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INTEGRATION OF RACIAL MINORITIES

IN PUBLIC HOUSING PROJECTS

A GUIDE FOR LOCAL HOUSING AUTHORITIES

ON HOW TO DO IT

Prepared by

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A Preliminary Outline Suggested for Use by
LHAS in New York and New Jersey

Note: A formal guide is being prepared for national distribution by
the Racial Relations Branch, Public Housing Administration,
Washington, D. C.

PURPOSE OF GUIDE

Local Housing Authorities in various parts of the United States, from New York City to Seattle, Washington, have demonstrated how racial minorities can be integrated successfully in public housing projects. Integration of racial minority families with white families in the public housing projects of some communities such as New York City and Seattle has been in operation for more than a decade; in communities such as Newark, New Jersey, and Youngstown, Ohio, it occurred within the last few months of 1950. In all instances, whether they be large cities or small cities, or whether a policy of integration was arrived at by choice or by compliance with legislation or ordinance, various racial groups have lived as neighbors in adjacent apartments, in the same stairwells, in the same buildings, and in the same courts. Experience has taught us there is only one way to integrate: DO IT!

When a racial minority family is accepted on the basis of need and referred to a vacant dwelling unit regardless of the race of his next door neighbor, the act in itself marks the end of discrimination and segregation which is what most State laws or local ordinances on non-discrimination in housing require. Experience has shown, however, that to eliminate or prevent discrimination and segregation, further steps are necessary, and these can be best described by the term INTEGRATION. The effort toward integration is the central theme of this guide.

The integration of racial minority families in public housing projects does not stop at the specific act of housing them in the dwelling units. It is a continuous operation which necessitates full understanding--sometimes special efforts--by the Commissioners and staff of the Authority, the project tenants, and the community in which the project is located.

The "doing it" takes some know-how, but for the most part it takes a wholehearted, sincere and firm interest on the part of the Local Housing Authority to make integration succeed. Once that interest exists and a forthright position is taken by the Commissioners and Executive Secretary of the Authority, integration then becomes another phase of management operation and is treated with the same judgment as other major management functions.

Some 150 Authorities throughout the United States are now required by state law or local ordinances to conform to policies of non-discrimination and non-segregation of families in their existing projects or new programs. A number of other Local Housing Authorities, on their own initiative, have adopted resolutions to build housing which would be open to all people without regard to race, creed, color, national origin, or ancestry. These and other Authorities will, in the future, want to derive the benefits of the combined experience of Authorities that have been engaged in the integration of Negro families. It is for them that this Guide has been written.

THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF INTEGRATION

but of the experience of the past ten years at least ten fundamental principles have emerged which may be used as guides to accomplish integration:

1. The Local Housing Authority must commit itself to a policy of non-discrimination and non-segregation.
2. The Executive Director must put this policy into effect in all projects under his jurisdiction at the earliest possible time.

3. The Executive Director must take a firm and forthright position in declaring this policy to the staff.
4. The Executive Director and his Management staff must assume full responsibility for putting into effect the program of integration.
5. All applicants and tenants should be made fully aware of the Authority's policy and its practices.
6. A continuous public relations program should be carried on by the Authority, and public interest groups should be made aware of the policies and practices and problems of the Authority.
7. The selection and placement of tenants must be carefully observed, especially in the initial stages of integration. Need must become the objective criterion upon which selection is finally made.
8. The public facilities of the Authority's projects must be open to all tenants regardless of race, creed, color or national origin.
9. The staff of the Authority must put into practice a policy of employing personnel in all job classifications based solely on qualifications and without regard to race, creed, color, or national origin.
10. The entire Housing Authority must demonstrate a wholehearted interest in making the program of integration succeed.

These guides may be used as a yardstick in the measurement of whether or not integration has been accomplished. Obviously, in dealing with the various factors inherent in the operation of public housing projects there can be no single blueprint which is applicable to any and all operations. Such factors as (1) the type of program, (2) the history of its operation, (3) the legislative climate in which it operates, (4) the background and attitudes of its personnel, (5) prevailing community attitudes determine largely how the job can be done.

