

Supporting Local Governments

Thursday afternoon 1:30 – 2:45 p.m.

From the beginning of NNIP, Partner organizations have worked with city and county governments to support data-driven decisionmaking and enhance agency capacity to organize and use neighborhood data. This entails NNIP Partners performing assignments directly for local governments, working collaboratively with them on a variety of other projects and programs, and operating in ways that support government interests in the broader work they conduct for other clients (see attached draft).

The purpose of this session is to share lessons about working collaboratively with city and county governments to help fellow Partners think about new ways they can effectively engage with their own local agency staff and elected officials.

Noah Urban from Data Driven Detroit will open with a brief framing and serve as moderator for the panel. Three Partners will offer brief presentations on their experiences in working with local governments, describing the relationship, the benefits to the city, and the business arrangements.

- *Megan Johanson*, Community Research Partners in Columbus
- *April Urban*, Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland
- *Alicia Rouault*, Metropolitan Area Planning Council in Boston

After a couple of moderated questions, we will move to plenary discussion, and encourage Partners to share their perspective from their own experience.

Discussion: (40 minutes)

- For Partners who have fewer direct engagements with their local governments, what are strategies to expand their connections?
- How can Partners manage individual assignments for local governments in ways that best build toward strong long-term relationships?
- How do Partners set expectations with government agencies and officials when they have a mix of work that is directly paid for by governments, indirectly by outside funders, or absorbed by overhead?
- How can Partners best handle the tensions in being responsive to local agencies, but doing so in a way that does not reduce their independence?

How Local Data Intermediaries Help Local Governments

Draft 5/7/2017. Comments welcome.

Because of their technical expertise and broad institutional relationships, NNIP Partners are uniquely well positioned to help their cities, counties and other local agencies in several ways. The following paragraphs outline the ways this can occur.

Direct service to local government. Local governments often directly ask NNIP Partners to provide products and services, generally falling into the categories below.

- ***Assemble, clean, and transform data.*** Local governments should have organized and efficient data systems. NNIP Partners can supplement this internal capacity in several ways. First, they can provide data to the city or county that they could not easily otherwise acquire. Because of established relationships and their neutral reputation, NNIP Partners regularly acquire data from outside sources (local, state and national) that they share in some form government staff. In cases where the staff has limited time or expertise, they can enhance the data by summarizing to local geographies or linking individual records to other sources to gain new insights. Partners could also assist governments in evaluating the quality of their administrative data, as the city of Cleveland asked Case Western Reserve University to do with data on vacancy.
- ***Provide training and technical assistance on data and analytics.*** Local governments have many knowledgeable and skilled program staff and analysts who know how to apply data to guide planning and operations. NNIP Partners can offer them more specialized technical assistance and training on data and technology skills and knowledge, methods of conducting and disseminating analysis, etc. Urban Strategies Council assisted their school district in thinking about the dashboards and processes teachers, principals, and administrators would need to more closely monitor absenteeism to intervene for individual students and develop district-wide protocols.
- ***Build tools to facilitate services and decisionmaking.*** NNIP Partners have developed specific technology tools for local agencies to use to achieve a variety of objectives. NNIP Partners work closely with agency staff to finalize the specifications and then develops the product. They also work with government staff in implementation and testing. For example, Indianapolis' Department of Metropolitan Development asked IUPUI to develop the IndyVitals website to track regional goals and help neighborhood groups participate in planning.

- ***Conduct and disseminate analyses.*** Local government asks NNIP Partners to conduct substantive analysis on conditions, programs, and policies, drawing on the Partners' issue area expertise. It also normally includes roles in disseminating the results; e.g., presentations about the findings at convenings, interacting with the press, writing articles about the analysis to appear in various outside publications. These analyses cover a wide range of methodologies and topics, such as Community Research Partners' Apartment Complex Survey for a growing corridor in Columbus or Rice University's analysis of the impact of streetlights on Houston neighborhoods.
- ***Assist in the implementation of initiatives.*** Here, the NNIP Partner directly participates in the design and/or implementation of a local government initiative (e.g., mounting a city-led neighborhood improvement program, developing a new system of county homeless shelters, designing a new strategy for economic development). The NNIP Partner offers assistance related to data to the initiative, often as a formal member of the local government team as a part of the local government team. This might involve the Partner in: quick-turnaround analysis on topics that arise as the work proceeds; helping acquire a specialized data set; coaching local government staff and other participants on using data effectively in specific tasks; offering broader advice on strategies for using data to address the issue at hand. Data You Can Use supports the Milwaukee Police Department in their Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation grant, engaging with the focus neighborhoods with data. The Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance is convening an advisory group on behalf of the city to explore how to expand the use of the city's open data.

Direct service to other institutions on behalf of local government. This is where a local government asks the NNIP Partner to provide (or endorses providing) data-related assistance to one or more outside organizations working in support of government interests: e.g., helping a community development corporation, the United Way, an association of health care providers, a workforce development intermediary. Local agencies often support NNIP Partners performing such assignments because, as neutral outside parties, the Partners can establish modes of operation and relationships that, given their government status, would be challenging for agency staffs to establish directly. The types of services Partners provide in this category are the same five noted under direct services above.

Indirect service to government to understand neighborhoods and strengthen local capacity to use data to improve governance. Civic leadership organizations other than the local government (e.g., United Ways, local philanthropies) provide funding to the NNIP Partners for various services and analysis. Local governments may be strong supporters of NNIP Partners taking on such assignments even where they are not involved directly.

Agency staff and elected officials can draw on in-depth analysis that NNIP Partners conduct to develop policies and programs. Partners raise the community understanding of issues through briefings and reports about trends and policies and their implications. NNIP Partners also participate in multi-institution collaborations, providing data support and engaging with other members to offer advice. NNIP Partners also assist in making investments (whether through philanthropic or city funding) more effective, identifying gaps in services or identifying neighborhoods in need.

Local governments also appreciate NNIP Partners efforts to more broadly strengthening local data-related civic capacity and governance. Partners organize events to engage the public and nonprofits more extensively in applying local data in the public interest. Many also provide general training courses to nonprofits on using data and technology in public policy and community building. Some of these nonprofits may be city or county grantees.