

Introduction

In this information age, city agencies and community organizations have tremendous potential to use data to make better decisions. Governments, from the federal level to local governments and agencies, collect vast amounts of information about buildings, businesses, people and natural features in neighborhoods. Unfortunately, this information is used far less than it could be. Those working to improve neighborhoods often are not aware data are available, do not have easy access to the data or lack the capacity to collect, store and analyze data.

In this atmosphere of insufficient information distribution, the city of Detroit and its neighborhoods face serious challenges. Following a trend of decline that began in the mid-20th century, Detroit's population decreased about 20 percent from 1980 to 2000. Poverty remains a problem, as 25 percent of Detroit's population live below the poverty line.¹ Vacant lots, houses and commercial properties put a drag on revitalization in some parts of the city.

At the same time, Detroit has a wealth of assets. Detroit has physical gems such as beautiful parks and historic buildings, and strong communities with individuals and groups working for a better future. Southwest Detroit is home to many such assets, and provides examples of the strength that exists in the city's neighborhoods and in its people. Home to a burgeoning immigrant population, Southwest Detroit is one of the few areas of the city that has recently gained population. The area boasts a vibrant culture and a strong sense of community. Its population has grown despite its adjacency to heavy industry and the negative effects of the current rail yards within its borders. Because challenges remain, Southwest Detroit has the need for communities to understand neighborhood health and the forces that threaten it.

Goals and Objectives

Our partners, the Southwest Detroit Business Association (SDBA) and the City of Detroit Planning & Development Department (P&DD), identified several key goals for this plan based on their need for systemized information about neighborhoods. The plan describes a flexible framework for a neighborhood indicators system for the city of Detroit to accomplish these goals:

- Maximize the potential of data to positively affect

¹ Berube, Alan. Ryan Prince and Hilary Smith. 2003. *Detroit in Focus: A Profile from Census 2000*. Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy, The. <http://www.brookings.edu/dybdocroot/es/urban/livingcities/detroit.pdf>. Accessed March 28, 2004.

Detroit's neighborhoods.

- Use neighborhood indicators to inform resource allocation decisions across the city, especially decisions about the distribution of federal funds to community groups, to ensure that those resources strengthen neighborhoods and combat blight.
- Provide decision-makers with accurate, balanced information that represents as many interests as possible to ensure thoughtful and fair planning outcomes.
- Empower organizations and individuals that work for Detroit's neighborhoods by providing a means to demonstrate the results of their efforts, their need for resources, and their own ability to strengthen neighborhoods.

A neighborhood indicators system (NIS) is a computer-based information system that contains a broad variety of data on conditions and trends at the neighborhood level.² The system should make data available to community-based organizations (CBO), individuals, governmental departments (city, state, regional, and national), academic researchers, students and local citizens.

The objectives for the Detroit Neighborhood Indicators System are as follows:

- Use data analysis to compare areas across the city and identify those that are improving or declining to help city agencies (especially P&DD) discern which areas are most in need of investment of time or money.
- Make data that are currently in the hands of P&DD more accessible to others.
- Gather administrative data from other agencies working in Detroit and make that data available to interested parties in reports and as databases.
- Educate CBO staff, neighborhood residents, government agency staff, researchers, and other users about effective utilization of the NIS, and train those users when necessary.
- Facilitate communication and collaboration among those that provide information about neighborhoods and those who use that data.

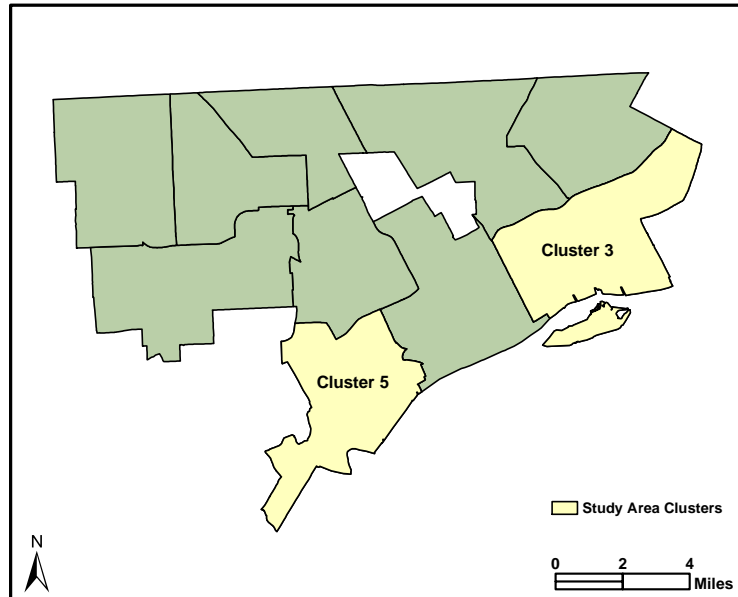
An NIS that achieves all of the above objectives will serve as a central repository of neighborhood information. This can reduce redundant data collection efforts across the city, empower less technically savvy or resource-poor organizations, and provide a way for those with an interest in Detroit's neighborhoods to work together towards the goal of enhanced neighborhood health.

