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Program on Community Development

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***Voluntary Associations in Low-Income Neighborhoods:  
An Unexplored Community Resource***

A Case Study of Chicago's Grand Boulevard Neighborhood  
from  
The Asset-Based Community Development Institute

John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight, Co-Directors  
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**Institute for Policy Research**  
NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

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## Voluntary Associations in Low-Income Neighborhoods: An Unexplored Community Resource

### *Introduction*

There is great concern in the United States about the current and future health of civil society. While definitions of civil society are diverse, almost all analysts include local citizens' associations as a vital expression of civil society and civic culture.

Recently there have been studies and reports indicating a decline in civil society measured by associational membership. These studies represent the conclusions drawn from data that are aggregated and reported by central sources. They do not include data regarding those associations that are not connected to central data collection systems.

In order to better understand the actual current status of associational life, as well as the functions they perform, we need to begin by gathering primary data at the local level. This report summarizes a recent exploration of the nature and extent of the associational life of the Grand Boulevard community on Chicago's South Side. In addition, the project surveyed a representative sample of those citizens' associations' leaders concerning their current activities and their willingness to undertake further specific community building and economic development activities.

These explorations focus on associations because they are the naturally existing community organizations for empowering individuals and mobilizing their capacities. Quite simply, an association is a group of citizens working together. It is an amplifier of the talents, resources and skills of individual community members. It is clear that any community-based effort

to solve problems must begin by recognizing the creative power of a community's formal and informal associations.

*The Survey Site: The Grand Boulevard Community*

Grand Boulevard is a low-income neighborhood on Chicago's South Side. A community of about 36,000 residents, Grand Boulevard is 99 percent African-American. In 1989, 82 percent of children in the neighborhood lived in families with a cash income below the poverty line. (Nationally, 17.1 percent of children live in poverty.) Median family income, at \$8,371 in 1989, was less than a third of median income for the city of Chicago (\$30,707). The 1989 income figure represents a 30 percent decline in family income, after adjusting for inflation, since 1979.

The shifting of manufacturing employment out of Chicago and the growth of the suburbs have hastened the decline of the community. The unemployment rate increased from 24 percent to 34 percent during the eighties. Between 1970 and 1990, Grand Boulevard's population halved, and, in the same period, almost 10,000 housing units were lost. Much of the community's population lives in high-rise public housing. The loss of population and housing stock, and the concentration of high-rise public housing, impose strains in addition to those of poverty.

Grand Boulevard residents, despite these depressing economic figures, have organized to rebuild their community. The community is the home of creative and vigorous community organizations, and is part of an ambitious economic development scheme, the Mid-South Plan, to reinvigorate that part of Chicago.

### *Data Collection Methods*

This study inventoried local citizens' associations which were defined as face-to-face local organizations whose essential work is done by members who are unpaid. An association of this type might have a small paid staff, i.e., pastor, organizer, or choir director. However, the primary work of the group is carried out by the citizen members rather than professional or paid workers. This definition excluded from the survey, therefore, local not-for-profit and governmental agencies as well as businesses.

"Mapping" Grand Boulevard's associational life involved a range of methods, of which four primary approaches proved most productive. The process began by gathering all of the written materials that could be found, including items from newspapers and newsletters, as well as membership and contact lists from local institutions, and from both public and nonprofit groups. The second step involved more than 45 interviews with local community, civic, religious, governmental and political leaders. During these discussions, leaders were asked to edit the existing inventory and to add groups not yet listed. A block-by-block field survey of the Grand Boulevard neighborhood then yielded both more specific associations, as well as a working map of the neighborhood's distinct characteristics such as patterns of public and private housing and differences in residents' income levels. Finally, using this working map in Grand Boulevard, 100 stratified phone surveys were conducted asking residents to add groups to the inventory.

The telephone survey targeted residents of four different subsections of Grand Boulevard, asking them about the associations in which they were involved as well as the issues and activities that interested them. The four subsections included public housing (both high- and low-rise); senior citizen housing (both public and private); an area of concentrated single-family

homes; and a section containing a mixture of rental units and smaller single-family residences. The survey uncovered many new groups in each section of the neighborhood, as well as some interesting variations in the types (*not* the numbers) of groups with which residents in each area are affiliated. (Middle-income residents, for example, were much more likely to belong to associations *outside* the neighborhood than were lower income people.)

