

Build on Your Strengths: Put Resources to Work

Money is not the key to a strong neighborhood. But at the same time, it does take resources to build a neighborhood where people thrive. This section will help you find the resources you need and put them to good use. It tells:

- ▶ **How to put your neighborhood treasures to work**– ideas for finding and using the resources that you already have.
- ▶ **How to make money work for you** instead of getting caught in the money chase. When it pays to play the money game.
- ▶ **What tools can help your neighborhood** finance the changes people want.

"The doors we open and close each day decide the lives we live."

[-Flora Whittemore](#)

"You can do anything if you have enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is the yeast that makes your hopes rise to the stars."

[-Henry Ford](#)

1. How Can You Put Your Treasures to Work? Making Better Use of the Resources You Have

There is no limit to what your neighborhood can accomplish – especially if you take advantage of treasures that are often overlooked—like the individuals’ talents, businesses, faith communities and neighborhood groups. By making better use of the resources you already have, you can join the growing numbers of neighborhoods that are inventing new ways to thrive.

Turning Abandoned Space Into a Neighborhood Jewel

Bethel New Life is a faith-based group that started a resident-owned, community development corporation in a west-side Chicago community. The group bought an abandoned building and transformed it into housing for the elderly, a community cultural center, and space for programs including child development, parenting education, a credit union, and mental health services. In addition to creating an employment center that offers job skills and literacy training, Bethel has become a major employer for the community. Through partnerships such as one with Argonne National Laboratory, Bethel is creating new businesses in the neighborhood and stimulating economic redevelopment.

Discover Your Buried Treasures

To take advantage of your neighborhood’s resources, you need to discover your strengths. Many of your treasures may be buried. For example, a vacant lot filled with garbage may not look like much of a resource for kids and families. But with some imagination and work, your neighborhood may be able to turn an eyesore into a community garden, a playground, a site for affordable housing, or a future community center. The key is to look at your neighborhood with your eyes and mind wide open to the possibilities.

<i>Look around for the potential resources of your neighborhood?</i>	<i>Examples of Resources That Neighborhoods Use to Improve Results</i>
<i>Physical Facilities – No matter what condition</i>	An unoccupied building, a school auditorium or stage, a vacant lot, outdoor walls, transit stops, a vacant storefront, meeting space, classrooms, indoor and outdoor recreation space, a library, a church basement.
<i>Equipment</i>	Vehicles that need repair, school computers, outdated computer equipment, office equipment, furniture, sports and other recreational

	equipment, tools of all kinds, musical instruments.
Materials and Supplies	Art supplies and things that can be used as art supplies, salvaged building materials, nutritious food that groceries discard, clothing, books, office supplies.
People Resources	People with artistic talents, mechanical skills, building skills, knowledge of accounting, business skills, legal expertise. Wise elders, adults and teens who care for young children, people who know the way government works, paid workers and professionals, volunteers or people willing to volunteer. The possibilities are endless!
Services	Public transportation, radio time, advertising, childcare, legal assistance, job training, financial assistance, healthcare, schools, adult education programs, after school activities, bookkeeping, reading, tutoring, mentoring, kinship foster care.

Making Better Use of Schools

Washington Middle School opened on the near west side of Indianapolis in late 2000. Like many schools, it could have been just a building that students use six hours a day. Instead, its doors are open morning, noon and night to offer more than 30 programs -- adult education, social service, pre-and after-school, health care and recreational programs. Space also is set aside for neighborhood organizations and community meetings. Evening parent meetings regularly draw more than 300 family members.

Renamed Washington Community School, it is now a model for schools in neighborhoods throughout the nation.

Share Resources: The Sum is Greater Than the Parts

By sharing what you have -- ideas, facilities, time, skills, talents -- you and others in your neighborhood can increase the opportunities available. It takes creativity, the willingness to share, determination, and work.

It also takes trust. People must be willing to give something in order to get something. They must be able to see what they have to gain and to trust each other. Once folks have agreed on a plan, they must be able to rely on each other to follow through.

