Governance

I. Background/Considerations

Neighborhood-based governance may be defined as the use of neighborhood-level mechanisms and processes to guide planning, decision making, coordination, and implementation of activities within the neighborhood; the representation of neighborhood interests to actors beyond the neighborhood; and the accountability and responsibility for actions undertaken on behalf of the neighborhood[1]. Governance structures may also provide administrative oversight and fiscal accountability to a project, as well as a mechanism for the development of collaboration and partnerships among stakeholders[2].

Developing and strengthening governance is a long-term process that may often occur in phases. For example, as an initiative emerges – the start up phase might be characterized by individual projects connected through informal linkages. As the work expands, resources are leveraged and strategic alliances created, increasing the number of stakeholders involved in all projects undertaken. At this point, issues of governance revolve around how to connect projects, develop organizational structures, and coordinate efforts to strengthen the initiative. How the informal and formal relationships, institutional structures, and diverse stakeholders are brought together is first and foremost a question of governance[3]. As goals and objectives are achieved (or not), the governance structures may change again to reflect new relationships, priorities, and needs.

Furthermore, issues of governance are inextricably tied to issues of leadership development and partnerships/collaborations (trust). An important finding of the evaluation of governance across sites in the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Mental Health Initiative for Urban Children suggests that the more skills and knowledge residents gained as a result of their involvement with the project, the more control over the initiative they eventually assumed. Thus, a significant amount of time and funds are needed to prepare residents for their role in governance. Furthermore, an equal investment is needed to build non-resident stakeholders skills and cultural competence in dealing w/ the target communities so that effective partnerships and collaborations may be established.

In order to identify an appropriate governance structure, several items should be considered by a community. Some of these may include:

- The function of the governing body: what is the purpose of the governing body? For example, is the purpose of the governing body to make decisions on behalf of the community, conduct planning, or to serve as an oversight board that approves plans and directions, facilitate partnerships and collaborations, or a combination thereof?
- The "charge" for which the body will be responsible: For example, is the governing body responsible for communications, resident engagement in the initiative, leadership/capacity development, etc?
- Careful thought about how to gather the right mix of key constituents so that the body can work effectively within their neighborhoods is also important. This might involve including public officials and other relevant stakeholders as well as sufficient numbers of residents so that they can make useful contributions.
- Strategize ways to solidify engagement of stakeholders/partners, especially residents.
- Identify concrete roles for residents and stakeholders at all phases of development/implementation of the initiative.

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[1] Chaskin

[2] *Neighborhood..*

[3] Potapchuk

- The identification/nomination process for determining who will serve on the governing body: what characteristics or qualities should they possess?
- The resources needed by the body in order to operate effectively.
- The relationship between this body and the Skillman Foundation, the other organizations contracted to contribute to the Good Neighborhoods Initiative, and most importantly the community at-large.

Additional issues for consideration may include[4]:

- The nature and level of resident participation: specifically, the process of involving residents is most important, and should include broad, on-going, active communication and outreach; the perception that participation is accessible; and must reflect an intent to speak "with" the community, not "for" it.
- The involvement of a diversity of stakeholders and the development of strategic partnerships.
- The establishment of legitimacy through action: Action as well as process is required. The role of small wins, as well as information sharing regarding funding received at the community level can increase community perception of "something happening" in the community as a result of the initiative.
- The role of funding with regard to establishing and maintaining accountability. Funding can act as the catalyst for successful local efforts, encouraging collaboration, catalyzing activity around a shared goal, and leveraging other resources – or it can engender a complex set of dynamics that may be corrosive at the community level. This can be countered by building into the initiative and grant requirements explicit expectations and mechanisms for accountability.
- The balance of power among participants in the governing body[5]. Professionalism, experience, and disparities in authority may diminish resident participation. For example, the managerial language and corporate culture of agency representatives may be intimidating to resident leaders. Residents may display a reluctance to participate, or aggressive participation calculated to wrest power from the "professionals." Residents may remain silent and drop out because their voices are not heard, or even employ a confrontational style fixing on the power imbalance.

