HELPING CHILDREN SUCCEED

DATA AND THE DC PROMISE NEIGHBORHOOD INITIATIVE

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The Urban Institute coordinates a peer learning network known as the National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership. NNIP is made up of local organizations in cities across the United States that collect, organize, and use neighborhood data to tackle issues in their communities.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

This case study is one of a series on data-related services provided by local partners in the National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership (NNIP)[1] to support federal place-based initiatives. It reviews the work of NeighborhoodInfo DC, NNIP's partner in Washington, DC, to further the objectives of the District of Columbia Promise Neighborhoods Initiative (DCPNI). This work is motivated by the belief that using data to guide choices in planning and implementing programs can indeed improve the programs' chances of helping children succeed in their lives. Data have had a substantial impact in shaping the DCPNI agenda.

Promise Neighborhoods is a US Department of Education program modeled after the well-known Harlem Children's Zone (Tough 2008). The founder of that effort, Geoffrey Canada, well understood the importance of "place." He focused on building a "continuum of solutions" that would guide the development of children from birth, through schooling, and into successful careers, and he purposefully did so in one neighborhood such that the synergy of in-community relationships could enhance results.

NNIP is a national network of local organizations whose mission is to advance the use of neighborhood-level data in decisionmaking to help strengthen local governance. All NNIP partners build and operate information systems with data from many sources on changing neighborhood conditions in their cities. They also commit to ensuring their data are used in practical ways to support policymaking and community building. NeighborhoodInfo DC is staffed by employees of the Urban Institute. The team that has provided services to DCPNI, which is reviewed in this case study, has included Urban Institute staff with special expertise in local education and human services issues, as well staff who work regularly as a part of NeighborhoodInfo DC. In this document, we refer to this team most often as NeighborhoodInfo DC/Urban.

We begin by introducing DCPNI and the neighborhood that is the focus for its work: Kenilworth-Parkside. We then explain how data were used to frame DCPNI's agenda when it first got underway. This discussion is followed by descriptions of other key data applications that have influenced the initiative since then. Finally, we draw conclusions and discuss implications for work with similar purposes elsewhere.

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[1] *This case is an extended version of a DCPNI story that appears in chapter 5 of Kingsley, Coulton, and Pettit (2014). That book also provides a full explanation of NNIP, which has local partners in more than 30 cities and is coordinated by the Urban Institute.*

KENILWORTH-PARKSIDE AND DCPNI

Kenilworth-Parkside is a predominantly African American community with 5,700 residents (2,000 children) located between the Anacostia River and the District's eastern border (with Prince George's County, MD). It had been comparatively prosperous until the 1980s, when many of its middle-income families moved across the border into the Maryland suburbs, leaving mostly low-income households behind. The vast majority of its families now are headed by single women, a group with a poverty rate of 37 percent. The unemployment rate is 29 percent, three times the city's average. The neighborhood contains a mix of subsidized housing and unsubsidized single-family homes and apartments.

In 2008, Irasema Salcido, founder of the Cesar Chavez Public Charter Schools (with a campus located in the community), saw that the academic skills of many students entering her middle and high schools were well below grade level. She convened a steering committee to adapt the comprehensive approach of the Harlem Children's Zone to address the challenges faced by Kenilworth-Parkside children. After completing a planning process with substantial resident engagement, a collaborative was formed to develop and carry out the program. The group included traditional District public elementary schools, government agencies, and various local service providers along with the Cesar Chavez Public Charter Schools. This group, which became DCPNI, was incorporated as a nonprofit later that year (Comey et al. 2012).

DCPNI received support from local philanthropies in 2009, and in 2010, it was awarded a $500,000 planning grant from the new US Department of Education Promise Neighborhoods initiative. Its work under that grant (community outreach, needs assessment, and planning) was the basis for its successful application for a full Promise Neighborhoods implementation grant of $25 million over five years (or $5 million a year for five years), awarded in 2012.

