USING NEIGHBORHOOD SURVEY DATA TO UNDERSTAND NEIGHBORHOODS AND IMPROVE PRACTICE IN COMPREHENSIVE PLACE-BASED CHANGE EFFORTS
USING NEIGHBORHOOD SURVEY DATA TO UNDERSTAND NEIGHBORHOODS AND IMPROVE PRACTICE IN COMPREHENSIVE PLACE-BASED CHANGE EFFORTS

MAY 2012
INTRODUCTION

Comprehensive community initiatives (CCIs) arose in the 1990s as an ambitious strategy to address the needs of residents of poor communities. They aim to catalyze the transformation of distressed neighborhoods by expanding and connecting the work of community-based organizations, concentrating resources in particular places, and applying “best practice” approaches from social, economic, physical, and civic development. \(^1\) In contrast to place-based initiatives that focus on one intervention at a time, CCIs and related community change efforts adopt a comprehensive approach to neighborhood change and work according to community building principles that value resident engagement and community capacity building.

Over the past twenty years, comprehensive community change efforts have become more sophisticated about using data to improve the design, management, and assessment of their work. At the same time, researchers have developed rich data bases and a more sophisticated understanding of poor neighborhoods and their effects on residents by tracking what happens to them over a period of years. Nevertheless, researchers who study neighborhoods and practitioners who design and manage place-based programs often work in isolation from each other. For example, mounting evidence suggests that household mobility and population turnover must be taken into account in place-based efforts to improve neighborhood conditions and outcomes and opportunities for families and children. But the community change field, for the most part, continues to rely primarily on static neighborhood level “snapshot” data that fail to address these dynamic dimensions of neighborhood life. Similarly, longitudinal data show how individuals change over time, but do not necessarily link to community conditions.

This paper explores some of the ways neighborhood-based work could be enhanced if managers and evaluators had access to data that can simultaneously track individuals and families, document community conditions and trends, and support analysis of their interaction. There are several well-known research projects in the U.S. that collect data of this type and make it publicly available. The Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods (PHDCN), the Los Angeles Family and Neighborhood Survey (LAFANS), and the Making Connections Cross-Site Survey have collected both cross-sectional and longitudinal survey data on a variety of neighborhoods, and supplement those data with additional information about neighborhood institutions. In addition, research on the Jobs-Plus Community

\(^1\) For a review of community change efforts’ goals, outcomes, and implementation challenges over the past 20 years, see Kubisch et al., 2010.
The Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change

Revitalization Initiative for Public Housing Families combined data from two waves of a cross-sectional neighborhood survey with longitudinal administrative data on residents in the target public housing developments to evaluate the effects of a large-scale community-based employment initiative.

These neighborhood surveys provide rich data bases that can be mined for multiple purposes. Two – PHDCN and LAFANS – were specifically designed to address the data limitations identified by researchers who sought to study the role of neighborhood context on the development of children. Two – Making Connections and Jobs-Plus – were designed to evaluate the effectiveness of a place-based change initiative in a number of poor, inner-city neighborhoods across the country.

Despite their different origins and purposes, these projects address many of the same themes and try to answer similar questions that are relevant for place-based change efforts. As a starting point for discussion, this paper examines what these four research projects are learning about neighborhoods, neighborhood change, and the critical interplay between neighborhoods, families, and individual well-being. More detailed information about the content and scope of each of these projects is provided in Attachment A.

Part One of this paper examines what PHDCN, Making Connections, LAFANS, and Jobs-Plus are contributing to a deeper understanding of some neighborhood processes that are particularly critical to neighborhood change efforts. The focus is on four topics: resident mobility and turnover; the dimensions and function of social capital and social organization; neighborhood trajectories and typologies; and the connections and pathways that explain how neighborhood context and processes affect individual development. Part Two presents some examples to illustrate how this information might help practitioners be more effective in designing, implementing, and evaluating community change efforts.

Part Three offers some concluding thoughts about how these neighborhood surveys are being used, poses questions for discussion, and suggests future directions to help the field. This final section also considers two other data sets that differ in scope but offer insights into questions of interest in community change work. The Mobile Youth Survey, developed to study risky behavior in adolescents, provides longitudinal data on multiple cohorts of youths growing up in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty in Mobile, Alabama. The project on Welfare, Children, and Families: A Three City Study was designed to study the effect of welfare reform on low-income children in low-income neighborhoods in Boston, Chicago, and San Antonio. Details on the design and components of these data sets are also provided in Appendix A.

This paper was prepared as background material for a meeting on Developing and Using Data and Evidence to Improve Place-Based Work, convened in September 2011 by the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change with support from the Annie E. Casey
The paper is not meant to be exhaustive review of all research or data bases that contribute to an understanding of neighborhoods and neighborhood processes. Nor is it intended to be a comprehensive review of all the studies that have been produced by the selected research projects. Rather, it is intended to provide readers with background information and illustrative examples to stimulate reflection and discussion about developing and using more policy-relevant and practice-relevant data in placed-based work. The paper has benefitted from insightful comments and suggestions from Anne Kubisch, Cindy Guy, Tom Kingsley, and Claudia Coulton, who all read a previous draft.

2 A summary of the meeting, which was held September 8-9, 2011, can be found on the website of the Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change at www.aspenroundtable.org.

3 Nor does it include a review of research studies that try to understand neighborhood effects by studying individuals who moved out of their neighborhoods. See Footnote 5 below.
PART ONE:
Understanding Neighborhoods and Neighborhood Processes

This section discusses what cross-sectional, longitudinal neighborhood surveys are contributing to an understanding of neighborhood processes, neighborhood-level social organization, neighborhood trajectories and typologies, and how neighborhood context affects individual development.

