Revitalizing a struggling, historic neighborhood can be daunting. The work, requiring major investments from multiple sources to address multifaceted challenges, must be coordinated, tracked, and monitored so that strategies can adapt and change as programs are implemented so that project teams can achieve the desired results. Who is positioned to produce and monitor data that guides decisionmaking in revitalization initiatives? Who can build local capacity to use data?

Organizations in the National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership (NNIP) are experienced in producing and monitoring data that guides decisionmaking in revitalization initiatives, and are well positioned to build capacity with partners to use such data and assist with place-based initiatives. This case study describes NNIP partner Community Information Now’s (CI:Now’s) support of multiple initiatives in San Antonio’s EastPoint neighborhood and the surrounding area.

CI:Now is a local data intermediary that provides tools to turn data into local news and information that communities can use to improve neighborhood conditions and quality-of-life outcomes for community residents. All NNIP partners build information systems containing data from multiple agencies on conditions and trends for small areas in their cities and regions. NNIP partners then work directly with communities to interpret and use the data that they manage and maintain. Their activities range from preparing analytic reports to informing discussions of public meetings to helping grassroots groups collect and understand data.  

For place-based initiatives, NNIP partners bring their existing data infrastructure and deep relationships in the community to support planning and implementation activities. Working collaboratively with a range of other local organizations, NNIP partners apply data in ways that enhance the effectiveness of these initiatives.

DATA INFORMS A SHARED VISION

Improving public housing, providing better educational opportunities and child care for neighborhood kids, creating programs to develop workforce skills, and reducing crime and improving health services. These are just some of the ambitious goals associated with federal and philanthropic investments in San Antonio’s EastPoint community. These

1 See www.neighborhoodindicators.org for more information about the network and its partners.

2 A detailed description of NNIP and its work is found in Kingsley, Coulton, and Pettit (2014).
investments include funding from the US Department of Education’s Promise Neighborhoods Initiative and the US Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD’s) Choice Neighborhoods Initiative.

Each distinct place-based initiative shares a common goal of improving neighborhood conditions and the quality of life in San Antonio’s EastPoint. These initiatives build from neighborhood strengths, such as parents who are committed to their children’s well-being and strong connections among residents who have deep pride in their historic neighborhood. The challenging conditions that these residents face include a lack of quality early learning programs, struggling schools, low graduation rates, poor health conditions, and insufficient supportive services. These challenges were most evident in Wheatley Courts, a 1940s-era public housing complex that contained 246 units before they were recently demolished.

San Antonio is working with national and local partners to address these challenges through place-based initiatives that are complementary and coordinated. This case study focuses on two federal examples, the Promise and Choice Neighborhood Initiatives, which enjoy formal cooperation through EastPoint PaCT (Promise and Choice Together). PaCT establishes a governance structure that develops and oversees shared goals, plans, and strategies that cut across these two federal initiatives as well as other place-based investments in San Antonio’s EastPoint.

The EastPoint community received a Promise Neighborhood planning grant in 2010 and then a five-year implementation grant in 2011 to develop cradle-to-career strategies, programs, and services that support neighborhood youth to achieve educational success and grow up with a high quality of life. The United Way of San Antonio and Bexar County leads the Promise grant with partners in local government, schools, and the nonprofit sector.

The Wheatley Choice Neighborhood planning grant was awarded to the EastPoint community in 2011 to inclusively engage neighborhood stakeholders in developing a Transformation Plan to revitalize Wheatley Courts. After receiving additional funding from HUD in 2012, the San Antonio Housing Authority leads the implementation of the Plan with the City of San Antonio and community development partners.

“\[In our collective impact work, community change occurs at the speed of trust. CI:Now has been critical to our collective success. Their significant data expertise and resources have saved us tremendous time and angst by helping us to quickly dispel misperceptions and redirect our focus on and confidence in productive data-driven problem solving.\]”

-Mary Ellen Burns
Senior Vice President, Grant Implementation
United Way of San Antonio and Bexar County
These initiatives complement each other by developing neighborhood assets, systems, and services that advance the vision for the EastPoint as a livable neighborhood with safe, affordable housing options where residents can raise their children in a supportive environment.

Data plays an important role as grantee teams plan and implement these initiatives. The Promise Neighborhoods Initiative requires data collection for 15 multi-part Government Performance and Results Act measures, many of which require creating data-management systems to track youth as they participate in services across partner organizations and schools. These data are used to monitor the progress of the initiative and to support decisionmaking, such as how to reprioritize resources or find new partners if expected outcomes are not achieved.