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² Kingsley, G. Thomas (ed.). 1999. *Building and Operating Neighborhood Indicator Systems: A Guidebook*. National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership – The Urban Institute. <http://www.urban.org/nnip/pdf/guidebk.pdf>. Accessed March 28, 2004.

Figure 1

Detroit: Cluster 3 and 5 Study Areas



Source: U.S. Census 2000; City of Detroit P&DD

Figure 1: Map of Detroit with Study Area (Clusters 3 and 5)

Background and Study Area Description

This discussion of neighborhood indicator systems is divided into two parts: a discussion of systems and a discussion of indicators. The systems discussion will address various types of indicator systems that are currently in use, their strengths, weaknesses and applicability to Detroit. The second section will give an overview of indicators – what they are made of and what functions they serve.

For this plan, the geographic scope has been narrowed from the entire city of Detroit to Community Reinvestment Strategy Clusters 3 and 5 (see Figure 1 above). The pilot system considered these clusters because they include a broad variety of neighborhood conditions. This variety allows Clusters 3 and Five to serve as a proxy for the city as a whole.

Systems

More than 25 neighborhood indicator systems are in place in the United States. However, the term means different things for different programs. The various types of systems fall into three major groups (although the groups are not mutually exclusive). A system often begins with an Early Warning System and expands to form what is referred to here as a Community Empowerment System. These

systems have benefits for both those who know the areas (by giving them new insights into their communities) and those who do not (by providing a better understanding of an area).

- **Early Warning or Detection Systems:** These systems seek to identify areas that are declining or improving, so that appropriate action may be taken to staunch decline or nurture improvement. They generally use fewer variables than other systems that describe neighborhood condition (e.g., property value, property tax delinquency, building code violation and land use data).
 - **Strengths of EDS:** Data used are often easy to access and hard to dispute. Such systems can be put online quickly.
 - **Weaknesses:** Narrow data set gives a limited view of a neighborhood. Many existing early warning systems fail to predict by merely describing an area.
 - **Detroit Relevance/Challenges:** According to P&DD and SDBA, some of the data used in these early warning systems nationwide (like fires, building permits and land vacancy) are neither reliable nor accurate enough to use in an NIS in Detroit.
 - **Examples:** CityNews in Chicago³ strives to prevent neighborhood decay by identifying early warning signs. The system uses city and county tax info, housing court cases, fire data, sales and census data to identify warning signs, and provides outputs through a web interface. (CityNews and many other indicator system models are discussed in detail in Appendix 1, Part II)

- **Community Empowerment Systems:** These systems often include many more data than EDS (including community surveys and qualitative data). Also, these systems do not try to predict the future of a neighborhood. Instead, they seek to describe a neighborhood as well as possible. They often allow users to download data as well as obtain pre-designed reports on neighborhoods.
 - **Strengths:** These systems can give a rich, nuanced look at a neighborhood.
 - **Weaknesses:** If they allow different data in different areas, these systems are not good for comparing one area to another. The complexity of these types of systems can make them difficult to use or interpret.
 - **Detroit Relevance/Challenges:** The complexity

³ City News Chicago. <http://www.newschicago.org/>. Accessed January 23, 2004.

An indicator is a measurement that reflects the status of some social, economic, or environmental system over time.

- of these systems means that they have greater demands for ongoing staff and user training.
- **Examples:** The Neighborhood Knowledge Los Angeles system (NKLA) includes an asset-mapping feature to enhance residents' awareness of their neighborhood. Systems in Minneapolis (Crossroads Resource Center Neighborhood Sustainability Indicators Project) and Chicago (Greater Chicago Area Housing and Community Development Website) also serve to empower neighborhood residents and organizations. (Further information about these systems and their roles is located in Appendix 1, Part II).
- **Hand-Built Indicator Systems:** Some systems generate neighborhood reports for interested parties on an as-needed basis.
 - **Strengths:** Interested parties can get reports built to fit their needs if they lack the capacity to produce reports themselves. One central source that is familiar with available data serves as a clearinghouse within the service area.
 - **Weaknesses:** Users must make specific requests to a staff member to generate reports. This means that those who do not know of the service cannot get the information. Also, staff resource limitations can restrict the amount of information distributed.
 - **Detroit Relevance/Challenges:** These systems have limited capacity and high staffing costs. They are not easily expanded, and are more of a 'stopgap' measure than a real solution to information sharing challenges.
 - **Example:** Miami Dade County employs one full-time staff person to respond to individual data requests. (See Appendix 1, Part II for more information)

This plan draws upon the positive aspects of each type of system in its design for a Detroit-based system.

