



# Creating a Resident-Led Community Development Corporation

A MAKING CONNECTIONS PEER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE MATCH BETWEEN  
SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS, AND NEWARK, NEW JERSEY  
PEER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE LEADS TO ACTION

*Part of a Series from the  
Technical Assistance Resource  
Center of the Annie E. Casey  
Foundation and the Center  
for the Study of Social Policy*

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*The Center for the Study of Social Policy, based in Washington, D.C., was established in 1979 with the goal of providing public policy analysis and technical assistance to states and localities. The Center's work is concentrated in the areas of family and children's services, income supports, neighborhood-based services, education reform, family support, community decision-making, and human resource innovations. The Center manages peer technical assistance as part of the Foundation's Technical Assistance Resource Center (TARC).*

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## BACKGROUND

Through the *Making Connections* initiative, the Annie E. Casey Foundation is working with San Diego, Boston, and 20 other communities across the country to strengthen neighborhoods and support families. One of the principal aims of *Making Connections* is to link neighborhood residents to the economic opportunities, social networks, and effective services that will improve the lives and well-being of children and their families.

As part of this initiative, the Foundation offers the participating communities access to technical assistance that will help them achieve their goals for strengthening families in a neighborhood context. Peer technical assistance, which allows the sites to capitalize on the practical knowledge that emerges from innovators in other places, is a particularly valuable resource these communities can use to address issues and solve problems they have identified in their own neighborhoods.

From August 3–6, 2001, colleagues from San Diego, California, Boston, Massachusetts, and Newark, New Jersey, came together in a peer match to exchange ideas about creating resident-led community development corporations (CDCs). This report summarizes the results of that meeting. For more information about *Making Connections* and peer matches, see page 33.

## SETTING THE CONTEXT FOR THE MATCH

Launched in October 2000, the Bronze Triangle Community Development Corporation promotes family-supportive neighborhood development and economic growth in San Diego's Logan Heights, Grant Hill, and Stockton neighborhoods. Motivated by its commitment to promoting resident leadership both within and outside of the organization, Bronze Triangle assembled a team to participate in a peer match with four East Coast-based organizations that are well-versed in organizing around a range of neighborhood development issues: Lawrence CommunityWorks, Inc.; New

Motivated by its commitment to promoting resident leadership both within and outside of the organization, Bronze Triangle assembled a team to participate in a peer match with four East Coast-based organizations that are well-versed in organizing around a range of neighborhood development issues.

Community Corporation; Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative; and the Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations. Over the course of four days, representatives of the Bronze Triangle CDC met with staff, community partners, and residents affiliated with each of the host agencies to share lessons and experiences in the following areas:

- Developing an expanded, multipurpose CDC that includes capacity building and training, organizing, economic development, and workforce investment strategies to support livable wages;
- Exposing residents to community planning and action processes that are built upon resident voices, resident leadership, and resident action;
- Defining the planning, convening, and coordination role that residents will play in developing and sustaining the CDC;
- Building relationships with other entities in the community to create a comprehensive array of supports; and
- Encouraging a diverse group of residents, business leaders, politicians, government officials, and community-based organizations to take an active role in supporting the development of a resident-led, innovative CDC.

In addition to thinking through issues of strategic planning and program development, the Bronze Triangle team members also sought guidance regarding the design of an upcoming community forum they agreed to cosponsor in September 2001. Entitled “What Is Community?” the forum was structured to bring together residents and other stakeholders from the 11 San Diego neighborhoods participating in the *Making Connections* initiative to address housing issues in their communities as well as identify ways to strengthen and support their neighborhoods, children, and families.

## Bronze Triangle Community Development Corporation

The Bronze Triangle CDC seeks to create a self-reliant, self-sustaining community by giving people the tools necessary to transform their lives. Thus, community organizing and the engagement of residents as leaders in neighborhood planning serve as the core strategies for revitalizing neighborhoods, developing new housing stock, building and attracting stronger economic anchors, stimulating new business development, and generally improving the quality of life for residents.

The origins of the organization can be traced to the vision of its founder, Gale Walker, a local resident and owner of Children of the Rainbow—a nationally renowned child care facility that provides quality care and services for nearly 200 local children. It was through the relationships she formed with parents and her employees that Ms. Walker first began to hear the mounting concerns about the diminishing availability of affordable housing, living wages, quality education, and accessible health care. Guided by her strong vision for a healthier and more vibrant community, she completed an economic development course at San Diego State University, conducted a series of neighborhood focus groups, and partnered with other residents and grassroots organizations to establish the Bronze Triangle CDC.

A key priority for the new CDC is working to ensure that the city's plans for downtown redevelopment and the construction of a new major league baseball ballpark do not pave the way for gentrification or the further displacement of low-income people living in the Bronze Triangle neighborhoods. In addition to housing concerns, local challenges include a median household income for residents that is well below the city average, schools that are struggling to meet state achievement standards, and the absence of a hospital facility that is easily accessible to the community.

Yet, there are also significant local assets and strengths that can provide a platform for building a vibrant, healthy neighborhood. Bronze Triangle residents are known for their strong sense of community, youthful enthusiasm and energy, cultural diversity, and notable work ethic—all of which are attributes integral to establishing

supportive networks designed to empower people rather than perpetuate their dependence.

Seeking to capitalize on the community's assets, the Bronze Triangle team wanted to learn from organizations that had successfully transformed neighborhoods side-by-side with residents—not “doing for the community,” but supporting residents as they worked to bring about change.

## Lawrence CommunityWorks, Inc.

Lawrence CommunityWorks, Inc. (LCW), formerly the Lawrence Planning and Neighborhood Development Corporation, is dedicated to the sustained revitalization of the city of Lawrence, Massachusetts. LCW had its beginnings in the struggle to build affordable housing in North Lawrence in the early 1980s. Twenty years later, its mission remains rooted in a commitment to fostering individual and neighborhood leadership; producing and preserving safe, decent, and affordable housing for low- and moderate-income families; and creating programs and facilities that help meet the educational, recreational, and economic needs of the community's young people, adults, and families.