We have studied and participated in the experiences of Authorities which have established one interracial project and at the same time have maintained others exclusively for whites. Still, other Authorities have established integrated policies and practices in all but one or two projects which they have maintained exclusively as white. In addition, there are Authorities that have attempted to practice integration but by the selection of sites and the policy of permitting tenants to show preference for certain projects, have facilitated the creation of all-Negro projects. The ten principles outlined earlier are derived from the experiences, both negative and positive, of Authorities which have attempted to institute or have accomplished integration.

Each community will have its special conditions. But no matter what its special conditions are; whether the community is large, medium or small; whether it is a new program or an old program or a combination of both; whether its projects consist of 50 or 10,000 units, the only one way really to integrate is to "do it."

to begin. It was determined on the basis of an evaluation of the effects on the tenants of the newly-announced policy that the Authority ought to DO IT IMMEDIATELY in order to avoid misleading rumors and opportunity for agitation by those tenants opposed to the new policy of the Authority. But still unresolved was the question of which project to select for the introduction of this policy. Should it be introduced in one of the projects with segregated buildings, or all four of them, or should it begin with an all-white project? The advisability of introducing families in all eight projects at approximately the same time became clear once it was recognized that some project managers might feel penalized in bearing the brunt of this program. It was also recognized that white tenants would resent the singling out of their particular projects while others remained untouched.

Thus, after careful deliberation, the Executive Director decided to put the new policy into effect in all projects within two weeks after its announcement.

3. The Executive Director's Forthright Position

When the Executive Director had decided what, when, and where, he held a meeting with all his housing managers, tenant selection staff and other key personnel. At this meeting he outlined the background of the decision of the Housing Authority to abolish segregation and the reasons for establishing a policy of integration. He made it clear to all that he expected full and wholehearted cooperation from every member of his staff and that no obstruction of any type would be permitted; that he did not want the "buck passed" to "upstairs"; that he expected the managers to "carry the ball" and assume full responsibility for carrying out the program as they had in carrying out all other management functions; that those who could not go along with the program should submit their resignations now; and that if they treated this program lightly and shrugged it off, he would consider it insubordination. His whole thesis was: This job has to be done. He expected it to be done with their full cooperation.

4. Staff Responsibilities

After the Executive Director held the meeting with his staff, plans were drawn up for an intensive staff training program aimed toward having the managers apply their trade skills and know-how in the introduction of the program of integration on their projects. Meetings with each manager were arranged at his project to be attended by the Director of Management, representatives of the PHA Racial Relations Branch and the Authority Tenant Selection Supervisor. At each of these meetings the characteristics of each project were analyzed informally, the manager being encouraged to set forth his ideas and plans for introducing integration. As a result, concrete suggestions were developed about each of the projects and other suggestions or techniques were developed to be used in all the projects.

For example, it was decided that in the first few months of this new program the manager should concentrate on interviewing all prospective tenants, white and non-white, who had been referred and cleared by the Tenant Selection Office. In addition, he should take it upon himself to show these families the apartments available to them. In the course of personally escorting the tenant, he should introduce him to the neighbors.

It was also decided at these conferences that once the policy had been clearly presented to prospective tenants and applicants, if an apartment adjacent to a Negro family were offered to a white family and it was refused on that ground, or vice versa, the refusing family should not be accorded the opportunity to choose another apartment, if such were available. The manager had performed his obligation when he offered the apartment to the family. -

It was further established at these conferences that the manager wanted the full responsibility of undertaking this program after the tenant had been referred to him. As part of that responsibility he felt it necessary to instruct his entire staff, his watchman, laborers, maintenance men, bookkeepers, and interviewers that he expected full compliance from them in regard to the spirit and letter of the Authority's policy. The general feeling of the manager was that if any questions were raised with his staff by neighbors or tenants, they should not get involved in any discussion of the policy but should refer all inquiries to him.

The managers also felt that there should be close liaison with Tenant Selection, particularly in the initial stages, to aid in the selection and placement of the proper type of tenants. In this connection the managers agreed that a control chart should be maintained, in order to avoid congregation of Negro families in any one building.

These individual meetings culminated in a meeting of all the managers and other key personnel to review the general conclusions drawn and also to hear a talk given by a housing manager with long experience in interracial management practices with another Authority. His general conclusions were that once you decide not to discriminate you don't discriminate and that if you are going to integrate, you just go ahead and integrate.

