Developing a Neighborhood-Focused Agenda: Tools for Cities Getting Started

Highlighting

Models

from Cities

Nationwide

Developing a Neighborhood-Focused Agenda: Tools for Cities Getting Started

By Grant Jones
Children and Family Fellow
The Annie E. Casey Foundation

701 St. Paul Street
Baltimore, MD 21202
(410) 547-6600

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Grant Jones

March 2000

By Nashville Mayor Bill Purcell

In cities across the United States, a growing number of locally elected officials are coming into office with neighborhood issues high on our agenda. In a recent survey by the National League of Cities, the question, "What is the most important goal citizens have for their city?" was posed to local government officials and community leaders from big cities and small towns all over the country. "Family-friendliness — a good place to raise kids" was cited more than any other as the most important goal that citizens have. And education, community safety and recreation were the characteristics of a family-friendly city named most often among the survey respondents.

Other characteristics frequently mentioned related to citizen involvement, the general climate of the city, the physical environment and the diversity of the community.

This focus on family-friendly neighborhoods represents a significant shift in thinking by local officials and community leaders that recognizes the interdependence between the success of communities and the success of the families who live in them.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is at the forefront of efforts nationwide to strengthen families by strengthening the neighborhoods they live in. This publication, *Developing a Neighborhood-Focused Agenda: Tools for Cities Getting Started,* created by Casey Fellow Grant Jones, supports those efforts. It is designed to give you the tools you need to create and implement a neighborhood-focused agenda in your city. It closely examines some of the key elements that are critical to the success of your efforts . . . soliciting stakeholder input and involvement, and using neighborhood-level data. And it provides many examples of how cities around the country are creating new and groundbreaking collaborative strategies for urban change.

As in every big task, the first step is the hardest — getting started. I believe you will find this publication a beneficial tool to help in the development and implementation of a meaningful and productive neighborhood-focused agenda for your city and the constituents you serve. City by city, we will begin to make our communities – and our country – a better place to live.

Bill Purcell

In their efforts to improve the lives of children, youth and families, city governments all across

the country are increasingly taking a neighborhood-based approach to addressing the problems

and opportunities in our cities. This is especially important where there are wide differences across

neighborhoods in a city with respect to ethnicity, culture, class, opportunity, and the current out-

comes being experienced by children. And, this is usually the case in any urban environment.

  For some cities this is not a new approach. Throughout the 1990s there seemed to be greater

acceptance of the need for collaboration among governments and the many others outside govern-

ment trying to improve conditions in U.S. cities.

While for some other cities, the focus on neighborhoods may be a new, and logical, transition from a long period of successful big-ticket projects, like the building of major sports venues and convention centers, and other explosive downtown business development activities.

Whatever the impetus, the emerging focus on neighborhoods as the strategy for community improvement invites new thinking and poses new challenges. Most especially,

> "Neighborhood revitalization is dependent on resident revitalization. One cannot build the physical infrastructure of a neighborhood without also building the social infrastructure."
>
> — Arthur Blum

it demands the engagement of citizens at a level that requires methods different from past work. This guidebook was designed to be a resource for city administrations entering anew into neighborhood-focused work. It was not created to make a case for why city administrations should put neighborhood strategies high on their agenda. But rather, it is intended as a tool for action that hopefully will be beneficial to those who have already decided to do so.

The project developed out of work I did from May 1999 through March 2000 as a Children and Family Fellow at the Annie E. Casey Foundation of Baltimore, Maryland. Through the fellowship, I took a journey of inquiry and discovery about city-run neighborhood initiatives across the country.

My inquiry included questions concerning the views of city officials on both the challenges of getting started and on managing the neighborhood office. I also inquired about how data informed their policy and practice in neighborhoods, their retrospective thoughts on developing the functional aspects of the neighborhood office, or the immediate challenges they perceived if just getting started. And of course, I inquired about their views on what information might be most helpful to others just getting started.

This guidebook, then, is an attempt to share what I learned and provide concrete approaches for developing neighborhood-focused strategies for improving conditions in our cities. Use it as a guide for designing your own action plan, based on the specific circumstances, needs, priorities and resources of your city.

Fundamental to efforts across the nation to "connect cities with their neighborhoods" is the belief that every voice is important and that efforts must involve and be informed by a wide spectrum of the community. But even holding that conviction, how exactly does a city go about making personal connections with the individuals, families and neighborhoods you hope to affect? That's what this chapter is designed to tell you.

In a nutshell, the answer is that new partnerships must be created. Partnerships between city agencies and neighborhood groups, between local reform efforts and outside intermediaries, and between the grassroots people that bring the local wisdom and the outsiders who have access to power and money.

This conclusion comes from what is perhaps one of the most difficult lessons policy makers have had to learn – that solutions to neighborhood problems cannot be imposed from outside. There is no one-size-fits-all model that can just be dropped into a community. Rather, successful programs are shaped locally to respond to the needs of local populations and to assure that local communities have a genuine sense of ownership.

It is necessary, therefore, to solicit stakeholder input, early and often. Put another way, it means taking the time to find out how neighborhood residents really feel about where they live, what their hopes are, what their fears are, and what is working in their lives and what is not.

Identifying the Stakeholders

The concerns of neighborhood residents and other "key stakeholders" — community leaders, local funders, community organizations and government officials, to name a few — must actively be sought. Stakeholders include all those who have a vested interest in the problem and its solution. In other words, they are those individuals and groups with the potential to affect your specific plan of action.

The stakeholder group must be as diverse as possible and represent every major interest and perspective in the community. It must represent the community's demographic diversity in terms of age, race, gender, perspective and places of residence and employment. This means thinking beyond the same community leaders and organizations that have always been involved. While these concerned people are important to have included, this effort must tap into populations and people that are traditionally excluded from community processes.

Getting Stakeholder Input

Getting stakeholder input can take a variety of common forms — focus groups, individual interviews, surveys, open forums — and be called a number of things – stakeholder

mapping, visioning processes and "listening in." A wealth of information about these research methods exists, and consulting firms specializing in them abound. We strongly suggest that you consult references about these tools or seek professional assistance before using them.

But in the end, whatever it is called, however it is done, this process brings together all sectors of a community to identify problems, evaluate changing conditions, and build collective approaches to improve the quality of life in the community.

There are many examples of cities that have successfully undertaken soliciting stakeholder input. For instance, early in his administration, Nashville Mayor Bill Purcell began holding a variation on the town-meeting theme with his "Mayor's Nights Out."

Held in neighborhood locations throughout the city, at these meetings Mayor Purcell and his agency heads invited citizens to give their input on the issues that are of importance to them.

In the early 1980s, Chattanooga, Tennessee undertook a community-wide visioning process to set priorities and goals for the city, which was faced with very dangerous pollution levels. The key to Chattanooga's complete

Examples of Neighborhood Stakeholders

• **Residents** (found through institutions and organizations they connect with)
Churches
Schools
Non-profit service providers
Neighborhood organizations
Door-to-door

• **Community Leaders**
Pastors
Neighborhood association presidents
Block council members

• **Community Organizations**
Non-profit service providers (food banks, employment/training programs, ministerial alliances, Head Start centers, adult education programs, tutoring/mentoring programs, health clinics)
Churches
Schools

• **Local Funders**
United Way agencies
Private foundations
Corporate grantmakers
Business leaders
Chambers of commerce (including minority chambers)
Small business owners (restaurants, hardware store, grocery)
Rotary members

• **Government officials**
Elected officials (city council, school board)
Department heads (housing, human services, parks, police, fire, public works)
Mayor's Senior Staff (chief of staff, budget director, city attorney, policy director)

turnaround is an all-inclusive vision and planning process that takes seriously the input of everyone who wants to participate. "When you look under a conference table in Chattanooga you find all kinds of footwear, from wing tips to tennis shoes," said city councilman David Crockett.