A. Understanding mobility and the role it plays in neighborhood change

Studies using data from successive waves of neighborhood surveys document high rates of resident turnover in poor neighborhoods. Across the ten Making Connections sites, roughly half the families with children moved within the three years between Wave 1 and Wave 2, although not all these moves were outside the neighborhood (Colton, Theodos, and Turner, 2009). Jobs-Plus data show that 31 percent of the residents moved out of their public housing developments within two years, and 42 percent did so within three years (Bloom, Riccio, and Verma, 2005). In Chicago, PHDCN data showed that over half the African-American children changed neighborhoods in the seven-year period between Wave 1 and Wave 3 (Sampson, Sharkey, and Raudenbusch, 2008). Mobility rates can vary considerably across poor neighborhoods within the same city, however. In the New Communities Program, for example, the proportion of residents who had lived in the same house for the previous five years ranged from a low of 36 percent in one neighborhood to a high of 87 percent in another (MDRC, n.d.).

High rates of mobility mean that simply looking at gross changes in neighborhood-level indicators over two points in time provides, at best, an incomplete, and at worst, a misleading, picture of what is happening in a neighborhood. Data from longitudinal surveys that track the rate of movement in and out of the neighborhood and the characteristics of who moves in, who moves out, and who stays, are important to understanding what is driving neighborhood-level change. In the Making Connections neighborhoods, for example, data from the Cross-Site Survey made it possible to determine that changes in neighborhood-level poverty rates between Waves 1 and 2 were due to turnover in the neighborhood population, not to improved outcomes among the population that remained in the neighborhood. The Making Connections neighborhoods that showed improvements in poverty outcomes between Waves 1 and 2 did so for one of two reasons: either the new residents who moved into the neighborhood were better off than those who stayed or left, or a large number of quite poor residents left the neighborhood (as in Louisville where a large public housing development was demolished). The longitudinal survey data showed little improvement in the outcomes
of the individuals who remained in the neighborhoods (Coulton, Theodos, and Turner, 2009). Looking only at neighborhood level data at two points in time (without survey information) would not have captured this dynamic. Conversely, neighborhoods that show little change in neighborhood-level indicators over time may nevertheless be experiencing substantial turnover in the residential population.

The evaluation of the Jobs-Plus Community Revitalization Initiative for Public Housing Families similarly documents the critical role that neighborhood turnover plays in producing neighborhood-level changes. Longitudinal data on the Jobs-Plus research sample, constructed from administrative records, showed that the strong individual-level earnings impacts in Jobs-Plus did not translate into equally strong development-level effects in sites where resident turnover was high.

Cross-sectional and longitudinal surveys are able to identify and characterize who is moving or staying in a neighborhood between two points in time. This kind of information cannot be constructed from census data alone. (An important component of the PHDCN, LAFANS, and Making Connections surveys is that they continue to study those who move out of the neighborhood as well as those who move in.) Combining information about neighborhood conditions with information about the families living in neighborhoods, and their movement in and out of the neighborhood, yields insights that can be used to develop services and interventions that are more attuned to the needs of individuals and households living in poor neighborhoods.

Using clustering techniques and data from the Making Connections Cross-Site Survey, for example, analysts were able to identify three types of stayers, three types of newcomers, and three types of movers, based on income, type of housing, attitudes about the neighborhood, and patterns of engagement in the neighborhood. A substantial proportion (30 percent) of movers represent what the researchers term “up and out movers” – families who moved because their circumstances improved and they were able to move to what they saw as a better neighborhood. Another group (46 percent), described as families who were “churning,” moved not out of choice, but out of necessity or hardship (Coulton, Theodos, and Turner, 2009).

Researchers are using several survey projects to provide a more refined understanding of the causes and effects of mobility among the residents of poor neighborhoods. The Annie E. Casey Foundation is doing additional work with the Making Connections Cross-Site Survey to explore the implications of moving within the neighborhood versus moving outside the neighborhood, and to understand the role that household breakups play in mobility (Coulton, Theodos, and Turner, 2009; Guy, 2010). Researchers also plan to use the Making Connections survey to quantify and analyze disruption of family units over the three-wave follow-up period and explore the relationship between family stability and neighborhood characteristics (Guy, 2010).
B. Understanding neighborhood-level social capital and social organization

The ability to study both poor neighborhoods and non-poor neighborhoods in a city or county, as PHDCN and LAFANS do, offers additional insights into neighborhood processes and characteristics. Using PHDCN data, researchers have analyzed the functions and characteristics of neighborhood-level social capital. An early finding is the critical role collective efficacy plays in limiting the level of crime and violence in a neighborhood (Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls, 1997; Morenoff, Sampson, and Raudenbush, 2001). More recent studies, discussed below, suggest that there are also links between collective efficacy and health outcomes.

Researchers have also used PHDCN data to analyze different types of resident engagement in Chicago neighborhoods. They found that both instrumental participation (participation in activities or organizations explicitly dedicated to maintaining or improving conditions within a community) and expressive participation (where the primary purpose is to build social networks and promote a sense of community among participants) are generally higher in more disadvantaged neighborhoods. However, after a certain threshold, greater disadvantage is associated with diminished forms of participation. Rates of instrumental participation are higher in neighborhoods where residents perceive more disorder, while rates of expressive participation are higher in more stable neighborhoods. Residents of neighborhoods characterized by high concentrations of Hispanics and immigrants have social networks and are actively involved in expressive organizations, but are less likely to participate in instrumental organizations (Swaroop and Morenoff, 2006).

Other PHDCN work has found that residents and community leaders show different patterns of engagement and social capital. One PHDCN study identifies four distinct dimensions of social capital (collective efficacy, local networks, organizational involvement, and conduct norms) at the resident level and two dimensions of social capital (positional contacts and organizational involvement) at the leadership level (Sampson and Graif, 2009a). The network structure of community leadership also varies: while most residents are less engaged in disadvantaged neighborhoods, community leaders are more engaged in seeking resources, often from afar. This research suggests that migration flows and population turnover may not be as harmful to community cohesion and social control as is often thought (Sampson and Graif, 2009a).

