



Building Community Ownership In Neighborhood Revitalization

A MAKING CONNECTIONS PEER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE MATCH BETWEEN
ATLANTA, GEORGIA; LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY; OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA;
AND SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

PEER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE LEADS TO ACTION

*Part of a Series from the
Technical Assistance Resource
Center of the Annie E. Casey
Foundation and the Center
for the Study of Social Policy*

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The Annie E. Casey Foundation

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States. It was established in 1948 by Jim Casey, one of the founders of United Parcel Service, and his siblings, who named the Foundation in honor of their mother. The primary mission of the Foundation is to foster public policies, human-service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families. In pursuit of this goal, the Foundation makes grants that help states, cities, and neighborhoods fashion more innovative, cost-effective responses to these needs. For more information, visit the Foundation's website at www.aecf.org.

Center for the Study of Social Policy

The Center for the Study of Social Policy, based in Washington, D.C., was established in 1979 with the goal of providing public policy analysis and technical assistance to states and localities. The Center's work is concentrated in the areas of family and children's services, income supports, neighborhood-based services, education reform, family support, community decision-making, and human resource innovations. The Center manages peer technical assistance as part of the Foundation's Technical Assistance Resource Center (TARC).

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BACKGROUND

Through its *Making Connections* initiative, the Annie E. Casey Foundation is working with communities across the country to improve outcomes for children and families living in tough neighborhoods. One of the principal aims of *Making Connections* is to link residents to economic opportunities, social networks, and effective services that will improve the lives and well-being of children and their families. The initiative emphasizes the need for residents themselves to be deeply involved in the transformation process.

As part of this initiative, the Foundation offers the participating communities access to technical assistance that will help them achieve their goals for strengthening families and neighborhoods. Peer technical assistance is a particularly valuable resource they can use to address issues and solve problems they have identified in their own contexts. Peer technical assistance allows sites to meet with innovators in other communities across the country who have successfully achieved similar goals and to capitalize on the practical knowledge they gained from their experiences.

On August 18–20, 2004, teams from three Casey sites in Atlanta, Georgia; Louisville, Kentucky; and Oakland, California, participated in a peer technical assistance match with staff and partners of the Jacobs Center for Neighborhood Innovation (JCNI) in San Diego, California. The visiting Casey sites are all at different stages of developing economic revitalization plans and are particularly interested in assuring that residents play a leadership role in their efforts. The peer match focused on a visit to Market Creek Plaza, a commercial and cultural hub at the heart of San Diego's Diamond neighborhoods that was developed by JCNI in close partnership with residents. Peer match participants wanted to learn more about JCNI's approach to planning and implementing Market Creek Plaza and to identify lessons and applications they could use to inform their own local community revitalization efforts. This report summarizes the lessons learned from this peer match and the next steps that participants from Atlanta, Louisville, and Oakland committed to undertake to move their agendas forward.

SETTING THE CONTEXT FOR THE MATCH

After a visit in February 2004 to Market Creek Plaza by senior staff of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Technical Assistance Resource Center of the Foundation helped set up a peer match for three Casey sites that wanted to learn more about JCNI's innovative approach to partnering with the community to develop Market Creek Plaza. The visiting sites included Atlanta, Louisville, and Oakland.

Atlanta

Atlanta is one of the Annie E. Casey Foundation's "civic sites" or hometowns. Both the Foundation and United Parcel Service (UPS) were founded by Jim Casey. Since UPS is headquartered in Atlanta, the Foundation has committed to work there to support community, city, and state efforts to improve the lives of Atlanta's children and low-income families. In 2003, the Foundation's investment in Atlanta shifted to a more place-based, results-focused, strategy-oriented agenda. Its efforts are concentrated on Neighborhood Planning Unit V (NPU-V)—an area just south of downtown Atlanta that includes some of the oldest neighborhoods and some of the highest concentrations of children and low-income families.

The vision of the team that guides the Foundation's investments in Atlanta is to help families achieve real self-sufficiency and to improve the social and economic vitality of the NPU-V neighborhoods. The team has outlined the following five results that it is seeking: (1) NPU-V residents solve their own problems; (2) families have good-paying jobs with benefits; (3) families are able to get ahead financially; (4) NPU-V neighborhoods are neighborhoods of choice; and (5) the government makes decisions that are good for children and families. The Atlanta site team wants to use what it learns from the peer match to influence the development of a Hope VI project in the neighborhoods, as well as two commercial corridor projects being considered by the Renewal Community Program. This program has the potential to use tax credits and federal dollars to attract commercial and community development.

Louisville

Louisville has been working to build a local movement for strengthening families focusing on four target neighborhoods—Smoketown, Shelby Park, Phoenix Hill, and California. Each of these neighborhoods has a proud and unique history that dates back to the mid-19th century. Their fortunes have ebbed and flowed with the overall economy; the decline in manufacturing jobs; the patterns in suburban growth; the impact of major public policies, including urban renewal; and the concentration of large public housing complexes. Today, these neighborhoods are home to about 15,000 residents, most of whom live in single-headed minority households and who are among the most vulnerable in the Louisville metro region.

A basic strategy supporting the *Making Connections* Louisville work has been a consensus organizing process that has operated on two levels: (1) building relationships with private and public institutional stakeholders committed to improving results for families, children, and neighborhoods; and (2) organizing and engaging residents to identify results and powerful strategies that can be implemented to achieve them. Significant work has been done to capitalize on current and planned redevelopment activities in the neighborhoods. The site team is particularly interested in leveraging a Hope VI project in one of the target neighborhoods. The site team views this project as a multineighborhood revitalization and economic development opportunity that can benefit the whole area. One of the main issues that the Louisville site team wanted to learn more about during its visit to San Diego was how to go about generating large business development that involves and benefits residents.

Oakland

Oakland is working on improving the quality of life for families living in the Lower San Antonio neighborhood. This area is home to a very diverse community of 32,000 residents, including large percentages of Asians (36%), Latinos (35%), Whites (20%), and African Americans (19%). The residents in this neighborhood face significant challenges, including lack of economic opportunities and a shortage of affordable housing. The peer match was meant to inform three pieces of the *Making Connections* Oakland work:

- A strong effort is under way to develop an action plan for revitalizing the 23rd Avenue Corridor, a key commercial area in the neighborhood. Stakeholders working on this project include two community development corporations that have helped lead the planning process, a group doing school-based organizing in the neighborhood, and a federation of small arts organizations that wants to infuse arts and culture into the development of the corridor. The group is transitioning into implementation and will be facing new challenges, such as how to maintain resident engagement in the process.
- To improve the housing options in the neighborhood, *Making Connections* community partners have put together a group of affordable housing and mixed-use developers who are working cooperatively to scope out and implement affordable housing projects.
- The city of Oakland is devoting a large sum of money to a waterfront development project and the neighborhood wants to be involved in negotiations concerning how these public funds are used and how the spending will benefit the Lower San Antonio neighborhood during and after development.

San Diego

Market Creek Plaza is a \$65 million commercial and cultural center located in the Diamond neighborhoods in southeastern San Diego. The project, which broke ground in 1999, was developed by the Jacobs Center for Neighborhood Innovation (JCNI), an operating foundation established by the Jacobs Family Foundation in 1995. Dr. Joseph J. Jacobs, who built a Fortune 500 company—the world’s second largest construction and engineering company—started the foundation with his family in 1988.

