



Neighborhood Restoration

Chapter 11. Neighborhood Restoration

Overview

Neighborhood restoration is the fourth major component of Weed and Seed. It focuses on revitalizing designated neighborhoods by leveraging local, State, and Federal resources. Restoring a neighborhood can be a complex and often long-term, ongoing process. This chapter highlights the steps to be taken in implementing a neighborhood restoration plan that encourages the leveraging of key resources at all levels to maximize the impact on the designated neighborhood.

Vision

Everyone wants to live in a community that has all the amenities—safe parks, grocery stores, schools, thriving businesses, homes, entertainment, and medical services. When communities experience a loss in the tax base, it is often because of deteriorating conditions, including business closings, homeowners shifting to home renters, a negative change in the quality of medical and social services, unkempt parks, and increased prices for basic necessities in local stores.

If your community suffers from any of these conditions, the area can be revitalized. Neighborhood restoration is about much more than physical buildings—it is about restoring the human capital in a neighborhood by providing tools to help residents secure livable-wage employment, start new and thriving businesses, increase the stock of affordable housing, and increase the number of homeowners. It recognizes the needs of both the young and the not so young. Youth activities in safe parks, senior housing and services, and increased medical and social services treat many community ills.

Imagine a community that provides access to local city services in strip malls (e.g., postal services and social security and employment offices). How about a competitive grocery store that offers quality food at affordable prices? It would be nice to have clean streets with bright lights that deter criminal activities. Maybe more businesses that have been operating from homes without proper licenses could open their doors in storefronts or malls in your community. You could develop programs that encourage residents to save their money and provide matching funds that can be used to buy a new home, start a business, or complete an education. Training programs that provide residents with increased technology skills would enable them to secure higher paying jobs. Some programs could help residents correct their credit problems and prepare them for owning their own home.

All your efforts to rid your community of crime, improve relations between residents and police, and provide residents with programs and services that prevent, intervene, or treat problems of youth, adults, and families focus on accomplishing other goals and objectives. That work lays the foundation for community restoration. Any effort to rid a community of negative elements brings positive resources and the physical assets needed to revitalize the community. Changes in population, economic or physical conditions, social attitudes, and business patterns all affect neighborhoods in complex ways. Many such changes are dictated by decisions made at the local government level—which is why Weed and Seed is an ideal strategy for improving neighborhoods in distress. Working in collaboration with local, State, and Federal government agencies, Weed and Seed brings community stakeholders together to leverage their collective resources

and achieve the restoration goals for the Weed and Seed neighborhood.

Chapter 5 describes the steps required to develop a local Weed and Seed strategy. The initial strategy results from analyzing needs and available resources and, once implemented, provides a safer, more stable community environment that promotes restoration. Of the four major Weed and Seed components, neighborhood restoration offers residents the opportunity to literally see improvements in their community. It does more than just inject new programs into a community. Neighborhood restoration is self-defining: The process originates from and is sustained by the actions and choices of those living and working in the neighborhood. The restoration process should reflect the needs of the entire community, not just the judgment of community representatives on the Steering Committee. Neighborhood restoration must also be viewed as a long-term strategy.

Although certain changes can be made to the physical appearance of a community in a relatively short period, restoring a community implies that it will return to its original state. For some communities, the strategy involves restoring only certain aspects of a community and developing some new components—which moves neighborhood restoration into the arena of comprehensive community development.

Although this manual does not cover community development in great detail, it serves as the cornerstone of effective neighborhood restoration strategies. All communities are in some state of development. Implementing neighborhood restoration strategies is necessary to help a distressed area work toward the vision of community restoration.

Restoring a neighborhood begins with a vision of how you want your community to look and what you want it to offer its residents. The

restoration process begins with taking stock of what in the community can be developed, what can be recruited or secured, and what needs to be replaced by positive, community-benefiting enterprises. This is not an easy task to achieve. However, working in incremental steps and building on small accomplishments can end in success. Remember to work from the inside out—if you build strong communities, businesses will come. When businesses come, people become employed, and when they are employed, they begin to create wealth.