Both the Sampson and Graif research and the Swaroop and Morenoff studies emphasize that the point-in-time snapshot data they use provide only a partial picture. Sampson and Graif (2009a) point out that analysis of longitudinal data is needed to examine the effectiveness of community leaders’ activism over time. Swaroop and Morenoff (2006) note that an analysis of longitudinal data that can link individuals’ perceptions of neighborhood conditions to their subsequent participation in community activities is needed to understand the connection between disadvantaged neighborhood contexts and community participation.
address this issue, Making Connections researchers are using successive waves of the cross-site survey to explore the connection between residential mobility and community participation as well as the connection between economic context and neighborhood satisfaction and participation (Theodos, Coulton, and Grosz, 2010; Coulton, Turner, and Theodos, 2010).

Some PHDCN studies are beginning to make use of longitudinal data to understand social organization in Chicago neighborhoods. For example, researchers used two waves of the PHDCN panel study of positional leaders in Chicago neighborhoods and the community survey to study trust at the network and organizational level (Sampson and Graif, 2009b). They found that long term increases in poverty in Chicago neighborhoods were linked to increasing levels of residents’ mistrust of institutions (such as law enforcement), and neighborhood leaders’ mistrust of residents. Over time, poverty mattered more than residential stability or racial diversity in predicting levels of residents’ trust in leaders and overall trust. The association between structural networks and working trust among leaders offers some hope that cohesive networks of community leaders could work effectively for neighborhood improvements over time, the authors conclude.

C. Understanding neighborhood trajectories and typologies

Several neighborhood survey projects are using survey data to create typologies of neighborhoods, based on how they function for large proportions of residents. Researchers have used PHDCN data on neighborhood social capital and neighborhood characteristics (concentrated disadvantage, residential stability, and racial/ethnic diversity) to cluster Chicago neighborhoods into four distinct typologies that describe how social capital is manifested and used in the communities (Sampson and Graif, 2009b). The authors conclude that neither community disadvantage nor racial/ethnic diversity are necessarily impediments to developing network ties or conduct norms, both of which are positive predictors of community well-being.

Making Connections provides an example of how a longitudinal perspective can add richness and policy relevance to efforts to develop neighborhood typologies. Making Con-

---

4 Neighborhoods in one cluster are characterized by Institutional Alienation; neighborhoods in the second cluster primarily affect Conduct Norms; another set exhibits Cosmopolitan Efficacy; and neighborhoods in a fourth cluster function as Urban Villages. Neighborhoods in the Institutional Alienation Cluster rank lowest on collective efficacy and resident involvement in organizations. Local leaders, however, show the highest levels of active involvement, organizational involvement, and positional contacts. These neighborhoods have the highest levels of disadvantage, and the least amount of diversity. Neighborhoods in the Conduct Norms Cluster show high agreement around conduct norms for youth, but medium to low levels on other dimensions of resident-based social capital as well as on leadership contacts and involvement. The neighborhoods have medium scores on disadvantage and residential stability, and the highest levels of language diversity, immigrant diversity, and percentage foreign born. Neighborhoods in the Cosmopolitan Efficacy cluster score high on collective efficacy, low on local networks, and highest on positional contacts among local leaders. They exhibit strong shared expectations combined with efficient organizational and leadership contacts. Neighborhoods in this cluster score low on disadvantage and residential stability, and higher on racial diversity. Communities in the Urban Village Cluster have the highest levels of social capital on all dimensions except norms, where they are second highest. Local leaders score the lowest on positional contacts and in the middle for involvement in religious or school organizations. This suggests they do not need to be very active to maintain community well-being. These neighborhoods are characterized by high stability, very low disadvantage, and low to medium diversity.
The Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change

connections researchers used survey data from the ten sites to develop neighborhood cluster classifications that describe neighborhoods in terms of how large proportions of residents relate to the neighborhood and how the neighborhood functions for those residents. They identified five types of neighborhoods: incubators, launch pads, neighborhoods of choice, comfort zones, or isolating neighborhoods (Coulton, Theodos, and Turner, 2009). These descriptions go beyond what can be seen in snapshots of neighborhoods at particular points in time; they provide moving pictures that capture changes over time and dynamic trajectories, and have implications for the kinds of services that might be particularly useful or needed in particular neighborhoods.

D. Understanding neighborhood context and individual development

Cross-sectional and longitudinal neighborhood data help to illuminate how neighborhood context and neighborhood processes affect individual development. They do this in two ways: by building evidence that demonstrates that such effects exist, and by helping to explain the connections and pathways by which neighborhood context affects individual development. Questions about neighborhood effects have long vexed researchers and scholars because it is difficult to distinguish the effect of growing up in a neighborhood of concentrated poverty from the effect of growing up in a poor family (Furstenburg and Hughes, 1997).

Longitudinal data are critical to this effort because correlational studies based on data from a single point in time cannot determine the causal direction of influence. Both PHDCN and LAFANS were designed to provide data that would allow researchers to answer questions about neighborhood effects by collecting both cross-sectional and longitudinal data; in addition, their neighborhood-cluster design allows for multi-level analysis and analysis of within- and between-neighborhood components (Sastry et al., 2005; Xue et al., 2005; Fauth and Brooks-Gunn, 2008). PHDCN’s inclusion of a community survey, independent of information derived from the individuals surveyed in the longitudinal cohort, makes this a particularly rich data set for statistical explorations of neighborhood effects. Research on between-neighborhood effects is expected to grow “exponentially” in the next few years as data from LAFANS and PHDCN are increasingly accessed from public archives (Fauth and Brooks-Gunn, 2008). Because the question driving this review is how to improve the design of community change interventions, we do not review the neighborhood effects research that is based on studies of what happens to individuals who move to other neighborhoods.

