

Improving the Outcomes of Place-Based

By Naomi Cytron



Initiatives



For more than five decades, public, private and nonprofit entities have implemented a range of targeted neighborhood revitalization strategies designed to tackle the challenges associated with concentrated poverty. These efforts have included urban renewal programs, loans and grants motivated by the Community Reinvestment Act, housing redevelopment through HOPE VI, Empowerment Zones, New Markets Tax Credit investments, as well as foundation-led comprehensive community initiatives and local nonprofit ventures. The most ambitious of these initiatives have aimed to concentrate multiple investments in both infrastructure and human capital in a single neighborhood.

At their core, these comprehensive initiatives try to tackle long-standing disparities in housing, employment, education, and health caused by public policy decisions, market forces and failures, and patterns of discrimination. Yet overcoming these inequalities has proven to be difficult. In some cases, place-based initiatives have led to measurable improvements; in others, efforts have struggled, failing to significantly “move the needle” on the challenges associated with deeply entrenched neighborhood poverty.

Despite these mixed-outcomes, place-based strategies are receiving increased attention and funding from both the public and private sector. The Obama Administration has explicitly endorsed place-based policy, and has launched an evaluation of existing federal place-based policies in an effort to identify areas of overlap and to seek avenues for interagency coordination. Additionally, the administration has budgeted for a new cohort of place-based anti-poverty programs. On a more local scale, a number of California-based foundations and CDFIs, as well as local government agencies, have also expanded investments in place-based initiatives.

While the goals of these initiatives are akin to those that have come before, the context in which they are being established has changed significantly. Encouragingly, the increasing range of institutional actors engaging in place-based initiatives creates new opportunities for alignment across institutions, including federal and local government, the private sector, philanthropy, and nonprofits, and across issue areas, including housing, health, workforce development and transportation. However, the continuing ripple effects from the recession—including the growth of state and local budget deficits, diminished resources flowing through private channels, and the deepened distress that households are experiencing—pose new challenges to the successful implementation of community change efforts. Cumulatively, these factors represent a “new normal,” one that both sets the stage for place-based initiatives to be even more strategic, efficient and collaborative than they have been in the past, and demands that funders from all sectors determine just how to do so.

In an effort to help funders of place-based initiatives respond to these conditions and think through the range of issues that might help improve planning and implementation going forward, on February 11-12, 2010, the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco and the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change hosted a day and a half long convening, “Improving the Outcomes of Place-Based Initiatives.” This event was also an outgrowth of the Federal Reserve System’s partnership with the Brookings Institution to examine concentrated poverty in 16 case study communities around the nation. One of the core themes that resonated across all communities was the isolation that very poor neighborhoods face—not just geographic isolation, but isolation from the strategies, resources and

Proposed Federal Programs

- HUD's Choice Neighborhoods Program, which links ideas and funding across HUD, DOT, EPA, and the Department of Education, aims to support neighborhood revitalization efforts that integrate the construction and rehabilitation of affordable and energy efficient housing along with improvements in early childhood and K-12 educational opportunities, job training, and case management for families in crisis.
- The Department of Education's Promise Neighborhoods program—modeled on the Harlem Children's Zone and encouraging alignment among HUD, DOJ, HHS, EPA and ED—proposes funding the integrated planning and implementation of neighborhood-based early childhood education and afterschool programs along with health, workforce development, and community engagement programs.
- The Sustainable Communities Initiative, a partnership between HUD, DOT, and EPA funded in the 2010 budget, aims to improve regional planning efforts that integrate housing and transportation decisions in a manner that supports housing affordability, enhances access to employment centers, promotes public health, and reduces greenhouse gas emissions.
- The Healthy Food Financing Initiative, a collaboration between HHS, Treasury, and USDA, proposes to help finance grocery stores and other healthy food retailers in underserved urban and rural communities across America. This program is directly aimed at addressing the lack of healthy food access in high poverty neighborhoods and the high incidence of related health risks, like obesity and diabetes, in those neighborhoods.

