



UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

CIVIL DIVISION



FEB 29 1972

Dear Mr. Jackson:

During our survey of Community Planning and Management programs of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) we noted certain matters relating to the administration of the Urban Studies Fellowship Program, established under Title VIII of the HUD Act of 1964, as amended, which we believe warrant your attention. These matters concern the need for HUD to (1) establish specific applicant evaluation criteria for selecting fellows and (2) evaluate the results attained under the program in light of the statutory objective of the program. This objective, as you know, is to provide fellowships for the graduate training of professional city planning and urban and housing technicians and specialists. 23

Our review was performed at the HUD central office. Our views and conclusions are based primarily on the applicant selection procedures followed by HUD for the 1971-72 school year. We discussed these selection procedures with HUD program officials, the former director of the program, and with HUD staff members who reviewed and evaluated applications. In addition, we reviewed data that was included in the applications of fellows who were selected by HUD for participation in the program during the 1971-72 school year.

HUD SELECTION OF FELLOWS

HUD received about 800 applications for financial assistance under this program for the 1971-72 school year. HUD officials said that because of the limited time that was available for the Urban Studies Fellowship Advisory Board to review all applications, the Board members asked that HUD select from this number about 225 applications for submission to the Board for its final review and approval. HUD designated about 15 of its employees (generally from the staff of the former Office of Small Towns Services and Intergovernmental Relations) to make the preliminary selection of about 225 applicants. Each application-- reviewed by at least two employees--was submitted to the Board for its consideration only if the employees agreed that the application warranted such further review.

The former program director told us that several factors were considered by the HUD employees (evaluators) in their review of the applications. These factors included such matters as the applicant's

715354 /

092422

commitment to urban public service; the applicant's reasons for desiring to work in the public service area; character references submitted by the applicant from such sources as his employer or supervisor, his advisor or professor, and his sponsor; grade point indices; Graduate Record Examination scores; and whether the applicant was a member of a minority group.

We discussed HUD applicant selection procedures with two program officials who had evaluated numerous applications. We noted that formal instructions or guidelines were not given by HUD to the evaluators to assist them in reviewing applications and we found that the evaluators differed in their views as to which of the above stated factors should receive the greatest amount of consideration in reviewing and approving applications for submission to the Board. For example, one evaluator said that he gave a great deal of consideration to the applicant's character references and added that in his view the program was not to be directed to students with the best academic qualifications. The other evaluator told us that she emphasized the grade point indices of the applicants in making a decision as to whether the application should be submitted to the Board for its review and approval. In summarizing their views on HUD's evaluation and selection procedures both evaluators said that, in their opinion, the selection of applicants was an extremely subjective process.

We recognize the difficulty of selecting--in light of the basic objective of the program--the most suitable applicants for participation in the program. We believe, however, that the inherent subjectiveness associated in such selection can, to a significant degree, be reduced by the development and proper implementation of certain applicant evaluation criteria.

In this regard, pertinent legislation for this program states that the applicant's "ability" is to be sole basis for selecting applicants. Accordingly, we believe that the applicant's past academic achievements--measured by factors such as overall grade point indices in major fields of study, and graduate school test scores--should be given prime consideration in the development of appropriate selection criteria.

We noted that in November 1971, you requested an opinion from HUD's General Counsel on whether non-academic factors can be considered in selecting applicants for this program. On November 18, 1971, the General Counsel stated that the statutory provision requiring selection of applicants on the basis of their "ability" would be met only if HUD first determines that the applicant is eligible to receive a fellowship grant because he possesses a "high ability" for undertaking graduate level studies. After this determination is made, the General Counsel added that the selection of applicants could include non-academic criteria that are reasonably related to the applicant's qualifications.

It is our understanding that the current procedures followed by HUD--making preliminary application selections for the Board--will be continued in the future years of this program. Therefore, to help ensure that applicants are--to the extent possible--evaluated on a uniform and objective basis, HUD should, in our opinion, develop suitable application evaluation criteria and develop guidelines for the use of those employees making applicant evaluations.

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that--in line with the basic objective set forth in the legislation for this program--appropriate applicant evaluation criteria should be developed that is, to the maximum extent possible, based on factors which are generally accepted as measures or indicators of the applicant's ability.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

We noted that HUD has not performed an evaluation of this program to

--ascertain whether the desired objectives are satisfactorily being accomplished and

--determine if certain revisions in the administration of the program, such as changes in the applicant selection procedures are necessary.

As previously mentioned, this program was established in 1964 and since its inception HUD has awarded about \$2.5 million in fellowship grants to about 400 applicants.

HUD, we noted also, has not established procedures to determine whether fellows who were financially assisted under this program were employed and continued to remain employed in the public service program areas. A HUD official told us that their follow-up procedures, in this regard, consisted essentially of sending a questionnaire to each fellow about the time he was to be graduated. According to this official, under this procedure, only general information was requested, such as the name of the fellow's prospective employer, his job title and a description of his future duties and responsibilities. This official said that additional follow-up on the applicant's employment activities was not performed because of the limited number of staff members assigned by HUD to administer this program.

RECOMMENDATION

In view of the length of time that this program has already been in existence and considering the possibility that this program may

continue for some time in the future, we recommend that you perform a current evaluation of the program. As part of this evaluation effort, we suggest that data be obtained on (1) whether the fellows entered the public service area of employment after completing graduate studies, (2) the length of time that the fellows remained in this area of employment, and (3) the fellows' current duties, responsibilities and positions.

This information, in our view, would assist you in determining whether the program has been accomplishing HUD's basic objective of increasing the number of professional workers in the urban areas of employment and would also be of value to you in making improvements in the future administration of this program.

- - - -

We would appreciate your views and comments on any action taken or planned with respect to the above matters. We shall be pleased to discuss with you or members of your staff the matters discussed in this report.

A copy of this report is being sent to the Inspector General, Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Sincerely yours,

B. E. Birkle

B. E. Birkle
Assistant Director

The Honorable Samuel C. Jackson
Assistant Secretary for Community
Planning and Management
Department of Housing and Urban
Development

00121