5. Tenant Orientation

The managers found that much gossip and rumor were spreading among the tenants in regard to the policy of the Housing Authority. Ever since the State law had been enacted there had been expectations among the tenants that some change would occur, but they did not know when, how, or where. Therefore, it was decided to post a bulletin in the management office which recited the State law and Housing Authority resolution. However, in a few days, upon further checking, this was found to be inadequate. Therefore, it was agreed to use the unusual expedient of addressing a letter directly to the tenant, attaching a copy of the law and Housing Authority resolution, together with a highly favorable editorial in a major newspaper praising the Authority "for a forward, progressive action." *

In addition to this direct approach which had extraordinarily satisfactory results in tenant relations, it was deemed advisable to incorporate the Housing Authority policy statement in the preliminary application just above the applicant's signature and also to have the Tenant Selection stationery carry this policy as part of the letterhead. These measures were designed to facilitate the operations of the Tenant Selection staff and to more fully acquaint the tenants with the policy of the Authority before they were referred to the manager's office for assignment to apartments.

*See attached exhibit.

6. Community Relationships

When the Authority announced its policy publicly, it immediately received not only wide publicity in the press but received commendation from all the public interest groups which had been concerned with its former segregated program. The Executive Director also kept in frequent touch with key representatives of these groups informing them of progress made. Immediately before initiating the program of integration, representatives of inter-group organizations arranged jointly with the Executive Director to hold a conference with the Department of Public Safety. At this conference, attended by representatives of the inter-group organizations, the Executive Director and Chairman of the Authority, and the Racial Relations Officer of PHA, the program was explained to the Commissioner so that in the event difficulties were to arise when Negro families arrived at the projects where agitation had been heaviest, the police would be available to handle the situation. Agreement was reached whereby proper arrangements would be made to alert the police. Suffice it to say, their intervention was not found necessary, but the patrol cars were readily and deliberately available at the time of some of the first move-ins.

Only one or two of the eight projects contained the possibility of racial difficulties. These projects were all white and were located in neighborhoods which had resented and resisted the building of the public housing projects in their respective areas.

Another example of how closely the intergroup organizations worked with the Local Housing Authority was a conference with the Superintendent of Schools about breaking down the barriers on the segregated project where the preponderant Negro population was separated by a one-way street from the white tenants. Here it was found that the school districting followed by coincidence the racial lines, so that most of the Negro children went to a school on one side of the project and white children walked in another direction to another school. Both schools, however, were interracial, yet the districting separated the project children along racial lines. The Authority and the inter-group representatives recommended that the School Board consider the possibility of redistricting so that the project would not remain so artificially divided. This proposition was considered favorably by the School Board which was at that time drawing up plans for redistricting the city. In addition, the Authority and community groups have considered plans which would eliminate the one-way street to make it a play street and facilitate movement back and forth, particularly of children. This is in view of the fact that the playground is on one side of the street located in the area occupied by Negroes and thus automatically used only by Negro children.

Thus, in various joint efforts and through good public relations, the Authority has let the public interest groups know that it is interested in their cooperation. It kept them informed of the progress made toward integration.

7. Tenant Selection

Initial steps taken by the Authority in tenant selection were reflected by the nature and characteristics of the projects to which tenants were to be referred.

The Authority was faced with a variety of occupancy patterns and a variety of neighborhoods. In regard to the project located in the most "unfriendly"

The experience was repeated in one form or another in the other six projects. Only carefully selected tenants were housed during this initial period, so that in a period of three months it had begun to put its policy into practice in all eight projects. The Authority realized that this crucial period should be short and not prolonged. Now that the eight projects have moved toward full integration, the need for high selectivity has lessened.

8. Public Facilities

The Authority has accepted fully the principle that the public facilities of the public housing project must be open to all tenants without regard to race, creed, color or national origin. It has reviewed the use of its public facilities with the view toward establishing these facilities for the full use of all tenants. In this regard, the public interest groups and the Authority have expressed interest in securing recreational supervision on these projects.

