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Where Do Minnesota Policy Ideas Come From?

by Virginia Gray



During the 1998 gubernatorial campaign, when candidate Jesse Ventura was asked how he and the legislature would make policy, his answer was that he would wait until a bill reached his desk and then he would sign or veto it, depending on what was best for Minnesota. This answer implies that the legislature will have the predominant role in policymaking, and that the governor will have a more reactive role.

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Now that Mr. Ventura is governor, a question naturally arises: How do bills get to his desk? How does he, or the legislature before him, decide what is best for Minnesota? In 1997 I conducted a study of legislative policymaking that bears on these questions, designed to find out where Minnesota legislators get their policy ideas.

Many a book has been written on how a bill becomes a law, detailing victorious journeys through the U.S. Congress or state legislatures. But only one notable book—by John Kingdon—has been written on how an idea becomes a bill, describing the case histories of twenty-three bills in the U.S. Congress and where they originated.¹ This article is about where policy ideas come from in Minnesota, specifically what sources of information are used in each of three stages of the policy process: identifying a public problem, formulating a policy solution, and deciding how to vote on a bill. How do legislators identify a problem or issue as something that needs government attention, and how much do they rely on the governor? Where do they turn when crafting a possible legislative solution to that problem? Whom do they consult in making up their minds about how to vote on bills? Presumably different sources of information might be relied upon in different stages of the policy process.

Identifying the Sources

Such an analysis is important for several reasons. First, in any era, but especially in the era of “reinventing government,” policy innovation is critical, and for this it is useful to identify where the stock of innovative ideas comes from and who supplies the intellectual capital. Second, many observers, such as Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam, have argued that contemporary America is deficient in social capital—the informal social networks, clubs, and associations that facilitate cooperation for mutual benefit. Social capital translates into effective governance. Minnesota is somewhat of an exception to this trend, as it ranks fourth on a recent ranking of state social capital, and therefore we might reasonably expect Minnesota to

¹John W. Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1984).

²Edward T. Jennings, Jr. and Meg Patrick Haist, “The Civic Community, Interest Groups, and Economic Development in the States” (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston, September 3-6, 1998).

have rich sources of policy ideas.² Third, the arrival of a triparty government in Minnesota may give the legislature an even more important role in policy invention than it previously had.

Initially I looked at the public affairs community in Minnesota, focusing on three sets of organizations that set our state apart from others. One unusual feature is that the Twin Cities has two major daily newspapers located in or near the capital city, both with historic commitments to public service. The *Minneapolis Star Tribune* and the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* both regularly cover state government and public policy and take editorial positions on public policy issues and on candidates. Another unusual feature of Minnesota is that it has a set of private foundations that are active in public life. These include the McKnight, Northwest Area, Bush, and Blandin foundations, community foundations such as the Minneapolis Foundation and the St. Paul Foundation, and others. These groups fund numerous projects that might furnish input to the policy process. A third distinctive feature of our community is the presence of two think tanks, the fifty-year-old Citizens League and the newer Center for the American Experiment. While many states have seen the recent rise of conservative think tanks, the longstanding presence of a centrist think tank is unusual.

To assess the contributions of these organizations, we have to compare them to the more typical sources of policy ideas, including the legislators themselves, their constituents’ experiences, and other internal legislative sources such as staff members and study commissions. Other political actors—lobbyists, the governor, bureaucrats, and party leaders—may be contributors of ideas as well, and ideas can additionally come from sources outside the legislative process such as other states, academics, professional organizations, and public opinion polls.

To gather information about where ideas come from, two mail surveys—one of legislators and one of staff members—were conducted during October and November of 1997, when the legislature was not scheduled to be in session; however, two one-day special sessions were held during the survey period. The response rates were very good: 62 percent for the 198 legislators available at the time of the survey and 71 percent for the staff. The staff sample, including all available professional staff engaged

in research and policy analysis work, both partisan and nonpartisan, totaled 172. Other components of the study included a citation study of newspaper mentions of the Center for the American Experiment and the Citizens League and an expert ranking of the ten most important laws of the past decade.

Sources for Legislators

Table 1 shows where legislators claim to get their information. Column one indicates that they relied mostly on their own experience and knowledge to identify public problems that might need government’s attention: three-quarters said they often relied on themselves. About two-thirds said they often relied on the experiences of their constituents to identify pressing issues, with lesser proportions citing legislative staff, other legislators, and lobbyists as often bringing issues to their attention. In other words, when deciding what is an important problem, legislators say they do not turn first to experts; rather, they reflect primarily upon their own experience or their constituents’ experience. Secondarily, they turn to nearby internal sources such as staff, other legislators who may be experts, or lobbyists.

When legislators then roll up their sleeves and tackle a problem (column two of Table 1), about three-quarters often look to their staff for possible solutions, followed by their own experience and knowledge about what will work. Sizeable proportions also consult other legislators and their constituents; the only additional source of information cited was executive agency officials, presumably because of their expertise on the topic. Again, legislators’ sources are primarily close at hand, either in the district or in the capitol.

When deciding how to vote (column three of Table 1), legislators say they mostly make up their own minds, guided also by feedback from their constituents, followed by cues from other legislators, staff and lobbyists—the same group of sources that were important in the initial phase of problem identification. Thus, Minnesota legislators do not by and large search out policy cues from sources external to the legislative chamber or external to the district.

It is difficult to directly compare these results with those from other studies because the questions differ from study to study. But in a 1993 study of state legislators in Ohio, the largest number of legislators (more than 60 percent) said they consulted

constituents in evaluating how to vote on legislation, followed by interest groups, party leaders, and other legislators.³ Both states put constituents high up, with interest groups and party leaders appearing more important in Ohio than in Minnesota.

The governor ranks relatively low in both states as a policymaking source: in Minnesota the governor was listed tenth in the problem identification stage, tied for tenth in the solution design stage, and tenth in the voting stage (only 9 percent of legislators listed the governor here). Since legislators were most likely referring to Governor Arne Carlson in their answers, it is unclear whether another governor would have elicited different responses. In Ohio about 15 percent of legislators said they consulted the governor in deciding how to vote.

³Results of the Ohio Legislative research project cited by Samuel C. Patterson, "Legislative Politics in the States," in *Politics in the American States*, 6th edition, eds. Virginia Gray and Herbert Jacob (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1996), 197.

Minnesota legislators' perception seems to be that they—not the governor—take the lead in the policymaking process, a view consistent with Governor Ventura's.

In Kingdon's study of the U.S. Congress using open-ended interviews, he found that the "visible participants" were most influential in the problem identification stage. By visible participants, he meant the president and Congress, along with party leaders, high-level political appointees, and the media. In the second stage of the policy process, where policy alternatives are generated, Kingdon found that the "invisible participants" were more influential, meaning career civil servants, congressional staffers, and policy specialists outside of government. This demarcation holds to some extent in Minnesota policymaking in that legislative staff are first in importance in generating policy alternatives, but they are third in importance in the problem identification stage. In Minnesota, however, legislative staff are more

important across the board than one might expect based on congressional observations.

Sources for Legislative Staff

Given the legislators' reliance on legislative staff, we also surveyed the staff themselves to see whom they turned to for information (Table 2). In the initial stage of identifying problems that need attention in Minnesota, the staff said they relied on their fellow staffers and on executive agency officials—fellow experts, in other words. Secondarily, they relied on legislative study commissions, lobbyists, the experiences of other states, and news reporting. Staffers cast a wider net in their information search than do legislators, as you might expect from full-time professional staff.

Still there is the sense that the staffers' bailiwick is the second stage of the policy process, designing solutions to problems others have identified. Here they rely on the same set of sources as in the first stage, primarily other staff and

Table 1: Top Five Sources of Information for Minnesota Legislators

Ranking determined by the percentage of 123 respondents who stated that they used the source "often."

Rank	Stage 1: Problem Identification	Stage 2: Solution Design	Stage 3: Deciding how to Vote
1.	Own experience, knowledge – 75%	Legislative staff – 73%	Own experience, knowledge - 86%
2.	Constituents' experiences – 66%	Own experience, knowledge - 69%	Constituents' experiences – 66%
3.	Legislative staff – 42%	Other legislators – 50%	Other legislators – 54%
4.	Other legislators – 38%	Constituents' experiences – 50%	Legislative staff – 39%
5.	Lobbyists – 25%	Executive agency officials – 33%	Lobbyists – 21%

Table 2: Top Five Sources of Information for Minnesota Legislative Staff

Ranking determined by the percentage of the 122 respondents who stated that they used the source "often" or that legislators used the source "often."