### *An Associational Map of Grand Boulevard*

Though no list of a community's associations can ever be regarded as complete, the inventory of Grand Boulevard's associational life represents at least an indicative snapshot of the neighborhood in 1995. In all, some 319 associations were located in Grand Boulevard. Only a few of those associations were of the very informal, unnamed kind. Further interviews conducted by local residents might well have uncovered more of these less visible groups. Nevertheless, the number and variety of associations uncovered in Grand Boulevard is significantly larger than most residents or experts expected.

What kinds of groups make up the associational life of Grand Boulevard? They are so diverse that it is hard to generalize. There are 71 religious congregations of various sizes and denominations. Beyond these, the groups range from those which are very small and informal — e.g., unnamed associations, such as a group of seniors meeting regularly to discuss neighborhood improvement, a group of adults and children gathering regularly around an artist who teaches them — to those that involve hundreds of people and even employ minimal staff — e.g., Alliance of Congregations Transforming the South Side (ACTS), or the Mid-South Planning Council.

One way of categorizing the 319 groups is depicted on the "Associational Map of Grand Boulevard" (Table 1). The map identifies ten different clusters of groups in the community, and provides an introduction to the ways in which citizens in Grand Boulevard organize their energies and commitments. The Associational Map reflects also the particular nature of the Grand Boulevard community. The ubiquity of public institutions, for example, has spawned a large number of associations whose tasks include advising and/or assisting schools, parks, public housing developments and the police. The large number of religious congregations, and of associations connected to local churches reflects the importance of religious institutions in the life of Grand Boulevard.

Table 1

<b>An Associational Map of Grand Boulevard</b>		
<i>Type</i>	<i>Groups Included (Number)</i>	<i>Number</i>
Religious Congregations		71
Age/Gender Defined	Youth (24), Seniors (12), Women (5), Men (4), Parents (4)	49
Public Institution Connected	Schools (15), Public Housing (14), Parks (8), Police (7)	44
Social/Recreational/Cultural	Special Interest (12), Athletic (9), Cultural (6), Social (2), Local Chapters of National Groups (4)	33
Non-Public Housing Residents	Tenants (8), Block Clubs (25)	33
Religious (not congregations)		31
Neighborhood Improvement/Advocacy	Improvement (16), Advocacy (12)	28
Physical Health	Self-Help (9), Health & Disability (6)	15
Economic	Business (6), Employment (1)	7
Political	Party (1), District (2)	3
Racial/Ethnic	History (2), Political (3)	5
<b>Total</b>		<b>319</b>

A complete list of the inventoried associations follows:

### **Grand Boulevard Associational Inventory**

Total Number of Groups: 319

#### Anti-Crime (7)

Community/Police Relations Subcommittee  
Court Advocacy Subcommittee  
Economic Development Subcommittee  
Housing & Development Subcommittee  
Neighborhood Watch  
Pastors of the 2nd District Subcommittee  
Youth and Family Subcommittee

#### Athletic (9)

Adult Basketball League (Robert Taylor Boys and Girls Club A)  
Adult Basketball League (Robert Taylor Boys & Girls Club B)  
Liberty Baptist Cheerleading Team  
Youth Basketball League (Robert Taylor Boys and Girls Club A)  
Youth Basketball League (Robert Taylor Boys and Girls Club B)  
Youth Basketball League (Liberty Baptist Church)  
Youth Basketball League (Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church)  
Youth Basketball League (South Park Baptist Church)  
Senior Croquette Team

#### Business (6)

35th Street Merchants Association  
47th Street Merchants Association  
47th Street Lounge Owners Association  
Chicago Black Artisans  
Ida B. Wells Entrepreneurs  
Liberty Baptist Business and Professional Club

#### Churches (70)

44th Street Church of God



Apostolic Faith Church  
Beersmeba M.B. Church  
Bethel A.M.E.  
Bible Way Evangelical  
Centennial Missionary Baptist Church  
Christ Chapel Missionary Baptist Church  
Christ The King Lutheran Church  
Christian Tabernacle Church  
Church of Christian Scientist  
Community of Islam  
Corpus Christi Church  
Crusaders Church of God in Christ  
Ebenezer Baptist Church  
First Baptist Church of Chicago  
First Church of Deliverance  
First Steadfast Baptist Church  
Fountain of Life Baptist Church  
Gentle Savior Missionary Baptist Church  
Gospel Outreach, Inc.  
Greater Joy Missionary Church  
Greater King Drive Methodist Church  
Greater Moriah Baptist Church  
Greater Mount Olivet Church  
Greater Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church  
Harris Temple  
Hartzell Methodist Church  
Hyde Park Bible Church  
Indiana Avenue Pentecostal  
Israelite Baptist Church  
Kingdom Hall of the Jehovah's Witnesses  
Liberty Baptist Church  
Louis Rawls Tabernacle Baptist Church  
Metropolitan Community Church  
Monumental Baptist Church  
Moorish Divine Temple  
Mount Carmel Missionary Baptist Church