The growing literature on neighborhood effects includes studies that employ other research designs and methodologies. Relocation experiments like Moving to Opportunity, the Gautreaux Program and the Yonkers Family and Community Program, and a “natural experiment” in Denver public housing (Cutsinger, Galster, and Santiago, 2010) focus on what happens to individuals and families who move out of a neighborhood of poverty and into a more advantaged neighborhoods. There is considerable debate about the “best” methods to learn about neighborhood effects (Fauth and Brooks-Gunn, 2008; Sampson, 2008). We do not discuss findings from the mobility and relocation research because they do not address our topic of interest—community change and neighborhood processes; instead, they provide information about how individuals and families fare when they change neighborhoods. Similarly, we do not report on the PHDCN studies that examine neighborhood effects by tracing the trajectories of children and adolescents who moved, even though they provide evidence that living in a neighborhood of concentrated poverty negatively affects children’s cognitive development (Sampson, Sharkey, and Raudenbush, 2008), and help to explain how mobility patterns and decisions reproduce concentrated racial inequality over time (Sampson and Sharkey, 2008).

5 The growing literature on neighborhood effects includes studies that employ other research designs and methodologies. Relocation experiments like Moving to Opportunity, the Gautreaux Program and the Yonkers Family and Community Program, and a “natural experiment” in Denver public housing (Cutsinger, Galster, and Santiago, 2010) focus on what happens to individuals and families who move out of a neighborhood of poverty and into a more advantaged neighborhoods. There is considerable debate about the “best” methods to learn about neighborhood effects (Fauth and Brooks-Gunn, 2008; Sampson, 2008). We do not discuss findings from the mobility and relocation research because they do not address our topic of interest—community change and neighborhood processes; instead, they provide information about how individuals and families fare when they change neighborhoods. Similarly, we do not report on the PHDCN studies that examine neighborhood effects by tracing the trajectories of children and adolescents who moved, even though they provide evidence that living in a neighborhood of concentrated poverty negatively affects children’s cognitive development (Sampson, Sharkey, and Raudenbush, 2008), and help to explain how mobility patterns and decisions reproduce concentrated racial inequality over time (Sampson and Sharkey, 2008).
A study that used two waves of the PHDCN longitudinal data on children, together with
data from the PHDCN community survey and census data, found that children aged 5 to 11
who lived in neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage were more likely to have men-
tal health problems relating to depression, anxiety and somatic problems, and more severe
mental health problems, than children in neighborhoods with higher socioeconomic status
(Xue et al., 2005). Both collective efficacy and resident engagement in neighborhood organi-
izations were associated with better mental health outcomes for children. The researchers
hypothesize that because collective efficacy is associated with reduced crime and disorder,
it lessens children’s exposure to violence, which is linked to mental health problems like
depression and anxiety. In addition, higher levels of adult participation in neighborhood
organizations may be an indication that services are available in a neighborhood.

Several studies used the PHDCN community survey in combination with other data sets and
found that collective efficacy plays a role in physical health outcomes. Cohen, Farley, and
Mason (2003) found that collective efficacy appeared to mediate the effects of concentrated
disadvantage on premature mortality and mortality from cardiovascular disease and murder.
Cagney and Browning (2004) found that collective efficacy was protective against asthma/
breathing problems: the higher the level of collective efficacy, the lower the prevalence of
asthma/breathing problems in the neighborhood. The authors hypothesize that in neighbor-
hoods with lower collective efficacy, individuals may be out less, and therefore more exposed
to indoor allergens; or they may have fewer opportunities to be informed about risky behav-
iors or protective factors.

LAFANS data are also being used to explore the interaction between neighborhood condi-
tions and individual development. One early study that used the first wave of LAFANS
survey data found little indication of neighborhood effects on health (Sastry and Pebley,
2003). Another, which also used the first wave of LAFANS survey data, found that neigh-
borhood cohesion and neighborhood satisfaction were related to higher self-rated health in
very poor neighborhoods. In poor neighborhoods, safety was linked to higher levels of self-
rated health (Shin, Clark, and Maas, 2006). Other researchers who are using LAFANS data to
study children’s development note the “importance of considering children’s environments
as cumulative and variable, rather than as isolated and unchanging” and stress the need for
longer-term longitudinal data to determine the effects of neighborhood change versus mov-
 ing on children’s development (Jackson and Mare, 2004).

Another study used data from the first LAFANS survey wave to study neighborhood effects
on reading readiness. It found some early indication that young children in poor neighbor-
hoods were more likely to have both sad/anxious behavior and aggressive behavior, behav-
iors that are negatively associated with school readiness. This suggests that neighborhood
poverty remains an important factor over and above family income in early literacy, but
researchers note that data from a later survey wave (completed in late 2008) are needed to
answer the question more definitively. Longitudinal data will allow researchers to explore,
for example, whether parenting style that is less warm and more disciplining causes bad behavior or whether it is a response to bad behavior. That is the kind of question that cannot be addressed by point-in-time data which can only establish that there is a correlation between parenting style and child behavior (Lara-Cinismo et al., 2004).
PART TWO:
Implications for Designing Interventions and Improving Service Provision

The findings described in Part One have important implications for policy and practice in place-based work. This section discusses how these findings could be used to develop better service models and more effective place-based interventions, drawing on examples from the research studies and related materials.

*Information about mobility patterns – who moves in or out of a neighborhood and who stays and why – has important applications for real-world initiatives to improve the quality and effectiveness of their programs.* For example, the high proportion of “churners” across the Making Connections neighborhoods led analysts to suggest that neighborhood initiatives should include activities and programs to help stabilize living arrangements and reduce unwanted moves (Coulton, Theodos, and Turner, 2009). The Jobs-Plus survey found that movers typically had strong concerns about safety and often had been victims of crimes in the developments/neighborhoods from which they moved. This prompted researchers to suggest that place-based interventions might enhance their effectiveness if they addressed issues of public safety (Verma, 2003). Finally, information about population turnover in neighborhoods can help initiatives remain responsive and adaptive. For example, Making Connections practitioners who had access to data on the changing ethnic or racial makeup of a neighborhood years before such data became available from the decennial census were able to adjust their programs and activities to accommodate the needs of rapidly shifting populations in two communities in the initiative (Guy, 2009).

