

The Pennsylvania Housing Research Center

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The Concept of a Network of Full Service Housing Resource Centers

(a report prepared for the Consortium of Housing Research Centers)

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Summary

Housing Research Centers exist at numerous universities, and many of these centers collaborate through the National Consortium of Housing Research Centers. In early 2001, the Consortium initiated a review of its status and related activities. Initially, the main purpose was to develop and publish a position paper that identified the status and role of the Consortium. The next step was to develop a plan of action for the Consortium and its members over the next few years. During the course of this exercise, it became evident that the issues and their resolution extend well beyond the Consortium. The question then became how best to address the future. That is the question this report seeks to answer.

The concept of a full-service Housing Resource Center and the concept of a strategic network of these centers represent a promising and practical approach. Both of these concepts emerged from a consideration of the basic responsibilities of a large land grant university in relation to housing.

The second chapter of this report presents background information on the Consortium. Each of the following interdependent activities is then considered:

- education and pedagogy;
- information transfer, training, liaison and outreach; and
- research, development, and demonstration.

These chapters lay the groundwork for the concept of a national network of regional Housing Resource Centers. The final chapter of the report develops and justifies this concept.

Preface

Since 1996, I have been a member of the Consortium of Housing Research Centers; for the last two years (2000 and 2001) I have been Chair. On balance, the experience has been rewarding. It has given me an insight into what other universities do in relation to housing research. In addition, I have been privileged to meet many interesting people and have made some good friends. Over this period of time, however, it has become evident to me that the impact of the Consortium has been much less than its obvious potential and that, as an organization, it is much less than the sum of its parts. As a consequence, the Consortium is losing rather than gaining support and new members.

It has taken me some time to realize that, given the rules of the academic community and the research funding agencies, it cannot be otherwise. Unless the value system and some of the rules are changed, the situation is not likely to improve. This opinion has been reinforced by my involvement with the NRC Committee to Review and Assess the PATH program, by my experiences as a member and, currently, Chair of the Board of BETEC and as Director of the Pennsylvania Housing Research/Resource Center.

In February 2001 as Chair of the Consortium, I proposed that members jointly develop a position paper, together with a strategy for future operation. In spite of excellent input and feedback from a core group of members, this proposal proved to be impractical. Consequently, this position paper *cum* strategic plan has largely been written by me with input from some members of the Consortium. In short, the responsibility for the opinions, biases, and any errors is mine.

This report is intended to offer a constructive and collaborative means of resolving a number of significant concerns. Specific recommendations set out in the report for developing and operating a full-service Housing Resource Center can be changed but, on balance, I believe that the general idea of a network of full-service Housing Resource Centers is sound and deserves serious consideration. Housing is far too important to be left to the universities but, conversely, the universities do have an important role to play. The questions are these: what role and how best to play it? Accordingly, the audience for this report extends well beyond the members of the Consortium.

Feedback is welcomed.