

The Organizational Framework: the Poverty Reduction and Neighborhood Development Task Force

Creating a Poverty Reduction and Neighborhood Development System: Toward a Strategy for Reducing Poverty and Developing Socially Functional Neighborhoods

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City of Buffalo, Poverty Reduction and Neighborhood Development Task Force
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The goal of the task force is to develop a strategic plan that leads to the establishment of a Poverty Reduction and Neighborhood Development System (PRND System) with the capacity to reduce poverty and create neighborhoods that change what it means to be poor in Buffalo. In the Queen City, and elsewhere, being poor correlates with living in bad housing, crime infested neighborhoods, attending underperforming schools, and facing a gauntlet of neighborhood-based issues that can thwart one's life chances. While we might not be able to eliminate poverty in this or in other American city, we can change what it means to be poor by turning distressed neighborhoods into nurturing, socially functional communities that produce resilient residents and desirable socioeconomic outcomes.

The Key: Tear Down the Silos and Replace Competition with Collaboration

Literally hundreds of organizations and institutions in Metro Buffalo work on issues related to poverty and neighborhood distress. Collectively, they form a de facto poverty reduction and neighborhood development system. The problem is the system is a non-function one where organizations and institutions carry out their work in silos with little or no meaningful interaction among them.

A fundamental goal of this task force is to tear down these silos and replace this "isolated," individualist approach to poverty reduction and neighborhood development with a quality improvement collaborative method that bases its work on the principle of planning and working together and working and planning together. Why is this type of approach necessary? The reduction of poverty and the regeneration of distressed neighborhoods require a strategic approach that encompasses the interplay of disciplinary and interdisciplinary strategies. Such a multifaceted method can only be realized in practice through the use of a collaborative approach to poverty reduction and neighborhood regeneration. This type of comprehensive approach is needed because poverty about more than income. Poverty is also a condition of life, where behavior and life chances are shaped by where you live, how you live,

and what type of resources you can access. For these reasons, social scientists refer to poverty as a wicked problem.

Poverty is a wicked problem, not because it is evil, but because it is composed of an aggregate of interconnected and interactive socioeconomic problems, such as unemployment, underemployment, declining labor force participation, inadequate schools, dilapidated housing, poor health, crime, violence, weak neighborhood institutional and social infrastructure, family instability, and a sense of hopelessness. Because of its complexity, no single initiative, however innovative, can reduce poverty or regenerate the neighborhoods where low-income population groups are concentrated. A complex, multifaceted problem, such as poverty, can only be solved through a collaborative effort.

Against this backdrop, we plan to attack this wicked problem by developing an authentic Poverty Reduction and Neighborhood Development System based on (1) bringing together existing organizations and institutions that work on poverty reduction and neighborhood development issues, (2) organizing them into domains based on their program goals and activities, and then (3) developing a system of integrating their activities within and across domains. The fundamental goal is to develop a structured approach to their work which will produce better outcomes.

This collaborative approach will be people-centered, neighborhood-based, goal-oriented and strategically focused on reducing poverty and regenerating distressed communities. Such a collaborative method, we posit, will lead to more desirable outcomes. The reason is that a collaborative will allow organizations and institutions to make more efficient and effective use of their resources [talent, knowledge, information, experiences, and fiscal] by planning and working together and working and planning together.

The Approach to Work

1.0 Implementation and Planning

The Task Force will combine implementation with planning. It will, for example, immediately launch a neighborhood demonstration project in the

Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood and start other initiatives when opportunities present themselves.

1.1 Evaluation

The Task Force will immediately start work on the development of an evaluative system with the capacity to measure success within and across work domains. The goal is to develop a formative and summative approach to evaluation. Formative evaluation is a method of judging the worth of a program while the program activities are unfolding, while summative evaluation focuses on outcomes that occur at specific milestones. In this approach to evaluation, we will be able to identify problems and make corrections during implementation, as well as at critical stages in the development of the initiative. In designing the evaluation tool, the goal is to construct a tool that reflects our model of poverty reduction and neighborhood development, rather than build an evaluation system that shapes our model.