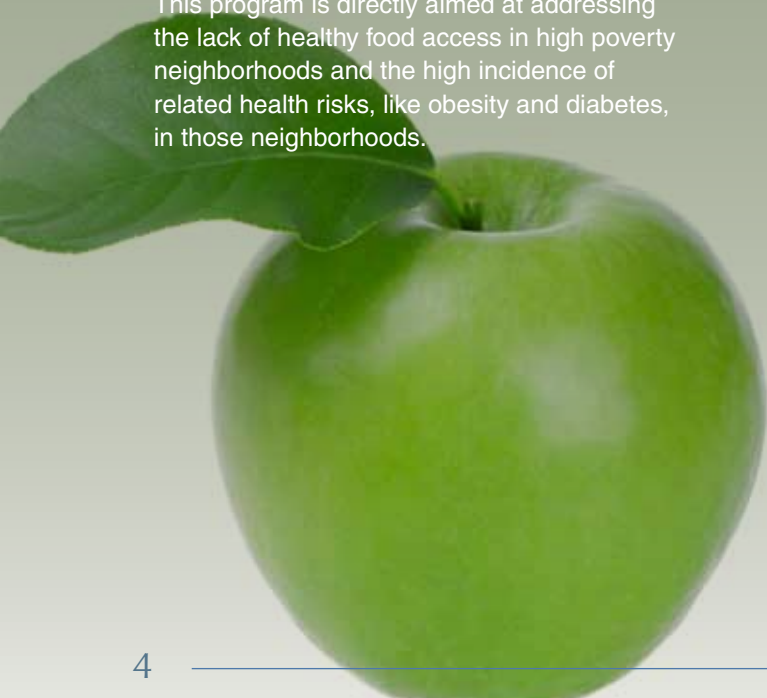
institutions that help generate economic opportunity. The case studies highlighted the need to build connections between high poverty communities and the institutional actors working on a range of issues both locally and in the surrounding region, and to improve the communication and collaboration across the variety of agents working to improve high poverty communities.

As such, "Improving the Outcomes of Place-Based Initiatives" was structured to bring together representatives of public, private, and nonprofit agencies working on place-based initiatives throughout California. Panelists and participants discussed ways to improve their understanding of the places in which they are investing, strengthen the capacities of their community partners, evaluate the outcomes of their investments, and align their strategies with other similarly-oriented efforts taking place both at other types of institutions and at different geographic scales. The conversations that took place during the convening were rich and multifaceted; this article aims to touch on some of the prominent themes and ideas that emerged over the course of the two days. For more detail on the event, including audio recordings of the sessions and PowerPoint presentations, please visit: <http://www.frbsf.org/community/resources/2010/0211>.

Federal Policy and Place Based Investing

"Things are really different in Washington." With these words, Raphael Bostic of HUD summarized the key message from the federal front: there is a sweeping movement within the federal government toward place-based policy-making. Bostic noted that all federal agencies have been explicitly directed to formally articulate, in essence, how place matters—a "path-breaking and unprecedented" approach to thinking about policy. Agencies that have historically operated largely in isolation of one another are being encouraged to find areas of overlap and opportunities for collaboration, and several interagency working groups have been formed to examine how to build policy along multiple dimensions. Additionally, several new programs in the proposed 2011 Budget, including Choice Neighborhoods, Promise Neighborhoods, Sustainable Communities and the Healthy Food Financing Initiatives (see sidebar), are representative of this commitment to integrate and align federal investments.

Bostic noted, though, that "successful development and redevelopment is... at most, only facilitated by the federal government." The successful implementation and long-term sustainability of comprehensive programs will ultimately depend on the readiness and ability of local actors to effectively align with the efforts taking shape at the federal level. However, panelists noted that communities differ in their ability to do so and that there is continued need for capacity building—for both institutions and residents—within isolated and otherwise lagging commu-



nities. Bostic noted that the federal approach to this work will have multiple strands: one will aim to fund communities that have the capacity to implement programs; another strand will build the capacity of communities that need assistance in building the skills and partnerships necessary to effectively utilize significant financial resources; and, in recognition that it is not possible to fund all communities, a third will figure out how to get useful information to the communities that don't receive direct funding.

