



November 3, 2020

Regulations Division  
Office of General Counsel  
US Department of Housing and Urban Development  
451 7<sup>th</sup> Street SW, Room 10276  
Washington, DC 20410-7000

**Re: OMB Control No.: 2577-0216 / Docket No. 85-FR-55312: 60-Day Notice of Proposed Information Collection: Moving to Work Demonstration**

As one of the nation's 39 original Moving to Work (MTW) public housing authorities, and as a proud participant in the MTW demonstration, the Minneapolis Public Housing Authority (MPHA) welcomes the opportunity to comment on proposed updates to HUD Form 50900. More than just another piece of required paperwork, the 50900 plays a fundamental role in advancing the statutory goals of the MTW program. The form itself should embody and advance the best intentions of Congress, HUD, and the MTW PHAs.

The good works that MTW PHAs seek to carry out in their communities can be empowered by—or hobbled by—the inherent requirements and expectations of the form. On a practical level, the Form 50900 entails substantial administrative effort by PHA staff—an application of taxpayer dollars devoted to satisfying technical requirements rather than directly advancing program activities. That investment should be worth it to HUD, MPHA, and our Minneapolis community.

## Values and Principles

We have certain specific observations to share in the second part of this comment. However, at this early stage it is essential to emphasize the underlying values that we hope will guide HUD in bringing much-needed improvements to Form 50900.

We are grateful to HUD MTW staff for their sincere engagement with MTW PHAs in recent months to brainstorm around one of the most important—and most time-consuming—aspects of the 50900: the MTW Performance Metrics (a component of *Approved Activities*/Section IV<sup>1</sup>). We understand that this draft distributed for 60-day comment does not yet reflect these conversations, but that HUD will be incorporating that feedback into subsequent drafts. We value HUD's expressed intention to proceed only once we have achieved a sense of general agreement by MTW PHAs that any changes will help us better serve our communities and are workable in the field.

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<sup>1</sup> Section IV appears to be mislabeled as Section III in the HUD draft distributed for comment. Section VI (Administrative) is also incorrectly labeled Section V.

To that end, **we join other MTW PHAs in calling for HUD to provide more time for adequate discussion**, so that we might collaboratively develop metrics that are a substantial improvement on the status-quo.

The current performance metrics can benefit greatly from the current rethink. Any revised metrics should pursue the following goals:

- The metrics must **provide a practical and valuable tool for self-reflection and analysis** by the PHA to evaluate the impact of its activities. MTW PHAs are “America’s Housing Policy Lab.” Metrics should be designed to provide meaningful data. PHAs should be able to disregard metrics that are irrelevant to an activity’s profile and purpose.
- To the extent possible, the metrics should **minimize administrative burden**. Certain current metrics are needlessly cumbersome for PHAs and/or the partner entities that we work with to deliver programs. We thank HUD for remembering that metrics are not costless, and most PHAs operate with little excess administrative capacity to absorb time-consuming requirements.
- The metrics should **have value in aggregate**, across activities and across MTW PHAs. This gets to the “apples and oranges” problem that plagues the current metrics (especially with regard to self-sufficiency and, to a lesser degree, cost-effectiveness).

Certain aspects of the revised, proposed metrics represent progress toward these goals. Here are some **positive** elements:

- **Reporting outcomes only for the primary statutory objective.** This will reduce administrative burden while focusing the assessment on the fundamental goal of the activity.
- **Clearly allowing agencies to select “N/A” for metrics that do not apply.** The clarity on this point from HUD is welcome, as it has been a point of confusion in the past.
- **Housing Choice metrics remain strong.** Of the three objectives, Housing Choice remains the most straightforward to track and to understand the meaning of the outcomes. The numbers are meaningful on an activity-by-activity basis, and in aggregate.
- **Introduction of qualitative elements at the agency-level.** Within limits, providing a space for PHAs to describe the impact of activities on the statutory objectives, in narrative form, could be a helpful tool for self-reflection and communication with the community.

However, many aspects of the proposed metrics give reason for concern. Among them:

- **The proposed case studies—two per objective—are burdensome, counter to MTW principles, and cannot be aggregated into useful data.** We fear this element will become distracting annual busywork for PHAs without adding value to the evaluative process. We urge HUD to remove at least one, and preferably both case studies. Instead, PHAs can focus on the proposed general qualitative assessment section, describing how each statutory objective was advanced and/or (just as important) how it faced *challenges* during the year. The premise of case studies generates a built-in bias toward positive results. This run counter to the fundamental concept of MTW as a *demonstration* in which we are learning about how well MTW interventions work.