Mount Pisgah Baptist Church  
Mount Zion A.M.E.  
New Bethel Church  
New Covenant Gospel Tabernacle  
New Haven  
New True Vine Missionary Baptist Church  
Olivet Baptist Church  
Omega Baptist Church  
Paradise Missionary Baptist Church  
Pilgrim II Baptist Church  
Prayer Band Church  
Prince of Peace Church of God  
Progressive Community Church  
Range Memorial Temple  
Sixth Grace Presbyterian Church  
South Park Baptist Church  
St. Ambrose Catholic Church  
St. Elizabeth Catholic Church  
St. James UMC  
St. John Baptist Church  
St. Joseph Baptist  
St. Martha Baptist  
St. Paul Church of God in Christ  
St. Paul Church of God in Christ (national headquarters)  
St. Paul Episcopal Church  
St. Thomas Episcopal Church  
Tabernacle M.B. Church  
Travelers Rest M.B. Church  
Tremont Baptist  
Turner Memorial A.M.E.  
West Point Baptist Church  
Ward Memorial Church  
Wilborn Chapel  
Zion Grove Baptist Church

Cultural (6)

201 Choral Ensemble  
Dramatist Guild  
Drama Group  
Organization of Black American Culture (OBAC)  
Roberta Martin Club (in honor of a deceased South Park Baptist Church  
Musician)  
An artist who teaches adults and youth to draw

Employment (1)

Job Source Advisory Group

Health & Disability (6)

Apostolic Faith Church Congregation Care (sponsors health forums)  
First Aid Board (Mt. Pisgah)  
Health Alliance (Liberty Baptist)  
Health Guild (Apostolic Faith)  
Hearing Impaired Group (Apostolic Faith Church)  
Junior First Aid Board (Liberty Baptist)

Local Advisory Councils (LACs) (10)

Cottage Grove LAC  
Ida B. Wells LAC  
Madden Homes LAC  
Prairie Avenue LAC  
Robert Taylor Homes South LAC  
Robert Taylor Homes North LAC  
Stateway Gardens LAC  
Washington Park Scattered Site LAC  
Wells-Darrow LAC  
Wentworth Gardens LAC

Local School Councils (LSCs) (15)

Beasley Elementary School  
Crispus Attucks Elementary School

Beethoven Elementary School  
Coleman Elementary School  
DuSable High School  
Dyett Middle School  
Farren Elementary School  
Fuller Elementary School  
Mayo Elementary School  
McCorkie Elementary School  
Mollison Elementary School  
Overton Elementary School  
Phillips High School  
Woodson (North) Elementary School  
Woodson (South) Elementary School

Men's Group (4)

Apostolic Faith Men's Group  
Men of Action  
Men of Wells  
Seniors Men's Club (Paul G. Stewart Center)

Neighborhood Block Clubs (26)

3500 & 3600 Block Club on Giles  
3500 & 3600 on Calumet  
39/40/41 King Drive  
3800 Wabash  
40th & Calumet Block Club  
41st Street Block Club, 427 East 41st Street  
44th & Vincennes Block Club  
44th & Prairie Block Club  
45th & Forrestville Block Club  
47-4800 Langley Avenue Block Club  
47th & Champlain Block Club, 4731 S. Champlain  
48th Champlain Block Club  
48th and Evans Block Club  
48th and Forrestville Block Club

49th & Champlain Block Club  
49th & Washington Park  
Bowen/Vincennes Block Club  
Calumet & Prairie  
Citizens in Action, 444 East 48th Street and 4826 S. Vincennes  
GAP Association  
Groveland Park Association  
Neighbors and Friends, 49th and Michigan  
Washington Park Court Block Club  
Youth Vision and Integrity, 3737 South Michigan  
Oakwood Boulevard Block Club  
Informal group of seniors who get together to discuss neighborhood  
improvement (2x a month)

