



# Resident Council and Housing Authority Case Study

Cincinnati, OH

## Jurisdiction-wide Resident Council Organizing

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This document is part of the **Public Housing Resident Organizing and Participation Toolkit**. The full toolkit includes topical guides, customizable resident council documents and forms, tools related to tenant participation funds, and case studies of resident organizations around the country. To see the full toolkit go to: <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/public-housing/resident-toolkit/>

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## Cincinnati, OH: Jurisdiction-wide Resident Council Organizing

*“[Get organized]—not just in name only!”*

*— Nashid Shakir, Jurisdiction-wide Resident Advisory Board*

**Cincinnati is a city in Hamilton County, Ohio, near the border with Kentucky. The public housing authority, the Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority (CMHA), serves much of Hamilton County, including the City of Cincinnati. CMHA owns 23 developments as of 2021.**

Five properties have gone through the Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) conversion process and are no longer conventional public housing. CMHA has a stated goal of pursuing RAD conversions for all of the public housing properties that it owns.



### Resident Council Structure:

#### Resident Councils

**Of the 23 CMHA properties, 18 have active resident councils as of 2021 (up from 13 in 2018).** Each resident council is independent and complies with HUD’s requirements as a duly elected resident council. When resident council leaders transition off the board or the board becomes inactive, the jurisdiction-wide resident council (J-RAB) will step in to recruit and train new leadership.

Ifetayo Mims is president of one of the active resident councils and a J-RAB board member. She reports that resident council events included healthy food preparation, activities for elderly residents and fundraising for her resident council.



**J-RAB  
(PRESIDENTS OF EACH RESIDENT COUNCIL)**

**18 RESIDENT COUNCILS**

## Jurisdiction-wide Resident Council

In addition to the resident councils, residents living at CMHA properties are organized through the **Jurisdiction-Wide Resident Advisory Board (J-RAB)**. J-RAB is an independent nonprofit organization with 501(c)(3) status and was incorporated in 2005. It serves as the housing authority's jurisdiction-wide resident council, representing residents at all CMHA properties. Cincinnati has historically had another jurisdiction-wide resident council.

The Board of Directors of J-RAB consists of the presidents of each building's resident council. J-RAB provides stipends for three resident leaders, plus there are three full-time J-RAB staff. CMHA provides office space for J-RAB at the Stanley Rowe Towers in downtown Cincinnati. Most J-RAB staff members are also CMHA residents.



## J-RAB's Funding: Tenant Participation Funds, ROSS Grants, and More

**J-RAB provides resident services, supports resident leaders with stipends, and holds activities for residents.** It is able to provide a strong level of support due to access to funding through ROSS grants and tenant participation funds.

*J-RAB's Vision is to collectively protect tenants' rights with a no-nonsense approach while promoting self-determination to resolve any issues and to also encourage a sense of humor as we strive to bring a smile to each resident's face with every interaction.*

**—J-RAB vision statement**

## Funding for J-RAB

**A large share of J-RAB's funding comes from a grant under HUD's Resident Opportunities and Self-Sufficiency (ROSS) grant program.** ROSS grants fund service coordinators who can work with residents and connect them to outside programs. Most ROSS grants go to housing authorities, but by law 25% of ROSS grants are reserved for resident councils or organizations that partner with resident councils. J-RAB is relatively rare in being a jurisdiction-wide resident council with a long track record of receiving ROSS funding over multiple three-year cycles. When J-RAB first received ROSS funding in 2008, they report that they were one of only four tenant-run organizations that directly received ROSS grants.

Dr. Samuel Little of the National Alliance of Resident Services in Affordable and Assisted Housing (NAR-SAAH) says that winning ROSS grants is difficult but possible for resident councils. One hurdle is making sure the resident council has a contract administrator, which often is the housing authority.

J-RAB also has funding from tenant participation funds available to all public housing properties. When Congress provides sufficient public housing operating subsidies, HUD provides \$25 for every occupied, public housing unit each year to the PHA for tenant participation activities. Of this amount, \$15 for each unit goes to the resident council and the other \$10 can be used by the housing authority to pay for costs related to tenant participation. For the traditional public housing properties, the CMHA has decided to provide \$10



*The San Marco, a CMHA public housing property. Photo credit: Philip Stump Kennedy*

per unit annually to J-RAB and \$15 to the building resident council (if there is one). In this way, CMHA has supported J-RAB by giving the \$10 per unit normally reserved for the housing authority to J-RAB.

