

DELIVERING OUTCOMES FOR COMMUNITIES CASE STUDY: DIVERSE PARTNERSHIPS TO ACCESS HIGH-IMPACT RESOURCES YOUNGSTOWN, OHIO

COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT

- Population: ~62,000 residents
- Average annual household salary of two working adults: ~\$24,000
- Number of vacant properties: 5,000
- Crime rate: nearly double the national average

THE CHALLENGE

Youngstown, Ohio was once home to almost 200,000 residents. Today, Youngstown has a population of less than 65,000 residents due to high crime, poor health conditions, blighted properties and an unstable housing market. Other challenges facing this community include a lack of support for education and coordination challenges between service providers and the city.

Youngstown now ranks at the bottom of most national quality of life indicators. There are an estimated 5,000 vacant properties, with some homes selling for as low as \$500. Opportunities for work and education are also limited. The average annual salary of two working adults is estimated to be \$24,000, and Youngstown's Taft Elementary School ranks worse than 87 percent of elementary schools in Ohio. Most neighborhoods are unstable due to the consistent poverty faced by residents. Federal and local assistance programs exist, but citizens and community organizations aren't aware of them.

PARTNERS

- U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Strong Cities, Strong Communities (SC2)
- Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS)—Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) Volunteers
- Fresh Coast Capital
- Johns Hopkins University, School of Education, Division of Public Safety Leadership
- United Way of Youngstown
- Youngstown Neighborhood Development Corporation (YNDC)
- Youngstown State University

EXERCISE

In 2012, President Obama designated Youngstown as a Strong Cities, Strong Communities (SC2) city. Since there was not a large federal presence in the area at the time, the SC2 federal experts had to identify and engage potential partners and resources. The team realized that with a lack of city resources, a strategy focused on federal grants alone would not be sustainable, so they had to find a way to incorporate local partners and resources.

In your assigned small groups, please discuss:

- What is the first thing you would do to understand the community's needs?
- What are the current challenges and anticipated barriers? What approach can you take to overcome them?
- What federal agencies and resources should come into play?
- What would be important to support long-term sustainability of the project outcomes? What could be recommended as broader policy or program changes across the government?

ACTUAL STEPS TAKEN

1. Through a partnership with SC2, HUD, the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) and the City of Youngstown, work began in the Taft School Area in August 2015. This fifteen-block community on Youngstown's south side surrounds the Taft Elementary School, and blight in the area made the route to school unsafe for many children. The team realized that focusing on the school allowed them to engage local residents around a host of related needs as well.
2. The SC2 team researched a number of models, theories and planning documents related to community-centered residential neighborhood development. They began participating in a variety of local community outreach activities to build relationships, identify key stakeholders, create strategic partnerships and plan projects. The team also partnered with VISTA volunteers and went door-to-door to collect metrics. This research helped the team determine how to share information about available assistance programs.
3. After establishing the community's goal to stabilize and revitalize the Taft neighborhood, the team used a coordinated, holistic approach to address four categories of needs: education, health and wellness, jobs and the economy and neighborhood revitalization.
4. As the SC2 team discussed ways to approach city revitalization, they tried to avoid making Youngstown dependent on federal funds, as this might make their progress unsustainable. The team worked to identify local partners, establish buy-in and create community ownership of programs. They approached the Youngstown Neighborhood Development Corporation and discussed ways to creatively rebuild confidence in neighborhoods. This resulted in strengthening Youngstown's community development capacity and the city-wide infrastructure for neighborhood revitalization.
5. The team built strategic local partnerships around each of these needs for the Taft School Area, with each partner agreeing to lead the committee for its respective category area. United Way focused on education, Youngstown State University and Mercy Hospital worked on health and wellness, Regional Chamber and Community One Stop focused on jobs and the economy and Youngstown Neighborhood Development Corporation and Mahoning County Land Bank worked on revitalizing the neighborhood. Together with these partners, the team has also used a variety of federal programs as leverage.

UNIQUE OUTCOMES

- **Creating a safer walk to school:** The team engaged the DOJ Diagnostic Center to improve public safety. They used data to measure needs, recognize trends, establish baselines, determine data-driven strategies and find available resources in communities. As part of ongoing technical assistance to Youngstown, the DOJ Diagnostic Center sponsored a multi-day training for the command staff of the Youngstown Police Department aimed at enhancing agency and officer performance evaluation. Subject matter experts from Johns Hopkins University’s School of Education and Division of Public Safety Leadership led the training.
- **Supporting more outdoor spaces:** In partnership with Fresh Coast Capital, the team planted poplar trees and lavender in four parks throughout the city. Fresh Coast Capital agreed to lease the parks from the city for seven- to eight-year terms and plant the trees and lavender. This partnership saved the city over \$150,000 in park maintenance costs and created public spaces where the community can gather.
- **Providing technical assistance for small businesses:** Magnet, a nonprofit organization that promotes manufacturing in the 18-county northeastern Ohio region, partnered with NASA and Youngstown State University to conduct a “road show” for local manufacturers. NASA subject matter experts provided technical problem solving to local small businesses to improve business development and productivity. This was part of their broader regional effort to support manufacturing and business development in the Cleveland area and other Ohio communities.
- **Developing small businesses:** Through a partnership with Youngstown State University and a local business incubator, the city received \$3 million grant from the U.S. Economic Development Association (EDA) for broader downtown revitalization.
- **Reducing blight:** The team worked with the DOD Innovation Readiness Training Program to design military exercises that demolished disused buildings. The city of Youngstown partnered with the 910th Airlift Wing from the Vienna Airbase to save the city money while demolishing blighted properties. The airmen used city machinery and equipment, but the local taxpayers did not have to pay for labor. Colonel James Dignan and Youngstown Mayor John McNally led the effort, and the 910th Airlift Wing demolished over 74 houses and installed over 600 street signs and traffic lights. This resulted in a savings ranging from \$500,000 to \$740,000 for the city. This creative partnership removed nuisance properties and allowed the reservists to meet training requirements.
- **Improving city planning:** With assistance from HUD, the city commissioned a contractor to review the regulations for demolition activities. Once implemented, the contractor’s recommendations improved the city’s process for dealing with high property vacancy rates, promoted changes to state and local targeted demolition regulations and helped administer existing resources.
- **Building a replicable model:** These partnerships are now serving as frameworks for other work across Youngstown:
 - The team worked with the city to overhaul financial management, including refinancing the convention center for a one-time savings of \$250,000.
 - The city is working with communities in the region to apply for a DOT TIGER Grant.

- Sharing the Story: PBS is filming a documentary on the Taft Neighborhood Partnership. This media coverage will share the Youngstown is model of partnership building with cities and communities facing similar challenges.

UNIFYING THEMES

- Develop relationships to understand local needs and find and identify possible matches for partnerships and federal resources.
- Review grants.gov and agency announcements and talk to local federal representatives to find resources that might help the community.
- Sometimes ideas will not work out, but it is important to keep trying.
- Local universities can be valuable partners and can supply data (including GIS data, analysis and planning capacity).

FEATURED HIGH-VALUE RESOURCES FOR COMMUNITIES

- Department of Justice Diagnostic Center (<https://www.ojpdagnosticcenter.org/>)
- Department of Defense Innovation Readiness Training (<http://irt.defense.gov/>)
- NASA roadshows with scientists for small businesses (<http://sbir.nasa.gov/>)
- Economic Development Administration planning grants (<https://www.eda.gov/funding-opportunities/>)
- Fresh Coast Capital (<http://freshcoastcapital.com/>)
- Department of Transportation - Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) Grants (<https://www.transportation.gov/tiger>)