

THE LEARNINGS OF JOHN MCKNIGHT

This compilation of learnings written by John McKnight are ideas and thoughts that will help you understand the Asset-Based Community Development approach and through examples show how the different players (individuals, association, profit, non-profit and government) can support and foster an asset approach.

These learnings were initially written for the Kettering Foundation. They are based on McKnight's experiences over 63 years as a neighbourhood organizer, trainer and author. If you have an interest in implementing any of these learnings in a neighbourhood you can contact John McKnight at jlmcabcd@alo.com

PRINCIPLES OF ABCD

- **Everyone has Gifts:** Each person in a community has something to contribute!
- **Relationships Build Community:** People must be connected for sustainable development.
- **Citizens at the Centre:** Citizens must be viewed as actors—not as passive recipients.
- **Leaders Involve Others:** Strength comes from a broad base of community action.
- **People Care:** Listening to people's interests challenges myths of apathy.
- **Listen:** Decisions should come from conversations where people are truly heard.
- **Ask:** Generating ideas by asking questions is more sustainable than giving solutions.

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A special thank you to John McKnight for permission to put this document together.

Introduction

In 1988, the Asset-Based Community Development Institute was established by two faculty colleagues, John McKnight and Jody Kretzmann at the Center for Urban Affairs at Northwestern University. The Center was an urban policy research group of 24 faculty members, largely social scientists. While the faculty was dedicated to social justice and urban change, their implicit view of neighborhoods was that they were full of problems and victimized people. Like nearly all other universities, their work focused on policies that would alleviate poverty and discrimination. Their understanding of the appropriate actors to implement their policies were government, health and social welfare agencies and other large institutions. Their unstated assumption was that "fixing" neighborhoods was the job of outsiders.

McKnight and Kretzmann recognized that this academic and policy framework rarely included neighbors. At that time, almost none of the policy research recognized that a principal party in neighborhood change was local residents and their inventiveness and problem solving capacities. Nor did the researchers conceive that there were local resources that represented the wealth in local places. Because of this policymaking blind spot, McKnight and Kretzmann undertook research to make visible the multiple resources in neighborhoods. Over four years they gathered resident stories (called 'case studies' in universities) in several hundred neighborhoods asking, "Can you tell us what residents in this neighborhood have done together that made things better?" The responses provided four key findings that became the core of ABCD practice.

The first is that scale is a critical factor in effective neighborhood work. ABCD stories came from small neighborhoods and towns. Therefore, the three findings that follow are based upon information gathered in small space-bound places. The essence of ABCD is lost when neighborhood personal relationships are not the basic connective tissue.

Second, the analysis of the hundreds of neighborhood stories enabled the Institute to identify the principal local resources that generate productive neighborhoods. These resources became the classic 6 assets that are the core of ABCD practice:

1. Individual resident capacities
2. Local associations
3. Neighborhood institutions - business, not-for-profit and government
4. Physical assets - the land and everything on it and beneath it
5. Exchange between neighbors - giving, sharing, trading, bartering, exchanging, buying and selling
6. Stories

The Institute published a book titled, "Building Communities for the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets." It described each of the assets and their uses. Very soon, thousands of copies of the book were sold and an "asset-based" movement emerged in many neighborhoods and some universities and agencies. This movement was manifested in a paradigm shift in the organizing and policy fields where the importance of local resources provided a new framework for analyzing and implementing community change.

The rapid spread of the ABCD paradigm was largely the result of three critical characteristics of the ABCD framework:

1. It is simple

2. It is eminently usable
3. It has universal applications as the worldwide movement has demonstrated.

The third core finding was that the most common method used by the groups to implement their collective activity involved three steps:

1. Local assets were identified
2. Assets that were unconnected were connected
3. Usually, a group or individual acted as the initiating connector.

Central to this process is the connective function. In fact, the hundreds of stories could be understood as descriptions of how unconnected local assets got connected. This understanding emphasizes the importance of ABCD work focused on connectors in contrast to leaders. While some leaders are connectors, most connectors are not thought of as leaders. Although there are thousands of leadership development programs, the Institute has developed a unique role in enhancing the capacity of people who are connectors and expanding the understanding of this function.

A fourth finding was the method used by effective local groups that engaged outside institutions. The process emerges when local groups undertake a more comprehensive initiative. In planning such an initiative, three questions are most frequently involved:

1. What can we produce with assets in our neighborhood?
2. What can we produce with our assets and some supportive outside resources?
3. What will our assets not be able to produce so that outside resources will have to do the entire function?

The sequence here is critical because, “you don’t know what you need from outside until you know what you have inside.” Therefore, ABCD work always starts with “what do we have in the neighborhood that can produce what we want?” The answer, of course, requires a thorough understanding of what local resources are available. This is why the “map” of the 6 assets has been so universally useful. In summary, the work of ABCD is to enhance and support local residents’ capacity to make visible their assets and to support and enhance the connection of those assets. These two essential roles are the way we undergird productive citizenship. We should emphasize the word “productive.” The basic standard for determining whether local activity is ABCD work is to ask who was the producer of the outcome. If it is a group of local citizens, then it qualifies. And to be the producer doesn’t mean to be a client, advisor or advocate. It means to be the implementer - a person with the power to act.

Alexis de Tocqueville wrote that, “The health of a democratic society may be measured by the quality of functions performed by private citizens.” This is why the ABCD work that enhances citizens and their associations is critical to the future of democracy. Citizens and their associations have a different place in democracy than institutions. In the 20th century there were two great tyrannies and both had great institutions. They were tyrannies because they stamped out all free standing associations and the free expression of citizens. They knew that they could control institutions but they couldn’t control citizens so they outlawed the basic power-making tools of citizens - freedom of expression and association. This is why the essential home of ABCD is with citizens, their gifts and their associations.

In 2016, the ABCD Institute found a new physical and spiritual home - DePaul University in Chicago. At the same time, the Institute Faculty was restructured to fulfill new functions and innovations. The result is a renewed ABCD Institute at DePaul University with increased ability to support a worldwide movement of powerful citizens

Associations

The Dilemma of Meetings

In many neighborhoods, local associations establish a schedule of meetings and the focus is on what should happen at that time. One of Saul Alinsky's inviolable rules was "never meet to meet." He knew that local associations "wear out" if they are a space in time that must be filled with something. Rather, he told organizers to have meetings when it was clear that there was something to be done so that the focus was on the substance rather than an agenda.



I've recently observed two alternatives to meeting-driven associations. The first we found in our study of associations in Spring Green, Wisconsin. It was interesting to note that most of the groups focused on environmental and conservation issues had large email lists. A small "idea" group at the center of the organization rarely called a meeting of the "email membership." Instead, they used the internet for three activities that might have traditionally been communicated through meetings. The activities are:

1. Alerting members to public policy issues where their advocacy could enhance the organizations purpose.
2. Providing educational information that would enhance the knowledge of the members.
3. To notify members of specific activities to be held at a certain time and place, frequently doing work to improve the environment at a particular site.

The second alternative involves the activities of our Asset Based Neighborhood Organizers. Their local Block Connector identifies capacities that residents want to contribute to the community's well-being and the Connector joins these people together. Here, the organizational function is one of creating local groups without calling meetings.

The meeting issue at the local level is often a problem because they rarely keep a significant number of people involved. They become routinized and participants are only those with a huge tolerance for meetings. It might be interesting to hold a learning exchange that examines the changing approaches to the functions of meetings.

The Affinity Dilemma

The essence of most associational groups is that they are composed of a group of people who care about each other and/or the same thing. By its very nature, this affinity creates outsiders. For example, a voluntary association of Cook County Labrador Retriever Owners creates affective relationships between these dog owners while also excluding owners of poodles. This is a reality and not a “problem” to be fixed. Because of these affinity-based associations, they tend to be parochial and exclusive. This orientation doesn’t foster openness to others. In fact, their affinity is not enhancing diversity.



A friend of mine believes that the heart of our social problems is “like-mindedness.” If he’s right, the nature of associational affinity is one cause of the problem.

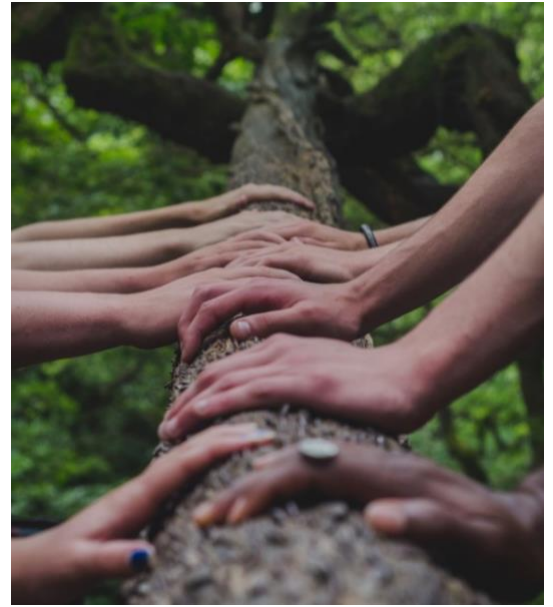
One way that I have seen that partially deals with the affinity dilemma is the creation of a local association of associations. This creates all kinds of new and “different mindedness” connections. I don’t have a lot of examples of such an association of associations. However, the clearest implementation of this method was the original approach of Saul Alinsky. He was a Tocquevillian and taught his organizers to get as many associations as possible together in their neighborhood organization so that it would be broadly representative of the community.

Unfortunately, his methodology has deteriorated in recent years becoming “church-based organizing” where the structure is built on five to ten local churches and their pastors. I think the reason for this is that it is very difficult to bring together forty associations. However, among the forty are the churches and they are the one association that has money. In order to pay an organizer, you need local money that can’t be controlled by outsiders. Five to ten churches can contribute enough to sustain an organizer. But, the resulting organization doesn’t promote wide engagement and the opportunity for “different mindedness.”

It might be useful to have a Kettering gathering on the local examples/possibilities of “different mindedness” which may be the way serious citizen dialogue can develop in relatively homogeneous places.

In Search of the Tie That Binds

One way of classifying associations is in terms of whether or not they are space-bounded. The greatest number of associations are not space-bound. However, our focus has been upon those associations where a neighborhood or small town provides the boundaries of our associational concern. Most of the associations that are not space bound are based on affinity. They draw from a broad constituency of people with a common interest. The tie that binds them is their mutual interest and passion rather than the people next door. The situation of associations bounded by space is quite different. Just because I live next door to several people does not mean that I see any basic affinity. So what is the tie that binds people on a block?



In recent years when I have met with a group interested in neighborhoods, I often ask the participants to identify whether they are over fifty. Then I ask them to describe their childhood experience in their neighborhood. The story is unusually common. Their story tells about how acceptable behavior was enforced and how they learned from and were supported by neighbors on the block. Then I ask people under 35 to describe their childhood experiences on their block. Their response is almost universally that the story the over fifty's told was not their story. They don't see the block as a point of primary relations because they were raised institutionally by outside systems. They usually add that in their adult life they know very few of their neighbors.

An important question for people interested in collective/communal decision making, is what happened to the common relationships of only two generations ago? How did most North Americans in a very short period of time become isolated in space? (One aspect of this phenomena is, of course, what Bob Putnam was reporting in *Bowling Alone*).

The over fifty story tells us that people in a local place were in significant common relationships. One reason is that they saw these relationships as necessary in order to fulfill their needs. In some ways, the relational local network was a safety net. It must be that our current neighborhood isolation is the result of people not seeing that they need each other-- otherwise they would connect with each other. It is my hypothesis that the generational change in the neighborhood story results from the rapid transformation of local citizen producers to resident consumers. Today, people on a block see their needs being met by access to the marketplace, professionals and public programs. This process was magnified by the fact that neighbors who are women entered the marketplace and so the powerful daily presence of adults disappeared. Therefore, the only residual manifestation of the old community is the annual block party.

I may lack vision, but I don't think we can go back to the old neighborhood. If being a neighbor is to once again become meaningful, I think we are going to have to discover how to create a new way. It is in this context of discovering new ways that I think we've been engaged in our relationship with the Kettering Foundation. In particular, I think we have discovered two new approaches to create ties that bind, enhancing both citizen productivity and decision-making.

The first is the initiatives convened by Kettering that has been named Asset-Based Neighborhood Organizing. This approach to isolated neighbors assumes that while people may not sense they need each other, each of them looks upon him or herself as endowed with gifts, skills, passions and knowledge that gives them their sense of personhood and value. However, there is no local structure or process that calls upon local residents to contribute these assets to their neighbors. The asset-based organizing process inspires local neighbors to identify their assets. It then invites the neighbors to contribute their assets by connecting with others who value the same attributes. The result is the creation of new affinity groups at the neighborhood level. These affinities are always building local social capital, initiating creative activity and providing a means for solving local problems. In sum, it reverses the consumer trend and calls for the productive possibilities of relationships on the block. It reveals why we need our neighbors, but it starts with what we can contribute which is always self-satisfying and empowering. This approach is now being tested in neighborhoods in Edmonton, Vancouver, West Palm Beach and Appleton. It provides a fantastic continuing learning opportunity.