J-RAB has also received funding from other sources, such as the Ohio-based organization Finance Fund. Finance Fund gave a pre-planning grant to explore a business incubator run by and for CMHA residents to support residents starting and running their own businesses.



## Community Partnerships

**J-RAB partners with the Legal Aid Society of Greater Cincinnati for help negotiating memorandums of agreement with CMHA.** They have worked with the Greater Cincinnati Homeless Coalition for organizing support, especially when the Homeless Coalition hosted a VISTA volunteer organizer.



## Resident Council Training

**For J-RAB, keeping resident councils active, engaged, and trained is the top priority.** Nashid Shakir, J-RAB's project director, says that having well-organized resident councils is one of the organization's big successes, and that means not being organized "in name only." J-RAB educates resident council presidents and other board members on how to exercise their rights, keep their councils active, and engage CMHA. Shakir says J-RAB encourages resident councils to use Part 964, referring to the section of the federal regulations relating to tenant participation in public housing, "as their bible."





## Looking Towards the Future

### RAD Conversion

**The “Rental Assistance Demonstration” (RAD) program was authorized by Congress to help housing authorities pay for needed repairs in public housing buildings.** The RAD conversion process allows a housing authority to pay for repairs and upgrades with private funding, and requires that if residents need to move for renovations they are able to return to the property. After conversion the property is no longer considered “public housing” and instead receives HUD funding to remain affordable through the Section 8 program.

For any tenants living in public housing, RAD conversion can present an unknown prospect. While the law that allows RAD conversion provides many protections for tenants, they still may worry about temporary relocation, or their ability to return to their housing after rehabilitation. Residents may also be concerned about who will manage the building after conversion. In Cincinnati, the housing authority continues to manage the RAD buildings.

J-RAB is working with CMHA to increase communication about RAD. CMHA understands the importance of communicating about RAD and engages residents both directly and through J-RAB. CMHA understands the unique relationship J-RAB has with residents. “They are elected. They are the people who residents are going to go to get information,” says Marquita Flowers, CMHA’s director of property management. Because of communication both directly from CMHA and through J-RAB, residents are more fully informed about RAD conversion and the impact it will have on them.

As RAD conversions continue, J-RAB is exploring ways to transform, searching for outside funding since a significant portion of their funding is connected to public housing. After RAD conversion, J-RAB will still have a role in representing resident interests and resident councils still receive some funding through tenant participation funds. J-RAB is also looking to represent other Cincinnati-area tenants—like voucher holders and tenants not living in CMHA housing. Ideas mentioned by J-RAB staff and board members have included:

- Business incubation for low-income Cincinnati residents
- Developing new housing projects, apart from CMHA
- Forming Resident Management Corporations



## Resources

**Jurisdiction-Wide Resident Advisory Board (J-RAB):** <http://jrab.org/>

**Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority (CMHA):** <https://cintimha.com/>

**National Alliance of Resident Services in Affordable and Assisted Housing (NAR-SAAH):**  
<https://www.narsaah.today/>

**US Department of Housing and Urban Development.** Notice H-2019-09 PIH-2019- 23 (HA) Rental Assistance Demonstration – Final Implementation, Revision 4. This notice clarifies that residents of RAD, PBRA, have the same rights to operate a resident organization and receive tenant participation funds as residents in public housing (24 CFR Part 245): <https://www.hud.gov/sites/dfiles/PIH/documents/PIH-2019-23.pdf>

## Related Guides:



[\*Guide 4: Partnering and Advocacy with the Housing Authority\*](#)



[\*Guide 7: Resident Training and Self-Sufficiency Programs\*](#)

## Interviewees:

**Nashid Shakir**, J-RAB staff

**IfeTayo Mims**, J-RAB board member

**Willie Mitchell**, resident of Beacon Glen

**Marquita Flowers**, CMHA director of property management