

PRRAC

Poverty & Race Research Action Council

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Protecting our gains and building a base of practice: PRRAC's housing research and advocacy goals in 2017-18

With the recent abrupt shift in federal leadership, and the threat of serious retrenchment on civil rights, PRRAC is also shifting its focus. For the past eight years, we have been operating effectively in the policy “weeds,” helping to move progressive policies at the federal executive branch level and connecting this work with advocates and practitioners in the field. In 2017, we confront a very different reality: leadership at HUD that is unlikely to advance new progressive policies, and the potential for reversal of gains we have won. To be most effective in this new environment, while PRRAC will continue to be a strong watchdog and advocate at HUD and other federal agencies, we will place an increasing emphasis on strategic communications, and we will extend our work at the state and local level, helping to build a base of practice and support for progressive housing policies.

Protecting our gains – the role of advocacy and strategic communications: PRRAC has been an important participant in many of the fair housing policy advances of the past eight years. The Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing rule has brought new accountability to HUD grantees; reforms in our two largest federal housing programs (Section 8 and LIHTC) have begun to open up new opportunities for low income families across the country, policies in expanding HUD programs like the Rental Assistance Demonstration, MTW, and Choice Neighborhoods, have increasingly incorporated civil rights goals and concerns, and federal policy has become increasingly intersectional, linking housing, education, transportation, and environmental planning. Many of these policy advances have been constructed at the federal agency level, and some can be potentially dismantled through regulations and guidance. In the next two years, we will actively monitor any significant policy retrenchment at HUD and related agencies, and with the help of a newly expanded communications capacity at PRRAC, we will publicly call out these changes and explain why they are inconsistent with American values of fairness, inclusion, and democracy. We will also support strategic litigation in response to actions that seek to weaken federal civil rights protections.

Expanding the base of practice and support at the state and local level: Over the next two years, PRRAC will continue to expand its work in the field. We began this work last year as a logical next step in implementing both the AFFH rule and Housing Choice Voucher policy reforms, but today this state and local work has taken on a new urgency. For example, through our Mobility Works technical assistance consortium, we are helping to both seed new housing mobility programs in and improve existing programs in eight key metro areas. This project helps to solidify a base of practice, creates a peer to peer network and strengthens grass roots support for housing mobility. Through our AFFH community engagement work, we are helping community based groups in New Mexico, upstate New York, Mississippi and other states realize the potential of HUD's new fair housing rule to expand housing choices, reinvest in low income communities and address transportation and environmental inequities. We are also continuing our LIHTC advocacy at the state level, helping selected state and local advocates engage effectively with their state housing finance agencies. The positive stories and best practices from all of this state and local base-building work will also be raised up nationally by PRRAC as part of the larger counter-narrative to the new politics of division, racial hierarchy, and deregulation that is rapidly emerging at the national level.