- **The self-sufficiency metrics need a fundamental reboot.** The current array of Self-Sufficiency metrics needs to go back to basics and thinned out. However, the proposed metrics go backward, if anything. PHAs and partners already have difficulty tracking and making sense of distinctions between education and job-training, for instance, or making the judgment call about whether someone whose employment status may fluctuate during the year belongs in one category or another. The proposed metrics add two lines (“Total Number of Households” and “Average Household Income *at Enrollment*”) that appear to lack a clear explanation. Finally, definitions of self-sufficiency vary dramatically not only from PHA to PHA, but from activity to activity. Aggregating the number of households “transitioned to self-sufficiency” will yield a fundamentally meaningless number.
- **The proposed cost-effectiveness metrics are confusing, and they conflate agency performance with MTW activity performance.** Two listed metrics (“Number of Households” and “Number of Individual People”) are unclear in their meaning and purpose in this section. Further, the addition of “Operating Information” and “Program Compliance” sections threaten to create real confusion about the outcome of activities versus overall agency measures that could vary based upon countless factors. Why, for example, if an MTW PHA does not have any activities related to unit turnover, would unit turnover be reported in this section? If HUD is seeking a better window into overall agency performance or compliance (with regard to turnover, QC error rates, etc.), there are more appropriate places to collect that information. We are unclear why HUD deviates from the format and approach taken in the other two statutory metrics sections to ask for this “Operating Information” and “Program Compliance” information here.
- **In general, the self-sufficiency and cost-effectiveness metrics do not aggregate well.** In principle, we could support the notion of rolling metrics up to the agency level. However, this exercise will not be valuable unless the metrics for self-sufficiency and cost-effectiveness are redesigned such that they become meaningful when totaled up.

### Other specific comments on the document

- **Pages 8 and 11: Actual Number of Households Served (II.B.i).** HUD should consider whether there is place in Section II to document non-MTW households (e.g., VASH). We would like for our community to be able to review our MTW Report without missing this important piece of what we do. MPHA has faced questions from the community, when reviewing the MTW Annual Report, about why numbers of families served appear lower than when we discuss our work in other forums. Reflecting non-MTW households served could eliminate this confusion.
- **Page 14: Number of Households Transitioned to Self-Sufficiency in the Plan Year (II.D.iii).** We do not see the continued need for this section, pending the outcome of HUD’s proposal to aggregate self-sufficiency outcomes within the performance metrics. In that event, this section would be redundant and constitute unnecessary administrative burden. Arguably, however, this Section II approach is preferable to that proposed in the draft metrics, because it calls out the different self-sufficiency definitions in-play, rather than muddying them into a single, meaningless number. Perhaps HUD should simply remove this from Section II, and implement this approach as part of its performance metrics.

- **Pages 14 and 21: Conflicting Approaches to Self-Sufficiency Definitions.** Related to the bullet above, the approach to self-sufficiency definitions in Section II (page 14) suggests distinct definitions for each activity. In Section IV (page 21), however, the form implies that the agency has a unified, universal self-sufficiency definition.
- **Page 16: Hardship Case Criteria (III.E.ii).** The proposed 50900 newly requires including a copy of “the MTW PHA’s hardship policy” as an appendix. This statement misunderstands the nature of hardship policies, which may vary depending on the program to which they apply. While some PHAs may have a unified “hardship” policy, many do not. It should be sufficient for the PHA to simply describe the associated hardship policy, as before, when proposing a new activity.
- **Page 30: Planned Application of PHA Unspent Operating Fund and HCV Funding (V.IV):** MPHA is in agreement with including this section, which will provide our communities valuable information. However, we see two necessary changes to make this section work.
  - **We recommend that the proposed reserve table feature a single line that combines an MTW agency’s voucher, admin, and public housing operating funding.** The table should not include a breakout across these categories, which MTW PHAs would not be able to provide given that a key component of the MTW Agreement is full fungibility of these MTW funds. The main purpose of the reserve schedule is to enable agencies to share information about future uses. Therefore, total funds available and how they will be used should be the primary focus of this section.
  - **HUD will need to provide MTW with accurate reconciliations of HUD-held funds.** Currently, MTW PHAs do not receive data from HUD with the regularity nor in the format we would need to provide a properly forecasted MTW funds figure.
- **Page 35: Certifications of Compliance:** We note that HUD has introduced changes to the extended fine-print of the Certifications of Compliance that require further legal review by MTW agencies. We anticipate joining in further comment on this point by the MTW Collaborative and/or its outside counsel, and request HUD to await this feedback.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our observations and suggestions on the Form 50900. For further questions on this comment, please contact MPHA Director of Policy & Communications Jeff Horwich: [jhorwich@mplspha.org](mailto:jhorwich@mplspha.org).