Indicators

An indicator is a measurement that reflects the status of some social, economic, or environmental system over time. It also helps to quantify or express the achievement and progress towards an outcome or goal.⁴ An indicator generally focuses on a small, manageable, tangible and telling piece of a system to give a sense of the bigger picture.⁵ To assemble useful indicators, one

⁴ Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance. *Definitions of Terms, Data Definitions, Map Definitions*. <http://www.bnia.org/definitions.html>. Accessed January 27, 2004.

⁵ Top 10 by 2010. 2004. *Glossary of Sustainability Indicator Terms*. <http://www.top10by2010.org/glossary.pdf>. Accessed January 27, 2004.

must first gather base data, test that data statistically, and then construct the indicator list.

A subgroup of indicators is neighborhood indicators, which are measures that demonstrate a neighborhood’s progress toward targeted goals. For example, a decrease in the crime rate is an indicator of neighborhood security. Properly interpreted, these indicators may provide some measure of a neighborhood’s health. As shown in Figure 2, indicators are distinct from primary data and statistics in that they represent data in an understandable manner to decision-makers and the public, for specific purposes.

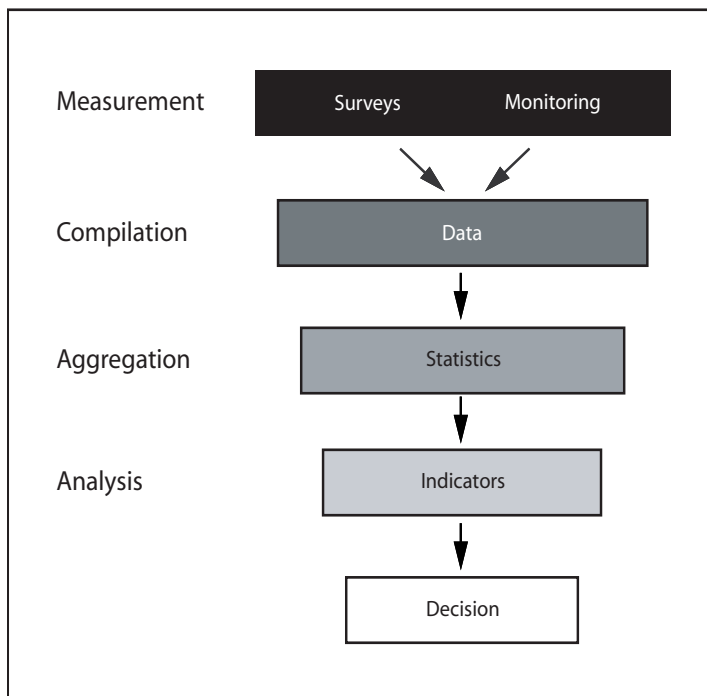
Based on the above findings on indicator systems and indicators themselves, the following section makes recommendations for the development of an NIS to provide information to help strengthen neighborhoods in Detroit.

Recommendations

The balance of this document lays out a plan for an indicators system that is built on a core data warehouse. All NIS have a data warehouse as their foundation. In this central data repository,

Figure 2

Indicators Used in Decision Making



Source: Briggs, et. al. (1996)⁶

Figure 2: An illustration of the process by which indicators can be used in the public policy decision-making process.

⁶ Briggs, D., Corvalan, C. & Nurminen, M. 1996. *Linkage Methods for Environment and Health Analysis: General Guidelines*. Geneva. Office of Global and Integrated Environmental Health, World Health Organization.

When implemented, the system will put the power of the information age at the fingertips of those working to strengthen Detroit neighborhoods.

information is stored and made available for particular applications. Different organizations, agencies, or foundations may eventually design new applications that utilize the data warehouse. This plan outlines two recommended applications as initial uses:

- **Community Empowerment System (CES):** This system component makes the data currently available to P&DD available to a wider audience. It also will function as a place to store other administrative and survey data on neighborhoods in a publicly accessible location. Finally, it will provide training for community organizations and other users, and will serve as a place where many organizations, residents and researchers can collaborate to get and share information through a web-based interface.
- **Early Detection System (EDS):** This part of the NIS allows for the comparison of various neighborhoods across the city. This system will allow users to see which areas improve or decline, as well as see the current conditions of neighborhoods. and researchers can collaborate to get and share information through a web-based interface.

