence, and disorder of their neighborhoods. And the evidence from MTO indicates that moving dramatically reduced their exposure to crime and violence, and appears to have contributed to significant improvements in physical and emotional health for both women and girls (though not for boys). If increased safety and security are indeed responsible for improved health, then the long-term consequences of mobility could be enormous.

Implications for Action

- Mobility assistance programs should give priority to helping families find neighborhoods that are safe.
- Programs that deliver assistance to residents of distressed communities should coordinate with local law enforcement or community groups to address explicitly problems of crime and violence.

If increased safety and security are indeed responsible for the improved health of MTO participants, then the long-term consequences of mobility could be enormous.

- Programs that preserve or produce affordable housing should focus on neighborhoods with low levels of crime and violence.

Lessons: Implementing Complex Strategies

MTO, Jobs-Plus, and BtW were all difficult to implement because they tried to address multiple challenges in families' lives, linking activities and services that are usually designed and operated independently. Crafting partnerships to implement complex program designs may be difficult, but it is by no means impossible. And the complex challenges that poor families in distressed communities face demand multifaceted strategies in order to achieve lasting and meaningful impacts.

7 *Implementation partnerships are hard but not impossible.* MTO, Jobs-Plus, and BtW all required local agencies to collaborate in new ways and to expand or upgrade existing activities in order to deliver the combinations of services needed by program participants. All three demonstrations required sites to show that they had entered into effective partnerships as a condition of demonstration funding. Nonetheless, every site had some difficulty establishing and sustaining partnerships. Still, the experience of these three demonstrations indicates that local organizations can build effective partnerships that take advantage of the diverse expertise and resources of multiple agencies and organizations. Partnerships are probably essential in many cases because no single agency can deliver the combination of services and supports that families living in high-poverty communities need. But new initiatives that rely on local partnerships should be realistic about the time, commitment, and resources required.

Implications for Action

- Provide funding and incentives to encourage partnerships among housing agencies, employment and training agencies, and transportation providers.
- Create expert intermediaries that can provide training and technical assistance to help agencies design new, cross-cutting initiatives.
- Disseminate information about partnership models that have proven effective.
- Give public housing agencies sufficient flexibility to be effective partners in innovative local initiatives.
- Develop meaningful performance measures so that partners can hold one another accountable.
- When establishing collaboratives, ensure buy-in from agency leadership and implementing representatives by explicitly tying program goals to each individual agency's mission.

8 *Interventions have to be focused—but not one-dimensional—if they intend to help families transform their lives.* MTO, Jobs-Plus, and BtW were all quite complex initiatives that tried to cut across conventional programmatic boundaries to help families overcome multiple challenges. All three recognized that focusing exclusively on employment and earnings would overlook critical barriers families face. But even so, each of the three demonstrations expected to achieve some important effects indirectly. MTO hypothesized that moving to a better neighborhood would produce improvements in educational achievement and employment. And both Jobs-Plus and BtW anticipated that neighborhoods would be transformed once residents got jobs and earned higher incomes. To date, the evidence of achievement is weakest for these indirect outcomes. The lesson, therefore,

seems to be that interventions need to be explicit about the outcomes they hope to achieve, and include direct (as well as indirect) services to address these outcomes.

Implications for Action

- Design programs to tackle the major barriers and challenges participating families face—housing, safety, health, employment, and education.
- Help families that are receiving housing mobility assistance think explicitly about job opportunities and school quality.
- Help families that are receiving employment assistance tackle transportation and child care problems, and think about residential location options.
- Help families that live in revitalizing neighborhoods take advantage of new opportunities there.
- Develop meaningful performance measures and monitor outcomes of interest over the long term.

Lessons: Obstacles to Success

Although many of the results from MTO, Jobs-Plus, and BtW point to the potential for success, the experience of the three demonstrations also offers evidence of serious obstacles facing initiatives targeted to poor families living in severely distressed communities.

9 *The needs of men and boys demand special attention.* Many of today's antipoverty programs focus—whether explicitly or implicitly—on single mothers and their children. Although men obviously play important roles in these families and their communities, they are often excluded or overlooked by efforts to encourage poor mothers to transition from welfare to work or to improve the life-chances of poor children. MTO certainly

fits this mold; the demonstration was targeted to families with children in distressed public housing, and the vast majority of these were headed by women. In contrast, Jobs-Plus tried to reach all working-age residents in the targeted developments, whether or not they were officially “on the lease.” However, the individuals tracked for research exclude those not officially living in the developments. Bridges-to-Work also focused on all working-age individuals in the target developments, and participants were approximately half men and half women. But TANF recipients and single mothers—rather than men—appear to account for any impacts attributable to BtW. In addition to concerns about men's participation, MTO has generated clearer benefits for girls than for boys (at least in the short-term). Evidence to date strongly suggests that boys may need additional supports or assistance in order to adapt successfully to new neighborhood environments.