The second initiative is the one that we identified through the Nebraska Community Foundation. For three years I have joined our faculty in working with that organization as it increases the decision making power in small communities. The NCF has precipitated small groups of local citizens who have taken on the responsibility to approach local residents of some wealth and to ask them to contribute to a fund to support the future of their small hometown. In many towns this method has created a substantial endowment for the community's well-being. Once the local fund has begun to generate substantial income, the local funding group is faced with a task that is not fundraising—how should the money be spent to enhance the future of our small town? In many of these towns, the result is creating various methods of citizen engagement that creates a vision and guides the use of the money based upon the popular decision-making. The incredible thing is that the NCF has been so effective at precipitating these local groups that there are more than 250 of them, at least half in towns under 700 people. And at this point, they are a wonderful peer learning group of towns where new ideas come from effective local experiments rather than top down programs.

Conceptually, it is especially significant to learn that they are creating and then occupying the civic space in the community that is not filled by the town government. The space they fill is decision-making and investing for the future. I can now see how time limited how local governments are in the span of their decision-making. Everything is immediate and short term. There is no citizen vehicle to identify assets beyond public budgets and to make decisions about their allocation. I think that these local groups are a major invention and we will continue to follow their development and work with Kettering on helping others learn about the process.

One way of defining a citizen is a person who has the collective power to create a vision and the means to be the producer of that vision. The Nebraska experiment is creating a new means for visioning. The Asset approach is creating a new means for being productive. Each way is an experiment in creating local ties that bind. Prospectively, both ways could be synthesized. In the broadest sense, what is ahead for me is understanding more and more about the possible new ties that bind—when they happen, how they happen and why.

Who Represents the Neighbor?

One way of understanding who represents a neighbor is their elected representative. Nonetheless, there are other neighborhood groups and associations that claim they also represent the neighbors.

In the fifties, sixties and seventies, the then Mayor Daley in Chicago was the leader of the municipal government and of the city's Democratic Party. The Party was organized with Precinct Captains at the most local level, then Ward Committeemen at the ward level. These Captains and Committeemen traditionally held jobs in the



government and acted together as a part of what was popularly known as “the Machine.” Mayor Daley believed that the neighbors were represented by the local party officials and their elected alderperson. He was unsympathetic with the idea of an independent neighborhood organization. When he or his organization were challenged by various kinds of neighborhood groups, he often responded by saying, “Who do you represent? We have a neighborhood organization with Precinct Captains, Ward Committeemen and the Alderperson. They really represent the neighborhood because they were chosen in an official election available to all the residents in the neighborhood. You don't really represent the neighborhood because you don't involve everybody.”

The Mayor's challenge to the representativeness of local neighborhood associations focused on breadth of participation. In practice, these associations tend to take three forms:

1. An organization historically created by a few neighbors that assigned themselves the name “Neighborhood Association.” These associations typically meet monthly at a public location and anyone in the neighborhood can attend. Quite frequently, these meetings involve twenty people in a neighborhood of 35,000 residents. Rarely would even 100th of the residents appear.
2. An association with a constituency base of block clubs. Early in the 50s, 60s and 70s, there was an aspiration to have a block club organized in every block in the neighborhood. However, the experience was that to organize and support these block clubs was far too demanding in terms of funding and organizing personnel. This form could be significantly representative, but it's resource demand is so great that there are very few places today where a block club neighborhood association involves all or even most of the blocks.
3. Saul Alinsky introduced a form of neighborhood association that is primarily based on creating an association of associations. The goal was to engage the leadership of local associations from sports leagues to veteran's organizations to women's groups to churches. It was his view that if you could get large numbers of local associations organized into one neighborhood association, you would have the greatest non-governmental possibility of being widely representative. He trained neighborhood organizers to identify local associations and to bring them together into a group that could claim to be the voice of the neighborhood. In fact, once again the resource problem limited Alinsky's aspirations.

To identify and engage fifty to one hundred local associations in one umbrella group requires talented organizers consistently engaged in creating and maintaining the alliance. Therefore, the association of associations began to atrophy because of the resource issues. The result is that today's Alinsky organizations are usually composed, in the main, of local churches. In fact, "churched based organizing" is now the dominant form of Alinsky based neighborhood groups.

It's obvious that none of these forms of neighborhood association could claim to officially "represent" the neighborhood as does Mayor Daley's electoral system. However, the actual participation in the electoral system at the municipal level is never very high and may, in actual numbers, engage no more people than the best neighborhood organizations can engage.

Another way of comparing associational with electoral representation is to think about the functions that each may distinctively be able to perform. Associations whose members are individual residents provide unmediated opportunities to define personal concern and interests. They provide the important opportunity to be heard –to "tell it like it is." Many people value a public forum where they give voice to their unique perspective. Collective action in response to their concern may be less important than the platform to express their concern. Because of the uniqueness of each individual voice, it is often difficult for these kinds of associations to reach a common position.

Another function of the individualized neighborhood associations is often to provide a vehicle for an unrepresentative few to have an inordinately powerful voice outside the neighborhood. This most often happens when the participants are home owners magnifying their voice, often at the expense of renters. These kinds of neighborhood groups usually defend their public positions by noting that their meetings are open to all.

Neighborhood organizations whose members are block clubs implicitly are space based, as are our elected units. They assume a geographic identity as the source of their authority. The very fact that a physical block is the unit of representation creates a local collective decision making process at the block and neighborhood level. These two levels of collective decision-making incentivize positions that represent the greatest common good. Because the best of these groups are structurally universal and informed by local discourse, they may be more "representative" of the neighborhood interest than the positions of a partisan elected official.

The third form of neighborhood organization is the "association of associations." Here the collective decisions are made by a coalition of special interest groups, i.e. sports leagues, gardening clubs, veteran's organizations, churches, cause groups, men's and women's organizations, etc. This form implicitly creates an organization of many collective interests rather than geographic or individual interests. These "associations of associations" have no locus of commonality based on space/residence. Therefore, it is much more difficult for them to cohere as a group. Nonetheless, their diversity of interest can be their strength because they bring to the table concerns that, in the aggregate, create a wholistic agenda with prospects of a much broader set of policies and actions. For example, the various associations bring to the table, diverse assets:

- Sports leagues – health, youth
- Artistic groups – culture, creativity, economy
- Merchant organizations – local markets and jobs
- Environmental groups – recycling, energy conservation
- Youth groups – safety, vocation, citizen preparation

- Veteran's groups – children learning citizenship
- Men's and Women's groups – family support, youth opportunities
- Gardening groups – health, local economy

Many of these special associational interests are recognized by most as for the common good –diverse issues around which they can cohere.

A functional analysis of the public benefits of these various forms of association suggests that each has a valuable and distinctive role. In sum, all three provide unique collective means of achieving the common good. The basic dilemma of our era is the continuing decline of the prevalence and influence of all three forms. The dilemma is magnified by the decline of belief in and support for the electoral means of achieving the common good. For those interested in how to enhance citizen participation, the first question may be, whether that can be done if our vehicles for achieving the common good are weak. What can revive or replace these vehicles? We need to search for and support associational actors and inventors. For, as Tocqueville 'said,' "In democratic countries the science of associations is the mother of science; the progress of all the rest depends upon the progress it has made

Local Associations as Schools for Democratic Practice

It is clear that most associations are created to enable the purposes of people who are “like-minded”. Whether it is an association of people who collect the stamps of Israel or who gather because of their common love of bowling, what they have in common is the “glue” that holds them together. They associate because they care about the same thing and/or they care about each other.



The activities of these “like-minded” associations tend to focus on administrative matters, arrangements for activities, making their advocacy more effective, and increasing the visibility of the group and its purposes. Rarely do these groups have tensions or divisions that one might describe as small “p” political.

Where might one look for associations where decisions of a political character require resolution? One such venue is neighborhood associations and block clubs. They often engage in decisions regarding local property, security, municipal services, local youth, etc. It is usually the case that there are diverse viewpoints that need to be resolved. One reason for these differing viewpoints is that each homeowner/renter chooses a residence because of their unique individual situation. They infrequently are involved in identifying the interests of their neighbors before they choose a household. Therefore, they tend to be much more diverse in their interests and confront quite diverse neighborhood questions. As a result, most neighborhood organizations and block clubs are engaged in serious resident political discussions embedded in diverse self-interests. As these local associations grapple with diverse views and multiple concerns, they act as experiential educators about democratic practice. A useful question might be to identify other associations where their “unlike-mindedness” requires decision-making through dialogue, debate, discourse, deliberation, etc.

Local associational decision-making, whether “like-minded” or not, tends to be a bonding process. The focus is internal. However, there is also the question of associational bridging. When do more parochial local associations have the motive to bridge? Most commonly in cities there are associations of neighborhood associations. These coalitions provide another level of learning about the democratic process because they multiply the nature of the issues and the nature of the constituents.

Another useful question is what other kinds of associations tend toward creating bridging structure, and where are there associational bridging structure among diverse, rather than “like-minded” groups?

Associating Associations: The Power of Convening

Because most associations are affinity groups of like-minded people, the potential for dialogue about issues is small. The focus of most associational discourse is about how to manifest their like-mindedness. There is, however, a context in which associations engage in discussions about public issues because they usually have some diversity of viewpoints. This occurs when they come together as a group – an association of associations. This creates enough diversity that contending views (or tensions) emerge.



An example of the dialogue created by associated associations was the Chicago Neighborhood Innovations Forums convened by The Center for Urban Affairs at Northwestern University. For several years, twenty neighborhood associations were convened every six weeks at a retreat center. The convened associations were often different depending on their interest in the topic of discussion. The topics to be discussed were determined by an advisory group of neighborhood organizations. They tended to fall into two categories. The first was issues of common concern. The second was innovations created by neighborhood groups from across the United States. The topics of discussion are listed below. Those focused on innovation are preceded by an asterisk.

The Place of Local Community Organizations in Decisions About City Expenditures in Their Neighborhoods:

- Building a New School/Community Partnership through the Participation of Local Schools in Economic and Community Revitalization of Their Neighborhoods Organizing for Chicago School Reform
- The Neighborhoods' Options in the Energy Crisis Neighborhood Economic Interests in Chicago's Mandatory Waste Separation Ordinance Developing an Affordable Housing Agenda for the Nineties Illinois School Reform Legislation Bill #18-39
- Credit Unions as a Tool for Community Development 30 April 2018
- Rethinking the Welfare Dollar: New Initiatives by Local Community Groups
- Issues in Local Ownership and Control: The Prospects for Community Land Trusts in Chicago Neighborhoods
- Neighborhood Responses to the Drug Trade
- Expanding Opportunities and Creating Community Change Through Small Groups
- New Directions in Community Strategic Planning: Thinking Through and Taking Charge
- New Directions in Community Organizing Local Community Stakes in State Economic Development Policies and Programs: Building an Agenda for the Future
- Community Gardening: A Community Building Tool The Role of Community Organizing in Chicago Public School Reform
- Neighborhood Initiatives for Improved Transit to Work
- The Future of Neighborhood Health Planning for Chicago's West Side Corridor
- Developing a Comprehensive Plan for Chicago Westside Strategy on Drugs Building a Neighborhood Agenda Neighborhood Capital Budget Group Board/Staff Annual Retreat

- Neighborhood Innovations in Financial Services as a Base for Community Economic Development Resources for the Neighborhood Agenda
- Public Policy Development for the Campaign for a Drug-Free Westside: Strengthening Prevention, Treatment and Enforcement
- The Greening Network: Past-Present-Future
- Strategies on Developing a Chicago Association of Local School Councils Planning for the Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy for the City of Chicago
- Exploring Governmental Initiatives for the Neighborhood Agenda
- Exploring Women's Initiatives to Build Multicultural Relationships in Chicago: Where Have We Been? Where are We? Where Do We Want to Go? Community Policing: Where Do We Go From Here?
- Youth Policy Forum I & Youth Policy Forum II

The discussions of issues tended to focus on what to do. The discussions on innovations focused on how something might be newly created. These two categories reflected key functions of associations – public decision-making and creative innovations. Both are essential to the democratic process. These discussions resulted in the creation of 13 sustaining groups of associations focused on acting on their discussions. These working groups made major contributions to neighborhood well-being and public policy, often over a lengthy period of time. This kind of forum is an example of the power of convening. While many institutions are interested in enabling neighborhoods, they tend to focus on interventions and see convening as a means to their ends. An even more productive function could be to act as a neutral convener.

There were two distinctive features in the convening of the Neighborhood Innovations Forums:

1. The first was that the neighborhood groups defined the questions they wanted to discuss rather than relying on institutions to define or join in to defining the questions. As a result, built into the discussions was the participant's motivation to act because the questions were those the associations themselves cared about.
2. The second distinctive feature was that the participants were all neighborhood organizations. With a few rare exceptions, representatives of agencies, business and government were not invited. The result was that the discussions placed responsibility and accountability for action on local citizen organizations. The presence of institutional representatives would have diminished associational accountability and, predictably, resulted in finger pointing and institution blaming.

There usually came a time when the forum groups met with institutional actors. However, this was after the groups had first become clear about their agenda and had determined how their own resources could be used in implementing issue or innovation decisions. This process reflected, in practice, the basic sequential planning process for productive neighborhood groups:

1. To achieve our purpose, what resources do we have in the neighborhood that will allow us to deal with our issue or innovation with no outside resources?
2. Using our own resources, what purposes can we fulfill if there are also some outside resources to support our work?

