

Community Development Needs a Quarterback

We need to take a new, more holistic approach to creating economic opportunity.

BY NANCY O. ANDREWS & BRANDEE MCHALE

In her first public speech as Federal Reserve board chair, Janet Yellen highlighted a new player in the community development field that we call the “community quarterback.” In her comments, Yellen singled out the quarterback model as a promising strategy for strengthening struggling communities that can, in turn, strengthen local job markets.

The idea of a community quarterback, first articulated in the book *Investing in What Works for America's Communities* (a project of the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco and Low Income Investment Fund, supported by the Citi Foundation), came in response to piecemeal approaches for addressing poverty and neighborhood revitalization. Challenges facing disadvantaged people and places are not confined to housing, education, or unemployment. To make meaningful improvements in the lives of the poor and vulnerable, we must address all these areas—and more—in an integrated fashion.

That’s what the community quarterback is all about.

The model itself—similar to what others have described as a backbone organization’s role in collective impact strategies—is pretty simple: A single local organization serves as a lead systems integrator for anti-poverty work within a community, bringing together people who work across sectors

such as affordable housing, education, health care, and workforce development. Under the quarterback organization’s leadership, these stakeholders work as a team toward agreed-upon goals, such as improving public safety or academic performance among children. The quarterback marshals the funding sources to support the work, tracks progress in achieving goals over time, adjusts strategy based on performance, and holds everyone accountable.

The quarterback model reflects a major shift in the community development sector. Instead of focusing solely on revitalizing *places* and counting outputs, such as the number of affordable housing units built, the model prioritizes comprehensive approaches that support the development of human capital. Early childhood education, quality schools, safe neighborhoods, access to fresh food—these are all things that make a big difference in people’s everyday lives. Their cumulative impact is the difference between children and families merely *getting by* and actually *getting ahead*, and living prosperous and healthy lives.

Pulling these pieces together is the hard part, and the quarterback model is a flexible, actionable strategy for making this happen. The quarterback may take many forms, depending on the community’s needs and circumstances. For example, in Living Cities’ Integration Initiative in St. Paul–Minneapolis,

it acts as a convener and coordinator, gathering an array of strong local institutions around one table to achieve desired community improvements. Living Cities' president and CEO Ben Hecht discussed the need for "unprecedented collaboration" through a model like the community quarterback in a previous post. In New York City, the Harlem Children's Zone took a more assertive approach to organizing resources and building capacity.

The Partners in Progress (PIP) initiative—funded by the Citi Foundation, which provided \$3.25 million in grants to 13 organizations across the country—is testing the quarterback model nationally. The efforts vary in scope and objectives, but they all hold true to the same framework for delivering powerful outcomes for disadvantaged people and places.

For example, as the community quarterback for the Los Angeles Promise Neighborhood, the Youth Policy Institute collaborates with more than 60 stakeholder organizations to offer a range of services for youth and families, such as prenatal and early childhood development, college preparation, career development, dropout and gang prevention, financial literacy courses, referrals to health and housing services, and legal support. The goals are to foster academic success, reduce crime and gang violence, and support job creation, training, and economic development.

Meanwhile, Neighborhood Housing Services of South Florida quarterbacks an initiative to expand and accelerate efforts to improve Miami-Dade County's 79th Street Corridor area. The initiative aims to transform a fragmented set of residential, commercial, and industrial sites into a cohesive neighborhood with better access to transit that connects residents to jobs, retail, and needed services.

These are just a few examples of how integrated initiatives that are responsive to both community needs and local input are working to turn troubled

neighborhoods around. While the PIP initiative is still in its early stages and the grantees are at different points in formalizing their efforts, all are showing progress in spurring the collaboration required to make community revitalization efforts more effective. As Yellen pointed out, even though the economy has improved overall, too many families continue to struggle financially, and the job market still suffers from serious weaknesses. Communities are the incubators of their resident's futures—the places where they are born, grow up and go to school, get jobs, and raise families of their own. That is why integrated community development strategies are so important. Continued progress will require the support of policymakers and philanthropy alike to test new ideas, develop better measurement tools, and create effective partnerships.

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For more information:

Partners in Progress: www.partnersinprogressproject.org

Citi Foundation: www.citifoundation.com

Low Income Investment Fund: www.liifund.org