Giving the community a voice: Lessons learned from a comprehensive survey in an urban neighborhood

Tamar Mott Forrest[a], Dawn M. Wallace-Pascoe[b], Michael D. Webb[c,*], Howard Goldstein[d]

[a] Department of Geography at The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH, USA
[b] Children's Defense Fund-Ohio, Columbus, OH, USA
[c] Center for Urban and Regional Studies at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC, USA
[d] College of Behavioral & Community Sciences and Professor, Communication Sciences & Disorders at the University of South Florida, Tampa, FL, USA

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Weinland Park, an urban neighborhood adjacent to The Ohio State University, has been targeted for revitalization following several decades of disinvestment. The goal of these efforts is to develop holistic solutions that break the cycle of poverty. Such an undertaking requires collecting baseline data to understand community needs, inform programming, and guide revitalization efforts. This paper describes the development and implementation of the Weinland Park Evaluation Project (WPEP) – a collaborative and comprehensive neighborhood survey and needs assessment. Using the RE-AIM framework as a conceptual model, the paper describes how the WPEP was designed to meet short-, medium-, and long-term community needs. In addition, it offers lessons learned as a guide for researchers designing neighborhood surveys and conducting community assessments. An Appendix A includes indicators measured via the survey tool.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Adjacent to The Ohio State University's (OSU) campus in Columbus, Ohio, Weinland Park is an urban neighborhood that has witnessed disinvestment and socioeconomic transformation over the past 40 years. However, several foundations, institutions, and the City of Columbus have recently targeted the neighborhood for investments to break the cycle of poverty and establish a mixed-income, vibrant community. Gauging the effectiveness of such efforts requires gathering data and conducting a comprehensive evaluation to understand the needs of the population, inform future programming, and provide baseline indicators for evaluating change over time (Chaskin, Joseph, & Chipenda-Dansokho, 1997; Manela & Moxley, 1999; Moxley & Manela, 2000; Naparstek & Dooley, 1997; Ostrom, Lerner, & Freel, 1995).

This paper details development, implementation, and lessons learned from the Weinland Park Evaluation Project (WPEP), a comprehensive survey and needs assessment conducted prior to significant community development investments. The WPEP also aimed to satisfy residents' short-, medium-, and long-term needs,

respectively, through (i) connecting residents to appropriate social services, (ii) informing existing and future programming in the neighborhood, and (iii) guiding investments to create a mixed-income, dynamic community. The following section briefly reviews literature on neighborhood surveys and the value of collecting neighborhood-level information before describing the research site and rationale for conducting the WPEP. Procedures to develop, implement, analyze, and disseminate results from the survey are then detailed. The paper concludes with lessons learned during each project phase and recommendations to practitioners.

1. The value of neighborhood-level evaluation

Given that uniformity across communities is rare, especially with regard to poverty and its causes and consequences, neighborhood-level information is essential for developing effective strategies for neighborhood revitalization efforts. Those involved in the National Neighborhood Indicator's Project (NNIP), for example, have recognized that " . . . either the task at hand could not have been accomplished, or serious policy mistakes would likely have been made, if data at the neighborhood level had not been available" (Kingsley, 1999).

* Corresponding author.
 E-mail addresses: forrest.97@osu.edu (T.M. Forrest),
wallace-pascoe.103@osu.edu (D.M. Wallace-Pascoe), mdwebb@unc.edu
(M.D. Webb), hgoldstein@usf.edu (H. Goldstein).

Recognizing this need, evaluation and research at the neighborhood level has increased markedly in recent years. This has included a proliferation of community indicator projects, with over 200 such initiatives identified in the U.S. (Phillips, 2003). Such work is not new – much recent community indicator work is similar to that begun by the Russell Sage Foundation in the early Twentieth century (Cobb & Rixford, 1998) – and includes indicator sets developed, for example, through the National Neighborhood Indicators Project (NNIP) (Kahn et al., 2010; Kingsley, 1999) and Healthy Cities Project (HCP) (Waddell, 1995).