In 1995, the city of Flint, Michigan began an 18-month process of focus groups and interviews with key stakeholders. The city was faced with many of the same problems that plague many of America's older urban communities – urban flight, high unemployment and poverty, growing crime and violence, drugs and racial strife.

According to officials, neighborhood focus groups helped identify common ground, centers of strength and opportunities for action in the community. They also uncovered tension points and obstacles. What emerged was a strategic plan to "foster a well-functioning, connected community that is capable of meeting the economic, social and racial challenges ahead."

All of these cities succeeded, in large part, because they underwent an extensive, sometimes difficult, planning process. All the key stakeholders – government, business, community groups and citizens themselves — participated in the development of a common agenda. Because all of the stakeholders were involved in the creation and ongoing development of programs, the programs received widespread support.

References for Soliciting Stakeholder Involvement

"Stakeholder Mapping," Center for Applied Research, (1992) Philadelphia, Penn.

"Strategies for 'Listening In' on an Institution," Center for Applied Research, Philadelphia, Penn.

"The Community Visioning and Strategic Planning Handbook," Alliance for National Renewal, the National Civic League, Denver, Colo.

The following resolution was adopted by the City Council of Portland, Oregon on February 7, 1996. It articulates the city's commitment to citizen involvement. "We hold that the success of citizen involvement depends on: Mutual respect of all parties; City officials and staff who recognize their role in facilitating and responding to citizen input." To carry out their commitment, the following guiding principles of citizen involvement were adopted:

1. Value civic involvement as essential to the health of the city.

2. Promote on-going dialogue with citizens by maintaining relationships with neighborhood and community groups.

3. Respect and encourage citizen participation by ensuring that city communications and processes are understandable.

4. Reach out to all our communities to encourage participation that reflects Portland's rich diversity.

5. Think creatively and plan wisely, using citizen involvement processes and techniques to best fit the goals of the particular project.

6. Seek early involvement of citizens in planning, project, and policy development.

7. Consider and respond to citizen input in a timely manner, respecting all perspectives and insights.

8. Commit to coordinate city bureaus' outreach and involvement activities to make the best use of citizens' time and efforts.

9. Evaluate and report on the effectiveness of city outreach efforts to achieve the quality of city/citizen collaboration critical to good governance.

10. Promote ongoing education of citizens in neighborhood and community groups and city officials and staff in community organizing, networking, and collaboration.

11. Provide financial and technical support to Portland's neighborhood association network as the primary channel for citizen input and involvement.

Having the capacity to collect and use data describing neighborhood conditions is an essential capability for cities working to address the opportunities and challenges that confront their neighborhoods.

This kind of solid information is needed to monitor neighborhood conditions, set priorities about the use of resources, evaluate the effectiveness of strategies and advocate for change. It should, in fact, serve as the foundation for all neighborhood-focused agendas and may well be critical in mobilizing the necessary local stakeholder participation.

While there are a growing number of good examples — including those highlighted here — of cities using neighborhood-level data to inform their efforts to create stronger, healthier communities,

the majority of cities across the country are not yet aware of the potential of using data. Often they are not equipped with the data and skills required to take advantage of the information technology available today.

If using data at all, it is most likely citywide data. Citywide data can be valuable if the conditions under study — say poverty or school performance — are fairly consistent across neighborhoods, but we know that in most cities such uniformity is rare.

Among the essential, early challenges of establishing a neighborhood-focused agenda is determining the data needed to paint a comprehensive picture of your community. What quality of wellbeing and quality of life indicators are needed to facilitate and inform effective planning and action? Which are currently available and which are not?

Among those commonly used are United States census data, and national and local statistics on education, employment, health, and crime, and other key variables such as public assistance cases, housing and property val-

ues, to name just a few. A third source of data available is from special surveys and inventories, such as information on the locations of businesses, public facilities and service providers.

The difficulty in the past of collecting and using these data is reduced by the convergence of a number of factors: the availability of powerful but inexpensive desktop computers, sophisticated but user-friendly spreadsheet and mapping software, and the accessibility to computerized administrative records from most local public agencies.

This chapter is designed to provide you with "how to" information you need to collect and use neighborhood-level data. It includes many resources to help you get started as well as examples of how other cities are using this kind of data to further their work in neighborhoods.

What Data Do You Need to Have and Where Do You Get It?

The kind of data we're talking about is referred to by many different names. Some call them quality of life indicators or neighborhood indicators. Others call them social indicators. The term "indicators" simply refers to the specific items measured to depict the status of a neighborhood. They are statistics related to a broad variety of topics such as employment, births, deaths, crime, health, educational performance, public assistance and property conditions. The idea behind developing these indicators is to have widely accepted measures for social conditions similar to those for economic conditions.

These data come from three sources, the U.S. Census, administrative data kept by local public agencies, and special surveys and inventories.

Census Data
Obtaining census data is easy. Tapes or CD-Roms can be purchased from the Bureau of the Census and the costs are low. There are two primary census products that are helpful. Both provide data at two levels: census tract and

Information Available Through Census Data

• **Basic Descriptors**

No. of people, households

Population/household composition

    Household types

    Age structure

    Race/ethnicity

• **Social and Economic Characteristics**

Adults by years/type of education

Household income

Poverty rate

Labor force

Employment (by type, occupation and industry)

Self employment rate

Unemployment rates

Households receiving public assistance

• **Housing**

No. of housing units

Housing units by type

    Type of structure

    Size of unit

    Tenure (renter or owner)

Rate of overcrowding

Housing physical quality measures

Housing affordability (ratio housing expenses to income)

Value and rent levels

Vacancy rate

• **Mobility**

    Households moved, past 5 years

Source: Building and Operating Neighborhood Indicator Systems, The Urban Institute, Oct. 1998

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block-group (there are typically four to ten block-groups per census tract).

- the STF-1A file contains data from the full 1990 census and basic descriptors of the population, like age, sex, race — households and housing units.

- the STF-3A file contains data from the census sample covering a broader range of topics such as social and economic characteristics of households and more detailed physical and economic characteristics of the housing stock.

Administrative Data

In cities across America today, most local public agencies have automated their administrative records. These records can be used to produce measures very useful to community work. They include data on topics such as jobs, births, deaths, crimes, incidences of illness, student performance in school, public assistance cases, housing-code violations, building construction and demolition, changes in property values and taxes, toxic emissions, and many others. Because these records are now computerized, it is relatively easy, and quick, to take an administrative agency's data and, by computer, address match and tabulate it for any geographic area, such as census tracts or block groups.

Special Surveys and Inventories

In cities across America, there exist many different kinds of other useful information that has been collected through surveys and inventories. This includes information on the locations of various types of businesses, such as grocery stores, banks, and liquor stores, information about the location of various public facilities, like libraries, health care clinics and schools, and perhaps even valuable information on the locations of churches, child care centers, and various nonprofit service providers.

While collecting this type of information from scratch would be cost prohibitive, it does make sense to be sure you aware of what currently exists and incorporate it into your neighborhood-level data collection and use.

What Uses Do the Data Have?

