The Promise of Comprehensive Community Development

TEN YEARS OF CHICAGO'S NEW COMMUNITIES PROGRAM

Executive Summary

David Greenberg
Sonya Williams
Mikael Karlström
Victoria Quiroz-Becerra
Marcia Festen

AUGUST 2014

mdrc
BUILDING KNOWLEDGE
TO IMPROVE SOCIAL POLICY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Promise of Comprehensive Community Development
Ten Years of Chicago's New Communities Program

David Greenberg
(MDRC)

Sonya Williams
(MDRC)

Mikael Karlström
(University of Chicago)

Victoria Quiroz-Becerra
(MDRC)

Marcia Festen
(Marcia Festen Associates)

August 2014

mdrc
BUILDING KNOWLEDGE
TO IMPROVE SOCIAL POLICY

For information about MDRC and copies of our publications, see our website: www.mdrc.org.

Overview

From 2002 to 2012, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation provided $50 million to the Local Initiatives Support Corporation of Chicago (LISC Chicago), to implement the New Communities Program (NCP). NCP supported community organizations in 14 neighborhood areas to convene local partners to define a "quality-of-life plan" for each neighborhood. It then provided grants to carry out these plans, which addressed a variety of local challenges, including unemployment, struggling schools, and gang violence.

MacArthur's investment was informed by research that residents have better outcomes when they live in neighborhoods where individuals and organizations come together to respond to local challenges. For its part, LISC Chicago wanted to help local agencies learn to work together to resolve long-standing antagonisms when they existed and to facilitate implementation of diverse community improvement projects. This report describes the challenges that NCP faced, the extent to which it achieved its goals, and the implications for similar initiatives. As a model for recent federal policy, the NCP experience is particularly important to consider.

Key Findings

- Nearly 850 varied improvement projects — many with multiple components — and over $900 million in total funding (grants and loans) were reported among the 14 neighborhood areas over 10 years. MacArthur's investment was always intended to leverage additional resources. NCP succeeded in connecting many groups to citywide and national funders and also resulted in partnerships *across* neighborhoods. Neighborhoods with multi-issue, high-capacity lead agencies and strong local partners tended to leverage the most additional funds.

- NCP helped to improve collaborative partnerships among local agencies. In neighborhoods where trust and cooperation were better established among community groups at the beginning of NCP, interorganizational relationships deepened over the course of the initiative. But where there were histories of antagonism among community partners, relationships improved during the periods of planning and early implementation, although it proved difficult to sustain both trust and collaboration over time.

- It was rare for interorganizational relationships to promote collaborative, coordinated programming across the many projects supported by NCP, and it was rare for NCP networks to add value to the implementation of small, individual projects. In some significant cases, however, when guided by a high-capacity lead agency, these organizational partnerships could tap into new funding streams and promote strong collaborations.

Building on the NCP experience, MacArthur and LISC have launched a next-generation initiative, "Testing the Model" (TTM). Like the original NCP model, TTM attempts to deliver resources to neighborhoods, but these investments are explicitly aimed at achieving longer-term change by concentrating efforts on a single issue or domain. Future work will report on the implementation of TTM and how neighborhoods are changing in these targeted domains.

Preface

Economic shocks like the Great Recession and natural disasters like Hurricane Sandy have had deep consequences for affected communities. But some neighborhoods struggle more with these negative events than others. That is, some places see neighbors and local organizations coming together to coordinate action to respond to problems, whereas collective action in other neighborhoods is rare, fragmented, or disjointed. Research suggests that neighborhoods with the ability to come together can respond better to shocks — be it a heat wave or gang violence — and can also support better outcomes for residents than their counterparts without this capacity. This research presents an important question for policymakers: Which policies and programs best support "resilience" and permit neighborhoods to respond to shocks of all sorts?

One of the largest investments in the country to promote the ability of local organizations to work together — to solve problems and take advantage of opportunities — was made by the MacArthur Foundation, to the Local Initiatives Support Corporation of Chicago (LISC Chicago) and its New Communities Program (NCP). With an investment of $50 million over 10 years, NCP supported community organizations in 14 neighborhoods to convene local partners to define a "quality-of-life plan" for each neighborhood. It then provided grants to carry out these plans, which addressed a variety of local challenges, including unemployment, struggling schools, and gang violence. LISC Chicago acted as a "managing intermediary," attracting additional resources to NCP neighborhoods; holding lead agencies accountable for making progress on plans; and brokering relationships within neighborhoods and between neighborhoods and city agencies, funders, and other powerful agencies. The 10-year period in which NCP operated was marked first by a period of housing inflation and then by the bursting of the housing bubble and the onset of the Great Recession. In other words, NCP was designed to support community resilience, and the recession, in fact, posed this test.

How funders, communities, and local practitioners responded to the volatility of a decade is of critical interest to the field. In many ways a template for the Obama administration's Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative, which emphasizes the coordination of comprehensive investments, NCP's challenges and successes provide a detailed sense of what it takes to implement this influential model for community improvement.

