

Next Generation Community Revitalization: A Work in Progress

Executive Summary

A new generation of community revitalization initiatives is gaining momentum. Prominent among them are six nascent networks: Building Sustainable Communities, Choice Neighborhoods, Promise Neighborhoods, Purpose Built Communities, Strive and The Integration Initiative. These six networks have approximately 50 sites in planning or implementation already; and they aspire to grow to at least 120 sites over time.

These initiatives and the widespread energy they have unleashed are truly exciting. We see grounds for optimism on a number of dimensions about their potential to outperform their predecessors:

- They share a bias toward building on “what works”
- They are explicitly embracing key management principles and practices, including the importance of focus and the use of data to manage, measure, and improve performance
- They recognize that lasting change cannot be achieved without the re-creation of a robust civic infrastructure, within a target community and/or in the city or region of which it is a part
- Policy makers in several of the federal agencies most actively engaged in this work are playing a new, and markedly different, role
- There is a strong, if dispersed and incomplete, body of knowledge and experience on which this generation of leaders can draw

At the same time, there are also significant risks—many structural and addressable—that could cause these efforts to founder and fail:

- Funding that is largely short-term, fragile and opaque
- Leaders who are overstretched, with gaps in organizational capacity and capabilities such as managing accountable partnerships and collaborations
- An uneven commitment to resident engagement
- Unrealistic expectations about how much can be accomplished how soon
- Limited access to what works—or shows promise of working—in critical program areas
- Silo-ed thinking as initiatives pursue work and learning agendas, many of which overlap, separately from one another

Should this generation of efforts fail, today’s positive momentum could quickly turn into tomorrow’s disillusionment. For this work to take hold and grow, it needs the kind of credibility that comes from

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genuine success stories. Creating those success stories will demand the steadfast commitment of energy and resources, a passionate commitment to social justice, and the management acumen to overcome a set of barriers that are consistent across these six initiatives: gaps in practical knowledge; painfully over-stretched management teams; and plans that are insufficient to guide implementation.

Based on what we heard from people doing this work, as well as their advisors and supporters, and what we know about the field's collective capacity to address those needs, we believe some of the most useful next steps for maintaining momentum and strengthening the field would be:

- Accelerate learning and the acquisition of practical know-how
Initiative and site leaders face two kinds of knowledge gaps: the need for technical resources, where tools and frameworks that can help decision makers already exist; and the need for new applied knowledge to inform decisions in areas where definitive answers are not yet known, or where there may never be “one best way.” Providing additional resources to support the delivery of “known solutions” is an elementary way to fill the first gap. Rapidly developing and prototyping new applied knowledge and developing the connective tissue that will enable it to be shared across existing initiatives and communities of practice will be critical in filling the second.
- Build stronger, deeper management teams at initiative sites and at the centers
Investing to develop cohorts of talented leaders, who would increase the capacity of the field overall as well as the specific initiatives with which they are involved, could be a particularly high impact opportunity for philanthropic funders
- Provide ongoing support and incentives for leaders at local sites to develop realistic operating plans that can be both funded and implemented

There are some sites which, by dint of previous hard work or more recent good fortune, have greater potential to deliver compelling results in the near term. National philanthropic leaders have a unique opportunity to help these sites break through as true success stories. Rather than “picking winners” an investment in these highest potential sites would truly be an investment in the entire field.

The stakes for this work are high. If these initiatives are effective and successful they alone could change the odds for hundreds of thousands of low-income people. The wherewithal to do this exists: the knowledge and experience base that success will require has been accumulating, community by community and initiative by initiative, for more than half a century. The question for this generation is whether community leaders and those who support them have the vision and will to come together to translate all our diverse experience and expertise into collective, concerted action. If the answer is “yes,” committed citizens from every sector of the economy—government, business, philanthropy and the social sector—can turn today's hopes into tomorrow's reality.

Overview of Next Generation Community Revitalization Initiatives

	<i>Building Sustainable Communities</i>	<i>Choice Neighborhoods</i>	<i>Promise Neighborhoods</i>	<i>Purpose Built Communities</i>	<i>Strive</i>	<i>The Integration Initiative</i>
Launched	2007	2010	2010	2009	2008	2010
Catalyzing entity (funder and/or "hub")	Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC)	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development	U.S. Department of Education	CS Foundation, The Robertson Foundation, Warren Buffett	KnowledgeWorks Foundation with dedicated national Strive staff	Living Cities
Antecedent	New Communities Project (Chicago)	HOPE IV experience (various)	Harlem Children's Zone (New York)	East Lake Foundation (Atlanta)	Strive Partnership (Cincinnati)	New Communities Project (Chicago) and Strive Partnership (Cincinnati)
Primary emphases	Built environment, education, economic development, health, and financial prosperity as prioritized by community	Built environment (esp. housing)	Cradle through college to career continuum with great schools at the center	Built environment (esp. housing) and education	Education	Open table of civic leaders
Current presence (July 2011)	30 LISC offices (varying adoption) affecting ~100 neighborhoods	17 planning grantees; ~5 implementation grantees	21 planning grantees	8 neighborhoods	5 cities	5 cities
Planned presence (varied dates)	30 LISC offices (varying adoption) affecting ~150 neighborhoods (no date targeted)	In total, 29 planning grantees; ~4 implementation grantees (2012)*	In total, 31 planning grantees; ~5 implementation grantees (2012)*	25 neighborhoods (2015)	25 cities (2015)	5 cities (2015)
Total funding per site by effort leader	Varies by site	To date, \$250K for planning grants and ~\$15M per implementation grant; in future, \$300K for planning grants	~\$0.5M planning grants; \$4-6M for implementation grants	No formal commitments for grants; sites can access a low- or no-interest loan fund	To date, \$100K; in future, no funding	\$15-20M in commercial debt, low-interest debt, and grants

* We have not projected grantee numbers beyond 2010, as they will be determined by the annual federal appropriations process