

Focused Group Discussions with Housing, Job Training and Employment Professionals:

*Barriers to affordable housing, education opportunities and
gainful employment, and strategies to remove them*

October 2009



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Executive Summary

The Multnomah County Health Department's Healthy Birth Initiative (HBI) program conducted eight focused group discussions in Northeast Portland during the summer of 2008: two groups with 10 employment and housing service providers and six groups with 52 African American community members. These groups were conducted as part of program evaluation activities and the findings informed the design of the new HBI program that began in June 2009.

Findings from these eight groups are presented in two reports: 1) *Focused Group Discussions with Housing, Job Training and Employment Professionals: Barriers to affordable housing, education opportunities and gainful employment, and strategies to remove them;* and 2) *Focused Group Discussions with African American Community Members in Multnomah County: Opinions of participants ages 14-87 about multiple factors affecting individual and community health.*

This report describes the findings from the two groups: one with housing agency staff and one with job training and employment staff. In response to the information learned during these discussions and evaluation feedback from clients throughout the years, the new program employs resource specialists to help women enroll in school or training programs, find and maintain housing, and secure employment. It was envisioned that these positions would be available to advocate if challenges occurred and provide longer-term coaching for women as they continued to improve their situations.

Key Findings

Housing

- The most common barriers to housing are lack of money, poor credit, no credit, previous evictions, and mental health issues.
- Equally influential, was that women did not have role models to learn how to run a household including paying bills and maintaining the condition of the home.
- "Health," was mentioned as a significant barrier to secure and maintain housing. It was explained that with increasing rates of chronic health problems and not being able to work, paying rent or mortgages was becoming increasingly difficult.
- The limited stock of single family housing for women and children was reported as a significant challenge as well.
- Individuals who have been denied housing do not know that they have the right to contest their denial and can often become eligible by providing additional information.



Employment and education

- It was felt that African American youth needed to be encouraged to pursue education that will lead to employment in growth industries to improve opportunities and career advancement options.
- Many people do not have the skills to apply for a job, especially if application is required online. This challenge is complicated further if they do not own a computer or have internet access. It was expressed that two hours of computer use at the local library was not long enough to complete an application.
- It was also expressed that recruitment by larger public and private employers need to be done directly to agencies within the community and need to include teaching people how to conduct informational interviews and complete applications.
- Some emphasized that there is real need to support entrepreneurship in light of the changing job market, especially in real estate development. The development of small businesses was seen as a way to build wealth in the community.

Recommendations

The following ideas for collaboration between HBI and the organizations participating were generated during the focused group discussions:

- Have HBI become actively involved in providing long-term advocacy for women as they secure and improve their housing and employment opportunities. This advocacy would be provided for women if they run into difficulties in their jobs, including interpersonal conflict, attendance problems due to transportation and childcare issues, and advancement challenges due to limited skills.
- Develop on-going collaborations with housing professionals to develop a demonstration project such as, dedicating a small housing unit for a few first-time mothers enrolled in HBI and experienced mothers not involved in the program to promote learning opportunities.
- Develop a “deposit” loan incentive benefit for women in HBI. This project would make available a housing deposit for clients who are ready to move into stable housing and are ready to learn the skills to maintain the condition of the housing unit. The client would be able to keep the deposit if she were eligible to receive it back from the landlord. This practice could result in good housing references for future moves.
- Work with other organizations participating in the focused discussion groups to teach youth and adults how to budget and build/repair credit and how to develop resumes, apply for positions online, conduct informational interviews, and secure learning opportunities (even if unpaid internships) as a way to develop skills and references.