Neighborhood Chapters of National Organizations (4)

Delta Sigma Theta  
Elks Club - IBOPW  
Phi Beta Sigma  
Prince Hall Grand Lodge

Neighborhood Improvement (15)

35th Street Gateway Citizens Association  
An Organization for a Better Community  
Community Outreach (St. Thomas Episcopal Church)  
DuSable Area Community Association  
GAP Community Association (GAPCO)  
Grand Boulevard Association  
Grand Boulevard 76 Organization  
Grand Boulevard Federation  
Greater Washington Park Community Coalition  
Mid-South Chamber of Commerce  
Mid-South Planning Council  
New Structure Organization  
Vincennes Improvement Organization  
The Coalition for United Community Action

## The Robert Taylor Homes Network

### Parent (4)

Parents Against LEAD  
Parent Community Council  
Parent Group for Day Care (First Church of Deliverance)  
Apostolic Faith Church Family Focus Group

### Park Advisory Councils (8)

Anderson Park Advisory Council  
Dyett Park Advisory Council  
Ellis Park Advisory Council  
Lake Meadows Park Advisory Council  
Madden Park Advisory Council  
Stateway Gardens Park Advisory Council  
Robert Taylor Park Advisory Council  
Washington Park Advisory Council

### Political (3)

Third Ward Poll Watch  
Third Ward Democratic Party  
Seniors of the Third Ward

### Race/Ethnic (5)

African Holocaust Society  
JUSTUS  
People of African Interest and Descent  
Task Force for Black Political Empowerment  
Universal Negro Improvement Association, Local 429

### Religious — Non-Church (31)

Adult Choir  
Benevolence Group (Liberty Baptist)  
Bible Club at a seniors facility  
Bible Study Group

Church & Society Group  
Community of Islam  
Couples Ministry (Liberty Baptist)  
Deliverance Ministry Group  
God Squad  
God's Gang  
Handbell Choir (Sixth Grace Presbyterian Church)  
Holy Name Society  
Mid-South Covenant for Jobs and Justice (congregations and community organizations)  
Missionary Society (Tabernacle Church)  
Missionary Society (South Park Baptist)  
Monthly meeting of Ministers of the 4th Ward  
Mother's Board  
New Horizons (Widow/Widower group)  
Pastor's Aide Club (Mt. Pisgah)  
The Renaissance Group (churches in collaboration)  
Seniors Choir  
Singles Ministry (Liberty Baptist)  
Singles Ministry (Hartzell Methodist Church)  
Singles Ministry (Apostolic Faith Church)  
Theology Club (Mt. Pisgah)  
Turner-Brown Prayer Group (Sixth Grace Presbyterian Church)  
Usher Board  
Westminister Religious and Social Club (Sixth Grace Presbyterian)  
Wide Awake Club (Liberty Baptist)  
Willing Workers Club (South Park Baptist)  
Youth Choir

Residential Management Corporations (RMCs) (4)

Dearborn Homes RMC  
King Drive North RMC  
King Drive South RMC  
Wentworth RMC

### Self-Help (3)

Alcoholics Anonymous (6 locations)  
Al Anon (1 location)  
Narcotics Anonymous (2 locations)

### Senior Citizens (12)

Ida B. Wells Seniors  
Friends of Seniors  
King Seniors (King Community Center)  
Nursing Home Visitation Group (Apostolic Faith)  
Seniors Social Club (First Church of Deliverance)  
Senior Citizens Group (Liberty Baptist)  
Seniors Club of CHA  
Seniors Group (at Park District)  
Seniors on the Go (Hartzell Baptist Church)  
Senior Saints Society (Apostolic Faith Church)  
Theta Omega Seniors  
United Community of Golden Agers (Corpus Christi)

### Social (2)

Informal Dinner Club for seniors. Meets once a week.  
Line Dancing Club

### Social Advocacy (12)

21st Century Vote (Voices of Total Empowerment)  
ACTS (Alliance of Congregations Transforming the South Side)  
Feed the People/Clothing Group (Liberty Baptist)  
Hunger Group (Sixth Grace Presbyterian Church)  
Just Say Know Club  
People to People Ministry & Pantry  
Policy Committee (Mt. Pisgah)  
Street Soldiers  
United N Peace (Street Nations)  
Vigil Against Violence  
Vigil for the Youth (Ida B. Wells)



Willing Workers and Strangers (Metropolitan Community Church)