Understanding Neighborhood Context

The goal of the second panel was to present various approaches to understanding neighborhood context. Where should funders start? Funders have to make a variety of decisions when launching a place-based initiative, but “to be intentional and strategic,” said Vanitha Venugopal of The San Francisco Foundation, “they need to base decisions on a variety of data... that can inform what the opportunity is and where the point of entry should be.” Panelists Garth Taylor of the Metropolitan Chicago Information Center, Peter Pennekamp of the Humboldt Area Foundation, and Victor Rubin of PolicyLink discussed the types of information that can help shape a funder's strategy upon entering a community, including data on socioeconomic conditions, market strength, power systems and institutional capacity, the regional context of a given neighborhood, and the residents themselves.

A key theme of this discussion was that it is critical to distill the vast array of demographic and economic indicators into an understandable set of indices and benchmarks so that funders don't drown in data. Panelists also raised a point that synthesis of quantitative data is not enough for understanding community context. Rather, funders must make an effort to gain an understanding of the institutional assets and systems in a community; critically, this should be done before injecting significant capital into a community. Peter Pennekamp stressed that if funders “lead with money” without first closely examining institutional capacity and structure, they run the risk of reinforcing exclusive or otherwise broken systems that might derail the overall aims of a community initiative. Work must thus be done at the outset of an initiative to ensure that the configuration of community assets and institutions generates accountability among community partners, and not just accountability to an external funder.

The panel also highlighted a common pitfall of place-based work—the danger of focusing so closely on a neighborhood that its wider regional context is ignored. Panelists emphasized that a neighborhood's trajectory is often shaped more by its regional context than by local interventions, and that it is important for funders to help local leadership understand how metropolitan patterns shape local opportunities. Additionally, funders should

seek ways to help local entities gain improved access to the ingredients of social and economic success that may be outside neighborhood boundaries. However, Victor Rubin noted that it is also important to recognize that the level of urgency of local needs, as well as the potential for political, racial and ethnic divides between leadership at the local and regional levels, shapes the ability to substantially link local and regional agendas. Significant groundwork may thus be necessary to create the conditions for connecting a neighborhood to the assets and institutional infrastructure of its surrounding region.

New Roles and Investors in Place-Based Revitalization: Lessons from California

Who does place-based work, how do their approaches and roles differ, and how can they work together more effectively? Five leaders engaged in place-based initiatives in California from very different vantage points tackled these important questions: Tony Iton of the California Endowment, Jennifer Vanica of the Jacobs Center for Neighborhood Innovation (JCNI), Nancy Andrews of the Low Income Investment Fund (LIIF), Kimberly Wicoff of the San Francisco Mayor's Office, and Elwood Hopkins of Emerging Markets, Inc. Much of their discussion centered on the commonalities and differences in the roles that different types of institutions—whether foundations, community development financial institutions, government agencies or banks—play in community change efforts.

First, how do different funders decide how to use their financial resources within a community? Nancy Andrews shared that LIIF deploys grants in such a way as to create small examples of real success—such as a new childcare facility in an underserved neighborhood—which can then be used to leverage external resources and create a platform for policy advocacy. Jennifer Vanica noted that JCNI also funds small, incremental projects, but for different reasons. “You need visible signs of progress because people don't have hope,” said Vanica. She emphasized that, rather than just putting large sums of money “on the table” for local organizations to ultimately fight over, JCNI has learned to invest in resident-driven, short-term projects. In this way, residents are enabled to work together toward accomplishing tangible goals and can demonstrate to themselves that change is possible. This approach has generated trust amongst community residents and has helped JCNI to secure a commitment from residents to share in the responsibility for finding solutions to neighborhood problems. The key point here is that targeted, incremental investments from funders can serve to catalyze the engagement from both internal and external stakeholders that is critical for comprehensively tackling the multiple challenges associated with high poverty communities. In other words, small wins up front can set the stage for long-lasting and broader change.

