

**TESTIMONY FROM NYCHA'S EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT FOR COMMUNITY  
ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS SIDEYA SHERMAN  
NYCHA MANAGEMENT OF TENANT PARTICIPATION ACTIVITY (TPA) FUNDS  
COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HOUSING  
MONDAY, APRIL 15, 2019 – 10:00 AM  
COMMITTEE ROOM, CITY HALL, NEW YORK, NY**

Chair Alicka Ampry-Samuel, members of the Committee on Public Housing, and other distinguished members of the City Council: good morning. I am Sideya Sherman, Executive Vice President for Community Engagement and Partnerships. Joining me today is David Pristin, Executive Vice President for External Affairs. Thank you for this opportunity to discuss our work to empower residents by helping them access and use tenant participation activity (TPA) funds. You just heard from some of our resident association leaders on their experiences accessing TPA funds, and we appreciate their feedback.

**TPA Funds**

I'd like to first explain how TPA funding is allocated to NYCHA. TPA funds are governed by a federal regulation, 24 CFR 964.150, which stipulates how the funds are disbursed and used. In sum, HUD requires that every public housing authority (PHA) set aside a specific portion of its federal operating subsidy for resident associations (RA); these funds are designated by HUD to be used for eligible tenant participation activities that engage residents in fostering a positive living environment. As part of our operating subsidy, the funds are subject to the same financial controls as the rest of our operating subsidy, meaning that NYCHA must ensure accountability and oversight of their expenditure. These are taxpayer dollars that are intended for the public good.

Some examples of eligible tenant participation activities include RA membership-building activities, information dissemination, resource fairs, development clean-up days, educational classes and workshops, and the purchasing of office supplies. Travel for training, conferences, and seminars may be eligible as well. For example, at Tilden Houses, TPA funds supported a three-day legal conference

for residents hosted by Brooklyn Legal Services – it covered topics such as re-entry following incarceration and clearing one’s record for employment. At Pomonok Houses, TPA funds were used to purchase emergency “go bags” for residents participating in an emergency preparedness workshop sponsored by NYC Emergency Management.

### **Improving the TPA Funding Process**

TPA funding was established in the early 2000s. We reformed NYCHA’s TPA program in 2016 as part of NextGeneration NYCHA, our long-term strategic plan, and continue to make improvements to the process based on feedback from residents. When NYCHA last discussed this topic with the Council in 2017, my colleagues committed to several actions that would improve the TPA funding process for residents. These included several process and transparency improvements, and I’m pleased that we’ve accomplished the following since then:

- We updated the written agreement between NYCHA and resident associations on the use of TPA funds based on comments from resident leaders and the City Council as well as input from the Legal Aid Society. That involved simplifying the agreement’s language.
- We updated the plain language guidebook that accompanies the funding agreement, and this is available online at [on.nyc.gov/TPA-Guide](https://on.nyc.gov/TPA-Guide). To help familiarize the Council with the process and answer your questions, we hosted a webinar and briefed Council Members one-on-one, as requested.
- We introduced a commercial card, which RAs use to make approved purchases up to \$5,000, to streamline the purchasing process. For instance, RAs can buy office supplies at a local store without having to order them through NYCHA’s Procurement Department. The card can also be used for approved travel, making travel arrangements easier and faster, and for recurring bills like phone and internet. RAs can reconcile their

spending through our online system, a process that promotes accountability and oversight. Currently, nearly 80 percent of RAs who are accessing funds are using the commercial card. I'd now like to show you a brief video on our work to promote use of the card.

- We created – and posted online – tip sheets on topics such as travel, budgeting, and accessing funds to help residents make the best use of TPA funds.
- We also posted online quarterly budget reports that list the TPA funds spent and available by development, so that RAs, residents, and the public have full visibility on spending.

### **The TPA Funding Process**

Let me take a moment to give you an overview of the TPA funding process. HUD requires a written agreement between PHAs and RAs on the use of TPA funds. HUD also directs PHAs to provide residents with guidance on their use and the process. As I mentioned, we updated our guidebook to make the process clearer for residents.

To access the funds, RAs submit spending plans on an annual basis. They submit separate proposals to determine eligibility for activities. TPA funds should benefit all residents; RAs should endeavor to include as many people in the activities as possible, as required by HUD's regulations. Again, all of this information is available online, and my office is always happy to answer questions or assist with these processes.

Last year, we processed over 1,500 TPA spending proposals. Our staff provides technical assistance to RAs to make sure expenses are eligible and to help with procurement issues. Each RA can also get support from one of NYCHA's 15 local Resident Engagement Coordinators, in addition to support from the central office

staff who administer the TPA funds. In accordance with HUD regulations on leadership building, we also host monthly cluster meetings to provide RA board members with updates on important and relevant topics – RA leaders select the topics of these meetings, and we host more than 30 per month.

We also provide residents with tools that help them use TPA funds to the maximum benefit of the community. For example, we surveyed seniors to identify their top priorities and have discussed the use of TPA funds to support their civic engagement projects. We will also launch a guide for using the funds on health programs. While our Resident Engagement Coordinators will work with RAs on identifying resources to support their efforts, it is ultimately the RAs that determine how to spend their development's TPA funds.

Going forward, we are working with RAs to achieve 100 percent utilization of the commercial card by this summer. To minimize the administrative burden on RAs and NYCHA, we are improving our system for processing stipend payments, eliminating certain requirements for RAs to submit proposals for most small purchases (such as refreshments and office supplies), and consulting with HUD on other ways to streamline the process while still satisfying the regulatory requirements of the program. This means faster access of TPA funds for residents.

## **Engaging and Supporting Residents**

Facilitating the TPA funding process is just one way that we engage and support residents at NYCHA. Guided by our long-term strategic plan, the Community Engagement and Partnerships department works tirelessly to empower residents and resident leadership.

In partnership with NYC Service and Capital One, our 13 Youth Leadership Councils are giving youth a voice, and a role, in tackling their community's most pressing issues. Nearly 100 Senior Champion volunteers work with NYCHA and

community members to engage their fellow seniors on health, safety, and educational projects. Thanks to support from the City Council and CUNY, our Resident Leadership Academy is helping established and aspiring resident leaders take a more active civic role in their community, including at their resident associations, through training and the cultivation of leadership skills – while earning college credits.

These are just a few examples – our team supports a host of other initiatives across the Authority that help create safe, clean, and connected communities, from services for seniors to entrepreneurship programs.

## **Conclusion**

TPA funds provide financial support to engage residents, bolstering NYCHA’s work to foster civically engaged New Yorkers. TPA funds can be a powerful tool to improve resident quality of life. They’re most effective when all residents are at the table and engaged. In our work with resident associations across the city, we’ve seen their impact, and there’s potential for even more. We welcome the Council’s feedback and partnership in working with the community so that more residents can help make a difference through the use of TPA funds.

Thank you. We are happy to answer any questions you may have.