



PRINCIPLE

We have long known that social problems tend to be concentrated within a few, specific geographic areas in a region. These are the places where many of the region's low-income people are living and suffer the consequences of "unequal access to public goods." These are the communities with high concentrations of social problems such as low household incomes, low levels of educational attainment, poor health outcomes, deterioration of physical infrastructures and low levels of civic engagement by residents.

This observation is confirmed by social research methods and impels social investors to concentrate their investments in such places with the hope of achieving breakthrough changes in community conditions and the quality of life for individuals and families. Historically, most social investing, whether from public or private sources, hasn't been "place-based." Instead, it has been practiced as if social problems were evenly distributed over all communities throughout the region. As a result, breakthrough changes have rarely occurred in those neighborhoods in which social problems exist and are concentrated. The individuals and families living in these communities have experienced a far lower quality of life than most of us would find tolerable.

A place-based investment approach recognizes the fact that most social problems are not spread evenly over all the communities that make up our region but, rather, are tightly concentrated in a limited number of defined geographic places. It makes sense to concentrate investments in some of those places in the hope that breakthrough changes could happen. Evidence suggests that the Comprehensive Community Initiative (CCI) approach is the best template for place-based social investing.

CCIs are highly coordinated, strategy- and system-level activities that happen at the neighborhood level. These types of initiatives seek to improve community conditions and the lives of individuals and families by tightly integrating the work of evidence-based human service interventions and proven community development strategies. Successful CCIs require a very high level of collaboration among neighborhood-based groups: resident associations, social service agencies, non-profit community development entities, schools, the police, and other community institutions and businesses.

Investors recognize the need for neighborhood residents, neighborhood support organizations and technical assistance providers to articulate desired outcomes that reflect local priorities. At the same time, funders expect to require communities receiving investments to work to achieve a set of outcomes agreed upon as mutually beneficial by investors. This set will include human service outcomes that track the goals of United Way's Agenda for Community Impact, physical and economic redevelopment outcomes that track the goals of LISC, and key social capital indicators that track the capacity of communities to achieve desired outcomes.

The "theory of change" behind the CCI investment strategy holds that neighborhoods in decline can achieve breakthrough revitalization when there is strong collaboration among neighborhood groups (e.g., social service agencies, community development corporations, community councils/resident associations, schools, businesses and business associations, the police, etc.), working together to achieve a set of desired, measurable outcomes (social, economic and physical). The collaborators are mutually accountable for the achievement of the outcomes and develop and work within an agreed-upon neighborhood plan.

In each neighborhood of a CCI, there is a strong mechanism of accountability, designed to assure that groups assume the roles and achieve the results spelled out in the collaborative plan. Even though each neighborhood has its own set of strategies that are working toward specific goals, overall neighborhood outcomes have been identified and connect with many of Greater Cincinnati's major initiatives such as the Agenda for Community Impact, Strive, Agenda 360, Vision 2015 and the Greater Cincinnati Workforce Network.

PRACTICE

In 2007, **place matters** was launched. With coordination by CBI and the funders collaborative of the United Way, Greater Cincinnati Foundation, SC Ministry Foundation, NeighborWorks America, Local Initiatives Support Corporation, PNC Bank, Chase Bank and US Bank, the **place matters** initiative began implementation in the communities of Avondale, Price Hill and the City of Covington, all in the greater Cincinnati, Ohio area.

Lead organizations and community partners were identified in each of the communities to coordinate neighborhood-based, community development and quality of life strategies. In Avondale, the Avondale Community Council partnered with the Center for Closing the Health Gap, Every Child Succeeds and

Avondale Redevelopment Corporation focused on the vision of creating a nurturing environment where children, young people and their families are safe and encouraged to develop intellectually, socially, physically and morally to their fullest potential. The second part of that vision is to fully draw upon the assets surrounding the community so that Avondale gains a reputation as an economically stable community where residents have good jobs and are able to live comfortably. The strategies to achieve these goals include:

- support at-risk mothers in the neighborhood;
- promote health awareness through the Do Right! campaign;
- target two to four streets for housing renovation and new construction;
- engage young people in a community-based program to promote leadership, discipline and civic participation; and
- help Avondale residents prepare for, find and retain jobs with local employers.

The projects supported by **place matters** in Covington have two goals: to improve Covington's aging neighborhoods and housing stock and promote educational opportunities that lead to lifelong learning.

The strategies to achieve these goals include:

- lead community building efforts to connect residents to each other and further engage them in their neighborhood and city;
- award mini-grants to neighborhood associations for community improvement projects;
- boost homeownership through renovation and construction of new housing;
- recruit Covington residents to act as mentors for local middle-school students;
- and
- improve educational opportunities in the neighborhood of Peaselburg.

Price Hill's **place matters** focus is to stabilize the housing market, promote neighborhood business districts and employment networks and support youth and early-childhood development. The strategies to achieve these goals include:

- revitalize housing and business districts in Cedar Grove, the Warsaw corridor and St. Lawrence Corner;
- use the Buy-Improve-Sell program and the Housing Resource Center for targeted physical and economic development;
- explore the Prosperity Center model to improve financial stability through housing, credit

repair, job matching and banking;

- improve the quality of early-childhood education and care; and
- support all school-aged children through after- school programming.

RESULTS

The pilot phase of **place matters** shows how measurable change happens when multiple service sectors of neighborhood-based community development. Collaborate with shared accountability. In Covington, the City has the largest number of resident-led neighborhood associations in recent history guiding the way for engaged and activated citizens. In Price Hill, three schools improved their State performance index as well as moved up in improvement categories of the State report card. In Avondale, all strategies are aligned and connected to each other under the coordination of a major projects coordinator. All neighborhoods have shown that it takes a committed, thoughtful and engaged group of community development professionals to guide, support and act on behalf of the volunteers who care about their communities. As the evaluation shows, **place matters** has been a successful pilot in the three communities selected. Now also in Felicity and Middletown, Ohio, the **place matters** initiative can be used as a model for urban, rural and suburban communities.

It's the principle and practice of evidence-based, aligned and supported, asset-based community development that can be ascribed to improving quality of life in communities.