Making the Case for Change
Using data to identify community needs and spur action
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Gathering information about the economic and social health of your community is an essential first step in launching any type of advocacy campaign, social enterprise or venture. Data helps you understand the needs of your neighborhood, helping to ensure that your advocacy efforts are tailored to the real challenges of the community and not the assumed needs.

Data matters

The One Hill Coalition, made up of faith leaders, unions, and community groups, began organizing in the Hill District of Pittsburgh in 2008. The coalition had identified several community needs, such as increased local employment, increased work opportunities for women and minority workers, and recreation and learning opportunities for youth.

Barney Oursler, Executive Director of Pittsburgh United, told a group in Columbus Ohio that the coalition had lots of perceived community needs, including good jobs and job training. But it wasn't until the coalition reached out to neighbors and started collecting data on the community that they identified one of the biggest community needs-access to healthy and fresh foods. This need was incorporated in to the coalition's goals and it galvanized the campaign for a community benefits agreement (CBA).

Ultimately, the coalition secured a CBA that included funding and first source referral status for community job training programs, targeted pre-bid outreach to minority-owned businesses and firms, assistance from the local government and the YMCA to develop a local recreation center, and funding and assistance from the local government to bring a full service grocery store to the district. Read the One Hill CBA and related fact sheets produced by the **Partnership for Working Families** at communitybenefits.org.

Accurate and compelling facts are also essential to making the case for change to the public and to decision makers. Whether you are asking for funding to support a neighborhood garden, seeking additional funding for public transit, or launching a community benefits campaign, having a basic understanding of available data will help you identify needs, discover assets, and make compelling arguments to support your position.

Fortunately, data and information is more accessible to individuals than ever; you don't have to work for a research institution to access rich information about your community. The democratization of data is not without its own challenges: with so much information available it can be hard to know where to start. In this brief, we provide an introduction to using Census data and community surveys to gain a better understanding on community needs, challenges, and assets. We suggest that you open the Census pages as you work through the guide. We also offer ideas for engaging stakeholders. Stakeholder groups and individuals can provide insight into the community and can maximize the positive impact of development initiatives.

Overview of Census Data

Most people are familiar with the ten year Census count of every person in America. The decennial census collects data about the number of people living in the United States, including the following data points:

- Number of people living in the home,
- Whether the home is owned, mortgaged, rented, or occupied without payment,
- Sex of each person living in the home,
- Age and date of birth of each person living in the home,
- Whether anyone living in the home is of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish decent, and
- Each individual's race.

You can access population fact sheets for Ohio, the US, and all other states, from the 2010 Census, here.[1] State demographic profiles can be found here.[2]

The data collected in the decennial census determines the number of seats each state has in the US House of Representative and is used in formulas to distribute federal funds to states and communities. The ten-year Census doesn't get into deep detail about economic and social issues. However, key indicators like poverty, unemployment, and education attainment, can tell you a lot about how a community is faring, particularly when those indicators are compared to other neighborhoods, or state rates. And fortunately, the Census Bureau does a lot more than just the decennial census. The Bureau also publishes the following surveys, which can provide detailed information about a particular place, population, or industry:

- Economic Census – published every 5 years, contains detailed information by industry on the number of firms, employment, labor costs, sales, receipts, expenses, assets, capital investment and inventory.[3] Includes information on the number of female- or minority-owned firms. Information is available by industry and by state, county, place, and metropolitan area.

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[1] http://www.census.gov/geo/www/maps/2010_census_profile_maps/census_profile_2010_main.html.
[2] http://2010.census.gov/news/press-kits/demographic-profiles.html.
[3] http://www.census.gov/econ/census07/www/understanding_data_sets/content_data_items.html.

- <u>Census of Governments</u>[4] – published every 5 years, contains information on the size and scope of the public sector, including information on public employment and payroll, and public finances. Data available by level of government (federal, state, local), type of government (state, county, city, township, special district, school district) and category of government activity. Includes information on public school finance.
- <u>American Community Survey</u>[5] – annual/ongoing survey, provides current information to plan investments and services in communities. The ACS collects data on how Americans are living. This survey is most likely to be helpful in understanding local needs and assets, including: basics (age, sex, Hispanic or Latino origin, race, and relationship of individuals in the home), social information (ancestry, citizenship status, disability, education attainment, grandparents as caregivers), financial/housing (type, value of property, taxes paid on property, cost of utilities), physical/housing (home heating fuel, acreage, bedrooms, plumbing), economic (class of worker, food stamp benefit, health insurance coverage, income, commuting information, occupation, place of work).