1.2 Monitoring and Tracking

We will also develop a system for monitoring the activities of organizations and agencies within and across working groups, including a system for geographically tracking activities and program participants. Setting up a Poverty Reduction and Neighborhood Development Monitoring System requires defining goals, indicators and targets, agreeing upon data requirements and deciding who will collect and analyze data and how.

The Poverty Reduction and Neighborhood Development Tracking System will focus on the deployment of a geographic information system to track spatially program participants, activities, and institutions, which will facilitate cooperation, collaboration and sharing within and across domains. For example, there may be children participating in a five-day summer program, but that do not participate in other youth development programs in the city. By determining where the children live, we can immediately determine what program and activities exist in their neighborhoods and have them enrolled in them. In this way, we can turn a five-day summer program into a year-long activity. Moreover, by examining housing, demographic, and crime data we can also gain insight into the types of neighborhood problems the children are likely to encounter.

1.3 The Neighborhood Development Focus

The neighborhood development strategy is anchored by the simple belief that neighborhoods matter in shaping a person's life chances and in producing positive socioeconomic outcomes. In this regard, because of the central role played by public schools in the lives of children, young people and neighborhoods, our strategic approach will focus on launching a university assisted, community school-centered neighborhood development demonstration project.

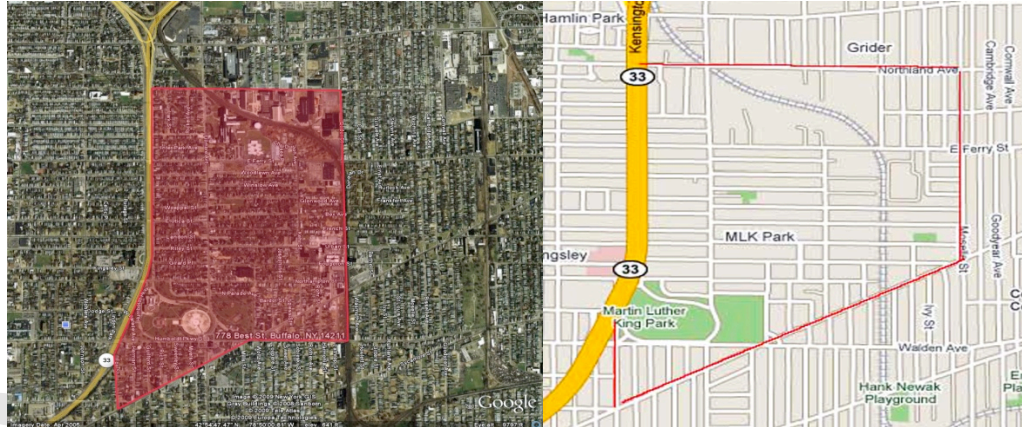
University-assisted, community school-centered neighborhood development is a concept based on two interrelated ideas. First, a university-assisted community school is both a place and set of partnerships and activities that turn a traditional school into a "hub" for the community and an entity that helps to educate, engage, empower and serve all members of the community in which the school is located. In these schools, there is an integrated focus on academics, social services, and community-based activities. An authentic community school, then, is a vital institutional anchor that not only educates students, but that also provides important community services.

Second, an authentic university-assisted community school turns its "set of partnerships" into a collaborative that drives the comprehensive, integrated development of the distressed neighborhood in which it is located. The reason is that a linear relationship exists between school reform and neighborhood reform. Indeed, the problems confronting inner city public schools are symptomatic of the distress found in those communities. Underperforming public schools and distressed neighborhoods, then, are interrelated problems that must be solved conjointly. Not only should school reform and neighborhood development proceed in tandem, but the community school should be turned into the engine that drives the redevelopment process. The reason is that university assisted community schools can be transformed into neighborhood change agents and strategic centers of collaboration which engage residents and stakeholders in efforts to regenerate the community. In this community school model, we emphasize "university-assisted" because universities, alone, possess the fiscal and human resources necessary to provide sustained and comprehensive support for community schools. By partnering with the university, the probability of sustaining a long-term quest to change both the school and the community is greatly enhanced.

The Better Schools/Better Neighborhoods Initiative

In our neighborhood development strategy, East High School will be turned into a community school with the capacity to drive the community development process in the Martin Luther King, Jr. neighborhood.