LCW views community organizing as the engine that drives its efforts to advance political, social, and economic development in Lawrence. This work includes promoting resident-driven neighborhood planning, building and supporting grassroots organizations, and organizing around issues that affect the community. Since 1999, LCW has helped develop the North Common Neighborhood Association (NCNA) into a strong, self-run community organization that is now one of its most important partners and has successfully built an active membership of 150 residents within its own organization.

All of LCW's current and planned housing development work is done in conjunction with its *Reviviendo!* (the Spanish word for rebirth and renewal) campaign in Lawrence's North Common section. As part of the campaign, the organization

started a comprehensive community initiative to target vacant land and abandoned properties in the neighborhood for redevelopment into affordable, resident-owned homes and rental units. In addition, LCW has initiated a variety of community-based learning programs designed to spur asset development and job creation.

## New Community Corporation

The New Community Corporation (NCC) is the largest community development corporation in the United States, as well as New Jersey's largest nonprofit housing corporation. NCC's origins can be traced to the riots that took place in Newark—and many other urban areas throughout the U.S.—during the summer of 1967. These conflicts laid bare all the pressing needs and inequalities of life in many of Newark's neighborhoods. At the time, there were few homes, few jobs, and little hope. Even though Great Society programs were providing the city with a substantial amount of money for day care, health care, low-income housing, and job training, most of these efforts were ineffective and inadequate.

In 1968, with neither money nor political influence, Monsignor William J. Linder, along with a group of residents from Newark's Central Ward, founded NCC *“to improve the quality of life of the people of Newark to reflect individual God-given dignity and personal achievement.”* Since its creation, the grassroots organization has been a major contributor to the revitalization and increased economic stability of Newark and has become involved in similar efforts in other urban communities. NCC seeks to fulfill its mission by providing: dignified and affordable housing; a safe, secure neighborhood; creative education programs; quality health care; social services; community arts; and neighborhood economic opportunities.

In addition to sponsoring numerous programs and services, NCC also owns several for-profit businesses that provide important resources for local residents (food shopping, restaurants, postal services, etc.). These businesses also offer job training and employment opportunities for residents and generate revenue that is used to support other in-house projects.

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## Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative

The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI) is a nonprofit, community-based planning and organizing entity located in the Roxbury/North Dorchester area of Boston. By the early 1980s, the Dudley neighborhood had been devastated by arson, disinvestments, neglect, and discriminatory redlining practices. In 1984, residents came together out of fear and anger to address these issues and protect the neighborhood from outside speculators. Their determined and unified activism ultimately led to the creation of DSNI, an organization designed *“to empower Dudley residents to organize, plan for, create, and control a vibrant, diverse, and high quality neighborhood in collaboration with community partners.”*

DSNI’s approach to neighborhood revitalization is comprehensive, taking into account physical, environmental, economic, and human conditions. One of DSNI’s major accomplishments has been organizing and empowering the residents of the Dudley Street neighborhood to continually refine and achieve a shared vision that emerged from a community-wide planning process conducted in 1987. By creating strategic partnerships with individuals and organizations in the private, government, and nonprofit sectors, the organization has grown into a collaborative effort of over 3,000 residents and other local stakeholders who are committed to furthering the goal of community revitalization.

## Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations

The Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations (MACDC) is a trade association of over 65 nonprofit, community-based organizations that seek to revitalize low- and moderate-income communities across the state. As a member organization, it supports community development corporations in their efforts to encourage social change and empower low-income and working-class people through activities such as affordable housing development and rehabilitation, commercial real estate development, employment training, small business development, and community organizing.

Since its incorporation in 1982, MACDC has engaged in a range of activities that strengthen the ability of member CDCs to carry out their respective missions. Organizational priorities include: advocating for support in the public policy arena and from private institutions, running programs that build CDC capacity, and educating the public about the community development movement.

In an effort to incorporate community organizing into the core mission of CDCs throughout Massachusetts, MACDC established the Ricanne Hadrian Initiative for Community Organizing (RHICO) in partnership with the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) of Boston. Named for the late Ricanne Hadrian, an organizer and MACDC deputy director who spearheaded the creation of this program, RHICO provides funding, technical assistance, training, and peer-to-peer support to Massachusetts CDCs, helping them to improve their community-organizing practices and raise community-organizing standards in the field. In the four years since RHICO was implemented, over \$1 million in multiyear grants have been awarded to 13 participating CDCs.

## THE CONSULTATION

A Bronze Triangle team comprised of CDC staff and board members, organizers, residents, consultants, and a representative of San Diego's Enterprise Community Program traveled to Massachusetts and New Jersey on August 3–6, 2001, to take part in the peer match. The team met with staff, community partners, and residents affiliated with each of the four host organizations. During the match, participants toured and learned about several housing and business development projects, direct-service programs, and neighborhood institutions. In addition, they took part in fruitful discussions regarding several key issues, including:

- Community planning and visioning processes (agenda building, the use of data, and formulating goals);
- Developing and implementing community and economic development strategies;

- Financing neighborhood revitalization initiatives;
- Power dynamics (understanding a community’s social and political landscape and leveraging power);
- Staffing and training supports;
- Managing organizational growth; and
- The key elements of effective community-organizing and resident leadership strategies.

## Organizational Structure and Operation

Each of the host organizations shared insights regarding the common challenges associated with constituency building and translating the hopes, dreams, and concerns of various stakeholders into a shared, clearly articulated community vision.

### Guiding Principles

The success of a revitalization initiative is dependent upon the ability of its supporters to build power via the creation of a solid constituency and a compelling vision. In reality, community development is about creating the environmental conditions and tools needed to transform something the world has no interest in transforming.

*To bring about lasting change, revitalization strategies must be comprehensive in scope.* For example, NCC was initially formed to address pressing housing needs and provide day care for the children of women who were seeking jobs. Yet it soon became apparent that building decent, affordable homes and providing quality child care were not sufficient to halt the pervasive cycle of urban poverty and decay. Recognizing the need for a stronger neighborhood infrastructure to support and sustain improvements, NCC gradually enlarged its focus to include economic development, job training, social services, and education.

The success of a revitalization initiative is dependent upon the ability of its supporters to build power via the creation of a solid constituency and a compelling vision.