Gordon L. Berlin
President, MDRC

Acknowledgments

Executive Summary

The New Communities Program: Goals and Structure

In many low-income communities, gang violence, housing disinvestment, and limited economic mobility may magnify the effects of poverty for residents, making it even harder for children to succeed in school, grow up healthy, and achieve economic success. But in their ability to meet these challenges, not all low-income neighborhoods are alike. A growing body of evidence suggests that when neighbors and local organizations can come together to respond to problems, residents in these places have better educational and health outcomes than their counterparts in lower-capacity neighborhoods.[1] With this goal in mind, beginning in 2002, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation supported the New Communities Program (NCP) in Chicago, providing $50 million over 10 years to help promote the ability of local organizations to band together, respond to challenges, and implement new solutions to improve communities.

Developed by the Local Initiatives Support Corporation of Chicago (LISC Chicago) as a way of promoting comprehensive community development among local groups, NCP is one of the largest single-city efforts to help develop local capacity, partnerships, and resources. (Box ES.1 defines the key terms associated with these efforts.) Although NCP continues in Chicago, this report is focused on the first 10 years of MacArthur's support for the program. This fourth and final report on the first 10 years of NCP describes the guiding principles behind the initiative, the extent to which it achieved its goals, the challenges it faced, and the implications of these challenges and successes for similar initiatives. As a flagship example of a significant comprehensive community initiative (CCI) — and one that has served as a model for recent federal policy — the NCP experience offers important lessons for the next generation of place-based CCIs.

From the outset, NCP had three important goals:

1. **Building the capacity of individual community organizations to function as neighborhood-wide conveners or "intermediaries."** NCP operated under the theory that neighborhoods that came together to identify problems, propose solutions, and implement locally developed plans would be more resilient than others. As such, this intermediary, convening approach to com-

---

[1]See Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Robert J. Sampson, *Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); and Katherine S. Newman and Rebekah Peeples Massengill, "The Texture of Hardship: Qualitative Sociology of Poverty, 1995-2005" (*Annual Review of Sociology* 32: 423-446 [2006]).

Box ES.1

Key Terms for the NCP Evaluation

Comprehensive community initiative (CCI): A program (such as NCP) distinguished by a comprehensive approach to community improvement. Some CCIs, like NCP, promote projects in varied domains of neighborhood work, while others use multiple approaches to target a single goal.

Community development corporation (CDC): A not-for-profit organization, usually serving a geographic location such as a neighborhood or a town. While CDCs can be involved in a variety of activities, they are often associated with building and renovating affordable housing and commercial real estate for low-income people through "bricks-and-mortar" development. NCP was designed in part to help CDCs enter into more varied areas of work.

Intermediary: An organization that supports relationships among groups, promotes their capacity, and helps steer investments to them. NCP relies heavily on intermediaries, with a "managing intermediary" in the form of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation of Chicago (LISC Chicago) taking a direct role in day-to-day operations of the initiative and 14 "local intermediaries" or "neighborhood intermediaries" (also known as "lead agencies," described next) overseeing the program's local implementation.

Lead agency: One of 14 organizations chosen by LISC and the MacArthur Foundation to manage NCP planning and plan implementation. Also referred to as "local intermediaries" or "neighborhood intermediaries," lead agencies were generally provided with two staff members, who first direct a community planning process and then help manage the plan's implementation. In contrast to other initiatives, NCP initially took the approach of designating a single lead agency to manage the initiative in each Chicago neighborhood. Lead agencies included CDCs, community organizing groups, and agencies newly formed to manage NCP.

Leverage: Additional funding from other sources that may follow an initial grant. Although it was a substantial investment for the MacArthur Foundation, NCP was designed to create opportunities for LISC, lead agencies, and partners to identify and obtain more funding.

Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC): LISC is a national community development intermediary (see above) founded in 1979 by Ford Foundation, initially to help promote the capacity of CDCs and support the financing of affordable housing. It has over 30 offices in urban areas around the country, and its Chicago office manages the NCP initiative.

NCP "platform": The idea that local relationships, capacity, and investments sparked through NCP can serve as a basis for future investments in the neighborhood. "Platform projects" were larger investments centered on education, broadband technology, and youth development that emerged over the course of the initiative in NCP areas.

munity development was seen to be more successful than various "go it alone" efforts that characterized previous community development efforts, which often led to fragmentation and disorganization.

2. **Building stronger partnerships and coordinating program implementation among neighborhood organizations, based on mutual trust.** Trust-building was considered to be a goal in itself and was also a step toward creating more strategic partnerships that connected isolated community improvement efforts to each other, thereby improving their targeting and coordination. NCP also hoped to help strengthen ties between neighborhood groups and powerful agencies outside the neighborhood.