Cities that have this kind of neighborhood-level data use it in many different ways to aid in local policy development and the design and evaluation of a variety of program initiatives – everything from improving schools, to providing decent and affordable housing, to making neighborhoods safe.

Once the data is assembled and reviewed, cities often choose to publish a report giving a citywide, multi-dimensional analysis of neighborhood change. It is an effective way to raise awareness of key issues and demonstrate the

value of the data. *Neighborhood Facts 1999* is the most recent such report published in Denver. Other examples are Boston's *In the Midst of Plenty,* Cleveland's *Analysis of Poverty and Related Conditions in Cleveland Area Neighborhoods,* and Providence's *Neighborhood Fact Book.*

While these types of reports can be valuable "first steps" in using neighborhood data, the more important reason for collecting and updating this data is to use it as the foundation for programs, initiatives and policy decisions for urban improvement efforts. In a variety of cities across the country good examples of activities and programs based on neighborhood data exist. A recurrent one is the

Examples of Administrative Data Available by Source

Vital Statistics Agencies
   Births
   Deaths

Police Departments
   Crimes
   Child Abuse/Neglect
   Police Calls

Public Assistance Agencies
   AFDC
   Food Stamps
   General Assistance
   Medicaid
   WIC
   Subsidized Child Care

School Systems
   Student Enrollment/Performance,
   i.e., enrollment levels, attendance, drop-out
   rates, test scores
   Special Education

Hospitals, Health Agencies
   Hospital Admissions
   Immunizations

Tax Assessor/Auditor
   Average Home Sales Price
   Parcel Characteristics
   Tax Delinquent Parcels
   Vacant Parcels

Building/Planning Departments
   Code Violations
   Building Permits
   Demolitions

Public Housing Authorities
   Public Housing Units, nos. and types

Development/Budget Dept.
   Community Development Block Grant
   Expenditures

Business Directories
   Employment/Economic Activity

use of the data as the primary basis for cities' Empowerment Zone/Enterprise Community (EZ/EC) application processes. The federal requirements for this program emphasize the analysis of objective data. Cities such as Atlanta, Boston, Cleveland, Denver, Oakland and Providence with well established neighborhood data systems have been successful in receiving designations under this program.

In Camden, New Jersey, a church group used housing and crime data to show a correlation between high vacancy rates and higher crime, and designed and implemented a program to address it. In Atlanta, a neighborhood improvement initiative used data on tax delinquency, code enforcement violations and other property conditions as the basis for several new efforts. These included changing code enforcement strategies to crack down more effectively on absentee property owners with abandoned properties, and new laws expediting foreclosure processes when communities are planning to redevelop sites with nonprofit housing. In San Francisco, the Bay Area Partnership: Building Healthy and Self Sufficient Communities for Economic Prosperity created a regional system for focusing on the achievement of goals relating to healthy communities and gathers data on more than 40 key indicators to measure progress on achieving the goals.

But these examples are still exceptions in most American cities today. However, they do give us strong indications that producing solid data that can serve as a basis for sensible strategies to address neighborhood problems may well be the most critical step in motivating local stakeholders to actually develop such strategies.

Who Should Collect and Manage Data?

Another critical consideration for cities relates to determining what organization might be best suited for and capable of collecting, analyzing and disseminating the neighborhood data. The existence of data gathered and

Uses of Neighborhood Data

- Identify and monitor neighborhood conditions
- Raise awareness
- Mobilize stakeholders
- Set priorities
- Allocate resources
- Evaluate the effectiveness of strategies
- Advocate for change

reported by different organizations presents formidable challenges — different software configurations, diverse data definitions and storage formats, and confidentiality issues.

Currently, in about a dozen cities there are efforts ongoing to collect and use data at the neighborhood level. With the assistance of the National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership, non-government intermediaries in these cities exist that are developing automated information systems with regularly updated information on neighborhood conditions. Because these local intermediaries maintain such systems, they can provide *one-stop shopping,* which offers enormous convenience for a variety of local users.

The seven cities that were the original collaborators in the partnership have well-established neighborhood data systems. They are Atlanta, Boston, Cleveland, Denver, Oakland, Providence and Washington, D.C. Five more cities joined the partnership later, Baltimore, Indianapolis, Miami, Milwaukee and Philadelphia.

In some other cities, Portland and St. Louis, for example, local agencies have expanded their capacity to play this role.

The costs of developing and operating a neighborhood indicators system are another important consideration for cities. The operating costs fall into three general categories: computer hardware and software, data acquisition

and staffing. Information compiled by the National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership in *Building and Operating Neighborhood Indicators Systems: A Guidebook* offers some reasonable estimates of the costs. It is difficult to be specific because the capacity and capabilities of the cities themselves vary so greatly and so do the circumstances of other organizations that might be candidates for doing this work. For example, many of the current systems are operated in affiliation with local universities, and benefit from the ability to use existing university computer facilities and staff.

Two things are clear however. One, the state of technology and data access is rapidly advancing and as a result it becomes more and more affordable. And two, there are likely local partners, including business and philanthropy, that would be willing to support the development and operation of a neighborhood-level data system.

Conclusion

As cities work to translate ambitious city goals into specific-neighborhood level program initiatives, they are increasingly recognizing a need for better information about neighborhood trends and circumstances to guide their efforts. As a result, in a growing number of cities across the country, work is taking place, inside and outside city governments, to build automated data systems.

These systems consist of a variety of information about the status of neighborhoods – including topics such as employment, births, deaths, health, educational performance – from three primary sources, the U.S. Census, administrative data from local agencies, and special surveys and inventories. Advances in information technology have made building such a system much more feasible than it was even just a few years ago.

Resources Available from the National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership

The agenda of the National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership is to further the development and use of neighborhood information systems in local policy making and urban improvement efforts. This includes activities that range from building and analyzing a national data system with neighborhood level data, to preparing "how to" manuals on local indicators use, to providing direct technical assistance to groups in other cities that want to establish data intermediaries in their cities.

• Web Site: www.urban.org/nnip/index.htm

• *NNIP News.* For information on subscribing, check http//www.urban.org/nnip/nnip_news.html

• *Building and Operating Neighborhood Indicators Systems: A Guidebook.* This publication can be downloaded from the web site.

We're also beginning to hear about a growing number of projects and activities resulting from the use of this data.

The key question that must be answered before developing an automated data system is what organization might be best suited for and capable of collecting, analyzing and disseminating this kind of data. Is it a local agency within government, like the planning office? Is it a university, or is it another organization outside of government, like in a dozen cities participating in the National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership?

In any case, it is clear that cities across the country will increasingly use computer technology and information to address the problems and opportunities of urban neighborhoods.

Learning from Models and Best Practices in Cities with Neighborhood-Focused Agendas

There are an ever-growing number of examples of how cities across the county are creating new and groundbreaking collaborative strategies for urban change. Increasingly, city governments are moving far beyond the limited view of constituent services as an exclusive function of their neighborhood agendas.

But what are the other important bodies of work uniquely appropriate for cities to take up? Certainly every city has different challenges, opportunities and political dynamics. And, each city has its own blend of social, economic, and political strengths and struggles that will shape the focus and strategies of its neighborhood agenda.

A survey of 16 cities revealed a wide range of innovations and effective practices in city-run neighborhood initiatives. Programs and activities ranged from faith-based partnerships and matching grants programs to decentralized city services and technical assistance to neighborhood associations.

But it's important to note that the information highlighted about these initiatives is not intended to be an inclusive description of their body of work, but rather a sampling of the varied and diverse ways in which cities are working in neighborhoods. The majority of the cities surveyed noted that inquiries from other cities were common. All 16 of those interviewed expressed a generous willingness to share with others their best practices and lessons learned.