Implications for Action

- Reach out to include men in place-based employment initiatives, even if they are not official residents.
- Consider whether men need different types of employment assistance and support than women.
- Give mothers who are receiving mobility assistance the explicit option of having a partner join the family in the new location.
- Provide ongoing support and assistance to help boys adjust successfully when their families relocate to new neighborhoods.

10 *We cannot ignore barriers of racial prejudice, discrimination, and segregation.* Because concentrated poverty is the consequence of long-standing patterns of racial segregation and discrimination, MTO,

Jobs-Plus, and BtW focused on neighborhoods and families that were mostly minority. Helping minority families escape the isolation and distress of these neighborhoods—whether by moving away, working more, or commuting to a suburban job—means helping them overcome discriminatory barriers that persist today. All three demonstrations encountered some barriers of this kind, and ongoing efforts to help residents of high-poverty neighborhoods should be prepared to tackle them as well.

Implications for Action

- Combat negative stereotypes about residents of distressed communities and assisted housing recipients.
- Find allies in neighborhoods where families are relocating to help combat opposition to mobility initiatives.
- Find allies among landlords who will help build support for housing vouchers and mobility assistance.
- Find allies among employers who will help build support for employment training and placement programs.
- Prepare participating families to recognize housing or employment discrimination if it occurs, and help them file complaints if they wish.
- Provide ongoing support to people who may encounter prejudice or racial conflict in a new neighborhood or job.

Opportunities for Action

The three demonstrations reviewed here represent a serious investment in rigorous research by HUD, foundations, the implementing organizations, and researchers. This investment clearly paid off—not necessarily with the expected results, but with significant new insights on strategies for

tackling concentrated poverty and isolation. Obviously, there is still a tremendous amount we do not know. But the cross-cutting lessons from MTO, Jobs-Plus, and BtW enable policymakers and practitioners to move forward intelligently on three basic fronts:

1. Encourage and assist low-income families to move to safe, opportunity-rich neighborhoods.
2. Saturate assisted housing developments in high-poverty neighborhoods with quality employment services and supports, delivered on-site in conjunction with rent rules that encourage and support work.
3. Help low-income workers who live in high-poverty neighborhoods find and keep jobs in opportunity-rich areas.

These three strategies should not be considered competing alternatives, but rather complementary approaches. In some circumstances, it may make sense to pursue two or three at the same time, while in other cases, one of the three strategies may be particularly well-suited to local needs and market conditions. Table 2 summarizes potential opportunities to act on the lessons of the three demonstrations and highlights key principles that emerge from the research findings. But this summary is not intended to exhaust all of the opportunities that may exist for ongoing innovation and experimentation. Instead, its purpose is to challenge policymakers, practitioners, advocates, and funders: what do the lessons from these three demonstrations offer for your work, and what can you do with the programs and resources you control?

Note

1. This brief is drawn from a longer report on the three demonstrations by the same authors: “Overcoming Concentrated Poverty and Isolation—Lessons from Three HUD Demonstration Initiatives,” Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 2005.

Helping minority families escape the isolation and distress of high-poverty neighborhoods means helping them overcome discriminatory barriers that persist today.