II. Governance Models
√ Voluntary task forces[6,7]

The Good Neighborhoods Initiative, through the implementation of voluntary action planning teams, has most closely followed the model related to the convening of voluntary task forces. There may not be one clear large-scale community initiative example of this structure, but there are several potential models that may serve as a guide as the governance structure(s) continues to develop in the initiative. These models may include the Blueprint for Aging http://www.blueprintforaging.org , and the National Alliance to End Homelessness http://www.endhomelessness.org. At the local level, block clubs and neighborhood associations often employ aspects of this model.

Pros and Cons:

- PRO-This model would probably allow for the greatest amount of overall participation. Anyone can participate in their area(s) of interest and provide input to the process.
- PRO-Workgroups would be organized around specific strategies already selected through the community meetings so that the desired outcome of each committee would be clear.

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[4] Chaskin

[5] *Rebuilding …*

[6] *Blueprint for Aging*

[7] National Alliance to End Homelessness

- PRO-There would be natural outlets for training and technical assistance in specific topical areas.
- CON-With no one entity responsible for creating an overall plan, the committees might come up with conflicting approaches or think about their mandates too narrowly.
- CON-Those not participating in the workgroups might become disengaged, particularly if a lot of time transpires during planning and decision-making phases.

√*Appoint a Board of Directors through community-wide election*[8]

The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI) took this approach. Because the Boston neighborhood is ethnically diverse with many different ideas and histories, this organization holds a community-wide election every two years to provide ongoing leadership. The DSNI Board currently is comprised of 34 members. These include 16 Residents from the whole area, 5 Nonprofit agencies representing the Health and Human Service fields from the core area, 2 Community Development Corporations from the core area, 2 Small Businesses from the core area, 2 Religious Organizations from the core area, 3 Youths from the core area (ages 15-18), 2 Nonprofit organizations or groups from the secondary area, and 2 Residents appointed by the newly elected board. Although the elected Board is an important representative and planning body, everybody is invited to community meetings, so there are many opportunities for all interested residents to contribute to decision-making. For more information see http://www.dsni.org/.

Application: Each neighborhood would be charged to elect a Board of Directors representative of the community. The Board would become the voice of the community, working with the community organizer to continue engaging residents, refining strategies, and overseeing the work of the initiative. As an incentive, the Board could be given money each year to plan activities and provide evidence of any progress being made toward the selected goal. At the local level, Neighborhood Associations and Citizens District Councils may employ aspects of this model, as they use local elections to appoint the council.

Pros and Cons:
- PRO-This would allow for greater resident participation. Those running for election will have to take time to think through their ideas and plan for their campaign. Those voting will be informed of various alternatives and have a voice in the process. Those elected to the Board of Directors would have a mandate to work in the neighborhood's interest.
- PRO-Within neighborhoods that have distinct ethnic communities or competing interests, seats can be set aside to represent each group (i.e seats set aside for Hispanic representatives, Black representatives, Arabic-speaking representatives, Hmong representatives, for-profit organizations, health and human service organizations, etc.)
- PRO-With regular elections every 2-3 years, there would be opportunities for leadership change and representatives that are not strong can be replaced.
- CON-Given that Board members are likely to have a wide range of ability and experience, there will still be a need for continued training and technical assistance, as well as guidance from the community organizers and funders.

√ *Utilize existing neighborhood structures*

Several of the GNI neighborhoods may have existing structures through which to implement governance of the initiative in the neighborhood. For example, Southwest Detroit's Joint Leadership Council (JLC) may be a possible venue for the governance of the GNI in Southwest Detroit. In Brightmoor, the Brightmoor Alliance may be able to provide the governance structure for the GNI in the community. Other communities may have existing civic groups that could take on governance of the initiative in the community.

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[8] Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative

Pros and Cons:

- PRO-The existence of a longstanding collaboration may provide a strong infrastructure for governance in the community.
- PRO-Funding could easily funnel through these venues, as the affiliation with non-profit organizations in the community provides multiple fiduciary possibilities.
- PRO-The existing infrastructure of these entities may provide many opportunities for capacity building, leadership development, and communication.
- PRO-Relationships and collaborations at many levels (community, policy, etc) may already be in place.
- CON-The reputation and relationship to the community of these entities may be poor, and may discourage resident/stakeholder buy-in and engagement.
- CON-These collaborative entities may not currently have a venue for meaningful resident engagement.
- CON-These entities may already be strapped for time and resources, and may not have the capacity at this time to take on governance of the GNI.