Implementation Process

Restoration goals and objectives may have to be revisited for appropriateness after the local Weed and Seed's first-phase strategy is under way. A review is recommended because initial stabilization efforts may not work exactly as planned, and restoration strategies do not work in a high-crime neighborhood. Also, the value of any neighborhood is determined by the consumers who live there. Although the Steering Committee can identify basic restoration issues with help from the city planning office, specific details and timing should be coordinated with neighborhood residents. For example, demolishing and reconstructing homes, if identified as a priority in the needs assessment, may not be as important to community members as public-private financing to expand the local supermarket. Making restoration plans that contradict community expectations and values can hinder the process and undermine stabilization efforts. Restoration designed without resident input can produce negative effects within the community and unintentionally accelerate decline.

As you begin to think about your plan, keep in mind the KISS principle (Keep It Simple Silly). Steering Committee members are not community development experts (in general), and it would be unrealistic to try to execute massive projects without sufficient expertise on board. In addition, neighborhood restoration is one of the

components of Weed and Seed that allows residents to become actively involved in the transformation of their neighborhood through a series of low-cost or no-cost activities. Remember, a team effort is necessary to bring about community change. Weed and Seed does not have to be solely responsible for everything. Yes, everyone wants a new shopping center in their community, but this should not be a top goal for Weed and Seed. Support existing community development corporations, which generally have the expertise to carry out these types of projects.

In developing an implementation plan for neighborhood restoration, the following steps should be taken.

Step 1: Create a Subcommittee

The creation of a subcommittee on neighborhood restoration is key to involving residents and other community stakeholders in an organized restoration process. Although several local community organizations may exist, they often focus solely on providing a specific service to residents and do not examine how they can all work together and leverage their resources. This does not mean that they are not interested. Often, they just need to be brought together to address a common purpose. The subcommittee unites the groups.

The subcommittee could include representatives from the Steering Committee and from community organizations who are not Steering Committee members but have an interest or expertise consistent with neighborhood restoration. Residents are generally interested in this type of committee, as are community development corporations, community action agencies, government agencies, financial institutions, foundations, and small businesses.

Make a list of organizations that might have an interest in participating on this subcommittee and contact them. Remember, individuals who agree to serve on the subcommittee should

understand that their participation is voluntary and that their organization or agency will not receive funds. Also make sure that subcommittee members have the time to attend meetings. Other members often are frustrated when someone who attends meetings infrequently wants the group to revisit issues that were addressed in past meetings.



The following are examples of the kinds of government agencies, community-based organizations, and educational and other institutions that should be included in the restoration planning:

- City planning department.
- Community development corporations.
- City finance department.
- Community reinvestment department of a local financial institution.
- Community action agencies.
- Housing advocacy organizations.
- Metropolitan planning commission.
- Metropolitan transportation authority.
- U.S. Small Business Administration.
- University or community college.
- Local public housing authority.

- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.
- Faith-based institutions.

How does the subcommittee connect to the Weed and Seed Steering Committee? The Weed and Seed Steering Committee promotes restoration plan development by enlisting professional help for the plan's design, targeting local resources, and soliciting local, State, and Federal cooperation that augments local plans.

Step 2: Revisit the Needs Assessment Conducted for the Neighborhood

One of the benefits of conducting a needs assessment is that the priorities identified can be used to formulate goals for each of the four Weed and Seed components. Because much of the assessment may focus on the economic conditions of a target area, this information should serve as a basis for creating neighborhood restoration goals. In a subcommittee planning session, the group may want to examine these issues and to determine what role it can play in addressing each of them.

Step 3. Formulate Goals and Objectives To Be Accomplished

Once the subcommittee has identified local issues, it can formulate goals and objectives and focus on how these goals and objectives should be met. Remember that some goals are directed at stabilizing the community and some at restoring it. Subcommittee members must consider activities or tasks that yield both short- and long-term results.

Residents may be frustrated by initiatives that start out strong and finish up poor; they look for immediate evidence that Weed and Seed is a positive investment in their community. Short-term activities to produce visible results include conducting neighborhood cleanups and allocating special days for graffiti removal—activities that residents can see, participate in, and benefit from.



Long-term neighborhood restoration challenges include reducing unemployment, encouraging more business startups, upgrading the quality of housing stock, and increasing the number of homeowners in the community.

Example

One of the priorities identified in the needs assessment is to improve the physical condition of buildings in the community.

Goal: Improve the physical conditions of the buildings in the community.