Introduction

During July and August, 2008, the Multnomah County Health Department's Health Birth Initiative (HBI) program conducted eight focused group discussions in Northeast Portland: two with employment and housing service providers and six with African American community members. Findings from these eight groups are presented in two reports: 1) *Focused Group Discussions with Housing, Job Training and Employment Professionals: Barriers to affordable housing, education opportunities and gainful employment, and strategies to remove the;* and 2) *Focused Group Discussions with African American Community Members in Multnomah County: Opinions of participants ages 14-87 about multiple factors affecting individual and community health.*

Each reports includes a description of the recruitment, participation, and content of the groups; key findings; detailed findings, including direct quotes from the participants; and recommendations for program development and collaboration.

This current report presents findings from the two focused group discussions conducted with staff from local organizations working directly with community members on employment, education, and housing issues. These two topics were identified as significant stressors by women enrolled in the Multnomah County's Healthy Birth Initiative (HBI) program. HBI has been in operation since 1998 and is a home-visiting program working with pregnant and parenting African American women and their families. The program was developed to address significant disparities in perinatal health among African American women living in Multnomah County. For the past 10 years, rates of infant mortality and low birth weight have been twice as high for African Americans as the rates for White non-Hispanics in Multnomah County. This persistent disparity in poor birth outcomes is also seen in national infant mortality and low birth weight rates.

For more than six years, the majority of women enrolled in the HBI program, and participating in program evaluation activities, have identified, as priorities, the need to improve their employment opportunities and secure stable housing. The two focused group discussions described in this report were designed to identify available services, discuss some challenges service providers experience when working with clients, and brainstorm possible collaborations between the various agencies and the HBI Program. Because HBI is a program design to specifically serve African American women and their families, the discussions explored whether there were employment and housing-related challenges that are unique to, or are disproportionately affecting African Americans and women.

The information learned through these groups informed the design of the new HBI program that began in June 2009. As a result of these groups and feedback from clients throughout the years, the new program employs resource specialists to help women enroll in school or training programs, find and maintain housing, and secure employment. It was envisioned that these positions would be available to advocate if challenges occurred and provide longer-term coaching for women as they continued to improve their situations.



Methodology

Two focused group discussions were conducted in August 2008 in Northeast Portland with 10 staff members of organizations providing services within the Multnomah County African American community. In an effort to promote a culturally competent and respectful environment, the majority of group participants and group facilitators were African American or biracial. The facilitators all had experience facilitating community discussions and were familiar with public health, housing, and/or employment issues. Recruitment of participants was done primarily by personal invitation by program staff with many years of experience working with professionals in these agencies. In addition, other professionals were contacted after identifying agencies that provide the types of services to be discussed and asking the organization to identify the most appropriate staff member to participate. Findings from the housing discussion will be presented first followed by employment and education findings.

Housing group participants

The housing focus group consisted of individuals representing four government and non-profit agencies operating throughout outer Southeast, North and Northeast Portland. The represented agencies provide a continuum of housing services, including transitional housing, rental/permanent housing, and assistance with home ownership. The types of services they provide have been developed in response to the housing needs women and families have and the barriers they face when trying to secure stable housing. These services include the following:

- Single-family housing in a wide array of neighborhoods rather than concentrated developments
- Financial fitness services, teaching families and youth about financial literacy, including budgeting, saving, managing credit, and investing
- Transitional housing units for people with mental health and substance addiction issues
- Housing and case management for families at risk for homelessness
- Housing for women who are getting out of the corrections system and reuniting with family
- Housing designed for in-home child care providers
- Preservation of affordable housing by working with private and non-profit developers for families at 0-80% of the median family income
- First-time mortgage lending, including second mortgages that are forgivable after a time period for people between 60-100% of the median family income
- Rental assistance and help with household needs, such as furniture and utilities
- Housing with wrap-around services designed to wean families off public housing in five to seven years to prevent multigenerational poverty
- Matched-savings plans (Individual Development Accounts) for home ownership, education and micro-business enterprise
- On-site work programs for youth that provide opportunities to gain job experience and earn stipends



Findings

Barriers to housing

Participants in the housing group identified several barriers their clients experience as they try to get housing. The most common barriers were lack of money, poor credit or no credit, previous evictions, and mental health issues. Additionally, there was consensus that there is not enough affordable housing stock for single mothers, especially single-family housing not attached to large public housing developments.