Rank	Stage 1: Problem Identification	Stage 2: Solution Design	Stage 3: Deciding how to Vote
1.	Other legislative staff – 66%	Other legislative staff – 78%	Own experience, knowledge – 90%
2.	Executive agency officials – 64%	Executive agency officials – 65%	Constituents' experiences – 79%
3.	Legislative study commissions – 48%	Lobbyists – 44%	Other legislators – 75%
4.	Lobbyists – 48%	Leg. study commissions – 42%	Legislative staff – 51%
5.	Other states' experiences & news reporting – 32%	Other states' experiences – 38%	Lobbyists – 44%



Senator Dennis Frederickson (R-New Ulm), right, meets with constituents in his office. Throughout the policymaking process, at least half of the legislators surveyed said they often used their own constituents as a resource.

bureaucrats and secondarily on lobbyists, the results of legislative study commissions, and events in other states. Thus, staffers find nearly the same sources useful in designing solutions as in identifying problems. Except for using lobbyists and an occasional news source, they rely on professional peers.

Very few surveys of state legislative staff have been conducted, but one was done in California where Paul Sabatier and David Whiteman asked three types of staff about the importance of various sources of policy information.⁴ Across the three types (percentages were reported separately for committee, central, and personal staff), state agencies, lobbying groups, and other legislative staff were used most often, correlating well with the findings in Minnesota. However, other states' experiences—consulted often by 38 percent of staffers in Minnesota—were infrequently used in California. Thus, Minnesota staffers believe more strongly in picking brains found elsewhere.

Finally, we asked staffers to assess how legislators made up their minds to vote. Amazingly, they picked exactly the same sources in the same rank order as did legislators. Staffers know the minds of their bosses!

⁴Paul Sabatier and David Whiteman, "Legislative Decision Making and Substantive Policy Information: Models of Information Flow," *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, X (August 1985): 395-421.

The Role of Public Affairs Organizations and Newspapers

Next we evaluated the likelihood that the sets of public affairs organizations identified earlier—newspapers, think tanks, and foundations—have an impact on legislative thinking. As already shown, when compared to the standard sources of information, these organizations ranked relatively low as information sources for legislators. Newspaper editorials, in fact, ranked dead last in each stage of the policy process. Think tank reports ranked between ninth and eleventh, depending on the stage of the process. Foundation reports ranked fourteenth. Thus, in the overall context, these organizations are not ones legislators say they would turn to quickly.

But other questions in the legislator survey allow us to see if these organizations have an influence at the margins. Initially, we needed to know if legislators or their staff read the publications of these groups; without reading, presumably, there would be no direct impact. As Table 3 shows, legislators do regularly read the editorials of the *Star Tribune* and, to a lesser extent, the editorials of the *Pioneer Press*. Smaller numbers read the publications of the two think tanks and very few regularly read publications of the two largest foundations.

However, it is possible that what legislators read is not so important because they rely on staff to read and

digest material for them. In the overall rating of the sources staff rely upon (discussed above), the editorial pages of the newspapers ranked in the middle of the pack in terms of problem identification, with the think tanks lower down, and the list of foundations at the bottom. None of these sources achieved double digit status. On the dimension of policy formulation, staff placed these sources in a slightly different order, but still none of the three types of organizations achieved double digit status.

Nevertheless, we asked staff about their reading habits (Table 4). Many regularly read the editorials of the two major newspapers, smaller numbers are regular readers of think tank publications, with more relying on the Citizens League than on the Center for the American Experiment, and very few regularly followed the publications of the largest foundations. Thus, in broad outline, the staffers' reading habits are about the same as the legislators: newspapers top the list and foundations anchor the list. However, staffers pay closer attention to the opinion pages of the newspapers than do legislators and less attention to the think tanks.

But neither of the two previous questions gets directly to the possible influence of the three information sources. Table 5 focuses on that angle, and it shows that legislators were loath to admit that any of these three types of organizations influenced their thinking on legislative issues. A resounding majority said no in each case. The highest attribution went to the Citizens League where forty-six members said their thinking had been influenced by the think tank. The least influence was attributed to the two foundations.

This attribution of influence to the Citizens League is interesting because in the portion of our study that analyzed the content of *Star Tribune* articles we discovered that mentions of the Citizens League had declined over time while stories mentioning the Center for the American Experiment had gone up (Figure 1). Since 1995, in fact, the Center for the American Experiment has eclipsed the Citizens League in newspaper mentions. But apparently the Citizens League's influence with legislators continues.

Evaluation of the direct influence of the public affairs organizations is difficult because of the variety of their purposes and the long-term nature of their work. In the background interview portion of our study we found that editorial writers aim more at shaping

Table 3: Publications Read by Minnesota Legislators

Number of the 121 respondents who read each organization's publications.

	Regularly	Occasionally	Seen But Not Read	Have Not Read
Citizens League	32	64	20	5
Center for the American Experiment	26	56	33	6
McKnight Foundation	8	50	43	21
Northwest Area Foundation	7	26	39	48
<i>Star Tribune</i> Editorials	73	42	4	3
<i>Pioneer Press</i> Editorials	56	56	5	5

Table 4: Publications Read by Minnesota Legislative staff

Number of the 122 respondents who read each organization's publications.

	Regularly	Occasionally	Seen But Not Read	Have Not Read
Citizens League	20	65	21	16
Center for the American Experiment	10	49	32	31
McKnight Foundation	1	43	32	46
Northwest Area Foundation	3	31	35	53
<i>Star Tribune</i> Editorials	87	34	1	0
<i>Pioneer Press</i> Editorials	80	38	2	2

Table 5: Influence of Public Affairs Organizations and Newspapers on Legislators

Number of the 113 respondents whose thinking on legislative issues was influenced by the following.

	No	Yes
Citizens League	67	46
Center for the American Experiment	78	35
McKnight Foundation	93	19
Northwest Area Foundation	100	9
<i>Star Tribune</i> Editorials	75	36
<i>Pioneer Press</i> Editorials	84	27

public opinion than at passing particular legislation. And legislators may use the editorials more as ammunition than as input: in the open-ended response section of our survey one legislator said, "I can't recall being influenced on any particular issue by the newspaper editorials, although it has probably happened. More likely, I use their editorials with which I agree to try and support my argument or influence others."

The foundations work on their own agendas in their own ways (through funding demonstration projects and research), and they only occasionally interact with government. Due to the prohibitions of the federal tax code, they are nervous about overt public policy activity. Even the think tanks are more involved in the problem identification stage of the policy process than in later stages where their tax-exempt status might be jeopardized. Also, both the foundations and the think tanks have a more long-term focus than is sometimes found in the political process. So while organizations of all three types have a few public policy successes they can point to, they are generally not trying to impact the policy process to the same extent as are the other actors described in this study.

Representatives of the People

For legislation in general we found that the primary sources of policy ideas were perceived to be internal to the legislature or close at hand. Constituents always ranked among the most important sources, ensuring a degree of accountability to the citizenry. As one staffer said in the open-ended responses to our survey, "The public underestimates what a difference one person can make in coming to their lawmaker with a problem. A lot of laws enacted begin with a constituent phone call or letter to a legislator. *A lot.*" In an era of backlash against "professional" or "career" politicians, the finding about constituents is comforting. The governor, by contrast, was not credited by legislators or staffers with being an initiator of ideas.

Still, it is possible that the chief executive has more influence on certain pieces of landmark legislation. A small portion of our study was designed to identify and analyze the sources of these, and so we gathered a panel of twenty politically knowledgeable Minnesotans including lobbyists, academics, public officials, and political commentators, representing both political parties and independents, and we asked these



Staff members are cited as a frequent source of information for legislators, especially at the stage of crafting a bill. Here Representative Karen Clark (DFL-Minneapolis), right, consults with a legislative intern.

experts to identify the most important ten laws passed by the Minnesota Legislature in the last ten years (1988-1997). Their answers represent a very impressive legislative output, with four of the ten laws attempting to improve education. Our task of analyzing the sources of these laws is not yet complete, and further research will determine if the usual internal sources apply or if others

were responsible, but we end here by providing this list of landmark legislation.

► **Health Right Bill, 1992** (later known as MNCare). HealthRight was designed to build on the existing Children's Health Plan by expanding healthcare access to the families of eligible children and eventually to all families meeting certain income requirements. The main funding source is a 2 percent tax on health care providers.

► **Welfare Reform, 1997.** The state imposed a lifetime limit of sixty months for receiving cash assistance. Local governments were given a package of sanctions, wage incentives, and child-care aid to help poor parents move into the work force.

► **Ethics in Government, 1994.** This major ethics bill bans nearly all gifts to lawmakers from lobbyists. A legislator cannot accept a gift from anyone or any group attempting to influence legislation.

► **Higher Education System Merger, 1991.** Three of the state's four higher education systems were instructed to merge by July 1995. The plan called for the merger of the state's technical colleges, community colleges, and the state university system.

► **Enrollment Options Program, 1988** (open enrollment). The open enrollment options plan, expanded to include all districts by 1990-91, allowed districts to refuse entry to nonresident students, but they could not prohibit residents from attending schools in other districts.

► **Northwest Airlines, 1991.** Lawmakers approved a package of publicly backed incentives for Northwest Airlines to build repair facilities in Duluth and

Hibbing. The law allowed for \$240 million in state and local agency-backed bonds to finance construction.