*Information about how neighborhood residents, and specific subsets of neighborhood residents, value, utilize, and benefit from resources or services can help practitioners and policymakers better address the needs of residents of poor neighborhoods.* The information gathered from surveys sometimes runs counter to perceived wisdom or “common knowledge” and can suggest better uses of neighborhood or initiative resources. Understanding the services that residents value and why can also help fashion interventions that meet specific needs. For example, Making Connections survey data indicated that residents’ problems in accessing medical care stemmed from regulatory barriers that made it difficult to use health insurance, rather than just a lack of healthcare insurance (Guy, 2009). The Making Connections survey also revealed that residents use check-cashing establishments in their neighborhoods instead of banks because they are more convenient, don’t set high minimum balance requirements, and don’t charge punitive fees. Counter-intuitive results such as these can lead program designers to re-think the nature of the problems they are addressing. Neighborhood surveys
can also elicit information from people who might otherwise be overlooked, people who are less engaged or connected. For example, the LAFANS survey was able to show that undocumented immigrants not only have more problems in acquiring health insurance, but are also more likely than citizens to lose it (Prentice, Pebley, and Shastry, 2005).

Emerging evidence that links collective efficacy to better mental and physical health outcomes suggests that interventions for at-risk children should focus on neighborhood level conditions as well as individual and family risk factors. These studies highlight the importance of community-building approaches in particular. “From a policy perspective, promoting collective action and community building among residents and investing in community resources may provide optimal communities in which to foster child mental health…. Building community social organizations should be considered within the larger rubric of child health policy,” PHDCN researchers note (Xue et al., 2005). At the same time, the strong connection between maternal depression and employment and children’s mental health led researchers to suggest the importance of interventions that treat depression and support meaningful employment for mothers.

A more sophisticated understanding of neighborhood typologies and trajectories has equally important implications for refining services and intervention strategies. The PHDCN data on engagement patterns and the dimensions of social capital, as well as the Making Connections work on neighborhood typologies and trajectories, suggest that both community engagement strategies and programmatic interventions need to be tailored to different types of neighborhoods. For example, the Making Connections researchers point out that San Antonio functions as a comfort zone for much of its Hispanic population, while larger structural factors limit the residents’ economic advancement. They conclude that, in this location, community-building efforts may need to be combined with larger policy-change strategies that address structural barriers. In Des Moines, which functions well as a launch pad for many residents and as an incubator for others, more services and community-building efforts are needed to meet the needs of low-income immigrants. Making Connections researchers also emphasize the importance of focusing on the needs of residents who are moving fairly quickly through a neighborhood as well as those who remain in it for the long-term (Coulton, Theodos, and Turner, 2009). As these examples illustrate, practitioners need to pay attention to the mix and proportion of different types of residents in a neighborhood and understand how the population is changing over time.

Deeper knowledge about residents’ concepts of their neighborhoods and connections to networks and resources in other neighborhoods suggests that neighborhood boundaries should be treated as more porous and flexible than they often are. Several projects have combined survey data with other field collection activities and used multi-method approaches to understand patterns of service usage, resident connections across neighborhoods, and residents’ sense of
neighborhood boundaries. These efforts speak both to the value of using mixed methods to develop an understanding of resident behaviors and neighborhood resource flows and to the fluid nature of neighborhood boundaries. Researchers in LAFANS and Making Connections combined survey data with neighborhood mapping efforts to explore residents’ connections, interactions, and use of resources in other neighborhoods. These exercises provide hard evidence that the neighborhood boundaries drawn by initiatives or used to define neighborhoods in a variety of place-based studies or data collection efforts are often arbitrary. In real life, residents interact with and use resources in other neighborhoods, and often belong to social networks that extend into other neighborhoods (Sastry, Pebley, and Zonta, 2002; Coulton, Chan, and Mikelbank, 2010). In addition, many residents continue to need services, even if they move away. An implication for practice is that place-based interventions should continue to make services available to individuals and families that move away, and work to sustain connections between those who move out of the neighborhood and those who stay (Coulton, Theodos, and Turner, 2009).

Understanding mobility patterns and neighborhood trajectories can also help to set more realistic expectations about neighborhood goals and successes, and the potential scale of neighborhood interventions. As the Making Connections researchers point out, neighborhoods serve a variety of important functions for their residents. Not all place-based initiatives will be able to transform their neighborhoods into incubators for all their residents; neighborhoods can serve an important need when they provide a launch pad for some residents. Expectations about what is possible to accomplish in place-based work need to be tempered by a realistic understanding of the current neighborhood trajectory. Neighborhood surveys can contribute to more realistic expectations about the scale of place-based change. For example, the Jobs-Plus evidence shows that strong program effects in a well-implemented saturation program can be diluted at the neighborhood level if there are high move-out rates. In addition, the two waves of the cross-sectional community survey used in the Jobs-Plus evaluation suggest that, even in sites where Jobs Plus produced strong individual-level effects, there were no spillover impacts on other neighborhood conditions (Bloom, Riccio, and Verma, 2005). These findings raise questions about both the scale of change that a service intervention would need to reach in order to “move the needle” on population-level outcomes and whether moving that needle is the appropriate definition of success.
Several additional issues are worth noting about the current body of cross-sectional and longitudinal neighborhood surveys. First, despite differences in their origins and initial purposes, there is considerable similarity across the research projects in how the surveys are being used and the types of questions they address. Almost all the projects have produced studies that focus on resident mobility, the reasons for it, and its effects on individuals, households, and neighborhoods. Efforts to understand parenting and adolescent and child development within a neighborhood context are common to both PHDCN and LAFANS. The Making Connections Cross-Site Survey, which was initially designed as an evaluation tool, is being used to understand neighborhood processes and typologies in ways that are similar to how PHDCN is being used.