Special Interest (12)

- Audio/Tape Club (Apostolic Faith Church)
- Bridge Club
- Bridge Club at seniors facility
- Knitting Club (Liberty Baptist Church)
- Photography Club (Mt. Pisgah)
- Race to Knowledge (youth arts & crafts)
- Seniors Mardi Gras Club (Paul G. Stewart Center)
- Seniors Flower Fund Group (Paul G. Stewart Center)
- Veterans Pocket Billiards
- Walking Club (Group of five women who walk down King Drive everyday)
- 2 informal card playing groups in public housing (2x or 1x a week)
- Youth Video Club

Tenant (8)

- Apartment group that meets once a month
- Building Council
- Informal group of seniors who get together to discuss apartment issues.  
Meets 4 to 5 times a year.
- Group making homes more affordable
- Lake Meadows Tenant Association
- Tenant's Council (Sixth Grace Presbyterian)
- Tenant Patrol
- Wells Tenant Organization

Women's Groups (5)

- Concerned Community Women
- Mothers Against LEAD
- Self-Employed Women
- Subgroup of United Methodist Women
- W.I.N.N.E.R.S. (Women In Need, Nurtured, Edified, Rewarded and Strengthened)

## Youth (24)

4-H Club  
After School Program (Olivet Baptist Church)  
Blue Skies  
Boy Scouts of First Church of Deliverance  
Boy Scouts of Liberty Baptist Church  
Boy Scouts of Paul G. Stewart Center Townhomes  
Campfire Girls, Mt. Carmel Baptist Church, 42nd & Cottage Grove  
Children Around the World (St. Thomas Episcopal Church)  
Girls Growing Gracefully in God (Apostolic Faith Church)  
Girl Scouts of Paul G. Stewart Center Townhomes  
Girls Scouts of Holy Angels Church  
Girl Scouts of Liberty Baptist Church  
Girl Scouts of Hartzell Methodist Church  
Girl Scouts of First Church of Deliverance  
Lakeside Community Afterschool Group  
Madden Park Youth Group  
Mentoring program for community youth (Sixth Grace Presbyterian Church)  
Near South Community Youth Association  
Rites of Passage (Boys Group at Apostolic Faith Church)  
Subgroup of South Side Youth Consortium  
Valentine Chicago Girls Club  
Young Adult Christian Network (Liberty Baptist)  
Youth/Young Adult Ministry  
Youth Committee of Darrow Home

### *Grand Boulevard's Associations: What Might They Do?*

The database of local associations created by the mapping process — which includes their addresses, phone numbers, and names of leaders — allows community leaders to build relationships with the local associations, and to explore ways in which they can contribute to building the community.

To facilitate that process further, the second part of this inquiry involved designing, testing and administering a survey aimed at discovering:

- What functions these neighborhood associations currently fulfill;
- Which associational activities have already affected the wider community; and
- What kinds of community economic development and more broadly defined community building activities associations would be willing to undertake.

The interviews probed past experience, current activity and potential future activities in three major areas:

- Providing Mutual Care Through Work on "Neighborhood Projects"
- Addressing Issues in the Community
- Contributing to Economic Development

A random sample of 23 leaders of the associations were engaged in the survey. These interviews revealed a rich and varied set of current involvements, many of which have impacted the community's life. More than half of the groups surveyed, for example, report having worked on "neighborhood projects," including those supporting youth, senior citizens and families, and those aimed at beautifying the neighborhood, and at improving neighborhood health and safety. Many of these projects represent the associations' experience entering into relationships that provide help, support, and mutual care to those in need.

However, many fewer association leaders reported that their groups had already been involved in working on neighborhood *issues*, as opposed to mutual care projects. Whether teen pregnancy, child abuse, drug abuse, domestic violence, youth groups, or issues facing people with disabilities or those who had been in prison — these pressing issues have not, for the most part, engaged the efforts of local associations.

In a parallel result, an extensive set of questions aimed at discovering how local associations might have been involved in direct economic development activity, or in supporting the vitality of the local economy, or in job training and placement, revealed very little previous activity.

But what the surveys *do* reveal, in question after question and category after category, is the consistent willingness of the association's leadership to seriously consider *doing more*. As concrete potential activities were put before them, the answer heard most often by the interviewers was, "Well, we've never done that before, but we'd certainly be willing to try."

The following four tables summarize the local leader's responses regarding the present and potential community-building functions of their groups.