“One of the biggest housing needs we have in this city is actually for single moms needing permanent housing. We have seen an increase the last couple of years of homeless mothers in the city of Portland. Because they can’t find affordable housing or they get into a domestic violence situation”

“Most of the family housing now is in the apartment setting and is going to be in East Portland. I mean the reality is that it’s harder and harder to find any affordable single-family housing west of 82nd.”

Several participants described difficulties some of their female clients have with significant others or family members wanting to move in even though they are not on the lease. Because it is illegal for anyone not on the agreement to occupy any type of subsidized/public housing, this occurrence can result in eviction. This eviction then will make it more difficult for the woman to secure future housing.

“A lot of times when you fold in all those other outside influences, albeit a male partner or the familial influence, that sometimes they try to capitalize on the fact that that young person now has an apartment or a house. We have had families pile on top of that. So it gets a little tricky for them to know how to say ‘No’ and to set boundaries.”

Other barriers discussed included people not having the skills to run a household, including paying the bills and maintaining the unit so that they don’t get evicted or lose their deposit. One participant explained that this lack of knowledge was most often the result of not ever seeing anyone do this successfully. She indicated that in response to this issue, her agency provides wrap-around services for families so that they can learn how to manage a household within a five to seven year time period and wean themselves from depending on subsidized/public housing, ultimately breaking the cycle of multi-generational poverty.

Other barriers discussed include clients not having financial literacy, adequate transportation (especially now that affordable housing is moving to outer East County), and the skills to advocate for themselves when they are denied housing.

“The other thing I think of barriers – when you don’t know to advocate for yourself. Because we have a process that if you get denied, that you can request that you can sit down and talk to someone. When a lot of the individuals sit down and explain their situation [they] actually end up with housing.”



“I think at the very basic level in terms of housing, if people can understand how to balance their check book and understand one simple concept, not how much money you make, it is how much money you save. That is the key too. It is that simple concept. It is not, I have got a young brother that worked that I have been talking to. He is making a lot of money. And I am like, man, you are spending your money more quickly than you can make it? And it doesn't matter how much money you can make. What are you putting it the bank?”

One participant talked about the decline in affordable housing available in the HBI project area due to increased property values for potential development sites.

“Look at what's happened the past five years. You are not going to see apartments built in the inner part. If people are going to buy, I mean buy a lot on MLK, it going to be at least \$500,000. I mean to buy a lot, just the lot itself, is going to be about \$200,000. Or a \$100,000 and it is going to be \$200,000 to build.”

Participants agreed that some valuable new housing developments were built in the project area, such as Humboldt Gardens and the New Columbia. However, they acknowledged that there were some unintended consequences from relocating people to outer East County while this new housing was built. One of these consequences is that after a year or so, families become settled in their new location. Only a small percent of people relocated are moving back to the North and Northeast housing developments. Respondents saw this as a hardship to those who had to move from the North and Northeast Portland neighborhoods. Participants felt the displacement of low-income families, especially single parents, was the greatest negative impact gentrification has made.

“Humboldt Gardens, beautiful housing there and everything. But what happens is, when someone initially gets moved out, the percentage of people who return is very low. Because once you get moved into another community and you get situated there, and you have paid your rent, and you start your kids going to school there, even when someone builds new housing with the expectation that you may move back in, the reality is you don't give up root again typically. You know so what happens you have new people going into that housing. Those who moved out no longer are able to either afford it or they don't come back.”

“So what happens? I live out in Gresham, but I work over here and my church is over here, and mom lives out here. It becomes more and more difficult for me to really get to the natural resources that I feel comfortable with.”

In spite of the transformation of developments like Humboldt Gardens and The New Columbia, one individual felt the public still associated these revitalized sites with the housing projects they had replaced, and stigma remained.



