COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community Engagement Roundtable
Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland

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What is Community Engagement?

- Builds social capital and cultivates civic mindedness
- Founded on long term relationships and community building
- Develops a cohesive and shared vision for the community
- Produces long term community development goals
Why Community Engagement is Important

“A civic community has an abundance of social capital; social capital represents the social networks and institutions, relationships, and norms that shape the quality and quantity of community interactions. Communities with greater civic participation and social capital have been shown to be healthier and more economically vibrant.”

– Jason Reece, Kirwan Institute

“…life is easier in a community blessed with a substantial stock of social capital. In the first place, networks of civic engagement foster…social trust. Such networks facilitate coordination and communication…and thus allow dilemmas of collective action to be resolved…At the same time, networks of civic engagement embody past success at collaboration, which can serve as a cultural template for future collaboration. Finally, dense networks of interaction probably broaden the participants’ sense of self, developing the "I" into the "we…“

– Robert Putnam, Bowling Alone

What Happened to Community Engagement?

- Only 26.8% of people volunteered in 2009 in the U.S.
- Voter turnout has dropped roughly 25% since the 19th century.
Diversity and Social Capital

the more ethnically diverse a community is:

- Institutions tend towards privatization…
- Private society draws on public resources…
- Social capital decreases

“In colloquial language, people living in ethnically diverse settings appear to ‘hunker down’—that is, to pull in like a turtle.” —Robert Putnam
Private Life is Replacing Public Life

the diminishing of public life
Challenges to Community Engagement in Disadvantaged Communities

- Decades of disinvestment
- Community fragmentation and segregation
- Poverty
- Family instability
- Crime
- Under-achieving schools
People learn how to define and identify “people like them” as they develop biases

- “In-Groups”, “Out-Groups”
- Perceived likeability and competency of groups
- These assumptions and behaviors are rooted in our values and morals, and play out in our policies and economic structures.

- Tax structures have become increasingly local, resulting in people only paying taxes on behalf of those in “in-groups”
Social Cognition: Warmth and Competence

- **Pity**: women, elderly, disabled
- **Esteemed**: Your own group, who you identify with
- **Despised**: African Americans, Undocumented immigrants
- **Envied**: Competent, but don’t really like them: Asians

Tim Wise

http://www.ustream.tv/recorded/8601383
Awareness Test

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yrqrkihlw-s
Implicit Bias

- Only **2%** of emotional cognition is available to us consciously
- Racial bias tends to reside in the unconscious network
- Messages can be **framed** to speak to our unconscious
“Day 44: still stranded, with nothing but flat empty water as far as the eye can see”

Source: www.xkcd.com
I do not believe that we can transform our social structures, including our highly racialized spaces, without transforming the self. Nor do I think that we can transform our view of self without transforming the social systems of domination and exclusion that we have created. I am calling not for a personal and interior project, but rather for an expansive and imaginative political process... This new vision of self – so needed in our structures and institutions – is one of interconnectedness, of interbeing. We must answer not only the question, “Am I my brother’s keeper and my sister’s keeper,” but also, “Are they indeed my brothers and my sisters?”
The Five Faces of Oppression

- Threats to civic life and an engaged public
  - Exploitation
  - Marginalization
  - Powerlessness
  - Cultural Imperialism
  - Violence
Community Engagement in Disadvantaged Communities

Robust and long-term engagement in disadvantaged communities is vital to addressing the issues of inequity. Therefore, the decline in community engagement is magnified in disadvantaged communities. The void of social capital makes community engagement an even more difficult challenge for low-income communities, which are vulnerable, marginalized or isolated from opportunity.

How can we change this?
“Building a civic-minded community takes time. It requires that people who have had little history of engagement in local affairs be given the opportunity to take part in local leadership opportunities. It means finding a mechanism that allows the ideas and issues weighing on the minds of all segments of the community to be heard and discussed. Moreover, it demands that local government, local people and local organizations work as equal partners in addressing existing opportunities and challenges. It is this sharing of leadership responsibility that will help generate a network of trust among these entities.”

—Lionel Beaulieu, Creating Vibrant Communities & Economies in Rural America
We must adjust our lens of analysis to reflect these changing conditions,

And move towards a systems approach of problem solving and identifying solutions.
INTRODUCING SYSTEMS THINKING

- Discussions about community are enhanced by thinking about opportunity – both structurally and socially.

- We need to think about the ways in which the institutions that mediate opportunity are arranged – systems thinking.
  - The order of the structures
  - The timing of the interaction between them
  - The relationships that exist between them
Historic isolation is perpetuated through our institutions...

System Interactions

Source: Barbara Reskin. http://faculty.uwashington.edu/reskin/
Before community engagement can flourish, the boundaries of community must be defined.

Building a region of opportunity is essential in order for all members of a community to be engaged.

Creating linkages between people and places is part of cultivating engagement.
Civic engagement springs from strong opportunity structures:

- Educational
- Employment
- Healthcare
- Housing
- Transportation

Healthy systems of opportunity allow and encourage community members to begin investing in the “us”
Opportunity systems consist of many components:
- Education
- Economics & Mobility
- Housing & Neighborhoods
Linked Fate

- A large body of research indicates that inequities inhibit the health of the entire metropolitan region.
- All residents and communities within metropolitan areas share a linked fate, and problems affecting one community will eventually prove detrimental to the entire region.
- This interrelationship requires collective solutions.
Building Community Engagement in Disadvantaged Communities: Success Stories

- Harlem Children’s Zone
  - “a unique, holistic approach to rebuilding a community so that its children can stay on track through college and go on to the job market.” - The Harlem Children’s Zone Project.
  - Cradle-to-college pipeline
  - Sustainable, long term results
  - The successes of HCZ and similar programs offer hope that a structurally-focused, neighborhood-based system of education and social services that also attends to individual and behavioral factors may in fact be the best approach to reducing disparities.
Brotherhood/Sister SOL

- Our programs and activities - mentoring, leadership development, international study, academic tutoring, internships, community service, job training, writing collective, youth organizing - provide these young people with the knowledge and skills necessary to understand and overcome the negative pressures of poverty, racism, drugs, and violence.” – Brotherhood/Sister SOL

- Comprehensive, long term
- Supports youth from age 8 to 22
- As of July 2008, 94% of their alumni graduated from high school or obtained a GED, and 85% were accepted into college.
Building Community Engagement in Disadvantaged Communities

- Long-term, holistic approach
- Cradle-to-College
- Build neighborhood support systems
- No one-size-fits-all answer – What are your neighborhood’s assets? What unique challenges does each community face?
Strategies for Community Engagement

- Start by addressing major issues of community concern
- Build trust by sharing responsibility and decision making
- Set goals, design a plan, and begin implementation
Laying the Groundwork for Change

- We must restore the balance between public and private life- and understand the societal and individual consequences of imbalance.
- We must understand our linked fates.
- Our communities need to be defined by “we”, instead of “us – them”.
- We must confront the challenges that diversity brings to the public forum in order to reap the benefits of a diverse society.
- Opportunity must be accessible and available region-wide.
Thank you!
For questions, comments or for more information: www.kirwaninstitute.org