√*Create and convene a collaborative board that oversees initiative activities*

The Ford Foundation's Neighborhood and Family Initiative (NFI) utilized this approach. In each of their neighborhoods, the community foundations were responsible for hiring a project director and recruiting representatives to serve as the governing body of the collaborative. This body was composed of neighborhood residents, business owners, and civic-minded professionals from both within and beyond the target neighborhood, and helped plan and monitor the implementation of NFI. Over time, most of the collaboratives incorporated as separate non-profit organizations to take on implementation responsibility.

Application: At the end of the GNI five meeting process, the Skillman Foundation and/or some subset of its GNI Team partners could recruit representatives to serve on a collaborative governing body that includes residents, business representatives, and other public and non-profit professionals. This collaborative body would be responsible for planning, setting goals, and organizing each community around a clear vision that includes concrete programs and activities.

Pros and Cons:

- PRO-Each community would have a mechanism through which to quickly build upon the goal and strategies announced and celebrated at the fifth large community meeting.
- PRO-There will be a clearly identified set of community representatives to provide input and feedback to the initiative and assume leadership roles, but some authority will remain with the Skillman Foundation until a clear plan and vision has been established and approved.
- PRO-During the planning period there will be time to establish trust and verify capacity before handing decision making authority off to a separate organization.
- PRO-There will be time for neighborhood residents and those with less experience with formal planning processes to gain comfort and capacity through participation.
- CON-There will be an indeterminate gap before an implementation phase begins. For some, the planning period may seem to draw out too long.

III. Some Lessons Learned regarding governance[9]

- Look at assets in the community around governance and build capacity within existing institutions.
- The establishment of a governing entity should not be seen as a substitute for ongoing dialogue with community residents not as closely affiliated with the project and/or not participating on the governing

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[9] *Neighborhood . . .*

body. A parallel effort to inform and organize the target community around issues of importance to them should continue.

- Issues of race, class, and culture should be properly addressed. Especially in diverse communities, issues such as primary language spoken, as well as cultural norms regarding communication and engagement should be considered and addressed.
- Trust building among various stakeholders is key to effective working relationships and on-going engagement with the initiative.
- Residents needs ongoing training and support regarding their role in initiative governance, while at the same time distilling and making explicit the skills residents are acquiring through their practical involvement in governance of the initiative.
- Time should be spent at the beginning discussing the type of changes (outcomes) desired, and the role of each stakeholder/partner (including residents) in achieving these changes.
- Governing entities should develop a plan to deal with turnover among stakeholders/partners (including residents) on the governance board and beyond. Turnover may lead to a loss of commitments, memories, and understanding which can be a constant source of difficulty.
- Any attempt to connect different stakeholders/partners (including residents) with themselves and each other is worth pursuing, even if it is not completely successful.

IV. Technical Assistance areas often required to build community capacity for governance:

- Consensus building and shared decision making – tools for building consensus and making decisions, while simultaneously moving the initiative forward.
- Strategic planning – outcome-based planning geared toward meeting community goal and fulfilling objectives/priorities in the action plans.
- Collaboration and partnerships – creating strategic partnerships and alliance with stakeholders at multiple levels.
- Conflict Resolution – constructive conflict resolution skills in order to maintain high levels of engagement of multiple stakeholders with varying agendas.
- Developing specific roles and responsibilities of the governing body and its members
- Leadership Development - *See brief on leadership development.

V. Conclusion:

Unorganized or unassisted communities, whether they be communities of place or communities of common interest or identity, will always suffer more than those that have come together to determine what they want and expect[10]. Our conclusion was that community development should really be about community building – the creation of viable, healthy, and constructive communities. Unless residents become involved in the governance of the community and unless attention is given to the next generation for viable citizenship, any and all efforts to physically revitalize the city's neighborhoods are unlikely to succeed[11].

VI. References

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[10] Peterman
[11] Peterman

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