The cities profiled below are illustrative both of the creativity of city leaders in addressing the needs of their neighborhoods and a growing willingness to invite citizens into the process.

> "I'm concerned about meeting the needs of citizens, but we cannot base our entire (neighborhood) focus on just doing a better job of answering the more than 60,000 calls and complaints that stream into the Mayor's Citizen Service Center each year."
>
> — Mayor Willie Herenton, Memphis, Tenn.

Supporting Neighborhood Associations — Neighborhood Services Department, City of Chattanooga, Tennessee

Working in close concert with the city's neighborhood associations is a major theme of Chattanooga's neighborhood services department. The department supports both neighborhood associations and grassroots community-based organizations through grants from the city's general fund and Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) dollars, and through a myriad of technical assistance.

The grants range from $1,500 to $10,000. Projects supported in the past year include beautification efforts, gateways, neighborhood newsletters, and mentoring programs for youth that are facilitated largely through the various neighborhood associations. In the past fiscal year, Chattanooga's neighborhood services department awarded grants to neighborhoods totaling more than $223,000. These grants were awarded on the basis of the recipient securing matching dollars or in-kind contributions for neighborhood projects, which multiplied their investment.

On the technical assistance side, the neighborhood services department also offers a range of services designed to enhance the effectiveness of neighborhood groups, including:

• Assistance in obtaining 501(c)(3) status.
• Help with strategies to improve resident involvement.
• Training for neighborhood association leaders.
• Assistance in developing newsletters to communicate with residents important information about opportunities and challenges in the neighborhood and to build a spirit of community among citizens.
• Organizational strategies to help move residents from crisis-based behavior to proactive neighborhood improvement.

Another tool used by the department of neighborhoods to support the community is the codes and community services section, which enforces rules that protect the health, safety and stability of Chattanooga neighborhoods. Formerly in the better housing division, the code enforcement function of the city was reconfigured under the auspice of the department of neighborhood services.

Moses Freeman, the director of the department of neighborhood services, describes the codes' function as one of the city's most strategic tools for neighborhood improvement. The city changed the codes' function from primarily a complaint-driven process to one of systematic enforcement. Instead of simply dealing with complaints, the codes enforcement staff now visit neighborhoods on a regular basis and proactively address issues of litter, overgrowth, illegal dumping and blight. The city passed a

blight acquisition ordinance, which deals more effectively with property demolition, imminent domain and the acquisition of abandoned properties so that they can be conveyed to community-based organizations for improvement and returned as affordable housing.

The department of neighborhood services produces an impressive array of publications and brochures, including a quarterly magazine, an annual report and a citizen guide to city services. All are designed to keep citizens better informed and engaged.

Little City Halls — Department of Neighborhoods, Seattle, Washington

The stated mission of Seattle's department of neighborhoods is to "build on the community's strengths by further empowering citizens and improving services to neighborhoods." The foundation of the department's work is a system of 13 "Little City Halls." These storefront offices in neighborhoods throughout Seattle provide a local connection to city government. A quarter of a million visits are made to these offices each year by citizens paying their public utility bills or taking advantage of a myriad of decentralized services.

Court magistrates maintain hours in the Little City Halls so that citizens can contest their parking infractions without having to go downtown. Likewise, police, crime prevention, and neighborhood planning staff can all be found

Key Points from Chattanooga

- Make sure that you make a distinction between constituent services and neighborhood problem solving. The former has a focus on assisting residents with personal issues, the later is tied more directly to community impact and identifying situations where people are encouraged and supported.

- Coordination of various city departments is a critical task of the department of neighborhoods.

- Work toward high visibility. It's important for residents to know that you are there and what you are seeking to accomplish on their behalf.

- Obtain mayor's blessing to fully use city resources to resolve neighborhood "front porch" issues, e.g. abandoned cars, illegal dumpsites, etc.

- Neighborhood associations can be important partners in neighborhood strategies. Therefore, providing support and technical assistance to enhance their effectiveness can pay big dividends.

there. Citizens can apply for passports, purchase pet licenses or transit passes, attend free legal clinics, learn about job openings, reserve meeting rooms or visit the city's public access network using the computer terminal. The program is growing and there are plans to expand to four additional Little City Halls by early spring 2000.

Each Little City Hall has a coordinator who is the link between the community and downtown. The coordinators know city government so they can help citizens and organizations access the programs and services they need. Likewise, the coordinators know the communities so they can assist city departments and officials in working with them effectively.

The Little City Halls are strategically located throughout the city and provide:

- City liaison – coordinators.
- City services.
- Neighborhood development—a location within the neighborhood where citizens and community organizations mobilize self-help efforts for neighborhood improvement.
- Human services.
- Utility payments/collections/registration facilities—four of the locations also offer municipal court services.

Faith-based Partnerships — Front Porch Alliance, City of Indianapolis, Indiana

In the fall of 1997, Indianapolis Mayor Stephen Goldsmith launched the "Front Porch Alliance" initiative as a cooperative effort among city government, churches, synagogues, mosques, and neighborhood organizations to enhance the community- building work of all the parties. Central to the initiative is:

- Supporting religious institutions.
- Bolstering neighborhood organizations.
- Rebuilding families.

The city's position was that the full commitment of the entire city, and especially the faith community, was need-ed to fortify neighborhoods and meet the needs of the people who live in them.

The mayor appointed a community outreach team to meet with local pastors, other neighborhood leaders, and residents and to coordinate the Front Porch Alliance. The team was led by the *Indianapolis Star*'s "Man of the Year" in 1993, Isaac Randolph. A primary objective of the team was to learn more about church-based and other neighborhood-based community programs and determine how private and public resources could be matched with program needs. The outreach team held a yearlong series of

Position adopted by City of Indianapolis:

- Government should support the work of churches, neighborhood associations and charitable organizations.

- Public officials can use their role as community leaders to spotlight positive efforts and emphasize the importance of value-shaping.

- Government can help churches and community groups form partnerships and connect neighborhood renewal efforts with existing private and public resources.

- Government can provide appropriate public resources whenever possible.

"round tables" examining a variety of issues in many neighborhoods. For example, roundtable meetings were held to discuss the importance of mentors for children and to hear from children about positive alternatives to crime and drugs.

At the end of the year, the outreach team and Front Porch Alliance compiled a report to the mayor. The Alliance established a mission statement, "to encourage the full energy of the City of Indianapolis to support the community-building work of churches, neighborhood associations and other value-shaping institutions—the organizations that are uniquely designed to support families, provide activities for children and enhance community renewal." And the roundtables informed planning and action and assisted in the development of a set of strategic programs and services, including the expansion of a community enhancement fund to provide grants for community-building activities of churches and other non-governmental institutions that are supporting families and renewal of neighborhoods. Grants ranging from $500 to $5,000 are reviewed and awarded to organizations on a quarterly basis.

The Front Porch Alliance has been touted as an innovative approach to addressing neighborhood problems and, in 1998, was recognized by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development with a John J. Gunther Blue Ribbon Practice Award.

A Comprehensive Approach to Neighborhood Improvement — Office of Neighborhood Involvement, Portland, Oregon

Portland's Office of Neighborhood Involvement (ONI) is one of the most advanced city- run neighborhood initiatives among the 16 cities surveyed. (The other was Seattle's department of neighborhoods) The office is actively engaged in assisting Portland citizens in building community and ensuring neighborhood livability.

