

Local Partner Presentation: Pittsburgh

Wednesday afternoon, 12:15 p.m. – 1:45 p.m.

Partner Overview and Welcome to Pittsburgh

The University of Pittsburgh's University Center for Social and Urban Research (UCSUR) is Pittsburgh's NNIP partner and was established in 1972 with a mandate to "bring together, in an organized and integrated fashion, the many research activities and some of the service activities of the University of Pittsburgh which focus on the urban phenomenon." The center provides state-of-the-art research and support services for investigators interested in interdisciplinary research in the behavioral and social sciences.

UCSUR has been an information intermediary for over a decade, helping numerous nonprofit and government organizations find and use information to improve the lives of residents and communities they call home. In this opening session, Bob Gradeck will provide an overview of UCSUR's recent efforts, including the development of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Community Profiles project and the Regional Data Center (RDC). UCSUR will manage the RDC in collaboration with the City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County, and will use the project to institutionalize its role as an information intermediary within a regional open data infrastructure.

Following Bob's presentation, Dr. Sabina Deitrick, director of the Program in Urban and Regional Analysis at UCSUR and Associate Professor at the University of Pittsburgh's Graduate School of Public and International Affairs will describe the ongoing change in both Pittsburgh and the region. She will discuss how the legacies of de-industrialization and population decline continue to affect communities. While these broader changes have been taking place, a new picture of Pittsburgh has taken shape, with impressive gains made in industries including advanced technology, healthcare, life sciences, education, financial services, energy, green building, and specialized manufacturing. These emerging sectors continue to reshape the demography, neighborhoods and communities of Pittsburgh.

Community Based Participatory Research and Community Engagement in Homewood

The second half of this session will focus on work UCSUR has done in its role as an information intermediary. UCSUR has developed extensive partnerships in many neighborhoods across the city and region, none more durable than in Pittsburgh's Homewood neighborhood. Located on the City's eastern edge, Homewood was developed during the first three decades of the 20th century and experienced

dramatic racial transformation during the 1950's. Despite its history as a middle-class enclave, it is plagued by social and environmental problems common to segregated neighborhoods across the United States. The built environment in Homewood is among the most blighted in the city. The neighborhood is more than 61 percent vacant with 3,160 abandoned houses and vacant lots. In this session, you'll learn more about how information is being used by a variety of researchers and organizations to support key community initiatives in the neighborhood.

One of the organizations that have incorporated information in its work is the Homewood Children's Village. The Homewood Children's Village is a comprehensive social service, health and education initiative whose mission is to "simultaneously improve the lives of Homewood's Children and to reweave the fabric of the community in which they live." The initiative is based on the Harlem Children's Zone model, and has developed partnerships with numerous organizations and institutions to provide services in support of its mission. The Homewood Children's Village is using data from the Allegheny County Department of Human Services' integrated data system to improve program delivery and track student outcomes. Our presenters have also used photos, property data and crime information in collaboration with students to design safe routes to school and learn more about how vacant and abandoned property impacts the perception of the neighborhood.

Operation Better Block is another Homewood-based organization that routinely uses neighborhood information to engage, organize and mobilize Homewood's residents. The organization has used administrative and survey data about properties to target code enforcement, inform demolition strategies, and hold government agencies accountable. Resident survey and property data has also been used by Operation Better Block to identify residents eligible for social service and property tax rebate programs. The organization has also helped residents appeal overassessed properties, and is using data to help residents participate in larger-scale neighborhood transformation efforts.

Guest Speakers

John M. Wallace, Jr., PhD, is the Philip Hallen Chair in Community Health and Social Justice at the University of Pittsburgh. He has academic appointments in Pitt's Schools of Social Work, Business and Arts and Sciences. Dr. Wallace's research, teaching and service focus on comprehensive community revitalization strategies using community-based participatory approaches. In addition to being a professor, Dr. Wallace serves as the senior pastor of Bible Center Church, located in Pittsburgh's Homewood Neighborhood, and as the president of the board of directors for the Homewood Children's Village and for Operation Better Block. Dr. Wallace has been married to his

wife Cynthia for nearly twenty-eight years and together they have four adult children. Dr. Wallace earned his AB from the University of Chicago and MA and PhD degrees from the University of Michigan, all in sociology.

Samantha Teixeira, PhD is an Assistant Professor at the West Virginia University School of Social Work. She earned her PhD with distinction at the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work in 2014. Her research is focused on how housing and neighborhood environmental conditions affect youth and how youth can be engaged in creating solutions to environmental problems in their communities. Samantha's recent work has focused on engaging youth as research assistants and using data to drive community organizing efforts in the Homewood neighborhood of Pittsburgh. She has published in the areas of macro practice and place-based, comprehensive community interventions for youth. Samantha's diverse practice experience includes work in child protective services, community organizing and development and local government initiatives. She recently won an Outstanding Doctoral Dissertation Award at the 2015 Society for Social Work and Research Annual Conference for her dissertation: "It Seems Like No One Cares:" Youth Perspectives on Housing Abandonment and Urban Blight.

Jerome M. Jackson is Executive Director of Operation Better Block (OBB). Using decades of experience in community consensus building, grass-roots outreach and community economic development, Jerome leads OBB in its mission to prevent the spread of blight and neighborhood deterioration and to further a sense of responsibility and civic pride. OBB carries out its mission by mobilizing residents, elected officials and through partnership with community agencies that focus on education, community safety, green initiatives and youth development. Jerome also has extensive experience and expertise in the areas of program management, mediation, training, community organizing and youth development.

Demi Kolke is the Community Development Coordinator for Operation Better Block, Inc. (OBB). OBB serves the Pittsburgh neighborhood of Homewood, one of the most blighted in the entire city. Her primary job is to work towards neighborhood revitalization through resident engagement, homeowner stabilization, and vacant property remediation. Recently, she co-authored a community development "how-to" manual to train other groups in the area. Demi graduated with a B.S. in Psychology from NDSU and a Master's of Social Work from the University of Pittsburgh.