► **Statewide Testing, 1997.** The new law will require uniform, statewide testing of third, fifth, and eighth grade students beginning in the 1997-98 school year and a new brand of assessment of students in high school beginning no later than 1999-2000. The tests are designed as a reliable means of comparing the performance of schools and their districts.

► **Passage of the State Lottery, 1989.** Six months after voters approved a constitutional amendment permitting a state lottery, the enacting legislation was signed into law. State proceeds were dedicated to an environmental trust fund and the Greater Minnesota Corporation.

► **Workers' Compensation Reform, 1995.** This law promised to reform the workers' compensation system by cutting business premiums up to 11.4 percent. The savings will be accomplished through three main changes: a cut in automatic COLA adjustments to injured workers, stricter qualifications for permanent and total disability benefits, and limited regulation of the workers compensation insurance industry.

► **Charter Schools, 1991.** As part of the outcome-based education initiative, the legislature authorized the creation of up to eight charter schools as a way to explore innovative teaching methods.

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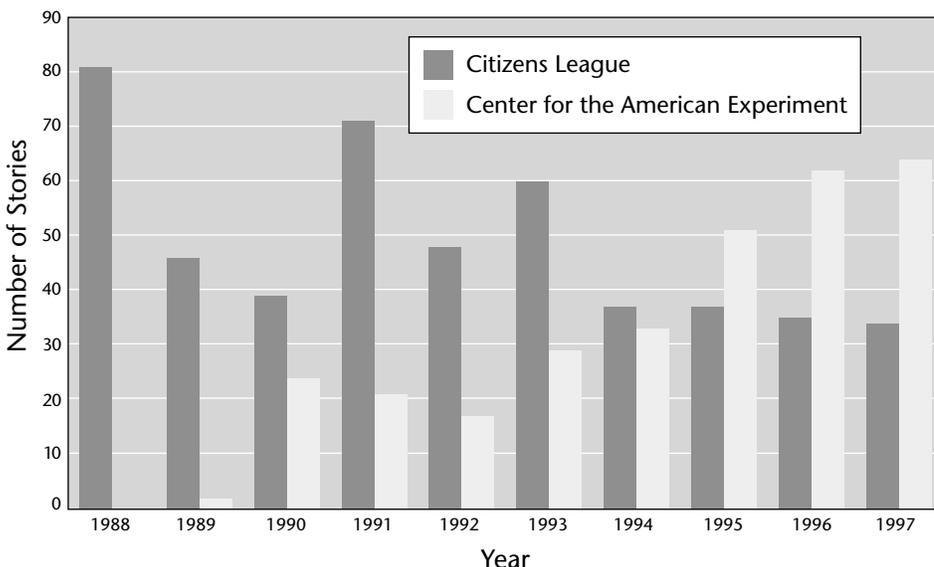


Figure 1. Number of Star Tribune Stories About Minnesota Think Tanks

The study reported here was made possible through one of CURA's Interactive Research Grants. Interactive Research Grants are supported by CURA and the Office of the Vice President for Research at the University of Minnesota. They have been created to encourage University faculty to carry out research projects that involve significant issues of public policy for the state and that include interaction with community groups, agencies, or organizations in Minnesota. These grants are available to regular faculty members at the University of Minnesota and are awarded annually on a competitive basis.

A Family View of Mobility Among Low-Income Children

by Karla Buerkle and Sandra L. Christenson

Moving is a highly personal experience for a family. Different families experience residential mobility in many different ways, but across all situations it is often the children who are most lastingly affected. And if these children come from low-income families—in which nearly one-quarter of school-age children are affected by mobility each year—the effects are too likely to be ignored. Low-income families in transition are often dealing with other family stresses, they have comparatively limited support from significant others, and they are an under-represented population in general. It is vital, however, to listen to their voices in order for communities to better understand what mobility means to low-income families, how it affects their children, and how researchers and public policymakers can better address it.

The Kids Mobility Project was initiated in 1996 by a group of planners and researchers to explore residential mobility and its impact on students in the Minneapolis public schools, where about one in every five students experiences mobility. Some common results of frequent moves had already been suspected, such as students falling behind academically, losing their social support systems, and acting out in response to the stress and their feelings of loss, but the goal of this project was to provide sound information to be used in creating policies and programs that will help to stabilize the lives of these children.

The project coordinated three separate studies. One was a quantitative analysis of the relationship between mobility and student achievement for a sample of Minneapolis Public Schools students, and another was a wide-ranging review of research on student mobility. The researchers found that the greater the number of moves, the lower the average reading score for students in the study, and that mobility negatively affects attendance, which, in turn, is a strong predictor of performance. These



findings were common to other studies on the subject, nationally and internationally.

Our study, the final component of the Kids Mobility Project, turned to the mobile families themselves in order to find answers to many of the questions that quantitative analysis cannot address. Why do families move? Do they have a choice? Do they recognize that frequent moves affect children's performance in school? We hoped that the point of view of the parents would give us a much more complete picture of the impact that mobility has on the lives of their children.

We asked one hundred families, through both questionnaires and in-depth, personal interviews, about their mobility-related experiences. They were solicited through the Welcome Center of the Minneapolis Public Schools, which registers all incoming elementary and middle school students as well as transfers within the district, and each chosen family had at least one child in the first through the sixth grade. Seventy-seven of these families were considered mobile, meaning that they had moved at least three times in the last year and a half, and twenty-three were non-mobile, meaning that they had changed neither residences nor schools during the same time period. This sample is not necessarily representative of families in the district, but to ensure that families from differing situa-



tions were adequately represented, the mobile group was composed of three subgroups: twenty-five new-to-the-area families who had changed residences and schools, thirty metro-area families who had changed residences and schools, and twenty-two metro-area families who had changed residences but not schools. We found mobile families significantly more likely than non-mobile families to be young, poor, and non-white.

Interviews were carried out over the course of six months, and each was conducted in one sitting ranging from thirty to ninety minutes, depending on the amount of information shared. All interviews were conducted by the first author and took place either in the family's home, in one of two public school sites, or in the Welcome Center. Families were provided a small monetary payment for their time, and the children were given toys to play with and a book to keep. At the end of the interview, families gave permission to access their children's achievement scores and attendance records from school files and to ask their child's teacher to fill out a brief psychological/social competence rating scale.

The Findings

The information provided by the schools revealed that achievement scores for the students in our study were low overall, but, despite the potentially confounding influence of income on achievement, we found that students

who had not changed schools in the preceding year and a half had higher math scores than children who had. Also, students in the former group were generally rated by their teachers as more competent in a range of psychological skills including relaxing, playing, and handling separation and independence. Those children who had changed neither school nor residence showed the most positive indicators in both the achievement and the psychological areas, and, perhaps most importantly given the quantitative studies mentioned above, these non-mobile children had better attendance than their mobile counterparts. These findings strongly suggest that mobility negatively influences school performance.

But the parents of these children gave us a revealing look at how and why this mobility occurs. They shared honest and riveting stories of their experiences and the lives of their children, and their willingness to open up and trust that their stories will make a difference is evidence of a connection not easily or often made. Many indicated that they rarely were given the chance to tell their stories, and perhaps the comfortable setting of the interviews encouraged their openness. When asked directly about the effects of moving on their children, many parents reported that they had seen problems with behavior, emotions, self-esteem, and friendships that they attributed to the stress of frequent moves. In their own words:



I want stability for my child. I could see the change and how it was bad for her when we... changed schools; it messed up her education and friendships.

It's really a hassle when you don't have enough money for moving, let alone bus fare. Don't know where your kid is going to go, don't know the neighborhoods, don't know if you're coming or going.

Overall, the responses of the interviewed families highlight four main findings.

■ **Limited housing options.** Families described continual struggles with finding decent, affordable, and safe housing. Consider the response of one young mobile parent:

I've been looking for a place for five months—landlords won't call me back, I just sit and wait by the phone. The few places I've seen have been dumps and unfit to live in. It's really bothering me that I can't find a place, every place looks trashy. I don't want to live in a place like that. I have Section 8, but the deadline is coming up and I can't find a decent place. What should I do?

The close relationship between mobility and limited quality housing options for low-income families was clear. Moves were often spurred by families judging their living situations as intolerable, and the frequency of family moves was increased by the pattern of finding temporary living quarters “until something better comes along.” Another parent showed exasperation:

I was trying for so long to find a place of my own. I don't like this place or area, but was forced to take this house just to have a place to stay. There's crowding problems, but I don't feel I have a choice. We just move from one dump to another.

Those interviewed told of being on subsidized housing waiting lists for years, and then having such limited and low-quality options that they lost their eligibility because they could not find something adequate.

I can't afford housing in a decent neighborhood—rent is going higher and higher to keep out danger, violence, drugs. We need more affordable housing in decent areas.

In some cases, families in high-risk situations with their own personal struggles find themselves caught in a cycle of not being able to qualify for or afford decent housing after having an eviction or unlawful detainer on their record. Families tell of being at the mercy of landlords who require cash deposits to get in and do not keep the places up to standard. These findings suggest a need for additional subsidized housing options of better quality and improved quality control, particularly in the form of landlord monitoring. In addition, the need to increase investment in and ownership of housing for these families is also apparent. As one interviewee commented, “There are problems with people (in subsidized housing) tearing places up, so distrust for everyone is there.”