Like many other low-income urban neighborhoods, the Diamond has experienced decades of underinvestment and little new development, falling behind in San Diego’s broader economic expansion. A study by the University of San Diego estimated that \$60 million a year were leaving the neighborhood because of the lack of

Market Creek Plaza is the first commercial real estate project in the country to be designed, built, and ultimately owned—in the most literal, economic sense—by neighborhood residents.

PolicyLink Case Study

economic development. Some 88,000 residents live in the Diamond, most are Latino and African American, and more than 15 languages are spoken there.

In 1997, JCNI made the decision to locate and focus its work exclusively in the Diamond neighborhoods and it plans to remain in the neighborhood until the foundation’s “sunset” clause puts it out of business in about 20 years. JCNI established its headquarters in a former supermarket in the area because it wanted to be physically located where its work would take place. Since then, JCNI has partnered with residents and a growing network of mission-related organizations to develop Market Creek Plaza and bring about the changes residents want for their community.

Market Creek Plaza was built on the former site of a 20-acre abandoned aerospace factory. The place was known then as “the four corners of death.” Today, it is a vibrant commercial and cultural hub for the community. The Plaza’s anchor tenant, a large Food 4 Less supermarket that opened in 2001, was the first major grocer to locate in the area in 30 years. The store draws over one million visitors per year to the Plaza. In addition to the food market, the Plaza has about 20,000 square feet of retail space, not all of which has been fully leased yet. More than 60 percent of the retail space has been leased to businesses owned and/or managed by local residents. Among them are locally owned ethnic restaurants and a gift shop where local craftspeople rent space to market their work. The Plaza’s architecture and bold colors combine shapes and styles from several cultures, and displays of public art including mosaic tapestries, totems, and murals portray community leaders. The back includes a restored creek and a grassy open air amphitheater and cultural plaza.

JCNI has engaged and worked side by side with residents to design and build Market Creek Plaza. From the outset, the project was intended as a vehicle to build resident ownership of neighborhood change. Market Creek Plaza is the first commercial real estate project in the country to be designed, built, and ultimately owned—in the most literal, economic sense—by neighborhood residents. JCNI conceives of Market Creek Plaza as an opportunity to reinvest profits back into the neighborhood and build both individual and collective assets.

THE CONSULTATION

The peer match took place August 18–20, 2004, in San Diego. The agenda for the peer match was planned in advance through a facilitated conference call with the lead contacts from each visiting site and the host organization. Participants agreed on the following learning objectives for the match:

- Acquire a better understanding about the vision and role of JCNI in the development of Market Creek Plaza.
- Learn more about the strategies that JCNI has used—as well as the kinds of results and main lessons it has learned—for:
 - involving residents in the planning and implementation of the development project;
 - attracting and developing businesses and creating links, if any, between business and housing development; and
 - funding and financing strategies, including strategies to build community ownership.

The lead contact from each visiting site put together a five-person team to participate in the peer match. The team from Atlanta included the site team leader, a Casey Foundation senior advisor to Atlanta, a consultant from the Casey Foundation, the deputy commissioner from the Department of Planning and Community Development, and the chair of the Renewal Community Program, who is also a well-known resident leader in the neighborhood. The team from Louisville was composed of the site team leader, two representatives from key public and nonprofit partner organizations—Louisville Metro and the Metro Housing Resource Center—and three representatives from local foundations—the Humana Foundation, the CE&S Foundation, and the James Graham Brown Foundation. The team from Oakland included the site team coordinator and representatives from several partner agencies involved with its revitalization efforts—East Bay Asian Youth Center, San Antonio CDC, East Bay Local Development Corporation, and the EastSide Arts

Alliance. The diarist for *Making Connections* Oakland documented the exchange and contributed to this report. Serving as peer consultants were several staff members of the Jacobs Center for Neighborhood Innovation, members of the Jacobs family who serve on the board of their foundation and partners of JCNI, including a group of residents who have been involved in the planning and implementation of Market Creek Plaza.

The dialogue was facilitated by staff from the Center for the Study of Social Policy in Washington, D.C. The peer match began at the Jacobs Center for Neighborhood Innovation in the Diamond neighborhoods in southeastern San Diego. The first session provided overviews about the work, vision, and goals in the four participating sites. A reception and buffet dinner that included a live performance by two Senegalese immigrant drummers who are residents of the neighborhood provided an additional opportunity for informal interaction and peer learning.

The next morning was devoted to a tour of Market Creek Plaza and two JCNI-supported projects, the Elementary Institute of Science and WriterzBlok. The tour was followed by a luncheon and panel discussion at Market Creek Plaza with a group of residents of the Diamond neighborhoods to talk about strategies for involving residents and promoting local ownership and business development. This was followed by a dialogue about the role of philanthropy in supporting such efforts. The afternoon session focused on a discussion about financing strategies to support the goal of building community-controlled assets. The peer match concluded with a debriefing on “take aways” and a discussion of next steps for the visiting teams.

“Jacobs was once
considered the
‘lunatic fringe of
philanthropy.’ Nobody
wanted to touch us with
a 10-foot pole.
Now we’ve become the
happening thing.”

Jennifer Vanica,
JCNI President and CEO

LESSONS LEARNED

Vision and Role

“Who are you? Who is the Jacobs family that you’ve been able to grasp all of the ingredients of doing community change, community empowerment, and community and economic development? This project is the essence of every one of those notions. The thing I don’t know much about is who are you—to have your insights, knowledge, and courage to take risks to do that.” *Sandy Jibrell, Annie E. Casey Foundation*

JCNI peer consultants use this parable to describe their approach to neighborhood revitalization: Give a person a fish, and he or she can eat for a day. Teach a person to fish, and he or she will eat for a lifetime. The “Jacobs experiment” goes one step further: help him or her buy the pond and stock it, and you will build wealth for future generations. Market Creek Plaza is a vehicle for building community ownership.

The Jacobs Experiment

Give a man/woman a fish & eat today

- Provide direct support to partners

Teach a man/woman to fish & eat for a lifetime

- Engage in hands-on learning relationships
- Train to a task

Help him/her buy the pond and stock it & build wealth for future generations

- Build value through entrepreneurial projects
- Build sustainability through community-controlled assets

The main notion behind the Jacobs approach to community development is that people must “own” the change process for change to be sustained. They use the term ownership in its broadest and most fundamental sense. As JCNI put it, its theory of change is that for neighborhood revitalization to be self-sustaining, residents must own the plans, own the implementation, and own the assets in their communities. To do this, JCNI leaders had to rethink and be willing to change themselves: how they thought, how they worked and staffed their efforts, what types of structures they utilized, and what roles they assumed. As the peer consultants put it, “It’s hypocritical of us to expect change of others and not be willing to change ourselves.”

This section outlines JCNI’s vision and evolving role and highlights a few key lessons and insights that the Jacobs experiment raises for philanthropic organizations about their role in supporting community development efforts.

A New Way of Doing Business

The journey that led to the Market Creek story began with the Jacobs Family Foundation’s realization in the early 1990s that the structure and tools of foundations were not helping to change the sense of dependency and disrespect in underinvested communities, nor were they contributing to sustainable change. The foundation wanted to design a way of helping that would break the cycle of dependency and be based on dignity and respect. A more thorough account of this journey can be found in “The Jacobs Journey: Rethinking Philanthropy” (JCNI, August 2003).