Founded in 1973, the office was created as a communications link between citizens and the city of Portland's

bureaus. Since then, ONI has become one of the key partners effecting increased participation in community activities and government affairs by neighborhood associations, non-profit organizations, business associations, and involved citizens. Through its seven programs, the Office of Neighborhood Involvement provides financial and technical support for the neighborhood network, community organizing, public involvement coordination, and outreach, information and referral to the people of Portland.

The city's seven program areas are:

- Neighborhood involvement—Portland's "neighborhood network" is made up of 94 neighborhood associations and seven neighborhood offices located throughout the city. The neighborhood offices provide support and information to volunteer-based neighborhood associations, other groups, and individuals interested in participating in their neighborhood and community to

strengthen its livability and vitality. Addressing land use issues, organizing neighborhood clean-ups, responding to traffic related issues and organizing community pride events are examples of community-building projects that neighbors take on.
- City information and referral—Portland's information center and referral line is a central source of basic information and referral to city programs, services and employees. The referral line handles more than 6,000 phone calls and 3,000 walk-in customers every month.

- Crime prevention—Neighborhood-based crime prevention services are an important part of the city of Portland's innovative community policing program. Working out of several neighborhood offices, crime prevention staff offers information and training to neighborhood associations, public safety committees and other citizen groups and individuals to coordinate crime prevention organizing.
- Community outreach coordination—Through the outreach coordination program, staff work to create community-building partnerships, provide information and technical assistance to other city bureau's outreach and involvement efforts, and train community members in leadership and community organizing skills.
- Refugee/immigrant coordination—The program works to coordinate the information and services needed by Portland's 24 different refugee and immigrant communities. Working with organizations as well as individuals, the refugee and immigrant coordinator helps the communities work with law enforcement and other agencies to effectively provide services and resolve problems.
- Metropolitan human rights center—Aimed at fostering mutual understanding and respect among people, the Metropolitan Human Rights Center offers education, networking and technical assistance on human rights issues—including the American with Disabilities Act—and responds to community crises. By sponsoring multicultural events and community-based diversity training and dialogues, the center strengthens community commitment to human rights and the city of Portland.
- Neighborhood mediation center—With a focus on creating good relationships between neighbors to build strong community, the neighborhood mediation center provides free mediation services for neighbor-to-neighbor conflict involving noise, nuisance, property mainte-

> The most successful neighborhood initiatives have been those where the neighborhood takes responsibility and ownership in the development and implementation of the initiative.
>
> — Las Vegas Department of Neighborhood Services.

nance, pets, interpersonal relationships, harassment, and landlord-tenant disputes.

Rapid Response Team — Neighborhood Services Department, Las Vegas, Nevada

The city of Las Vegas created the neighborhood services department to maintain and enhance the quality of life for all residents and neighborhoods. The rapid response team is a division of the neighborhood services department. The response team's mission is the improvement of the quality of life in every neighborhood. Proactive compliance of city codes and ordinances is promoted, requiring that the team work with citizens, neighborhoods, local businesses and city departments daily to maximize the effect of neighborhood clean-ups and the maintenance of properties. The response team provides a swift and direct action response to constituent concerns (received via a established hotline) about a host of neighborhood conditions, including:

- Graffiti removal — usually within 48 hours of a call to the team hotline.
- Removal of unsightly signs or littering public right-of-ways — also within 48 hours of a constituent call.
- Removal of abandoned refrigerators or other discarded dangerous material—the neighborhood services depart-

ment promotes an immediate dispatch of rapid response team personnel on these matters.

• Although other city departments are responsible for care of certain medians, alleys and other public right-of-ways, the response team will remove any vegetation or other debris located on city property upon receiving a call to the hotline.

The Rapid Response Team also partners with neighborhood residents to eliminate blight and to conduct neighborhood clean up. The department of neighborhood services notes that the neighborhood clean-up events are very effective at not only disposing of unwanted items from yards and vacant lots, but also are big events for building the relationship between residents and city government.

Grants — A Common Strategy in Cities' Offices of Neighborhoods

A strategy common to all of the city-run office of neighborhoods listed above is grantmaking. Each has established a strategy for leveraging city funds and stimulating resident-driven solutions to neighborhood problems. The following are brief snapshots of the grantmaking initiatives within the neighborhood programs highlighted above:

1. Seattle annually distributes more than $1.6 million in grants in support of neighborhood-based initiatives. The Seattle Neighborhood Matching Fund program is an award-winning program that distributes city money for projects planned and created by neighborhood groups. The Ford Foundation and Harvard's Kennedy School of Government have recognized it as one of the nation's 10 most innovative state and local government programs. Jim Diers, the dynamic director of the city's office of neighborhoods, describes the program as a way of meeting the neighborhoods halfway and multiplying the city's resources. He notes that an even bigger benefit may be the way the matching fund has involved thousands of people who were not previously involved with their community organizations.

City's Grants Focus on Youth Violence Prevention

The Safe City Initiative, housed within the Denver Mayor's Office, has an impressive $1,000,000 a year grant program that specifically targets youth violence. The initiative began in 1993, when Mayor Wellington Webb joined with the Denver City Council and appointed a 150-member task force that held meetings throughout the city. The task force received recommendations from more than 2,500 citizens on how Denver could address the increase it was seeing in violence, particularly involving youth, and improve the quality of life and safety of neighborhoods. The grants are distributed annually to more than 90 community and neighborhood groups that have provided positive alternatives to more than 10,000 youths and 3,300 families.

2. Chattanooga's Department of Neighborhoods has combined general funds and Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) dollars to encourage and support a broad array of neighborhood services. A matching mini-grant programs, which infuses more than $200,000 into Chattanooga's neighborhoods annually, also has encouraged matching support for resident-driven initiatives from the private sector, the foundation community and from residents themselves.

3. Portland's Office of Neighborhood Involvement provides grants via its neighborhood network, which is made up of 94 neighborhood associations and seven neighborhood offices located throughout the city. The neighborhood offices provide support and information to volunteer-based neighborhood associations, other groups and individuals interested in participating in their neighborhood and community to strengthen its livability and vitality.

More City Models of Neighborhood-Focused Agendas

Dayton, Ohio. Neighborhood activism in Dayton is commonly known as the Priority Board System. The Priority Boards have become the most effective vehicle for Dayton's neighborhoods to integrate their needs and concerns with the policy, service delivery, and budget systems of Dayton's city government. Dayton's resident volunteers – Priority board members, neighborhood associations and other civic groups — continually energize this nationally recognized system of citizen participation.

Kansas City, Missouri. The Neighborhood Advocate Team focuses on connecting citizens/neighborhoods with improved delivery of services, encouraging effective community-building partnerships and establishing innovative ways for citizens to actively participate in and be informed about Kansas City government.

Salt Lake City, Utah. The Office of Neighborhood Services acts as a liaison between 29 community councils and city government. It assists the community councils in preparing for regularly scheduled meetings as well as meetings with city departments. The office sends out notices and agendas of meetings, and prepares and distributes minutes of the monthly meeting between the mayor and community council chairs. It coordinates the Neighborhood Self-help grant and provides leadership training for community council chairs. The office maintains a neighborhood resource library and produces a monthly calendar of community council and city government meetings and events.

St. Louis, Missouri. The Neighborhood Stabilization Team serves as a catalyst for bringing together city departments, the police and neighborhood residents to solve neighborhood problems. There are 27 Neighborhood Stabilization Officers who serve all 79 city neighborhoods. The officers work as community organizers promoting initiatives such as Team Sweep, Weed & Seed, Enterprise Community Program, and a Landlord Organizing Program. They also respond to neighborhood crises and facilitate formal and informal neighborhood planning processes.

