

Engaging with Suburban Neighborhoods: What's Different?

Thursday morning, 9:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

Since the start of the National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership (NNIP) one of the guiding principles of the network and its local partners is to use neighborhood data to build the capacity of institutions and residents in low-income neighborhoods. In the 1990's more poor people lived in cities than in the suburban areas and most neighborhoods with concentrated poverty existed in the urban core. These central city neighborhoods are the ones NNIP partners have traditionally focused on serving. In recent years, however, the number of people living in metro areas who are poor and living in suburban areas outnumber the poor population living in cities. Over the last decade the suburban poor population grew by 64 percent compared with 29 percent growth in the urban poor population. Further, concentrated poverty can be increasingly found in the suburbs. Since 2000, the number of poor people living in census tracts with 40 percent poverty rates in suburban areas grew by 139 percent, much faster than the pace of growth in cities. (See for example, [Confronting Suburban Poverty in America](#) and Elizabeth Kneebone's brief on the [Growth and Spread of Concentrated Poverty](#)).

Although poverty and distressed neighborhoods are still a big problem in cities, an exclusive focus on the central city may overlook the suburban areas that the NNIP model and role in facilitating the use of information for action could help. The issue of suburban poverty affects both metropolitan areas that are growing quickly as well as older legacy metro areas. Just as in cities, some suburbs have a strong nonprofit service sector and sophisticated political leadership and agency infrastructure. However, smaller jurisdictions may lack analytical staff and advanced data systems necessary to implement data-driven decisionmaking. Suburban areas even in the same metro area may be incredibly diverse in terms of population, jobs, housing, and infrastructure. NNIP partners can play an important role both in assisting suburbs in advancing their data infrastructure, describing the diversity of suburbs present in their regions, and identifying innovative policy solutions to address these new challenges.

In this session we will have about 45 minutes of presentations followed by 45 minutes of plenary discussion. After an introduction to the topic by Leah Hendey (Urban Institute), we will have three partners present on some of the work that they have performed for suburban governments or nonprofit partners working in low-income suburban areas.

- Meg Merrick, Institute for Portland Metropolitan Studies
- Susan Millea, Children's Optimal Health
- Anthony Galvan, Institute for Urban Policy Research, UT-Dallas

Each presenter was asked to address these questions in their presentations:

- How did you get involved with the work?
- What were the big challenges? How did you overcome any challenges?
- How do you see work on the suburban communities fitting in with your mission?
- What are your concerns about being able to do this well or in the same way that you work in the urban core?

In the plenary discussion, we'd like to have others share their experiences working in low-income suburban areas and respond to the questions above. In addition, please think about:

- What are the challenges that come to mind for working with low-income suburban areas in your area?
 - Are they technical?
 - Would it stretch your staff capacity?
 - Would it be difficult to build the needed relationships?
- How have you handled negotiating data and creating comparable indicators from different jurisdictions and potentially different states?
- What are the ways that the NNIP network could support partners working in the suburbs?