

EVENT REPORT

NATIONAL FSS CONFERENCE 2020

Harnessing the Power of FSS through People, Programs, and Policy

October 20-22, 2020

COMPASS
WORKING CAPITAL



For the past five years, Compass Working Capital has been honored to gather together a community of Family Self-Sufficiency program practitioners and other stakeholders each fall for our National FSS Conference. It was with some uncertainty that we entered into this year's Conference, which we were forced to hold virtually in light of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. We weren't sure if the same spirit of camaraderie and common purpose that we love about this event would permeate in a digital environment.

Thankfully, our uncertainty was wholly misplaced. While a virtual event was no doubt different than our typical in-person Conference, it also opened new avenues for the knowledge sharing and community building that are a hallmark of this annual event. In fact, this was our largest Conference yet, by leaps and bounds, with over 450 people attending from 39 states and 205 organizations.

The number of people and the diversity of perspectives and experiences that this Conference brought forth were a testament to what makes the FSS program such a unique opportunity – the fact that in every community, large and small, urban, rural, and in between, across this country, this opportunity for families with low incomes to build savings and work toward their financial goals can be brought to bear.

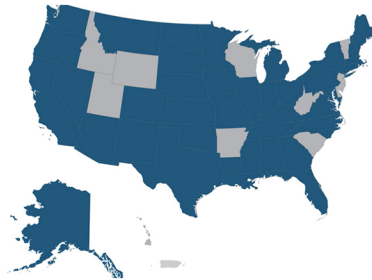
This past October marked an important milestone for Compass and our journey with the FSS program. Ten years ago, we enrolled our first client in our first FSS partnership, in Lynn, Massachusetts. The opportunity we have now, to convene this national community and reach more families in FSS than ever before, is thanks to these first families and to the public housing authorities and multifamily owners that we are fortunate to call our partners today.

We hope that these three days gave you an opportunity to continue to build your skills to “harness the power of FSS.” But just as much, we hope this was a time for you to find strength and inspiration in being part of a national community of people who share in the commitment you bring to the families you serve every day.

With gratitude,

Sherry Riva
Compass Founder and CEO

BY THE NUMBERS



2019

160+ Attendees

18 States

50+ Organizations

vs.

3X more Attendees

Double the States Represented

4X more Organizations Represented

2020

462 Attendees

39 States

205 Organizations

44 SPEAKERS AND FACILITATORS

WHAT ATTENDEES ARE SAYING



"I believe the most valuable takeaway from the event was the "why" of why FSS is implemented. From service providers giving their "why" to client testimonials of why coordinators should be in FSS."



"It was wonderful to be able to attend because it was a virtual platform. If it had not been, I would not have been able to afford to attend in person."



"The speakers & presenters brought great depth to the idea of using FSS as a platform for building equity. They were able to articulate the imperative to be flexible in viewing the [regulations] at this time as a way to expand access to the program."



"I enjoyed the session with HUD but it was extremely inspiring and motivating to hear the stories - it reminds you just how important this work is, and the impact it has on the participants served by the program."

STATISTICS FROM THE CONFERENCE FEEDBACK SURVEY:

95%

agree that the knowledge and/or skills learned at this conference will be useful in their job

96%

agree that the conference was focused meaningfully on topics related to diversity, equity, and inclusion

90%

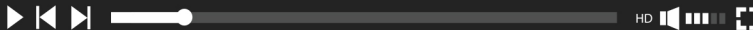
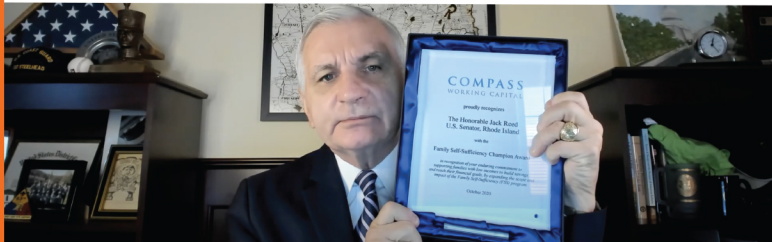
agree that they feel more connected to the FSS policy work happening at the federal level

77%

agree that they connected with, learned from, and/or cultivated relationships with fellow practitioner's work

ADVANCING FSS IN CONGRESS AND AT HUD

This is an important moment in the evolution of the FSS program – a once-in-a-generation opportunity as HUD develops new regulations for the program following the passage of the FSS Act in 2018. At the same time, we continue to see renewed interest from Congress in expanding access to this program, with both the House and Senate having taken steps this year to increase funding for FSS. We were honored to be able to honor one of the FSS Program's most tireless supporters in Congress: Senator Jack Reed of Rhode Island, whom we presented with the first ever FSS Champion Award during this year's Conference.



