NNIPCamp Indianapolis, October 12, 2017

Session 1 – NNIP and local evictions data projects

Led by Ashley Williams Clark, UNC Urban Institute and John Kileen Data Works NC

Notes by Sara McTarnaghan

**Summary:** With a lot of attention now on the role evictions play in destabilizing families and communities, what work are NNIP partners doing to track evictions and use the information to inform action?

**Present**: Sara McTarnaghan, Leah Hendey, Sheila Martin, Jessie Patridge, Kristen Murray, Spike, Noah Urban, Maxwell Austensen, Jeremy Pyne, Ryan Gerety, Ashley Clark, John Kileen, Becky Zwicki, Geoff Smith, Jack Doughtery, Deb Hollon, Mingming Zhang, Ryan Ferriman, John Cruz, Nate Ron Ferguson.

Minutes

**Ashley**: So evictions is a topic both John and I have been working on more in North Carolina We thought we’d have this session to see what other partners are doing, share experiences or challenges, and potentially think about cross-site projects on this topic.

To start, we could have everyone go around and say if they are currently working with eviction data and what they have done?

**Depaul**: Interested in using eviction data more

**Becky**: In columbus, we have gotten eviction data from city but we don’t have consistent access to it and we need a compelling reason to get consistent access

**John**: NC, starting to work with it, try to work on local processes

**Ashley:** We have a 3-part data collection for individual level data going back to 2000. Now figuring out how to make the best use of that data

**Ryan**: Data fellowship at ford foundation, very involved with anti-eviction work, trying to scope out what is happening locally, how the foundation can support.

**Jeremy Pyne**: Grand Rapids, very good relationship with local data partners have been able to get some some data

**Maxwell**: NYU, recently gotten housing court eviction data, struggle to get through talking to judges, we have permission to start doing research projects

**Noah Urban:** We don’t have eviction data in-house, we have been trying to get it from a local journalist who got it through FOIA requests.

**Spike**: Oakland. We don’t have it yet, but looking at a project to study development impact of stadium project. An SF group got eviction data through FOIA request and we are trying to get it from them. This is the first time that our model of doing the work to get the data and then sharing it might be flipped on its head. Would be nice to get data that someone else managed to get.

**Katie**, Minneapolis: did get county data, propose working with county to get qualitative data to go alongside

**Jessie**: People interested in no-fault evictions, collaborating with MIT researchers and then people working on policy level to make information available digitally.

**Sheila**: no-cause evictions, majority displacement not through court order, new legislation about increase rent; we might be able to do something with complaints; hoping to work with city council person who created that ordinance

**Leah**: DC, We don’t currently have eviction data. WAPO just did eviction story about one building

**John:** St louis, extremely limited eviction data in st louis. 85 percent of evictions estimated to be informal. Struggling to figure it out but there are a handful of us working on it. Equal housing opportunity council made estimate of 85 percent.

**Nate**: We don’t have any eviction data right now; closest that we come is monthly updates from local code enforcement. Use “picker pile” as proxy when 311 gets called for curbside pickup.

**Ryan**: Denver, just started getting asked about eviction data but incomplete data. Hard to tell if evictions actually happen, are people getting represented in court what is your success rate if you represented in court vs not.

**Ming Ming:** Houston, we have access to court’s eviction data but we haven’t done anything about it yet

**Deb**: moving towards housing and eviction data

**Jack**: Hartford resident board gave top vote to eviction study, so far we have scraped data from pdfs and add to map. Continue to work of this.

**John**: So some of our goals or guiding questions for this session were:

* Knowing what the sources of data are (court process, scraping)?
* Who are the local partners that we connect with trying to put that data to work?
* What are the local ordinances or local controls on rental that might influence these processes and inquiries locally?
* What do we know about volume and nature of evictions?

The data that I am working with the most is from the sheriff’s department. When sherriff’s show notice of writ. We have 5 years of that with docket #, address, writ of possession, geocoded those. I have been working on those for 2 months. Right now we have about 95% mapped. It was a big lift that I felt was worth it. Our goal is to get quarterly rent market work tied to quarterly eviction data. There is also county-level information

**Ashley**: UNC Greensboro is looking at same issue. Their housing center had students scan court documents for a month. Found that the PHA is the biggest evictor in the county. We use sheriff’s data as well that has outcomes; but we want to be able to capture more details (how much money they owed, who the landlord was etc). For two weeks we had people scanning documents, army of volunteers entering forms into qualtrics. We thought that would be a short process, but it’s not. We haven’t started data cleaning piece of that, but hope that it will give us a snapshot and allow us to work with court of clerks to create better systems in future to capture these data.

**John**: Courts put out summaries of civil process counts on annual basis; monthly, but just count and outcome. In Durham, there is an evictions diversion program. 3 counties that had highest eviction rate from 2015-2016. Durham county 11,000 evictions a year, 900 a month, such a high volume of them. I thought it might be tied to real estate pressure, but it is more than that. It’s not about failure to pay at housing authority properties, but they evict for a lot of different reasons.

**Ashley**: Legal aid advocate took us to eviction court walked us through the process, helped us to understand the process, it’s very complicated. If we are going to explain how many evictions, we had to be able to explain how that process happens. Trying to create some literacy around that. Legal aid group was incredibly helpful for that. Working closely with partners. We don’t have any way of getting to informal eviction data, except for doing our own MARS survey like Desmond’s work.

