HOW TO SUPPORT A MORE POWERFUL NEIGHBOURHOOD:

A City Officials Guide to Supporting Strong Neighbourhoods

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Abstract

Neighbourhood functions are the basis of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD). City officials have the opportunity to support the 7 functions of neighbourhoods, by becoming precipitators of strong neighbourhoods. Taking the time to get out into the neighbourhood and develop an understanding of the unique structures of associations is where city officials can help to further strengthen their neighbourhoods. This ABCD practitioner series report discussed how through micro grants, free space, and other resources, city officials can help to bring out the best in their neighbourhoods and help to create strong and healthy communities.

ABCD Practitioner Series

How to Support a More Powerful Neighbourhood:
A City Officials Guide to Supporting Strong Neighbourhoods

Introduction to ABCD and the 7 Functions of Neighbourhoods[1]

The list below are the 7 functions of neighbourhoods[2]. These are shared functions, things that neighbours take on together that result in a community that supports, collaborates, and results in a good life for themselves, their neighbours and the local environment and economy. Over the years institutions or large organizations have stepped into these roles and although they have done this with good intention, they have not been able to replace the care that comes for one another when these functions are being carried out amongst neighbours. The list is based on several years of research by John McKnight and Jody Kretzman, which formed the foundation for what we now know as Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)[3]. Just over thirty years ago, McKnight and Kretzman travelled to and spent time in hundreds of neighbourhoods around the United States. As they spent time with citizens in neighbourhoods, they learned that when neighbours were producers in their neighbourhoods, tapping into their local assets these 7 neighbourhood functions are where their efforts centred.

1. Enabling Health
2. Assuring Security
3. Stewarding Ecology
4. Shaping Local Economies
5. Contributing to Local Food Production
6. Raising our Children
7. Co-creating Care

At the heart of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) is the pursuit of what is strong in community, not what is wrong. What is strong or the assets in communities and neighbourhoods include,

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[1] The term neighbourhood is used in this document. City Officials should use the langue that feels most appropriate and best received in the community where they are working, for example in a rural area community may be the better term.

[2] Neighbourhood Necessities, Seven Functions that Only Effectively Organized Neighbourhoods Can Provide, John McKnight, 2013 https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/publications/publications-by-topic/Documents/Neighborhood%20Necessities%202013.pdf
The 7 Functions of Flourishing Communities: A Path Towards Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Vison, Cormac Russell https://www.nurturedevelopment.org/blog/the-7-functions-of-flourishing-communities-a-path-towards-finding-and-mobilizing-a-communitys-vision/

[3] Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets (1993). By John P. Kretzmann, John L. McKnight https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/publications/Pages/basic-manual.aspx

- individuals and their gifts; people's gifts of the head, hands, and heart[4],
- associations; any group where two or more folks get together around a common passion, gift, or cause such as, neighbourhood groups, clubs, service groups, informal groups, faith groups,
- institutions; municipalities, health care organizations and community agencies,
- places in community; parks, trails, third spaces,
- local exchange with local businesses and local economic development or the way money and goods flow through a community, and
- culture and stories; sharing how the assets have come together, encouraging us to do even more together.

Taping into those assets or weaving them together is how neighbours can experience the 7 functions of neighbourhoods. Using an ABCD approach, neighbours can ask three questions:

1. What can we achieve by using our own assets?
2. What can we achieve with our own assets if we get some outside help? and
3. What can we not do with our assets that must be done by outsiders? Institutions cannot do what communities can do, and communities cannot do what institutions can.[5]

Questions for City Officials About How They Can Act as Precipitators for Strong Neighbourhoods

There is great possibility in local municipalities finding their role as

> Saul Alinsky, one of the Godfathers of neighborhood organizing, enjoyed asking people, "What is a leader." Usually, no one gave the answer that he had in mind, and he said, "A leader is somebody who has followers." By that he meant that at least they were people who had vision, solutions, special skills and the ability to inspire. There is another kind of leader who **precipitates** groups of productive citizens who have vision, solutions, skills, and the ability to inspire.
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> The community organizing that needs support today is focused on enabling local relationships that result in production of well-being rather than consumption of system commodities. This requires us to understand what we can produce as neighbors and when we need institutional support.
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> Source: https://johnmcknight.org/enabling-productive-neighborhoods-the-role-of-a-new-kind-of-leader/