■ **Different types of mobility.** Families moved for many different reasons, indicating the existence of different types of mobility and increasing the complexity of its meaning in people's lives. All families, including those in the non-mobile comparison group, were asked about their most recent move. Their moves can be categorized into four types: coping, forced, upward, and lifestyle (Figure 1).

Eighty of the one hundred families interviewed described their most recent move negatively, as either coping or forced mobility, over which they had little choice. They told of tension in family interactions, strain on adults to provide family stability and on children to adapt, and stress for those dealing with losses in support and challenges to their identity. Accompanying forced

mobility, in particular, was a sense of hopelessness about ever having the financial resources to escape the cycle of moving that is spurred by poor housing and unsafe environments. Mobility was most often viewed negatively by families in these situations; they described it as synonymous with stress and as an additional risk factor in their lives.

Coping mobility refers to moves that are made to avoid substandard housing, dangerous neighborhoods, or struggles with drugs and other addictions. The fifty-nine of our interviewed families who moved to cope most often chose to do so, but they had little control because their moves were dictated by circumstances.

I saw mobility as a way to escape from bad relationships and try a new life. I had stress and misery brought on by my moving—all I wanted to do was come home and stay stable.

Summed up by one twenty-four-year-old mother with the phrase “you gotta do what you gotta do,” mobility for a majority of families was a way to cope with unsatisfactory living conditions, to increase perceptions of safety, to escape stressful family situations and unhealthy environments for children, or to make one step forward in order to, in the words of a thirty-eight-year-old mother, “get where you want to be [and] improve things for you and your family.”

I always moved to cope with awful conditions of houses and problems with slumlords. The things I had to do at that time... I had to accept it, had no choice.

If you gotta move, you gotta move. Ain't no way to get around it if you want something better.

Forced mobility is often due to evictions, condemned housing, inability to pay rent, housing destroyed by fire, or being faced with imminent danger. The twenty-one families who were forced to move simply had no choice. They tell of a series of crisis situations:

For me, moving was always tied with drugs and not having any money to pay the rent, then going to a shelter. Now that I'm clean, I'm going to stay put, give my kids a place to stay. I hope we can make it.

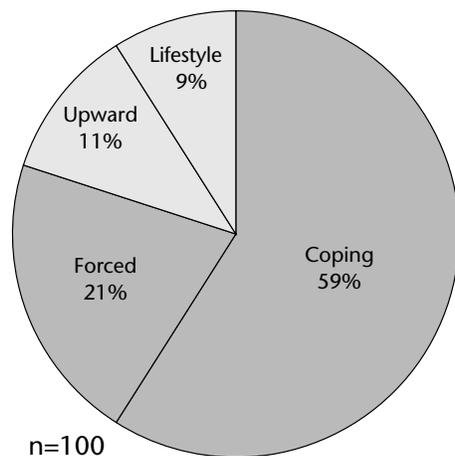


Figure 1. Types of Mobility Experienced by Interviewed Families

We were forced to move because of dangerous situations that the landlord did nothing about. I was there for five years, and it was decent at first. I had to move to stay safe.

In these negative circumstances, moving could accurately be viewed as a proxy for underlying instability, as both coping and forced mobility frequently occur with other life stressors.

We didn't have a place to live; we were homeless for almost a year because of escaping my husband's drinking. Plus we never had money to pay the rent.

Those families faced with coping or forced mobility seemed to expect that frequent moves (and the accompanying stress) would continue because they saw the circumstances that dictated the necessity of moving as unlikely to change.

Twenty families, on the other hand, described their mobility positively, as either upward or lifestyle. For them, moving was a means of improving themselves and the future of their children, a chance for a new start, and an exciting, skill-building opportunity to discover diverse people and places. These kinds of mobility were often associated with positive emotions, independence, and optimism about control over mobility-related decisions and their effects on family members. When parents felt they had made such a move in their living situation, their responses reflected hopefulness for “a blessed new start” or pride in their ability to “do what we needed to do.” Although few of these parents saw mobility as completely separate from stress and adjustment difficulties, several focused only on the excitement of a new location, a feeling of control, and they emphasized the moves as helping them and their children gain skills in adapting to change.

Upward mobility, reported by eleven of the families interviewed, is moving to improve oneself or one's family. It is often associated with optimism and control, and it is spurred by such things as being nearer to job opportunities and seeking a comparatively nicer, safer area or home.

Moving now, when we're financially secure and could be planful, is so much better. This move is full of opportunity.

These families spoke of changing their lives for the better, and they saw mobility as progress.



Past moves made me wiser. I realized I could stop renting and start trying to do something promising for my family. I'm more responsible and am buying a house.

Lifestyle mobility refers to a pattern of moving. These families, only nine of those interviewed, reported moving “just because.” They like change, they want different experiences, and they are excited by a move. They also tend to minimize any negative effects of mobility on themselves or their children.

Moving is exciting, although it stretches you. As long as kids get in school quick, it's okay.

I like to move. I'm always on the go, seeing new people and places.

These families describe mobility as a choice, albeit one in which they may or may not exercise complete control:

If I don't like it, I'll leave anyway, even though I'm sick and tired of moving. I move mainly to find different atmospheres. I like changes. I'll move after a while, every year or two. Kids like something new, although adjusting to new schools is difficult sometimes.

The type of mobility a family experiences, and whether it is characterized as positive and negative, seems to depend on the circumstances of the move, the family's fit into the new environment, their perceptions of control and choice, the occurrence of other stressors in conjunction with the move, and the availability of support and resources.

■ **The positive aspects of mobility.** The third finding, closely related to the second, is that moving is not always pejorative; rather, mobility must be viewed in context. Most families describe moving as stressful, yet many families also describe positive aspects that are rarely seen in the existing literature on mobility. Mobility helps them to escape negative situations and improve their lives, or mobility is a lifestyle choice.

I got my kids away from drugs and crime. Now I have a positive outlook on life.

I moved to better myself and my kids. We don't have to worry about the past... this is a new beginning, a blessed new start.

Learning to adjust to new neighborhoods and different people has been good. It helps me now, in learning to adjust to changes in general.

Most literature describes mobility as (at least temporarily) negative, and, fairly often, a discrete life event. While some researchers have found benefits in moving for some families, such as those in the military, who have resources and support during the transition, it is less common to find literature describing its positive role in the lives of low-income families. A more positive, non-pejorative view of residential mobility was seen among the families in this study, as some interviewees described moving as making a choice for a better life, investing in themselves and their children, and discovering new and exciting opportunities.

■ **The correlation with other life stressors.** The fourth major finding is that it is difficult to isolate the effects of mobility from other adversities. We found that highly mobile families reported a significant number of stressful life events happening concurrently, more than did non-mobile families. Ninety percent of the mobile families had experienced at least one family-change event in the previous year, with over half reporting a personal issue such as chemical dependency, death of a relative or friend, or legal problems. When mobility occurs for families living in high-risk situations, it is often so mixed up with various problematic issues that it becomes nearly impossible to sort out its impact on outcome variables. Families describe this condition when they tell of the circumstances surrounding mobility.

It's been very stressful. I lost my job, had court problems, then my new place wasn't ready 'til the middle of the month even though it was promised to be [through a subsidized housing program]. But I still had to move on the first of the month, so I had to stay with a friend for two weeks and put my stuff in storage.

Families' reports of additional stressors were used in conjunction with qualitative information gained during interviews to rate their overall stability, continuity, and consistency/predictability. Summary ratings were then completed following each interview (Figure 2). Stability was gauged here as the degree to which the family members, schools attended, and place of residence remained the same over time, continuity consisted of maintaining opportunities for community involvement and fitting comfortably into new environments, and consistency/predictability was judged as providing structure and clear expectations for children, particularly in adjusting to the changes brought on by moving. Significantly lower ratings across all three variables were given for a majority of mobile families, illustrating the disruptive effect that mobility, when combined with other stressful life events, has had in the lives of the families interviewed. Thus, although the event of a move may not be a strong, single predictor of family instability, perhaps mobility, at least when characterized as coping or forced, can be viewed as a marker for family problems.

The evidence shows that low-income mobile families report not only more stressors but lower levels of social support overall. Children often experience loss as a result of moving, particularly the loss of friends and a social network at a time in their lives when

peer relationships are extremely important. Adults are affected in a similar way, since support from significant others in the lives of people in transition is often limited and is directly related to a loss of social support networks. For highly mobile families, disconnection with the local community was frequently tied to perceptions of danger in their neighborhoods, and many believed that there is no use making connections when their life experiences suggest that they will only have to move again. Families new to the metro area felt particularly vulnerable, while those who moved within the area felt somewhat more connected, finding some support in schools, churches, or professional agencies. These realities highlight the need for additional resources and strategies for building support networks in the lives of mobile families.