Tampa, Florida. The Office of Neighborhood Liaison works to preserve and improve the physical, social and economic health of Tampa's neighborhoods. It helps organize associations and work with their members to develop neighborhood action strategies. The Neighborhood Liaison serves as a point of contact between citizens and the mayor and city departments.

City Models and Best Practices

City	Grantmaking	Neighborhood Resource Service Centers	Neighborhood Involvement Planning	Publications Newsletter	Special Events	Leadership Training	Human Relations Mediation	Information Referral
			Major Program Components					
Birmingham, AL	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Chattanooga, TN	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dayton, OH	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Kansas City, MO	✓	✓	✓					✓
Portland, OR		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Seattle, WA	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
St. Louis, MO	✓	✓	✓					✓
St. Paul, MN			✓	✓	✓			✓
Tampa, FL	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓

4. The city of Las Vegas has been developing public and private funding arrangements and has worked in partnership with local financial institutions, developers and non-profit organizations in a myriad of grantmaking concepts. These include Community Development Block Grants and other entitlement grants, HUD discretionary grants such as continuum of care and supportive housing private activity bonds, section 108 loans and 15 percent aside redevelopment funds, and private foundation grants.

5. Indianapolis provides funding through its Community Enhancement Fund, which was established in 1993 to support a wide array of community improvement efforts. More recently the fund has been expanded to include grants to support the community-building activities of churches and other non-governmental institutions that are supporting families and the renewal of neighborhoods.

Other Cities Surveyed

The neighborhood initiatives listed above are not highlighted because they have claimed to be among the best in the country nor are the summarized program areas said to be the most important work that they are doing. It is, however, clear that they are very progressive in their approach to neighborhoods and the role of local government.

Other cities surveyed included Birmingham, Alabama; Columbus, Ohio; Dayton, Ohio; Denver, Colorado; Fort Wayne, Indiana; Kansas City, Missouri; Salt Lake City, Utah; St. Louis, Missouri; St. Paul, Minnesota; Tampa, Florida; and Tucson, Arizona. Some were operating very mature neighborhood initiatives, others were just getting started or getting started again with a neighborhood agenda.

The following are several key points those interviewed made about matters critical to their success and/or challenges in neighborhoods:

- Neighborhood associations can be powerful allies for citizen engagement and information dissemination.
- Inter-departmental cooperation can pay big dividends, especially when coordinated with the office of neighborhoods.
- Data and the mapping of data can paint a picture of neighborhood challenges and opportunities heretofore unimagined in community-building circles.
- Resident leadership training encourages positive citizen participation and keeps fresh the people and voices involved in neighborhood revitalization.

Conclusion

As you can see, there is no one model of what a neighborhood-focused agenda should look like. The cities highlighted in this chapter are working to change conditions in neighborhoods in varied and diverse ways. While some may be focusing on bringing city services closer to their citizens with storefront offices, others may be providing residents with training on community organizing.

But there are a number of strategies that are consistent across the models:

• A belief that systems of support in neighborhoods can only be established "with" and not "to" a neighborhood.

Or put another way, solutions to people's problems in neighborhoods are more often than not close to where they live and involve them.
• The value of diversity and fostering broad community participation.
• The importance of building on neighborhood strengths as well as the assets of existing city departments.
• Developing partnerships and collaborations.

In all of the cities, they emphasized the importance of inviting residents and city leaders to join in the effort as equal partners, recognizing that only in working together do they hold the key to what is needed to bring about meaningful and lasting improvements within neighborhoods.

How do I contact cities for additional information?

City	Contact	Phone Number	Web Site
Birmingham, AL	Don Lupo	205-254-2633	www.ci.bham.al.us
Chattanooga, TN	Moses Freeman	423-757-5277	www.chattanooga.gov
Columbus, OH	Gail Gregory	614-645-2489	www.ci.columbus.oh.us
Dayton, OH	Charles Meadows	937-333-3636	www.ci.dayton.oh.us
Denver, CO	Jim Martinez	303-640-2335	www.ci.denver.co.us
Fort Wayne, IN	Andrew Downs	219-427-1111	www.ci.ft-wayne.in.us
Indianapolis, IN	Isaac Randolph	317-327-1372	www.indygov.org/mayor/fpa
Kansas City, MO	Donovan Mouton	816-513-3500	www.kcmo.org
Las Vegas, NV	Sharon Segerblom	702-229-2330	www.ci.las-vegas.nv.us
Portland, OR	Dr. David Lang	503-823-4519	www.ci.portland.or.us/oni
Salt Lake City, UT	Pat Van Tine	801-535-7915	www.ci.slc.ut.us
St. Louis, MO	Anna Ginsburg	314-622-4628	www.stlouis.missouri.org
St. Paul, MN	Bob Hammer	651-266-8989	www.ci.stpaul.mn.us
Seattle, WA	Jim Diers	206-684-0464	www.cityofseattle.net/don
Tampa, FL	Julie Harris	813-274-7734	www.ci.tampa.fl.us
Tucson, AZ	Liz Miller	520-791-4204	www.ci.tucson.az.us

Up to this point, the steps outlined in this guidebook have hopefully generated a lot of ideas for a neighborhood-focused agenda in your community. Certainly, by actively soliciting the involvement of key stakeholders you have gained the benefit of the thinking and experiences of more, and different, people and organizations. The neighborhood data you have collected has provided you with a new depth of information about your community's status in relations to key social, health, economic and environmental conditions. And the sampling of city-run neighborhood initiatives presented in the previous chapter has presented you with some out-of-the-box thinking about civic solutions.

Now you have come to the challenge of deciding the scope of work for your neighborhood-focused agenda. Put another way, it is the time to make the transition from planning to action around the critical community issues your research and planning have brought into focus. Issues, perhaps, such as the health and welfare of children and families, the quality of public education, and the condition of the environment.

Guiding the efforts is an "action plan" that describes strategies, details the actions that the various participants will take, and even proposes timelines for implementation. In developing that plan, there are number of related issues that need to be taken into careful consideration. In this chapter, eight factors to consider in developing your plan of action are discussed. They were selected based on the comments from city officials around the immediate challenges they faced in "getting started" and their views about what information might be most helpful to others.

The Scope of Work and the City's Role
Scope of Work

Among the most important early tasks is developing clarity about the scope of work that needs attention and the role the city will play. The reality is that there is not enough money or other resources to fix every problem or address every worthy cause. And even in all that a city finds important to be done, not all needs to be done by the city.

Therefore, a statement of what the office of neighborhoods will set out to do and what it might be inclined to encourage and/or support others to do is critical. This statement becomes a preamble of sorts to the plan of action. Some cities express it in the form of a mission statement, others as goal statements. But whatever form it takes, it is the action expression of your ideas. And it becomes the language that staff will use when they talk to residents, community-based organizations and the media about the work.

