

PREFACE

In this Preface, we want to share some of our thoughts about community development and communicate our goals for the book and our reasons for writing it.

Community development can be defined as a purposeful effort to improve a place while involving the people who live in that place. Community development provides a forum for all voices to create a shared vision, with a goal of strengthening the economic, social, and environmental fabric of a community. Community development recognizes and builds upon community assets, rather than focusing on deficits. Community development engages residents and connects businesses, health-care institutions, educational institutions, faith-based organizations, elected officials, and administrators.

Finding solutions in the face of sometimes overwhelming odds is part of the DNA of community development. The community development sector identifies opportunity where others see adversity, creates new markets out of disinvestment, and brings hope to individuals and communities that have been ignored and disenfranchised.

While the core values, passion, mission, and vision of community development has been fairly consistent for the past 50 years, the practice of community development has evolved significantly. It has built a strong foundation based on what has worked, and it has adapted to dynamic economic markets and changing political conditions.

The raison d'être of this book is to provide guidance to practitioners, policy makers, and academics on how best to position community development efforts

in the future. There are an inordinate number of competencies needed for community development work. We believe that if organizations focus on a few of these competencies and become adept at leveraging their comparative advantages, it will lead to improved outcomes for individuals and the community.

Why Now?

The Presidential election of 2016 dramatically underscored how disconnected and polarized our country has become. The United States is divided between the haves and the have-nots, and the inclusive and the exclusive. There are those who welcome newcomers to our country and those who would prefer to build a wall to keep people out. Concentrated poverty is on the rise and racial tensions are running high. Given these dynamics, we believe that the time for developing strong, united communities is needed now more than ever, and that community development work is the way to achieve this.

The goal of this book is to show how building strong organizational competencies leads to comparative advantages that can build sustainable community development collaborations that improve economic, social, and health outcomes for underserved residents and communities.

The Authors

We bring over 60 years of leadership, program, and policy experience in community development at the local, regional, and national levels. Here is a bit on how both of us came to writing this book.

Bob's Story

I count myself very fortunate to have landed in the community development field in my early twenties at the National Congress for Community Economic Development (NCCED), the trade association of community

development corporations (CDCs). The late 1970s were an exciting time to observe and participate in the early days of the community development movement/industry. Three years later (1980), I was leading NCCED and continued to do so over a 13½-year period, just as the field was coming of age and experiencing an explosion of growth, strong networks, and intermediaries. At the time, community development was one of the few concepts and sectors that responded to the genuine aspirations, skills, and assets of diverse people and communities. NCCED felt like a mini United Nations with its core strengths being the diversity of its people and the skills they embodied, and its many resources. It was a mosaic of ideas and people. While I was at NCCED, we launched a number of partnerships with faith-based organizations, financial institutions, and funding groups.

NCCED left me with a lasting community development framework that I have utilized to work in a number of different sectors at the national, state, and local levels, including a 3 year stint at New Community Corporation in the Central Ward of Newark, New Jersey. I have been a catalyst in the asset-building world and in the human services field and have held leadership positions in the United Way system, as well as with disability economic self-sufficiency work, older adult “Age-Friendly Banking” and economic security work, and the healthy homes sector.

Through all this work, one of the key themes that I have followed and researched is how multi-sector collaborations build on strengths and competencies of diverse organizations to create lasting impact and outcomes. I have seen this type of collaboration first-hand—forging the community tax partnership model at United Way of America, and playing a lead role in Congregations as Partners in Community Development with Lilly Endowment, the Ford Foundation, Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC), and NCCED.

The two things that excite me most about this book is that I had the opportunity to learn from some of the leading community development practitioners advancing multi-sector collaborations across diverse fields. Secondly, I was able to learn of the growing interest and skills of emerging community development leaders in broadening the impact of community development to address some of our most pressing social and economic challenges.

Dee's Story

I have worked in the community development sector my entire professional life. I was attracted to this work after I experienced my first substandard housing and “slum landlord” while attending university in a city with a severe housing shortage. I recognized that once I graduated and got a job I would have better housing choices, but that people with limited incomes and opportunities would not be so fortunate. In my junior year of college I got involved with a group of urban planning and law students who were forming a tenants’ union to help improve renters’ rights and housing conditions. This experience was a turning point for me and led me to work as a VISTA volunteer after college with a nonprofit housing agency, and later to a graduate degree in urban planning with a focus on housing.

My work experience includes stints with the community development departments of three cities, including a remarkable 2 years working in Seattle’s Chinatown-International District. In 1988 I joined REACH Community Development in Portland, Oregon, and during a 24-year period grew the organization from a small neighborhood-based CDC into a regional housing development organization. During my tenure at REACH, I launched three separate comprehensive community development efforts, partnering with private and public sectors partners. I also oversaw the development of 1300 units of affordable housing, including the one of the first passive house apartment buildings in the USA.

While at REACH, I was active on the boards of several national organizations including NCCED, Enterprise Community Partners, and the Housing Partnership Network (HPN). I also taught affordable housing policy and finance in the Master of Real Estate Development program at Portland State University. I left REACH in 2012 and spent 3 years as Executive Vice President for Network and Corporate Affairs at HPN and in early 2016 became the COO for the Network for Oregon Affordable Housing, a statewide, federally certified community development financial institution.

The book draws from my many years of experience, including first-hand work with the REACH-ACE merger, which is one of the case studies in the book. I have two goals for the book—to raise the bar of professional practice for the community development sector, and to attract young

people to the sector. It is my hope that this book not only provides helpful insights and examples for current practitioners, but also inspires the next generation to join in this very important work.

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Navigating Community Development
Harnessing Comparative Advantages to Create
Strategic Partnerships

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