Implications for Research, Policy, and Practice

In the interest of building resources to strengthen our support of children and families dealing with residential mobility and school change, this study makes it clear that mobility must be understood in context. From a phenomenological point of view, it is diverse and complex, influenced by many factors, and the tendency to oversimplify must be avoided.

While our findings reinforce the evidence that families with the highest risk of forced mobility are those living in high-risk neighborhoods, receiving public assistance, or being headed by poorly educated individuals, and while our subjects vividly described the negative effects of frequent moves, this study challenges the assumption of a direct and explicitly negative relationship between mobility and effects on children and families. We suggest instead that future research examine the impact

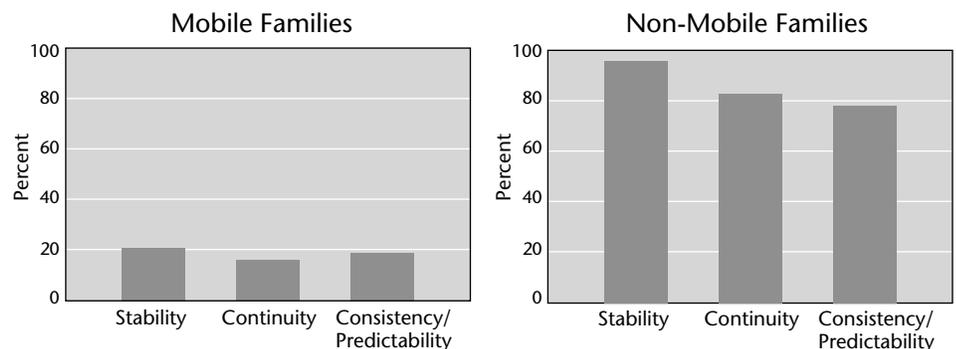


Figure 2. Percentage of Mobile and Non-Mobile Families Rated "Moderate to High" in Three Categories

of mobility within a multidimensional framework (Figure 3). This framework could differentiate among the following elements: type of mobility (residential or school), reason for mobility (including a positive or negative characterization), time dimensions (recency, frequency, seasonality, period of moves, rate of moves), distance (notably within or outside of a school district), person-environment fit (similarities or differences between two places), and attitude toward moves. Researchers also must begin to ask questions differently; instead of working with a traditional research question such as “What is the effect of mobility on student achievement?,” for example, we might better ask “Which aspects of mobility affect student achievement?”

In the area of public policy, the need for additional, better-quality housing options in safer neighborhoods for low-income families was strongly stated by a majority of the mobile families in this study. The inadequacy of the current supply is evidenced by descriptions of applicants waiting years for subsidized housing, despite eligibility. Also, findings regarding the primarily negative consequences of school change invite a revisiting of the question of neighborhood/community schools and rigid attendance lines. There are strong arguments on either side of these issues already being debated in school districts, but one goal that is beyond debate is improving children’s attendance. Its strong and direct relationship to

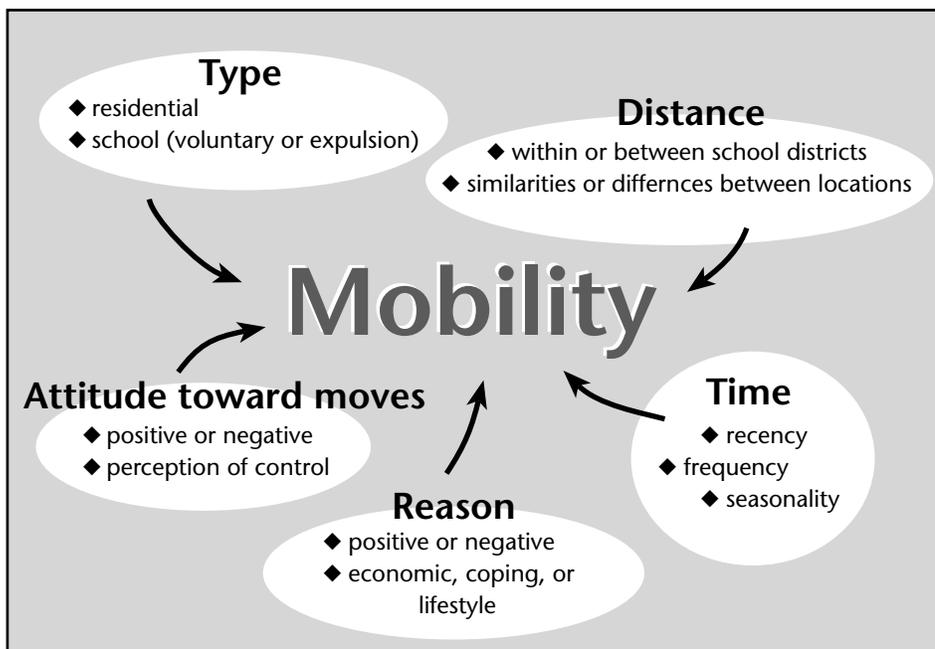


achievement is clear.

Finally, the results of this study have some very practical implications as well. Perhaps most important to those of us working with mobile children and families, the findings present a challenge to our beliefs and assumptions about mobility—a challenge to think less negatively about the families who move. Attitudes and beliefs are frequently cited as important in a family’s ability to cope with stress, and our goal should be not simply to reduce mobility but to improve children’s stability and the outlook of struggling families by making the circumstances surrounding a move as positive and smooth as possible.

Families adjusting to a residence or

school change need more support. A focus on the competencies and life skills necessary for success across environments, and for resiliency in the face of adversity, may best serve children struggling with instability. Understanding which resources are most effective for this effort and what kinds of support mobile families desire from the institutions they turn to for help allows us to better focus on the promotion of the children’s well-being. Our opportunities to enhance the capabilities of mobile families are the best avenue to our goal of promoting children’s academic, behavioral, and social competence across environments. With this focus, we will all be better able to fulfill our role as facilitators of life success.



■ Karla Buerkle was a graduate student in the Department of Educational and Child Psychology at the University of Minnesota at the time of this study and received her doctoral degree in 1997. She is currently a licensed school/clinical psychologist at the Wilder Foundation in St. Paul. She works in a school-based mental health collaborative program with children that have severe emotional and behavioral disorders. She also works with their families. Sandra Christenson is an associate professor in the Department of Educational and Child Psychology at the University of Minnesota and is director of the School Psychology Program. Her recent research focuses on engaging students in learning. She has also published extensively on the theory, research, and strategies for engaging parents in school and learning and has served on several editorial boards.

Figure 3. Multi-dimensional Aspects of Mobility

Losing Ground: The Twin Cities Livable Communities Act and Affordable Housing

by Edward G. Goetz and Lori Mardock



Recently constructed housing in Eagan offers low-income residents a two-bedroom townhouse for rent at \$460 per month. The project was financed by a family housing partnership of the Dakota County Housing and Redevelopment Authority and private industry, and it is affordable to families with an income as low as \$12,000 per year.

The availability of affordable housing in the Twin Cities area has been a major regional issue for several years. Recent estimates show that 125,000 low-income households in the Twin Cities region pay more than 30 percent of their incomes—the generally agreed-upon limit for affordability—on housing. In the early 1990s, State Representative Myron Orfield (DFL-Minneapolis) authored several bills passed by the legislature that would have required suburban areas to create their “fair share” of affordable housing, but these bills were vetoed three years in a row by Governor Arne Carlson. Finally, in 1995, the legislature enacted a compromise bill, the Metropolitan Livable Commu-

nities Act (LCA), that was signed by the governor and became the state’s official strategy for dealing with the lack of affordable housing in the region. Responsibility for implementing the program was given to the Metropolitan Council.

LCA is a voluntary program that operates by establishing affordable housing targets for all participating communities through the year 2010. The Metropolitan Council creates benchmarks for each community and then each one negotiates goals with the council for the percentage of new housing units that will be affordable. Presumably these goals are set to increase the level of affordable housing in the communities, but we have found

that this is not always the case. In fact, our study of the program’s current implementation reveals that it is unlikely to curb the affordable housing problem of the region and may well exacerbate it.

The Relative Availability of Affordable Housing

Most housing programs are evaluated simply by looking at the number of units they produce, and the Metropolitan Council estimates that LCA might produce as many as 55,000 units of affordable housing in the Twin Cities region by the year 2010. This number represents an increase in the *absolute* number of affordable housing units, assuming no demolition of units and no “filtering up” (a process in which currently-affordable units increase in cost to the point that they become unaffordable).

Simply looking at the increase in absolute numbers of units available, however, does not take into account the increased demand for affordable housing in the future. There are several ways to estimate this, each of which starts with an estimate of the growth in the region’s population. The Metropolitan Council’s projections state that the region will grow by 185,000 households between 1995 and 2010, and some percentage of these new households will need affordable housing. In order to account for this growth, we analyzed the degree to which the housing goals stated by each LCA community would increase the *relative availability* of affordable housing. That is, we asked whether there would be more affordable housing as a percentage of all housing units at the end of this program than there was at the start. To increase relative availability, a community must create affordable housing as a percentage of all new units in a proportion greater than currently exists in the community. The difference between the absolute and relative availability of affordable housing is depicted in Figure 1.