Panelists also saw differences in how they can help to build the capacity of neighborhood residents to shape change efforts in their community. All speakers agreed that it is imperative to engage residents in decision-making processes and to build a variety of capacities—including advocacy skills around neighborhood interests and needs and the ability to work across racial, ethnic, and cultural lines toward a common agenda—among neighborhood residents. However, certain types of institutions may be better positioned than others to conduct capacity building and community organizing activities. “Leading as a government institution,” said Wicoff, “the power dynamics are such that you can’t do community organizing... you can do engagement, but you can’t train people to advocate against you.” Hopkins noted, however, that power building in a community is not always about fighting back and being adversarial. Bringing up the example of Community Benefit Agreements, which set forth the range of measures that a developer must provide as part of a development project in exchange for community support, Hopkins emphasized that community power can be about demonstrating assets and bringing residents together to proactively demand that externally-driven development is aligned with community interests. Overall, the panel drew attention to the need for funders to be cognizant of power dynamics and the ways in which they are perceived by a community, as well as the type and direction of momentum they might be able to generate, in seeking to build community capacity. In addition, funders may need to partner with other organizations to carry out the community and capacity building activities that they themselves might not be positioned to conduct.

The New Normal

If there was any doubt that external factors can dramatically shape local outcomes, it was put to rest by the discussion on the current economic and fiscal crisis in California and its impact on local communities. Tracy Gordon of the University of Maryland spoke of the challenges posed by California’s budget situation, noting that this past year was the worst on record for state tax revenues and that huge budget shortfalls are projected for the coming years. California’s budget woes are related not just to the current economic climate, but to other factors as well. Some factors are political in nature, such as Proposition 13, which caps property tax increases and also contains language requiring a two-thirds majority vote in the legislature for approving the budget as well as future tax increases. California’s narrow and volatile tax base, cost drivers that stem from demographics and eligibility rules for public programs, and policy choices about where to allocate resources have also fueled the budget strain. Gordon put particular emphasis on this last factor, saying, “Budgets are about much more than numbers. They’re really about tradeoffs and the choices that we make as a society as to what we care about.” The values that drive the tradeoffs here in California impact the distribution of resources across education, health, transportation, and other systems that compose both the backbone and safety net of the state. This point had broader relevance to community change initiatives, in that to be effective over the long-term, local place-based interventions need to be rolled up into systems change and policy advocacy.

Tim Rios of Wells Fargo and Denise Fairchild of the Community Development Technologies Center spoke

Neighborhood residents participating in a community investors meeting. Photo Credit: Jacobs Center for Neighborhood Innovation



about the ways they are seeing the economic crisis affect organizations on the ground. Rios noted that in California's Central Valley, nonprofits are seeking and competing for additional sources of capital to stay afloat, including stimulus dollars and grants as well as bank loans and lines of credit. However, he noted that many organizations are stretching to qualify for funds or do not know how to apply for funds, and are otherwise struggling with capacity-related issues. Fairchild offered a more optimistic view, suggesting that the economic crisis is offering the potential for organizations to think outside of the box—that it provides the opportunity to redefine notions of growth, development, and change, and necessitates that organizations become more engaged in the policy process as a voice for equity. "It's a new day and we really have to begin a transformation," said Fairchild, imploring participants to reexamine local and regional economies and to seek ways to bring a higher level of environmental consciousness to the work of community building and revitalization.

Assessing Outcomes and Measuring Impact

One of the most challenging aspects of place-based work is measuring impact and demonstrating outcomes. During the last panel of the conference, Clare Nolan of Harder + Company, Melanie Moore Kubo of See Change, and Carla Javits of REDF discussed the complexities of evaluating place-based initiatives and measuring the return on investments made by the variety of stakeholders working in a neighborhood.