3. **Leveraging external resources for varied improvement projects of quality and scale.** NCP stemmed from LISC's belief that community development corporations (CDCs) had focused too exclusively on building affordable housing and not on the variety of interconnected problems that befall neighborhoods. Accordingly, NCP attempted to help neighborhoods address different types of local challenges, including unemployment, struggling schools, and gang violence. While MacArthur's investment was substantial, it was spread over many different neighborhoods over a long period time, so grants were always intended to leverage additional resources by convincing other public and private funders that NCP neighborhoods represented good investments.

To enact these goals, NCP selected a local "lead agency" in each neighborhood area and paid for two full-time staff, technical support for planning, and an opportunity to participate in learning from peers and subject-area experts. Lead agencies varied in size and historic capacity. LISC Chicago acted as a "managing intermediary," attracting additional resources to NCP neighborhoods; holding lead agencies accountable for making progress on plans; and brokering relationships within neighborhoods and between neighborhoods and city agencies, funders, and other powerful agencies.

During the planning phase of NCP, each lead agency convened other community organizations to define its own "quality-of-life plan" for its neighborhood. The plan provided a template for varied projects to be accomplished over the course of several years. Projects spanned large public investments that did not currently exist (such as a new transportation stop on a commuter rail line) to small private ones that were already planned (such as murals and tree plantings). These plans were meant to be very inclusive of all groups' ideas and existing efforts, thereby building trust among local organizations. The plans did not, however, set standards for the implementation of individual projects or dictate how groups would interact with each other in the future. During the implementation phase of NCP, LISC Chicago awarded

loans from its own National Loan Pool and grants using MacArthur Foundation funding and other sources to support these projects. Over time, LISC was able to attract significant external resources into larger "platform projects" (Box ES.1) in youth development, middle school improvement, and access to technology, among other areas. These projects became an increasing emphasis of NCP implementation.

NCP Neighborhoods and the Great Recession

NCP operates in 14 Chicago areas, encompassing primarily African-American, primarily Latino and immigrant areas, and more racially and ethnically mixed locations. (See Figure ES.1.) It is important to note that the 10 years of NCP implementation included both a housing boom and the period known as "the Great Recession." That is, in 2006, during the height of NCP implementation, the housing market collapsed, bursting the speculative bubble that had been growing since the turn of the century and helping launch one of the worst financial crises in decades.

The most profound effect of the recession was seen in housing and lending indicators. Completed foreclosures exhibited a dramatic upswing, going from an annual average decline of 28.4 percent in the period 2003-2005 to an annual average increase of 24.5 percent in the years 2006-2009. Across Chicago, the volume of housing lending declined, with lower-income neighborhoods being particularly hard hit. Commercial lending declined overall, and job growth and employment also suffered. Although neighborhoods experienced stresses associated with the recession differently, the tumultuous period of NCP implementation put its underlying theory — working together, neighborhood organizations can respond effectively to shocks and take advantage of opportunities — to the test.

Key Findings

1. Building capacity: Lead agencies varied substantially as to whether they developed the convening or "intermediary" skills of the NCP model.

NCP rests on the premise that community improvement may best be achieved by mobilizing many local groups to take ownership of the program, supported by outside partners. But histories of conflict or fragmentation among local agencies can derail this collaboration. NCP charged a single agency in each neighborhood with coordinating and steering work by other groups over which it had no direct authority, asking it to overcome differences among them and to sustain engagement over a long period of time. These tasks are challenging by definition, especially because most organizations are skilled in providing services — not in acting as neighborhood-wide conveners and leaders.