**Sheila**: Need to find student volunteers and motivate the purpose. Is there some other source of volunteers?

**Ashley**: students, retirees, church groups. We had Matt Desmond come speak recently, so we had a county wide book group and tried to solicit volunteers through that energy.

**Leah**: How can NNIP network help access to court documents?

**John**: It is really really hard to get into that ecosystem of the courts to get data. You would have to find an activist judge

**Ashley**: our courts are really underfunded, which doesn’t help to add work to them in this way.

**John**: Everything is underfunded

**Spike**: One of the things I’m hearing is that the courts is a new target for us to invite to table and pressure to get data. If there is an opportunity presented that makes sense, judges wanted to be able to triage. Maybe they are a better partner they we might think.

**Ashely**: Yes, this is the first time the data has ever been requested. Benefit of working with a partner, we aren’t allowed to advocate, but our partners focuses on the so what piece? Now engaged apartment association on this issue. Our legal aid has been training volunteers to train people about their tenant rights.

**Sheila**: Has anyone used 211 data?

**Becky**: Columbus, we use it a lot, but we don’t have any way to de-duplicate, we have it at zipcode level.

**Spike**: 211/311 is an interesting measure, not good data but not resolved. Piece that is missing is who is calling, no way to track what else is happening outside of official process?

**John**: The fair housing office in city is a good resource, they can respond if there is protected class case involved. If it’s not protected class they often pass to legal aid.

**Ashley**: Our legal aid is able to help only 1 % of people, but 98% of their cases are in favor of tenant, so it is hugely important to get more people legal representation. The system is built upon people not showing up in court and not knowing their rights. Going in and observing the cases is really important for us to better partners.

**John**: The diversion program in Durham was sparked by the social services agency in Durham, after realizing that their beneficiaries were getting targeted. Now every time there is a summary ejectment, when they get notice from court, they get a page of information about their rights and legal aid – it serves as an educational touch. One of the big questions for legal aid is what is the inventory of available units?

**Ashley**: Another questions is gow do you reduce the impact of eviction on people’s future prospects for renting? The fact that nothing happens in eviction court doesn’t reflect well on people’s records because it still shows up. Having individual level data is necessary to understand the phenomenon. Aggregate numbers would be a bit misleading. For example, Sheriff office data is very hard to judge, is 1 eviction one person, or all household members? There is a cost to each of those filings, which gets passed onto tenant + late fee. Tenants with HCV are getting eviction, failed quality inspection, when housing authority fails the property, they are the ones get stuck with the eviction record. People don’t want to report terrible conditions for fear of evictions.

**John**: anecdotal, but issues where there is a piece of property, but landlord will section off units for 300-400 dollars a month, stuck in a single room, don’t have a whole lot of options. We are seeing a lot of really bad stuff happening.

**Ryan**: Desmond is setting up a new eviction lab at Princeton. There will be a January release of national data purchased from court through Lexus Nexus. Going to raise more questions than answers. Will fall to local data people to answer questions about it and dig into what is happening. The numbers are going to be surprising whichever they are.

**Geoff**: There is a vendor that does sell that info in Chicago, really difficult to interpret; how to deal with unresolved questions.

**Ryan**: We have been organizing with local advocacy and organizing partners, but they will need a local research partner. It is going to take an effort between researchers and organizers.

**Geoff**: Journalist came to us with data asking questions. And we reviewed but it was impossible to understand phenomenon from the data. Showed evictions going down even though you would expect it to go up with rising rents. At the end of the day, we just told them to not use the data.

**Ashley**: Yes, totally our evictions are going down, but there is a whole other side of informal evictions. So whenever we report the data we are really careful to tell that full story.

**John**: Also geographies matter. Changes based on what scale and where you are looking.

**Spike**: We have seen screenshots of real estate forms to strategize and play that game and work in mass collusion. What happens around evictions is similar to foreclosure crisis. Feels like there valid cause to make a playbook for how to get into eviction data. Complex legal landscape, need strong community and legal aid partner. We waited way too late with foreclosure crisis, probably smarter to get ahead of it.

**Ashley**: Also peaks and dips in the same exact months each year, social service agencies has fall rush, seasonal perspective is important for policy solutions. Because we have indiv data we are working with city to link to calls for service and code violation and look at quality of life data to look at correlations between neighborhood quality of life.

**Maxwell**: PHD students at NYU looking at impacts of eviction, we found judges helpful. We had tried to help them before with information they need to understand that data systems; what can we be doing for them to change the relationships – reciprocal.

**Ashley**: Charlotte is trying to track who actually landlord and owner is. We had a landlord database that got shut down.

**John**: We do have statewide business database for corporate landlords, not always going to point to an actual person.

**Ryan**: when you are looking at all of this data, how do you know the outcome? Hard to make policy decision off of the numbers because there can be many many evictions at same address in short period of time. How do you actually know what happened?

**John**: how many of the cases drop off? Can’t imagine it is a lot?

**Ashley**: Actually, 40 per cent of cases dismissed voluntarily or involuntarily. Important to chart out all of the drop out points, data is rough, but we know that it is an undercount. That recognition is a really important piece of the conversation. We need a cost effective way to look at informal evictions.

\_\_: There is also a housing link – what percentage of homeless had been informally evicted?

**John**: like the idea of a playbook, I could start on something like that. Are there others that are interested in that? Code books for specific data set