The City's Role

Today, it is clear that local government is increasingly being called upon to play a more process-oriented role in their neighborhood efforts, including:

Examples of Mission Statements and Goal Statements from Offices of Neighborhoods

"The Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Advocate as envisioned by Mayor Barnes is a new effort to bring to the Office of the Mayor a voice for neighborhoods into the priority-setting process of Kansas City, Missouri. Our mission is to strengthen and sustain every neighborhood and facilitate access to the Mayor's Office."
—Kansas City, Missouri

"To preserve and enhance the quality of life in our neighborhoods and throughout our community by working in partnerships with citizens, businesses, agencies and other city departments."
— Sacramento, California

"To build on Seattle's strengths by further empowering citizens and improving services to neighborhoods. Toward that end, the department supports a wide range of programs."
— Seattle, Washington

"To improve the quality of life in Las Vegas neighborhoods by assisting citizens, property owners and community organizations in social and economic development by investing in public facility construction, improvements and programs that meet identified resident needs, and by creating visible change in older neighborhoods by expanding community housing and business opportunities by leveraging public and private funding." — Las Vegas, Nevada

- Convenor – bringing together groups to work jointly on issues.
- Facilitator – helping groups resolve conflicts and reach consensus.
- Catalyst – making change happen.
- Partner – combining government resources with others.

Clarity about the purpose, scope of work and the role of the office of neighborhoods is the foundation on which ideas are translated into practice.

> "Ain't nothin' to it but to do it."
>
> — Maya Angelou

Targeting Neighborhoods for Initial Action

Obviously, one of the challenges for city government in general, and an office of neighborhoods, in particular, is the notion of service to all people. But at the same time, there are certain community conditions that demand greater attention and greater resources. A city can be judged by its worst neighborhoods, or how it reaches out to the least of its citizens. In this vein, targeting certain neighborhoods, taking a public position about what neighborhoods need particular attention, should be a priority.

But what neighborhoods? Of course, neighborhood data, as discussed previously, should inform targeting strategies and decisions. But targeting need not be based uniquely on the most needy. The selection process calls for an intentional discussion, both internally and externally, based on mission and resources.

Some options to consider:

- Targeting neighborhoods where your efforts could add significant value or bring much needed attention to existing efforts that are making a difference at the neighborhood level.
- Piggybacking on existing efforts and alliances of various city departments.
- Targeting neighborhoods on the basis of schools or school clusters, when boundaries are not conducive to strategies for a geographic area.
- Targeting neighborhoods based on distress, poverty among children and families, or other challenges like

helping recent immigrants assimilate into the city.

Partnerships and Linkages

It is important for the staff in new "neighborhood offices" to be aware that they may not be welcomed with open arms by neighborhood residents. In fact, many neighborhoods have increasingly become distrustful of outsiders' (including local government) efforts to assess them and then publicize neighborhood problems and not involve them in crafting solutions.

Of course, if the work of the office of neighborhoods is limited to constituent services, or simply responding to citizen complaints, there may be limited resistance. On the other hand, proactive efforts aimed at neighborhood improvement and citizen engagement can be challenging and even confrontational.

Moving ideas for a neighborhood agenda into practice will require partnerships and linkages with residents, neighborhood associations, community-based organizations, faith-based institutions, as well as cooperative efforts with a host of other city agencies. A few considerations:

- Use stakeholder mapping and any other available source to identify existing and nascent leadership.
- Neighborhood associations can be very meaningful and strategic allies. Several of the cities surveyed formed alliances with neighborhood associations to engage residents, test the implementation of new ideas for neighborhood improvement, plan neighborhood events, and engage residents in proactive plans around enterprise zones and more.
- Faith-based institutions have both leaders and followers that represent a significant asset for moving ideas into practice in neighborhoods. And, many are located in the "eye of the storm," in some of the most distressed neighborhoods.
- Don't overlook the foundation community as partners. Foundations represent more than financial resources. They often are aware of innovative programs and ser-

vices because of their funding of neighborhood initiatives. They frequently have information about community-based organizations that have been effective and those that have not. Often they are connected to regional and national grantmakers with volumes of information about models and best practices all across the country. And, they may have a valuable point of view about what matters most in strategies to improve neighborhoods and how best to move ideas into actions.

Relative to internal partnerships, the office of neighborhoods should consider what plans and efforts other city agencies have related to neighborhood improvement. For instance, other departments (like the planning office and parks and recreation) often have experience working in neighborhoods that would be of great benefit to a new and developing office of neighborhoods.

And while many cities and county agencies have moved away from large, segmented bureaucracies to fewer departments that integrate a broader set of functions, considerable overlap still exists. Constituent service is one area in which there is frequently a tremendous amount of overlap. Sometimes an intentional conversation between the right parties about how to approach the task with more synergy can result in both financial savings and better service to citizens. The ideas and plans for putting those ideas into practice should be discussed with any department that could remotely improve the benefit to community.

The notion of collaboration, if not cooperation or synergy, among city agencies could greatly amplify the program and services being planned in the office of neighborhoods.

Building Internal and External Capacity

At the heart of all strategies to strengthen neighborhoods are people — the children and adults who reside in these communities, and the people from government, business and nonprofits who have committed to work together to achieve this goal. To facilitate moving ideas into practice in community, building the capacity of both the internal (staff)

and external (people in neighborhoods) stakeholders must be incorporated in the office of neighborhood's strategy.

Building Neighborhood Capacity

Building the skills of neighborhood residents to understand the issues facing their communities and to devise and implement solutions is a key to the success of city-run, collaborative efforts to strengthen neighborhoods. Building neighborhood capacity is a common activity among the cities surveyed. The director in one city's office of neighborhoods described neighborhood capacity-building as the most important work being done in his city. He noted that it was a little like housework: it is noticed only when it is not done.

A few neighborhood capacity-building considerations:

- Neighborhood capacity-building takes different forms in different neighborhoods. One plan of action does not fit all.
- Building the knowledge base of community-based organizations, neighborhood associations and residents is one form of building capacity. This can be accomplished in a variety of venues, including the provision of technical assistance to neighborhood-based organizations, leadership training for residents and grants to support and encourage citizen participation.
- Establishing effective communication between city government and neighborhood residents alleviates confusion about what technical and other resources are available to support various elements of neighborhood work.
- Being responsive to and supportive of solutions crafted by residents to address their local issues and concerns even when considered non-traditional is important. Examples might be for the office of neighborhoods to support resident planned block parties, community gardens, provide refreshments for community cleanups and sponsor the mailing of neighborhood association newsletters.
- There are a number of ways to build the capacity of neighborhood associations to engage residents in productive ways. For example, developing the capacity of

neighborhood associations to do resident conflict resolution and mediation, providing technical assistance to acquire 501(c) (3) status, and creating forums for the training of their volunteer citizen officers and members.

- Promoting/supporting cooperative efforts between and among faith-based institutions and other community organizations aimed at meeting the secular needs of residents is another way of building neighborhood capacity.

- A hands-on example of neighborhood-capacity building could involve the city's role in developing and supporting/advocating for the development of youth-centered activities at the neighborhood level. This might include expanding the availability of soccer and baseball fields for Little League play, sponsoring events planned by and/or for youth, being attentive to and advocate for youth mentoring efforts when the Mayor's office can add stronger voice to the need for adult volunteers.

Internal Capacity Building

And what about the training and capacity-building needs of internal staff and volunteers responsible for implementing the work of the office of neighborhoods? The very first step is to create an environment within the office where a commitment to excellence is the rule and a dedicated approach to retooling and continuous skill building is valued.

Whether the training is focused on better phone and customer service skills for staff engaged in constituent services or community organizing training for the office of neighborhood outreach staff, training opportunities are plentiful. The office of neighborhoods might seek out information about training opportunities made available through the National League of Cities, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, the National Civic League, and other affinity groups that focus on local government officials.