The New Communities Program

Figure ES.1

The NCP Neighborhoods

Logan Square

Humboldt Park

Garfield Park — West Haven

North Lawndale →

Pilsen

Little Village

Quad Communities

Washington Park

Chicago Lawn   Englewood   Woodlawn

Auburn Gresham

South Chicago
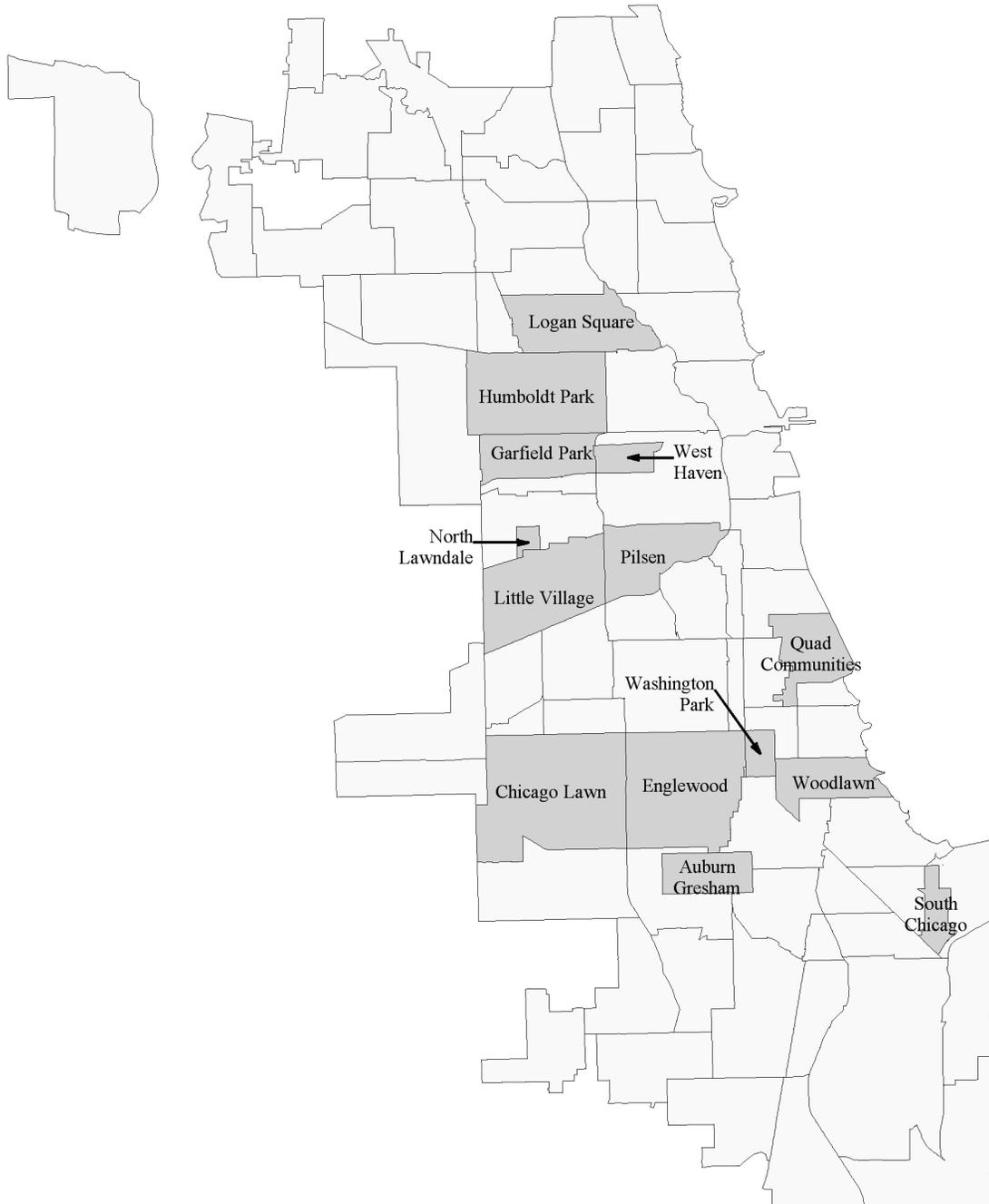
NOTE: The map displays the Chicago municipal area within Cook County divided into the 80 neighbor-hoods defined for the NCP analysis. The 14 NCP neighborhoods are labeled and shaded.

5

- **Lead agencies that began NCP with a track record of bringing local groups together enhanced these skills over the course of the initiative.**

Within NCP, about one-quarter of lead agencies started NCP with a significant track record of convening other neighborhood organizations. However, these agencies uniformly *improved* those skills through NCP — a notable accomplishment, given the agencies' strong starting places. Some were community organizing groups that had brought local organizations and individuals together for some time. But other larger, generally high-capacity groups also improved their ability to act as conveners. For example, a large CDC in northwest Chicago which had been seen as an important partner in local collaborations (but not necessarily a leader of them) learned to staff and facilitate multiple task forces over the 10-year course of NCP and also learned to teach *other* groups how to accomplish this convening work.

- **Small-to-midsize CDCs that formed in the 1980s as well as new organizations that formed for the purpose of implementing NCP found it difficult to learn how to spark and sustain productive partnerships among neighborhood organizations over time.**

About one-quarter of NCP lead agencies were smaller CDCs that focused on building affordable housing, and all but one these groups found it difficult to make the transition to NCP's model of facilitating action by others. In many ways, it is not surprising that organizations that were "built" primarily to do something different from NCP found its model more challenging to implement. However, about another third of lead agencies were founded expressly for the purposes of implementing NCP, and these groups also faced difficult trade-offs between consolidating themselves as independent organizations that provided services and acting as conveners or intermediaries. Challenges that both types of agencies faced were compounded by the fact that they operated in neighborhoods where there were fewer partners to convene or where trust was low among organizations.

2. Forming relationships: NCP helped to improve collaborative partnerships among local agencies that started from a stronger foundation of trusting relationships.

NCP attempted to build relationships among community organizations and to connect these groups to actors outside the neighborhood, under the theory that neighborhoods with closer connections are better able to respond to crises and take advantage of opportunities.