*Although overarching strategies should be broadly structured, it is often wise for new CDCs to limit their initial set of activities.* Typically, constituencies and funders pressure organizations to take on the biggest issues first. However, it is important to establish a track record of success and work out the inevitable mistakes before doing so. Smaller-scale projects (e.g., murals, façade improvements, a few small homes) offer CDCs an opportunity to accomplish something that is both manageable and important as they prepare for bigger challenges.

*CDCs that have established quality-of-life issues as a top organizational priority often pursue risky strategies in order to meet pressing community needs.* As an example, LCW purchased one-third of a vacant property it sought to rehab without the prior guarantee of obtaining the remaining two-thirds. With the community's support and a proven track record, LCW is confident that the transaction will eventually be completed.

### **The Importance of Data**

*Documenting factors that are contributing to a neighborhood's decline is a critical aspect of the planning process.* As a helpful starting point, most communities and local agencies have existing scans that provide detailed data related to residents' assets and needs.

*Given that the accumulation of assets is essential to neighborhood and family vitality, the asset development lens is an important vantage point for assessing neighborhood needs and trends.* Research regarding home rental and ownership rates, how families cope with financial emergencies, wage and cost-of-living disparities, the financing of higher education, and borrowing practices can tell a powerful story. Questions such as "Would a person who grows up in the community be able to buy a home in the same community if they chose to do so?" also highlight key issues.

*Seeking data and input from commercial entities and businesses about their needs will bring added attention to local economic development issues* (e.g., city services, business development, and technical assistance for start-ups).

*Much benefit can be derived from collecting information about the specific needs of young people—especially since many communities are heavily populated by youth who often have*

*the least access to services.* More importantly, young people are going to be the anchors for communities ten years down the road and should be viewed as potential and future leaders for neighborhood improvement efforts.

### **Formulating Goals**

*CDCs should take care not to make the mistake of identifying tactics such as “promoting resident leadership” as the end goals they are working to achieve.* Ultimately, organizations have to name the specific changes they want to help bring about as a result of their efforts.

*Although CDCs should think comprehensively about neighborhood challenges and the changes that need to occur, it is just as important that they think strategically about what they can contribute to such a process—especially since no one organization can do it all.* Goals and objectives should be viewed as “tributaries” that contribute to a broader vision and will evolve over time.

*The effective use of neighborhood planning, issue research, and power analysis improves the likelihood of formulating realistic goals. For example:*

- Before launching a neighborhood revitalization agenda, LCW hired a consultant team to conduct a three-month feasibility study and develop recommendations. In addition, Project *Reviviendo!* was initiated as a result of an 18-month community-organizing and assessment effort that involved over 150 residents and local stakeholders.
- In the aftermath of the Newark riots, Monsignor Linder and other local residents brought together approximately 60 families for monthly discussions at Queen of Angels Church. Over the course of two years, participants spent time examining why the riots had happened and what they could do to prevent them from ever happening again. With funding from the state’s Department of Community Affairs, they also visited three other cities to learn more about effective neighborhood improvement strategies. Out of the sharing and relationship building that took place during those meetings and trips, NCC was born.

- The Consensus Organizing Institute has been working with San Diego residents to conduct a survey designed to assess the conditions, needs, assets, and strengths of the city’s neighborhoods as well as demographic information pertaining to income, family structure, and homeownership.

*When developing an organizational workplan, each component and action should directly correlate with the desired goals and changes that have been articulated.* Principles of resident leadership, empowerment, and family well-being should also be woven throughout each part.

## Community and Economic Development Strategies

The multifaceted community and economic development strategies utilized by Lawrence CommunityWorks, Inc., New Community Corporation, and Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative are highlighted separately in synopses inserted throughout this summary. Outlined below are overarching themes and lessons that emerged from discussions regarding the development, implementation, and sustainability of such strategies.

Beyond organizing and physical redevelopment, growth in tangible financial assets among families is key to neighborhood renewal.

### **Organizational Capacity**

*Start-up CDCs often do not pay sufficient attention to issues of sustainability because of the pressure they feel to make a big splash in a neighborhood as quickly as possible.* As an example, LCW is just now coming to a place—two years into its efforts—where it can begin to think long term about building internal capacity, strategic planning, etc.

*The challenge and political strain associated with monitoring their own work makes it difficult for many CDCs to lead planning processes while also serving as a developer.* Although some have done it successfully, organizations should consider hiring an outside entity to manage their properties in order to reduce this inherent tension.

*Beyond organizing and physical redevelopment, growth in tangible financial assets among families is key to neighborhood renewal.* However, CDCs should first assess internal capacity before trying to meet multiple community needs.

## NEW COMMUNITY corporation

As the largest CDC in the United States, NCC's economic activity has reached \$200 million annually and its real estate replacement value exceeds \$500 million. It sponsors a wide array of projects designed to maintain and expand low-income, inner-city residents' access to capital and quality housing, including the following:

**COMMUNITY INVESTMENT**

The *NCC Credit Union* provides user-friendly consumer banking services. The *New Community Development Loan Corporation (NCDLC)* makes capital available for growing businesses and start-up ventures (e.g., laundromats, CPAs, a newly formed minority law firm, auto detailing, and child care providers). It also provides technical advice to help entrepreneurs and business owners develop sound business plans.

The *New Jersey Housing Opportunity Fund II* provides equity investment for the construction of affordable housing units.

**WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

*NCC Technologies* produces and markets supplies for affordable housing developers throughout Northern New Jersey's urban areas. Housed in a 40,000-square-foot factory, NCC Tech will create over 200 jobs once it is fully operational. Employees learn construction skills that will eventually enable them to compete for higher-paying jobs in the private sector.

The *One-Stop Workforce Development Center* is a new, state-of-the-art facility that will serve over 2,000 people annually through welfare-to-work and training programs.

The *Center for Employment Training* offers 13 different skill-building programs. It also provides basic skills remediation and General Equivalency Diploma (GED) preparation for students who have not completed high school.

The *NCC Youth Automotive Training Center (YATC)* trains low-income, at-risk youth to become skilled automotive technicians. Industry experts estimate that there will be 60,000 jobs available nationwide for advanced auto technicians, and YATC graduates are guaranteed a job at the completion of training.

## **BUSINESS VENTURES**

The *New Community Pathmark* supermarket opened in 1990 and draws an average of 50,000 customers per week. The shopping center was the first neighborhood grocery store opened in the community since the riots of 1967, bringing needed jobs and services to the area.