Second, these data sets have applications for, and are being used by, an increasingly broad set of disciplines, including criminal justice, psychology, education, employment and health. Over time, the focus and content of the data collected have expanded and broadened. PHDCN, for example, added a study on childcare and its impact on early childhood development, while LAFANS added a major health component in the second wave of the survey. The potential usefulness should expand even further as more of the data enter the public domain, and researchers use them to study an even broader range of topics, or to do comparative studies that can add robustness to the findings and conclusions. One recent study, for example, used data from both LAFANS and PHDCN and found that neighborhood-level influences operated similarly on at-risk, native-born Latino youth in both Los Angeles and Chicago (Frank and Bjornstrom, 2011). Cross-disciplinary perspectives are particularly relevant to comprehensive community change efforts which work across a broad array of domains and aim to affect a broad range of outcomes.

Third, our review has focused on research projects that combine cross-sectional neighborhood surveys with longitudinal data on individuals and families. Other efforts, like the Mobile Youth Survey in Mobile, Alabama and the project on Welfare Children and Families: A Three City Study, that provide longitudinal survey data on adolescents, children and families living in very poor neighborhoods, might also inform practice in community change efforts.

The Mobile Youth Survey (MYS) was developed to study risk behaviors among adolescents in very poor communities in Alabama, using a multi-cohort, longitudinal sample, and a survey that is administered annually. A primary focus of MYS research has been on the connection between hopelessness and adolescent risk behaviors (Bolland, 2003; Bolland, Lian, and For-
Researchers are also using the MYS longitudinal data to study the effect of neighborhood disorganization on parenting (Spano et al., 2008). This research treats parenting behavior as a dependent variable; many other studies, in contrast, treat parenting as an independent variable that acts as a buffer or mediating influence against social disorganization in neighborhoods. The Mobile Youth Survey is also being used to understand the effect of moves that involve the relocation of a child to a relative or friend’s residence versus the relocation of an entire family (Bolland, n.d.). Other research is using MYS data to explore under what circumstances moving is beneficial or harmful to youth development, what motivates moving, and how moving affects the social networks that are important for youth development (William T. Grant Foundation, 2010). The MYS data are also being used to evaluate the effectiveness of two place-based interventions – an effort to reduce gun violence, and an adolescent substance abuse treatment program (Bolland, n.d.; University of Alabama Psychology Department, n.d.).

The project on Welfare, Children, and Families: A Three City Study (TCS) is another potential data source for place-based work. Designed to study how the transition from Aid to Families with Dependent Children to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families affected the wellbeing of low-income children in low-income neighborhoods in Boston, Chicago, and San Antonio, TCS provides data on mobility, service use, and social networks, using three waves of survey data and observational research. TCS has produced a number of studies exploring how neighborhood context affects parental expectations and behavior, and adolescent development and behavior among Latino and African-American youth in low-income urban neighborhoods (for example, Roche, Ensmiger, and Cherlin, 2007; Quane, 2008; Roche and Leventhal, 2009). Researchers documented high mobility rates in the target population and found that children in the households that moved were more likely to have had elevated behavior problems and other risk factors prior to the move (Silver and Sussman, 2008). Other researchers have combined data from the longitudinal surveys and ethnographic studies with GIS mappings to explore residents’ use of resources in other neighborhoods and social connections to residents in other neighborhoods. The findings reinforce the notion that neighborhood boundaries are porous (Matthews, Detwiler, and Burton, 2005).

A critical issue for the field, going forward, is how to strengthen both the practice-and-policy-to-research cycle and the research-to-practice-and-policy-cycle, so that people who work on the ground in neighborhoods can benefit from what is being learned by researchers, and researchers are more likely to develop information that is useful to practitioners in the community change world. Despite the obvious intersections between neighborhood research and community change practice, researchers who study neighborhoods and neighborhood processes and program designers and managers who work with families and children in poor neighborhoods often seem very isolated from each other. Three possible directions for future work that could potentially increase the practical value of neighborhood research for practitioners and program designers and help to incorporate a longitudinal perspective into community change work are noted below.
A. Identify priority issues and mine data sources more systematically to address them

The research discussed in this paper is producing a considerable amount of information about a number of topics of core concern to the community change field. This preliminary review focuses on the themes of mobility, social capital and social organization, neighborhood trajectories and typologies, and neighborhood effects. The usefulness of the existing data sets might be further enhanced if there were more systematic efforts to address some priority questions that pose practical dilemmas for the community change field.

- What are priority questions for the field that these data sets might usefully address?
- How could these research projects be mined more systematically to answer such questions?
- What would it take to do this? What could be done to develop opportunities for collective or collaborative work?
- How might researchers be made more aware of the issues that program designers and managers struggle with on the ground?

B. Develop additional or alternative sources of longitudinal data

Not all community change efforts will have access to the rich data sets that are used in the projects discussed in this paper. A key question, therefore, is whether there are alternative sources of data, other than survey data, that could capture the dynamic aspects of neighborhoods and provide longitudinal information that could enhance effectiveness in community change efforts.

- What alternative sources of longitudinal data on individuals and neighborhood conditions might be useful to practitioners on the ground, and less costly or less time-consuming to collect and produce?
- What potential is there for using administrative data sets in community change efforts?
- What would it take to access these data sources?
- How might they be used by practitioners on the ground?

C. Make research findings and data more useful to practitioners on the ground

A critical challenge is how practitioners can be helped to use findings from these studies and other data sources to interpret the less complete data that many com-
munity change efforts will be working with on the ground. Using research findings and data to inform strategic design-making and improve program performance requires more than just access to data and evidence. It requires active interpretation and application.

