

THE **Handbook** **FOR COMMISSIONERS**

3rd
Edition

A resource guide for housing and community
development agency commissioners



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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF HOUSING
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Acknowledgments

This edition of the *Handbook for Commissioners* is made possible by the diligent work of the NAHRO Commissioners Committee, particularly Henrietta Snipes (Chair), Karina Mason Rorris (Vice-Chair) and the Communications Subcommittee; members of the NAHRO faculty; and NAHRO's Communications, Congressional Relations, and Policy and Program Development staff.

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INTRODUCTION:

Housing Authority Commissioners: Local Officials Fulfilling a Federal Mandate

Thank you for choosing to serve as a commissioner. Your work enables your local housing or redevelopment agency to function smoothly, to provide residents with shelter, services, and opportunities, and to improve your community.

Housing authority and redevelopment agency¹ commissioners oversee how billions of dollars in federal, state, and local funds are spent to improve housing for more than eight million low-income individuals, including the elderly and the disabled.

This work is carried out by thousands of commissioners who work in cooperation with housing authority executive directors and staff, residents and with members of state, local, and federal governments in some 3,300 localities throughout the United States. As advocates for decent housing and safe, sustainable communities, this dedicated cadre of men and women both determine the character, quality, and success of assisted housing programs and improve the opportunities and outcomes for the residents they serve.

Housing authorities were created through a patchwork of federal, state and local legislation, and localities appoint commissioners in different ways and operate independently. Thus, no one-size-fits-

1. For convenience of reference in this Handbook, "public housing authority" or "public housing agency" should be deemed to include community redevelopment agencies and combined redevelopment and housing agencies wherever the context permits.

all job description applies to all housing and redevelopment commissioners.

In general, commissioners are charged with:

- Overseeing the local housing agency's operation.
- Ensuring fairness in the administration of housing policies and compliance with both the letter and spirit of ever-changing federal, state, and local laws and related housing regulations.
- Acting as an advocate for the housing agency, its residents, and its programs in ways that ensure decent, safe, and sanitary housing for the community's low- and moderate-income residents. This work includes making the case for local housing expenditures, arguing in favor of local housing programs and services, and bringing stakeholders together in cooperative ways that improve the larger community.

This handbook provides a broad overview of the commissioner's job, including how to build critical relationships with the agency's executive director, housing authority staff, government officials, the news media, and the general public. It is not meant to be read in a single sitting; rather, we hope that you will dip into it as needed when you want to learn about some of the myriad aspects of a commissioner's work or familiarize yourself with housing and community development programs. This handbook also provides guidance on how to effectively participate in board meetings and other practical aspects of serving as a housing commissioner.

While this handbook provides a good general starting point, local and regional specifics are beyond its scope. It is the responsibility of all new commissioners to understand the specific roles and duties of their job. For example, new commissioners should understand whether they are appointed as Advisory Commissioners or Commissioners with legal responsibilities, and importantly, what these designations mean and how the designation impacts the execution of their responsibilities.

Here are a few initial tips for commissioners to consider as they take on their new roles:

- Interact with fellow board members and the housing agency's executive director. These individuals are key sources of information who can reveal a board's inner workings and shed light on the complexities of the commissioner's role and responsibilities.
- Understand completely any legal agreements between the housing authority and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), federal regulations governing authority activities, and HUD notices and handbooks (see Chapters 2 and 3, and appendices).
- Connect with the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO) and take advantage of our many resources for commissioners. (see Chapter 12).

CHAPTER 1

What a Commissioner Does

What's in This Chapter

- **No One-Size-Fits-All**
- **Overseeing the Housing Agency**
- **Controlling Against Fraud and Abuse**
- **Essential Skills and Abilities**
- **Developing an Annual Plan**
- **Key Points**

America's housing authority and redevelopment agency commissioners oversee the spending of billions of federal, state, and local dollars directed toward improving housing for more than eight million people, including low-income individuals, the elderly, and the disabled.

Essentially, the job of a housing and redevelopment commissioner is to:

- Oversee the local housing agency's operation (including advocacy for decent housing in sustainable communities) and to ensure fiscal responsibility.
- Make sure that housing policy administration is fair and that it complies with both the letter and spirit of ever-changing federal, state, and local laws and housing regulations.
- Act as an advocate for the housing agency, its residents, and its programs. This means making the case for local housing expenditures; arguing in favor of local housing programs and services; and bringing stakeholders together in cooperative actions that improve the community as a whole.