- NCC also operates the popular *Priory Restaurant* out of its headquarters, which was once an abandoned church.
- NCC will be launching a for-profit vehicle repair business that will service the organization's own 100+ fleet, as well as fleets from other large local institutions. In addition to vehicle repair, NCC will secure contracts to retrofit other vehicles (ambulettes and trucks) with new equipment.
- NCC is also exploring franchise opportunities in the automotive industry varying from Jiffy Lubes to tire franchises to specialized parts.

## **HOUSING**

Father Linder and the NCC Board of Trustees developed a 20-year plan for the Central Ward that includes a model for 45 acres of housing, commercial, and education facilities. Within this model, a resident advisory committee was established to ensure that those living in the community had the power to make critical decisions about the planning and design of their own housing.

To date, NCC has developed and financed over 3,000 units of mixed-income, owner-occupied, and rental housing. NCC Community Hills is a recent project that is being developed as part of a federally funded program to improve housing in the inner city by providing affordable housing ownership opportunities. Funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development under a \$24.88 million HOPE IV grant, the 13-acre community will contain over 200 townhouses and include a day care center and community center.

In addition, NCC's housing for special populations includes Harmony House, 102 units for homeless families; the Essex County Family Violence Shelter, with a capacity of 45; the 180-bed NCC Extended Care Facility; and the Children Together Home, a foster-care residence housing up to 12 neglected children in a family-type setting.



## Features of Effective Strategies

*Effective land use strategies that make productive use of vacant properties are critical to community development because abandoned space will eventually be used for harmful purposes if left unattended.*

*First-source hiring ordinances provide residents with an avenue for tapping into job opportunities through new local businesses and projects. In Newark, NCC recently played a major role in getting such an ordinance passed by the city council and is now looking toward organizing stakeholders for its implementation.*

*CDCs have successfully increased affordable housing in locales with very little open space by identifying abandoned or dilapidated buildings that can be taken over and converted into new units with some degree of rent control.*

*Economic and workforce development initiatives should include measures to address issues of cultural and language diversity. For example, many existing employment training systems are not sufficiently prepared to assist people who do not speak English as their first language.*

## Communicating the Strategy

*The availability of reliable, user-friendly data makes it easier to sift out the strategic information that is necessary to define a compelling vision and do effective planning.*

*Marketing strategies are enhanced by visual representations of ideas and proposals. Project models provide a sense of concreteness that words alone cannot convey. They also heighten the perception that proposals and strategies are well-conceived and vision-driven.*

*It is important to constantly keep communities abreast of what is or is not happening and why. Routinely updating residents about key accomplishments is instrumental in helping them to stay motivated and encouraged. Also, consistent communication serves as a safeguard against frustrations that often emerge due to the incremental nature of revitalization work.*

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## Revenue Sources

*Given the wide array of potential CDC funding sources (which often include some combination of private, state, federal, and local revenue), a start-up organization should place added emphasis on devising a funding strategy that allows it to stay on mission rather than indiscriminately chasing after grants. Also, CDCs should be aware of the significant capacity required to meet state and federal reporting requirements.*

In placing community interests first, CDCs often undertake very demanding, risky projects. Therefore, they must be *realistic when calculating the costs of such projects and assume a more aggressive stance when demanding their fees*—especially since those fees will be used to fund the next project.

Along with the capital needed to fund specific neighborhood improvement projects, *organizing represents a fundamental cost of development.* However, LCW decided not to charge membership dues because it might have served as an obstacle to engaging residents. Instead, the organization has aggressively gone after grants by leveraging the public and governmental support it gained via organizing efforts. Presently, the organization is working toward obtaining a larger grant that will allow them to move more quickly on property acquisitions.

*When embarking upon a new direction or initiative, CDCs sometimes intentionally strive to develop ambitious ideas as a means of attracting needed attention and support.* Plagued by years of state and city cutbacks, LCW was left with a \$30,000 deficit by June of 1999. At the time, its board members were faced with a difficult decision—divest and go on to something else or create a new and improved agenda to pull resources back into the organization and community. In deciding to continue operations, the board and staff felt it was important to treat the situation like a start-up, by pursuing work that was considered to be innovative, bold, and exciting. Moreover, its committed board members were not interested in saving, or being a part of, an organization that was not accomplishing much. After initial plans for the *Reviviendo!* campaign had been devised, the organization sought to secure approximately \$300,000 to fund its operating budget. Within a year of embarking on the project, it had raised over \$400,000.

*Many CDCs establish for-profit subsidiaries to provide added revenue. Of the 40 spin-off ventures launched by NCC, 12 are for-profit corporations that produce funds to help support its nonprofit operations.*

*Development projects are often undermined by owners who are not willing to wait for CDCs to gather the financial resources needed to acquire properties. LCW has dealt with such challenges by land banking properties until they are able to obtain sufficient funding to complete projects.*

(LCW)

LAWRENCE CommunityWorks, inc.

LCW's revitalization strategy encompasses three major areas:

- Comprehensive neighborhood revitalization;
- Community-based family learning; and
- Affordable housing development and management.

Together with the North Common Neighborhood Association (NCNA) and the city of Lawrence, LCW launched three flagship projects under the *Reviviendo!* campaign that are designed to stabilize and revitalize the vibrant but troubled North Common community:

- *The Summer Street Home Ownership Project*—Four, two-family units of much-needed housing and a new playground are being built within a vacant two-block area on Summer Street, which is the geographic and social heart of North Common. The project is largely supported by a grant awarded under Massachusetts's HOME First-time Buyer Program, which allows organizations to buy and rehab existing properties or construct new units and then sell them to eligible low- and moderate-income buyers at below-market prices. Once they close on the homes, owners will be able to generate additional income by renting out the remaining unit. In June 2001, *Reviviendo!* partners celebrated the completion of two duplexes and held a lottery to select its first new buyers.
- *The Our House Family Learning Center*—LCW is poised to acquire a vacant property that once served as a thriving Catholic church and elementary school. In partnership

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with Merrimack College, the property will be redeveloped as a family learning center. It will provide classroom space, high-tech studios, offices, a gymnasium, recreational facilities, and public space to be shared by neighborhood residents and college students.