Table 2

Mutual Care				
	<i>Willing To Do</i>	<i>Not Willing To Do</i>	<i>Uncertain</i>	<i>Have Done So Already</i>
Neighborhood Beautification	18	0	5	10
Working with Youth	21	1	1	16
Working with Senior Citizens	21	0	2	13
Supporting Families	19	0	4	8
Improving Neighborhood Health	17	3	3	11
Neighborhood Safety	17	3	3	8

Table 3

<b>Job Training/Placement</b>				
	<i>Willing To Do</i>	<i>Not Willing To Do</i>	<i>Uncertain</i>	<i>Have Done So Already</i>
Start a job training program in the neighborhood	15	6	2	2
Participate in existing job training program in the neighborhood	19	2	2	7
Participate in an inventory of the job skills and interests of local residents	14	7	2	1
Inform members of neighborhood through postings	18	2	3	6
Inform non-members of local jobs through postings	19	2	2	5
Help local teenagers find jobs	19	1	2	4
Connect unemployed residents to the workplaces of employed members	18	3	2	4

Table 4

Local Economy				
	<i>Willing To Do</i>	<i>Not Willing To Do</i>	<i>Uncertain</i>	<i>Have Done So Already</i>
Start or attract new businesses to the neighborhood	18	0	5	2
Buy at new businesses in the neighborhood	18	2	3	2
Invest in new businesses in the neighborhood	15	6	2	2
Buy at existing local businesses	20	1	2	3
Improve the general business climate	16	3	4	1
Invest in the expansion of local businesses	17	4	2	1
Get banks to provide credit to existing local businesses	19	2	2	1
Close undesirable local businesses	12	4	7	0

Table 5

Neighborhood Challenges				
	<i>Willing To Do</i>	<i>Not Willing To Do</i>	<i>Uncertain</i>	<i>Have Done So Already</i>
Teenage Pregnancy	12	7	4	3
Child Abuse	15	4	4	4
Drug Abuse	18	1	4	6
Domestic Violence	13	7	3	2
Youth Truancy & Gangs	19	2	2	7
Facing Disabled People	17	3	3	4
Facing Ex-convicts	15	4	4	5

In the area of "neighborhood projects," where many were already involved, 75-90 percent of the groups expressed willingness to be further involved. "Neighborhood challenges" elicited slightly lower percentages of those willing to get involved, particularly around the difficult problems of domestic violence and teen pregnancy.

In general, the associations' lack of experience with economic development and job-related activities was overshadowed by the large numbers of groups who were quite willing to start gaining that experience. Questioned about eight specific strategies for enhancing the local economy, for example, 75 percent or more of the groups were willing to be involved in five:

- Start or attract new businesses to the neighborhood
- Buy at new businesses in the neighborhood
- Buy at existing businesses in the neighborhood
- Improve the general business climate (i.e., safety patrols, parking)
- Get banks to provide credit to local businesses

A somewhat smaller percentage, still a majority, expressed willingness to invest in either new or existing businesses, and to work toward closing "undesirable" local businesses.

Similarly, with respect to jobs, more than 75 percent of the associations interviewed expressed a willingness to participate in five of the seven strategies suggested:

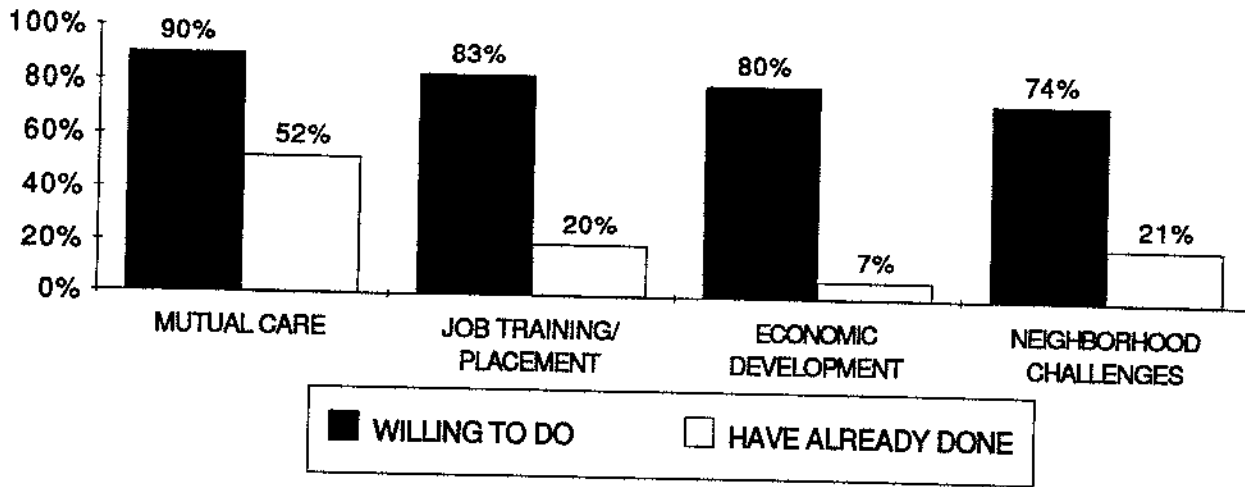
- Participate in an existing job training program in the neighborhood;
- Inform members of neighborhood jobs through postings;
- Inform *non*-members of jobs through postings;
- Help local teenagers find jobs;
- Connect unemployed residents to the workplaces of employed members.