Promise Neighborhoods is one of the programs in the Obama administration's Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative (White House 2011). All the programs in this initiative seek integrative solutions through work that breaks down programmatic silos and deals with neighborhoods and families in a holistic manner. This goal means Promise itself deals with barriers and opportunities in children's lives well beyond what happens in the classroom. It also means Promise needs to coordinate its activities with broader efforts to improve conditions in the neighborhood.

This coordination of efforts is exactly what happened in Kenilworth-Parkside as various local community development organizations planned new housing and improvements to community facilities and infrastructure to coincide with the implementation of DCPNI (Gallagher et al. 2015, 6).

WORK BASED ON DATA FROM THE START

All Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative programs emphasize the use of data in planning and, especially, in performance monitoring. DCPNI had favored this approach, however, even before those programs began. The idea of making programs more data driven had been discussed actively in the mid-2000s by Washington, DC, civic leaders, some of whom were involved with DCPNI, and DCPNI recognized the important role data had played in the Harlem Children's Zone.

The DCPNI team, like many teams managing similar programs in other cities, recognized that internal development of all the data-handling capacities likely to be required would be extraordinarily expensive. The obvious solution was to contract with another organization that already had those capacities. But just any organization would not do. Given the mission of Promise, DCPNI needed to hire a local "data intermediary" that not only had the necessary capacities but was also well tested and trusted locally in community work. Such intermediaries are the foundation of the NNIP model, and the DCPNI team understood immediately that the local NNIP partner, NeighborhoodInfo DC (supplemented by other Urban Institute specialists), would be the right choice. Like other NNIP partners, NeighborhoodInfo DC not only had an information system (a broad array of neighborhood-level indicators with trends going back over many years), but it also had experience in designing and conducting surveys and in obtaining other types of data. In addition, NeighborhoodInfo DC had developed solid relationships with city and community institutions established by helping them analyze data in creative and productive ways.

DCPNI had contracted with NeighborhoodInfo DC/Urban to serve as its data partner by the time their planning grant was awarded in 2010. The work began with the development of a "needs assessment and segmentation analysis" in the period from October 2010 to July 2011 (Popkin et al. 2011).[2] This work included (1) a comprehensive analysis of neighborhood conditions and trends using national and local datasets, (2) focus groups with adult and teenage residents, (3) resident retreats, (4) teacher interviews, and (5) a school climate survey of middle school and high school students about how they see the environment in their schools.

Most noteworthy, however, was the role the NeighborhoodInfo DC team played in the first round of program planning. The planning process was conducted through eight "results-driven working groups" that corresponded to the goals that had been adopted by DCPNI: (1) ready for

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[2] *The segmentation analysis identifies and presents more detailed information on subpopulations judged to be most in need.*

kindergarten, (2) students proficient in core subjects, (3) middle school–high school–college transition success, (4) students are healthy, (5) students feel safe, (6) students live in stable communities, (7) families and communities support learning, and (8) 21st century learning tools (Popkin et al. 2011).

Too often public programs collect data but relegate the data to an appendix and do not really use them in decisionmaking. To avoid that problem, DCPNI embedded data partner staff in each of the working groups and told them to be active participants. These staff would select relevant data to present at meetings and then facilitate the discussion with the other participants about what the data implied for program design. These "dialogues with data" were credited as having an important influence on the plans that emerged.

One example that affected almost all the working groups was the data partner analysis showing that most of the school-age children who live in Kenilworth-Parkside attended schools outside its boundaries (Popkin et al. 2011, 6). In the 2008–09 school year, public school students living in the neighborhood attended 149 schools. Approximately half the elementary school students went to one of the two elementary schools inside the boundaries (Neval Thomas and Kenilworth). Rates were even lower for the schools at higher levels (both charter schools) located in the Kenilworth-Parkside footprint. Only 29 percent of the resident middle school students attended Cesar Chavez Parkside Middle School, and 15 percent of the high school–age students attended Cesar Chavez Parkside High School. Even though DCPNI leaders were well aware that the Washington, DC, school district was extremely "choice oriented," these numbers came as a shock.