1.1 The Martin Luther King, Jr. Neighborhood



Using a social function model of integrated development, our neighborhood development strategy will be launched under the banner of Better Schools/Better Neighborhoods, and will include a series of projects and initiatives which focus on housing, infrastructure, capacity building, education, economic development, wellness, workforce development, job creation, job placement, social services (especially for vulnerable populations), youth development and culture. The initiative will be led by the Better Schools/Better Neighborhoods Collaborative.

1.4 The Poverty Reduction Focus—Citywide Strategies that Cut Across Neighborhoods

A poverty reduction strategy must not only regenerate distressed neighborhoods, but also it must attack those socioeconomic forces that confine families and individuals to the bottom of the economic ladder. Such a comprehensive approach must focus on the formulation of local economic development strategies that lead to job creation, while simultaneously developing the capacity of residents, so that they can take advantage of those jobs and opportunities. A central feature of our poverty reduction strategy will

be to forge interactive linkages between workforce development and job placement programs so that people can be placed in “real jobs” once their training is completed.

We also intend to build a supportive environment for those living in or near the poverty line. People who live in or near poverty reside in a complex world filled with numerous problems and difficulties. It is unrealistic to expect them to negotiate the world of work and education without support. Therefore, we must construct a nurturing social framework that provides people with critical services, including those that support health and wellness. This approach includes the development of a range of educational and youth development programs designed to enrich and support the most vulnerable population groups, including the elderly and disabled.

1.5 The Role of the Private Sector and Economic Development Agencies

Economic development is the heart of any city and region and Buffalo is no exception. A strong and vibrant economy must be part of any poverty reduction and neighborhood development strategy. The best way to move in this direction is for the economic development agencies, along with key business leaders, to come together and collaborate on forging realizable strategies to (1) improve the business climate in Buffalo and the region (2) bolster the local economy (3) connect workforce and neighborhood development to economic development and job placement and to (4) find innovative ways to connect economic to social development.

1.6 The Role of Eds and Meds

Higher Eds, academic medical centers and health institutions can play a critical role in the reduction of poverty and the building of strong neighborhoods. These anchor institutions, alone, possess the unique range of human and fiscal resources, which if applied to reducing poverty and building strong neighborhoods, could dramatically change the face of the City of Buffalo. When the entire university is engaged—human, academic, cultural, economic—enormous progress can be made in reducing poverty and transforming inner city neighborhoods into vibrant and healthy places. At one level, university scholars can provide insights into many of the problems faced by inner city residents. These scholars can also provide insight into solutions to these complex problems—economic, social, and health. Through academic based

service learning programs, thousands of faculty, students and staff can work with residents and stakeholders to reduce poverty, bring needed community services, and help build neighborhoods. Moreover, through their procurement activities and participation in workforce training and entrepreneurial development, Higher Eds and Meds could have a powerful impact on the stimulation of economic development and job creation in distressed communities.

The reality is that Eds and Meds can advance their core missions of research, teaching and service by helping to solve real-world problems—problems that are universal but manifested locally in Buffalo (substandard housing, inadequate healthcare, unequal school, dilapidated neighborhoods, poverty and unemployment). If they make poverty reduction and neighborhood development in Buffalo a high priority, we can make enormous progress. Through their varied service learning, civic engagement and internship programs these universities can play a sustained role in the quest to reduce poverty and develop distressed neighborhoods.

1.7 Establishing an Office of Poverty Reduction and Neighborhood Development

The primary mission of the Task Force is to establish an Office of Poverty Reduction and Neighborhood Development, which will be responsible for launching and managing the PRND System. We recommend that this office be financed through a combination of public and private funds and anchored by a collaborative relationship with area colleges and universities.

The Task Force Work Plan

1.0 Goal:

1. Create a effective and efficient Poverty Reduction and Neighborhood Development System that is capable of carrying out work in specific neighborhoods, as well as across neighborhoods.
2. Reduce poverty by 5% to 10% over the next decade years.

