Planning the Housing Opportunity and Services Together Demonstration
Challenges and Lessons Learned

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The multisite Housing Opportunity and Services Together (HOST) demonstration is an ambitious effort to test strategies that use housing as a platform for services to improve the life chances of vulnerable children, youth, and adults. This brief provides an overview of the project's early challenges and successes to offer practitioners insights on the planning and design of "dual-generation" interventions and to inform policy supporting comprehensive place-based initiatives.
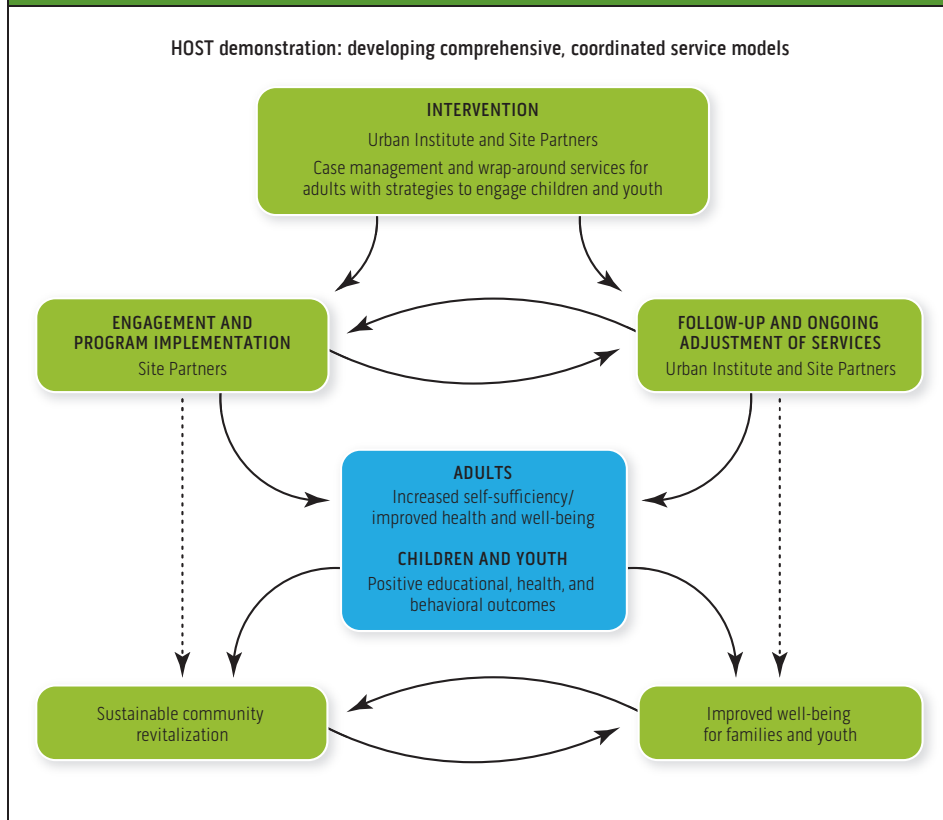
Launched in December 2010 with the support of the Open Society Foundations' (OSF) Special Fund for Poverty Alleviation, the multisite HOST demonstration tests innovative, two-generation service models to improve the life chances of vulnerable low-income families living in public and mixed-income housing communities. At its core, the demonstration aims to address parents' key barriers to self-sufficiency—such as poor physical and mental health, addictions, low levels of literacy, lack of a high school diploma, and historically weak connection to the labor force—while simultaneously integrating services and supports for children and youth.