In 1995, the board of the Jacobs Family Foundation incorporated the Jacobs Center for NonProfit Innovation—later renamed the Jacobs Center for Neighborhood Innovation—as a way to take a hands-on approach and work alongside the groups that it supported. With the creation of the operating foundation, Jacobs embarked on a new path of rethinking philanthropy and adding a new set of tools—such as a team that blended the profit and nonprofit worlds, a technical assistance program, and a new way of working—that could break the sense of dependency, promote risk, and allow the foundation to be directly engaged in the work. As a partner in

community change, the vision of JCNI is “to be part of a caring community where people are responsible to each other, where all cultures are embraced, where the resources are in place for a vibrant economic life, and where residents create the future they envision.” Its mission is to explore and implement new ways to partner for community change through entrepreneurial projects, hands-on learning relationships, and the creative investment of resources.

JCNI’s goals are to unite residents, organizations, and funding partners to:

- Build the social well-being of the neighborhoods.
- Foster the creation of businesses, jobs, and community wealth.
- Support the enhancement of the physical environment through neighborhood-owned assets.
- Expand the avenues and opportunities for resident participation in the planning, decision-making, implementation, and ownership of community change.

One of the early lessons JCNI learned is the importance of being clear about your values and living up to them in the way you do business. Its work is rooted in four core values that it defines as follows:

- **Relationship**—working together in learning relationships that allow us to connect as people.
- **Respect**—valuing the gifts each person brings to a community and honoring the dignity and worth of all.
- **Responsibility**—being responsible to and not for people working for community change.
- **Risk**—Being innovative and daring in our approach and accepting the risk of failure.

Working in Partnership with Residents

From 1992 to 1999, JCNI worked to strengthen its nonprofit partners by assisting them with strategic planning, organization development, and funding. In 1997, JCNI redirected its course and decided to focus its work exclusively in the Diamond neighborhoods. Direct engagement no longer meant direct involvement with nonprofit boards and staff, but with the people they serve. JCNI wanted to be physically located where its work was taking place, so it established its headquarters in a former supermarket. “Moving was important. We wanted to be here. We put our own team in the field. We’re at the table side by side with residents,” said Jennifer Vanica, JCNI president and CEO. Using business language, peer consultants from JCNI described this change of course as “getting rid of the middleman”—the quality control mechanism of the business world—in order to address the difficulty in the traditional way foundations do business, which often disconnects the person who “pays” from the person who “receives” the service.

Increasingly convinced that people have to own their change for revitalization to be sustainable, JCNI set off to develop what is now Market Creek Plaza in partnership with Diamond residents. JCNI believes that its role is to be at their side helping to strengthen the social and economic networks needed to support risk taking. As described in its 2000–2001 Annual Report, JCNI has developed five key strategies to do this work:

1. *Entrepreneurial Projects*—Help residents develop innovative, profit-generating projects that ensure community ownership of assets.

Market Creek Plaza was designed and built in close partnership with residents, combining social, economic, and physical development into a model project. Community ownership is a central goal of this work. More than 100 residents participated in the development of a plan for residents to have an ownership stake in the Plaza and to create other wealth-building strategies. An ownership design team focuses on ways for residents to earn income and build assets while rebuilding their neighborhoods. The business development and leasing team scouted the community for local

entrepreneurs to partner with JCNI to bring multicultural restaurants and shops to Market Creek Plaza. Peer match participants had an opportunity to talk directly with several of these resident entrepreneurs about this experience.

2. *Community Building*—Support residents in ongoing, comprehensive planning and the implementation of their hopes for their neighborhood.

A powerful example of a community-building activity that Jacobs has supported is WriterzBlok, a youth program that explores the history of graffiti as mural art and works to eliminate the defacement of property while transforming artistic expression into financial opportunities for youth. WriterzBlok encourages youth to move from mural art to graphic design and silk screening and provides them with opportunities to get involved in community art on a broader scale. Peer match participants had an opportunity to visit the program facilities and talk with several youth leaders about the various components and benefits of this program. For more information, visit its website at www.writerzblok.com.

3. *Capacity Building*—Expand and engage neighborhood skills, talents, and resources through capacity-building partnerships that allow residents to work and learn together.

From one-time trainings to comprehensive planning and implementation, JCNI provides support and resources to help their partners—neighborhood residents, businesses, and organizations—succeed. An example of a very productive and comprehensive partnership that has developed over time is with the Elementary Institute of Science (EIS), a hands-on, after-school science enrichment program serving children in the neighborhood and throughout San Diego. A strategic plan and a campaign planning study conducted by JCNI evolved into a full partnership to support EIS's move into a new state-of-the-art facility. JCNI provided assistance in systems development, campaign planning, communication, and construction, while

learning from EIS how to improve JCNI's capacity-building strategies. Peer match participants had an opportunity to tour the new EIS facilities and talk with its leadership about its work and long-term partnership with Jacobs.

4. *Community Investment*—Make entrepreneurial, risk-taking investments and creatively use JCNI's assets for neighborhood change.

There are several ways in which JCNI is going about finding innovative ways to create neighborhood wealth. These include: providing loan guarantees for community-based contractors to help them expand their businesses, hire employees, and bid on larger jobs; supporting the development of a Diamond business development fund to provide support to entrepreneurs starting new businesses or expanding existing ones at Market Creek Plaza; working with other foundations to establish a social purpose investment fund demonstration project; managing a Spirit of the Diamond Mini-Grants Fund for the Jacobs Family Foundation that helps groups working to strengthen their neighborhoods, regardless of whether or not they are nonprofit organizations; and teaming with partners such as the Neighborhood National Bank to offer working lines of credit to nonprofit organizations.

5. *Strategic Support*—Develop the resources and systems required for long-term, lasting impact and stimulate the ongoing analysis and application of learning.

The JCNI team provides strategic support to groups inside and outside the community to facilitate the work and to create forums for collaborative learning. One example is last year's effort by a 30-person team of dedicated neighborhood residents who surveyed over 800 residents in their homes in less than two months. The results were compiled into a Neighborhood Quality of Life Survey that measures resident perceptions of their neighborhoods and identifies key areas to be addressed by community members,

public officials, and other leaders. Another example is the early support and in-kind staff that JCNI has contributed to a collaboration of local and national grantmakers interested in assisting San Diego’s southeastern neighborhoods.

Being Flexible and Accepting the Risk of Failure

A foundation needs to be flexible if it genuinely wants to be a partner with the community it seeks to help. This was one of the main lessons that surfaced during the peer match discussions. Meg Jacobs, chair of the Jacobs Foundation Board, explained that when the foundation decided it wanted to do a commercial project to catalyze other activities and outcomes: “We said, ‘Let’s do it’ and accept the fact that we were leaping off into the unknown. We had to be completely open to change. We had to have problem solvers in the team. We never had the luxury of doing lots of planning. We did it on the fly. We had to accept whatever costs and problems came along and deal with them. We had the advantage of being a small board, and we were the people who had control over the money. We were committed to take risks to do the job.”