The plan that follows outlines a system that will collect the data in one place, use that data to begin to indicate neighborhood health or decline, deliver data to community organizations that need it, and provide a way for those organizations to build upon the system with their own information. When implemented, it will put the power of the information age at the fingertips of those working to strengthen Detroit neighborhoods. Figure 3 (see following page) demonstrates the relationship between the three components within the NIS and how they interact. The next section of this plan describes the considerations and recommendations surrounding the first step of neighborhood indicator system construction, the establishment of the data warehouse.

Figure 3
Detroit Neighborhood Indicator System Diagram

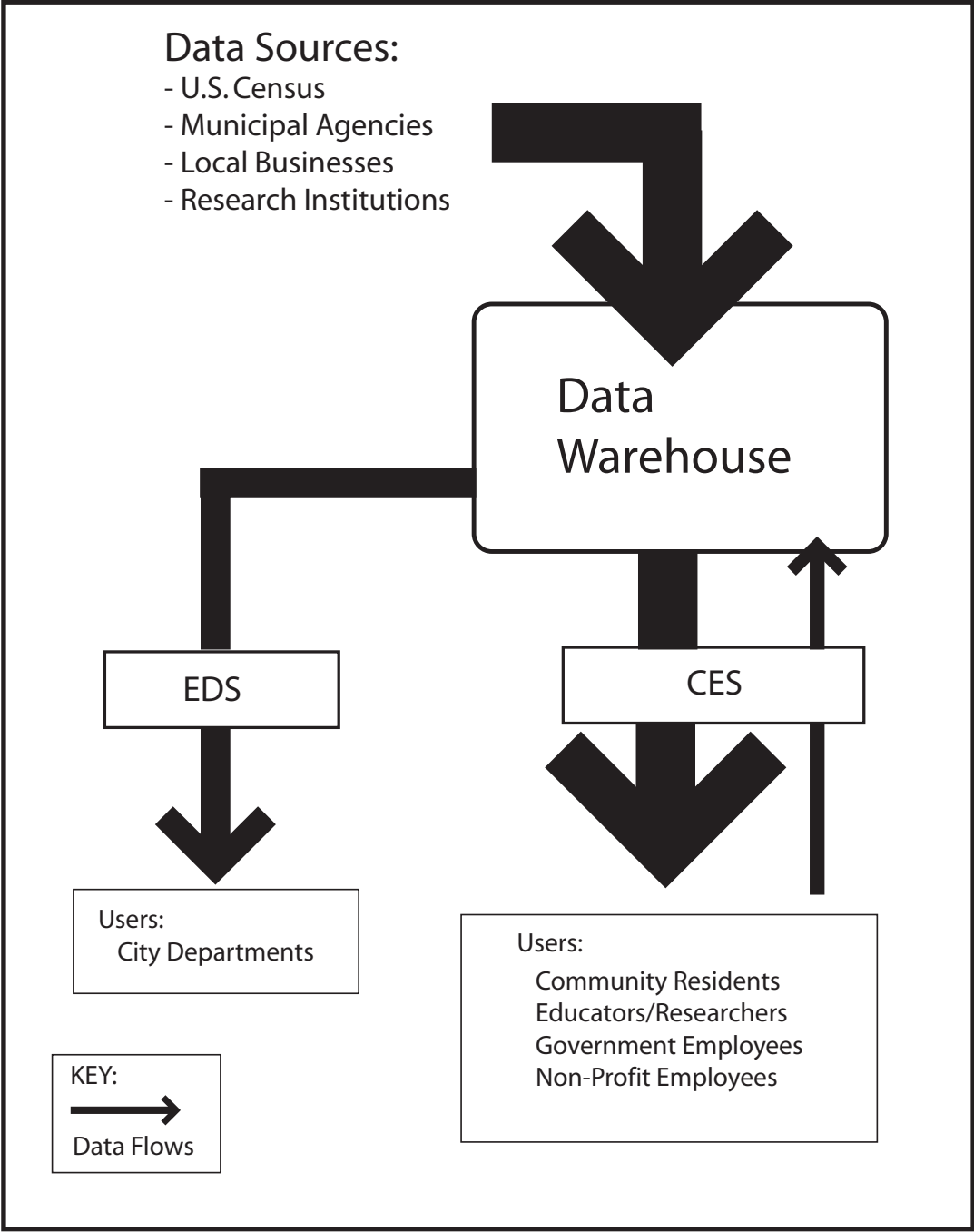


Figure 3: An illustration of the system design and data flows within the Detroit Neighborhood Indicators system.