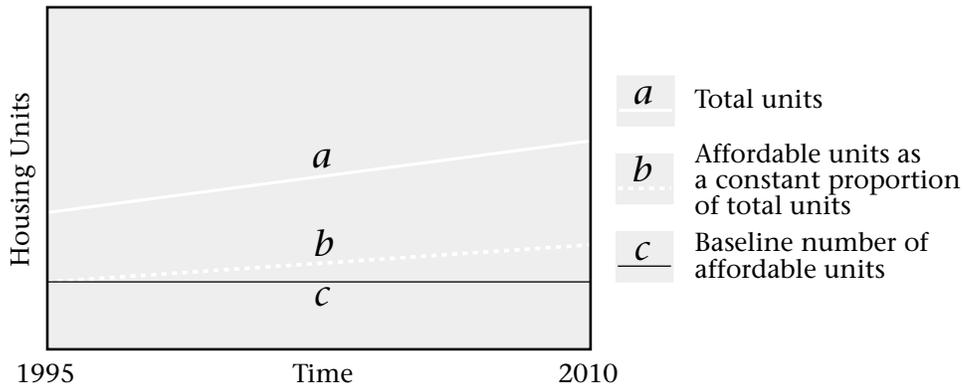


Figure 1. Relative Availability of Affordable Housing

Line *a* of Figure 1 represents the total number of housing units in the region. Line *c* represents the current number of affordable housing units (set, arbitrarily for the sake of this example, at 50 percent of all units in 1995), and any increase in units above line *c* represents an absolute increase in the number of affordable housing units. Line *b* in the figure represents the increase in affordable units if they remained 50 percent of all units in the region, which would keep relative availability constant. An *increase* in the relative availability of housing requires an increase in affordable units above line *b*.

The exact level of demand for affordable units in the future, however, is extremely difficult to estimate. There are three possible scenarios for the additional demand created by the region's new households. The first is that housing prices may fall relative to the incomes of Twin Cities households and thus the overall need for subsidized affordable housing may decline (although it is unlikely that the need will decline so much that none of the new 185,000 households will need subsidized housing). In this case, the required number of affordable units will be above line *c* but below line *b*. The second scenario is that incomes will continue to fall relative to housing prices and that a greater percentage of all households in the region will need subsidized affordable housing. Such a scenario would require an increase in the relative availability of affordable housing, which would be a level of production above line *b*.

The final scenario is that the future population of households in the Twin Cities will need affordable housing at the same rate that the current population needs it. That is, the third scenario is simply a continuation of the status

quo, accounting for the growth in the population. Future production would need to be right at line *b* in order to keep in line with future demand for affordable housing. For the purposes of our analysis, we made the assumption that future demand would match current demand, and thus we argue that LCA must produce housing that would at least maintain the current rate of relative availability of affordable housing.

This goal, however, assumes that the current demand is fully met, but this is not the case. According to the Metropolitan Council's own figures, there are 125,000 households of people with low incomes who are currently paying too much for their housing, and we can think of this number as the *affordability gap* in the region. Thus, if the objective of LCA (or any regional housing program) is to reduce the affordability gap, then affordable housing must be produced at a rate that will increase its relative availability, not simply maintain it. Our analysis of LCA, therefore, focuses on the extent to which it will increase the relative availability of affordable housing in the Twin Cities region.

The Impact of LCA

■ **Affordability.** The LCA definition of affordability is very generous. The portion of a community's housing that is currently affordable, according to the Metropolitan Council, is how much of it can be rented or purchased by a household with the metropolitan area's median income for a family of four. In 1997 that meant a purchase price of \$128,000 and a rent of over \$600 a month. By this definition, close to 69 percent of the existing housing stock in the region is affordable. In truth, of course, not all families have four members and many housing units do

not have the number of bedrooms that would be expected to accommodate such a family, but the definition of affordability is not adjusted for household size nor unit size. Furthermore, it is unclear why any affordable housing program would be needed in a region in which seven out of ten units were, indeed, affordable.

Partly as a result of the program's generous definition of affordability, 74 percent of the communities participating in LCA already meet or exceed the program's guidelines for affordable ownership opportunities in the first year of the program, and 72 percent of them meet or exceed the guidelines for affordable rental housing. More to the point, this leaves only 26 percent and 28 percent of communities that currently need more affordable homes and rental units, respectively. Meeting program guidelines does not mean that these communities will not have to add affordable housing units between 1995 and 2010, however, because any future growth will require more affordable housing units to be built, but these figures nevertheless indicate that the Metropolitan Council considers most communities in the region to already be in good shape regarding the availability of affordable housing.

■ **Program benchmarks.** The Metropolitan Council created a series of benchmarks against which a community's housing efforts could be judged. The benchmarks are not, however, based on the need for affordable housing, nor are they established to compensate for the lack of affordable housing that has been built in the past. Instead, communities were grouped into different planning sectors based on geography and stage of development, and separate benchmarks were created to reflect the amount of affordable housing that had previously been built in each planning sector. Sectors that had less affordable housing in the past were given lower benchmarks, a system that effectively rewards those areas that have done the least in the past with the lowest standards in the future. In addition to discouraging substantial change in affordable housing opportunities, such a system ensures that their spatial distribution will not change significantly.

Furthermore, it turns out that if one assumes that all communities will meet their benchmarks through the year 2010, the amount of affordable housing built will not keep up with household growth, even as a constant percentage of



The two-bedroom townhome on the right is available for purchase for monthly payments of \$900-\$1,000 after a 5 to 10 percent downpayment. Located in Vadnais Heights, a family would need a yearly income of more than \$35,000 to purchase this home. Under the current guidelines for the Livable Communities Act program this home would still be classified as affordable housing.

all units. Our estimates, based on 1998 household growth projections by the Metropolitan Council, show that the benchmarks represent a net increase in affordable units that is 4 percent less than the status quo, meaning a reduction in the amount of affordable housing as a percentage of all housing units in the region over the time period of the program. Referring back to Figure 1, the benchmarks, if met but not exceeded by all communities, would create an increase in affordable units that is slightly less than line *b* and that guarantees a reduction in the relative availability of affordable housing.

■ **Housing goals.** Participating communities must negotiate affordable housing goals with the Metropolitan Council, and most communities have goals that are roughly equal to their benchmarks. This is what should be expected if the benchmarks reflect the real expectations of LCA. However, there remains fully one-quarter of participating communities that have goals below the benchmarks for both affordable ownership and rental housing. In other words, these communities were able to negotiate goals with the Metropolitan Council that are less than the standards set for them.

Which communities have goals that

do not meet the program standards? They are disproportionately the communities that started the program with less affordable housing than their benchmarks indicated they should have. In fact, 81 percent of the communities that had rates of existing affordable ownership less than their benchmarks negotiated goals that were also less than the benchmarks. On the other hand, 80 percent of the communities that had already met or exceeded their benchmarks had goals that also met or exceeded the benchmarks. These patterns are essentially the same, though less pronounced, for affordable rental housing. Thus, it seems that for housing affordability, the benchmarks were most often applied to those communities that had already met them.

Projections

If meeting the program benchmarks guarantees a reduction in the relative availability of affordable housing, and if some communities were allowed to negotiate goals below their benchmarks, what is the likely impact of LCA on the region's affordable housing gap? According to program documents, 66 percent of LCA communities have goals that are actually less than the current level of affordability for homeowner-

ship, while 53 percent have similarly low goals for affordable rental housing. Just as notable, only one community in ten (10 percent) is committed to building affordable ownership at a rate higher than they currently have, while just over one in four (26 percent) are committed to increasing the relative availability of rental housing. This means that most communities participating in LCA have, as a result of the goal setting and benchmark process established by the Metropolitan Council, committed to providing less affordable housing between 1995 and 2010, as a percentage of all units produced, than they had in their baseline year of the program.

By using the Metropolitan Council's growth projections for each community in the region it is possible to project the number of affordable housing units that would be built if LCA goals are met. These LCA projections can then be matched against a continuation of the status quo (simply maintaining the current proportion of affordable housing units through to the year 2010). Community goals for ownership, if fully met, would result in about a 13 percent decline in affordable units compared with a continuation of the status quo, and the goals for rental

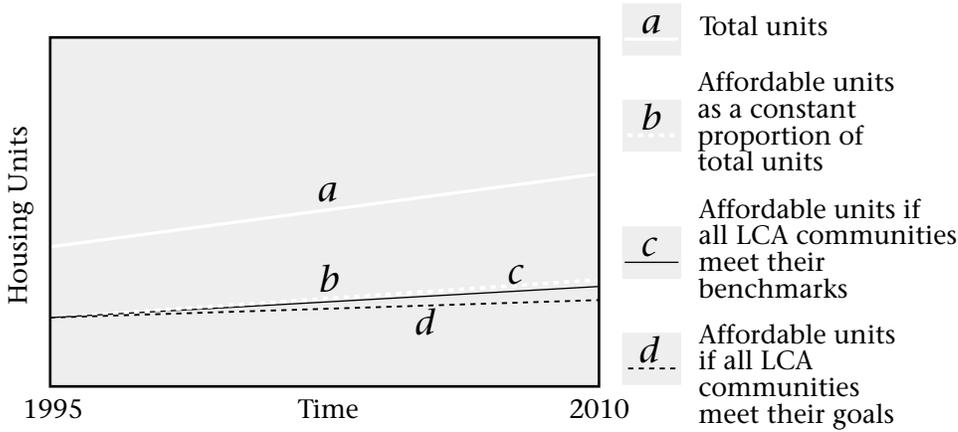


Figure 2. Projected Affordability According to the Livable Communities Act Program

housing would result in 4 percent fewer affordable units compared to the status quo. The combined effect of LCA ownership and rental projections is 12 percent fewer units of affordable housing compared with a continuation of the status quo.