The “do it on the fly” theme lived on as the idea for a commercial development evolved. Initially, the foundation envisioned the Market Creek Plaza site as a combination headquarters and shopping center. But true to its values, prior to conceptualizing the project, the foundation initiated efforts to connect with and involve residents in its design. The result was a vision that combined both commercial and cultural aspects of community development.

Flexibility is also important when it comes to the project’s outcomes. While there is a full list of outcomes sought by Market Creek Plaza—in areas related to economic value, social value, sustainability, and philanthropy—the peer consultants emphasized that it would have been “a real disaster” to use these outcomes for leading the process of working and partnering with residents. Who defines success matters. Residents often feel, and with reason, they have been tested, scored, tracked, and used by the big “systems.” Building trust requires that residents feel they have some

“To expand our possibilities,
we must welcome innovation,
seek untried solutions to
problems, and accept the risk
of failure.”

Dr. Joseph J. Jacobs

power in making the decisions. “Who decides the outcomes goes to power dynamics. We had to let go of that,” said Jennifer Vanica. As another staff member reflected, a lot of times they have started a particular process with the community, but don’t know where it’s going to end up. That is what happens when you bring residents into the project as decision-makers in building the vision and implementing it. The main value—and ultimate result JCNI seeks—is for residents to own the change.

Peer consultants also noted that philanthropic organizations tend to be risk averse and accepting the risk of failure goes very much against the grain. Norman Hapke, a member of the Jacobs family who serves on the board of the foundation, “In order to get anywhere, you have to risk your money and reputation. As a small board, we do that. We try to challenge foundations on the ways they do things. They give away one nineteenth of their assets every year. You can grow your assets by a factor of 20 if you are willing to risk foundation assets to do that. The reason it doesn’t happen is that there are two sides of foundations: grantmaking and the bean counters. When we lose money, we say, ‘What have we learned?’ When foundations figure out they have more power than they’re using, they can discover they can do things they haven’t dreamt of.”

A funding partner, the Legler Benbough Foundation, agreed that through its involvement with this project it has learned valuable lessons about being flexible and has begun to rethink the way it traditionally does business. “From a funder’s perspective, everything points to accountability,” said its president, Pete Ellsworth. “That is totally inconsistent with funding this kind of work.” A concrete example he mentioned is the Community Faces project, a community arts project that the Benbough Foundation supported. It consists of a series of large murals placed on different facades around the Plaza’s many buildings. The murals depict 27 residents who have made outstanding contributions to the community. A resident team planned and made decisions about who to include in the portraits, and artists from the Diamond neighborhoods painted the portraits. An interesting by-product that emerged from this activity was the bringing together of experienced and emerging artists. Each group was apprehensive of the other. They all worked in a warehouse

together, an unusual set-up for usually independent artists. In the end, the process worked out well, with experienced artists learning as much from the less-experienced artists as the new artists learned from them. Subsequent collaborations between some of the artists have ensued. “Finding out what residents truly want requires a whole different mind-set that is different from what we have done in the past, but I am convinced it gets better results,” Ellsworth said.

Involving Residents in Development Efforts

“Generally we see top-down strategies and hand-picked leaders who bump up against the issues. That doesn’t work. It’s very rare when you start with the people and what they want. It’s very hard work. I commend you for starting at the right place.” *Sandy Jibrell, Annie E. Casey Foundation*

Among the learning objectives that participants in the peer match identified in advance was to better understand how the foundation has gone about engaging residents in the development of Market Creek Plaza. Questions included: How has the design of the project involved the neighborhood residents? What are some ways to keep residents at the table during implementation? How does the Jacobs strategy relate to building social networks among residents and the development of other services and supports? What lessons has Jacobs learned from its efforts to engage residents?

From its earlier work to strengthen nonprofits, JCNI learned some valuable lessons that it applied when it embarked on the development of Market Creek Plaza. Among these were the need to build trust and the recognition that trust is built by working together over a long period of time; the need to train to a task, so the learning is relevant to getting things done; the affirmation that you can do with, but not for; and the recognition that if you want innovation, involve everyone your organization plans to serve. During discussions about how JCNI went about involving the residents in Market Creek Plaza, the components outlined below were highlighted.

Building Broad Resident Ownership

JCNI contracted with PolicyLink to produce three case studies about Market Creek Plaza, the first of which—currently in draft form—focuses on resident engagement and ownership of neighborhood change. As portrayed in this case study, the development of Market Creek Plaza was a thoughtful and deliberate process to involve residents as leaders and partners in neighborhood change. Market Creek Plaza has been a “vehicle” for building broad resident ownership.

JCNI views this process as follows:

1. RESIDENTS MUST “OWN THE PLANS”—WHICH IS HOW VISION GETS BUILT.

The strategies for residents owning the plans include:

- Extensive resident-led community listening/research;
- Planning circles and living room meetings; and
- Large resident planning teams.

2. RESIDENTS MUST “OWN THE IMPLEMENTATION”—WHICH IS HOW SKILLS AND CAPACITY GET BUILT.

The strategies for residents owning the implementation include:

- Working teams with residents and consultants;
- Community contracting (construction, property management, and security);
- Community leasing with business planning, loan fund, and percentage rents; and
- Community art.

3. RESIDENTS MUST “OWN THE ASSETS”—WHICH IS HOW FUTURE CHANGE GETS LEVERAGED.

The strategies for owning the assets include:

- Value recapture;
- Individual benefit—IPO;
- Community benefit—Neighborhood Unity Foundation;
- Social purpose investors (PRIs); and
- Financial literacy training.

Starting with Outreach and Building Relationships Directly with Residents

Before conceptualizing the project, JCNI initiated efforts to connect with residents in the Diamond and involve them in the planning. Outreach to residents began in earnest in July 1997. JCNI was on the verge of purchasing the 20-acre parcel that once housed an aerospace plant. “We started knocking on doors and told folks we’re going to purchase the property, and we asked for their thoughts,” said Roque Barros, director of community development for JCNI. “There was skepticism at first, but then people started helping us open doors. People would ask, ‘What are you going to do for us?’ We said, ‘We’re going to hire you to help us.’ We started to build relationships. We started to build trust.” Working to JCNI’s advantage was its commitment to having a long-term presence. JCNI plans to remain in the neighborhood until the foundation’s “sunset clause” puts it out of business.

Listening is Aimed at Helping to Form a Vision Rather Than at Requesting Input on a Plan

As soon as JCNI had access to the property, it opened up an outreach office there. Barros formed an outreach team of residents and trained them in designing and conducting community surveys. As with other residents who make intensive and sustained contributions to implementing the work—they were considered valuable resident consultants and received stipends to compensate them for their time. The team conducted door-to-door surveys in four languages with over 600 residents to find out what they wanted to see at the site. Their answers indicated they wanted Market Creek to serve as a commercial and cultural hub for their community. Food was identified as the top priority. There were no grocery stores in the neighborhood or other food services. Their responses formed the guiding vision for what Market Creek Plaza would be.

After the listening phase, there was a design and an implementation phase. The efforts under way to create a resident-led neighborhood foundation—the Neighborhood Unity Foundation (NUF)—illustrate this process. After Market Creek Plaza was up and running, JCNI initiated discussions with residents about starting a neighborhood foundation run by residents. The current plan—elaborated by one of the working teams—is that the foundation eventually will hold a one-third ownership of the development. The process for planning the foundation

began with a listening phase in which about 500 residents were surveyed with questions such as, “What do you like about your neighborhood?” A report was pulled together with the findings. “At first residents were skeptical of our survey, but they were really impressed when they saw we came back to them with the results from our survey and invited them to get involved,” said Sandra Candler, a resident member of the neighborhood foundation planning team.