HOST builds on lessons learned from the successful wraparound service model that the Urban Institute and the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) piloted from 2007–2010 with residents of Dearborn Homes and the Madden/Wells development. While this model showed promising gains for even the highest-risk adults, the benefits did not extend to their children. Parents reported that their teens were struggling in school, engaging in risky behavior, being arrested, and pregnant and parenting at rates far above average (Popkin and Getsinger 2010). Developing effective place-based models that reach youth is critical not only for improving the lives of individual children and youth, but also for ensuring the health and viability of public and mixed-income communities. If youth engagement strategies are successful, they can reduce critical neighborhood

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Figure 1. HOST Demonstration Theory of Change

HOST demonstration: developing comprehensive, coordinated service models

INTERVENTION
Urban Institute and Site Partners
Case management and wrap-around services for adults with strategies to engage children and youth

ENGAGEMENT AND PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION
Site Partners

FOLLOW-UP AND ONGOING ADJUSTMENT OF SERVICES
Urban Institute and Site Partners

ADULTS
Increased self-sufficiency/ improved health and well-being

CHILDREN AND YOUTH
Positive educational, health, and behavioral outcomes

Sustainable community revitalization

Improved well-being for families and youth

problems such as vandalism, drug trafficking, fighting, and gang activity—the disorder and violence that have considerable impact on residents and can drive others away. Figure 1 shows the theory of change for the HOST demonstration sites.

During its two-year implementation, the HOST demonstration will identify strategies and services that help the families at greatest risk and offer the best potential for strengthening the community. This information is vital as the federal government begins to take place-based initiatives to scale through its multiagency Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative, which encompasses the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Choice Neighborhood program, the Department of Education's Promise Neighborhoods program, and the

Department of Justice's Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation program.[1] Looking forward, HOST will help answer critical questions about what works for whom and provide important insight into how local communities implement similar dual-generation models to improve the life chances of their most vulnerable children and families.

An Overview of HOST Partners and Program Models

The first step in putting together any demonstration is to identify suitable partners. For HOST, partners must have the capacity to (1) implement dual-generation case management models, (2) integrate meaningful programs for children and youth into their service plans, (3) leverage federal and local funds to comply with OSF's required dollar-for-dollar match,

and (4) commit to participating in a research demonstration and evaluation.

HOST's first two partner agencies—Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) and Home Forward (formerly the Housing Authority of Portland, Oregon)—both have a history of developing innovative service models for their HOPE VI redevelopment initiatives, working with the Urban Institute, and participating in research projects. The partners' Moving-To-Work (MTW) status also grants them greater flexibility to shift their federal funds to pay for resident services.[2]

Both housing authorities are implementing dual-generation case management models, but their programs target substantially different communities and residents (table 1). CHA is focusing its efforts on Altgeld Gardens, its last remaining large public housing development, which sits in an extremely isolated community on the far south side of Chicago near the Indiana border. CHA's HOST program builds on the previous case management demonstration, which identified heads of household who were sporadically employed, did not have high school diplomas, had high rates of physical and mental health problems, and had children in the household noted as "high risk" and most in need of intensive case management (Theodos et al. 2010). For HOST, CHA has targeted 230 "high-risk" households where the head of household was "work able" but failed to obtain employment during the first nine months of 2011. Many of these residents are longtime public housing residents and all are African American. In addition, children living in these targeted households are less likely than youth living in employed households to participate in extracurricular activities offered at Altgeld.

Home Forward has opted to build on its existing Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program initiatives, which hold rent constant and provide case management to help residents increase their income and save additional earnings in a five-year escrow account

accessible upon program completion. For HOST, Home Forward is enhancing one of these programs, the Opportunity Housing Initiative (OHI), by offering more services for adults and incorporating case management for youth. HOST also allows Home Forward to reach more than twice as many households as before with this enhanced version of OHI. The housing authority already requires residents of Humboldt Gardens, one of its smaller mixed-income developments, to participate in OHI and has expanded access in its largest mixed-income development, New Columbia, and an adjacent public housing property, the Tamarack apartments. Home Forward's 136 HOST families are much more diverse than CHA's and include immigrant and refugee populations, as well as African Americans, Latinos, and whites. And, since the Portland program targets mixed-income communities, it will be serving families with a wider continuum of needs.