- *The Spicket River Brownfield Site*—This former industrial site is the largest parcel of vacant land in the neighborhood. Because the contaminated, overgrown property is a source of enormous anxiety for nearby residents and property owners, LCW is working with local partners to gain control of the site, secure funding to study related environmental issues, clean up the property, and redevelop the area as park land and recreation space.

Closing the “learning gap” in Lawrence is also a priority for LCW. Only 37 percent of the city’s population has the equivalent of a high school diploma, causing a major impediment to employment and financial security for vast numbers of Lawrence’s diverse immigrant population. To address this challenge, the organization has embarked on a strategy of alternative, community-based learning programs to promote financial literacy and career development among residents.

- *Assets Build Communities (ABC)* is a savings and financial education initiative that was launched to address the problem of persistent poverty that deeply affects many Lawrence neighborhoods. Participants pledge to save at least \$25 per month for two years and attend monthly classes that teach skills related to establishing savings, banking procedures, maintaining good credit, securing a mortgage, and understanding broader economic issues that impact the community. In return, ABC will provide \$3 for every \$1 participants save with the funds going toward starting a business, attending school, or purchasing a home.
- *Young Architects/Arquitectos Jovenes* is an architecture and design “studio” course centered around actual planning and design projects in the North Common neighborhood. Youth ages 14 to 18 who have an interest in architecture, design, drawing, building, or community involvement team with graduate planning and architecture students from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and other professional volunteers on projects designed to transform their environment.
- *Young Web Masters* is for young people ages 12 to 18 who have an interest in computers, the Internet, graphic design, animation, and technology. Through a hands-on course, participants work with staff from a local Internet education business and other professional volunteers to design software and create web pages for themselves and local community organizations.

# Power Dynamics

## **Understanding the Social and Political Landscape**

*CDCs need to analyze the roots of neighborhood challenges in order to develop constructive, lasting solutions.* For example, NCC understands that Newark's history did not begin in 1967 with the riots. Rather, the riots were directly linked to a continuum of economic oppression and unjust practices (e.g., redlining and disinvestments) that had occurred in cities around the country. In turn, the riots gave way to rising fears within surrounding communities and government institutions. In the wake of the riots, Newark received substantial federal funding. As Monsignor Linder often says, "NCC was in the right place at the right time." Yet, given today's conservative political climate, new start-ups will probably have to pursue a very different path toward growth, based on their own analyses of factors leading to disinvestments and opportunities for community development.

*Leadership development at both the resident and governance levels is vital to distressed communities that have been plagued by years of inadequate resources and failed attempts to improve conditions.* When LCW took on neighborhood revitalization in Lawrence, it started with a few projects it could do well in order to boost local confidence.

When attempting to organize people and move a revitalization agenda forward, *CDCs must be prepared to grapple with underlying racial and ethnic tensions.* All of the host organizations have explicit strategies in place to address these issues. For example:

- In Lawrence, the city is now predominantly comprised of Latino newcomers from the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. Yet the majority of elected leaders are Anglos, due to a disparity in voter eligibility and registration rates. Thus, LCW actively supports organizing and voter registration campaigns to motivate local officials to embrace community growth rather than perpetuate the status quo.
- Dudley Street is a trilingual neighborhood of African-American, Latin American, Cape Verdean, and white families. To ensure that the distribution of neighborhood power is equal among residents and keep people focused on the issues—not jockeying among themselves—DSNI established an equal number of seats for each ethnic group on its board of directors.

*Clarity of mission and commitment to constituents helps CDCs remain focused when controversy arises.* Neighborhood revitalization strategies are typically viewed as “political hot potatoes” that generate a great deal of conflict and mistrust because they often fuel competition over scarce resources. To successfully navigate these inevitable pressures, a CDC needs to be very clear from the beginning about its mission, guiding principles, and its constituents.

### **Leveraging Power**

*CDCs must actively build the relationships and constituencies needed to operate from a position of strength.* Power is the bottom line for any organization seeking to bring about change, so CDCs should not shy away from the issue. Dealing with people from a posture of strength is key to protecting an organization’s ability to be independent and self-determining—even if you are only able to create the perception of it at times.

Building resident power is about diverse groups of neighborhood residents thinking, arguing, figuring things out, and moving forward together—which is a significant departure from traditional approaches to revitalization.

Although dependence upon funders and community partners is a common reality among nonprofits, *organized residents can serve as a shield against those who might attempt to make an agency deviate from its mission or undermine its efforts.*

*CDCs should explore opportunities to link organizing efforts with larger public policy agendas in poor neighborhoods* where many people choose not to vote because they feel disconnected from representatives who either do not live in the community or behave as if they do not have the community’s best interests at heart. NCC is devising an outreach strategy designed to educate and inform many of the suburban-based people who donate their time or money to its programs yet may not consider where various candidates stand on urban issues when voting.

*A vital piece of sustaining collective leadership and action is helping people to share in a common vision and values.* Building resident power is about diverse groups of neighborhood residents thinking, arguing, figuring things out, and moving forward together—which is a significant departure from traditional approaches to revitalization. The importance of creating the space and opportunity for people to express their points of view and find common ground cannot be overestimated.

## Staffing and Infrastructure

The peer match participants shared the following insights regarding the creation of an effective CDC staffing structure:

*In order to establish an atmosphere of mutual respect and collaboration, staff and governing bodies should be representative of the diverse communities they serve.* For instance, consistent with Lawrence’s growing Latino immigrant population, 13 out of 15 LCW staff members are bilingual in English and Spanish, and nine are of Latino descent.

*Creating an effective mix of organizational expertise is critical—especially for start-up CDCs with a comprehensive focus.* Suggested areas of emphasis include: community organizing, real estate development, family asset development, and youth programs. The availability of administrative and financial staff that can assist with the management of day-to-day operations is also key.

*An executive director’s organizing skills are paramount to the success of start-up CDCs that need to quickly establish a solid constituency.* Development expertise will be needed further down the line and is sometimes easier to purchase in the form of a consultant.

*Given the interdependent nature of neighborhood challenges, it is important to develop an internal system that values people working on all the different elements of a CDC’s agenda and processes.* Too often, less visible aspects of the work get lost in the shuffle as organizations push high-profile projects forward. Thus, each staff member should have at least a rudimentary understanding of the functions and contributions of operational divisions across a CDC.