Slightly fewer, but still a majority, indicated that they would be willing to *start* a job training program in the neighborhood, and would participate in an inventory of the job skills and interests of local residents. Finally, a majority of association leaders appeared willing to explore more direct economic development activity — starting a business, or supporting members' business ventures, or supporting other neighborhood economic development projects (see Figure 2).



Figure 2

**PERCENTAGE CURRENT AND POTENTIAL INVOLVEMENT BY  
COMMUNITY ASSOCIATIONS IN SPECIFIC DEVELOPMENT  
ACTIVITIES**



## *Conclusions*

What does all of this mean? Interpreters of these data should be cautious. The interviewers attempted to gain some insight into the respondents' seriousness of intent by asking for some examples of how this willingness might be carried forward into activity. But in reality it is impossible to measure intent, and to project it into the future.

Furthermore, even if one assumes a serious intent that can be transferred to other members of the association, it is extremely difficult to measure a group's capacity for effective involvement. How much can the group take on? What resources, including their members, can they bring to the table to tackle new agendas? Nonetheless, what this work has discovered so far can be summarized very simply:

- The associational life of Grand Boulevard is rich and varied, consisting of at least 319 groups;
- The associations of Grand Boulevard are already engaged in significant community-building activity, especially that which provides "mutual care";
- Large numbers of the associations of Grand Boulevard express their willingness to become even more thoroughly engaged in contributing to the social and economic health of their community, by participating more fully in providing mutual care, working on community issues, and supporting community economic development.

## *Program and Policy Potential*

Local associations in low-income communities clearly represent an extraordinarily diverse array of energy, creativity and mutual support. They

could be encouraged to contribute even more than they already do to the economic and human development of their neighborhoods.

1. Community leaders could contact voluntary associations to discover which groups were willing to pursue particular economic and community development strategies.
2. Interested associational leaders could then, as a group, develop such specific economic development strategies as "buy local" campaigns, form local purchasing councils with institutional partners, and assist local employers to hire local residents through job networks, skill banks, and hiring pacts.
3. In the same way, interested associations could convene around their common interest in the mutual care of neighborhood residents.
4. The mutual care groups could be organized around a particular interest, e.g., young people or senior citizens. They could explore ideas for maximizing mutual care, first focusing on the capacities of associations, and then exploring ways that associations' own agendas can be supported by local human service agencies.
5. To facilitate these ideas, a group of local leaders may want to invest in a "neighborhood association organizer" whose task would be to convene community associations to enhance their contribution to community development.
6. One organizational outcome might be a congress of associations, designed as a forum for maximizing the associations' mutual care, issue-focused activity, and economic development involvements. Such a congress could also emerge as the principal community planning and development group in its neighborhood.

In addition to local associational initiatives, public and philanthropic funders could support and magnify the community-building functions of local associations.

1. Funders could invest in local associational inventories that identify the neighborhood's associations and determine the types of new community-building initiatives their members would undertake.
2. Support for local associational action could be offered to groups of local associations with a common agenda. In this way, funders can avoid creating competition rather than cooperation among local groups.
3. Funders could develop guidelines that make clear that local associations are as eligible for grants as traditional grantees such as agencies and other not-for-profit institutions.
4. Evaluations of local proposals or grants could incorporate a measure of the number of associations involved and new functions undertaken.