The two housing authorities have also made different strategic decisions about how to staff the services that compose their HOST models. CHA is contracting out its services, with the Uhlich Children's Advantage Network (UCAN)[3] serving as the lead. UCAN has provided services for vulnerable children and families in Chicago for nearly 150 years. The agency is CHA's supportive services provider for all of Altgeld. In that capacity, UCAN provides basic case management and clinical services for adults; for youth, it either provides them with or links them to after-school programming. For HOST, UCAN will provide intensive case management to the 230 families in the target group, lowering caseloads from 55:1 to 23:1; providing employment, clinical, health, and financial literacy services for adults; and partnering with another CHA provider, Project Match, to develop and implement the youth component.

In contrast, Home Forward is using its own staff to provide case management to adults at a ratio of 40:1, while contracting out

individual components including case management and services for youth. The local workforce investment board, Work Systems Inc., will deliver employment-related programs along with Portland Community College; Innovative Changes runs a series of financial literacy workshops for HOST participants; and another outside consultant manages the youth component.

Intensive interaction between case managers and families serves as the centerpiece of HOST in both sites. CHA and Home Forward are using the opportunity presented by the HOST demonstration to enhance their existing service models and to move from a traditional case management approach to a collaborative "coaching" model that will more actively engage residents and leverage their strengths and assets (Theodos et al. forthcoming). Home Forward is also offering the Pacific Institute's STEPS training, a series of workshops that aim to improve motivation, raise personal accountability, and provide insight into how the mind works so participants can control the way they think to achieve success. All HOST case managers, HOST adults, and older youth are required to attend STEPS in order to construct common language and goals around self-sufficiency and resiliency.

Both CHA and Home Forward have developed new youth programming for HOST. Project Match, an employment program with a long history of working with CHA families, will partner with UCAN to provide school-age children and youth the opportunity to make concrete, measurable progress along two distinct but interrelated trajectories—one for enrichment and the other to help "off-track" children and youth.[4] The enrichment group will target those whose in-school and out-of-school behaviors suggest they are developmentally stable. This group would include both early excellers and average achievers. In contrast, the at-risk track will target those with behavioral indicators classified as red flags, (e.g., school-age kids with high

absenteeism and failing grades). Project Match staff will be integrated into UCAN's HOST case management team and will provide a system of incremental goal setting, incentives, verification, and public recognition. The case managers and Project Match staff will work to link HOST children and youth to services available on site, including UCAN's after-school programming and groups for male and female teens.

Home Forward's youth component is also highly tailored to the needs of individual children and youth but is structured quite differently. A multicultural team of experienced licensed clinical social workers will coordinate closely with Home Forward's HOST case managers to identify children and youth with acute behavioral or academic problems. The youth case managers will then work intensively with these children and their families to resolve these issues and connect them to additional resources (e.g., tutoring, specialized clinical therapy). The youth team will also work with the larger group of HOST children to develop activities and opportunities for engagement and support, including weekly girls' and boys' support groups and service projects.

Building a Collaborative Effort

HOST is a formative rather than a traditional evaluation, which affects how the researchers relate to the program staff. In a traditional evaluation, researchers do not enter the picture until after the intervention has been designed, and they wait until the study's end to reveal their findings and provide feedback to program and service administrators. In contrast, HOST is a collaborative effort and the Urban Institute has worked closely with the sites on developing the demonstration design, planning for the evaluation, and addressing administrative issues to ensure its timely launch. Through this process, the Urban Institute has built a valuable feedback loop that will allow the partners to refine services and strategies over the course of the demonstration.

The Urban Institute's site liaisons have ongoing communication with their sites, including regular conference calls, e-mail exchanges, and site visits. Initially, conference calls covered a wide range of conceptual and practical issues and required an "all hands on deck" approach with all Urban Institute and partner staff. But over time, the calls have become more targeted and attendance more limited to key personnel. In-person communication is particularly important for more intensive conversations about actual program models and design decisions. The site liaisons and the principal investigator make at least quarterly visits to each site and extra visits when challenges arise. These visits have served as a solid platform for reaching consensus around philosophical approaches and goals as well as hammering out the specifics of the demonstration design. The evaluation team also takes advantage of time on the ground to