*In order to get projects off the ground, new CDCs sometimes have to start with part-time and volunteer positions.* However, it is very hard to manage the incredibly intensive work around assessing needs, fundraising, and organizing without the presence of full-time staff. To meet these capacity demands, LCW’s board contracted with Bill Traynor’s consultant group to serve as the start-up management team and move its agenda along quickly. As the interim executive director, Mr. Traynor eventually plans to transition out once the organization is able to fully establish a wholly owned team.

Given the interdependent nature of neighborhood challenges, it is important to develop an internal system that values people working on all the different elements of a CDC’s agenda and processes.

## Resident Leadership

A CDC's treasure is the number, strength, and commitment of the people it engages as supporters and partners. Yet, resident involvement goes beyond participation; it is about leadership, ownership, and people going to city hall to voice their opinions. Therefore, nothing is more important than getting out in the streets to knock on doors, talk about what a CDC can do, and encourage people to become active leaders in the organization.

### neighborhood initiative (DSNI)

#### DUDLEY street

DSNI's basic approach is to create an environment of opportunity that encourages and supports sustainable business development and asset accumulation and increases the purchasing power of neighborhood residents. Its strategy for sustainable development is resident-directed and builds upon the community's inherent and acquired strengths and assets, which include: its strategic location with respect to Boston and major transportation routes; available labor force; vacant land; eminent domain authority; a comprehensive revitalization plan; location within the Enhanced Enterprise Community (EEC); strong community partners, including CDCs, philanthropies, and the city of Boston; designation as a brownfields site; historic landmarks and sites; cultural diversity; and a business base of 250 companies.

#### **HOUSING AND REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT**

After convincing the authorities in Boston's city government to take the unprecedented step of granting eminent domain authority to the community, Dudley residents were able to acquire over 1,300 neglected properties that they transformed into high-quality affordable housing, gardens, and public spaces. More importantly, they gained a "place at the table" during any discussions about the development of their community. Now, city officials must work with DSNI on facilitating a community planning process if they want to pursue a deal or change a zoning law related to local property.



By July 1990, DSNI had begun the process of acquiring privately owned vacant land in the Dudley Triangle from approximately 40 property owners who were compensated at a fair market value. Since then, more than \$43 million has been invested in the construction of nearly 300 units of new housing in the DSNI area, and another \$12 million has been invested in the rehabilitation of existing homes.

As a result of the construction of quality affordable housing, hundreds of families have become new homeowners. In turn, increased homeownership has helped stabilize the community by contributing to an improved sense of community and substantial growth in individual assets.

#### **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

DSNI also seeks to strengthen the neighborhood economy, promote sustainable business development, and increase the purchasing power of residents via a range of strategies, including:

- Organizing area merchants into the Dudley Village Business Association (DVBA) and supporting local entrepreneurship opportunities;
- Advocating for and linking local entrepreneurs with business development resources;
- Assessing the feasibility of developing a local currency;
- Exploring models for creating worker-owned businesses and cooperatively owned franchises;
- Enhancing business development opportunities with commercial real estate development;
- Redeveloping brownfield sites;
- Creating opportunities for asset accumulation through the development of individual and community development accounts;
- Launching an earned income tax credit campaign; and
- Offering programs such as economic literacy workshops through DSNI's Resident Development Institute (RDI).

## Guiding Principles

Organizing is different from mobilizing, development, or service work. *It involves building relationships and consolidating perspectives, ideas, and thoughts into an organizational structure.*

The first step in resident organizing occurs when people start talking about an issue. However, *organizers should be mindful of the difference between outreach to learn the needs of the community and identify common concerns, and outreach designed to build support for a preestablished agenda.*

*Leaders who grow naturally from a community are an essential component of resident organizing and the most effective agents of change, as they are the truest representation of a community and its needs.*

*Significant community development cannot occur by investments in physical infrastructure alone.* When CDCs become involved in multimillion dollar development deals and hire talented professional staff, they often struggle to remember that real estate is not their core mission. In reality, *the politicians and funders that CDCs approach for support will look first at how many residents are organized and committed to their efforts.* For instance, the ability of NCC's 80-member Resident Advisory Board to solicit 12,000 signatures in a massive petition drive played a pivotal role in convincing city and corporate officials to select Newark's Central Ward as a site for what became the New Community Pathmark.

*Although establishing a resident-led governance structure is critical, it is not enough to ensure broad-based representation of various community stakeholders.* CDCs must make certain that a diverse array of interests, ideas, experiences, and resources are represented in decision-making processes.

the RICANNE HADRIAN initiative  
for community organizing (RHICO)

RHICO is based on the premise that significant community development cannot happen by technical or physical means alone. Rather, it can occur only when low-income residents and people of color are empowered to bring about positive change in their communities and address the institutions that create obstacles to change.

Building a strong, organized base of community residents will provide CDCs with the clout to:

- Win additional resources for communities;
- Effectively respond to community priorities when choosing development projects; and
- Engage new residents and achieve a diversity that accurately reflects its community's profile and views.

To further these aims, RHICO designers have defined four capacity goals for CDCs:

- Increase membership and participation. Do not rely solely on a resident-led structure to represent the community perspective.
- Provide leadership development training for community residents and CDC members.
- Build power for low-income residents and people of color.
- Integrate CDC organizing and development activities.

Currently, the Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations (MACDC) is developing a training manual and curriculum that captures the many lessons learned during the first phase of the initiative. Key themes include the following:

- A CDC's entire staff needs to recognize and embrace organizing as their mandate if it is to accomplish genuinely meaningful resident involvement. Bringing in people who either understand organizing or accept that they are being hired to do development work within the context of an organizing model is key. However, the creation of internal structures to support their understanding is also critical, since the leap between promoting a shared perspective and integrating that perspective into daily operations is quite significant. As an example, the traditional practice of excluding organizing staff from senior management positions limits their voice and influence within CDCs.
- The disillusionment that emerges when CDCs fail to maintain a strong link with the community will ultimately undermine the sustainability of development projects.
- Pressures to be efficient and keep development costs low often hinder CDCs from investing sufficient time and effort toward really learning about community needs.
- Participating organizations have been much more receptive to peer learning than the centralized training model MACDC initially utilized.
- Additional guidance and support is needed concerning board development, especially the recruitment, training, and retention of resident members from different socioeconomic and literacy levels.