“How a community views where you live is very important. I see here in Portland. And I say all those things because of Columbia Villa and New Columbia. To this day and age you hear people; people asked me when I lived in Columbia Villa, they said, ‘Aren’t you afraid?’ I said, ‘Of what?’ And children getting off the bus early, getting off the number 4 bus line early so that people wouldn’t know that they live in Columbia Villa; being called a Villa rat.”

One participant explained that her clients are making more of an effort to maintain their housing in the neighborhoods that make up the HBI project area as a result of the changes in the neighborhood.

“One of the things that is real interesting to us is we don’t have huge turnovers in these houses. Because the rent they are paying is not market rent, it is way below market rent. And what [we] have found is they will try and maintain these houses and stay in them. So therefore the rent that they pay for these single family homes, we don’t have lots and lots of turnover for not non-payment. They pay that rent. Because they realize they are in a, especially in NE Portland, if they are in one of those houses, they are in a housing they can never afford to get again if they lose it. Because it they are living next door to someone who may be paying \$1,200-\$1,300 a month for rent, where they are paying a huge mortgage. And here they are in this house paying \$700-\$800 or whatever they are paying. But they know once they lose that, they are not going to be a single family home in NE Portland at an affordable rent again.”

Housing issues for African American women, men and families

When asked to discuss unique or specific housing barriers facing African American clients, the first response was “health.” When asked to elaborate, the participant explained, *“More and more you are starting to see issues that are cropping up, chronic issues that are starting to happen within the African American community around health that affects so many facets of their lives.”*

Another participant added, *“So if you have arthritis or asthma within your household or if you have migraine headaches or if you have diabetes or those type of things. Hypertension and you don’t have any of those things under control. And then it begins to impact the way you can live. It impacts your children; it impacts your ability to go to work on a daily basis.”*

In addition to health, the group agreed that there is a significant need in the community for better opportunities for education and employment so that people are not living in poverty.

“I think the reason why education is so critical is because it really is going to [be] one of the single factors that is going to determine long term the type of employment that a person is going to get. Because our society has become so service-oriented and so technologically advanced that if you look at the issues with African Americans within the city of Portland, 80% of African Americans are at 80% median family income and below.”



The group also discussed the challenges current public policies create. The discussion included the need to support entrepreneurship in light of the changing job market and downsizing of large employers. One participant emphasized the need to incentivize “*minority developers and minority entrepreneurship*,” particularly in the area of real estate development. It was felt that helping people develop their own businesses facilitated more control over their families’ financial security. Additionally, several in the group agreed that community displacement was a direct result of housing development policy.

“I think the other issue is displacement and to outer SE. So I would say it is not the heart of the African American community, but between 1990 and 2000 the African American population almost doubled [in SE]. And I bet if you look at 2010 that is when the change [is permanent]. It is when it started happening. And I know the last building we opened, 40% of the residents are African Americans on 122nd Avenue.”

Ideas for collaboration with the Healthy Birth Initiative Program

When the group began generating ideas on how HBI could collaborate with these housing programs, the first response was to have HBI staff become knowledgeable about all the programs available and work with women in HBI as they access the housing programs. Participants went on to suggest that it would be very helpful for HBI staff to support clients as they apply for and secure housing so that they can confront any barriers they may run into.

Examples of the type of things HBI staff could do included coaching women to advocate for themselves if they are denied housing, encouraging women and their family members to enroll in financial literacy programs, and working with women as they learn to maintain a household. In addition, because HBI staff work with women in their homes, it was discussed that it could be very helpful to help women avoid eviction due to other people wanting to move in, not paying bills, and not maintaining the physical condition of their home.

As part of this last issue, it was brainstormed that perhaps housing agencies could dedicate funds to HBI clients that would be used as “*loans*” for security deposits to women so that more landlords would be willing to take a risk on a tenant who may have a poor rental history. HBI staff then could work intensively with the woman to maintain the condition of the housing so that the deposit would be returned.