Although the team is still assessing the implications of this finding for its work, one programmatic strategy is to increase attention to out-of-school-time programs inside the neighborhood that could assist resident children and strengthen their sense of community regardless of where they actually attend school.

A second example pertained to a key measure for the "ready for kindergarten" working group: the "percent and number of young children in center-based or formal home-based early learning programs." NeighborhoodInfo DC mapped the center-based child care locations and collected data on capacities and quality ratings of both center- and home-based providers. Although about half of all children ages 4 and younger were enrolled in formal early child care, the early child care providers were largely rated as low quality. The data also showed a dearth of programs for infants and toddlers and supported DCPNI's efforts to bring an Educare early childhood school to the neighborhood.

In a third example, new data made available to the "students are safe" working group showed locations where different types of crime were concentrated in the community. This information led to collaborative work with the police to better target the deployment of police resources generally and to new efforts to monitor locations where children were most likely to be mugged as they came to and from school. Their approach to the latter problem involved employing returning nonviolent ex-offenders to walk the routes at appropriate times to ensure children would be safe.

In yet another example, data were uncovered to show that retention rates in the Cesar Chavez Parkside High School were surprisingly low (in one year, the size of the 12th-grade class was half the size of the 9th-grade class four years earlier). This finding stunned the working group focusing on middle and high school issues and led to their design of a pipeline of new strategies, such as establishing an Early Warning Attendance System to prevent and reduce chronic absenteeism.

DATA IN THE IMPLEMENTATION PHASE: TRACKING PERFORMANCE AND OUTCOMES

Since the DCPNI implementation grant was awarded in 2012, the US Department of Education issued a comprehensive guidebook on the use of data in Promise Neighborhoods nationally (Comey et al. 2013). DCPNI has stayed ahead of the curve in this area, performing all the activities suggested in the guidebook and more. It has retained NeighborhoodInfo DC/Urban as its data partner to lead this aspect of its work and took an additional step to strengthen its internal capacity by hiring an experienced director of data and evaluation, Isaac Castillo, in February 2013. (Castillo has since been promoted to deputy director of DCPNI. His replacement in his previous position was hired in May 2015, and two additional staff members have been hired to support data and evaluation efforts.) Much of the data-related activity in this phase relates to tracking progress, and always doing so in a manner aimed at improving performance. This activity is happening in three ways.

First, DCPNI, with active support from its data partner, conducted a new and more detailed round of data collection about the neighborhood in October 2013. NeighborhoodInfo DC/Urban designed and provided technical support for a comprehensive neighborhood survey and designed and administered a new school climate survey. They also conducted key stakeholder interviews, focus groups, and observations as part of an implementation study. Together, these data sources provided a rich baseline for understanding the neighborhood's families and students and also revealed other policy-relevant trends that influenced priorities in the DCPNI agenda more broadly (Gallagher et al. 2015). The survey consisted of 156 questions

on neighborhood conditions, safety, services, and amenities as well as the respondents' household composition, transportation, education, employment, income, and other characteristics.

The survey was conducted by two-person teams made up of one neighborhood resident and one young professional from City Year, a national service organization that supports and trains young adults to serve students in urban public schools. Involving residents in this way offered them not only extra income, but also education about issues and processes that enhanced their capacity for more effective participation in the work of neighborhood improvement. Results from the neighborhood survey are used to track neighborhood change over time; school climate surveys track school change.

The second expansion of tracking capacity, still underway, is the development of a full case management system using Efforts to Outcomes software. This system, which is being developed internally, will have the capacity to track the progress of individual students and their families. The case managers (called "Promise advocates") will use data in the system and information collected directly from clients as a basis for lining up appropriate services to fit the circumstances of each individual case (called "Promise mapping"). These interactions with service providers and their results will be recorded in Efforts to Outcomes to serve as the basis for improved assessment and case guidance in the future. The data can also be combined with assessments and school performance information to enable DCPNI to assess the efficacy of its efforts.