Other training and capacity building opportunities often overlooked are those designed for business people and foundation staffs. These opportunities are often in the form of conferences and seminars and frequently focus on cross-cutting themes and skills that also would be

Important Resources for Cities "Getting Started"

The range of resources available to city governments interested in strengthening neighborhoods has grown enormously in the last decade. There are "how-to" guides published by a variety of groups, sites on the world wide web, and many conferences and workshops sponsored by trade and affinity groups.

Three very important resources include:

- **National League of Cities**
  1301 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
  Washington, DC 20004-1763
  (202) 626-3000
  www.nlc.org
- **U.S. Conference of Mayors**
  1601 I St., NW
  Washington, DC 20006
  (202) 293-7330
  www.usmayors.org
- **National Civic League**
  1445 Market St., Suite 300
  Denver, CO 80202
  (303) 1-800-223-6004
  www.ncl.org

appropriate for the office of neighborhood staff. Common themes include conflict resolution and mediation, time management and effective communications skills.

Funding

Many of the plans developed will require financial and other resources, sometimes substantial. Successful city-run neighborhood initiatives have made a point of gathering financial and other resources from throughout the community to ensure broad ownership of the efforts. In developing these resources, consider the following:

- Be strategic about thinking about how your limited financial resources might be leveraged. If you are planning a modest grants program, consider a matching grant format in which you require a grant recipient to match your gift in-kind or with equal dollars.
- Consider the common interests you might have with local or national foundations in terms of community improvement efforts. Have you been considering a neighborhood strategy that they also want to see tested in your community? Staying current with philanthropic interest and initiatives is the key. Project grants, start-up grants or research grants might be useful for the rapid infusion of cash into new programs and ideas.
- Is your city missing out on any federal waivers, HUD programs, mental health initiatives, etc. that might meet a special need in your community? Staying on top of all the initiatives is a big challenge and all too often a city will discover the opportunity at the 11th hour, too late to do what is necessary to explore the fit and engage residents in a thoughtful process.
- City governments can take some actions to increase collaboration both within government and with outside partners that require little or no financial resource outlay.

Timelines

It is important that action plans have timelines associated with them. But the reality is that improving conditions in urban neighborhoods will take a great deal of time. It could take years to achieve the magnitude of improvement you seek. But at the same time, stakeholders feel a sense of urgency about the need for change and want to see progress as soon as possible. In addition, it can be necessary for your office of neighborhoods to have something to show at an early stage in order to gain and keep support from inside and outside city government. In reality, everyone wants evidence that their investment – of time, effort, money, institutional support or political support – is worth it. Here are some things to consider in relation to balancing these needs:

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Dayton Uses Federal Block Grant Funds for Neighborhood Efforts

Funding from federal community development programs has always been important to neighborhood programs in Dayton. The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program in particular has provided a substantial portion of the funding for the Priority Boards (citizen boards) in the city.

In 1997, the total budget for the citizen participation systems was $1.2 million, with 80% coming from CDBG and 20% from the city. All of the funds in Dayton are directly administered by the Human and Neighborhood Resources Department and are divided between the central office and the six neighborhood Priority Board offices.

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- The stakeholders should select the time frames for the action plan.
- Small successes at the neighborhood level can serve to help gain momentum and give those involved a sense of accomplishment. Examples include putting in a four-way stop sign; closing a crack house; getting drug dealers out of a park.
- Be sure these accomplishments are portrayed as part of a larger plan that links the action to the plan's broader vision.
- Publishing neighborhood data you have collected and analyzed can be an effective way to raise awareness of your efforts and the key issues in your city.
- Effective two-way dialogue between the office of neighborhoods and its stakeholders is a critical component in the long-term support of your action plan.

Communications

An essential key to the success of a city's neighborhood-focused agenda is an active communications plan. It is important that all sectors and segments of the community's population should be kept informed. An effective two-

way dialogue between the city and its stakeholders is a critical component in creating a relevant, widely supported and effectively implemented action plan.

Annual reports, newsletters, brochures, fact sheets, progress reports, posters and fliers, news and feature stories, letters to the editor, and special events are examples of communications tools that may be needed. In addition, the office should explore using new technology, like the Internet, for improving dialogue among citizens. There are a growing number of examples of efforts in this regard across the nation.

One consideration around developing a message to the community is the notion that the office may not want to simply focus on what it is doing. You should also consider communicating what matters in neighborhood and what others are doing or setting out to do that is consistent with your mission. Newsletters, for example, are excellent vehicles for lifting up the good work done by neighborhood associations or residents who are making a difference.

Monitoring

While the idea of monitoring or evaluation may not relate comfortably, or even realistically, to the overall work of the office of neighborhoods, monitoring the progress of your action plan has merit. Assessment will provide you with the information you need to know whether or not your strategies are achieving your goals. And it will provide you with feedback for the various stakeholders, such as residents, staff and funders.

Here are some things to consider related to monitoring the progress of your action plan:

- Decide which information/data will show the extent to which the goals of your action plan are being achieved.
- Develop and implement a plan for measuring those indicators. Much of the same data collected and analyzed for tracking neighborhood conditions can be used.

Advice from City Leaders in Chattanooga on "Getting Started"

Think local – and diverse. Rethinking a community starts at the neighborhood level, says Chattanooga City Council member Mai Bell Hurley. Start with your neighborhood associations, she advises, and "include people from a variety of perspectives."

Seek broad input. Many Chattanoogans attribute their success in large part to what's often called "the visioning process" – a series of public meetings in which residents were encouraged to offer their ideas for the future. "Nothing catalyzed our people more," says James Catanzaro, president of Chattanooga State Technical College, who helped lead the process.

Listen to experts. "Often we know so little about what people are doing elsewhere that we spend time reinventing the wheel," says Catanzaro. "People are being brought in all the time to speak to colleges and service clubs." Why not ask those groups to set a year-long theme – strengthening neighborhoods – and cooperate in lining up speakers?

Start small. "Make sure that the first opportunity that you tackle is diverse and doable," says University of Tennessee professor Stroud Watson. Dealing with issues like repairing sidewalks or street landscaping can build resident confidence and provide early success. The point is to make sure the project comes off. "Success builds confidence in the city that once one neighborhood does something that's good for them, we can do it in another," he says.

Conclusion

The neighborhoods in America's cities — and the people who live in them — deserve and are getting new attention for supremely important reasons. There is a growing national recognition of the interdependence between the success of cities and the success of the families who live in them. And there is also an increasing realization that the public sector lacks the resources and reach to address the problems and opportunities in our cities. Cities therefore must develop new, collaborative strategies for urban change.

The search for solutions to improving circumstances and opportunities for residents of our cities' neighborhoods demands that we develop ideas that are not only strategic and action-oriented, but that also include the thinking and experiences of more people and organizations.

Across the country there are a growing number of elected officials who have neighborhood issues high on their agenda. Included in this report are examples that illustrate the wide range of community collaboration and action taking place. They run the gamut from fledgling efforts focusing initially on decentralizing city services to full-blown offices of neighborhoods with agendas that include grantmaking, technical assistance and issue-specific programs focused on everything from improving public education to fighting youth violence, from beautifying parks to building affordable housing.

But there are many more cities that have yet to find a way to translate their ambitious city goals into specific neighborhood-level program initiatives. This publication is designed to be a tool for cities trying to create and implement a neighborhood-focused agenda in the 21st century. For as in every big task, the first step is the hardest — getting started. It is my hope that this guidebook will act as a catalyst for action and a resource for expanding the options, considerations and possible directions for your city's neighborhood-focused agenda.

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