- What supports and incentives would help practitioners to make better use of data and evidence in decision-making?
- What skills and relationships are needed to do the necessary translation and interpretation work effectively?
- What types of individuals or organizations are well-suited to help in this work?
The Jobs-Plus Community Revitalization Initiative for Public Housing Families

The Jobs-Plus Resident Survey was developed as part of an evaluation of the Jobs-Plus Community Revitalization Initiative for Public Housing Families. The Jobs-Plus Initiative offered three types of assistance in public housing developments: employment related services; rent breaks as an incentive to work and earn more; and the promotion of social ties among residents to create community support for work.

**Design and components:** The Jobs-Plus Resident Survey provided two waves of repeated cross-sectional data on residents living in Jobs-Plus public housing developments and comparison public housing developments in three cities (Baltimore, Dayton and St. Paul). The baseline survey was administered in 1998 and the follow-up survey was fielded in 2003. Both interviewed a sample of residents who were household heads living in the targeted public housing developments in three sites. Residents who moved out of the development after baseline were not included in the follow-up Resident Survey, but new residents who had moved into the development were interviewed. Because of high mobility rates, only about 30 percent of the baseline sample was in the follow-up survey sample. A total of about 1200 residents were interviewed in each survey wave, including residents in the comparison developments as well as in the Jobs-Plus developments. Administrative records data provided longitudinal information on residents in the Jobs-Plus study developments and the comparison developments, and were used to calculate individual-level effects and development-level effects.

**Topics:** Both survey waves elicited information about economic and material well-being, social capital, personal safety and victimization, problem conditions in the development and neighborhood, residential satisfaction, and child-well-being. A separate study on mobility in the Jobs-Plus developments used the survey data, in combination with administrative records data, to analyze mobility rates, the characteristics of movers, and their reasons for moving.

**Purpose:** The Jobs-Plus evaluation provided a unique opportunity to measure the effects of an intervention at both the individual level and the development level. The Jobs-Plus Resident Survey was used in the Jobs-Plus evaluation to determine whether increases in work among residents resulted in improvements in neighborhood conditions and outcomes.

**Source:** Bloom, Riccio, and Verma, 2005.

**Website:** http://www.mdrc.org
Los Angeles Family and Neighborhood Survey

The Los Angeles Family and Neighborhood Survey (LAFANS) is a panel study of a representative sample of all neighborhoods (census tracts) and all households in Los Angeles County. It combines the advantages of a panel study of children and families with the advantages of a repeated cross-sectional sample of each neighborhood. The multi-level stratified survey samples a random sample of 65 neighborhoods, then samples blocks within those neighborhoods, then families within those blocks, and then children and adults within those families.

**Design and components:** Data were collected in two waves, in 2001-2002 and 2006-2008. Additional waves are under consideration. Wave 1 interviewed one adult in all sampled households, and, in the households that included children under 18, one child and the primary caretaker (if different from the interviewed household adult). The Wave 1 sample included about 3,000 families; poor neighborhoods and families with children were oversampled. In Wave 2, all sampled adults and children were reinterviewed, whether they remained in the neighborhood or had moved away. In addition, the Wave 2 sample included a sample of “new entrants” who moved into the neighborhood between Wave 1 and Wave 2. These additions were to be reinterviewed in subsequent waves, as were all the Wave 1 sample members.

Cognitive assessments were administered to sampled children age 3 and older.

LAFANS also includes information on Neighborhood Services and Characteristics that includes geo-coded census data and administrative records data. Additional information on neighborhood conditions is derived from the adult surveys, observations by block walkers, and key informant interviews conducted in 2000, 2002, and 2004.

**Purpose/Topics:** LAFANS was designed to support research in three main areas: the effects of neighborhoods and families and peers on children’s development and well-being; the effects of welfare reform at the neighborhood level; and the process of residential mobility and neighborhood change. Wave 2 added health assessments for interviewed adults and children.

**Source:** Sastry et al, 2005.

**Website:** http://lasurvey.rand.org/design
Making Connections Cross-Site Survey

Making Connections was a ten-year, multisite initiative to improve outcomes for children and families in low-income communities in ten cities (Denver, Des Moines, Hartford, Indianapolis, Louisville, Milwaukee, Oakland, Providence, San Antonio, and Seattle). It focused on strengthening families’ connections to economic opportunity, positive social networks, and effective services and supports. The Making Connections Cross-Site Survey was designed so that a longitudinal sample was maintained over three waves, and a representative point-in-time sample was also collected.

Design and components: The survey, which provides information about representative samples of households in the Making Connections neighborhoods, was conducted in three waves. Wave 1 was fielded in 2002-2004, Wave 2 in 2005-2007, and Wave 3 in 2008-2010. The baseline survey was fielded in the ten Making Connection sites and the counties in which they were located. The Wave 2 survey was conducted in the Making Connections neighborhoods only. Wave 3 was fielded in seven of the original 10 sites. The survey was administered to the primary caregiver of a randomly selected “focal child” in each selected household. Waves 2 and 3 included surveys of the baseline households, including those who moved, those who stayed, and a sample of households with children who moved into the Making Connections neighborhoods between waves. Waves 2 and 3 collected information about all children in the household. Each wave of the neighborhood survey consists of at least 800 interviews, divided between households with and without children.

School readiness was measured for young children. In Wave 1, respondents were asked to draw neighborhood maps. The survey data can be linked to census and administrative records data.

Topics: The Making Connections survey provides information about mobility, social capital and networks, neighborhood processes, resident perceptions and participation, economic hardship, the availability and utilization of services and resources, and child and adolescent well-being.

Purpose: The Making Connections Survey was originally intended to measure population-level changes in outcomes of interest in the Making Connections neighborhoods, as part of the Initiative’s evaluation. However, when it became clear that the interventions were not operating at scale sufficient to produce neighborhood level changes, and early results showed very high levels of mobility among households in the Making Connections neighborhoods, focus turned to using the survey to understand the dynamics of neighborhood change in the Making Connections sites (Fiester, 2010).