One participant shared an idea about developing a small housing project designed for first-time mothers. As part of this project, HBI staff could work with all of the women together and teach skills on maintaining a household and financial literacy along with the program’s perinatal curriculum. The women could benefit from the community of other women in similar situations. The program would be short term and include transitioning women to permanent housing after successfully completing the program.



“One of the things that I feel is successful is like I think the support of having people around you who maybe in the same kind of situation you are. I think it would be really nice, for example, [if] there was a four-plex, or a three-plex that was dedicated to new moms. ...Someone could concentrate on those four families that were in there, providing some support services, but the housing would be set aside for them to get themselves on their feet; to live in it for a year. And it could be something that is affordable. It could be where you work with one of our organizations to do this and to get this in place.”

Another participant suggested that instead of having only first-time mothers from HBI, it would be better to have women of a specific socioeconomic status and include women who have already raised children. *“You learn from having a mom next door who has raised children. Who is like, becomes a mother to you. And they support you and when you have a problem you run next door and they say, ‘Honey, if he is running a temperature, this is what you do.’”*

There was strong agreement that another thing HBI staff could do was incorporate the value of life-long planning and setting high expectations for children. It was recommended that as part of the HBI curriculum, there be a parenting section on how to set goals and expectations for youth, how to break the cycle of poverty, and how to expose youth to other options.

“I also have to say that one of the saddest things I have ever seen was going to a high school graduation and seeing that all the valedictorians and all the people getting scholarships were white while all the black kids weren’t getting anything. To me that is fundamental. And I guess what I would say that the HBI can help do in planting that seed is, it is not just about sending your kid to school. It is not just about your kid getting an education. It is about your kid being the best. It is that you one day, what is that image and maybe you see having the visualization of the kid with the parent and having them do an exercise. And say close your eyes and look at this baby being 18 years old. And what do you see as they going to get their diploma. And it is not about getting their diploma. It is they got the diploma and they got accepted to this university and got those scholarships. That is the image that we have to start putting into our kids.”

Employment and education group participants¹

The employment focus group consisted of individuals representing six government and non-profit agencies operating throughout the Portland Metro area. They represented agencies providing the continuum of employment services, including high school equivalency programs, apprenticeships, job placement, and employment. Services are provided to a wide array of people; however there is special emphasis on populations who are at high-risk for unemployment, including youth, ex-offenders, people in alcohol and drug treatment, and the mentally ill.

¹ In July 2008, the unemployment rate in Oregon was 6.0%, higher than the country’s rate at 5.7%. At time of writing, Oregon’s unemployment rates in March 2009 rose to 12.1%, compared to the national rate at 8.5%. Oregon has the second highest jobless rate in the United States, according to the Oregon Employment Department.



Barriers to employment

Participants in the group discussed the most common barriers facing the populations their organizations serve. The barriers include lack of experience, inconsistent work history, not having finished high school or an equivalency program, not having a driver's license, not having transportation, not having affordable childcare, having a criminal record, having poor credit, not having a computer, and not knowing how to apply for a job. Part of the difficulty for people attempting to apply for employment was attributed to the on-line application process many employers now use.

The group acknowledged that the libraries have computers available, but participants felt that the two-hour limit was too short of a time for someone to do a job search and complete online applications.

A participant who works with human resources expressed concern about the automated system and that two unintended consequences were occurring. First, if there was anything in the candidate's application that looked unusual, the application would be dismissed rather than the individual being able to explain what the issue was. Second, the participant explained that she had seen numerous occasions in which applicants did not complete the online application. She described candidates not completing supplemental questions or all of the online application, possibly because they didn't know how to navigate the application online and may not have been aware of all the forms to be completed.

“Some of the things that we are seeing, some of the people applying, do not complete the application. And that will screen someone out. The application, I'm not saying for everybody, but I'm seeing where as the applications are not fully completed.”