3. Finally, which purposes do we have that depend entirely on outside resources? In this sequence, citizen capacity for productivity is the primary question and institutional roles are understood to be supportive of these capacities.

Finally, there are many possible institutions that could convene local associations including universities, local governments, community centers, some social service agencies, civic organizations, chambers of commerce, etc. The unusual aspect of this type of convening is that the institution needs to set aside its own substantive priorities while recognizing the critical value of increasing the social capital and productive capacity of local citizens.

The Power of Proliferating Associations

Most local associations are small affinity groups whose members jointly accomplish their purposes without being paid. Their forms can range from a local American Legion Post to a softball team to a conservation club, etc. When they are created, they are almost always composed of a relatively small number of people.

As the association undertakes its work, it depends on two attributes of the members if it is to achieve its purposes:

- The capacities talents and abilities of each member.
- The mutual trust of the members with each other.



Through time, many associations grow in membership. The growth may increase the capacity of the group. However, beyond a certain number of members, the association may diminish in its effectiveness. This is because the associational essentials of trust and mutual knowledge cannot be maintained beyond a certain scale. As the group expands from 10 to 100 individuals, each member has less and less trust building mutual experience with the others. And each knows less and less about the associational building capacities of the others. Because of the inherent limitations of going to scale, often the associational members feel the need for a “centrifugal force” in order to keep or pull them together.

Commonly, the response is to create an administrator, convener, or executive – someone all can trust and who can keep track of the unique capacities of each member. This person will usually need to be paid so the funding issue emerges. This is followed by the necessity to have tax exemption. In this way this association slowly transforms itself into a small institution with a developing culture of a system rather than an association.

This process is, of course, the positive process by which we have created many of our important institutions such as hospitals, universities, social agencies, etc. Obviously, this has been a beneficial process. However, the nature of these hierarchical systems loses the community building power of trust based, capacity enabling citizen associations.

In this paper, the focus is upon beneficial characteristics of associations. However, an association is an amoral structure. It has no inherent values. The local chapter of the NAACP and the KI Klux Klan are both local citizen associations. While associations here are discussed in their beneficial aspect, it is critical to also recognize the impact of negative associations and to deal with their effects. Just as “the answer to bad speech is more speech”, the answer to bad associations may be the same.

It is, of course, not inevitable that associations will evolve into institutions as they face the issue of growth. There is another approach to dealing with the problem of scale, an approach that preserves the essential associational characteristics of trust and shared mutual capacities. This approach might be called proliferation rather than institutionalization or replication. It is a process that frequently emerges when a founding group recognizes the special power of their being a small group but also see that what they have learned to do could be usefully learned by others. Therefore, they support or stimulate more small groups with similar purposes.

However, they do not create a centralizing or hierarchical system. Rather, they spawn a proliferation of small groups, each with their uniquely skilled members and with mutual trust as the cohering force.

One well-known example of such a proliferating group process is Alcoholics Anonymous. There are countless AA groups around the world and almost no central entity. The members recognize that beyond a certain scale, the intensely personal trust and mutual contribution will be lost.

Another example is La Leche League - proliferating small groups of mothers enabled by trust and mutual capacity. They do have a small central organization but it is a support unit held in check by the dispersed power of the local groups.

There are many other examples of proliferating small associations including:

- Associations of “home schooling” parents that often link together in decentralized associations of associations for mutual support, learning, and assistance to newly formed groups.
- Parent associations of children labeled “developmentally disabled” who create linked associations of associations supporting each other and newly forming groups.
- Neighborhood organizations that create links through their annual convening as Neighborhoods USA where they share learnings and inform newly created associations.
- “Church planting” groups of churches that foster new local efforts to create small-scale centers of faith.
- Black Lives Matter, an alliance of local groups with no central structure or hierarchy although they are guided by 13 principals.

Nationally, there are undoubtedly hundreds of thousands of these “flat proliferated associations”. Many of them perform functions that parallel those of institutions e.g. health, education, addictions, recovery, care for vulnerable and marginal people, civil rights, neighborhood wellbeing, etc. 2 Replication is a system-designed method of reproducing a standard model of activity. In many cases the cumulative effect of the actions of “flat proliferated associations” achieve more desirable outcomes than the parallel institution. And they achieve this outcome in spite of having very little money and/or paid employees or experts.

Consider the measurable increase in health status resulting from associational social capital compared to that of institutionalized medical activity. Robert Putnam’s data in *Bowling Alone* demonstrates that social capital formation is more consequential in improving health status than medical systems. In this sense associations are low-input and high-output “producers” while institutions are generally high-input and low-output methods of achieving a healthy population. Therefore the proliferation of associational groups is the most efficient and effective way of enabling a healthy neighborhood or nation.

In terms of utility and productivity there are some other significant distinctions between the nature and functions of proliferated associations compared with institutionalized systems:

- Institutions are believed to provide continuity of functions while associations are thought to be more fleeting and ephemeral. However, if one considers local faith-based groups as essentially proliferated associations, many have proven to endure for centuries.

- Institutions operate on the premise of scarcity and money is their mode of rationing benefits. The proliferated associations operate in the context of abundance. Their basic resource of citizen capacity, care and knowledge are abundant.
- Institutions operate within the context of the economics of scarcity. Therefore, their essential mode of behavior is competitive. The competitive model is antithetical to the survival of proliferated associations. Both individually and collectively, the associational mode is necessarily cooperation.
- By their very nature, every association is creating social capital that provides numerous ancillary individual and community benefits that are not necessarily related to each association's purpose.³ The proliferating process in itself is always increasing the benefits of social capital in the lives of more and more people.
- In the world of engineering a measure of effectiveness and efficiency is a process that has reduced inputs and increased outputs. One way of understanding the parallel process of institutions and associations is to use the engineering standard.
- The most serious decision making discussions require face-to-face interaction. Beyond a certain associational size, universal participation becomes practically impossible. There are too many people for everyone to speak. This is why the proliferating associations are so critical for an inclusive democracy. They provide an ever-expanding potential for universal access to the deliberation. On the other hand, institutions cannot provide the structure for a universalizing voice in shaping public goals.

For a data-based explanation of the multiple benefits of social capital, see Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone*. Considering the unique and powerfully beneficial effects of associations and their proliferated work, it is important to consider the factors that enable and enhance the proliferation of associations and the links and networks of these groups. Are there initiatives that see their basic task as enhancing the proliferation of associational functions and inventions?

Also, to what degree are the effects of increasing institutionalization of community functions a significant deterrent to associational proliferation? What could be done to limit these institutional barriers? Would there be any institution willing to take on this task? Or is it one of the essential functions of the proliferated associations to push back the institutional barriers?

The Mother of Science

“Nothing, in my opinion, is more deserving of our attention than the intellectual and moral associations of America. The political and industrial associations of that country strike us forcibly; but the others elude our observations, or if we discover them, we understand them imperfectly because we have hardly ever seen anything of the kind. It must be acknowledged, however, that they are as necessary to the American people as the (political and industrial) associations, and perhaps more so. In democratic countries the science of association is the mother of science; the progress of all the rest depends on the progress it has made.

– Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America

While there may not be any University Departments of Associational Science, Tocqueville still commends us to study their nature and functions because of their critical role in a democracy. Indeed, the practice of associational life is often viewed as the “school for democracy.” As we study associations, it is useful to begin by understanding the topography of the associational domain – the space not occupied by commercial, governmental or not for profit institutions.

Definition

An association can be understood as a club, group, or organization of people where the members do the work but they are not paid. They may have a paid member like a convener, organizer or pastor. However, the essential work is produced by members who act, within associations as citizens.

Associations are as varied as the human interests that lead people to create them. They include American Legion posts, book clubs, sports leagues, senior clubs, choirs, 4-H clubs, advocacy groups, etc. These organizations are the core of a democratic society because they are the means by which free people make power by acting together. This is why the first amendment of our Bill of Rights identifies our primary freedoms as free speech and free association and assembly.

Examples of Associations

In practice, associations may be informal or formal. An informal association could be a group of women who meet each Saturday morning at a diner where they have coffee. They are an association, but they have no public name. The more formal associations are characterized by having names and, frequently, officers. A useful typology of modern associations is:

1. Addiction Prevention and Recovery Groups
 - Drug Ministry/Testimonial Group for Addicts
 - Campaign for a Drug Free Neighborhood
 - High School Substance Abuse Committee
2. Advisory Community Support Groups (friends of...)
 - Friends of the Library
 - Neighborhood Park Advisory Council
 - Hospital Advisory Group



3. Animal Care Groups

- Cat Owner's Association
- Humane Society

4. Anti-Crime Groups

- Children's Safe Haven Neighborhood Group
- Police Neighborhood Watch
- Senior Safety Groups

5. Block Clubs

- Condominium Owner's Association
- Building Council
- Tenant Club

6. Business Organizations/ Support Groups

- Jaycees
- Local Chamber of Commerce
- Economic Development Council
- Local Restaurant Association

7. Charitable Groups and Drives

- Local Hospital Auxiliary
- Local United Way
- United Negro College Fund Drive

8. Civic Events Groups

- Local Parade Planning Committee
- Arts and Crafts Fair
- July 4th Carnival Committee
- Health Fair Committee

9. Cultural Groups

- Community Choir
- Drama Club
- Dance Organization
- High School Band

10. Disability/Special Needs Groups

- Special Olympics Planning Committee
- Local American Lung Association
- Local Americans with Disabilities Association
- Local Muscular Dystrophy Association

11. Education Groups

- Local School Council
- Local Book Clubs

- Parent Teacher Association
- Literacy Council
- Tutoring Groups

12. Elderly Groups

- Hospital Seniors Clubs
- Westside Seniors Clubs
- Church Seniors Clubs
- Senior Craft Club

13. Environmental Groups

- Neighborhood Recycling Club
- Sierra Club
- Adopt-a-Stream
- Bike Path Committee
- Clean Air Committee
- Pollution Council
- Save the Park Committee

14. Family Support Groups

- Teen Parent Organization
- Foster Parents' Support Group
- Parent Alliance Group

15. Health Advocacy and Fitness Groups

- Weight Watchers
- YMCA/YWCA Fitness Groups
- Neighborhood Health Council
- Traffic Safety Organization
- Child Injury Prevention Group
- Yoga Club
- 16. Heritage Groups
- Black Empowerment Group
- Norwegian Society
- Neighborhood Historical Society
- African American Heritage Association

16. Hobby and Collectors Group

- Coin Collector Association
- Stamp Collector Association
- Arts and Crafts Club
- Garden Club of Neighbors
- Sewing Club
- Antique Collectors

17. Men's Groups

- Fraternal Orders
- Church Men's Organizations

- Men's Sports Organizations
 - Fraternities
18. Mentoring Groups
- After School Mentors
 - Peer Mentoring Groups
 - Church Mentoring Groups
 - Big Brothers, Big Sisters
 - Rites of Passage Organizations
19. Mutual Support Groups
- La Leche League
 - Disease Support Groups (cancer, etc.)
 - Parent-to-Parent Groups
 - Family-to-Family Groups
20. Neighborhood Improvement Groups
- The Neighborhood Garden Club
 - Council of Block Clubs
 - Neighborhood Anti-Crime Council
 - Neighborhood Clean-up Campaign
21. Political Organizations
- Democratic Club
 - Republican Club
22. Recreation Groups
- Kite-flying Club
 - Bowling Leagues
 - Basketball Leagues
 - Body Builders Club
 - Little League
23. Religious Groups
- Churches
 - Mosques
 - Synagogues
 - Men's Religious Groups
 - Women's Religious Groups
 - Youth Religious Groups
24. Service Clubs
- Zonta
 - Optimist
 - Rotary Clubs
 - Lions Clubs
 - Kiwanis Clubs
25. Social Groups
- Bingo Club
 - Card Playing Club
 - Social Activity Club
 - Dance Clubs
26. Social Cause/ Advocacy/ Issue Groups
- Get Out the Vote Council
 - Peace Club
 - Hunger Organizations
 - Vigil Against Violence
 - Community Action Council
 - Social Outreach Ministry
 - Soup Kitchen Group
27. Union Groups
- Industrial (UAW)
 - Crafts Unions (Plumbing Council)
28. Veteran's Groups
- Veterans of Foreign Wars
 - Women's Veterans Organizations
29. Women's Groups
- Sororal Organizations
 - Women's Sports Groups
 - Women's Auxiliary
 - Mother's Board
 - Eastern Star
30. Youth Groups
- After School Group
 - 4-H
 - Girl and Boy Scouts
 - Junior Achievement
 - Campfire Girls

Associational Functions

The functions of associations are numerous and diverse. Primarily they serve the self-interests of the members. People associate because they care about each other and/or they care about the same things. The

“glue” that holds them together is mutual care rather than money which is the “glue” which holds institutions together. Beyond fulfilling immediate self-interests, associations are also schools for citizenship providing space for practice in public affairs and civic life. This participation often involves the exercise of three powers:

- the power to decide what needs to be done.
- the power to create a method to do it.
- the power to implement their solution themselves or by recruiting their neighbors, other associations and institutions to join their effort.