3. Reduce Concentrated Poverty in neighborhoods which have poverty rates in excess of 30%.
4. Reduce unemployment and increase labor force participation in the African American and Latino communities.
5. Develop a Neighborhood Demonstration project in the Martin Luther King, Jr., which leads to the construction of a redevelopment model capable of reducing poverty and enhancing the quality of life in distressed neighborhoods. The idea is create neighborhoods that produce resilient residents and positive socioeconomic outcomes.
6. Use a comprehensive approach to housing development [new builds, rehabilitation, weatherization, repairs, rent-to-own] which functions as a stimulus to both economic and neighborhood development. In this approach, housing is an economic stimulus that produces jobs for workers, contracts and sub-contracts for entrepreneurs, as well as produces neighborhood capacity.

1.1 Tasks

1. Establish a Neighborhood Demonstration Project in the Martin Luther King, Jr. community—the Better Schools/Better Neighborhoods Initiative. Once this model is developed, it will be replicated across neighborhoods in the City of Buffalo.
2. Establish a Poverty and Neighborhood Development Evaluation System.
3. Establish a Poverty and Neighborhood Development Monitoring and GIS Tracking System.
4. The UB Center for Urban Studies, the Community Action Organization of Erie County, and the Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority will formulate a strategy for facilitating the activities and work of the Seven Work Domains and developing a framework for strategically focusing projects and

programs occurring on the East Side, as well as in the most troubled neighborhoods in the City.

5. Establish a Poverty Reduction and Neighborhood Development System (PRND) that consists of seven Domains:

a. Education Domain –Forging a Life Long Learning Strategy

This domain will forge a strategy that will transform neighborhoods into communities of learning, which not only compliment pre-k -16, but that creates a framework that supports life-long learning.

The main focus of the Education Domain will be on establishing programs that improve the academic performance of public school students through the implementation of activities that compliment classroom work, including tutoring, after-school programs, summer programs and other activities that connect schooling to problem-solving activities that promote neighborhood development and place making.

b. Workforce Development and Job Placement Domain – Connecting job training to job placement

The task of this Domain will be to construct linkages between neighborhood and economic development and job creation and capacity building for African Americans and Latinos, along with other residents in distressed neighborhoods. The big goal will be to connect workforce development initiatives to specific jobs, so that employment will be waiting for those who complete the training.

c. Social Development Domain [Health, Social Services, Youth and Family Development, Senior Services]—Bolstering quality of life and helping individuals, families and children reach their full potential

This Domain seeks to increase the quality of life among residents by constructing a framework that helps them negotiate bureaucracies, solve problems, obtain critical social services, and develop programs that promote wellness, early diagnosis and treatment, independent living, and other cultural and recreational activities aimed at improving the lives of neighborhood residents. These activities will also including parenting classes, home

management, financial literacy, gardening and other activities designed to increase the capacity of families and households.

- d. Housing and Neighborhood Development Domain**—Creating socially functional neighborhoods which produce a high quality of life and a nurturing environment for its residents

This Domain will situate housing development within a neighborhood context and views housing development as community building activity. The housing development strategy will be multi-tiered and will stress increasing homeownership along with establishing high quality rental units, including rent-to-own units. The focus will be on new builds, rehabilitations, and repairs situated in a well manicured physical setting. Within the neighborhood development domain, there will be a special focus on establishing resident-led safety and security strategies for every community. The strategic plan will be to turn every neighborhood project in jobs and opportunities for business investment and development.

- e. Neighborhood Economic Development Domain** – Commercial corridors are the windows through which people see neighborhood life and culture. If the corridor is lively and well-maintained, then people will believe the surrounding neighborhood is lively and well-maintained. If, other the other hand, the corridor is dilapidated and rundown, then people will believe the surrounding neighborhoods are dilapidated and rundown.

The main focus of this Domain will be on building strong and animated commercial corridors that can spur job creation, while simultaneously providing residents with high quality and affordable goods and services. Buffalo neighborhoods are built around commercial corridors and the goal of this Domain is to determine how to turn this asset into a real strength. Thus, one goal is to turn the corridors into environments that will promote business development, while simultaneously providing business owners in the corridors with an array of supportive services, including opportunities for additional training.

- f. Regional Economic Development Domain**—creating an environment that enables us to use our competitive advantage to create a strong local and regional economy.

This charge of this Domain will be to (1) determine how improve the Buffalo as a place to do business (2) bolster the local economy and (3) creating linkages between economic development and neighborhood development.