- **In neighborhoods where trust and cooperation were better established among community groups at the beginning of NCP, interorganizational relationships deepened over the course of the initiative.**

In about a third of NCP neighborhoods, organizations had good working relationships before NCP. For example, in Humboldt Park, relations were already strong in the eastern, Puerto Rican part of the neighborhood, but trust continued to deepen among service, youth, and cultural organizations, resulting in new types of collaborations and new opportunities for funding outside NCP. Trust also deepened between the western, African-American side of the neighborhood and its eastern, Puerto Rican sections, with the result that new resources were delivered to that underserved portion of the neighborhood. Across the initiative, LISC Chicago helped broker relationships among lead agencies and between these groups, outside funders, and city government.

- **NCP helped connect many lead agencies to citywide and national funders, and it resulted in partnerships *across* neighborhoods.**

Participation in NCP over time helped enhance lead agencies' connections to each other from around the city, building community among them and resulting in programs being spread from group to group in connection with youth programming and teacher recruitment efforts.

- **Where there were greater histories of antagonism among community partners at the beginning of the initiative, NCP improved relationships during the planning period and through early implementation, but both trust and collaboration were often difficult to sustain.**

Although neighborhoods with histories of antagonism among community groups had planning "task forces" to explore different issues at the beginning of the initiative, they tended not to sustain active participation over the course of NCP. For example, in North Lawndale — a historically disinvested area on the West Side of Chicago — planning and early implementation helped form some partnerships, but these were difficult to sustain after the planning period ended.

- **It was rare for relationships to promote collaborative, coordinated programming across individual projects, but when guided by a high-capacity organization, innovative partnerships did develop.**

Across the many projects supported by NCP, it was rare for NCP networks to add value to the implementation of individual projects in concrete ways; in other words, while groups may have had greater awareness of each others' projects, this tended not to change the ways that smaller initiatives were implemented in relationship to each other. (Individual "platform" initiatives did, however, attempt to change practice, for example, in the ways that agencies approached workforce development.) In some significant cases, however, when guided by a high-capacity lead agency, these new relationships enabled agencies to tap into new funding streams and promote strong collaborations. For example, the lead agency in Chicago Lawn, the Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP), helped bring together churches, schools, and other

community organizations whose work was not related to housing but who quickly became more convinced that foreclosures represented a community crisis that threatened their own efforts in the neighborhood, and so they worked to address that crisis. In general, even though NCP emphasized relationships in areas outside of housing development, housing and foreclosure prevention was an area in which NCP networks could be especially instrumental.

3. Implementation and leverage: The lead agencies and their partners implemented varied improvement projects, which reported substantial leverage of additional resources from sources other than the MacArthur Foundation.

Comprehensive community development programs such as NCP proceed under the belief that neighborhood improvement is best achieved through a multipronged effort, instead of a sole focus on physical, "bricks-and-mortar" improvement to housing alone. Through 2008, early implementation demonstrated the completion of projects in social services and education under the auspices of NCP,[2] but the Great Recession altered the flow of resources to neighborhoods, making it more difficult to attract loans for affordable housing construction and reducing state funding, even as it provided other resources through federal stimulus programs.

- **Nearly 850 projects — many with multiple components — and over $900 million in total funding (grants and loans) were reported among the 14 neighborhood areas. Work continued to be comprehensive, and there was no "flagging" of implementation efforts during the later years of the initiative.**

The Great Recession moved project activity away from real estate development, with the result that more leverage came in foundation or federally supported initiatives than from loans or grants associated with housing construction. These significant investments demonstrate that the NCP platform remained a vehicle for substantial improvement efforts. For example, in the later years of NCP, "The Green Exchange" initiative in Logan Square provided job training and employment for low-income workers in the community, and it was reported to have leveraged more than $6 million in additional funding. (See Figure ES.2.)

- **NCP lead agencies and their partners were able to direct resources *within* neighborhoods, often to promote work along commercial corridors or to subareas that they saw as being underserved.**

---

[2]David Greenberg, Nandita Verma, Keri-Nicole Dillman, and Robert Chaskin, *Creating a Platform for Sustained Neighborhood Improvement: Interim Findings from Chicago's New Communities Program* (New York: MDRC, 2010).