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[4] 1. Gifts of the head (subjects residents know, e.g., law, mathematics, medicine and so on), 2. Gifts of the hands (practical skills that residents know, e.g., playing a musical instrument, fixing a car, taking care of children, videography, writing and so on) and 3. Gifts of the heart (issues residents care deeply about, e.g., childhood education, healthy eating, biking infrastructure and so on). From: Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD): core principles Ivis García https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/publications/Documents/Workbooks/ABCD%20101%20-%20Chapter%20-%20CD%20Reader.pdf

[5] Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD): core principles. Ivis García https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/publications/Documents/Workbooks/ABCD%20101%20-%20Chapter%20-%20CD%20Reader.pdf

precipitators[6] so that citizens in neighbourhoods might be producers in their neighbourhoods. The following, are 5 questions that City Officials can ask themselves:

1. How can you find out if the neighbourhoods you know are active in these functions?
2. Do you have neighbourhoods that are active in those 7 neighbourhood functions? What are they doing to fulfill the functions?
3. How can you support these neighbourhoods to fulfill those seven functions?
4. How can city officials precipitate neighbourhoods that are not engaged in doing work in those seven areas?
5. What are the functions that you do as a city official that are better done by people in the community?

Why focus on these 7 functions of neighbourhoods?

These 7 functions are necessary for a healthy and productive neighbourhood. They are also functions that cannot be fulfilled by any institution (e.g., social service agencies, health care organizations, municipalities, businesses) without active neighbourhoods. Cities need active neighbourhoods for these functions to be realized. This is the difference between the people in neighbourhoods being consumers of city services as an approach to fixing the problems in a neighbourhood and those same people becoming the producers of well-being in their neighbourhoods.[7]

Looking at the function of assuring safety for example, an institutional approach to safety is traditionally through policing while a neighbourhood approach to assuming safety includes knowing one another's names, and being intentional about how we connect and associate with one another while together in the community.

> "Police activity, even when it is community centred, is still only a secondary protection compared to these two community actions. Therefore, most informed police leaders advocate for community alternatives to heavy-handed enforcement and surveillance."[8]

A second example is the co-creation of care, seen in the hospitality shown and connection between neighbours. Care is very different from service. Care doesn't come from a program. Care does come when individuals in their neighbourhoods are seen for their gifts, where gifts are given and received.

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[6] "Precipitation" looks like asking the community is there something that we can do so that you can do your thing in community to address those 7 functions.

[7] Leading by Stepping Back: A Guide for City Officials in Developing Neighbourhood Capacity, by Henry Moore and Deborah Puntenney (1999). https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/publications/Documents/Leading%20by%20stepping%20back.pdf

[8] The Connected Community, Discovering the Health, Wealth, and Power of Neighbourhoods Russell, Cormac and McKnight, John (2022) Berrett-Koehier Publishers Inc. p. 90

> "We cannot purchase care. Care is the freely given commitment from the heart of one to another."[9]

This is citizenship lived out in neighbourhoods, with citizens in relationship looking out for one another.

When neighbourhoods focus on the 7 functions and City Officials are precipitators of this work there is a culture of community building and a shift from "I" to "we". A collective accountability and identity begin to emerge from the neighbourhood. Collective efforts endure but programs come to an end. This is about building an ecology in neighbourhoods that lead to a good life, requiring small inputs but results in large outputs. City Officials supporting neighbourhoods to do this work is the most effective way to the development of strong, healthy, and productive neighbourhoods.

Suggestions for things City Officials might try

Build a team within the city that has people from a variety of departments that are sympathetic to the importance of being precipitators for strong neighbourhoods. This doesn't need to be a committee or formal group but a circle of people that want to move together to support neighbourhoods. This work will be more powerful if you find others to come alongside you.

Get out into the neighbourhood. Join in and support the work of local associations, taking time to listen in for what the city has that might help the neighbourhood, leaving space for citizens to sort out their solutions and contributions before they offer to help.

Simplify gaining access to city services. Create one point of access for citizens to tap into the services they need to support neighbourhood initiatives.

Create environments and practices that ensure community members and groups feel comfortable and safe approaching city officials with their ideas. Ensure language, culture, personal intersections, and accessibility are not barriers for individuals or groups wanting the city to come alongside an initiative or are not barriers to City Officials being invited into community conversations.

Develop opportunities for micro grants and loans to support neighbourhoods that have taken on the seven functions of neighbourhoods, allowing citizen-led ideas to flourish.