Another barrier discussed was the lack of awareness of employment opportunities. This lack of information was attributed in part to people not knowing other people who have good jobs, and who would be privy to information about new job openings within their companies.

There were similarities between the agencies represented in how they recruited and conducted outreach to their targeted client groups. These types of efforts included advertising in local, community-specific publications, job or community fairs, and word of mouth.

There was agreement that these are also appropriate ways to recruit for employees as well, and one participant suggested that employers work with these agencies to reach the clients as they become prepared for employment. Specifically, it would be helpful for major employers to work with the clients to let them know how to determine whether their job skills are an appropriate match for the job opportunity, how to complete the application, and how to conduct informational interviews within their organizations.



Employment issues for African American women, men and youth

When asked about specific issues they have seen when working with African American clients, a participant who works in human resources for a large employer explained that outreach efforts and training were increasingly important when working with underrepresented communities of color.

There was strong agreement that outreach be done in the community to help people learn how to apply for jobs. Two participants discussed how many of the African American youth they work with have barriers around not having confidence, and not being encouraged by family to pursue higher education and professional employment. Rather, youth learn that they will earn a GED and get a low-wage job or, for some youth, they have not been given any expectations. It was agreed that human resource departments should work in the community to help young people learn about different careers by shadowing professionals at work and also conduct informational interviews.

Participants briefly discussed the presence of racism in the workplace as a barrier for people of color to succeed in the workplace.

“If it [racism] exists in America, it exists in Oregon, it exists in organizations, and that I believe that people could use a system in terms of how to navigate the biases that occur in an organization.”

“As an African American male and I’m sure that the females have experienced it as well, especially in this city and state, I don’t know what the solution is. I guess more experience and maybe getting the different agencies to get some more diversity training and things like that about how to work with different types of people, and have them be more willing to help us, and to be able to make them be willing to be more inclusive with us. But I run into a lot through the years. So I definitely agree with that.”

Another barrier briefly discussed was the lack of good-paying jobs for women. Specifically, the conversation was about women not pursuing historically male-dominated fields such as carpentry, plumbing, and electrical work. The participant explained that a local organization in the HBI project area was helping women get the skills needed to apply for these types of positions and was putting efforts into recruiting women of color.

Ideas for collaboration with the Healthy Birth Initiative Program

Participants agreed that it would be helpful for HBI staff to help women enroll in their training programs, help them navigate all of the different systems involved, help them with reliable transportation, and most importantly, provide and link women with wrap-around services on an on-going basis, especially when they face barriers and are at high risk of giving up. The need for providing this longer-term wrap-around function to support women in employment programs and eventually in their jobs was described as being more important now because of all of the lay-offs social service organizations are experiencing.



“I think that the people they are seeing, I am seeing, there needs to be more wrap around services, for someone to be successful, in employment. They need to have health care; they have to have child care. They need to have A & D treatment if they need it. They need to have mental health treatment if they need it. They need to have housing.”

One participant expressed interest in involving women’s significant others when working on employment issues and thought that it would be very helpful for HBI staff to actively work with the men in the women’s lives and link men with wrap-around services too.

“And one of the things I found out also that in a real world, dealing with young woman, and especially if they are pregnant or old, they have a significant other, and that significant other is not really in the picture, and I kind of like tell them to bring them in so that I can tell them okay, if you’re not going to be working, and she is going to be going to school, and she is getting a welfare check, you need to stay home and take care of this baby. I mean, parenting skills also go into effect as far as the job. You don’t know who is going to be taking care of your child, or they get sick, and you have to stay home. I mean you wouldn’t believe it.