  The ACS sample size is much smaller than the decennial census. Therefore in order to develop accurate estimates for jurisdictions with populations of less than 65,000 you will need to consult the ACS 3- or 5-year estimates. The Census Bureau offers a detailed guide to help data users understand when to use which ACS product. You can access the guide <u>here</u> and detailed users guides can be found <u>here</u> on the census.gov website.

Access Census Data

The American Factfinder is your portal to census data. All data described in the Census section of this brief can be accessed through the American Factfinder search engine on the Census Bureau's <u>website.</u> The Bureau is in the process of transferring all data to a more user-friendly search engine. The move should be complete in the fall of 2011. Until then some data will only be accessible through the Legacy version of the Factfinder, also available on the Bureau's website.

The Factfinder, even the updated user-friendly version, can be difficult to use. The "quick start" search tool, found front and center on the Factfinder home page is a good place to start a search, particularly if you are looking for state level data and you know how the Bureau labels the topic you are seeking. The Bureau provides detailed instructions and a tutorial for using "quick start," which can be accessed <u>here</u>.[6]

The "<u>search</u>" page give you more control and more search options, if you are searching for very specific data, such as how much manufacturers in Lorain county spend on energy costs. The right sidebar of the search page lists the various ways you can narrow your search and locate data:

- Topics (people, housing, businesses, product type, dataset),
- Population groups (race, ancestry, country of origin),
- Industry codes, and
- Geography (nation, state, city, place, metropolitan area, census tract).

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[4] <u>http://www.census.gov/govs/cog/</u>.
[5] <u>http://www.census.gov/acs/www/</u>.
[6] <u>http://factfinder2.census.gov/help/en/american_factfinder_help.htm#searching_for_data/quick_start.htm</u>.

As you add data points to your selection box, the data sets will be narrowed. Adding items will help you zero in on the data you are most interested in.

There are four tips to remember when using the Factfinder:

1) Click on the grey "I" info icon for more information about the data or the search box. These icons appear in several locations on the website and often lead to tutorials and FAQs, particularly helpful if a search is unproductive. The icons also provide detailed information about the source of the data being retrieved, particularly important if you are trying to use 3- or 5-year estimates of the ACS.

2) The "Your Selections" box in the upper left corner of the search page is your search road map. As you add topics, populations, and geographies to your search the selections should appear in the box. You can easily remove selections by deleting them from the box. If your search is not producing results or producing results that don't match your request, your selections box will tell you exactly how your search is being narrowed.

3) When comparing data on different geographies or populations make sure you are using the most recent and largest sample size that is available for *all* the geographies or groups being compared. You should not compare ACS-5 data with decennial data.

4) The census website, even the more user-friendly site, is often difficult to navigate. You can call the Bureau for assistance; contact the regional office at 1-800-432-1495.

Turning Census Data Into a Community Story

Knowing where and how to access data is only one aspect of making a case for community change. You must also transform the data into a meaningful story about your community. Often your project will suggest what sort of data points to collect and analyze. For example, if you are interested in public transit, you may want to know what is the primary way people in a particular city commute to work. In Oberlin, Ohio most people drove alone (41 percent) or walked (32 percent). You can find that information in the ACS 5-year survey data.

If you do not know where to start or if you want to collect data to produce a snapshot of a particular community, there are some key indicators you can examine:

- Median income;
- Poverty rates;
- Housing characteristics (own/rent);
- Education attainment;
- Employment.

You can examine these statistics for a particular geography and/or for specific demographic populations. The Factfinder allows you to download the data as a PDF or an excel file. Downloading the data in Excel will allow you to build charts and graphs that will help you analyze the data and communicate the information to others in a compelling persuasive way.

Table 1 is an example of one way to compile and communicate census data. The table shows income disparities by race and education in Lorain County, Ohio. According to the data, African-Americans, individuals with a high school education or less, women, and single parent families are more likely to be poor. This data suggests that the community needs to do more to bring women and African Americans into the economy. The disparity could be addressed by increasing funding for pre-apprenticeship programs that seek to boost the number of women and minorities in the skilled trades, or by creating a public jobs program.

Table 1	
2010 Census data shows large income disparities in Lorain County	
Population	**% of population living below poverty level**
Race	
White	9.6%
African American	46%
Educational attainment	
Less than high school	27.7%
High school graduate	10.9%
Some college, associate degree	9.8%
Bachelor Degree or higher	1.8%
Employment status	
Unemployed male	22.2%
Unemployed female	36.6%
Household	
Family with female householder, no husband present	36.1%
Family with female householder, no husband present (with children under 5 years, only)	52.9%
Source: 2010 American Community Survey, American Factfinder	

"Columbus by the numbers," a slide presentation based on Census data, shows how a particular zip code compares to the city, state and nation on key economic indicators. As the slides demonstrate, comparing census data can show great disparities between neighborhoods or demographic populations. The presentation is available on our website at www.policymattersohio.org/high-road-toolkit2011.