While some indicator projects have analyzed secondary data sets, many have collected primary data through neighborhood surveys (see Table 1). These are often developed from a unique context and vision – e.g., improving programmatic efforts (Advanced Marketing Research, 2010; City of Monrovia, 2010; Flexman-Evans, 2009; Sibirsky, 2001); meeting needs and building on community assets (City of Ypsilanti, 2011; Kovari & Davis, 2010); identifying predictors of neighborhood satisfaction (Grogan-Kaylor et al., 2006); improving youth development outcomes (Earls, Brooks-Gunn, Raudenbush, & Sampson, 1994); increasing levels of safety (City of Monrovia, 2010; Earls et al., 1994); and enhancing community capacity and social networks (Earls et al., 1994; Flexman-Evans, 2009). To increase representativeness, a subset have used random sampling techniques (Advanced Marketing Research, 2010; Earls et al., 1994; Flexman-Evans, 2009; Grogan-Kaylor et al., 2006; Perkins & Brown, 1995; Sastry, Ghosh-Dastidar, Adams, & Pebley, 2006) and/or a door-to-door interview format (Alameda County Public Health Department, 2011; City of Ypsilanti, 2011; Earls et al., 1994; Sastry et al., 2006; Sibirsky, 2001). Moreover, while many neighborhood surveys are comprehensive with regard to the domains included (Advanced Marketing Research, 2010; Flexman-Evans, 2009; Sastry et al., 2006), most do not go in-depth enough to enable communities and researchers to understand phenomena beyond a superficial level with health sections, for example, not probing beyond whether respondents have access to health insurance or need referrals to health services (Sibirsky, 2001).

Given the vast number of existing neighborhood surveys and indicator systems, WPEP stakeholders sought to identify one that could be used for the project. However, no existing survey met the needs of collecting comprehensive data across many domains while also gathering needs assessment information in a community such as Weinland Park (Forrest and Goldstein, 2010). In response, a survey and needs assessment was designed that best reflected neighborhood goals and incorporated stakeholder priorities – the process for which is discussed later in the paper.

2. Conceptual approach, analytic methods, and intervention site

While the WPEP was most obviously a neighborhood evaluation, it was part of a larger series of interventions – including in housing, community cohesion, and public health – in the neighborhood (discussed later in this section). Given this broad range of interventions, the RE-AIM framework is appropriate for providing a contextual frame for the project (Glasgow, McKay, Piette, & Reynolds, 2001). RE-AIM is an acronym which encompasses (Glasgow, Vogt, & Boles, 1999, p. 1323):

- *Reach*: how many individuals (within the population) receive the intervention? It is important to ensure that those who receive the intervention are representative of the population, and not just the 'usual suspects' who often participate in interventions.
- *Efficacy*: how successful is the intervention? Those conducting the evaluation must ensure that a broad range of outcome measures – both positive and negative – are considered.
- *Adoption*: is the intervention conducted in locations that are both representative and replicable? Doing so will allow the intervention to be replicated in the future.
- *Implementation*: is the intervention conducted as originally planned? Implementation can be conceptualized both at the individual-level (do they adhere to the prescribed action?) and at the organization-level (do those conducting the intervention follow procedures?).
- *Maintenance*: are measures in place to ensure the intervention continues beyond direct interaction? Like implementation, this can be assessed at the individual-level (e.g., continued adherence to a plan) and at the organization-level (ensuring that the intervention impacts the organization's culture).

Regarding the WPEP, project leaders prioritized reach, implementation, and maintenance. As discussed later in the paper, we devised a sampling method to ensure that participants were

Table 1
Summary of relevant neighborhood surveys.

	Improving programmatic efforts	Meeting needs and building assets	Predictors of neighborhood satisfaction	Improving youth outcomes	Increasing safety	Enhancing community capacity	Random sampling techniques	Door-to-door interview format	Comprehensive
Advanced Marketing Research, 2010	■						■		■
Alameda County Public Health Dept., 2011								■	
City of Monrovia, 2010	■				■				
City of Ypsilanti, 2011		■						■	
Earls et al., 1994				■	■	■	■	■	
Flexman-Evans, 2009	■					■	■		■
Grogan-Kaylor et al., 2006			■				■		
Kovari & Davis, 2010		■							
Perkins & Brown, 1995							■		
Sastry et al., 2006		■					■	■	■
Sibirsky, 2001	■						■	■	