Discussion Guide Employment Professionals

I. Welcome– 5 minutes

Welcome: *Introductions of facilitator, assistant. – Before we get started, help yourself to refreshments. The restrooms are*

Groups should take about 1 1/2 – 2 hours. *We'll be out of here by 11:30.*

Confidentiality: *All of the information we collect today will be kept confidential – that is we will not associate anyone's name or organizations with any of the information we report. The information will be combined with information from the eight other focus groups we are conducting. No information will be used in a manner that would be traceable to an individual or group. We will be taking notes and using a tape recorder to help us capture everything that is discussed.*

II. Purpose of Groups– 5 minutes

We asked you to come here today to provide input into Multnomah County Health Department's planning process for services. The purpose of the focus group is to learn from you and other professionals working with employment issues, about what makes a participant successful in the program/services you offer. Also, we want to learn about ways that the Healthy Birth Initiative Program can help women and men access your services in order to improve their employment prospects.

*The Health Department's Healthy Birth Initiative is sponsoring these groups. We are not expecting that you have heard of this program, **but out of curiosity, can I see a show of hands of those who have heard of the Healthy Birth Initiative (HBI) Program?***

The Healthy Birth Initiative Program works exclusively with African American women and their families to improve birth outcomes and family health. This program was developed because in Multnomah County, African American women are more than twice as likely as White women to deliver a low-weight baby (weighing less than 5 pounds, 8 ounces) and to see their child die before his/her first birthday (infant mortality).

We have an on-going evaluation of this program and findings clearly indicate that the women and men in the program face significant challenges in securing gainful employment and stable housing—both of which have a direct affect on health and pregnancies.

III. Discussion Questions

*We have a lot to discuss, and in order to get to all the questions and end when we said we would, **I may have to move us along if we go longer than we have time for. Is that okay with the group?***



I know that we have employers, along with staffing agencies and training and placement services represented here today. We tried to make most questions fit all of your different roles.

1. So, let's start by going around the room and have each of you introduce yourself by just your first name and give a brief (2-3 minutes) description of the employment and/or training services your organization provides. Also, describe any efforts or initiatives that you have to recruit/serve communities of color, specifically African Americans? (15 minutes)

Think about successful people in your program/organization. (10 minutes)

2. What makes someone successful in your programs or organizations? What are the successful person's attributes and what role did your program/organization play in the success?
3. Describe any support or incentives you offer to encourage people to stay in high school, go back to school, or get their GED. How about support for continuing education and professional development for those who have completed high school?
4. What types of support do you provide or link people to, that helps them stay employed and advance in their careers?

Now I'd like you to think about barriers to success. (30 minutes)

5. What are potential barriers for people to apply for programs, services or positions within your organization? (Follow-up questions if necessary: How about *application fees, income eligibility, interview skills, resume development, or job skills?*).
6. What are common reasons why people do not complete your program or do not get hired? What do you have in place to address these challenges? What do you wish was in place either in your organization or in the community to address these challenges?
7. What supports do you provide or services do you link people to that help people overcome employment barriers such as no work history, poor work history, poor credit, criminal record, and/or substance abuse issues? What do you wish was in place either in your organization or in the community to address these challenges?
8. What about pregnancy and having small children needing childcare? What services/resources are you able to link people with to ensure that these issues do not hinder program completion or employment success? What do you wish was in place either in your organization or in the community to address these challenges?
9. Are there any resources for health insurance for participants in your programs? How about the positions they are eligible to apply for once they complete your programs. For employers, are you able to provide affordable health insurance?

We have been conducting several focus groups with women in our program and community members. One of the themes we are hearing is that African American women have to deal with a



lot of stress and discrimination at the workplace. Some women stated that they felt that they had to be at least “twice as good” as anyone else in order to succeed.

I’d like to talk about this issue not necessarily in your program, but in general. (15 minutes)

10. What are the most important employment issues for African American women, men and teens? How do you think these issues can be addressed? To your knowledge, what is being done effectively to address these issues?

Now, I would like to talk about employment trends. (10 minutes)

11. What are the current and future employment trends that your organization is planning for? What are the challenges you anticipate you will have when recruiting/training or placing future employees?

12. Is there anything we have not asked that we should have?

Thank you very much. If you would like to get a report of what we find out from all the focus groups, please let us know when you leave.