Create opportunities for free space for neighbourhood associations and groups to meet. Policies that address the need for and increase access to easy to navigate free community space (e.g., meeting rooms and use of parks for community events) is a great way for a city to leverage its assets for citizen-led neighbourhood building.

Be on the look out for community connectors, those people that are focused on other's gifts and provide hospitality to others in community. Take the time to convene those neighbourhood

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[9] Neighborhood Necessities. Seven Functions that Only Effectively Organized Neighborhoods Can Provide. John McKnight. National Civic Review 2013 https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/publications/publications-by-topic/Documents/Neighborhood%20Necessities%202013.pdf

residents who indicate an interest in being connectors in their neighbourhoods. Bringing community connectors together is a powerful way to strengthen communities.

Questions to consider when working to precipitate strong neighbourhoods.
Beware of approaching neighbourhoods with the assumption that they need to fit in the city structure. **Instead ask how can we recognize the unique structures of associations and find ways to support those structures?**

Avoid creating the situation where neighbourhood associations and groups are dependent on the city. **The alternative is to ask how City Officials can encourage people and groups to generate their own solutions for their neighbourhoods?**

The associational life that is happening in the city and its neighbourhoods is something to be celebrated. Take the time to be curious and **ask what those groups are doing now what might they take on to further strengthen their neighbourhoods if asked?**

Additional Resources about ABCD, City Officials and Strong Neighbourhoods

Articles and Reports

A study of the Community Benefits provided by Local Associations, John McKnight 2013.
https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/publications/publications-by-topic/Documents/Formatted%20SG%20Study%203(1).pdf

Navigating the Power Dynamics between Institutions and their Communities. by Byron P. White. 2009 https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/publications/Documents/Byron%20White2009Navigating%20Power%20Dynamics.pdf

Strengthen Government and Community through Genuine Partnership, Jim Diers.
http://www.neighborpower.org/papers/building-genuine-partnerships.pdf

The 7 Functions of Flourishing Communities: A Path Towards Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Vison, Cormac Russell. https://www.nurturedevelopment.org/blog/the-7-functions-of-flourishing-communities-a-path-towards-finding-and-mobilizing-a-communitys-vision/

Videos and Podcasts

Pt 1 & 2 ABCD Faculty member Jim Diers explores the key steps towards fostering effective community-government partnerships through examples of his work in Seattle.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=31a8wkHgJJc

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5oCmGTVdhy8

Podcast: Empowering Communities to Discover and Use their Assets to Create Change
https://www.allindata.org/resources/podcast-empowering-communities-to-discover-and-use-their-assets-to-create-change/

ABCD Examples from other Cities

Edmonton, Alberta

Asset Based Neighborhood Organizing: The Method of the Abundant Community Initiative in Edmonton, Canada Kim Hopes John McKnight Howard Lawrence May 2015.
https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/publications/publications-by-topic/Documents/Edmonton%20write-up%20draft%203(2).pdf
Edmonton Neighbouring. Abundant Community Edmonton Stories
https://gis.edmonton.ca/portal/apps/storymaps/stories/aa40fb3085d64caabb7801bf9051e14c

Leeds, UK

ABCD in Leeds website
https://www.abcdinleeds.com/
Pioneering Leeds Asset Based Community Development programme a success, according to university study.
https://news.leeds.gov.uk/news/pioneering-leeds-asset-based-community-development-programme-a-success-according-to-university-study
ABCD Leeds
https://youtu.be/7ezvHZmkLA4

Savannah, Georgia

Leading by Stepping Back: A Guide for City Officials in Developing Neighbourhood Capacity, by Henry Moore and Deborah Puntenney (1999). https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/publications/Documents/Leading%20by%20stepping%20back.pdf

City Sponsored Community Building: Savannah's Grant for Blocks Program

https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/publications/Documents/City-Sponsored.pdf

Seattle, Washington

Seattle Department of Neighbourhoods Website

https://www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/about-us

Seattle Department of Neighbourhoods 2022 Annual Report

https://www.seattle.gov/documents/Departments/Neighborhoods/Shared/FactSheets/AnnualReport.pdf

Community storytelling project, "Reimagine Seattle," Sam Read from the Seattle Department of Neighborhoods, keynote presentation abcdBrant Symposium, 2021.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DtWV3I4TUjM