Table 1. Overview of HOST Demonstration Sites

	CHICAGO HOUSING AUTHORITY	HOME FORWARD
Sites	Altgeld Gardens	New Columbia Tamarack Humboldt Gardens
Type	Public housing	Mixed income
Target population	230 households	136 households
Case management	UCAN	Home Forward
	▪ 23:1 caseloads ▪ Strengths-based coaching model ▪ Weekly meetings	▪ 40:1 caseloads ▪ Strengths-based coaching model ▪ Triage model of engagement ▪ STEPS training
Employment	UCAN	Work Systems Inc.
	▪ Barriers to success inventory ▪ Job-readiness training ▪ Literacy programs	▪ Comprehensive employment preparation ▪ On-the-job training ▪ Internships
Financial stability	UCAN	Innovative Changes
	▪ Required financial literacy training	▪ Required financial literacy training
Clinical	UCAN	Home Forward
	▪ On-site clinician ▪ Clinical eco-maps	▪ Referrals to off-site clinics
Youth/parenting	UCAN and Project Match	Joy DeGruy Consulting
	▪ Pathways to Rewards incentive program for youth age 0–18 ▪ After-school programming ▪ Summer jobs program ▪ Clinical counseling ▪ Early childhood delay screening	▪ Intensive case management with high-need youth 6–18 ▪ Referrals to tutors and specialized clinical services when needed ▪ Community enrichment activities ▪ STEPS training for all youth age 12–18

interview staff about the programs and models and how they are being adapted. Lastly, Urban Institute staff e-mail to follow up on pending items after conference calls and site visits, provide a written record of discussions, and clarify decisions made.

In addition to building strong relationships between partners, HOST aims to create a community of practice. During the planning phase, the Urban Institute organized two cross-site meetings, one in Chicago and one in Portland. These meetings allowed partners to share their insights and expertise with each other and mutually support the development of HOST models. For example, at the October 2011 cross-site meeting in Portland, CHA staff led a session on strengths-based coaching techniques. In between cross-site meetings, the Urban Institute organizes webinars to continue this sharing and encourages partners to use each other as sounding boards and to contact each other directly for technical assistance.

Designing the HOST Demonstration

For most public housing authorities, structured case management programs like the HOST demonstration tend to be small, boutique undertakings funded with FSS or MTW funds and targeted to particularly self-motivated, mostly adult clients. As a result, scaling up a high-capacity HOST model focusing specifically on hard-to-serve adults and children presents a new set of challenges. HOST partners have the added task of designing, staffing, and launching HOST models that support rigorous evaluation within nine months. Further complicating this formidable undertaking are the constraints under which public agencies operate, such as hiring freezes, contracting regulations, and concerns about service equity.

The first challenge for the HOST sites was deciding which residents to target for services. CHA chose to target residents who were not gainfully employed for at least 20 hours per week. Since households were eligible to receive

services through their existing service programs, CHA did not need residents' consent to *identify* them as part of its target population. CHA used its administrative data to select high-need, work-able families in Altgeld for the demonstration. However, while the work-able definition seems straightforward, CHA staff discovered that the prevalence of seasonal labor and unstable employment made employment fluid. Because of these issues, a sample of families pulled at any particular moment in time will inevitably include some not appropriate for the demonstration and will miss others that are. CHA reviewed its administrative data three times between December 2010 and September 2011 to select as the final target population the 230 households that were work able and not employed in the final two reports.

The challenges for Home Forward were very different. Because the OHI program requires a signed contract with the client, Home Forward had to *identify* HOST participants before implementation, and actively *engage* and *enroll* them. With the help of two other general resident services staff, the four HOST case managers in Portland actively recruited residents for six months to make sure there were enough families to support the statistical analysis needed for the evaluation. These multicultural staff also actively reached out to refugee and immigrant residents as well as to high-need families identified by the local school to minimize the selection bias inherent in a voluntary program.