In engaging in these three steps, they are acting powerfully, experiencing the meaning of citizenship and their own efficacy. Self-efficacy is further enhanced by those associations that have vertical structures that allow them to express themselves at the regional, state or federal level. Examples would be the United Auto Workers, American Legion and League of Women Voters. These tiered associations are intermediary bodies connecting individuals and their associational concerns to institutions with other capacities and forms of power. In this way, the local associations become a magnifier of each member’s voice and the concerns they advocate.

The Efficacy of the Collective Work of Local Associations

While most associations provide some form of community benefit, the aggregate of their work is the infrastructure of communities. A study of the collective community benefits of local associations was supported by the Kettering Foundation in 2012 and conducted by the Asset-Based Community Development Institute. The study involved an extensive analysis of 62 associations in the small Wisconsin town of Spring Green, WI (population 1,600). The summary of this study illuminates the collective efficacy of multiple associations as they create (unintentionally) the infrastructure of community life through citizen decision making and action. The study's summary outlines the collective impacts:



Parallel Functions of Associations and Service Institutions

Reviewing the data, one is impressed by the diversity and density of the associations as well as the multitude of functions and benefits they provide. One hypothesis is that their frequency is related to the relative absence of local institutions providing social services. Spring Green is in the southwest corner of the county while the county seat and many social services are physically located in the northeast. Consequently, there are almost no social service facilities and very few resident social service professionals. The result may be that the numerous associations providing services have emerged to fill the institutional absence.

The Associational Safety Net

It is clear from these data that the associations have created a dense system of service, providing personal and social support. The study makes visible the rich infrastructure of associational production of wellbeing that is usually invisible to policy makers or service providers. This “invisibility” limits both an understanding of the community safety net or the policies that could support, enhance or expand the associational system and its productivity.

The Web of Associational Relationships

The study reveals a complex network of relationships surrounding each association. First, each association creates a context for relationships that empower each member. Second, the associations have relationships with each other when they engage in collective initiatives. Third, some associations have relationships with regional, statewide or national organizations. Fourth, many associations have relationships with local non-governmental institutions including businesses and not-for-profit groups. Finally, the associations have relationships with governments, primarily at the local level. This dense vertical and horizontal web is, in itself, a structure that provides several community benefits.

- The structure is a network that communicates information among the community actors.
- The information creates the basis for partnerships, coalitions and joint activities.
- The network enhances the effectiveness of both the institutions and associations.
- The connections between associations and institutions facilitate bridging as well as bonding.
- The entire structure is the community generator of social capital.

The Learning Functions of Associations

Associational benefits are often classified as creating relationships that enable activity. However, it is significant that the most frequent reason given by interviewees as to why residents join their group is classified as “learning.” When asked what the major benefit residents get from their association, once again the most frequent classification is “learning.” With the exception of only one group (a book club), the learning is the result of an activity. In this sense, the associations are providing experiential learning, a powerful pedagogy distinct from most classroom learning. This learning through association is a form of adult continuing education that deserves further study and recognition as a major source of community knowledge.

Fundraising and the Culture of Care

In many communities, the major fundraising activity is the United Way. This agency gathers most of its funds through institutions that solicit their employees for contributions. In Spring Green, there is no United Way. This may be the reason that one third of the associations studied indicated that they engaged in “charitable giving and drives.” Contrasted with the United Way process, this associational giving involves the members in deciding who should receive the money as well as direct personal knowledge or engagement with the recipient. This personalization of giving supports a community culture of care that is not present with a system of annual contributions at the workplace.

Associations and Power

It is significant that only 8 of the 60 associations indicated they have engaged in advocacy with some level of government regarding an issue. In a majority of these cases, the advocacy involved the village government. There is a theory that associations are “mediating institutions,” providing a means for local individuals to gain collective power in dealing with larger, distant institutions such as the higher levels of government. These data from this study indicate that this mediating function is not prevalent. Further study could focus on the other means of advocacy that local people use to influence the state and national government. However, it may be that the local associations are understood as tools for empowerment through the production of community benefits rather than vehicles seeking outside help. While “power” is often understood as the ability to effectively advocate for change, a power of equal importance is the ability to create change with the resources of the community—principally the web of local associations.

The Future

In Yoni Appelbaum’s article titled, “Losing the Democratic Habit” (Atlantic Magazine, October 2018) he observes that:

“*Like most habits democratic behavior develops slowly over time, through constant repetition. For two centuries, the United States, was distinguished by its mania for democracy. From early childhood, Americans learned to be citizen by creating, joining and participating in democratic organizations. But in recent decades, Americans have fallen out of practice, or even failed to acquire the habits of democracy in the first place.*”

The results have been catastrophic. As the procedures that once conferred legitimacy on organizations have grown alien to many Americans, contempt for Democratic institutions has risen.” This dire warning urges us to develop the science of associations. We can do no less than understand and share broadly the associational habit that is the core of democratic practice and community well-being.

Putting Associations Back in Public Education

The Asset-Based Community Development process identifies five basic community building resources that exist in almost every neighborhood. These resources are:

1. Capacities of individuals
2. Associations
3. Institutions (four profit, not-for-profit, government)
4. Physical environment
5. Exchange

The first three assets represent human learning resources in addition to their other attributes. There are numerous neighborhoods organized to identify the knowledge of local residents as learning resources. However, almost none have understood the potential of associations as learning resources.



A study of local associations was conducted in the small town of Spring Green, WI, entitled [A Study of the Community Benefits Provided by Local Associations \(2013\)](#). The actual questionnaire for the study, is the Spring Green Study Questionnaire. Item C-2 on the questionnaire asks, “What are the major benefits your members get from your association?” Of the 62 associational leaders interviewed, 20 answered that “learning” was the major benefit their members acquired. Therefore, the associational life of the community was identified as an educational resource in a third of the cases.

Reviewing the 62 associations, the following 23 can be identified as learning sites:

- Bloomin Buddies Garden Club – gardening
- Friends of Governor Dodge State Park – environment and ecology
- Friends of the Lower Wisconsin Riverway - environment and ecology
- Friends of the Spring Green Library – literature
- Green Squared Building Association – energy efficiency
- Habitat for Humanity – construction methods
- Mew Haven – animal care
- Mostly Mondays Poetry Society – literature
- Older and Wiser Land Stewards (OWLS) – prairie restoration, environment
- River Valley Players – theater
- River Valley Soccer Association – sports
- River Valley Stitchers – quilting
- Solstice Jazz Band – music
- Spring Green Arts Coalition – arts
- Spring Green Chamber of Commerce – business
- Spring Green EMT – emergency preparedness, medical care
- Spring Green Historical Society – history
- Spring Green Food Pantry – food scarcity
- Spring Green Film Club – films
- Spring Green Lions Club – community service and citizenship
- Spring Green Literary festival – literature
- Stitch’n Bitch – needlework
- Veterans for Peace – peace advocacy

There are also 8 associations specifically designed to engage youth:

- Girls Scout Troop 669 – citizenship
- Cub Scout Pack No. 38 – citizenship
- Future Farmers of America – agricultural management and citizenship
- River Valley Youth Football Club – sports
- High School Madrigal Choir and Jazz Vocal Group – music
- High School Senior Service Learning Class – community service, citizenship
- Skills U.S.A. – mechanical skills
- Spring Green Dolphins – sports

There are also 4 church associations that provide numerous learning opportunities for their members, including young people:

- Christ Lutheran Church
- Cornerstone Church
- Community Church
- Catholic Church

The total is 35 associations providing diverse learning opportunities. Paradoxically, practically none of the 23 non-youth/non-church associations have youthful members such as teenagers. This lack of a relationship results in several losses:

1. The loss of valuable learning opportunities for young people.
2. The establishment of productive relationships between young people and adults in the community.
3. The loss of energetic contributions that young people could make to the life of the association.
4. The loss of the learnings that the adults in the associations would acquire from the young people with different perspectives.

There is an open field for creative invention in civic life if associations could be inspired to begin to incorporate people in their organizations who are under 18 years of age.

Wicked Issues For Neighborhood Leaders and Organizers

Most effective people acting as neighborhood organizers or leaders have a primary value of maximizing participation – more people mean more power to advocate and create. This places a high value on community questions that unify rather than divide. In the Alinsky model of neighborhood organizing, the questions have been mainly about the inadequacies of outside institutions, for example, local government, schools, merchants, etc. The neighborhood's common perception of these inadequacies maximizes the participation of residents. In the lingo of Alinskyism, the organization grows powerful as a common external 'enemy' is identified.



While external institutions are frequently a problem, there are also many questions within the neighborhood where collective resident action would be required to resolve them. It is these internal questions that many leaders and organizers understand as divisive rather than inclusive. Some of the most common issues with divisive possibilities include child abuse, domestic abuse, sexual predators and abortion, etc. Each of these questions is a major issue in the lives of local residents although they tend to be publicly invisible. Whenever residents raise these issues, most organizers and leaders recognize their divisive potential and typically engage strategies that sidestep them.

In one sense, there are visible and invisible issues in a neighborhood. Those typically acted upon are the visible, external and internal problems. However, is a role for neighborhood organizers and leaders to make visible the kinds of issues described above? Is there a way for these kinds of issues to be raised so that they do not reduce the participation of local residents in civic life?

Several years ago, as I drove through a small Wisconsin town, I noticed on one block that the same signs were posted in many of the yards. The signs said, "There is No Room for Domestic Abuse on This Block." I wondered whether these signs were the results of a few concerned individuals on the block or the result of an initiative from some local association or institution. Certainly, the signs made visible the invisible and would have affected the consciousness of many people in the neighborhood who were not on the block. One wonders whether the signs stimulated discussions in families, other blocks or neighborhood and community organizations. What kind of community discussions might build upon the visibility of an issue that was once discussed only behind closed doors? In practice, the typical public response to these wicked issues is to place them in the domain of professionals – certified people who have expertise in child abuse, domestic abuse, etc. Could it be that this professionalization of issues removes citizens as critical actors in dealing with the problem? Could it be that a collectively energized local citizen could have more real impact on the issue than the professional interventions?

Another question with great divisive potential is whether neighborhood civic associations should endorse particular candidates. It is customary that local groups might hold forums involving all candidates in order to inform their constituency about the choices. However, when local activist citizens attempt to get a local association to endorse a particular candidate, they are likely to be told that the local organization is not-for-profit and cannot legally endorse candidates, or that the association is nonpartisan. These responses preclude

a discussion of the comparative relevance of the positions of the two candidates in terms of significant community issues. Could it be that a discussion of the impact of these candidate's differing positions as they affect the neighborhood, is a critical civic function? And, what use is a discussion about community impacts of the various candidacies without the ability of the group to select the one whose positions are most congruent with the association's goals? In many localities, the candidacy question is redirected to those local associations that are political parties or activist groups. Therefore, the vital citizen role of making associational decisions about potential officials who will vitally affect the neighborhood's life is precluded. However, the unity of the civic association is enhanced.



Institutions

Differentiating the Functions of Institutions and Associations: A Geometry Lesson

In the community-building world, a significant number of local initiatives fail because the participants are not clear about the difference between the functions of associations and institutions. This failure most often occurs when institutions attempt to take on functions that are actually better performed by associations.

Associations are defined as smaller, often face-to-face groups where the members do the work and they are not paid. Their geometric form is symbolized by a circle. Typical examples include block clubs, veteran's organizations, gardening clubs, advocacy groups etc. Institutions are defined as groups of paid people in formal, hierarchical organizations. Their form is symbolized by a triangle. They come in three organizational forms: for profit, not for profit and governmental.

Just as a hammer and a saw each perform distinctive functions, circular associations and triangular institutions have forms appropriate to their functions. In order to clarify these distinctive functions, it is useful to outline the unique nature and capacity of institutional and associational forms of organized people. The chart below is a summary illustration of the distinctive capacities of each form.

	
CONTROL	CHOICE
PRODUCTION GOODS SERVICES	CARE
CLIENTS CONSUMER	CITIZEN
NEEDS	CAPACITY

Institutions are triangular constructions because their essential purpose is to provide a means by which a few can control many. This is why most institutional organization charts have one person at the top and many people at the bottom. This control function is valuable whenever we need uniformity and standardization as in mass production. The “glue” that holds the people in institution together is money.

Associations are flat and circular because their function is to synthesize the unique interests of each participant and their continuity depends upon the choice to voluntarily participate. The glue that holds them together is trust. The purpose of institutional control is to produce “lots of the same things” – goods or services. While some associations may produce goods, they are rarely mass-produced. Instead, they are handmade and homemade. Therefore, they are the product of what people care about. While care is sometimes described as being provided by service institutions, this is a misuse of the meaning of the word care. Care is the freely given

commitment, from the heart, of one person to another. For example, “He cares about his spouse and his neighborhood more than anything else.” No institution can produce care in this traditional meaning. On the other hand, care is the essential necessity of an association’s continuity. It will not survive unless it provides an opportunity for its participants to care for each other and/or care about the same thing.

In recent times, institutions have laid claim to care because it is one of the deepest of human motives. Nonetheless, institutions cannot care. For example, Medicare doesn’t care. It is a group of people organized in a triangle to regularly send out checks to doctors and patients. Whenever institutions purport to care, they are actually performing a function accurately called service. When they attempt to become the “providers of care,” they are actually manifesting counterfeit care that can reduce genuine associational care in communities. Institutions require many clients or consumers in order that the “lots of the same things” they produce will be purchased. Associations neither produce nor need clients or consumers. Instead they need citizens. Institutions are designed to meet what they call needs. Actually, they need needs because without them their system of control is useless. Associations do not need needs. Instead, they need the capacities of citizens who may also have deficits. Institutions need those deficits in order to have clients or consumers.