## How-to's

### **Governance**

*Control of a CDC should reside with the people who live in the neighborhood—not city hall or the business community.* While organizations may need to bring in outside talents as a resource, residents should comprise the majority of staff and governing bodies to ensure that community interests are upheld and respected as the priority.

- DSNI is guided by a 29-seat board that includes three residents from each of the four ethnic groups in the neighborhood (African American, Latino, Cape Verdean, and white), two youth members, and two additional board-appointed residents who work alongside representatives of seven nonprofit agencies, two churches, two businesses, and two other CDCs.
- Ten of LCW's 15 staff members not only live in Lawrence, several of them grew up there. Also, 11 seats on its 17-member board are reserved for residents who are elected by its members.
- Massachusetts has passed a statute requiring that at least 51 percent of CDC board seats be held by community residents.

*The election of residents to formal leadership and governing bodies should be based on an open community process.* To illustrate, DSNI has established a model of collaborative governance where community members elect board members via annual elections. All residents ages 15 and older are eligible to vote in DSNI board elections and on community referenda.

*In addition to a central, resident-led board that has the ultimate authority over NCC's mission statement and financial matters, most of the subsidiary corporations have established their own separate governing bodies.* NCC has also established a board to oversee the New Community Foundation. This board is primarily made up of corporate leaders who can serve as brokers for leveraging external resources and funds.

## Investments and Strategies

Major investments in capacity building, teaming, and leadership development are needed to prepare residents for the complexity and fast-moving pace of community revitalization efforts. For resident-led governing bodies, training should be configured as a leadership development track that also addresses issues of financial and organizing responsibilities.

*A key ingredient to success is making sure residents have regular access to information that will allow them to help shape and guide the community vision—which promotes a sense of broad ownership.* DSNI’s executive director and board members rely upon a rigorous and full community review process to help set organizational priorities. Staffers offer residents opportunities to caucus around issues prior to meeting about them. They also consistently report out to the community about proposals, processes, and neighborhood activities.

*As a starting point, it is important for CDCs to establish a membership list, but organizing does not end with the adding of names to a database.* Nurturing members so that they may serve as leaders in decision-making and be a resource to one another is the ultimate goal.

Because it is a lot easier for officials to cut some deals with a few “anointed” community leaders than it is to do genuine community-building work, CDCs need to have a strategy in place to deal with individuals or groups who try to dictate the community process once planning gains momentum.

Leaders who grow naturally from a community are an essential component of resident organizing and the most effective agents of change, as they are the truest representation of a community and its needs.

## urban VISIONING process

### DSNI'S

As a community intermediary, DSNI does not sponsor development or deliver services. Since it is not in competition for such contracts, it is free to serve as a neutral convening presence that assists residents in planning and monitoring development efforts. Thus, its sole purpose is to promote resident power.

Back in the 1980s, city officials laughed when Dudley residents presented their plan for revitalizing the burnt-out and abandoned area that would come to be known as the Dudley Triangle. After residents rallied together in support of the plan, city officials reconsidered their position and endorsed it—giving rise to a new sense of empowerment within the community.

During the next decade, residents began talking about the “next phase” of their community revitalization plan. Beginning in the summer of 1996, DSNI designed and carried out a community visioning process over a period of eight months. Over 180 residents and organization representatives from throughout the neighborhood met together in several groups to develop an updated and shared vision. After the small group meetings were completed, a core team took the reports from all the sessions and came up with the theme areas listed below:

- Lifelong learning,
- Unity through neighborhood activity,
- Community economic power,
- Physical and visual quality of life,
- Harmony with nature,
- Community security,
- Community-friendly transportation,
- Self and group expression,
- Political power, and
- Mutually supportive relationships.

Within each theme, “standards” were created that capture values or principles that will ensure maximum community benefit. DSNI also developed “actions” that outline concrete activities that will help the community meet its goals. Together, these elements provide a framework for DSNI staff, residents, and local stakeholders as they look for the resources and work with partners to achieve community objectives.

## LESSONS LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS

At the close of each session, Bronze Triangle CDC team members set aside time to share their thoughts regarding the information gained and relationships established during the course of the peer match. Their key observations and potential next steps are summarized below:

### General Feedback

The team building that occurred as a byproduct of the match brought the Bronze Triangle participants closer together and heightened their awareness of the strengths each one brings to the table.

Although the host agencies showcased three very distinct approaches to community and economic development, team members recognized many similarities between each organization's efforts and what they are attempting to accomplish in San Diego. Overall, participants felt that LCW symbolized the kind of operation the Bronze Triangle CDC will be striving toward within the next couple of years, while NCC provided powerful lessons regarding sustainability and the management of organizational growth. At DSNI, the team noted how focused the organization was on building resident leadership capacities within several different layers of the community. In addition, the operational overview and concrete tools provided by MACDC further highlighted the common themes throughout each agency's work.

Team members came away from the match with a greater understanding of the significant commitment community development requires and expressed their desire to ensure that Gale Walker—who will continue to oversee Children of the Rainbow in addition to heading the CDC—has adequate support.

“I’m feeling a lot of energy from the team and very blessed and thankful for the opportunity to be a part of the match. There are ideas that I can appreciate from all of the organizations about being a voice for the people and looking at our work as a means to social justice and equity... and I believe there is a real opportunity for a resident-led effort in the Bronze Triangle and that everyone has potential. So, once that fire is ignited in the community, it’s going to take flight and really come together.”

Norma Chavez, Community Organizer,  
Bronze Triangle CDC

“I’m really honored that I was invited to be with this group, and it’s helped me understand the kind of role I can play. It’s been wonderful to get so many good ideas about what can really work. Even though there is no cookie-cutter model, I think we can be successful by tailoring the ideas to our community. So, I’m coming away with a sense of lifted-up strengths.”

Veronica Garcia,  
Resident and Bronze Triangle CDC  
Board Member

Participants recognized two elements as essential to neighborhood revitalization:

- Supporting continual learning about existing and emerging neighborhood issues; and
- Training residents to be leaders who can help make important decisions.