Figure 2, an adaptation of Figure 1, shows the relationship between goals, benchmarks and the existing affordability across all LCA communities. As in Figure 1, line *a* represents the growth in the total housing stock between 1995 and 2010. Line *b* represents the number of affordable housing units to be added if all communities simply maintain their current degree of affordability, but unlike Figure 1, for which we chose an arbitrary percentage, Figure 2 incorporates the LCA definition of affordability and therefore puts the percentage of affordable units at 69 percent. Line *c*, in this case, is the amount of affordable housing that would be produced if all communities exactly meet their benchmarks, and line *d* represents the number of units that would be added if all communities exactly meet their LCA goals.

As the figure shows, LCA will not increase the relative availability of affordable housing in the Twin Cities region. Both the benchmarks (line *c*) and the housing goals established by the participating communities (line *d*) would result in increases in affordable housing below a continuation of the status quo (line *b*). Put another way, were the communities participating in LCA to fully achieve their goals relative to affordable housing production between 1995 and 2010, the region will have a *smaller* proportion of its housing stock affordable to low- and moderate-income families than it has currently.

Figure 3 presents a mapped version

of the difference in affordable housing production under LCA as compared with a continuation of the status quo by sub-regions of the metropolitan area. We divided the area into thirteen sub-regions: the central cities, which are excluded from this analysis; the inner-ring suburbs, a group of older communities that surround the central cities; five

sub-regions of developing suburbs that together encircle the inner-ring—eastern, northern, western, southwestern, and southern; and six sub-regions of outer-ring suburbs which lie beyond the developing ones, the boundaries of which have been drawn along county lines.

The map shows that only one sub-region in the metropolitan area will produce more affordable housing under LCA than would be produced under a continuation of the status quo—the outer-ring of Washington County to the east. Every other sub-region will see less affordable housing under LCA; some areas, such as the southwestern developing suburbs, will see far fewer units under LCA than under the status quo.

Figure 4 breaks down these findings by type of community. As the graph shows, inner-ring suburbs, developing suburbs, and outer-ring suburbs will all, in the aggregate, produce fewer affordable housing units under LCA than under a continuation of the status quo. The gap, however, is greatest in the fast-growing developing suburbs.

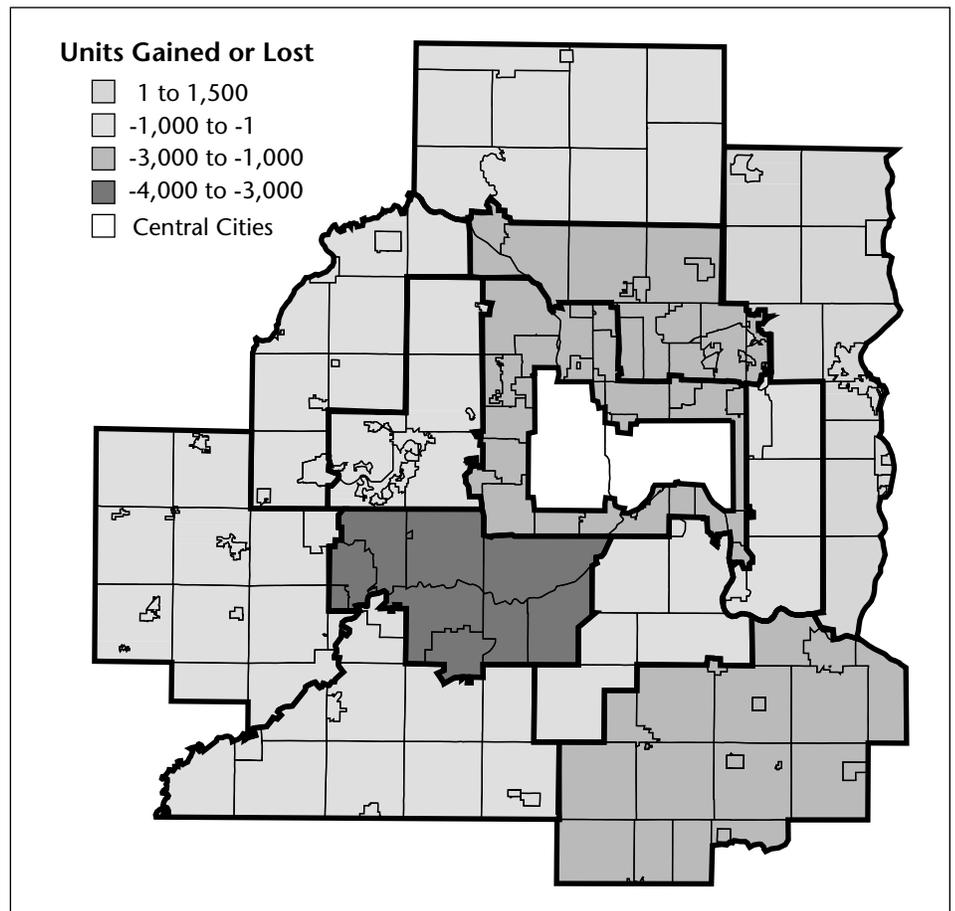


Figure 3. New Affordable Housing Under the Livable Communities Act Program as Compared to Status Quo

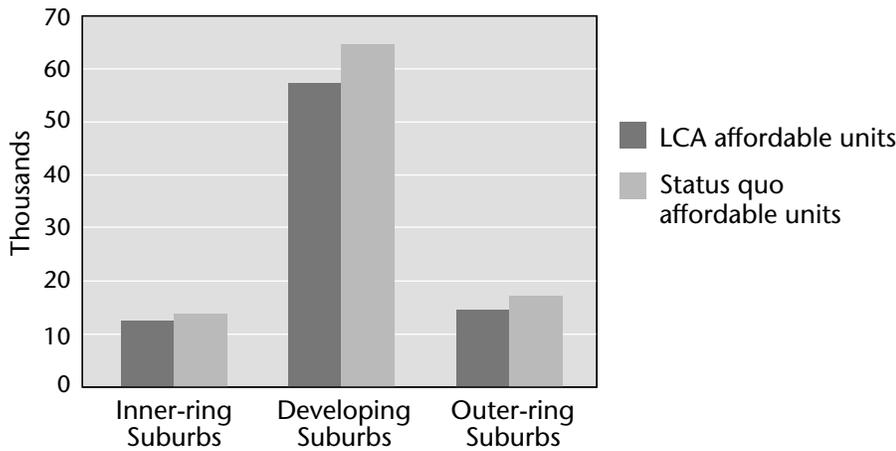


Figure 4. Number of New Affordable Housing Units by Sub-Region

Recommendations

Our analysis of the housing elements of LCA reveals a program that institutionalizes retrenchment in the relative availability of affordable housing in the region. The real solution to the affordability problem will require a bolder and more imaginative policy than LCA currently offers. We suggest, however, several ways that LCA might be improved.

1. Revise program definitions of affordability. Affordability thresholds are not adjusted for housing type or size, nor is household size considered. This results in too many communities being able to claim that they have large quantities of affordable housing. According to the current guidelines, 69 percent of all housing units in the region are affordable.

2. Revise the benchmark system. The standards against which communities are judged are based on previous development history, and this basis is deficient in two ways. First, they result in a regional housing program that is divorced from regional housing needs. Second, the system rewards previously poor performance in the development of affordable housing. Communities in sub-regions with historically less affordable housing have, as a result of the benchmark process, lower performance standards to meet.

3. Improve the incentives for the production of affordable housing. The current mix of incentives offered by LCA is inadequate. More meaningful incentives include increasing the weight of affordable housing initiatives in the Metropolitan Council's review of applications for Municipal Urban Services Area (MUSA) line and sewer extension, and tying affordable housing progress to the receipt of Homestead and Agricul-

tural Credit Aid (HACA) and local government aid from the state.

4. Increase affordable housing resources. The incentive fund for affordable housing development must be increased. The fund ranges in size from \$500,000 to \$1.5 million annually, but many times this amount is necessary to make a significant dent in the affordable housing gap in the Twin Cities region.

5. Initiate a program of inclusionary zoning. Currently, LCA focuses on government subsidies as the only means of producing significant amounts of affordable housing. Yet other jurisdictions around the country have had success with inclusionary zoning regulations that require a set-aside of affordable housing units in every sub-development. Frequently, these regulations are coupled with density bonuses for the developers or tied to the use of tax increment funding.