The only real limits are the ones we put on ourselves and our neighbors. The creativity, determination, and trust it takes can be developed.

Making Investments Work: Sharing Space and Equipment

The Boys and Girls Club of Kansas City, Missouri, operates after school programs. When the Club ran out of space, it was able to avoid spending scarce funds to rent or build new space. Instead, schools in neighborhoods with active resident groups loaned space and equipment. Resources that would have been spent for building costs were used for services instead. The Club was able to provide before-and-after-school activities to more children. Organizations and individual supporters were encouraged by the thoughtful use of resources and recognized the value of investing in these active neighborhoods.

Many schools have computer labs that are used only during the day and during the school year. A growing number of schools allow neighborhood residents to use the computer labs at other times for adult computer training – including classes that prepare people for higher paying jobs.

The Snowball Effect in Milwaukee

By rehabilitating homes in their northwest Milwaukee community, teens increase the amount of safe, affordable housing and help develop their neighborhood's economy. A group of local businesses provides materials, information, tours, and job training. The project also contributes directly to the young people, who are paid, get school credit, and develop marketable skills. Many of them have started their own businesses or been hired by one of the local businesses.

Get a Push From Others: Influence Decisions That Have an Impact on the Neighborhood

People in your neighborhood may feel powerless to change the conditions of their lives. But people across the country and worldwide are proving that together there are many actions we can take to create the lives we want. Besides direct actions, people in your neighborhood can influence others who make decisions that affect their lives.

Influencing decisions is one of the main ways to get things done. Together, you can exert enormous influence on public officials, government agencies, businesses, and community organizations. The more you are able to join forces with other individuals and groups that share your interests and concerns, the more influence you will have.

For example, you can take many steps to improve the safety of children in the neighborhood. You can take direct actions as an individual or group -- like organizing a neighborhood watch, cleaning and repairing the local playground, and organizing supervised after-school activities. You can get others to help improve child safety by:

- Persuading local businesses and faith groups to sponsor an information campaign to educate people about gun safety.
- Convincing the local social services agency and workforce center to provide training for family day care providers.

- Developing a campaign to persuade the mayor and city council that your neighborhood needs a new recreation center for supervised, out-of-school time activities.
- Joining with child and family advocates across the state to convince officials to provide more funding for quality child care for low income families.

Questions to Ask

- ❑ ***What do we have that we can use to improve our lives?***
- ❑ ***How do we use these resources now?***
- ❑ ***What have we overlooked?
What do we have that we're not using?
What can we put to better use?***
- ❑ ***How can we make better use of what we have?***
- ❑ ***How can we influence people who make decisions about resources in our neighborhood?***
- ❑ ***What's stopping us?
Are there barriers or excuses that keep us from using our resources better? If so, how can we overcome them?***

Who To Ask

- ❑ ***Your Neighbors***
Kin and friends
Neighborhood groups
People who get together in the neighborhood
- ❑ ***Neighborhood Groups and Businesses***
Business owners, managers & workers
Nonprofits & service-providers
Faith-based organizations
Community foundations
- ❑ ***Government and Public Programs***
School staff
Staff & leaders of government organizations
Elected officials – city council, county commissioners, mayor, state legislators

2. How Can You Make Money Work for Your Neighborhood?

Avoid the Money Trap

When people come together to improve the neighborhood, money is often one of their biggest concerns. First, they may believe that they can't do anything without money, and, second, they think that they should set out immediately to look for funding. But it's a mistake to start chasing money!

It's true that money can help improve the lives of children, families and others. But knowing your neighborhood and where you're heading is more important than raising money. And money should be one resource among many for achieving the results your neighborhood wants. It's not the only asset you should rely on or even your main asset.