- Objectives:**
- Develop a graffiti-removal program that involves youth and adults.
 - Establish quarterly neighborhood cleanups to rid the community of unwanted trash and other safety hazards.
 - Explore the creation of a home repair program for seniors in which residents volunteer their time to fix the homes of seniors.

Example

Goal: Improve the economic self-sufficiency of residents in the area.

- Objectives:**
- Coordinate with the local chamber of commerce to offer

small business development courses targeting home-based businesses.

- Develop a series of job fairs that offer residents exposure to employment opportunities in various trades.
- Establish individual development accounts (IDAs) for low-income residents who are participating in job-to-work initiatives.

Step 4: Develop Activities To Achieve Goals and Objectives

After you formulate some goals and objectives, you must identify relevant activities that emphasize serving residents and the overall neighborhood. Activities may require a series of partners, both internal and external to the community. The following are examples of activities that can help restore the economic health of the community:

- **Reducing unemployment.** Convene weekend job fairs at area schools with area employers and employment assistance organizations to provide information on jobs and job assistance programs.
- **Increasing the level of resident business development.** Work with area faith-based institutions to conduct workshops on how to start a business. Encourage the area community college or chamber of commerce to lead these workshops and possibly establish a satellite office in the community for ongoing technical assistance.
- **Upgrading the quality of housing stock.** In most distressed communities, one of the biggest challenges is that most of the residents are renters. They live in buildings that absentee landlords have little incentive to keep in good repair because they do not live in the area. One way to address the quality

of the buildings is to work with the city's housing department to identify code violations. As these violations are identified, subcommittee members can work with the landlord to help reestablish a commitment to the community or encourage the landlord to sell the building to an interested buyer who will commit the resources needed to maintain the building.

Because housing is so critical in distressed communities, the subcommittee could engage community development corporations or other local housing coalitions to help formulate new policy recommendations for the city. These recommendations would help ensure that future housing development includes neighborhoods for low-income residents.

- **Increase the number of homeowners.** Issues such as poor credit, savings, and investments must be addressed; homeowner classes could be offered. Local organizations could partner with Weed and Seed to offer classes on one or more of these topics. Programs such as IDAs, which are designed to match the savings of low-income individuals for future investment in a home, new business, or education, are ideal offerings that directly benefit residents. Contact your local financial institutions to see which offer the IDA program. Other community-based organizations may also support this program.

Encouraging home ownership is a major strategy for increasing the level of local investment in the community.

Financial institutions, foundations, and government agencies have all developed training programs for new home buyers that explain the resources available to assist these individuals in purchasing their new home. Offering these workshops in the community sends a signal that everyone can save a little

and have a personal goal of owning their own home one day.

In each of these examples, the subcommittee does not have to take the lead role but rather facilitates the implementation of these strategies by encouraging collaboration among organizations (public and private) that have the resources and expertise to deliver the services.

Step 5: Secure Approval From the Steering Committee

After the implementation plan is developed, it is submitted to the Steering Committee for approval—an important process because it provides additional opportunities for residents and other stakeholders to provide input on the plan and on how the activities described in the plan complement the activities of the other components of the Weed and Seed strategy. Everyone involved with Weed and Seed must understand the implementation plans for all components of the program.

The coordinator is responsible for scheduling activities to ensure minimal duplication of events that target residents for participation. The Steering Committee has ultimate responsibility for monitoring the entire site plan; however, the Neighborhood Restoration Subcommittee is directly responsible for implementation of neighborhood restoration activities. The progress of planned activities is reported to the Steering Committee on a regular basis. No component of Weed and Seed is more important than another. Communication between the subcommittee and the Steering Committee not only ensures successful implementation of the Weed and Seed strategy but also permits the maximum resources to support each of the planned activities.

Step 6: Adjust the Goals, Objectives, or Activities

Now that you have formulated goals and objectives and begun to implement activities, you should evaluate them for necessary adjustments. When groups are formulating their plans, they often tend to be overly ambitious. The time required to pull new initiatives together may be underestimated, or unforeseen challenges may arise that hamper the progress of certain activities. Initial goals may turn out to conflict with other community activities, or the support needed from local organizations to achieve these goals may not be forthcoming. Remember that the goals you establish are not for EOWS but for the community. If Weed and Seed goals appear to conflict with those of other community organizations, either incorporate these organizations into the Weed and Seed strategy or develop new goals.