Table 2. Opportunities for Innovation and Action

	Implementation of existing federal programs	State and local experimentation	Philanthropic contributions
Encourage and assist low-income families to move to safe, opportunity-rich neighborhoods.	<p>Housing vouchers Provide information and assistance to voucher recipients who want to move.</p> <p>Public housing relocatees Help HOPE VI relocatees find housing in opportunity-rich neighborhoods.</p>	<p>Locally funded vouchers Target families that want to move to opportunity neighborhoods.</p> <p>Regional mobility assistance Fund organizations that can help recipients take full advantage of vouchers.</p> <p>Housing development and preservation Develop and preserve assisted housing in safe, opportunity-rich neighborhoods.</p>	<p>Support for enhanced mobility assistance Provide funding for groups that provide housing search assistance and mobility services.</p> <p>Training and technical assistance Support the development of national intermediaries.</p> <p>Monitoring and research Fund development of performance measures and ongoing research about what works.</p> <p>Public education Help overcome opposition from “receiving” neighborhoods.</p>
	<p>Key principles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Give families the opportunity to decide about whether mobility makes sense for them, and provide meaningful information about the pros and cons of different neighborhoods. ✓ Give priority to neighborhoods that are safe and offer access to quality public schools and employment opportunities. ✓ Provide ongoing support to help families find and take advantage of opportunities in their new neighborhoods. ✓ Help families that move to remain in their new units or move to other units in similar neighborhoods. ✓ Provide support and counseling to families with boys to help with the transition. ✓ Consult with single mothers about whether their partners can and should join the family in the new location. 		
Saturate assisted housing developments in high-poverty neighborhoods with quality employment services and supports, delivered on-site, in conjunction with rent rules that encourage and support work.	<p>Public housing Target HOPE VI properties or other developments requiring significant reinvestment; take advantage of regulatory flexibility under the Moving to Work demonstration.</p> <p>Job training and placement Provide on-site services in public and assisted housing developments.</p>	<p>Existing housing developments Target locally subsidized properties with high unemployment and poverty.</p> <p>New housing developments Build new properties explicitly targeted to helping residents work.</p> <p>Job training and placement Provide funding for on-site offices and programs in assisted housing.</p>	<p>Support for partnership development Provide funding to encourage local housing and workforce agencies to collaborate.</p> <p>Training and technical assistance Support the development of national intermediaries.</p> <p>Monitoring and research Fund development of performance measures and ongoing research about what works.</p>
	<p>Key principles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Help newly employed residents retain their jobs over time and advance to higher wages. ✓ Provide workable transportation assistance (possibly cars) to reduce the costs of working. ✓ Make it a priority to reduce the level of crime and violence in the development and surrounding community. ✓ Reach out to provide services to men, even if they are not official residents of the development. ✓ Allow sufficient time for program design and start-up, and sustain services over multiple years. ✓ Help residents remain in the development (rather than moving) if they want to stay. ✓ Educate the public about high rates of employment and work effort among residents of distressed communities. 		

Table 2. Opportunities for Innovation and Action (continued)

	Implementation of existing federal programs	State and local experimentation	Philanthropic contributions
Help low-income workers who live in high-poverty neighborhoods find and keep jobs in opportunity-rich areas.	<p>Job training and placement Target employment centers in suburban locations that offer well-paying jobs.</p> <p>Housing vouchers Help voucher recipients find housing in areas close to suburban employment centers.</p>	<p>Commuting assistance Fund programs targeted to residents of high-poverty neighborhoods.</p> <p>Locally funded vouchers Target assistance to help families find housing close to their work.</p> <p>Housing development and preservation Develop and preserve assisted housing in safe, opportunity-rich neighborhoods.</p>	<p>Support for commuting assistance Provide funding for groups that help workers access jobs in opportunity-rich areas.</p> <p>Training and technical assistance Support the development of national intermediaries.</p> <p>Monitoring and research Fund the development of performance measures and ongoing research about what works.</p>
	<p>Key principles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Allow sufficient time for program design and start-up, and sustain services over multiple years. ✓ Provide ongoing assistance with job retention in conjunction with transit assistance. ✓ Ensure that commuting times are reasonable and predictable so that the cost of working is not excessive. ✓ Consider individual cars rather than transit as a commuting solution. ✓ Link commuting assistance with child care and other supports families need. ✓ Enable families that find jobs to move closer to employment if they want to move. 		

Address Service Requested

For more information,
call Public Affairs:
202-261-5709
or visit our web site,
<http://www.urban.org>.

To order additional copies
of this publication, call
202-833-7200
or visit our online bookstore,
<http://www.uiPress.org>.

The Urban Institute's Center on Metropolitan Housing and Communities believes that place matters in public policy. We bring local perspectives on economic development, neighborhood revitalization, housing, discrimination, and arts and culture to our study of policies and programs. Our research pioneers diverse and innovative methods for assessing community change and program performance and builds the capacity of policymakers and practitioners to make more informed decisions at local, state, and federal levels.

THE URBAN INSTITUTE
2100 M Street, NW
Washington, DC 20037
Copyright © 2005
Phone: 202-833-7200
Fax: 202-467-5775

Research for this brief was funded by the Rockefeller Foundation.

Photo by Jim Hubbard.

The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the Urban Institute, its trustees, or its funders.

Permission is granted for reproduction of this file, with attribution to the Urban Institute.