UPDATE FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING & URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Compass thanks the Department of Housing & Urban Development for the participation of Anice Chenault, FSS Program Manager & Carissa Janis, Program Analyst and Multifamily FSS Lead. A special thank you to Carissa Janis, who will be retiring this year. We are incredibly grateful for her contributions in the multifamily space and dedicated years of service. Compass wishes her well in her next endeavors!

Conference attendees were excited to hear from Anice Chenault, FSS Program Manager at HUD on what to expect in the coming year for FSS on the national level. Anice's presentation came in the wake of the proposed FSS regulations that were open for public comment through November 20th. She encouraged the audience to take advantage of the time to make comments and homed in on the fact that no suggested provision change is too small or too big. The public comment period helps to shape the structure and implementation of the FSS program and on-the-ground perspectives that bring creative and expansive ideas are welcomed and needed. The final rule is expected to be published in the Federal Register by late spring.

PRESENTATION HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE:

In FY21 HUD will begin to monitor 20% of funded PHA programs for each field office each year (i.e., every FSS program will be monitored once every five years)

Action plans will need to be updated based on the final rule

Additional technical assistance is forthcoming

POSITIVE HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE PROPOSED RULE:

Any adult in the household can complete the CoP and head of the FSS family may transfer or assign the CoP to another adult member of the household

Revision of the welfare independence policy from 12 months prior to graduation to at the time of graduation

Allow use of non-HUD CoP Forms

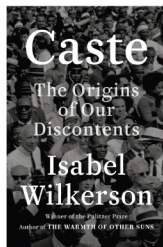
Prohibition of mandatory goals by PHA or owner

KEYNOTE PRESENTATION



ISABEL WILKERSON

It was a privilege beyond measure to welcome Isabel Wilkerson as the keynote speaker for this year's Conference. Isabel Wilkerson, winner of the Pulitzer Prize and the National Humanities Medal, is the author of critically acclaimed, *New York Times* bestsellers *The Warmth of Other Suns* and *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*. "Wilkerson's work," in the words of *The American Prospect* magazine, "is the missing puzzle piece of our country's history." *The Warmth of Other Suns* won the National Book Critics Circle Award, among other honors, and was named to more than 30 Best of the Year lists, including *The New York Times'* 10 Best Books of the Year, Amazon's 5 Best Books of the Year, and Best of the Year lists in *The New Yorker*, the *Los Angeles Times* and *The Washington Post*. Ms. Wilkerson's remarks in her keynote address focused on her new work, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*, which was published in August 2020 to critical acclaim, with Dwight Garner of *The New York Times* calling it, "An instant American classic" and Oprah choosing it for her monthly book club pick. As a leading figure in narrative nonfiction, Ms. Wilkerson's impassioned remarks and thoughtful responses to our questions provided a powerful link between the events of our past, and the current state of our country and era of upheaval that we all – and the families we serve – are living through. Compass wishes to recognize and thank BlackRock, our presenting sponsor for this keynote address, for whose continued support and partnership we are so grateful, as we pursue our vision to make wealth building the norm and not the exception in our nation's anti-poverty work. ■ ■ ■



This keynote presentation was made possible with support from

BlackRock

PLENARY & BREAKOUT SESSIONS

This year's virtual conference spanned three days and packed in 18 sessions including time for networking and office hours with HUD. Presenters discussed topics not only on the principles of FSS, but also about innovations in the multifamily space, how to take a trauma-informed approach to our work, confronting health and wealth inequities, and how to capture and uplift client voices. We heard from a variety of organizations including leaders from Abt Associates, WinnCompanies, Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership, Housing Partnership Network, and Credit Builders Alliance. We also heard from practitioners and participants from a variety of FSS programs, including Clarifi (PA), Boston Housing Authority (MA), Cambridge Housing Authority (MA), and Philadelphia Housing Authority (PA).