The third tracking effort involves a set of 15 indicators all local Promise Neighborhoods implementation grantees are required to submit to the US Department of Education. The department has identified these measures to hold the overall program accountable under the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA). Examples include[3]

- *GPRA 2*. Number and percentage of three-year-olds and children in kindergarten who demonstrate at the beginning of the program or school year age-appropriate functioning across multiple domains of early learning.
- *GPRA 4*. Number and percentage of students at or above grade level according to state mathematics and English language arts assessments in at least grades 3 through 8 and once in high school.

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[3] *All indicators are defined and explained in Comey et al. (2013, chapter 4).*

The neighborhood survey and other data collection efforts by NeighborhoodInfo DC/Urban provide the basis for DCPNI's submissions to the US Department of Education on the GPRA indicators. Those indicators are useful, but they cover only a small share of the topics DCPNI must monitor in regular management, given the breadth of its program activities. The survey has proven particularly valuable because it provides information on a much wider range of topics of concern and interest to DCPNI.

DATA IN THE IMPLEMENTATION PHASE: EXPANDING THE AGENDA

In its agenda for the implementation phase, DCPNI has incorporated many of the program elements it began under the working groups, but it has added others that further thought and information indicated were likely to be important. All elements are now grouped under four main goal-oriented components: (1) children succeed, (2) parents succeed, (3) strong community, and (4) healthy places.

Data collection and interpretation from NeighborhoodInfo DC/Urban have been important in all four areas, both in formulating (or revising) program concepts and work plans and monitoring implementation. In some cases, new data confirmed existing program directions. For example, focus groups showed parents strongly appreciate and endorse DCPNI's program of out-of-school-time activities. Also, although it is recognized that more needs to be done, recent analysis of attendance data showed improvements in attendance that were attributed mainly to DCPNI's Every Day Counts effort; for example, chronic absenteeism in one of the neighborhood's elementary schools dropped from 36 to 30 percent from 2012–13 to 2013–14.[4]

In other cases, the data suggested the need for new program initiatives or provided a much improved basis for guiding and monitoring management. We cannot review all these data-driven changes in this case study, but we note three examples concerning food insecurity, parents, and school safety (Gallagher et al. 2015).

FOOD INSECURITY

The neighborhood survey found food insecurity (defined to include running out of food or money to buy food over the previous 12 months) was a much more serious problem than previously recognized. In 2013, 49 percent of neighborhood families faced this problem at some

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[4] *See Isaac Castillo, "Chronic Absenteeism," (DCPNI blog) http://dcpni.org/blog-chronic-absenteeism/.*

level. Furthermore, the majority of families have a difficult time accessing healthy and affordable food within a reasonable distance from their home. Most families (63 percent) shop for food outside the neighborhood. Trips average 22 minutes one way, and almost half the residents surveyed think the fruits and vegetables they ultimately buy are too expensive. DCPNI worked through its partners to address this issue soon after the survey results were available. So far their efforts have resulted in (1) securing the services of a mobile food market that now visits Kenilworth-Parkside on a weekly basis and (2) securing an agreement with Capital Area Food Banks to service the neighborhood.

PARENTS

It is obvious that the capacities and behaviors of parents are critical to outcomes for children, but child-oriented programs have only recently begun to act on this understanding. New two-generation initiatives, for example, work with parents in concert with programs for their children (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2013a, 2013b). Although DCPNI had already adopted parental success as one of its four major implementation goals, neighborhood survey data reinforced the importance of this theme. More importantly, the data provided an array of indicators to help staff guide and monitor efforts to address this goal.