Source: Fiester, 2010; Coulton, Theodos, and Turner, 2009.

Website: http://mcstudy.norc.org/study-design
Mobile Youth Survey

The Mobile Youth Survey (MYS) is a multiple cohort, longitudinal study of adolescents growing up in the poorest neighborhoods in the Mobile (Alabama) Metropolitan Statistical Area.

Design and components: The survey, which has been fielded annually since 1998, tracks youths aged 10-19 in the 13 most impoverished neighborhoods in the Mobile Metropolitan Statistical Area. All of the neighborhoods are located in Mobile or the bordering city of Pritchard; 7 of the 13 neighborhoods were public housing developments. Each annual survey wave reinterviews the youths in previous cohorts (until they turn 20), regardless of where they are living, and adds a new cohort of youths from the targeted neighborhoods. As of 2010, over 9,000 youths had been interviewed, contributing over 27,000 data points. The longitudinal samples are constructed from successive waves of the annual cohorts, rather than being a targeted longitudinal sample.

Topics: The survey includes questions about the respondent’s risk behaviors, family structure and support, peer pressure and support, and attitudes and behaviors, including sense of connection to the neighborhood.

Purpose: The survey began as an effort to study adolescent risk behaviors in the context of families, schools, and neighborhoods. More recently, the survey data are being used to evaluate the effectiveness of specific interventions in these neighborhoods.

Source: Bolland, 2003; Spano, Rivera, and Bolland, 2006; University of Alabama Psychology Department, n.d.

Website: None
The Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods (PHDCN) is an interdisciplinary study that combines an intensive study of Chicago’s neighborhoods – including their social, economic, organizational, political and cultural structures and the changes that take place in those structures – with a series of coordinated longitudinal studies of children, adolescents, and young adults.

**Design and components:** PHDCN covers 847 census tracts collapsed into 343 neighborhood clusters in Chicago, and consists of five study components.

Information about neighborhood conditions and structures comes from three sources: A *Community Survey* interviewed a sample of adult household residents in the 343 neighborhood clusters in 1995 and in 2000, and included questions about cultural values, informal and formal social control, and social cohesion. About 9,000 residents were in each wave of the survey. A *Neighborhood Expert Survey*, based on a snowball sample, interviewed community leaders on community social life and decision-making in 1996. A total of 2,822 neighborhood experts were interviewed. A *Systematic Social Observation Study* was conducted in 80 of the 343 neighborhood clusters in 1996 and 2000. It included observation and videotaping that focused on land use, housing, litter, graffiti, and social interactions.

The *Longitudinal Cohort Study* uses an accelerated longitudinal design with seven cohorts separated by three year intervals. The interviews focused on children, adolescents, young adults and their primary caregivers in 80 neighborhood clusters. About 6000 children and youths are in the sample. Wave 1 was fielded in 1995 -1997; Wave 2, in 1997-1999; and Wave 3, in 2000-2001. The original design called for a fourth wave of the study. The longitudinal study includes an *Infant Assessment Unit* for 431 infants in the birth cohort and their primary caregivers, in Waves 1, 2, and 3.

**Topics:** PHDCN’s initial focus was on understanding the causes and pathways of juvenile delinquency, violent crime, substance abuse, and adult crime. More recently, it added a focus on children’s exposure to violence and its consequences, and a study of child care and its impact on child development.

**Purpose:** The intent is to understand the complex influences of community, family, and individual factors on human development.

**Website:** [http://www.nber.org/kling/surveys/PHDCN](http://www.nber.org/kling/surveys/PHDCN); [http://www.macfound.org](http://www.macfound.org); [www.icpsr.umich.edu/PHDCN](http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/PHDCN)
Welfare, Children, and Families: A Three City Study

The Three City Study (TCS) was designed to assess the well-being of low-income children and families in Boston, Chicago, and San Antonio after Temporary Assistance for Needy Families replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children in the late 1990s.

**Design and components:** The Three City Study consists of three interrelated components: longitudinal surveys, embedded developmental studies, and contextual, comparative ethnographic studies. The longitudinal surveys tracked a random sample of 2400 households with children in low-income neighborhoods in Boston, Chicago, and San Antonio, and were fielded in three waves: Wave 1 in 1999; Wave 2 in 2000 and 2001; and Wave 3 in 2005-2006. Each household had a child aged 0-4 or aged 10-14 at the time of the Wave 1 interview; 40% of the households were on welfare in Wave 1.

The Embedded Developmental Study studied 757 children aged 2-4 at Wave 1. It included videotaping and coding of caregiver-child interactions, time study diaries, and childcare observations as well as interviews with the focal child’s mother, father, and primary non-maternal caregiver. Interviews with mother and caregiver were repeated in Wave 2.

The Ethnographic Study included 256 additional children and their families, who were not in the survey sample, but lived in the same neighborhood. It focused on participants’ use of resources, local offices, and institutions.

**Topics:** The survey elicited information about neighborhood characteristics and conditions, schools, and welfare services as well as information about family members. Recent studies focus on understanding neighborhood effects on parenting and adolescent behavior.

**Purpose:** The Three-City Study investigated the strategies families used to respond to welfare reform, including employment, schooling and other forms of training, residential mobility, and fertility. A key focus was how these strategies affected children’s lives, especially their health and development, and their need for, and use of, social services.

**Website:** [http://web.jhu.edu/threecitystudy/study_Design](http://web.jhu.edu/threecitystudy/study_Design); [http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/studies](http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/studies)


Verma, Nandita. 2003. Staying or Leaving: Lessons from Jobs-Plus About the Mobility of Public Housing Residents and Implications for Place-Based Initiatives. New York: MDRC.


The Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change is a national organization that distills lessons about how to revitalize distressed communities and helps policymakers, practitioners, and funders develop and implement effective strategies for promoting vibrant, racially equitable communities in the United States and internationally.