Community Surveys

Census data can be used to create a snapshot of the community. It is important to remember that all Census data are estimates and even the most current data can't capture what is trending in a neighborhood and can't replicate the fears, concerns, hopes, and wishes of the people living in the neighborhood. A community survey is a way to bridge the data gap.

A survey is a time- and resource-intensive project, but the results can speak volumes about the needs and assets of the community. The process of conducting the survey can help disseminate information about pending developments and generate interest in the project. Ultimately, a survey provides a new avenue for public participation in the development debate.

Engage Community Stakeholders

Policymakers should encourage meaningful stakeholder engagement with the development process by conducting targeted outreach to a diverse and broad set of community leaders and members. Community participation is essential to making sustainable and fair neighborhood development decisions. Similarly, a diverse coalition of stakeholders is an essential component of any community benefit commitment campaign. A broad coalition is often the only way for community members to build sufficient political power and campaign resources to impact local development.

Groups engaging in sustainable community development should consider who or what groups will be impacted either positively or negatively from the proposed investments. Stakeholder groups that should be targeted for outreach include:

- Community advocacy groups;
- Representatives of labor unions;
- Faith leaders;
- Business leaders;
- Environmental advocacy organizations;
- Research organizations and institutions;
- Neighborhood associations;
- Students and youth organizations, and;
- Residents.

The Good Jobs and Livable Neighborhoods Coalition in Milwaukee, Wisconsin is made up of more than 20 organizations, including anti-poverty advocates, faith-based organizations and churches, environmental organizations, and labor. This type of 'big-tent' inclusive coalition is essential to building the kind of political leverage needed to win a community benefits policy that addresses a range of community needs.

Milwaukee Good Jobs and Livable Neighborhoods Coalition Members

9 to5 National Association of Working Women • AFSCME District Council 48 • FT Local 212 Arlington Court Resident Organization Community Advocates • Great Waters Group of the Sierra Club • Harambee Ombudsman Project, Inc. • Hillside Neighborhood Residents Council • Institute for Wisconsin's Future • Interfaith Conference of Greater Milwaukee • Metro Milwaukee Fair Housing Council • MICAH- Inner city Congregations • Milwaukee County Labor Council • Northcott Neighborhood House, Inc. • Painters Local 781 • St. Benedict Community Meal • St. Benedict the Moor Catholic Church • United Auto Workers Local 469 • United Lodge 66, Machinists Union • Urban Underground • Wisconsin Citizen Action • Wisconsin Council on Children and Families • Wisconsin Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals • Women and Poverty Public Education Initiative

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The Good Jobs and Livable Communities coalition secured a **community benefits policy**, an ordinance requiring any development on a specific tract of county-owned land to meet job quality standards and hire local residents. It also established a separate fund that will finance affordable housing development using money from the sale of county land. The organization secured high road development provisions that created good wages and ensured local workers had access to those jobs. Plus, the group helped create a pool of money to solve another problem – the lack of affordable housing. The Good Jobs and Livable Communities ordinance is available from the **Partnership for Working Families**.

Similarly, the Department of Housing and Urban Development has published a list of key stakeholders for workforce development initiatives. The list includes workforce practitioners, housing and homelessness advocates, social service advocates and provides, and the business community. The list can be found here.[7]

Stakeholder engagement means more than hosting a meeting for community comment on a development initiative or seeking community comments at the close of project planning. Engagement is building and maintaining relationships with stakeholder groups and starts with targeted outreach. Policymakers should inform stakeholders of development initiatives when new developments and initiatives are being planned and when their participation can have impact on the decisions being made. Similarly, community groups interested in community benefit campaigns should not decide community needs before building and consulting with a broad coalition of stakeholders. Stakeholders are not simply project validators. They can have real insight and information that can maximize the positive and mitigate the negative impacts of the initiative, development, or campaign.

Conclusion

This brief outlines ways in which community members, policy stakeholders, and decision-makers can find information on their community's economic and social health. The Census is a critical tool in accessing this type of information. Once the information from the Census is retrieved, a community story must be told in order to accurately portray the importance of the data. These stories reveal community fears, concerns, hopes, and wishes using real data. Enabling communities to be incorporated into project developments gives community members a sense of empowerment and ensures their needs are also of concern to the developer. A broad coalition is often the only way for community members to build sufficient political power and campaign resources to impact local development. This can be achieved through various policy options, including community benefit agreements and community benefit policies. This brief gives some tools to empower communities and stakeholders to take charge of development occurring in their community by using data from the Census.

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[7] www.hudhre.info/documents/KeyStakeholdersHandout.pdf.