Associations ignore deficits in order to mobilize the capacities of citizens. The most common reason for failure of neighborhood based initiatives is triangles attempting to provide choice, care, citizenship, and capacity. In this confused effort, they not only fail to perform essential associational functions, but they can also promote the decline of associations by claiming that they can do what only associations can do.

It is important to recognize that institutional triangles have appropriate and necessary functions. If we want to fly an airplane we cannot do it in an associational form. We cannot have a pilot who says, “Well folks, we are all here. Where should we go?” At the same time, if we want to have citizens creating and implementing a vision for their neighborhood’s future, we cannot get an institution to do it for them. Instead they must fulfill a role called citizenship and use their principal tool – associations.

There are seven distinctively associational functions in local places. These are functions that, if unperformed, will create a widespread decline in the well-being of neighbors and increase their dependence on inadequate institutional substitutions.

First, our neighborhoods and associational relationships are the primary source of our health. How long we live and how often we are sick is determined by our personal behavior, our social relationships, our physical environment, and our income. As neighbors, we are the people who can change these things through our associated activity. Medical systems and doctors cannot. This is why epidemiologists agree that medical care counts for less than 15% of what will allow us to be healthy. Indeed, most informed medical leaders advocate for community health initiatives because they recognize their systems have reached the limits of their health-giving power.

Second, whether we are safe and secure in our neighborhood is largely within our local domain. One landmark study shows that there are two basic determinants of our local safety. One is how many neighbors we know by name. The second is how often we are present and associate in the public outside our houses. Police activity is a minor protection compared to these two community actions. This is why most informed police leaders advocate for block watch and community policing. They know their limits and call out to the neighborhood residents for associational solutions.

Third, the future of our earth - the environment - is a major neighborhood responsibility. The “energy problem” is a local domain because how we transport ourselves, how we heat and light our homes, and how much waste we create are major factors in saving our environment. That is why the associational movement is a major force in calling us and our neighbors to be citizens of the earth and not just consumers of the natural wealth.

Fourth, in our villages and neighborhoods, we have the power to build a resilient economy - less dependent on the mega-systems of finance and production that have proven to be so unreliable. Most enterprises begin locally - in garages, basements, kitchens, and dining rooms. As neighbors, we have the local power to nurture and support these enterprises so that they have a viable market. And we have the local power to create credit unions that capture our own savings so that we are not captives of large financial institutions. We also are the most reliable sources of jobs. Word-of-mouth among neighbors is still the most important access to employment. The future of our economic security is now clearly a responsibility, possibility, and necessity for the associational neighborhood.

Fifth, we are quickly learning that part of our domain is the production of the food we eat. We are allied with the local food movement, supporting local producers and markets. In this way, we will be doing our part to solve the energy problem caused by transportation of food from continents away. We will be doing our part to solve our economic problems by circulating our dollars locally. And we will be improving our health by eating food free of poisons and petroleum.

Sixth, we are local people who must collectively raise our children. We all say that “it takes a village to raise a child”. And yet, in modernized societies, this is rarely true in neighborhoods. Instead, we pay systems to raise our children - teachers, counselors, coaches, youth workers, nutritionists, doctors, McDonalds, and iPhones. We are often reduced as families to being responsible for paying others to raise our children and transporting them to their paid child-raisers. Our villages have often become useless; our neighbors responsible for neither their children nor ours. As a result, we all talk about the local “youth problem”. There is no “youth problem”. There is a “village problem” of adults who have forgone their responsibility and capacity to join their neighbors in raising the young. There is a remarkable recovery movement that joins neighbors in sharing the wealth of children. It is our greatest challenge and our most hopeful possibility.

Seventh, locally we are the site of care. Our institutions can only offer service - not care. We cannot purchase care. Care is the freely given commitment from the heart of one to another. As neighbors, we can care for each other. We can care for our children. We can care for our elders. And it is this care that is the basic power of a community of associated citizens.

Health, safety, economy, environment, food, children, and care are the seven special capacities of local associations. They are the unique functions of local associations. When local associations fail to fulfill these functions, institutions and governments cannot provide a substitute. Their “triangular” capacities mainly create counterfeits, palliatives, and dependency. Tocqueville said that “in democratic countries the science of association is the mother of science: the progress of all the rest depends upon the progress it has made.” The progress he commends depends on our ability to understand the unique and critical functions of associations and our ability to create and multiply their ability to perform their unique functions.

Institutional Precipitation

It's my understanding that in chemistry, a precipitant is a reagent that produces a reaction of which it is not a part. It is analogous to one form of institutional action in relationship to a local neighborhood. Most neighborhood-focused institutional actions involve introducing a substantive program that serves the interests of the institutions, therefore, the people in the neighborhood are not involved in determining what should be done, how it should be done and who should do it. However, these three activities are critical if neighbors are to act as citizens defining and producing the future. There is one possibility for institutions to enable citizen action if they can be a precipitant rather than a programmatic intervener. A precipitating action would avoid defining for neighbors what should be done, how it should be done and who should do it. However, it could act to precipitate citizens performing these three actions. Two examples of institutional precipitation are:



Grants to Blocks

In Savannah, Georgia, the Assistant City Manager sent a letter to every household in the lowest income neighborhood in the city. The letter indicated that the City appreciated the community building efforts of neighborhood people and wanted to support those efforts wherever possible. It said that if the local resident wanted to do something that would improve life on their block, the City was prepared to provide any funding that might help their effort- up to \$100. The resident was asked to send a one-page letter describing what they wanted to do and to identify at least two other residents that would join in implementation. In the first year, 85 residents sent in a letter with their proposal and all were funded. The result of sending these letters each year had a cumulative effect that clearly transformed the neighborhood. The assistant city manager developed ways to celebrate these initiatives and he realized that the people who were signing the letters of proposal were the real leaders in the neighborhood. This entire process is described in our publication, *City-Sponsored Community Building: Savannah's Grants for Blocks Story* by Deborah Puntenney and Henry Moore (1998). We will send you both copies.

Idea Jam

In a neighborhood in Vancouver, Canada, a local settlement house publicized what they called an "Idea Jam." It invited any resident in the neighborhood to come to a gathering with an idea about how the neighbors working together could make the neighborhood better. At the event, the admission fee was having an idea for neighborhood improvement. The participants came together in various groups to discuss the ideas, how they might be implemented and who would be involved. Then they formed teams to implement the initiatives. In both cases, institutions precipitated significant citizen action without intervening substantively. These two examples could provide a stimulus for the identification of other institutionally precipitated actions. These kinds of actions could then be described as case studies and used in training institutions on how they might take a different approach to the support of neighborhoods.

A Neighborhood Impact Statement: Changing the Burden of Proof

There has been a great deal of effort to persuade local institutions to reach out to the local citizenry and to engage them in participating in decision-making. This process usually leaves the decision as to which decisions citizens should be involved in to the institutional actor. The local citizenry is responding to the institutional agenda. This process usually leaves the decision as to which decisions citizens should be engaged in to the institutions. Citizens are responders rather than definers, advisors rather than deciders.



An alternative could be the development of a Neighborhood Impact Statement modeled on Environmental Impact Statements. The Environmental Impact Statement places the burden of proof on the outside intervener. The intervention into the natural environment must be tested against a set of standards. The assumption is that to intervene in the natural environmental order, institutions must prove in advance the nature of the impacts of their proposals.

Similarly, the neighborhood is a social environment where the proposed institutional intervener should have to demonstrate in advance positive impacts measured against local community standards. Instead of the local citizenry having to depend on institutional decisions as to those questions for engagement, the burden of proof would be shifted so that citizen standards would be the given and the institutional impacts would be assessed against them.

A Neighborhood Impact Statement could be developed by a coalition of neighborhood associations. They would define the areas of potential impact and the standards to be used to evaluate the impact. One possible method of developing a statement would be to focus on the three major kinds of intervening institutions – businesses, not-for-profits and government. For each of these, a set of values and standards could be created by the local citizen coalition.

A beginning example of possibilities might be:

Businesses

- What will be the effects of the intervention on existing local enterprises?
- Effects on local employment as well as new jobs
- Effects on public social life
- Effects on the physical environment
- Effects on local newspapers and community based media

Not-For-Profits

- Will the initiative replace or support neighborhood functions?
- Will the intervention enhance local jobs and enterprises?
- Will local citizens have the final decision regarding the intervention?
- Will the intervention identify and utilize local assets?

Government

- What will the job and enterprise impacts be?
- Will the intervention increase capacity of citizens to perform functions?
- Will citizens have the power to veto the intervention?

This is a limited “starter” list of neighborhood values and issues related to proposed interventions of institutions. The key to developing an effective Neighborhood Impact Statement is that it be developed by neighbors at the block level where effects on family and the local social contract is experienced. An overarching question might be, does this intervention enhance the capacity of local residents to perform functions that are the basis for wellbeing.

One measure of the effectiveness of a Neighborhood Impact Statement would be its effect on the status and functions of local residents. A continuum that defines local citizen power and status is this sequence:

Most Powerful
Producer
Advocate
Advisor
Client/Consumer
Victim
Least Powerful

Traditional engagement initiatives assume the preferred status of neighbors is as client/consumer and advisor. These forms of engagement do not involve neighbors as decider/producer. Therefore, they are actually not citizen engagement because the resident has none of the basic powers of a citizen.

Government

A Guide for Government Officials Seeking to Promote Productive Citizen Participation

Some years ago, I attended the annual Canadian Conference of Community Development Organizations. Several hundred groups were attending. The convener of the conference told me that the best community “developer” in all of Canada was at the conference. He pointed toward a middle-aged man named Gaeton Ruest, the Mayor of Amqui, Quebec.

I introduced myself to Mayor Ruest and asked about Amqui. He said that it was a town of about 6,000 people on the Gaspé Peninsula amid the Chic Choc Mountains. It is located at the intersection of the Matapedia and Amqui Rivers. These rivers are the richest Atlantic salmon rivers on our continent and Amqui is the regional center for fishing for these salmon. Gaeton invited me to visit his town and a year later I was able to do so. I found that all the people in the town were French-speaking. A great deal of the economic base of the community was from fisher people who came to fish for the rare Atlantic salmon.



Walking down the street with Gaeton, two men approached him. There was a long conversation in French, which I did not understand. After they were finished Gaeton explained to me what had happened. He said that the town had put nets on salmon streams in order to keep them near Amqui and accessible to the fishing guides. The two men reported that somebody was cutting the nets to let the salmon go upstream where they could poach them. Gaeton responded, “That’s terrible. What do you think we can do about that?”

The men thought for a while and then told him three things they thought could be done. Gaeton replied, “Is there anybody who could help you do those things?” “Yes,” they responded. “We know a couple of other fisher people who could help.” Gaeton said, “Will you ask them to join you to meet with me at City Hall this evening?” They agreed. That evening I joined Gaeton at the meeting with four concerned people. He insisted that their discussion be held in the City Council’s meeting room. Gaeton led a discussion of how the group could deal with the salmon poaching problem. By the time they were done, they had specific plans and specific people committed to carrying them out.

Then, Gaeton asked, “Is there anything the City can do to help you with the job?” The participants came up with two ways the city could be helpful. Gaeton then said, “I am making you the official Amqui Salmon Preservation Committee. I want you to hold your meetings in the City Council Meeting Room because you are official. I want you to come to City Council meetings and tell the Council people how you are coming along.”

The convener of the National Association of Community Development Organizations told me that the process I just observed was repeated over and over by Gaeton who was a long-time mayor. As a result, the convener said that in Amqui, hidden away in the Chic Choc Mountains, almost all the residents had become officials of the local government and the principle problem solvers for the community. Every public official can learn a

great deal from the Mayor of Amqui. He starts with the premise that the residents are principle problem solvers. This means they have the best ideas about what needs to be done. It also means that they have the best knowledge regarding who can do what needs to be done.

Working on the basis of these assumptions, the Mayor's, functions involved:

- Listening carefully to the problem definition and solutions of citizens
- Convening residents to develop a plan of action involving themselves and their ideas.
- Offering to supply support for resident initiatives rather than assuming the City was the problem solver in the community.
- Making residents into official actors with responsibility and authority over their initiative.
- Creating an experience that will lead residents to feel they have ownership in the community.

Amqui flourishes because the Mayor acts on three principles:

1. First, determine with residents whether problems can be resolved by the citizen's acting together using their own community resources.
2. Second, can the municipality enhance the collective citizen resources by providing supportive municipal assets.
3. Third, there will be some problems that cannot be resolved with citizen resources, even if supported by government assistance. In these cases, the municipality must take full responsibility.

The sequence of these three steps is critical, if citizen participation and production is to be achieved. The first question needs to be: can citizens define the problem, create solutions and implement the solution. The last question is what must the municipality do.