The New Communities Program

Figure ES.2

NCP Funding, by Domain and Time Period
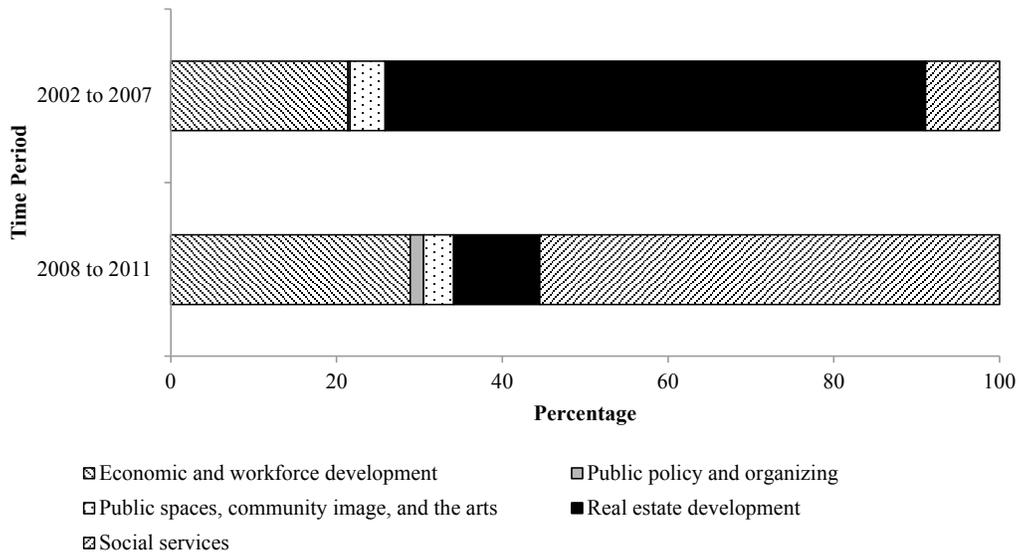
SOURCE: MDRC analysis of lead-agency annual progress reports provided by LISC Chicago.

NOTE: This analysis includes NCP projects reported to have received support grants from LISC Chicago, non-LISC investments, other kinds of support, and projects that do not list any funding or support.

MDRC mapped the locations of implemented projects in three neighborhoods and whether these projects were located in areas with more reported crime, foreclosures, and housing investment *within* the community. In all three neighborhoods, there was evidence that lead agencies and their partners consciously targeted activities, generally along local commercial corridors. For example, in Chicago Lawn, the 63rd Street Streetscape program beautified and improved a central commercial corridor and was reported to have brought in $600,000 in private donations from the Islamic community in Chicago Lawn and surrounding neighborhoods, as well as over $1 million in additional financial resources. Despite the fact that NCP planning might have produced projects that were spread thinly throughout the whole neighborhood, lead agencies were, in fact, able to channel implementation efforts within communities. (However, these activities were not always *coordinated* with each other, as described above.)

- **Neighborhoods with multi-issue, high-capacity lead agencies and strong local partners tended to leverage the most additional funds.**

For example, in Logan Square, the Logan Square Neighborhood Association is a well-established community organizing group that had established planning task forces in multiple areas. NCP helped it bring affordable housing developers into deeper partnership with the lead agency, and when construction of local apartments faced opposition from those worried about additional affordable housing in the neighborhood, organizers mobilized networks to request their support for a zoning change that would allow for the construction.

4. Managing the initiative: LISC Chicago played a critical role in attracting additional investments to NCP and lead agencies, but it was challenged to help lead agencies implement strongly coordinated local initiatives.

The interim report on NCP found that LISC Chicago was able to manage grants flexibly and to mediate community conflict successfully.[3] Community organizations valued the flexibility and speed with which LISC Chicago provided seed grants and its technical assistance during planning. Given the challenges of sustaining action over a long period of time, it is worth considering how LISC's management of the initiative evolved over the course of implementation.

- **During the budgetary crises associated with the Great Recession, LISC Chicago was able to attract significant additional funding to make up for service cuts and the absence of construction loans, based on the comprehensive approach that NCP promoted.**

Local groups were often directly affected by budgetary crises, and they valued NCP and the resources that LISC Chicago was able to attract, as an alternative source of revenue during a difficult time. In some cases, LISC's support was critical to keeping agencies viable during the downturn. The fact that NCP operated in multiple domains and that it provided a framework for local collaboration was very important to attracting these additional resources, as it allowed LISC Chicago to solicit funding for large, cross-neighborhood initiatives related to income and credit building, education, broadband, and youth development.

- **LISC Chicago provided a structured approach to creating neighborhood plans, but, later in the initiative, NCP had few formal mechanisms for encouraging quality or coordination among smaller and larger stand-alone projects.**

The broad quality-of-life plans initially developed through NCP did not require projects to be concretely connected to each other. Indeed, one purpose of the NCP small grants was to provide flexibility and autonomy without onerous requirements on participants. Lead agencies

---

[3]Greenberg, Verma, Dillman, and Chaskin (2010).

and LISC Chicago were also reluctant to direct other groups' efforts, given a need to maintain relationships and a desire not to undercut community control of interventions. In part due to these factors, lead agencies took different approaches to implementation, and about half did not attempt to foster or maintain collaborations over time that could result in greater coordination. As described above, among individual platform projects, additional planning, engagement, and quality mechanisms were implemented, but there was variation in how well these efforts were connected with other community-based initiatives associated with NCP.