6. Reduce zoning barriers to affordable housing. A recent study¹ identified a number of zoning regulations in use in the Twin Cities metropolitan region that increase the cost of housing. These barriers need to be reduced or eliminated. Anthony Downs² recommends statewide zoning laws that would include the ability of the state to override local zoning rules where they have been found to unnecessarily restrict the development of affordable housing.

¹Barbara Lukermann and M.P. Kane, *Land Use Practices: Exclusionary Zoning, de facto or de jure? An Examination of the Practices of Ten Suburban Communities in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area* (Minneapolis: Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, 1994).

²Anthony Downs, "Reducing Regulatory Barriers to Affordable Housing Erected by Local Governments," in *Housing Markets and Residential Mobility*, eds. G. Thomas Kingsley and Margery Austin Turner (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute Press, 1993).

Short of such outright override power, the state could condition access to local government aid on the development of more reasonable zoning practices.

7. Regulate the demolition of affordable housing. By giving communities benchmarks for levels of affordable housing that are lower than what they already have, the LCA program currently provides a rationale for some communities to demolish affordable housing. The Metropolitan Council's own figures indicate that 317 affordable rental units and 340 affordable ownership units have been demolished since the program began. The state's "one for one replacement housing" law was repealed at the time LCA was enacted, but recent experience suggests that there is a need to revisit this decision.

Our analysis of the goal setting process in the LCA program suggests that the Metropolitan Council's system of implementation undermines the program's goal of increasing affordable housing. The apparent result is that the majority of communities will not be adding affordable housing in higher proportions than currently exist, and since it is safe to assume that the need for affordable housing will grow along with the total need for housing, more low-income citizens will be unable to find an affordable residence. Reducing this region's affordability gap in housing requires a different approach than that taken by LCA.

■ Edward G. Goetz is an associate professor and interim director of the Planning Program at the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota. He is author of *Shelter Burden: Local Politics and Progressive Housing Policy* (Temple University Press, 1993) and several articles and monographs on local housing and economic development. Lori Mardock is a graduate student in the Design, Housing and Apparel program at the University of Minnesota. Her thesis research concerns neighborhood early-warning systems and the prediction of housing abandonment in central city neighborhoods.

This article is a summary version (with the addition of Figures 3 and 4) of a longer study published by CURA under the same title. It can be ordered through the Publications Order Form at the back of this CURA Reporter, or from our website at www.umn.edu/cura/pubsord.htm, or by calling 612-625-1551.

Project Awards

To keep our readers up to date about CURA projects we feature a few capsule descriptions of new projects underway in each issue of the CURA Reporter. The projects presented this time are made possible through CURA's Communiversities Personnel Grants. The grants are awarded twice each year to grassroots organizations in the community. Each grant supports the extra personnel needed, usually an advanced graduate student, who works directly with the organization receiving the award. The grants are competitive and organizations working with people of color are favored. The projects described here are only a sampling from the forty-three projects that received CURA support during the 1996-1998 school years.

► **Services for Low Income Families**
Low income families in Washington County have problems obtaining housing and services. They are often isolated. The East Metro Women's Council (EMWC) sought to improve things for these families, especially in Cottage Grove. A student intern worked to organize residents of the Parkside Apartments to deal with solving their own multiple problems. She was so successful that EMWC contracted with her to continue her work. A collaborative of police, schools, early childhood education groups, county services, family violence workers, and health clinics now uses an apartment in the complex as an office where they bring their services to the residents. The project is considered a model of what can be accomplished.

► **City Songs**
City Songs provides an after-school program for 50-100 disadvantaged youth of color each year. Its choruses are directed by well-known professional singers. No auditions are needed and all members get a chance to be soloists, announcers, or dancers. The program,

for grades three through eight, uses music to address problems that interfere with healthy youth, family, and community development. It is located on the East Side of St. Paul and performs in local churches. The program needed to find a meaningful way to evaluate itself. A student built a theoretical framework for evaluation. The services City Songs provides are easily measured, but whether the "stealth" social services impact the lives of these youth may be impossible to measure.

► **Reducing Gun Violence**
Violence is the number one public health problem affecting youth today. Preventing access to guns has become a priority. A student, working with the Initiative for Violence-Free Families, researched what strategies other than gun control legislation have been tried in the United States and Canada. He also conducted focus groups with more than seventy youth who live with guns every day to get their perspectives. Two reports resulted from the study. The intern organized a press conference resulting in both newspaper and TV coverage. Presentations were made to a number of local agencies and foundations and two community meetings were held on the issues.

► **Treatment for Chemically Dependent Women**
Wayside House in St. Louis Park provides treatment and social services for more than 300 women and children each year. Over the last few years they developed a comprehensive program evaluation system, based on the work of an earlier Communiversities intern. They sought a second intern to do an in-depth analysis of recent findings from the evaluations. The student tracked Wayside clients at three, six, and twelve months to identify the most critical elements in the clients' achieving their goals. A demographic analysis of social and clinical characteristics was also

done to determine which clients are most likely to succeed in Wayside's programs. The analysis helped Wayside document the effectiveness of their programs and the student based her master's thesis on the material she developed at Wayside House.

► **Impact of Welfare Reform**
Children's Defense Fund exists to provide a strong and effective voice for children through research, public education, and advocacy. They used the services of a graduate student to design a survey that they are now using to monitor the effects of welfare reform on low income people across the state. The student developed the methodology and questions to be asked of human service providers in a sample of Minnesota counties. The providers are interviewed four times each year. The student conducted the first round of interviews and prepared a report. The results provided the Children's Defense Fund with guidance in their legislative efforts.

► **African Americans in Science**
The Science Museum of Minnesota is hosting an exhibit on Africa from Chicago's Field Museum. A student helped them gather information on historic and contemporary African and African American scientists that will be added to the exhibit. The student researched the legacy of African science and the work of African American scientists, past and present, interviewed scientists chosen for the exhibit, worked on developing the exhibits, and participated in meetings of the African Advisory Group. The museum hopes that the exhibit will dispel the notion of science as a white domain and encourage young African Americans to consider pursuing science as a career. The exhibit serves as a prototype for a small new exhibit that will recur annually at the Science Museum in its new location.

American Indian Research

American Indians have a distinct way of life. In the past traditions and beliefs were handed down from the elders to younger generations through the spoken word. Young American Indians were responsible for seeking out this knowledge from the elders. Changes in contemporary life pose the risk that traditional knowledge will be lost. The American Indian Research and Policy Institute has recently released a report, *Reflections on Traditional American Indian Ways*, that brings together the voices of fifteen American Indian elders speaking on the

American Indian way of life as it used to be, the changes they see happening in the American Indian communities today, and the future of American Indian communities.

The researchers asked elders from the Ojibwe, Lakota, Dakota, and Ho-Chunk nations to speak from their experience and share their broad perspective. The elders were both women and men who were raised during the Second World War era when nearly all Indians lived on Indian reservations. The written report of these talks is grouped around themes: the way it was, Amer-

ican Indian communities in change, important knowledge for younger generations, challenges for the younger generations, helping younger generations face challenges, and the future.

This report is a product of the Building Communities Across Cultures project, a collaboration among the American Indian Research and Policy Institute, CURA, and the University of Minnesota Extension Service. Copies are available free-of-charge from CURA (612-625-1551).

Deconcentrating Public Housing

In 1992 some residents of public housing in North Minneapolis filed suit against the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Minneapolis Housing Authority, the City of Minneapolis, and the Metropolitan Council claiming that they were being discriminated against by being placed in segregated housing in an area of concentrated poverty. The suit was one of about two dozen similar law suits that have been filed around the country. The Minneapolis case, known as *Hollman v. Cisneros*, was settled out of court in 1995 by a consent decree.

The Family Housing Fund of Minneapolis-St. Paul and the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency awarded the contract for evaluating the implementation of the consent decree to Edward Goetz and CURA. The evaluation will look at each of the elements in the

decree: 1) The impact of redevelopment on the north side site where over 700 units of public housing will be torn down. 2) The relocation of families from these units. Where do they go? To what type of housing are families relocated? How do they feel about the new neighborhoods? 3) The impact of changes in Minneapolis' Section 8 housing to increase location choices for those receiving assistance. 4) The impact of 900 new "mobility certificates" to move public housing families out of areas of concentrated poverty and racial segregation into non-concentrated parts of the metropolitan neighborhood. Where do they go? How do they like the new neighborhoods? What impact does the move have on their income and employment? 5) The impact of replacement housing built in non-concentrated parts of the metropolitan area, usually suburbs. Does this have an adverse

impact? What do the neighbors think? Do property values change? Is there an increase in criminal activity? The evaluation project is part of CURA's new Housing Initiative.

Credits:

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- students strengthen their education through practical experience,
- government agencies and community organizations get the assistance they request,
- and the University of Minnesota fulfill its land grant and urban missions.

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