HEALTH AND WEALTH:

"Medicine is taught to focus on disease – whatever is sitting in front of you. But you have to engage the lowest hanging fruit, which is the patient, to understand whatever is driving these perpetual cycles of unstable health, poor health outcomes, repeated ER visits and admissions...when you do that, you understand that at the core is economic mobility or the lack thereof and opportunities to build wealth. People don't have stable safety nets, or safety nets at all."

- **Dr. Thea James, Associate Chief Medical Officer and Vice President of Mission, Boston Medical Center**

"It will take intentionality to not only expand FSS, but to continue to look for ways to improve FSS...intentionally thinking about the ways racism and discrimination show up so that we can actively work against it and reverse the injustices of zip codes dictating health outcomes."

- **Peggy Bailey, Vice President for Housing Policy, Center on Budget & Policy Priorities**



PLENARY & BREAKOUT SESSIONS



HELPING RESIDENTS THRIVE IN FSS

"We were in the field in June/July, so we were talking with people who had COVID-19 or who had been exposed. [In the interviews] we saw some cases where the mindset shifts had resulted in some level of reduced anxiety. They felt more comforted in using some of the skills learned in budgeting or cutting costs to manage the financial struggles they found themselves in."

- **Hannah Thomas, Senior Associate, Abt Associates**



STRENGTHENING OUR CAPABILITIES TO DELIVER SERVICES REMOTELY

"Using the tool was super awesome! I feel very fortunate to be a part of RSP Prototype 3's testing. It was so directed and streamlined that there was no opportunity to get lost. I loved the short videos that could give you more information about a particular portion of the program. As a person that joined FSS without any previous experience, I felt it was awesome. I really appreciated the time saving component that the remote option gives to a client. I think it's going to do a lot to boost enrollment."

- **Dawn Duncan, Compass/Boston Housing Authority FSS Participant**



MONEY VALUES

"It's all about treating others how they want to be treated. We all have unique needs, we're all our own individuals. So, it is important to take a step back and say, 'this is what works for me, but it might not work for someone else.'"

- **Tania Shabazz, Financial Services Manager, Compass Working Capital**



Ana Estrella



Joselyn Yrayta-Martinez

THANK YOU

The National FSS Conference 2020
was made possible thanks to the support of



Compass wishes to recognize its local housing partners as well as the organizations that presented at this year's conference.

*Boston Housing Authority**^*

*Abt Associates**

*The Aspen Institute**

*Baltimore Regional Housing Partnership**^*

*Boston Medical Center**

*Brandeis University**

*The Caleb Group**^*

*Cambridge Housing Authority**^*

*Center on Budget & Policy Priorities**

*Clarifi**

Codman Square Neighborhood Development^

*Credit Builders Alliance**

Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corporation^

*Housing Partnership Network**

Lena Park Community Development Corporation^

MA Department of Housing and Community Development^

Madison Park Development Corporation^

*Metro Housing | Boston**^*

*National Housing Trust**^*

*Philadelphia Housing Authority**^*

*Preservation of Affordable Housing**^*

**Conference Speaker*

^Compass Working Capital Housing Partner

WHAT'S NEXT

THE CONVERSATION DOESN'T END HERE

What makes a virtual conference special is the conversation between its attendees. Continue connecting with each other on FSS Link, an online community of over 1600 FSS practitioners from across the country. Ask a question on the discussion board or private message another member directly.

RE-WATCH, LEARN, AND IMPLEMENT

Unable to attend all the plenary or breakout sessions? You can review the presentations and materials shared at the conference on the conference platform: fssconference.pathable.co.

BECOME A PREMIUM FSS LINK MEMBER

Premium members get all of the perks! **Click here to sign up** for a Pro or All Access FSS Link membership by February 28th and receive \$250 off of your annual subscription. All Premium FSS Link members will receive free passes to our next conference. **Use the coupon code SAVE250 at checkout.**

STAY TUNED!

As we continue our work into unprecedented uncertainty, we are thinking of ways to bring this community together. Please stay tuned to FSS Link for updates and more information.