A Guide to Government Empowerment of Local Citizens and Their Associations

In his legendary analysis of American democracy, Alexis de Tocqueville observed that;

“ *the more government stands in the place of associations, the more will individuals, losing the notion of coming together, require its assistance: these are causes and effects that unceasingly create each other.* ”

In effect, he is describing a closed hydraulic system. As the government, or any large institution, takes over community functions, power is relocated, and institutions grow stronger as the associational communities lose power and become more dependent. Today, many kinds of institutions are seeking to engage and empower citizens and their associations. However, many are not clear about the nature of the citizen power they seek to enable.

Tocqueville reminds us that acting in association, citizens take on three powers:

- Power to decide what is to be done
- Power to decide how it is to be done
- Power to mobilize themselves to produce the outcome they have defined.

These three are the powers to decide what to do, how to do it and who will produce it. The last century has seen these three powers flow from community to institutions. For example, Jamie Vollmer, in his book, “Schools Cannot Do It Alone.”

documents over 85 new functions assumed by schools since 1900. The majority are functions previously performed by associated citizens in their neighborhoods. Similarly, Robert Putnam in “Bowling Alone” documents the precipitous decline of American associational life since 1970.



The reality is that we have actually seen a century of community disempowerment as community power and functions have flowed to institutions. This transfer of functions from the neighborhood to institutions and the marketplace has created a consumer society where once productive citizens have become clients and consumers.

The costs of this functional transfer is that most institutions try, for money, to do what productive associations of citizens could do more effectively and less expensively. Seven of these functions include safety, health, enterprise, food, ecology, raising children and the provision of care.

For institutional leaders concerned about their dysfunctional efforts to replace uniquely local functions, we can learn about alternatives from some wonderfully inventive institutional experimenters. While we have yet to recognize a common name for these experimenters, they act like precipitants or catalysts. Intentionally, they do not become involved in the local power to decide what is to be done, how it is to be done or who shall do it. They recognize that to interject their authority in any of these three functions is actually disempowering. Therefore, they act in ways that result in powerful associational action that would not have happened without their action. Paradoxically, they are initiators of citizen action that empowers associational functions rather than

replacing them. And they benefit by initiating local invention and problem solving that their institutions could never equal. Five examples of institutional precipitators are:

1. In Savanna, Georgia the municipal government sent a letter to the residents in a low-income neighborhood saying that it wanted to support efforts for block level improvements. They asked interested residents to write a brief letter describing the initiative they wanted to undertake. The letter needed to be signed by at least two people on the block who would also be involved. If the initiative required some money in order to be fulfilled, up to \$100 would be available. Initially, people from 80 blocks responded by indicating what they wanted to do, how they would get it done and who on the block would do it.

They usually indicated the specifics for which they needed some money. The result was more improvement in the neighborhood than had been achieved from a sizable block grant. Of even more importance, the city was able to know who were the natural leaders in the community because they were the people who signed the proposing letter. Subsequently, the city engaged in supportive activities that increased the number of local producers and the scale of their production.

2. In a small town in Quebec province, when residents came to the Mayor and told him about a problem, he asked them how the problem they had defined could be solved. Then he asked who would join them in solving the problem. In recognition of their initiative, the Mayor “officialized” them by making them an official problem solving committee of the city with the ability to meet in the council meeting room and to call on the council if they needed additional resources.
3. In Edmonton Canada, a group of neighbors began to meet with people on their block to find out what skills, abilities and interests they had. Then they began to connect neighbors with similar interests, creating one-on-one matches as well as new associations. The civic results of this connecting process were so impressive that the City “seconded” (lent) an employee to work under the direction of the neighbors’ group. This assistance was invaluable because the volunteering neighbors had somebody available full time to take on administrative and technical tasks.
4. In St. Paul, Minnesota, the city government outlined a series of functions that it was performing in neighborhoods. It offered neighborhoods the power to take on these functions for the amount of money that the city had used to carry them out. This unusual process of “de-functioning” reallocated authority, responsibility and money based on local citizens’ response. And the citizens were free to improvise their own methods of implementation.
5. In Chicago, an alderman delegated his decision-making power to the block organizations in the ward. They were informed of legislative issues to be decided by the city council. Then they were able to discuss their position and cast their block’s vote with the alderman. He then voted the way the majority of the participating blocks desired. He delegated his power to decide, creating something like an informed referendum that made clear to local citizens that they had a real voice and public power.

In each of these cases, local citizens and their associations created community benefits by taking on new functions and in each case, institutional leaders led by stepping back so that the neighborhoods and the city could each be more effective. These experimenters started with the common assumption that their principal role was to enable local citizens and their associations to become more powerful and productive. As a result,

they have developed unique 'precipitating' tools. Through their work they are creating a new approach to empowerment that reaches beyond more traditional empowerment methods that involve hearings, consultations, community advisory boards or even co-production. Their methods are doubly powerful because they not only enhance the productive capacity of local citizens and their associations, but they are also gaining the community-wide benefits of new citizen creativity and problem solving.

Other Topics

The Problem with Problems: Using the lens of Assets Instead of Problems

At a recent Kettering meeting with City Managers, I was struck by how universally the focus of relationships with community was “problems.” Certainly, problems are one way of defining a part of the kinds of relationships government or any institution might have with a neighborhood and local people. However, the possibilities of productivity are also limited by the idea that what we are about is problems.

In the five communities where we have Asset Based Neighborhood Organizers, two of which are supported by local government, people are associating the name for the main activity as “connecting.” The connections are not about problems. They are about possibilities and creativity. They result in collective action growing out of the desire people have to make their neighborhood ever more livable. It is probably the case that if these newly connected people were engaged by institutions around problems that require meetings the whole activity would begin to wither away.



It is important to recognize that the language we use to define the purpose of an association or meeting often puts people in a box that limits their productivity. The “problem” box usually focuses on a negative aspect of community and a resolution provided by institutions. The asset-based approach is a box that usually focuses on creativity produced by citizens. One of the reasons we may have so little productive citizen creativity at the local level is that people buy into the belief that the purpose of getting together is to deal with a problem. There is another purpose that is probably more important and that is engagement that mobilizes citizen creativity and contributions. Perhaps we need a name for this. It is not problem solving. It is mobilization of creative vision.

Embracing Deviance

One of the unfortunate results of assigning responsibility for marginal people to institutions and professionals is that citizens lose their capacity to incorporate marginal people. Over the years, I've observed an increasing intolerance for marginal people in a neighborhood. We say they "need professional help" and send them elsewhere. This, of course, increases the homogeneity and like-mindedness of people in a neighborhood.

An interesting question is how we could increase the tolerance of local people for people they consider deviant. By deviant, I mean, in particular, people with labels such as developmentally disabled, mentally ill, physically disabled, single welfare mothers, gay and lesbian people, people of different ethnicities and races, drug users, etc. While each of these is clearly a distinctive group of labeled people, what I've seen to be most common is that people do not know them personally. They see them through the lens of the label.



One thing I have learned in our work is how efforts to include developmentally disabled people have worked. The guiding principle is to never aggregate people with the same label in the community. The institutional aggregation of developmentally disabled people evokes the label rather than the individual capacity. The very successful efforts to introduce these people into some aspect of community life have depended upon their being connected individually around their capacities, gifts, skills, etc. The principle effect of labeling is, of course, to de-individualize human beings. The primary connectedness at the community level is essentially personal and individual.

There may be an important learning here as to methods that include rather than exclude at the local level. It would be interesting to have a collection of case studies and stories about how individuals from all these labeled categories have contributed to the life of the community through their individual gifts. A starting point might be to review the literature of the Inclusion Press that is exclusively dedicated to methods for including people who are called mentally or physically disabled. The current concern about diversity might better be defined as a concern with exclusion of labeled people. The greatest diversity in any local community is the gifts that the members have. If we focus on the gifts of everyone, then this valuable asset may be more effective in overcoming exclusion than efforts to talk about our categorical differences.

What Counts?

It's useful to conceptualize what counts as a means of evaluation. Counting is a limited tool. It doesn't really help much in determining whether there are new friendships and a web of mutual support creating a culture of interdependence, the goal of asset-based neighborhood organizing. Nonetheless, in understanding whether door-to-door asset-based organizing is fruitful, there are ways of counting things that provide useful, if limited, feedback that is satisfying to people who know by numbers. For of these numeric methods are:



Connections and Social Capital

The first step in utilizing the information from neighborhood questionnaires or community conversations is to establish connections. These could be:

- One to one relationships.
- More than two people being connected in a new association.
- Individuals being connected to an existing association.
- Individuals being connected to local institutions.

Each of these types of relationships can be counted and this information used to demonstrate "social capital." Social capital is widely recognized as a major factor in all forms of well-being — health, security, knowledge, economy, etc. Robert Putnam, in his famous book called *Bowling Alone* spells out the many benefits of social capital. It's worth looking at his chapters.

Action Outcomes

Many institutional and funding leaders are more interested in "outcomes" than they are in the increase in social capital. They want to know what happened as a direct result of the connections. In order to document these outcomes, it's necessary to follow-up on each outcome so that the actions can be identified and quantified. For example, if the action of five relationships could be classified as promoting health, then we reach the level of generalization that is of greatest interest to most institutional people. We can say that the connections in the neighborhood show evidence of actions that produce health and it is "evidence based" activity.

Attitude Change

Connections and actions may result in a change in attitude by participants and neighbors regarding the significance of the neighborhood. It is possible to measure attitude change by asking a series of questions at the beginning of an initiative and then following up within a year or so, asking the same questions to determine whether there has been a change. One measure of attitude change is called the "Sense of Community Index." The responses to its questions can be counted up demonstrating the amount of change in attitude and the nature of that change.

Community Participation

One result of the connective process has been greater attendance at the meetings of the local neighborhood associations as well as greater presence at the meetings of city council or its committees. This increase may be difficult to count, but the observation of the officials chairing these meetings can be useful in demonstrating more participation in local democracy.

Re-functioning: A New Community Development Strategy for the Future

Jamie Vollmer has written a landmark book titled, *Schools Cannot Do It Alone* (Enlightenment Press, 2010). In his book, he has documented the following new functions that have been undertaken by public schools since 1900:

From 1900 to 1910, we shifted to our public schools responsibilities related to:

- Nutrition
- Immunization
- Health (Activities in the health arena multiply every year.)

From 1910 to 1930, we added:

- Physical education (including organized athletics)
- The Practical Arts/Domestic Science/Home economics (including sewing and cooking)
- Vocational education (including industrial agricultural education)
- Mandated school transportation



In the 1940s, we added:

- Business education (including typing, shorthand, and bookkeeping)
- Art and music
- Speech and drama
- Half-day kindergarten
- School lunch programs (We take this for granted today, but it was a huge step to shift to the schools the job of feeding America's children one third of their daily meals.)

In the 1950s, we added:

- Expanded science and math education
- Safety education
- Driver's education
- Expanded music and art education
- Stronger foreign language requirements
- Sex education (Topics continue to escalate.)

In the 1960s, we added:

- Advanced Placement programs
- Head Start
- Title I
- Adult education

- Consumer education (resources, rights and responsibilities)
- Career education (options and entry level skill requirements)
- Peace, leisure, and recreation education [Loved those sixties]

In the 1970s, the breakup of the American family accelerated, and we added:

- Drug and alcohol abuse education
- Parenting education (techniques and tools for healthy parenting)
- Behavior adjustment classes (including classroom and communication skills)
- Character education • Special education (mandated by federal government)
- Title IX programs (greatly expanded athletic programs for girls)
- Environmental education
- Women's studies
- African-American heritage education
- School breakfast programs (Now some schools feed America's children two thirds of their daily meals throughout the school year and all summer. Sadly, these are the only decent meals some children receive.)

In the 1980s the floodgates opened, and we added:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keyboarding and computer education • Global education • Multicultural/Ethnic education • Non-sexist education • English-as-a-second- language and bilingual education • Teen pregnancy awareness • Hispanic heritage education • Early childhood education • Jump Start, Early Start, Even Start, and Prime Start • Full-day kindergarten | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preschool programs for children at risk • After-school programs for children of working parents • Alternative education in all its forms • Stranger/danger education • Antismoking education • Sexual abuse prevention education • Expanded health and psychological services • Child abuse monitoring (a legal requirement for all teachers) |
|--|--|

In the 1990s, we added:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict resolution and peer mediation • HIV/AIDS education • CPR training • Death education • America 2000 initiatives (Republican) • Inclusion • Expanded computer and internet education • Distance learning • Tech Prep and School to Work programs • Technical Adequacy Assessment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-secondary enrollment options • Concurrent enrollment options • Goals 2000 initiatives (Democrat) • Expanded Talented and Gifted opportunities • At risk and dropout prevention • Homeless education (including causes and effects on children) • Gang education (urban centers) • Service learning |
|--|--|

- Bus safety, bicycle safety, gun safety, and water safety education

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, we have added:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No Child Left Behind (Republican) • Bully prevention • Anti-harassment policies (gender, race, religion, or national origin) • Expanded early childcare and wrap around programs • Elevator and escalator safety instruction • Body Mass Index evaluation (obesity monitoring) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organ donor education and awareness programs • Personal financial literacy • Entrepreneurial and innovation skills development • Media literacy development • Contextual learning skill development • Health and wellness programs • Race to the Top (Democrat) |
|---|---|

This research indicates that at least ninety-five new functions have been assumed by public schools and that the increase in these new functions has accelerated since the 1980's. Some of these functions are innovations that were created within school systems. However, most of them are functions that were once performed outside of the systems-especially in local communities. This transfer of community functions to the schools has had two negative effects on schools. First, teachers have been asked to add topics to their pedagogy for which they have no training. Second, the growing number of new topics has burdened the classroom teacher with more responsibilities than can possibly be fulfilled. The result is often frustrated and overloaded teachers who have less and less time to teach the basic topics for which they were trained.