9. Staff Integration

The Authority is in the process of analyzing its job classifications. During 1950 a Negro economist was appointed to the staff. Another Negro has been assigned to training for management operations. One of the recent Negro employees is a civil engineer. The Authority has one Negro manager, and one Negro is a member of the Authority itself. A Negro is in the key position of Tenant Selection Supervisor. The Executive Director is conscious of the need to carry out this phase of the Authority's operations and obviously is actively putting the policy into practice.

10. Wholehearted Interest of Housing Authority

The staff members of the Authority expressed their wholehearted interest in a meeting held early in 1951 of all tenant selection personnel and management personnel, including the Executive Director and the PHA Racial Relations Officer. At this meeting, each manager reported on the success the program had achieved on his project; the tenant selection people referred to the positive attitudes expressed by prospective tenants and applicants to this program. The staff asked for more regular meetings to review the programs and the progress made on each project.

The Executive Director urged acceleration of the program, pointing out that all the groundwork laid in the early months probably was responsible for the smooth operations. He noted further that as a result of the positive steps taken, public housing had won the strong friendship and support of more groups than it had before, that the Housing Authority had won state and nation-wide acclaim for doing a job honestly and forthrightly, and that all groups recognized the Authority's sincere interest in achieving full integration by going ahead with the job and doing it.*

*See attached statement by Louis Danzig, Executive Director, Housing Authority of the City of Newark.

APPLICATION OF GUIDING PRINCIPLES TO ALL AUTHORITIES

Our review of this Local Housing Authority's experience in some detail reveals clearly the necessity to deal forthrightly and honestly with the staff, the tenant and the community. Obviously the successful execution of the Guiding Principles of Integration in any Authority is reflected in how effectively the staff, the tenant, and the community are orientated.

All Authorities, therefore, might well bear in mind the following considerations in introducing a program of integration to the staff, the tenant and the community:

The Staff

Once the Authority has announced its policy and the Executive Director has taken a forthright position on integration, doing the job of integration is conditioned by the most effective use of the staff.

1. It may be necessary to take into consideration personalities and activities in the assignment of individuals to key operations.
2. Special effort should be made to employ and utilize at their highest level of skill and training various racial groups as a visual demonstration of a policy of integration.
3. Periodic staff meetings should be held and exchange of experiences and ideas encouraged.
4. Spot maps (for staff use only) indicating the location of families by various racial groups may be utilized as a check against segregation.

The Tenant

All applicants and tenants should be made fully aware of the Authority's policy of integration.

1. A prospective tenant should be informed of the Authority's policy at the initial interview.
2. A statement of the Authority's policy might well be incorporated in the application form.
3. The Authority's policy might well be incorporated in the lease.
4. In those Authorities which are undergoing changes of policy, it may prove desirable in most instances to inform tenants by letter of the Authority's policy of non-discrimination and non-segregation.
5. Furthermore, in those Authorities which are undergoing changes of policy, Management should make it a point to introduce the prospective tenant to his neighbor on as casual a basis as possible at the time the tenant is being shown the apartment allocated to him.
6. Special attention should be given to the assignment of tenants on a selective basis during the relatively short crucial period of effecting changes in policy.

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7. In Authorities with more than one project, tenant selection should be centralized and referrals of tenants should be made to vacancies existing or occurring in all projects, thus facilitating the selective process in the assignment of applicants to the various projects.
8. In those Authorities undergoing changes of policy to integration, definite consideration should be given to the intra-transfer of families on the basis of their need for different sized apartments. Management might well consider some of these families in the initial stages of integration.
9. All public services, utilizing project space, should be open to all families regardless of race, creed, color or national origin. This is a basic principle.

The Community

A continuous public relations program should be conducted by the Authority.

1. Maximum cooperation of all municipal officials and departments is an essential element in effecting the policy of integration.
2. A continuous cooperating relationship should be maintained with the churches, labor unions, minority group and inter-group organizations and all other groups and individuals interested in housing and the general welfare of the community.
3. The beneficial use of the local newspapers, radio and television will often stimulate an atmosphere favorable to integration.
4. Periodic consultation with these various forces tends to point up the community's stake in the operation of a housing program and to stimulate a feeling of community participation and responsibility.

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