During the design phase, the team went back to the residents to find out what they wanted. “What would leadership of our neighborhood foundation look like? We want people of the neighborhood to run this,” Sandra Candler said. “This impressed a lot of residents too.” Currently, the team members are canvassing the neighborhood in order to surface nominations for residents to serve on the foundation’s governing board. “We have had very good response. People are open to information, and they are giving their input. We’ve had people showing up from all over the place. It’s been wonderful, fantastic,” Candler added. “Being a resident, I have a voice, and I want to be heard, too.”

“At first residents were skeptical of our survey, but they were really impressed when they saw we came back to them with the results from our survey and invited them to get involved.”

Sandra Candler

Developing and Supporting a Network of “Working Teams” Instead of a Top-Down Structure

In trying to find a way to have a direct dialogue and shared decision-making with residents, JCNI helped build a network of working teams that bring out the natural creativity, problem solving, and risk taking of residents. As recounted in the PolicyLink case study mentioned earlier, the concept of the working team has given JCNI the flexibility it needs to work with multiple groups and to allow any resident to come in and out of the process. It has served as a mechanism for finding those people who had the will to change things, and it has provided a way to follow the natural momentum of the work.

More than 2,000 residents have been involved in the working teams. The process usually begins with large groups, meeting three or four times. Participants then self-select to participate in small working teams. Each team has a structure, but “we’ve gotten to the point where we don’t have a formal governance structure,” said Ron Cummings, chief operating officer of JCNI. “It’s bound to dive into politics. We got

stuck when we wanted one group to create a governance structure. That turned out to be a disaster. But we just kept meeting. Believe me. I am a structure-type guy, and I have had to let go. It all just flows.”

Using Short Time-Limited Increments that Residents can Commit to Participate

“Everything we look at is in a three-month phase,” said Roque Barros. “Lots of residents can’t commit to a longer period of time.” In addition, every phase has a start, an end, and then a celebration. People have the opportunity to come in or leave at any phase. This strategy makes it easier for people to commit their time and allows for the inflow of new people, energy, and ideas to renew and sustain the work.

There are large resident teams as well as small working teams. The goals of the large resident teams are to: create balanced representation in planning, provide a forum for creative ideas and learning, establish links to community networks, facilitate dialogue about issues and opportunities, and establish goals for work to be implemented. The role of the small working teams is to translate goals into strategies for implementation and guide the work in a way that honors those goals.

About 14 teams were involved in the planning and implementation of Market Creek Plaza. Examples of key planning teams and their main goals are listed below:

Outreach Team

- Maximum participation by residents
- Representation of diverse populations in surrounding neighborhoods

Art and Design Team

- Architectural character that is a blend of cultures
- Art pieces that represent individual cultures
- Resident artists developed
- Youth talent cultivated

Construction

- 65% participation by minority and women contractors
- Programs for training, advocacy, and access to capital
- Develop 10 contractors to compete in open market

Business Development and Leasing

- Mix of tenants for dynamic business environment
- Focus on multicultural cuisine, arts, and entertainment
- 85% of in-line space to resident-owned businesses
- Customized training and support for entrepreneurs

Employment Development

- 65% of all new jobs to residents
- Neighborhood workforce development programs linked
- Multicultural workforce promoted

Ownership Design

- Way for residents to capture increasing value of neighborhood created
- Individual wealth, community resources, and ongoing capacity built through direct ownership of the project
- Forum for discussion of wealth-building investment strategies created

Resource Team

- Coordination of fundraising and communication with external audiences
- Project investments and resources developed
- Philanthropy linked to neighborhood

Assembling a Diverse Team to Work “Side by Side” with the Residents

The JCNI team is as diverse as the communities it serves, bringing together people from varied cultural, educational, social, and political backgrounds and blending for-profit and nonprofit experiences from a wide range of disciplines. To simplify the work, JCNI has organized its five-year plan into five areas: Market Creek Plaza and the Village Center Development; Ownership; Partners in Innovation; Centers of Excellence; and Organizational Development. JCNI has four internal teams that support the work in these five areas. The overall goals of the internal working teams are to keep the work integrated and to share leadership and responsibility with residents. As mentioned earlier, the JCNI offices are located in the neighborhood

and serve regularly as a meeting and convening place for working teams. Food and child care are often provided to support the participation of residents.

“Training to the Task”

Building and leaving skills and capacity in the community by accomplishing specific work is a key component of the Jacobs approach. “We learn as we go,” said Jennifer Vanica. “Since residents are at the table, if they don’t have capacity, we stop. If we have to wait six months or a year to build capacity to lead the work, that is what we will do.”

JCNI has facilitated numerous learning opportunities on diverse topics that take place in the working teams so that they can get their jobs done. In addition to focusing on building residents’ skills throughout the project, JCNI facilitates workshops on financial literacy, covering topics such as financial planning, asset accumulation, and credit repair. The project has leveraged existing expertise in the field for assistance on curriculum development and presentations and has offered trainings in four languages for about 500 residents to date.

The Neighborhood Coordinator Training Program is one example of how Jacobs is working to facilitate the development of a skilled group of coordinators who are effective in mobilizing residents and resources. Mariana Ledezma, a Diamond neighborhood resident, shared with peer match participants her experience as one of the community coordinators involved with this program. Ledezma was recruited four years ago to attend a residents’ meeting convened by JCNI. She knew little about her neighborhood or about how local city services functioned. Through her involvement in the program, she had the opportunity to attend trainings where she learned about team building and community development and about community resources and tools for working with her community. She began organizing her neighbors into a watch group. They meet every third Wednesday of the month. She also conducts workshops to educate her neighbors about their community and how to access better services.

“Since residents are at the table, if they don’t have capacity, we stop. If we have to wait six months or a year to build capacity to lead the work, that is what we will do.”

Jennifer Vanica

Mariana Ledezma has become a firm believer in the “you can do with, but not for” philosophy espoused by JCNI. She recounted how many of her non-English-speaking neighbors began to depend on her to find solutions to their everyday issues. They would call her, for instance, about what to do with abandoned vehicles in front of their homes. “At first, I would try to help by calling the appropriate city department myself. Then, at our meetings, I began to tell people to use a list I put together of relevant city services and encouraged them to call in their issues themselves.” Ledezma is now part of a multicultural team of community coordinators. “This job I have is very rewarding in so many ways,” she said. “People are now coming out to get educated about our neighborhood. To me, that is very positive. It makes me happy to have the opportunity that the Jacobs Center has offered me to move ahead.”

Peer consultants acknowledged that JCNI’s approach to involving residents in the development process—which emphasizes thorough discussions about the work at hand and building skills to do the work—takes a great deal of patience, trust, time, and resources. On the other hand, it has also helped forge resident ownership of the implementation and they have gotten a better project as a result.

