



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

BETSEY MARTENS, PRESIDENT

Outcomes, Not Outputs

I was recently invited to a White House roundtable that was convened as part of a national women's outreach initiative and as part of the overall effort of the White House Office of Public Engagement to hear from individuals across the country. The roundtable that I attended in Denver was hosted by Shelley Poticha, Director of the Office of Sustainable Housing and Communities at HUD and so had a housing focus.

Ms. Poticha asked what the attendees thought the administration could be doing differently to produce better outcomes for women and for affordable housing. In a group setting like this you never really know how many times you will get the floor and so I chose carefully from a long list of possible answers. My answer in this moment has set the stage for the ideas you'll be hearing from me here on Page 3 and at NAHRO conferences where I have the opportunity to speak.

I think that we need a fundamental, if not transformative, shift in the way that HUD approaches the work we do together. In the Public and Indian Housing realm, we need to shift the conversation from outputs to outcomes. As housing authorities, we continue to be measured in units and widgets, rather than on meaningful outcomes for our residents. We are long past the question about whether we are housing providers or social services providers — we are an inextricable blend of both. We are community change agents, and we need to press for HUD to align a clear set of outcomes with funding that is

proportionate to expectations, regulations that allow entrepreneurial ideas to unfold and a mission that captures a broader potential.

We are still too focused on reporting to HUD about things that don't tell us if we're making a difference in our community. I think we need to be asking, and reporting:

- o How many of the children in our housing are graduating from high school?

- o How many families are encouraged and supported in increasing income?

- o How many families with disabled members can avoid nursing home care?

- o How many families have avoided homelessness?

- o How has our housing inspired change in its neighborhood?

- o How has our housing investment contributed to creating jobs?

In my long career in this business I have grown to understand that while housing for very low-income people might seem like the goal, we are only truly successful if, in the provision of that housing, we are changing the expectation for positive life outcomes for the families that live with us and the communities and neighborhoods we're engaged in.

We all better understand that when we offer someone the choice of a home, we are not just offering shelter but both the opportunities and limitations of that choice—transportation options to work, schools for children, access to shopping and amenities and public

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safety. Families are choosing a community—and the choices available in that community.

Our keynote speaker in Louisville (Ky.) last summer, Wes Moore, said that “[p]otential is universal, but opportunity is not.” He remarked that he wants his work to contribute to a country in which opportunity is universal. I hope, and expect the same, for all of us.

I think that our sector can contribute to creating a country of universal opportunity by shifting the conversation to meaningful outcomes and then aligning everything else with that focus: mission, regulation, reporting and funding. ■