Many neighborhoods fall into the trap of chasing money instead of making it work for results. Experienced neighborhoods point to many reasons for avoiding this trap. Here's what they say:

- Money can become the driving force for what you do – not better lives for people in the neighborhood. It's easy to get caught up in chasing new funding and lose sight of what you set out to accomplish.
- Money can help, but it is not the answer. Changing a neighborhood is about the will of residents and the power that grows as they work together for common goals.
- Every neighborhood has an abundance of resources that can help you achieve results. Money is just one resource among many, and often it's one of the hardest to find. Besides, finding and using the talents and interests of the people of your neighborhood gets everybody invested in results. Money, which often comes from outside, won't do that.
- If money is the main focus, the sense of partnership your neighborhood has created can quickly disintegrate into individuals and organizations competing with each other to get and hold onto funding.
- Tapping funds often requires strong relationships with government agencies and public officials. To develop the trust and relationships you need takes time and experience.
- Funders want to invest in neighborhoods with a strong track record -- where people have shown that they are able to work together, use resources wisely, and make a difference in the lives of residents. Investors want to see that they will get their money's worth!

- Instead of a scattershot approach of pursuing whatever money you can get, you will make smarter use of your time and energy if you are selective. Take time to find opportunities that contribute to the results your neighborhood wants and that allow people to work together in the ways that are important to them.

Once your and your neighbors have put money in its proper place, there are many tools for opening the treasure chest that can help improve the lives of residents.

***Where's the Money?
Find Funding Without Losing Your Way***

When you set out to find funding, you may discover challenges and hazards. There are steps you and your neighbors can take to avoid running into problems.

***Be Picky About Funding:
Questions to Discuss Before Looking for Money***

- Who are potential funders inside and outside the neighborhood?
- What are their interests and what activities are they likely to fund?
How do their interests fit with yours?
- Do the funding requirements fit with your neighborhood, including:
The results your neighborhood wants,
Residents' values and beliefs, and
The way people want to work together?
- Can the funds be used for something that is already planned or does it have to be a new activity?
- If you receive the funding, will you have additional costs – for matching funds, experts' time, or staff?
- Is there a local organization that is a better fit for the money and that would agree to use the funds for the results the neighborhood wants?

Make the Most of Money

Here are some sources for funding and examples of neighborhoods making the most of these resources.

**1. Government Funding:
Federal, State, and Local Sources**

In every neighborhood, public funds are already being used. They pay for schools, social services, health care, housing, roads and public transportation, and other services. In fact, there are thousands of federal, state, and local “funding streams.” To obtain and use public funding, you must have strong partnerships with government agencies. It takes time to build these relationships.

Working With Government

Residents of a rural Georgia county joined with local and state government agencies to work on improving six results for the county’s children and families. One of their priorities was reducing teen pregnancy. When they inventoried the resources of the agencies and programs in their area, they learned that:

- The agencies’ funds were tapped out. The only additional funding that might be available was grants from outside sources.
- Many programs depended entirely on short term grants, and many of those were running out. Service providers were struggling to juggle small grants and stretch their funding as far as possible. For example, the local after-school program would have to be discontinued when its five grants ended.
- None of the programs was using its resources to reduce teen pregnancy.

The residents contacted service providers, agencies, business people and public officials. They used this information to influence the people who decide how government money will be used in their neighborhood. To support neighborhood efforts to reduce teen pregnancy, local leaders included funding in the annual city budget and in their company budgets.

2. Small Grants: From Service Organizations, Businesses, Charitable Groups and Private Foundations

Finding ways to use small amounts of money for maximum impact encourages funders to invest in the neighborhood. It’s usually better to find small grants that can help you take steps toward the results you want than to pin all your hopes on a huge windfall.

Start Small: You Can Build From There

Denver’s Cole neighborhood has been largely African-American, but is seeing an influx of Latino residents. People want to get rid of drugs and other problems, but decided that getting to know their neighbors was the most important first step. They had little trouble finding a small grant to hold a block party.

3. Private Contributions: From Individuals and Organizations

Lots of small contributions can add up to big changes when determined people work together.

From Humble Beginnings, A Financial Powerhouse for Neighborhood Improvement

To start Bethel New Life, the Westside Chicago faith-based community development corporation, some church members committed \$100 each. Their contributions totaled \$9,600. For \$275 they bought a foreclosed, three-unit apartment building from the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and began rehabilitating it with the help of volunteers.