As noted above, the successful evaluation of a place-based demonstration like HOST depends heavily on the number of families engaged because of the need for statistical power to detect the intervention's effect. When the central component of the intervention is intensive case management, the number of case managers needed increases exponentially as the number of families increases. This can pose difficulties when the agency providing core services is a housing authority bound by local hiring freezes or other issues

that may limit the number of staff available. CHA has addressed its HOST staffing needs by realigning 10 UCAN case managers to Altgeld from another site, which effectively cuts the case management ratio from 55:1 to 23:1 for HOST families. Home Forward has navigated this challenge by adapting its HOPE VI relocation model to triage HOST families and tailor the level of case management to their level of need. Given the site's mix of both high- and low-need families, the triage approach allows Home Forward to serve a larger number of families than if it were using a one-size-fits-all model.

When designing a model like HOST, there is a strong temptation to spread the money broadly and offer families a wide variety of programs and services. While this approach has its benefits, the resulting intervention may not be strong enough in any one area to really move family outcomes. To avoid this problem, the Urban Institute and its HOST partners used a logic model process to ensure that the programming pushes key HOST outcomes. In this way, the housing authorities have struck a balance between being comprehensive in their service model and providing the support families need to succeed.

The process of designing the HOST youth component highlights this tension. Both HOST partners have chosen to serve children in a wide age range and considered directly funding multiple tutoring programs, mentoring programs, and youth employment programs. However, CHA and Home Forward have chosen to implement highly tailored one-one-one youth case management models because the other approach spreads resources too thin and may not deliver sufficient services to each child.

Both HOST partners have wrestled with the question of which services to provide in house and which to contract out. The core components of CHA's HOST model—intensive case management, job training and development, mental health services, and other

specialized programs—resulted from lessons learned over the past decade through implementing a robust resident services program. CHA's long-standing relationship with UCAN as the service provider in Altgeld Gardens has made UCAN the natural choice for managing the HOST demonstration.

By 2010, the disappointing youth findings from the evaluation of the Chicago Family Case Management Demonstration had already helped CHA think more comprehensively about youth interventions (Popkin et al. 2010). Leadership in CHA's Resident Services department was interested in partnering with Project Match to implement their Pathways to Rewards model in a public housing setting. Initially, CHA, UCAN, and Project Match debated whether Project Match should provide the youth component independently; but during the planning period, CHA realized that Project Match did not have enough staff to serve the high number of HOST children. As a result, CHA opted to have UCAN direct youth services through either providing services or referring to community or school programs with technical assistance and support from Project Match.

In contrast, Home Forward traditionally provides the majority of its case management and resident services functions in house; its model HOPE VI relocation program laid the groundwork for the intensive coaching model so central to HOST. However, Home Forward generally leverages its relationships with other agencies to provide programs and services for residents. Thus, for HOST, Home Forward has largely chosen to work with existing subcontractors that already know the community, understand residents' needs, and are familiar with the housing authority's procedures and expectations. However, because Home Forward was looking to make a large investment in a new area of services, the agency used an intensive RFP process to select the right youth services provider.

Planning the Evaluation

Evaluating a complex model like HOST presents challenges far beyond the usual issues such as controlling for the larger context and identifying an effect within a prescribed time. HOST models are different in each site and, by design, will be refined and adapted over time. Moreover, because adding comparison groups is contingent on gaining additional funding, the Urban Institute may not be able to measure program impacts in a traditional sense. To address these challenges and others particular to dual-generation interventions, the HOST demonstration team organized a research advisory panel of practitioners, researchers, and other experts in health, family stability, employment, housing management, and education to inform the evaluation design.

The advisory panel stressed that, as a proof of concept evaluation, HOST has great potential to contribute new knowledge and create valuable prototypes for innovative service models. However, the evaluation's success depends on employing a strong research design and creative data collection techniques. The group's suggestions directly informed the Urban Institute's evaluation plan, which consists of three key components: (1) a process evaluation, (2) an outcome evaluation, and (3) a detailed cost analysis.

Process evaluation. A robust process evaluation is especially important to HOST because of the demonstration's structure and planned evolution over time. The process evaluation will (1) create a mechanism by which HOST partners can fine-tune client engagement, services, and management using feedback from the Urban Institute; (2) help analysts better understand and interpret findings from the outcome evaluation; and (3) provide the detailed information on implementation needed for other communities to adapt HOST models. Methodologies include interviews and observations of HOST partners and service providers, focus groups with HOST participants, in-depth family

interviews, monthly HOST administrative data on client engagement, and contextual data on local economic and political trends.