NCP Evolves

In 2012, MacArthur's investment in the New Communities Program entered a new phase, with a shift toward LISC Chicago's "Testing the Model" (TTM) pilot project. Over the course of NCP, the foundation became increasingly interested in establishing specific community change targets as part of its next phase of investment in Chicago neighborhoods, as it believed that establishing these outcomes could be a way to establish greater coordination of investments within NCP neighborhoods. In response, LISC Chicago developed TTM as a pilot program meant to test whether relationships that formed over the course of NCP could be harnessed in a focused attempt to change neighborhood trajectories in health, housing, education, and safety. In this way, TTM represents a way to align LISC's traditional interest in capacity-building and the MacArthur Foundation's traditional interest in demonstrating measurable community change.

TTM represents an effort to deploy NCP's platform of interorganizational relationships and partnerships toward a more outcomes- and data-oriented approach to comprehensive community development. It asks lead agencies and their community partners to identify a single issue area or domain in which they will concentrate and coordinate efforts and around which they will target multistrategy, multipartner approaches to enacting quantifiable, community-wide goals. Like the original NCP model, TTM attempts to improve capacity, further develop relationships, and deliver resources to neighborhoods, but near-term capacity-building is less an end in itself than a means to achieve longer-term community change goals. The agencies and neighborhoods selected for TTM included some of the strongest performers among NCP, where the deepest relationships were built and where agencies had best learned to act as conveners and intermediaries. In March 2012, the MacArthur Foundation awarded a three-year, $8 million grant in support of TTM. Currently, five TTM sites from the original 14 NCP neighborhoods are implementing plans that were developed with the help of community partners and issue experts. Areas of intervention that were selected by local groups include education, safety, housing, and public health. Future reports will study the implementation of TTM and how neighborhoods are changing in these targeted domains.

Lessons for the Field

The NCP experience is particularly relevant for communities launching initiatives that rely heavily on partnerships among neighborhood organizations or that emphasize coordinated and comprehensive action. NCP research provides some important lessons for future comprehensive community development initiatives and for an emerging set of federal and place-based initiatives that have modeled themselves in some ways on it, such as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's *Choice Neighborhoods* program for redeveloping distressed public housing projects via comprehensive strategies; the U.S. Department of Education's *Promise Neighborhoods* initiative to promote place-based planning and implementation of comprehensive services to help "a continuum of cradle-through-college-and-career solutions"; and LISC's national *Building Sustainable Communities* (BSC) program, which is, in many ways, an explicit replication of NCP, now operating in 110 target neighborhoods in 25 cities across the country. Such initiatives faced several formative decisions that are illuminated by the NCP experience.

- **Defining comprehensiveness.** Designers of future initiatives should define "comprehensiveness" as a framework for varied but coordinated strategies that work together to achieve common goals.

Led in many ways by LISC Chicago, comprehensiveness has become a significant guiding principle for community development across the nation. Within NCP, "comprehensiveness" was defined primarily as *the promotion of a broad and inclusive range of neighborhood improvement projects.* This approach was successful in promoting community engagement in the quality-of-life planning process. It later allowed LISC Chicago and lead agencies to attract grants in broadband, education, and foreclosure prevention that helped them offset the funding gaps caused by the recession. But there are pitfalls to this model of comprehensiveness, including the risk of spreading limited resources too thinly among many different types of projects. In NCP, it did not ensure high-quality implementation across a broad range of work or promote coordination among varied projects growing from the early implementation of quality-of-life plans. Its breadth also made it difficult if not impossible to establish quantifiable community change goals and to measure community-level outcomes. (However, *within* large, multisite initiatives such as income and credit building, middle school education, broadband adoption, and youth sports programming, programmatic goals were established as a way of monitoring implementation).[4] These challenges suggest that program designers may be better

---

[4] For evaluations of these initiatives and accounts of how they developed, see Caroline Tolbert, Karen Mossberger, and Chris Anderson, "Measuring Change in Internet Use and Broadband Adoption: Comparing BTOP Smart Communities and Other Chicago Neighborhoods" (Springfield: Partnership for a Better Illinois, 2013); and Caroline Goldstein, "New Communities Program Data Brief, 2003-2011," Updated Draft (Chicago: Local Initiatives Support Corporation of Chicago, December 1, 2011).

served by defining comprehensiveness as *the coordinated mobilization of a varied range of complementary efforts and strategies to achieve more limited and well-defined common goals.* This is the approach now being pursued in TTM.

- **Deciding where to invest.** Initiative managers should be aware of the neighborhood conditions and features of local partner organizations and should plan accordingly.

All community initiatives — even large federal efforts like Choice Neighborhoods and Promise Neighborhoods — face difficult choices as to where they will invest limited resources, since there are many neighborhoods in the United States with high levels of need. The neighborhoods that were best able to implement NCP — best able to convene others, build strong relationships that allowed for more coordinated efforts, and leverage additional resources from funders other than MacArthur — tended to be neighborhoods with many potential implementing partners and generally good relationships among them. They also tended to be neighborhoods where NCP was led by organizations with a proven track record of achievement and growth over time, experience with convening and coordinating, a history of working in more than one issue area, and a community organizing background. NCP proved most difficult to implement where all or most of these conditions were absent, suggesting that implementers should expect that greater resources and more creative strategies will be required in such contexts. (LISC made significant investments in these more challenged environments, and it saw some notable successes, in such neighborhoods as Quad Communities on the South Side.)