- g. Higher Education and Medical Institutions Domain**—In the 21st century, Higher Eds and Meds will be judged by their ability to assist in solving urgent social problems.

This Domain will bring together Higher Eds and Meds and challenge them to make poverty reduction and neighborhood development top priorities at their institutions and determine how best to develop and implement strategies that lead to the reduction of poverty and the regeneration of distressed neighborhoods.

The Selection Process and Orientation

1.0 The Selection Process

The CAO will work closely with the City to identify the pool from which the agencies will be selected. Central Referral Service listing will be the prime vehicle by which we identify agencies to be selected to participate in the initiative. In addition, preference will be given to those agencies that receive city funding. After the work domains have been formed, the admin team, in consultation with the Mayor, will select coordinators or co-coordinators for each of the work domains.

A maximum of ten agencies will be selected to work in Education, Workforce Development and Job Placement, Social Development, Housing and Neighborhood Development, and Neighborhood Economic Development Domains. A manager will be selected to coordinate each domain and a support team will be assigned to work with them (taking minutes, making telephone calls, gathering information, etc.). In addition to the domain agencies and institutions, a select number of people will be recruited to work with each domain. These individuals will be selected based on the knowledge, experience, skills, insight and creativity they will bring to the process.

A similar process will be followed in setting up the Regional Economic Development (RED) and the Higher Eds and Meds domains. The RED domain will consist of the major industrial development agencies, the business support units at Buffalo State College, Canisius College, and the University at Buffalo, along with select entrepreneurs. The Higher Eds and Meds domain will bring together the presidents of area institutions of higher education and leaders of the Buffalo–Niagara Medical Center.

Objectives of the Domains

1.0 [Education, Workforce Development and Job Placement, Social Development, Housing and Neighborhood Development, Neighborhood Economic Development]

- a. Develop a vision and mission statement for the domain
- b. Develop a set of goals and objectives
- c. Develop a set of performance standards
- d. Development a system for monitoring and evaluating outcomes
- e. Develop a plan for working and planning together and planning and working together.
- f. Outline the barrier that inhibit planning and working together and then develop a strategy for overcoming these barriers
- g. Outline the facilitators that make planning and working together easier and then develop a strategy for strengthening these facilitators.
- h. Identify the local and national and international model programs that should be replicated
- i. Determine what programs or activities are missing, which should be developed
- j. Determine how their domain can work efficiently and effectively across all domains.

1.1 The Commercial and Economic Domain

- a. Determine how economic development agencies and support organizations can create an environment that is more conducive to business growth and development.
- b. Create a framework that enables them to plan and work together to achieve city and regional development.

- c. Develop a strategy for creating strong linkages among business development, minority entrepreneurial training and development, and workforce training and development.

.2 The Higher Eds and Meds

- a. Develop a strategy for ways in which they can join in the quest to reduce poverty and develop neighborhoods in Buffalo.
- b. Develop a plan for ways in which higher eds and meds can plan and work together to reduce poverty and develop neighborhoods.
- c. Each institutions should develop their own strategy approach to reducing poverty and developing neighborhoods

Their final product will be a strategic plan, which contains these elements, along with an implementation strategy. The tasks of the commercial and economic domain is to determine how to enhance the business development environment and how best to create linkages between business development and neighborhood development. On the other hand, the higher Eds and Meds will outline a strategy for how they can work with the City and neighborhoods to reduce poverty, enhance education, and improve conditions inside neighborhoods.

Time Table

The work domains and coordinators will be in place by the end of the second week of June, along with those assigned to develop the monitoring, evaluation, and spatial analysis system. The strategic plan will be completed by the end of September.

Questions to be Resolved:

- **What type of resource base, fiscal and human, will we have to carry out this work?**
- **What type of product does the Mayor expect the task force to produce?**

- **What type of entity will be developed to implement the plan developed by the task force and where will the funding come from?**
- **We need to develop a framework so that other City Hall initiatives compliment the work that we are doing. Most important, we need to make sure that those City Hall initiatives that impact on poverty reduction and neighborhood development are consistent with and reinforce the activities of the Poverty Reduction and Neighborhood Development Task Force**

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