A central theme of this discussion was that because place-based initiatives involve moving parts and multiple stakeholders with information interests that shift over time, simple outcome metrics will not do. Rather, if the goal is to truly both describe and explain neighborhood change, multi-faceted, creative, and malleable strategies are needed. Panelists emphasized that a mixed-methods evaluation design is critical here—that bundling together a variety of evaluation tools can allow stakeholders to understand not just the "what" of change, but the "how" of change. Moore Kubo noted that investigating qualitative, process-related issues, and not just quantitative outcome measures, can also reveal what might be driving "implementation gaps"—the relationships, day-to-day politics, power structures, or other factors that might be posing a detrimental effect on progress. This kind of qualitative information is vital for finding ways to improve a place-based initiative mid-stream, and for teasing out lessons for funders about how to construct initiatives going forward.

Another key point of this discussion was that information about community change is valuable not just for reporting purposes or to point out course correction

needs—it's also a powerful tool for generating additional investment from external agents. As such, funders need to be able to communicate about change in a way that resonates with a variety of stakeholders. Javits spoke of the ways that REDF is looking for ways to document the social return on investment (SROI) as a means to help communicate with the business community about how the input of financial resources is related to the production of certain community and social outcomes. "Business leadership still influences the allocation of resources in our society like almost nothing else," she said. "ROI and SROI is language they understand, and if we speak to them in language that they understand, while incorporating the subtleties of what we do, we can move some very powerful actors to help us invest in communities," she said.

Panelists also raised bigger questions about place-based initiatives and what we know about them. What are the best practices for building capacity of both organizations and community residents? When capacity is present, what are the best kinds of resources to inject so that high-capacity places can really make a leap forward? These questions are more easily asked than answered, but they represent core issues for the field to resolve.

Conclusion

Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco President and CEO Janet Yellen noted in her closing keynote address that "strong local networks are an essential precondition for effectively using money—whether private, for-profit capital, socially responsible investment, or government subsidy—to invest in communities facing persistent poverty." This event aimed to build these kinds of networks, engaging leaders from a variety of sectors, including public health, education, and transportation, as well as those from key community institutions, such as foundations, government agencies, financial institutions, nonprofits, and universities, many of whom had not met in the same room to talk about place-based investing. Jennifer Vanica underscored the importance of this type of cross-sector communication in drawing a parallel between place-based work and jazz music. "In jazz, everybody leads, but you have to listen really intently to know when the right time is for you to step into the leadership role. And, it requires a different type of thinking so that you're making music and not noise." While this convening provided a venue for "band-mates" to get to know one another and share notes (pun intended!), much work remains, including finding ways to better share data and outcomes, disseminate best practices, and bring residents into the discussion. We must continue to communicate openly and challenge each other to consider how we can leverage resources to help improve the outcomes of place-based initiatives. **CI**

Endnotes

Community Change Initiatives from 1990-2010

- 1 The full publication will be available in summer 2010. For more information, see www.aspenroundtable.org or contact akubisch@aspenroundtable.org