For instance, the data showed Kenilworth-Parkside parents were performing better than national averages for similar income groups on some relevant measures but worse on others. For example, 70 percent of neighborhood parents read to their kindergarten-aged child three or more times a week (compared to 55 percent nationally), but only 54 percent report talking to older children about college and careers post–high school (compared to 65 percent nationally). To strengthen results, DCPNI has launched a Parent Academy that offers classes and counseling to parents of elementary school children and a Moms on the Move program that focuses on social, educational, and emotional support for parents of younger children. Part of this component is improving parent achievement directly and, again, the survey provides useful data. For instance, 88 percent of parents have a high school education, but only 28 percent have a college degree; just half of neighborhood parents work for pay (10 percent have more than one job), and 20 percent of parents are enrolled in classes (predominantly in career training programs).

SCHOOL SAFETY

The 2013 school climate survey contained many indicators useful for managing school safety, showing generally that improvements had been made since the earlier survey in 2011, but that much room for further improvement remained. Results for the Chavez-Parkside school complex,

for example, indicated more students reported feeling "very safe" inside school buildings (61 percent in bathrooms, 65 percent in hallways) than on the school property overall (50 percent); 90 percent in 2013 felt staff helps to maintain discipline (compared to 70 percent in 2011); 75 percent in 2013 said security guards help make the school safe (versus half in 2011); 61 percent of students who live in the neighborhood felt very safe in school (versus 53 percent of those who live outside). Between surveys, the share saying someone offered or sold them illegal drugs dropped from 12 to 5 percent; threatened them with a weapon dropped from 21 to 11 percent; and stole or deliberately damaged their property dropped from 41 to 26 percent.

In addition to the data, it is worth considering the value of the "Making Good on a Promise" report itself in the initiative (Gallagher et al. 2015). As a part of its services, DCPNI asked NeighborhoodInfo DC/Urban to prepare this overall report to present the findings of the 2013 surveys in a manner that showed how these findings related to DCPNI's substantive agenda. This request represented a commitment to write the "DCPNI story" in a form that was both consistent with the data and could be shared with the public. This context put substantial pressure on both organizations to think hard together about the meaning of the data in relation to each component of the program. The NeighborhoodInfo DC/Urban team believes the report process has served as a learning device that will strengthen the program in the future.

CONCLUSIONS

Although cost–benefit relationships in a program like DCPNI cannot be quantified, the experience documented here suggests that employing a trusted local data intermediary (like the partners in NNIP) can offer many advantages to Promise Neighborhoods grantees. DCPNI deserves the credit for deciding to be data driven at the outset and for employing NeighborhoodInfo DC to help implement that decision. Most of DCPNI's key decisions in planning and operations have since been based on an analysis of relevant data, when such data could be made available. DCPNI staff now instinctively "look for the data" when they ask themselves the basic management questions: "How well is this element of our program doing?" and "What could we do to make it better?"

This case also suggests that long-term relationships with a data intermediary make sense for Promise grantees. DCPNI contracts with NeighborhoodInfo DC/Urban began in 2009. They have now been extended through 2016 and are likely to be continued after that. It should be self-evident that it would have been almost impossible (certainly cost prohibitive) for DCPNI to try to build the data-oriented skills and experience of the NeighborhoodInfo DC/Urban team into its own organization. Equally, however, the DCPNI story suggests grantees can and should

strengthen their own data capacities over time. That point was well recognized in this case as NeighborhoodInfo DC/Urban encouraged and assisted DCPNI in doing just that. DCPNI staff have expanded and become experienced with the analytics involved with tracking progress and interpreting change. They are also building their case management system. Consequently, the role of NeighborhoodInfo DC/Urban has been modified and somewhat reduced and now focuses on more specialized analysis, data provision, and supporting DCPNI data staff. They continue to provide general guidance and support to DCPNI management on the information side of their activities.

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NNIP is a collaboration between the Urban Institute and partner organizations in more than thirty American cities. NNIP partners democratize data: they make it accessible and easy to understand and then help local stakeholders apply it to solve problems in their communities.

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