Outcome evaluation. This part of the evaluation will analyze changes in key outcomes such as employment, residential stability, and health in assisted households and youth-specific outcomes like school engagement and risky behaviors.

The baseline and follow-up HOST family surveys will bolster sound analyses of these outcomes. First, to benchmark HOST outcomes against those of similar households through a formal comparison group, UI will employ administrative data and standardized measures that can be compared to populations in national, state, and local surveys. Second, the Urban Institute will administer the surveys not only to an adult in each household, but also to one youth 12 or older when present. This will enable the Urban Institute to capture the unique experiences of young HOST participants directly.

Because not all outcomes are captured well by survey data, the Urban Institute has also chosen to track some outcomes with administrative data. HOST case managers will record monthly interim data on employment status, wages, and housing stability for all households because these outcomes often fluctuate widely over time. In addition, the Urban Institute and its partners are currently evaluating the feasibility of gathering report cards for HOST children and tracking common measures of school engagement and achievement through this mechanism.

Cost analysis. This research component is central to understanding which policies or programs generate maximum returns on investment. To gather this information, the Urban Institute will pair HOST partners' monthly administrative data on engagement and service use with cost estimates by service providers.

The Urban Institute has already begun the process study by documenting local program and staffing decisions through interviews and

observation of the HOST partners. The institute has also worked closely with HOST partners to prepare for the other aspects of the evaluation. At the first cross-site meeting, CHA staff shared their experiences with the Chicago Family Case Management Demonstration with UCAN and other HOST partners; staff gave partners a sense of what to expect from the Urban Institute during a formative evaluation and advice on balancing services with the added tasks of tracking outcomes and activities. At the second meeting, site staff met with the firm conducting the family survey to define core administrative measures across sites.

Looking Forward

CHA and Home Forward launched the service component of the HOST demonstration in November 2011. In the first few months, they have continued to intensify resident outreach, finalize staffing, and modify service provision. The full HOST model will be rolled out over several months in 2012 as residents become engaged with new opportunities. Undoubtedly, there will be new programs added, tweaks to services, and perhaps major changes to existing models. Nevertheless, both program failures and successes will be useful for policy and practice.

This brief documents the start-up for only two HOST sites. However, in the year to come, the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) and the District of Columbia Housing Authority (DCHA) plan to join the demonstration and begin their own planning processes in time to roll out new HOST models in late 2012. Because large action-oriented research undertakings like HOST require collaboration from multiple organizations, the Urban Institute will continue its conversations with major national philanthropic organizations to leverage the support of foundations coming on board during the planning year, including the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation and the Kresge Foundation.

Meanwhile, evaluation activities are in full swing. In December 2011, the Urban Institute, in partnership with Decision Information Resources (DIR), launched the baseline survey of families in both Chicago and Portland. Research and evaluation activities during the second year will include analysis of the baseline survey data; ongoing analysis of the administrative data on engagement, service use, and interim outcomes; focus groups with adults and youth on early engagement with case management and services; observations of program activities; interviews with program staff; and in-depth interviews with participants about their experiences with HOST.

As HOST develops, the research team will assess the lessons learned, challenges, and successes from the demonstration and disseminate those findings in an interim report in 2012. Communication with stakeholders and other interested parties will be an ongoing effort for the Urban Institute and its partners, ensuring that HOST informs the work of practitioners, public housing authorities, local governments, philanthropy, congressional offices, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative partner agencies. Lessons learned from the demonstration are sure to make an impact in the lives of low-income children and families. ▪

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. For a full description of the Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative, see the White House (2011).

2. For more information on the Moving to Work program, see http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/public_indian_housing/programs/ph/mtw.

3. http://www.ucanchicago.org/.

4. Project Match's services build on the Pathways to Rewards incentive-based model they developed for families in the CHA's Westhaven mixed-income development. See http://pmatch.org/.

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