Understanding the Different Types of Low-Income Neighborhoods

- 1 Elwood M. Hopkins is Managing Director of Emerging Markets, Inc. and President of the Center for Place-Based Initiatives. Juan Aquino, Rudolph Espinoza, and Daniel Tellalian also contributed to this article.
- 2 *Managing Neighborhood Change, A Framework for Sustainable and Equitable Revitalization* (2006), Alan Mallach proposes a six-type classification system based on the condition of the local housing stock, homebuyer characteristics, and housing prices. For each type, he specifies strategies for improving housing as well as the implications of these strategies on local residents. In a 2005 study entitled, "Housing in the Nation's Capital," Margery Austin Turner, G. Thomas Kingsley, Kathryn L.S. Pettit, Jessica Cigna, and Michael Eiseman propose a new neighborhood typology for Washington, DC neighborhoods based on housing characteristics.
- 3 The Center for Housing Policy uses a composite of data on subprime lending, foreclosures, and mortgage delinquencies to categorize neighborhoods according to foreclosure risk. Similarly, in *Using Data to Characterize Foreclosure Markets*, Phyllis Betts at the University of Memphis segmented five different types of home loan borrowers (in terms of their level of financial precariousness and ability to absorb a mortgage) and characterized neighborhoods according to which type of borrower predominates. She then factors in the type of housing stock and general housing market trends, discovering four distinct neighborhood types: Classic Distressed; Transitional-Declining; Stable Neighborhoods of Choice; and Transitional-Upgrading.
- 4 In *Contributions of Accessibility and Visibility Characteristics to Neighborhood Typologies and their Predictions of Physical Activity and Health*, a team from the University of Michigan and Detroit Health Department proposed nine neighborhood types in terms of health impact. For each, the team correlated physical characteristics (housing density, sidewalk coverage, street configurations, pedestrian pathways) to physical activity of residents and the prevalence of heart disease, diabetes, dietary cancers, and obesity.
- 5 In 2005, the USC School of Policy, Planning, and Development compared twenty residential neighborhood types in terms of the mobility patterns of residents. They separated neighborhoods by their location in the inner city, inner suburbs, outer suburbs, or exurban areas. The types are grouped according to clusters of traits that influence transportation decisions: street configurations, access to freeways or public transit, local land uses, topographies versus level ground and so on.
- 6 In *How Does Family Well-Being Vary across Different Types of Neighborhoods?*, Margery Austin Turner and Deborah Kaye use data from the National Survey of America's Families to classify neighborhoods as family environments. The authors of *Neighborhood Poverty: Policy Implications in Studying Neighborhoods*, tackle a similar task. In "Explorations in Neighborhood Differentiation" in *The Sociological Quarterly*, Donald Warren compares service utilization across neighborhoods.
- 7 In *Sharing America's neighborhoods: The Process for Stable Racial Integration*, Ingrid Gould Ellen examines six types of neighborhoods in various stages of racial and ethnic transition. For each, she identifies a typical bundle of quantifiable factors (ethnic breakdown, tenure, and demographic shifts under way) and qualitative factors like overall social stability. In *Paths of Neighborhood Change*, Richard Taub, D. Garth Taylor, and John Dunham identify eight neighborhood types at different stages of evolution from decline to gentrification to stability.

Five Simple Rules for Evaluating Complex Community Initiatives

- 1 CCIs here are defined broadly and include community change initiatives, complex community initiatives, comprehensive community initiatives, and even comprehensive place-based initiatives.
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- 3 Weiss, C. (1995). Nothing as practical as good theory: Exploring theory-based evaluation for comprehensive community initiatives for children and families, in J. Connell, A. Kubisch, and L. Schorr (Eds.), *New Approaches To Evaluating Community Initiatives: Concepts, Methods, and Contexts*, Washington, DC: Aspen Institute.

Understanding How Place Matters for Kids

- 1 Leventhal, T. and J. Brooks-Gunn. (2000). "The neighborhoods they live in: Effects of neighborhood residence upon child and adolescent outcomes." *Psychological Bulletin* 126; Leventhal, T., V. Dupere, & J. Brooks-Gunn. (2009). "Neighborhood Influences on Adolescent Development." In R. M. Lerner & L. Steinberg (Eds.), *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology* (3rd ed). New York: John Wiley and Sons; Sampson, R.J., J. Morenoff, and T. Gannon-Rowley. (2002). "Assessing 'Neighborhood Effects': Social Processes and New Directions in Research." *Annual Review of Sociology* 28:443-478; Sampson, R. J., S.W. Raudenbush, F. Earls. (1997). "Neighborhoods and Violent Crime: A Multilevel Study of Collective Efficacy." *Science Magazine*. August 1997 277(5328): 918-24.
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- 37 See, e.g., Bank on California, <http://www.bankoncalifornia.ca.gov>.
- 38 FDIC. (2009). "Alternative Financial Services: A Primer" Vol. 3, No. 1. FDIC Quarterly.
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Tackling Payday Lending in California

- 1 This article is an excerpt from the study "Report on the Status of Payday Lending in California." The full report can be downloaded at <http://www.siliconvalleycf.org/news-resources/publications.html#reports>
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