Over the years, the community has grown that initial \$9,600 investment to a \$10 million annual budget and a valuable array of resources for residents. Mary Nelson, Bethel's President and sister of the minister says, "It wasn't easy. When we started, the only asset we had to use as collateral was the church building. So we mortgaged the church - five times - to secure the funds we needed to move forward."

Be Aware of the Strings That Come with the Funding

Most funding comes with “strings” attached – rules or laws about how the money can and cannot be spent. These may require that the money be spent for certain kinds of activities, be paid to people or organizations that meet certain qualifications, or benefit specific groups of people (like children or people with disabilities). If you try to get funding, be sure you know what strings are attached. You'll have to decide whether a particular fund is worth the requirements that come with it.

3. What Tools Can Help You Use Money to Achieve Results?

A Fiscal Agent

A fiscal agent is a person or organization that acts on behalf of the neighborhood to keep track of and manage the money. The fiscal agent must be legally able to accept and account for money. The agent's responsibilities are to keep financial records, prepare reports (including regular reports about the money you raise and the money you spend), put together a budget, and keep track of spending.

Finding a Fiscal Agent

There are several options for finding a person or organization that is willing and able to act as the neighborhood fiscal agent. Some funding sources require a particular fiscal agent. For example, federal funding rules may require that a state government agency serve as the fiscal agent.

1. Look for an existing organization within the neighborhood or an organization that serves the neighborhood:
 - A state or local government agency, for example the health department, social services department, housing authority, community development agency, mayor's office.
 - A nonprofit corporation such as a local YMCA, community foundation, United Way, or faith-based organization.
 - A local business or for-profit corporation.
2. Hire a fiscal agent such as an accountant. Talk to funders about acceptable options and to local leaders about individuals or companies they recommend.
3. Consider creating a neighborhood organization with the legal authority to act as its own fiscal agent. You might create a nonprofit corporation.

A Financial Plan

If you are so lucky as to get some funding, the person or organization that made the contribution will want to know how you spend it. The neighborhood will want to know. A financial plan is a written tool to help you figure out how you will use money to achieve neighborhood results. It includes:

- Introduction:
 - The results the neighborhood wants,
 - How you will tell if you're making progress toward those results,
 - Your neighborhood plan for achieving results- the activities you'll use.
 - Your neighborhood values and the way people want to work together.

- ❑ Inventory:
Your neighborhood's resources and assets,
How existing resources will be used to achieve neighborhood results.
- ❑ Action Plan
Who will do what, when, and where – specific roles, responsibilities and activities,
How you will put your results plan into action.
- ❑ List of Reports
The reports you will make to funders about the money raised and how it is spent,
The schedule for these reports -- usually monthly or quarterly.
- ❑ Budget
How you plan to spend the money.

Your financial plan will change as your neighborhood puts your results plan into action. Regular financial reports keep track of existing and new funding and other resources.

Using a Budget to Focus on Results

You will need a budget to organize and manage money you receive. Most written budgets use “line items” to separate funding for different activities or operations. At first, your line items might include postage, printing, office supplies, meeting refreshments. As you go along, you may need to add line items that reflect new spending like transportation, computer equipment, and more. Together and individually, line items show important information about the costs of your activities.

Some neighborhoods are using a results budget hand-in-hand with their regular line item budget. The results budget groups funding and spending according to each result the neighborhood is working to achieve. The document corresponds to these results and to your neighborhood plan.

Here's what a results-based budget can do for you:

- Focus attention on results instead of separate activities or programs.
For example, a safe neighborhood, children entering school ready to learn, young people making a successful transition to adulthood.
- Show how resources are invested. It informs residents and others of progress toward particular results.
- Show that together people and organizations are willing to take responsibility for improving neighborhood results. Every dollar must be used to improve conditions for kids, families, and the neighborhood.

- Increase the neighborhood's sense of responsibility for and ownership of results. The commitment is clear. It's up to the neighborhood to put the money to good use.