Adopting a “Both/And” Rather than an “Either/Or” Strategy

Partnerships and collaborations often are political and cultural minefields through which each party must navigate carefully. Sometimes agendas mesh; sometimes they clash. JCNI has had its share of struggles and conflicts. In the process, it has learned to adopt a both/and strategy to get things done in which all sides get something. Below are some concrete examples of how this strategy has played out and help shaped the project.

JCNI and resident teams wanted Food 4 Less, the anchor tenant at Market Creek Plaza, to hire workers from the nearby neighborhoods. But Food 4 Less is a union shop, and the people it hires must be union members. That qualification was one that few residents met. The solution that JCNI, the resident team, and Food 4 Less came up with illustrates the project’s use, of what JCNI officials call the “both/and, not the either/or” approach. JCNI did outreach to the community and provided

pre-employment skills training in subjects like writing a resume. The union agreed that Diamond residents would be hired and trained at stores throughout the region and then given first priority at the Market Creek Plaza store upon its opening. Ninety-one percent of the initial employees at Food 4 Less were hired from the community. All jobs were unionized, including living wages, health care, and pension plans.

The “both/and” strategy worked as well in blending arts and cultural elements into the design and operation of Market Creek Plaza. JCNI and community residents really wanted a place that was both commercial and cultural. At first, the architects and community artists clashed on their respective visions for the physical design of Market Creek Plaza and the incorporation of art and cultural elements. Residents played a mediating role and pushed them to work together to incorporate elements of the cultural groups living in the Diamond. This process took time and tested the patience of everyone. The result is a dazzling array of bold shapes and colors that blend and reflect the different cultural roots represented in the neighborhood.

“At first, everybody was
scared of the location ...
Now many of those who
wouldn’t talk to us are
wanting to be here.”

Chip Buttner

Attracting and Developing Businesses

After the community listening research phase that surfaced food as the number one priority for residents, JCNI began conversations with potential tenants. “At first, everybody was scared of the location,” said Chip Buttner, the president of Diamond Management, Inc. “After people started looking at the numbers, they thought there was a great opportunity here. And once we got our first tenant, then we got moving. Now many of those who wouldn’t talk to us are wanting to be here,” he said. The first tenant, Food 4 Less, currently draws over 1 million visitors per year to the Plaza. In addition to the food market, the Plaza has about 20,000 square feet of retail space, not all of which has been fully leased yet. More than 60 percent of retail space has been leased to businesses owned and/or managed by local residents. Peer match participants had an opportunity to meet briefly with the owners of two, locally owned, ethnic restaurants—Magnolia and Snapper—and other members of the business development and leasing team to learn about how the project has gone about attracting and developing locally owned businesses.

The “both/and” approach worked well when it came to deciding the mix of tenants for Market Creek Plaza. Members of the business development and leasing team had different views. Some wanted employers who would pay a “living wage,” including benefits. Others advocated for first-time, or relatively inexperienced, local entrepreneurs who could probably not afford to pay the same salary level to their employees. “When the goals were set, we had to have both, and the design team had to find a way to include both,” said Vernon Brinkley, a resident member of the team. Ultimately, the design team used the “theory of thirds,” which is a version of the “both/and” strategy, to choose the mix of tenants that they wanted in Market Creek Plaza. Roughly one-third would be national tenants like Food 4 Less that could support the Plaza’s debt service, another third would be local entrepreneurs, and a third would be those who could invest their profits back into the businesses and the Plaza.

Developing the Capacity of Emerging Entrepreneurs in the Community

JCNI’s approach involves seeking out emerging local entrepreneurs as lessees and providing them with multifaceted support to launch their businesses. One of the challenges that the project has experienced is addressing the specific conditions and needs of local entrepreneurs. The business development and leasing team met with hundreds of potential merchants who had expressed interest. While many of them had great ideas, most had no business plans, had financing issues, or retracted when they realized the amount of work involved. Realizing that the technical assistance needs of prospective tenants were greater than anticipated, JCNI had to rethink its approach and began focusing on hands-on business development as well as access to low-cost capital. JCNI also made a program-related investment to a local community development financial institution to establish a low-interest loan pool for emerging entrepreneurs at Market Creek Plaza.

One of the businesses that is about to open at the Plaza is Magnolia, a southern-style sit-down restaurant owned and operated by Charles and Bessie Johnson. They were among the residents that spoke with peer match participants about their experience. In spite of the support they have gotten from Jacobs to open their business, they are also very cognizant about the risk they are taking. Magnolia’s will be the first sit-down top-of-the-line restaurant in the neighborhood owned by

African Americans. “You know it’s going to be run well. But we are trying to change mind-sets that have been ingrained for a long time,” said Vernon Brinkley.

Peer match participants also wanted to know what connections, if any, the project has with housing. Chip Buttner mentioned that when they started Market Creek Plaza, the residents had no interest in housing, but that has changed over time. According to the current community plan put together by residents, the undeveloped portion of Market Creek Plaza will include affordable housing, a hotel, and additional commercial space. The project will be adding 830 residential units, one-third for sale and two-thirds for rent. Because they are just in the early stages of planning for this housing, peer consultants did not have lessons to share as they did in other areas. They were confident, however, that residents will be at the table making the tough decisions that will need to be made every step of the way.

Beyond Gentrification: JCNI’s Seven-Point Plan*

JCNI is working in the following seven areas to counterbalance the negative forces of gentrification and ensure that residents will be the ones to capture the value of their work in strengthening their neighborhoods and developing a vibrant community.

1. Resident control of land-planning decisions
2. Structures for capturing the appreciating value of land within the neighborhood
3. System for capturing significant percentage of all new job creation
4. Comprehensive support systems for local entrepreneurs
5. Support for affordable housing and home buying
6. Broad-based training in financial planning and disciplined investing
7. Networks of social, cultural, educational, and economic partners

* Abbreviated version. For more details and information, please contact the Jacobs Center for Neighborhood Innovation (www.jacobscenter.org).

Financing Strategies

Facilitating Local Control and Ownership of Resources

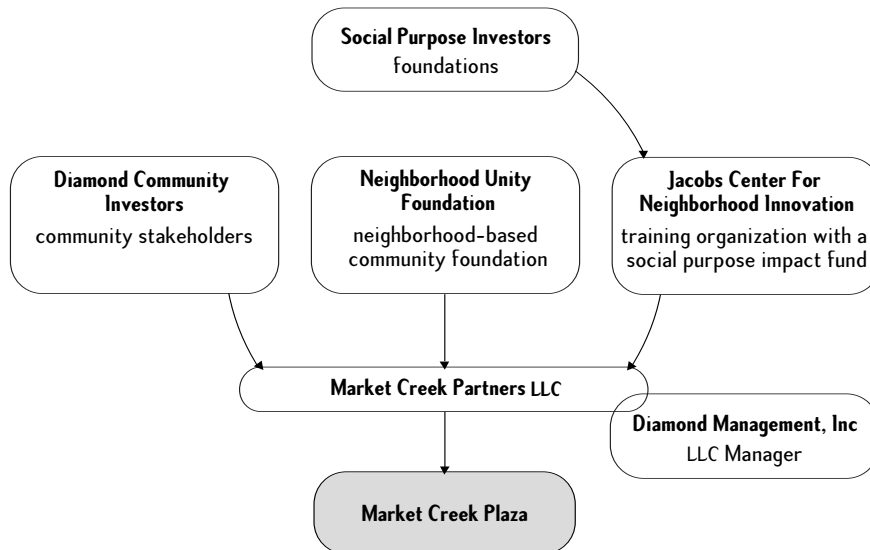
One of the lessons that JCNI has learned is that “to do with and not for,” it had to focus on the design of self-generating systems of wealth creation and resident control of assets. Toward this end, JCNI and a group of community business owners launched a working team to engage in the design and creation of a community ownership strategy. The strategy uses the profits from Market Creek Plaza to balance and accomplish three goals:

- To build individual wealth within the neighborhood through ownership of the project;
- To expand community-controlled resources that can be used for public benefit; and
- To create ongoing development capacity.