Based on the community needs assessment conducted by the Planning Committee, you should have a list of issues identified by community stakeholders to be addressed in restoring the neighborhood. If you need to adjust your goals or objectives, be sure to revisit this assessment to ensure that the Weed and Seed strategy is working to address priority issues. Sometimes the goal or objective is fine, but the time needed to implement an activity may have to be extended. Adjustments are acceptable as long as you remain focused on activities consistent with neighborhood restoration.

Step 7: Evaluate the Neighborhood Restoration Plan

To be effective, some type of planned evaluation must be conducted to determine the affect of the restoration efforts. It is vital for the subcommittee to know whether restoration goals and objectives are appropriate and achievable.

Subcommittee members should monitor two levels of core indicators during the implementation of key activities. The first level pertains to the outcome measures established as part of the overall planning process to coincide with the objectives. For example, if an objective includes offering workshops on small business development, two indicators can be evaluated: How many workshops were offered, and how many people attended these workshops.

The next level of indicators is broader than the objectives and may take months to fully document. Referring back to the example of the small business workshop, the second-level indicator to be documented is the increase in new business startups in the neighborhood. Where would you get information to document the level of business development? The city’s department of economic development or the department handling business registration can usually assist in documenting an increase in the number of new businesses.

Core indicators are important because they measure the overall effectiveness of the restoration process, which includes both stabilization activities and restoration activities. You need to document whether the conditions in the community that affect residents are improving and resulting in an increase in the number of residents securing employment, capital investment in the area through new businesses, and the number of homeowners. Such increases suggest another level of investment in the community.

Other broad indicators to consider are

- **Property values.** The demand for housing increases as overall neighborhood quality improves. As demand increases, value increases.
- **Home or business loans.** Increases in loans indicate higher incomes of applicants,
- **Improved physical conditions in the neighborhood,** increased confidence in the stability of collateral, and reductions in perceived risk.
- **Building permits.** Increases in building permits usually mean an improvement in the neighborhood. However, they should be analyzed closely because permits to convert single-family housing to multifamily units, for example, may not necessarily indicate community improvement.
- **Property taxes.** A decrease in delinquencies compared with overall trends indicates an increase in incomes and greater community commitment and confidence.
- **Household income.** Although difficult to measure, increases in household income are directly related to neighborhood conditions.
- **Home ownership.** Increases in home ownership mean the neighborhood is improving.

Recap of the Process

- Assemble a diverse team of individuals to serve on the Neighborhood Restoration Subcommittee.
- Review the needs assessment completed by the initial Planning Committee.
- Formulate goals, objectives, and activities to be accomplished.
- Submit the neighborhood restoration plan for Steering Committee approval, and ensure neighborhood restoration tasks complement the other components of the Weed and Seed strategy.
- Implement the plan, recognizing that adjustments may be needed over time.
- Establish core indicators, and evaluate the plan on a regular basis.

Implementation Issues

The subcommittee does not have to be directly responsible for the implementation of neighborhood restoration activities but rather serves to coordinate such activities by organizations that may already exist in the community and have the appropriate expertise.

Also, if neighborhood residents are not participating in the program, restoration will probably fail. Participation does not mean listening to Weed and Seed updates at the local community center but rather includes voluntary participation in activities designed to remove negative influences and create a positive living environment. Encouraging participation can be difficult, but it can be done. There are no formulas for creating an environment that results in effective neighborhood participation. Community policing officers can help involve residents because they talk with the residents daily. You are urged to monitor this aspect of the program.

It may be necessary to occasionally reexamine the composition of the subcommittee. As some people lose interest or just cannot attend meetings, their positions may need to be filled with

new members. Community youth can also play an important role in restoration efforts. Also, if you cannot secure participation of top officials from local organizations, make sure that individuals who do participate have the power or direct access to power to make decisions on behalf of their organization.

The timing of subcommittee meetings might be an organizational challenge. Although meetings for staff representing organizations might be ideal during the day, the number of employed residents able to attend at that time may be limited. You should find the best schedule for everyone.

Planning and managing a successful restoration process is difficult because many of the socio-economic market forces that affect the value of the neighborhood cannot be controlled by the Weed and Seed strategy. Keeping a realistic eye on the time required to restore a neighborhood helps balance expectations for change and results in critical activities, programs, and services that positively affect lives of residents.