- **Planning ahead for implementation.** The planning process should encourage relationship-building by including an array of existing groups and projects. But it also should establish *how* individual projects will be coordinated and should identify new implementation collaborations where possible.

Public and interagency planning processes are central to the White House's Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative (NRI) strategy. Accordingly, decisions about how to structure these processes are particularly important. NCP was remarkably effective in building relations among community organizations through a very inclusive 18-month period of collective planning and visioning. LISC Chicago supported this inclusive approach to promote community priorities, acting as a "partner" to lead agencies rather than as an ordinary funder, and lead agencies valued this more relational approach to NCP management. At the same time, LISC did not generally set guidance for project coordination or for greater collaborative impact during implementation of varied projects established in quality-of-life plans (although it provided greater guidance on larger, multisite, platform projects.). Attention to these issues during planning may, therefore, be important for similar initiatives, such as Choice Neighborhoods and Promise Neighborhoods. While they are challenging efforts, both TTM and the inclusion of

accountability goals in platform projects have been important ways to establish new quality, targeting, and coordination goals. Funders in foundations or government should be aware that the amount of resources provided to local implementers — often significant for a funder but modest relative to the community's or project's needs, and divided among multiple parties — should be taken into account while setting these expectations.

- **Sustaining local governance.** Initiative managers should support local convening and accountability mechanisms during implementation.

NCP, like many community initiatives, sought to build strong relationships among local groups and between these groups, government, and funders — what initiative managers came to call "the NCP platform" (Box ES.1). One early choice by NCP designers to promote this goal was making a single lead agency responsible for coordinating a collective planning process and managing the implementation of quality-of-life plans. In contrast to earlier initiatives that struggled with collective governance structures, this choice proved to be an effective way of balancing efficiency of implementation with collective ownership. However, neighborhoods that did not continue to convene local groups through implementation found it more difficult to sustain relationships and coordinate projects over time. Thus, managers may need to set stronger expectations and provide stronger supports toward sustaining such governance structures and charging them with periodic re-planning and joint decision-making about important implementation projects, while remaining flexible as to the specific form this local governance takes.

Earlier MDRC Publications on the New Communities Program

Creating a Platform for Sustained Neighborhood Improvement: Interim Findings from Chicago's New Communities Program.
2010. David Greenberg, Nandita Verma, Keri-Nicole Dillman, and Robert Chaskin (Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago) with James Riccio.

Beyond the Neighborhood: Policy Engagement and Systems Change in the New Communities Program.
2012. Robert J. Chaskin (The University of Chicago) and Mikael Karlström (Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago).

Dynamics of Neighborhood Quality in Chicago: An Analysis of the Interaction Among Quality-of-Life Indicators from the New Communities Program Evaluation.
2012. Sonya Williams (MDRC), George Galster (Wayne State University), and Nandita Verma (MDRC).

NOTE: A complete publications list is available from MDRC and on its website (www.mdrc.org), from which copies of reports can also be downloaded.

About MDRC

MDRC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan social and education policy research organization dedicated to learning what works to improve the well-being of low-income people. Through its research and the active communication of its findings, MDRC seeks to enhance the effectiveness of social and education policies and programs.

Founded in 1974 and located in New York City and Oakland, California, MDRC is best known for mounting rigorous, large-scale, real-world tests of new and existing policies and programs. Its projects are a mix of demonstrations (field tests of promising new program approaches) and evaluations of ongoing government and community initiatives. MDRC's staff bring an unusual combination of research and organizational experience to their work, providing expertise on the latest in qualitative and quantitative methods and on program design, development, implementation, and management. MDRC seeks to learn not just whether a program is effective but also how and why the program's effects occur. In addition, it tries to place each project's findings in the broader context of related research — in order to build knowledge about what works across the social and education policy fields. MDRC's findings, lessons, and best practices are proactively shared with a broad audience in the policy and practitioner community as well as with the general public and the media.

Over the years, MDRC has brought its unique approach to an ever-growing range of policy areas and target populations. Once known primarily for evaluations of state welfare-to-work programs, today MDRC is also studying public school reforms, employment programs for ex-offenders and people with disabilities, and programs to help low-income students succeed in college. MDRC's projects are organized into five areas:

- Promoting Family Well-Being and Children's Development
- Improving Public Education
- Raising Academic Achievement and Persistence in College
- Supporting Low-Wage Workers and Communities
- Overcoming Barriers to Employment

Working in almost every state, all of the nation's largest cities, and Canada and the United Kingdom, MDRC conducts its projects in partnership with national, state, and local governments, public school systems, community organizations, and numerous private philanthropies.