The ownership concept is modeled on the Native American “theory of thirds,” a practice that spreads benefits broadly and equitably. A third of profits are dedicated for individual benefit, a third for community benefit, and a third to be reinvested in ongoing development. Figure 1 shows the ownership structure, which will be composed of the following organizations:

- *Diamond Community Investors* will return profits to residents and build individual assets.
- *The Neighborhood Unity Foundation* will return profits through neighborhood grants and build community assets.
- *The Jacobs Center for Neighborhood Innovation* will build development, construction, and outreach capacity in the neighborhood.
- *Market Creek Partners LLC*, a limited liability corporation, will be the owner of Market Creek Plaza.
- *Diamond Management Inc. (DMI)* will manage the LLC. Diamond Community Investors will have voting representation on DMI’s board, and all investors will have a voice in major decisions.

FIGURE 1: OWNERSHIP STRUCTURE



Building Individual Assets and Community Equity

In the coming months, JCNI will conduct the nation’s first community development initial public offering (IPO), which will enable up to 650 community residents to be actual stockholders in the development. JCNI and the Irvine Foundation are covering all of the offering expenses, allowing capital raised from the community to be invested directly in the project. The process of designing the IPO—which has led the planning team into uncharted territory and tested the patience of everyone involved in this effort for the last two years—will be the focus of one of the PolicyLink case studies mentioned above.

Diamond Community Investors (DCI) will be governed by a special charter. It has a goal of raising \$500,000 from residents who can buy units (akin to shares) of Market Creek Plaza for as little as \$200 or as much as \$25,000. The planned IPO will be “really accessible to people in the neighborhood,” said Duane Crenshaw, JCNI’s director of ownership. “Each ‘unit’ will be priced at \$10. The majority of the shareholders will be low-income residents, and they will be able to spread out their

investment payments in installments.” JCNI will continue to facilitate opportunities for residents to learn investing basics through workshops conducted in different languages.

Individual investors from the neighborhood “will have a voice in decisions about leases and the mix of tenants at Market Creek Plaza. It’s one person, one vote; it doesn’t matter if you invest \$200 or \$25,000,” Crenshaw said. Individual investors as part of DCI will be paid off first. They will also get the highest yield, a 10 percent preferred return on capital. The Neighborhood Unity Foundation, another investor in DCI, will be paid second with a 7 percent preferred return on capital. JCNI/Diamond Management Inc. will be paid third with 7 percent also. All investors will split any remaining profit based on percentage of ownership.

Ensuring Neighborhood Reinvestment

One powerful result of the community ownership strategy is the creation of a resident-led charitable organization, the Neighborhood Unity Foundation (NUF), to grant a portion of the profits from the development back into the neighborhood. NUF already has been approved as a 501(c)(3) organization and, as mentioned earlier, members of the NUF design team are in the process of canvassing the neighborhood to get nominations for residents to serve on the board. A training program is already in place to build residents’ skills in philanthropy so that, over time, they are increasingly able to assume responsibility for operating the foundation. NUF is being capitalized with an endowment comprised of funds donated by the Jacobs Family Foundation and other foundations. It will invest \$1 million in Market Creek Plaza, receiving a 7 percent preferred return on capital following the payout to individual resident investors.

JCNI shared with peer match participants a package of materials that provided more information about its innovative work and lessons that the Jacobs Family Foundation has learned as a partner in community change. Interested readers can consult the following documents:

- “*The Jacobs Journey: Rethinking Philanthropy*,” by Jennifer S. Vanica (JCNI, August 2003)
- “*Toward Resident Ownership of Neighborhood Change*,” a PolicyLink Report by Lisa Robinson (Draft). JCNI has contracted with PolicyLink to produce three case studies. The first case study—which was referred to in this summary—focuses on resident engagement and ownership of neighborhood change. The second will focus on the funding and financing strategies for Market Creek Plaza. The third will look into the process of designing and gaining approval for the project’s initial public offering.

PARTICIPANT REFLECTIONS

One of the questions peer match participants raised before the visit to Market Creek Plaza was about its replicability. As JCNI put it, Market Creek is an example of what happens when you promote an authentic resident voice in a process of shared decision-making, learn and train to a task, promote the ownership of change, and own your own change. Anyone can use its principles—just expect a different result. “We no longer believe in replication, but we know there are strategies we can learn from one another,” said Ron Cummings, the chief operations officer of JCNI.

As the peer match drew to a close, participants took a few minutes to share their most important take-aways. In their own words, these included the following:

“What I am taking away is the transformative power of the common people. They rallied around and they have come this far, and that’s incredible.”
Shobini Sarkar

“I am taking away the whole concept of land and land ownership and the history that is so tied to that, and that this is a mechanism to reconnect in a real way.” *Elena Serrano*

“The Jacobs Foundation is the only one I know that has given community a chance to work out its own destiny. It’s an overwhelming thing I got out of this—how community residents were organized and had the opportunity to decide their own priorities, not necessarily driven by nonprofits. More people came out because they saw a stake in the community. This is a powerful methodology for building economic development and joint venturing with the community—giving out ownership in terms of stock.” *Don Davenport*

“One thing I became aware of is the need for a long-term commitment to consistent goals and the willingness to reach them, and those goals are bought into by the community.” *Eric Cone*

“One thing stands out for me. Everything we’ve seen and heard reflects constant attention to the multicultural aspects—the arts and culture piece, investment strategies. Everything is sensitive to people in the neighborhood—what it means to have integrity, to celebrate a multicultural neighborhood.” *Sammy Moon*

“I was struck by the notion and realization of ownership—whether financial or emotional—how ownership stays atop everything, how the Jacobs Foundation acts as a partner in that, how the board thinks about its commitment and its power, and how it uses it and doesn’t use it. I take back powerful lessons on how to do philanthropy.” *Alicia Lara*

“I’ve learned a lesson of partnership. You have taken partnership with residents to another level, where there are actual investors. Jacobs is to be commended.” *James Shelby*

“I am impressed with the Jacobs family. They want to create the same wealth as they have for people in the community. This is something other families that have created wealth should think about. You really inspire us, and the learning will take us to another place.” *Gail Hayes*

“I always talk about possibilities in Atlanta. Things like the WriterzBlok—how excited I was about seeing that. You’ve taught me how to do large group visioning and how to take that and form working groups to implement the work. I want to do visioning with our citywide resident network. Atlanta city officials need to hear what the possibilities are.” *Peggy Harper*

“I am taking away two words. One is ‘impressive.’ This is the most impressive approach to revitalizing a community I have ever seen anywhere. The other word is ‘trust.’ Your ability to trust the process and the people—it’s all incredible. To give up power and trusting in residents to do the right thing—it’s amazing.” *Ntaminika Youngblood*