The transfer of community functions to the schools has also had two negative effects upon local communities. The first is that because the schools have been structurally unable to fulfill many of the functions once performed in the neighborhood, there have been an increasing number of unsolved neighborhood problems. Second, communities, neighborhoods and local residents have also lost the competence to collectively perform their essential functions. This lost knowledge of how a competent citizenry performs its unique community functions is displaced and paradoxically, citizens become frustrated because schools can't solve the problems that their own communities once resolved.

This transfer of community functions to institutions is not limited to the schools. Indeed, it is a phenomenon that has occurred in many other institutions. For example, the responsibility and capacity to deal with neighborhood security has been transferred to police systems. Paradoxically, the superintendents of most major police departments now say that the "crime" problem cannot be solved without community engagement. In some cases, police departments have even created units that organize neighbors into "block watch" – a group of local residents relearning how they can use their collective power to be more secure. While "block watch" is a commendable effort by police systems to transfer some of the security functions back to the local community, the overall trend is to invest in more police rather than more refunctioning of communities. As a result, in many cities neighborhood security has declined while police power has increased.

Almost all the leaders of the medical establishment agree that the primary source of good health is in the local community. They point to individual behavior, associational life, the physical environment and economic status as the major health determinants. However, they have no control over any of them because these determinants are largely the work of local communities. Nonetheless, many local residents now believe that the medical care system is the primary source of health and that their wellbeing is primarily created in a hospital.

Local governments have professionalized, developing management skills while using more technology. As their capacities have grown, local residents have shifted from being productive local citizens to becoming advocates for the government to solve all their problems. In some local governments, there has been an effort to maximize citizen participation, but this activity largely culminates in new responsibilities and function for local government rather than re-functioning neighborhoods. As the corporatization of food production and distribution has blossomed, the capacity to produce food locally has diminished. The once common backyard garden disappeared. Recently, a hopeful, burgeoning movement to produce local food has emerged across the nation creating the first bloom of a re-functioning of the source of nourishment.

This history of institutions assuming community functions is a major cause of community dysfunction. Its consequence is expressed in the growing isolation of neighbors, one from another. It is also expressed in the decline of local associational life that was documented by Robert Putnam in his book, *Bowling Alone*. Together, these two declines have dissolved the basic social fabric that is the primary resource for productive, functional civic engagement.

The functions where collective citizen productivity can reclaim neighbor well-being and problem solving include:

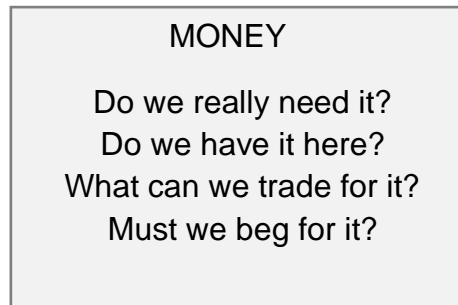
- | | |
|---------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Safety | 5. Ecology |
| 2. Health | 6. Children |
| 3. Enterprise | 7. Care (not service) |
| 4. Food | |

In redefining the functions of neighborhoods, these seven domains are the development agenda for the future. What collective, local citizen action can enhance these domains? What policies and action of institutions and funders can support, rather than displace, these productive citizen capacities? In this new development strategy, it is important to recognize the secondary benefits. As new relationships develop locally in order to create a competent community, the neighbors are building a bank of social capital. They are also creating a culture supporting the presumption of citizen capacity rather than citizens being merely consumers of institutional outputs. Also, the relationships growing out of community work will often necessarily cross, dividing lines of age, race, ethnicity, gender, etc. And finally, this collective citizen productivity creates a new sense of efficacy and self-worth among the participating individuals.

While it takes a village to raise a child, our current dilemma is the lack of village. Therefore, the first step in creating a village is to relocate functions that have made so many neighborhoods powerless and unproductive.

Money and the Civic Impulse

When you enter the storefront office of a neighborhood organization in Montreal, the first thing you see is a large sign:



The Chairperson of this neighborhood organization explained that the sign is an attempt to remedy their “grant dependency.” This dependency had once led the group to believe that if they wanted to get anything done, they first needed a grant. The hidden assumption became that without outside money, their citizens organization was impotent.

As a result of this dependency, the leadership developed the four criteria on the sign. It became the group’s guide to a new understanding of the resources necessary to get things done.

The first question asks whether the group’s goal could be achieved without money. Is there a combination of local civic resources that, if connected and mobilized, could achieve the goal?

The second question asks whether the residents and local merchants might have the money that is needed? One measure of the authenticity of a local neighborhood organization is whether local citizens and their enterprises will financially support the neighborhood group’s activities.

The third question asks whether there is something the neighborhood could create or produce that would be valued enough that outside money might invest in it. It recognizes that when the neighborhood people are “first investors,” the outside money is secondary while the second investor/funder has increased security that their money will be productive.

The fourth question is intentionally stark: Must we be a beggar? The blunt phraseology is designed to push back against a “grants mentality.” It makes clear that the last resort of a group of citizens is to act like a client. The word client comes from the Latin *cliens*, a person who is a follower, a retainer or dependent. The Montreal group recognizes that there can be many ways to immobilize citizen engagement and one of the most powerful can be outside money, even that purported to be available for citizen engagement.

The Civic Legacy of Saul Alinsky

In 1946, Saul Alinsky published “Reveille for Radicals.” It described the methods he used to create a neighborhood organization that gave a powerful new public voice to the exploited residents in a Chicago neighborhood. His methods quickly spread to many working-class and low-income neighborhoods across the United States. Today, his approach is still the most common methodology used by urban neighborhood organizations.



“Alinsky style” organizations have been most widely known for their activist methods of institutional confrontation. A classic example is neighborhood groups invading the offices of a Mayor and releasing rats that they caught in their alleys. The rats were there because the city had failed to consistently pick up the garbage. The local media loved these kinds of “actions” and so they became the public hallmark of Alinsky organizations. While this public confrontation has been most visible, much less noticed have been the unique methods used to create the neighborhood organizations. These methods involved new forms of civic organization and action.

There are at least two elements of the Alinsky method that are important civic inventions. They manifest the processes that enhance and enlarge the authority of local citizens. The first of these elements recognizes local voluntary associations as vital sources of collective citizen action. Before Alinsky’s methods became popular, if there was a local neighborhood organization it was usually a small group of residents who purported to speak for the neighborhood. Instead of organizing individuals, Alinsky focused on coalescing the local clubs, groups, organizations and churches – the voluntary associations. The resulting new neighborhood organization was basically an association of associations. This form of organization greatly increased the number of residents involved in the group, ensuring that it was much more representative than an organization of a few self-selective individuals. The association of associations also led to defining mutual concerns for the common good of the associated residents. Also, because the association defined the concerns of a large number of associated residents, it was a powerful public voice for those who often had been voiceless and unheard.

The second civic contribution of the Alinsky method was a simple practice called a “one-on one.” This activity involved neighbors in visiting other residents on their block and engaging in a discussion regarding deeply felt concerns or issues. This information provided useful guidance for setting the agenda of the neighborhood organization. The discussion also created a relationship of trust between the neighbors. Trust is the bedrock necessity for effective associational life. This trust manifested itself in the willingness of neighbors to join collective neighborhood actions focused on the collective personal concerns of the residents. The Alinsky focus on associations and resident concerns recognized the vital civic function of the world of the personal and its collective manifestation in associations. This world contrasts with the institutional world. To “institutionalize” something is to depersonalize it. Institutionalization ensures that the system will function regardless of which person is involved. It is also true that institutional participation depends upon money – a paycheck. In the associational world of civic engagement, participation depends upon personal trust. Tip O’Neill famously said, “All politics is local.” Alinsky added that politics’ local manifestation depends upon the personal trust that “glues” residents together in civic associations that magnify their power to create, produce, advocate and vote.

It Doesn't Take a Village to Raise a Modern Child: The Economic, Political and Cultural Socialization of Young Americans

At a County Board Meeting in California, a commissioner said, "We've got a proposal here asking for money to support another youth program. I vote no. Our real problem is that we always pay to keep young people together when what we really need is for them to be associated with adults."

A Chicago neighborhood leader, concerned about the local "gang" problem said, "The gangs aren't the problem. The problem is that our youth have lost connection with the grown-ups." A suburban mother complains that her daughter spends most of her free time at the mall with her friends.

These three observations are particular manifestations of a widely recognized youth culture. It has, in significant measure, been generated and exploited by the marketplace. Then, this age-based culture has been enhanced and institutionalized by schools and youth programs that intentionally organize young people's lives around the daily experience of age-based segregation. In a sense, this process can be understood as adult communities "out-sourcing" their youth to segregating institutions and markets. As a result, there are very few neighborhoods, towns or villages that actually take part in collectively raising their children."

While there are many negative results of this age-based segregation, perhaps the most consequential is the loss of the adult community's ability to introduce the young to the economic, political, cultural and spiritual worlds that surround them. The experience of acting as a citizen or an economic producer or a creator outside the youth culture or as a political participant is largely delayed until an emancipatory event called graduation.

This has led many people to ask whether it is possible in this consumer society filled with age segregating institutions for a "village to raise its children." Are the adult members of the village capable of introducing and engaging its young to the experience of unsegregated life? There are, of course, many exceptional villages where this experiential integrated life is available to the young. Many of these places are communities where the historic integrative role has survived.



However, ask members of local neighborhoods and villages how they collectively raise their children and in most, silence will prevail until someone points to the schools. In truth, most villages have long since lost the memory of how to introduce their young to the knowledge, collective wisdom, associational productivity, enterprising skills, and "small p" political life. It is not that they don't have the capacity to do this work. It is that they have forfeited this 2 community function to the age-segregating world of consumer culture, educational institutions and youth programs.

Is it possible for these villages to recover their roles as knowledge producers and providers of integrated experiential learning? Fortunately, the answer is positive. There are villages and neighborhoods experimenting with modern approaches to recovering their capacity to raise their children. Often, they begin by identifying the knowledge of local residents. A current example is the knowledge of residents on two blocks of a working-class neighborhood in a small midwestern city:

Village Knowledge

Customer service	Crafting	Veterans Services
Acts of kindness	Creating safe neighborhoods	Reduce/reuse/recycle practices
Cooking soup	Hunting	Working with elderly
People skills	Fishing	IT skills
Accounting	Shooting safety	Painting rocks
Cooking	Working on trucks	Designing T-shirts
Baking	Carpentry	Kayaking
Farming	Homebuilding	Walking
Animal care	Saving the bees	Coloring
Excavating	Handyman	Hamster care
Human resources	Neatness	Fostering children
Jack of all trades	Welding	Writing children's books
Heart and soul of people	Tree cutting	Prosthetics
Gardening	Bike riding	Dog training
Volunteering	Working on cars	Basic maintenance of houses and cars
Writing	Soccer	Mathematics
Playing violin	Swimming instructions	Writing songs
Making good friends	Remodeling homes	Football
Working in a Thrift Store	Mowing grass	Riding and fixing motorcycles
Gay subculture	Singing	Building self-esteem
Raised gardens	Dealing with bullying	Dealing with mental illness
Landscaping	Dealing with anxiety	Recovering from alcoholism
Horses	Dealing with binge eating	Writing recipes
Family life	Stand-up paddle boarding	Karaoke singing
Working with kids	Sociology	
Event planning	Anthropology	

It is especially significant that only 10 of the 72 topics are those that schools typically teach. And of even more importance, connecting neighborhood young people to this pool of knowledge establishes many new youth-adult relationships. In the aggregate, this process revives one fruitful way for villages to once again raise their children. In addition to knowledge of individual residents, the village also has collective knowledge held by its clubs, organizations and associations. A typical example of these "knowledge banks" is this list of associations in a small midwestern town with a population of 1,600.