Specific program elements that stood out for participants included:

- Involving youth through creative training and technology programs that prepare them for well-paying jobs; and
- Using an intergenerational approach to community organizing, where mature adults have an opportunity to pass on their knowledge and experience to youth who, in turn, share visions of what they want to achieve in the future.

## Potential Next Steps

Following the peer match, members of the Bronze Triangle CDC team established the following priorities for its future work:

- Hiring a local organizer to support the CDC’s community mobilization efforts and establishing collaborative links with other local organizing efforts;
- Continuing and expanding research activities to obtain the information and tools needed to take advantage of the opportunities presented by San Diego’s booming development market;
- Working with the Bank of America on a land trust initiative;
- Approaching local business owners, developers, and banking institutions regarding the establishment of a Bronze Triangle fundraising authority that is accountable to a resident-driven mission;



- Enhancing outreach and development efforts for the CDC's board of directors;
- Intensifying youth outreach and leadership development efforts;
- Conducting a historical analysis of what created existing conditions in the Bronze Triangle community;
- Drafting a concept paper that provides a general overview of the CDC's agenda, goals, and strategies;
- Seeking additional guidance about how to do effective strategic analyses that will help the CDC set realistic goals and accurately evaluate successes;
- Sponsoring workshops designed to build resident grant writing and program development skills; and
- Seeking additional training for staff, residents, and community partners around developing and implementing resident-led revitalization initiatives.

## Applying the Lessons Learned

### the “WHAT IS COMMUNITY?”

### forum

In September 2001, the Bronze Triangle CDC hosted the “What Is Community?” Forum. More than 300 people attended, including 100 residents as well as elected officials, developers, bankers, directors from community-based organizations, faith-based leaders, educators, and representatives from local housing authorities and government agencies. During the forum, both adult and youth residents were front and center—leading discussions; asking questions; and presenting statistics, surveys, and stories that painted a compelling picture of a challenged, but energized community. In the end, they came away from the experience feeling like their credibility and authority had been established among external stakeholders.

Moreover, several of the key public officials and development experts in attendance expressed their interest in partnering with the Bronze Triangle CDC and continuing to explore solutions with the community.

Specific items on the CDC’s current agenda include:

- Securing start-up funding;
- Devising an organizing strategy to identify the issues that are of concern to local residents;
- Developing a strategic plan in partnership with San Diego’s Community Congress;
- Facilitating the formation of a land bank; and
- Developing business creation and job formation programs.

## WHAT IS *MAKING CONNECTIONS*?

*Making Connections* is the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s initiative to improve outcomes for some of the nation’s most vulnerable children and families. The initiative is conducted through deep and durable partnerships with selected cities and neighborhoods across the United States—currently 22 cities that make up the broad *Making Connections* network. Several core ideas underlie *Making Connections*:

- *Making Connections* is based on the recognition that the greatest number of American children who suffer from “rotten outcomes” live in city neighborhoods that are in many ways cut off—disconnected—from the mainstream opportunities of American life. Thus, *Making Connections* is “place-based”—it focuses on specific neighborhoods in specific cities.
- *Making Connections* has a simple theory: that children do better when they grow up in strong families, and families do better when they live in supportive neighborhoods. Thus, *Making Connections* strategies are aimed at helping families obtain what they need to be strong, and helping neighborhoods gain the resources they need in order to support families well.
- *Making Connections* focuses on three major types of “connections” that help families grow stronger and achieve what they want for their children. The first of these is helping families connect to **economic opportunities** and to jobs that provide income, assets, and an economic future. Research and experience suggest that this type of connection is unlikely without two others: strong connections to the **social networks** of kin, neighborhood groups, and other informal ties that sustain families when times get tough, and to high-quality, **effective services and supports** that help families reach their goals.

*Making Connections* focuses on improving results for children and families in tough neighborhoods. Core results that *Making Connections* communities are mobilizing around include:

- Families have increased earnings and income;
- Families have increased levels of assets;
- Families, youth, and neighborhoods increase their participation in civic life;
- Families and neighborhoods have strong informal supports and networks;
- Families have access to quality services and supports; and
- Children are healthy and ready to succeed in school.

A key task in ensuring the success of *Making Connections* is making available the learning and technical assistance that the participating sites need to move forward with their work. One of the ways that the Foundation provides this kind of support is by making peer matches available.

## WHAT ARE PEER MATCHES?

Since 1995, as part of a broader effort to rely more intentionally on the experience of people working in the field, the Center for the Study of Social Policy began working with several partners and funders to develop and offer a rather intensive form of peer technical assistance known as peer matches. Peer matches are structured opportunities for teams of people from two or more jurisdictions who are working on a similar issue to exchange experiences and practical knowledge toward resolving a particular challenge that has been identified in advance.

The rationale behind peer matches is straightforward. Often, the people best able to provide hands-on help are the “doers” themselves—people from states and communities who have successfully addressed a problem or created an effective new policy or strategy. These are the people who have an acute sense of what has and hasn’t worked, and why and why not. They have developed good tools and strategies they can share. And they are usually eager to help others because of a strong sense of shared mission. But while good peer matches are informal, they are never

casual, using a carefully designed process and structure to focus the common interests, roles, and goodwill that exist between peers on producing meaningful change for a community.

Peer matches are a resource and time intensive strategy. Careful consideration of when, where, and how to use this approach is therefore always warranted. Experience has shown that careful preparation and execution of the matches are critical factors for their success. This approach tends to work best when the following conditions are in place:

- A specific problem or issue has been identified, and the people looking for help are at a key decision point with respect to the design or implementation of a state or community strategy;
- Stakeholders are invested in and have a high degree of ownership in solving a problem;
- The timing is right—e.g., a decision or action that will affect the community’s family strengthening agenda is going to be taken and/or someone needs to be convinced to take action; and
- A reasonably small number of people have the authority and ability to act on what they learn in the match.

To date, the Center has brokered over 60 peer matches on topics ranging from creating resident-led community development corporations and governance structures, to establishing multilingual homeownership assistance centers, to building integrated services models. As illustrated in the case summaries that are part of this series, peer matches help spread good policies and practice, build relationships among different stakeholders who may not always have a chance to work together, and enable people to put changes in place that improve results for children, families, and neighborhoods.





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