

DEVELOPING A STATEWIDE HOUSING TEMPLATE: A POLICY CASE STUDY

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Under contract to the Kansas Division of Housing, the authors recently developed the Kansas Housing Template. The computerized Template includes selected data and teaches community task forces about the interdependent nature of the housing process as they collect requisite additional data. Their resultant community housing profile presents relevant statistical data and describes all actors and actions involved in the local housing situation: consumers, providers, public and private resources, institutional structures, and relevant public policies and regulations.

The Kansas Housing Template disks contain selected community-specific 1990 Census and other data for each of the state's 605 cities and 105 counties. The accompanying Template Workbook instructs local housing task force members to gather additional data, which are organized by source into ten worksheets. The disk also contains a user-friendly program that includes prompts for entering the worksheet information and formats all data for presentation.

The objective of each Kansas city or county that chooses to complete the process will be to develop a comprehensive local housing database and profile. Using a volunteer housing task force to share the tasks of gathering unfamiliar data from diverse sources should help create ownership in the Template results. Furthermore, this participatory activity may save funds that would otherwise be paid to outside consultants.

The completed Templates will offer policymakers timely data upon which to base local decisions and state legislation. Specifically, the results can help to 1) create awareness of local housing and economic development connections; 2) establish strategies and action plans for community housing development; 3) document market feasibility for private housing developers, mortgage lenders, and appraisers; 4) make cross-community comparisons to facilitate cooperative regional efforts; and 5) obtain housing and community development funds from the state and other sources.

A copy of each completed Template disk is also returned to the state to build a comprehensive statewide housing database. The Housing Division will use the data to update its HUD Consolidated Plan and Kansas Housing Services Directory, to enhance local economic development profiles, and to justify requests for exceptions from federal program procedures. They may also incorporate Census 2000 data into the Template system as soon as they are available.

To develop the Template framework, data content, and format, the authors conducted consensus-building sessions with the Kansas Housing Division Director and selected staff. Resources utilized in this process included: 1) regional housing feasibility study models from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development/Federal Housing Administration, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development, and

the Low Income Housing Tax Credit program, 2) investment analysis formats used by real estate appraisers, accountants, and bond counsels, and 3) various housing needs assessment guidelines.

Following selection of the data content, the authors drafted the Kansas Housing Template Workbook, which was reviewed subsequently by the U.S. HUD regional economist, several development professionals designated by the Housing Division, and members of the Governor's Commission on Housing. A computer programmer and the University's Population Laboratory were then employed to write the Template program and transfer Census data to disks, respectively.

Specified data from 1990 Census Summary Tape Files 1 and 3 for the state and its cities and counties were copied from the CD ROM to 710 individual disks. The U.S. poverty thresholds and selected county-specific data (e.g., HUD income guidelines, housing cost burdens by tenure, owner- and renter-occupied housing by age of householder) were also placed on the disks. Concurrently, the user-friendly Template program was developed to 1) format the Census data into four tables, 2) provide instructions for inputting the additional data collected by the communities, and 3) reorganize all data into the outputs specified by the Workbook.

The Kansas Housing Template Workbook identifies the Census and other data essential to the community housing assessment process. To streamline collection of additional information, ten worksheets organize the requested data by source (e.g., city manager's office, planning department, building code officials, local housing authority, other housing organizations and emergency shelters, Board of Realtors, etc.). Instructions for each worksheet also define the relevant housing standards to use to assess various housing assets and deficits.

Initially, a local Steering Committee may use the four Census tables for preliminary analysis of population, housing, housing affordability, and employment and residency. Later, a larger, more representative Housing Task Force may collect and enter the worksheet data on the disk. Then, the Template program can format their additional data into six "report" outputs: population; housing/services inventory; housing needs/affordability assessment; local economic conditions and growth; housing delivery system, resources, and public policies; and strategies for local action.

Each Template report and its corresponding Census table provides an organized basis for a portion of the final narrative analysis. To this end, the Workbook's last chapter includes a suggested Table of Contents and several questions to address in analyzing the tables and reports. To permit local comparisons, recent national and statewide population trends and changing housing needs are also outlined. Finally, to enable local analysts to begin developing strategies, the researchers present several potential "starter" conclusions that might arise from a given community's data.

To introduce and pilot-test the Kansas Housing Template, the authors presented half-day workshops at three sites across the state. In addition to local officials, the state's

Business, Community Development, and Housing staff, plus Rural Development field personnel, regional planning agencies, economic development officials, and Cooperative Extension agents were trained to assist participating communities. The state is distributing Template packets to the communities not represented at the workshops.

Throughout the Workbook, the authors suggest that the data and the process are of equal importance. When the Template is complete, the Housing Task Force must prepare a final narrative analysis of all the data and develop a few workable strategies and action plans. Local officials may also choose to distribute the raw tables and reports "as is" to developers who are calculating capitalization and absorption rates for specific housing project feasibility studies. Finally, Template data excerpts soon may find their way into individual Community Home Pages.¹

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