“I am blown away. I am so impressed with the use of art, in the context of culture, as a vehicle for engaging community. Art as a vehicle is very doable as a community-building strategy.” *Sandy Fibrell*

“What I take away is, ‘Who am I and who are we in Oakland?’ This is a good example of an organization that has gone through a transformation. I saw a lot of stuff that I can relate to. Our organization has tried to do a transformation from a service to a relationship organization that has been difficult. Sometimes I feel we are part of the problem and not the solution. I am really looking in the mirror about what we do to improve.” *David Kakishiba*

“What I take away is, it can be done, but it won’t be easy. You’ve accomplished hurdle after hurdle. It inspires us to do it, maybe not this model.” *Bill Gatewood*

“I work with individual development accounts, and I am looking forward to learning more about how the IPO of Market Creek Plaza goes.” *Carl Pascual*

“This work for me is a powerful affirmation and testament that—as we say in Spanish—‘Sí se puede.’ It can be done!” *Rosa Briceno*

“Thanks for the compliments; they are nourishing. On a daily basis, our work doesn’t feel that way. It’s a privilege and humbling for people of your experience and knowledge to be in our house. I hope it’s the start of a relationship. We want to learn from your communities. We no longer believe in replication, but know there are strategies we can learn from one another.”

Ron Cummings

NEXT STEPS

As they prepared to wrap up the work, the visiting teams from Atlanta, Louisville, and Oakland had an opportunity to spend some time identifying key lessons and insights and exploring some ways in which they might use these ideas to help move their local efforts forward.

Next steps identified by each of the sites included:

Oakland

- Invite the Jacobs Center for Neighborhood Innovation to confer with the Real Estate Council of the Lower San Antonio Collaborative of *Making Connections* Oakland (MCO).
- Make a better connection with the EastSide Arts Alliance to infuse the arts and culture aspects of community development into MCO.
- Consider adopting the “four-phase” strategy of Jacobs into MCO. The four phases are listening, design, implementation, and evaluation. Within each phase, strive to have a “start, end, and celebration” cycle in three-month increments.
- Consider a different use of the communications consultant—to launch a media campaign for more positive coverage of the Lower San Antonio neighborhood.

Atlanta

- (Our Annie E. Casey Foundation civic site) is going to ask, “What is the nature of our Atlanta work going to be? Where do we fit into the huge spectrum of the Casey Foundation’s work? We want the top leadership of the Foundation to be exposed to our work.”
- Another question for us is, “What expectations do we see for residents?” We want to get into a true visioning process for residents, and we want to talk about several different models.
- We want to talk about our larger region and look for possibilities that can be an economic engine that residents can benefit from.

Louisville

- Bring the visiting team up to speed on the work that has been done and create linkages with the *Making Connections* group and framework.
- Share what we’ve learned here with *Making Connections* Louisville (MCL). In doing so, it is important that we focus on the blueprint for Louisville, noting some mechanisms we saw work well in San Diego.
- Report and give presentations to our respective boards about what we’ve learned from the visit.
- Continue the relationship with the Jacobs Center for Neighborhood Innovation.
- Reshape our arts and culture work to be more focused. The timing is really opportune to make a case around the cultural blueprint. Team members will share this experience and urge that group to take a broader approach.
- Identify funders that will be receptive to this approach and explore bringing together funders to come up with local funding strategies.
- There is an opportunity to assemble various parcels of land. The team wants to explore ways to help assemble those isolated parcels to make a greater impact.

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WHAT IS *MAKING CONNECTIONS*?

Making Connections is the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s initiative to improve outcomes for some of the nation’s most vulnerable children and families. The initiative is conducted through deep and durable partnerships with selected cities and neighborhoods across the United States (for more information, visit www.aecf.org/mc). Several core ideas underlie *Making Connections*:

- *Making Connections* is based on the recognition that the greatest number of American children who suffer from “rotten outcomes” live in city neighborhoods that are in many ways cut off—disconnected—from the mainstream opportunities of American life. Thus, *Making Connections* is “place-based”—it focuses on specific neighborhoods in specific cities.
- *Making Connections* has a simple theory: that children do better when they grow up in strong families, and families do better when they live in supportive neighborhoods. Thus, *Making Connections* strategies are aimed at helping families obtain what they need to be strong, and helping neighborhoods gain the resources they need in order to support families well.
- *Making Connections* focuses on three major types of “connections” that help families grow stronger and achieve what they want for their children. The first of these is helping families connect to **economic opportunities** and to jobs that provide income, assets, and an economic future. Research and experience suggest that this type of connection is unlikely without two others: strong connections to the **social networks** of kin, neighborhood groups, and other informal ties that sustain families when times get tough, and to high-quality, **effective services and supports** that help families reach their goals.

Making Connections focuses on improving results for children and families in tough neighborhoods. Core results that *Making Connections* communities are mobilizing around include:

- Families have increased earnings and income;
- Families have increased levels of assets;
- Families, youth, and neighborhoods increase their participation in civic life;
- Families and neighborhoods have strong informal supports and networks;
- Families have access to quality services and supports; and
- Children are healthy and ready to succeed in school.

A key task in ensuring the success of *Making Connections* is making available the learning and technical assistance that the participating sites need to move forward with their work. One of the ways that the Foundation provides this kind of support is by making peer matches available.

WHAT ARE PEER MATCHES?

Since 1995, as part of a broader effort to rely more intentionally on the experience of people working in the field, the Center for the Study of Social Policy began working with several partners and funders to develop and offer a rather intensive form of peer technical assistance known as peer matches. Peer matches are structured opportunities for teams of people from two or more jurisdictions who are working on a similar issue to exchange experiences and practical knowledge toward resolving a particular challenge that has been identified in advance.

The rationale behind peer matches is straightforward. Often, the people best able to provide hands-on help are the “doers” themselves—people from states and communities who have successfully addressed a problem or created an effective new policy or strategy. These are the people who have an acute sense of what has and hasn’t worked, and why and why not. They have developed good tools and strategies they can share. And they are usually eager to help others because of a strong sense of shared mission. But while good peer matches are informal, they are never

casual, using a carefully designed process and structure to focus the common interests, roles, and goodwill that exist between peers on producing meaningful change for a community.

Peer matches are a resource and time intensive strategy. Careful consideration of when, where, and how to use this approach is therefore always warranted. Experience has shown that careful preparation and execution of the matches are critical factors for their success. This approach tends to work best when the following conditions are in place:

- A specific problem or issue has been identified, and the people looking for help are at a key decision point with respect to the design or implementation of a state or community strategy;
- Stakeholders are invested in and have a high degree of ownership in solving a problem;
- The timing is right—e.g., a decision or action that will affect the community’s family strengthening agenda is going to be taken and/or someone needs to be convinced to take action; and
- A reasonably small number of people have the authority and ability to act on what they learn in the match.

To date, the Center has brokered over 60 peer matches on topics ranging from creating resident-led community development corporations and governance structures, to establishing multilingual homeownership assistance centers, to building integrated services models. As illustrated in the case summaries that are part of this series, peer matches help spread good policies and practice, build relationships among different stakeholders who may not always have a chance to work together, and enable people to put changes in place that improve results for children, families, and neighborhoods.



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