CI:Now assisted in accessing and analyzing the neighborhood and student data needed for Eastside Promise’s early planning efforts and both grant proposals. The Wheatley Choice Neighborhood also relies heavily on data, and although the Promise and Choice footprints do not exactly match, Wheatley Choice was able to use some of the census tract and block-level data collected for Eastside Promise in its application and planning phases. CI:Now has also helped PaCT leadership and partners to select shared indicators to track the high-level shared goals within PaCT’s vision of the collective impact of these investments. CI:Now continues to be a leader in collecting and using data across the multiple EastPoint grants.

**CI:NOW LEADS DATA ACTIVITIES**

CI:Now’s work in San Antonio’s EastPoint leverages its trusted relationship as a neutral data partner in the community. The United Way of San Antonio and Bexar County and the San Antonio Housing Authority have supported CI:Now’s development for many years and are represented on CI:Now’s governing board.

For the Eastside Promise Neighborhood, CI:Now is supporting partners in meeting reporting requirements and create data systems that can be used as management tools. Little capacity or experience existed locally for setting up and supporting the longitudinal data systems needed to collect and manage data about youth. CI:Now leveraged its data and technology expertise to identify options for creating or acquiring an integrated data system to track outcomes for individuals over time. They identified and translated the initiative’s data requirements into technical specifications that enabled development of the CommunityViewer integrated data system. As the EastPoint plans evolve, CI:Now continues to provide support for CommunityViewer and envisions that it can be further developed into a system that serves all of San Antonio and Bexar County.

Promise Neighborhoods also requires regular community and school surveys related to the 15 measures. CI:Now provides technical guidance.
on how to administer the surveys and analyze the resulting data to produce the required measures. CI:Now worked with local and national program and research partners to establish detailed parameters for the survey to ensure that it would produce locally useful data, while also complying with reporting requirements. CI:Now also ensures that their partners understand and follow data privacy policies. They have been a leading voice in educating initiative stakeholders about the importance of protecting confidential data.

When Eastside Promise began, CI:Now also played a crucial training and technical assistance role in assisting partner organizations with collecting, reporting, and using data. Many organizations do not have the infrastructure, staffing, or technical expertise to apply data to coordinate services and manage performance. Another important contribution has been collaborating with out-of-school time service providers and Eastside Promise staff to measure their program participants’ academic outcomes, explore patterns in their data, and improve how participant data is shared and integrated across organizations.

Maintaining a high level of data quality is crucial for Eastside Promise’s efforts to track individuals across different systems. CI:Now has provided partner agencies with technical assistance on data collection and quality control checks to improve its usability. CI:Now also created a custom excel workbook for data-sharing that built in quality checks and then provided the training to partners on how to use it.

Through PaCT, CI:Now sits on several coordinating committees and advisory boards in San Antonio’s EastPoint neighborhood. This provides them with opportunities to share findings from their data analysis, as well to report on data and technical capacities that are being built. Participation in these cross-cutting groups has helped CI:Now build a strong understanding of data needs for the Wheatley Choice Neighborhood. This enables them to consider and address Wheatley Choice data needs when designing systems and providing technical assistance for Eastside Promise. Thus, CI:Now’s contributions lead to better coordination of these two separate federal grant programs.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR PLACE-BASED INITIATIVES**

The Promise and Choice initiatives in EastPoint had an advantage from their first early planning meetings: the presence of CI:Now in San Antonio. CI:Now successfully collaborated with the EastPoint partners to submit strong funding proposals and to understand the data needed for the initiatives. Beyond the technical skills, they are able to communicate how data can be useful in planning and program implementation and build capacity among partners to use data for continuous improvement.

As anyone involved in Promise, Choice, or similar initiatives knows, the data skills required to
implement a place-based initiative are significant. The work is difficult to do without a partner that has a track record of locally managing and leading data projects. In particular, the expertise and relationships needed to create data-sharing partnerships and data-management systems take time to develop. An organization that already has these in place can quickly help an initiative meet its data needs for program management and reporting. For these reasons, CI:Now, and NNIP partners generally, are ideal partners for place-based initiatives.

REFERENCES


Jake Cowan is an independent consultant that works with NNIP nationally, as well as with individual local NNIP partners.

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NNIP is a collaboration between the Urban Institute and partner organizations in more than two dozen American cities. NNIP partners democratize data: they make it accessible and easy to understand and then help local stakeholders apply it to solve problems in their communities.

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