4PeteSake	Christ Lutheran Church	Friends of Governor Dodge
American Legion Post 253	Community Theater Association	State Park Friends of the Lower
Badgerland Girl Scout Troop	(Gard)	Wisconsin Riverway (FLOW)
2669	Concerned Citizens of the River	Friends of the Spring Green
Bloomin' Buddies Garden Club	Valley	Community Library
Cub Scout Pack # 38 Spring	Cornerstone Church of Spring	Green Squared Building
Green	Green Driftless Area Book Club	Association
Bunco Babes	FFA Organization (at River	Greenway Manor Volunteers
	Valley High School)	Habitat for Humanity, Lower
		Wisconsin River

Knights of Columbus Knitters at
Nina's Kops for Kids
Mew Haven, Inc.
Miracles on Hoof
Mostly Mondays Poetry Society
Older & Wiser Land Stewards
(OWLS)
Pineland Association
River Valley Area Community
Choir
River Valley Boosters
Association (athletics)
River Valley Mom's Group
River Valley Music Boosters
River Valley Players
River Valley Soccer Association
River Valley Stitchers
River Valley Youth Football
Club Rural Musicians Forum
River Valley High School
Alumni Band

River Valley High School
Madrigal Choir & Jazz Vocal
Group 4
River Valley High School Senior
Service Learning Class
Skills USA (at River Valley High
School)
Solstice Jazz Band
Spring Green Area Arts
Coalition
Spring Green Area Chamber of
Commerce
Spring Green Area EMT District
Spring Green Area Fire
Protection District
Spring Green Area Historical
Society
Spring Green Arts & Crafts Fair
Committee
Spring Green Cemetery
Association

Spring Green Community
Church
Spring Green Community Food
Pantry
Spring Green Dog Park
Spring Green Dolphins
Spring Green Farmers Market
Spring Green Film Club
Spring Green Golf Club, Inc.
Spring Green Lions Club
Spring Green Literary Festival
Spring Green Senior Citizens
Club
Stitch 'n Bitch
Unity Chapel, Inc.
Wyoming Valley School
Cultural Arts Center

Youth connected to any of these associations learn the skills of collective decision-making and democratic practice in addition to the substantive interests of the group. Examples of the integrated experiential learning available from local associations include:

- A knitting club teaches finger knitting to children.
- Rotary Club members teach a youth group how to run a meeting.
- Local college band members offer a Saturday learning event for new, fifth grade band students.
- A voluntary association of emergency medical technicians offers an after-school first aid clinic.
- A motorcycle club offers free rides to kids and their parents around a parking lot.
- A Veterans for Peace group member gives a talk at the local middle school.
- A group of retired teachers volunteer to have their monthly lunch at a local elementary school a few times per year to spend time with kids.
- A master gardeners association starts a school garden.
- An informal group of neighbors who like to jog together offer a week-long track and field "tournament" for neighborhood children.
- A genealogy enthusiasts group offers to work with youth who want to research their family history as part of a school assignment.
- A high school chess club teaches the game to fourth graders.
- An annual music festival hires high school students to design and contribute to social media and other marketing strategies.
- A neighborhood association seeking a mural to cover a graffiti-laden wall creates an opportunity for neighborhood youth interested in art to learn about the neighborhood from the local historical society. With that information, they design and paint the mural to reflect both the past and the future of the neighborhood, with guidance from a professional mural artist/educator.
- A neighborhood association organizes neighbors to teach middle school students how to provide lawn care services. Neighbors teach lawn mowing, hedge trimming, and weeding skills. Other neighbors offer their lawns as

practice sites. The association helps the young people market their services in the neighborhood.

- The organizers of a front porch music festival dedicate one porch to youth performers, and seasoned gig musicians also performing at the event provide the young people with tips on pursuing future performance opportunities.
- The Rotary Club creates a special role for youth participants to connect with local business owners and learn about community issues.
- A fourth of July Parade Committee asks youth to be involved in the planning.
- A neighborhood association establishes a youth-led committee to take on projects of their choice.
- A local chapter of the League of Women Voters invites youths to get involved with voter registration efforts.
- “Friends of” the neighborhood park hold a youth summit to identify priorities and organize youth activities to improve the park.
- A community theatre group invites a young person to learn about and assist with lighting and set design.
- An environmental group requests that a youth with visual art skills attend a community forum on river water quality and create a drawing that captures all of the dreams people have for a healthy river.
- A Parent-Teacher Organization invites high school students to come back to their

elementary school to design and lead a school event.

- American Legion members invite a middle school band to perform at a Memorial Day service.
- A local poet’s group creates an open-mic poetry event for high school students and provides one-on-one feedback sessions.
- A quilter’s club partners with a church youth group to make a prayer quilt together for a grieving family.
- The local historical society invites and trains high school students to help with primary research, interviewing residents who lived through a local natural disaster.
- The local conservation club helps a high school student do field research on water quality for a school project.
- A bowling league organizes an intergenerational team tournament.
- An environmental justice group trains youths to make presentations about asthma and air pollution.
- A string chamber ensemble invites strong youth musicians to perform with them in concert.
- A canoeing club invites families with young children who live nearby the boat launch to ride along and learn about canoeing.
- A local makers space opens the doors to teen inventors twice per month.
- Youth are invited to take charge of children’s activities at a neighborhood National Night Out celebration.

Local businesses, not-for-profit organizations and government entities also can provide valuable experience and knowledge as the following list indicates:

- A church Bingo game invites teenagers to participate as guest callers.
- The Boys & Girls Club organizes an afternoon walking tour to nearby businesses including a book store, yarn shop and candy store. At each location students learn something about how the business works “behind the scenes.”
- Students at a vocational high school form a credit union using skills they have learned from a local credit union’s staff. Anyone from the school or community can invest, and upper

class men teach incoming freshmen how to keep the business running.

- A local food pantry asks for help from youth in designing a new logo.
- Construction firm staff teach young people how to use graph paper and architectural rulers to design a building.
- The owner of a yarn shop offers a free month-long knitting workshop for neighborhood middle schoolers.

- Bank employees share the power of compound interest with elementary students through a marshmallow game in math class.
- A municipal community planning department engages youths in focus groups to inform comprehensive planning, and invites a team of youths to participate in data analysis.
- A neighborhood café owner meets with a group of youth entrepreneurs to answer questions about starting a business.
- A salon volunteers to teach skin care to adolescents.
- A yoga studio offers trauma-informed yoga practice for youths in a residential facility.
- Middle school cafeteria staff invite seventh graders to plan a menu and quantities within a budget for one week of school lunches.
- A rental property owner teaches graduating high school students about their tenant rights and responsibilities.
- A garden center sponsors, and staff supports, middle schoolers to install a butterfly garden at their school.
- A graphic design company works one-on-one with high school entrepreneurs to create a logo and business card.
- Neighborhood teenagers are hired to work at an understaffed library.
- A municipal Parks Department creates a youth Advisory Council which learns from Parks staff how to raise and manage funds for youth projects, publish a youth-focused newsletter, design and plant gardens, and organize activities for younger children.
- Experienced students enrolled in a literacy program are trained to become teachers for students just entering the program.
- A group of middle-schoolers who started a recycling program in their school help their old elementary school do the same.
- A group of small retail businesses work together to create a labor pool of neighborhood teenagers to call upon for part-time, seasonal and on-call work.
- A senior center invites youths to teach smart phone skills.
- A commercial business association invites neighborhood teens offering services (babysitting, lawn care, pet care, etc.) to be part of the local business directory and attend meetings.
- A local political party creates internships for youth to learn about and participate in campaign work.
- A real estate agents professional group invites ten high school students to shadow ten real estate agents for a day, and attend one of their group lunch events to learn about the profession.
- A Habitat for Humanity chapter enlists teens to do physical inventories of housing stock in target neighborhoods.
- A performance auto shop invites teens with mechanical ability to intern for the summer.
- A local hospital invites teens to job shadow.
- A mayor's office creates a high school internship in Communications and Policy.
- A police department offers ride-alongs to high school students interested in a career in law enforcement.
- A fitness center offers a once/month teen night with personal trainers to help develop personal exercise routines.
- An ethnic grocery offers a food tasting event and kid-friendly recipes for local parents with young children.
- A hardware store offers a tool library and club for youths working on do-it-yourself projects.
- A sexual assault crisis center creates internship positions, educates and supports high school students who want to tackle toxic masculinity in their schools.
- A bakery invites a preschool class to make bread and learn how commercial baking equipment works.
- A nature center supports a "youth crew" that works with staff to design and lead environmental projects.
- The local farmers' market engages high school students in inventorying weekly crops offered by vendors, visiting other area farmers' markets for comparison, and recommending new kinds of vendors to strengthen the market in future years.

The obvious point is that outside the mall, school and youth programs, any neighborhood is rich in associational and institutional experiential learning resources. Connecting youth interests with these three community resources results in several benefits:

1. First is the knowledge gained by youth that is not available in schools.
2. Second are the skills learned that are not in school curricula
3. Third is the experience of participating in the social, economic and political life of the community.
4. Fourth are the special relationships that develop when youth are connected to adults in productive roles. This heals the brokenness of an age-segregated community.
5. Fifth is the village would become stronger as it enjoys the productive vitality and energy that it's young people contribute.

As a village recovers and manifests its capacity to integrate youth into productive life, an unintended side effect usually emerges. The village will learn that it does not have a "youth problem." Instead, the adults will learn that what they have is a "community problem" that grew out of allowing its young people to be raised in a segregated culture created by a marketplace, schools and youth programs. Solving that community problem will result in a village with the new power to raise its children.

Who Should Have the Final Say in Community Decision-making? Learning from Pilots, Pastors and Guards

Many institutions, agencies, governments and companies seek to develop effective relationships with the neighborhoods or small towns that they serve. Often, these desirable relationships are called co-production, collaboration, cooperation, etc. The “co” in each of these definitions implies a parity of power, influence, or authority. However, in almost every case, institutions, agencies, governments and companies rarely achieve actual parity in their relationship. The institutions have money, technology and expertise that inevitably results in dis-parity. And usually, in a legal sense, whatever the “co” may be, it is the institution that has the legal final say. Therefore, “co” activities are almost always an unbalanced relationship.



How might a balance with parity be achieved? There are some interesting examples of authoritative experts, professionals and administrators whose role is necessarily in alignment and parity with the interests of those they serve. Consider the airline pilot. She or he have great power, technology and expertise that none of their passengers share. Nonetheless, the pilots interests are in absolute alignment with their passengers because the passengers fate will be their fate.

Another example is the pastoral principle of Reverend John Perkins who founded the nationally influential Christian Community Development Association. It was his premise that the necessary precursor to a legitimate pastorate is that the pastor lives in the neighborhood where most of the parishioners live. Therefore, the pastor will have intensely accurate information about the local community and will live with the neighbors in experiencing the neighborhood reality.

Another example was a rule developed by Dr. Jerome Miller who directed the Massachusetts Department of Juvenile Corrections in the 1970s. The most severe punishment in the system was sending young people to isolation cells. If an authority in a local reformatory sent a youthful inmate into isolation, Miller required the authority to spend several hours of each day in isolation with the inmate. The effect was to quickly change policy in terms of isolation.

In each case, the authority/expert personally experienced the consequence of her/his decisions and actions. In these cases, the “co” resulted in a parity of interests unequaled by the usual imbalance in co-production, collaboration, cooperation.

The reality is that very few people who have institutional authority are prepared to establish a local relationship where the consequence of their decisions will be the same as those they serve. Therefore, who should have the final say in “co-decision-making?” Should it be those who must live with a co-decision? Or those who do not? One way to resolve this dilemma is to stipulate, at the outset of the co-decision-making process, that those who must live with the decision have the final say or a veto. With this authority, they can act as citizen rather than supplicants or clients. And when the final authority of citizens acts as a counter balance to the

money, technology and expertise of institutional authorities, the substance of the final decision will also change. As citizens learn that they have real power, “co” will now mean that they can be creators, designers, analysts, planners and implementers. And they will learn that the people across the table are their servants – public and not-for-profit

Community Dreams: The Power of Citizen Authority

For many years before Ronald Reagan's administration, the Federal Government provided funds to Regional Health Planning Agencies. These agencies oversaw the area health planning focusing on medical systems and resources. The Reagan Administration discontinued support for these agencies and many then sought to replace the Federal Funds.

On Chicago's Westside there was great concern within this African American community that local hospitals would close or move away. Many felt that the Regional Agency had provided some control over the hospital exodus. Therefore, local neighborhood and activist groups convened to decide what they could do without the regional group's helpful authority.



They developed a plan to create their own citizen organization to replace the useful functions of the Federally supported agency. Near the conclusion of their planning meeting, there was a discussion of the name they should use for their new organization. Should it be the 'Westside Health Committee' or 'Health Council' or 'Health Coalition'? Suddenly, a woman who was a wise elder from the community said, "In the past, the government was the authority but now they are gone. So, we have a plan to replace them. Now we are the authority. So, let's call ourselves what we are - the Westside Health Authority.

The participants were unanimous in accepting the new name. Thirty years later, the Westside Health Authority (WHA) Has provided shelter for all kinds of community building initiatives. They include student health career planning in local hospitals, building a large community Wellness Center, buying a closed hospital and turning it into a clinic. In addition, they created a neighborhood organization called "Every Block a village," a housing rehabilitation organization employing local African American contractors and craftsman, a men's group, a women's group, youth organizations and, most recently, a "Good Neighbor Campaign" designed to reconnect residents in order to have a stronger community.

Local leaders believe the title of "Authority" has been a vital factor enabling WHA in mobilizing and engaging citizen action. The idea that residents are the authority calls forth community dreams and replaces the tendency for neighbors to wait to fulfill the dreams of planners and institutions.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines an authority as "those who have control." Local resident groups are usually defined as advisors, advocates, or co-produce but rarely as the people who are in control. However, a citizen authority calls forth a critically different role for residents. That role is to be the responsible party. Authority means you have responsibility because of your control. It is this power of residents to be responsible for their future that has proliferated the functions and the powers of citizen authorities like the Westside Health Authority.

For those interested in more detail about the Westside Health Authority see:

- <http://healthauthority.org/>
- <http://healthauthority.org/good-neighbor-campaign-austin/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/WestsideHealth/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/GoodHood5417/>