Discussion Guide Housing Professionals

I. Welcome– 5 minutes

Welcome: *Introductions of facilitator, assistant. – Before we get started, help yourself to refreshments. The restrooms are*

Groups should take about 1 1/2 – 2 hours. We’ll be out of here by 11:30.

Confidentiality: *All of the information we collect today will be kept confidential – that is we will not associate anyone’s name or organizations with any of the information we report. The information will be combined with information from the eight other focus groups we are conducting. No information will be used in a manner that would be traceable to an individual or group. We will be taking notes and using a tape recorder to help us capture everything that is discussed.*

II. Purpose of Groups– 5 minutes

We asked you to come here today to provide input into Multnomah County Health Department’s planning process for services. The purpose of the focus group is to learn from you and other professionals working with housing issues, about what makes a participant successful in the program/services you offer. Also, we want to learn about ways that the Healthy Birth Initiative Program can help women and men access your services in order to secure affordable, safe, stable housing.

*The Health Department’s Healthy Birth Initiative is sponsoring these groups. We are not expecting that you have heard of this program, **but out of curiosity, can I see a show of hands of those who have heard of the Healthy Birth Initiative (HBI) Program?***



The Healthy Birth Initiative Program works exclusively with African American women and their families to improve birth outcomes and family health. This program was developed because in Multnomah County, African American women are more than twice as likely as White women to deliver a low-weight baby (weighing less than 5 pounds, 8 ounces) and to see their child die before his/her first birthday (infant mortality).

We have an on-going evaluation of this program and findings clearly indicate that the women and men in the program face significant challenges in securing stable housing and gainful employment—both of which have a direct affect on health and pregnancies.

III. Discussion Questions (90 minutes)

We have a lot to discuss, and in order to get to all the questions and end when we said we would, I may have to move us along if we go longer than we have time for. Is that okay with the group?

1. So, let's start by going around the room and have each of you introduce yourself by just your first name and give a brief (2-3 minutes) description of the housing services your organization provides. Please also explain whether you focus on transitional housing, long-term rentals, and/or home ownership? (10 Minutes)
2. What are the barriers to success in transitional housing, long-term rentals, and/or home ownership for individuals/singles and for families? (Follow-up probes if group can't answer question (we are not looking for these answers specifically): How about application fees, income eligibility, good credit, single individual—no kids, criminal record, inadequate housing stock, alcohol and drug?). (15 minutes)
3. What types of support do you provide or link people to address these barriers so that they can apply for and stay in their housing? What do you wish was in place either in your organization or in the community to this? (10 minutes)
4. Do you include employment support? What do you wish was in place either in your organization or in the community to this? (5 minutes)
5. On average, how long do people, who benefit from your services, maintain their housing? Are there limits to the length of time they can stay? (Follow-up probes if group can't answer question (we are not looking for these answers specifically): treatment-based, income based, children, another adult moves in, etc)? (5 minutes)
6. In your opinion, what are the most important housing issues for African American women, men and families? (5 minutes)
7. Describe any efforts or initiatives that you have to serve communities of color, specifically African Americans. (5 minutes)



8. How do you think these issues can be addressed? To your knowledge, what is being done effectively to address these issues? (5 minutes)

9. What about pregnancy and having small children needing childcare? What services/resources are you able to link people with to ensure that these issues do not hinder program completion or maintaining stable housing? What do you wish was in place either in your organization or in the community to address these challenges? (10 minutes)

Think about successful people in your program/organization.

10. What makes someone successful in your housing programs? What are the successful person's attributes and what role did your program/organization play in the success? (5 minutes)

11. Can you see a way to partner with a program such as HBI to improve the number of women in long-term, safe housing? (May need to describe program again very briefly—case management, pregnant/parenting, low-income, high risk, etc). (10 minutes)

12. Is there anything we have not asked that we should have? (5 minutes)

Thank you very much. If you would like to get a report of what we find out from all the focus groups, please let us know when you leave.

