



# Chapter 2. Neighborhood Selection

## Overview

This chapter focuses on designation of the neighborhood(s) for Weed and Seed. Critical components of this selection process are the assessment of neighborhood assets and needs, overall community involvement and ongoing support for Weed and Seed, and identification and commitment of community resources that will be essential to the implementation of the Weed and Seed strategy. This chapter describes the criteria needed to make the appropriate neighborhood selection for Weed and Seed designation, how to conduct an assessment of each neighborhood to identify its assets and challenges, and how to identify and assemble resources that exist in the community that can be leveraged to support the overall Weed and Seed strategy.

## Vision

After the Steering Committee has been determined, the designated neighborhood(s) must be selected to implement the Weed and Seed strategy. Although some communities may already have a predefined area to target for Weed and Seed, a selection process is important to ensure the area meets the criteria established by EOWS and can be transformed through implementation of the strategy. Although some might argue that the most disadvantaged communities in a city should have a priority for Weed and Seed, they are not always the most appropriate choice.

Selection of a neighborhood entails the collection and analysis of information that highlights community conditions, the level of readiness among community leaders, and the willingness of stakeholders to commit the necessary resources to make a positive and long-lasting change in the neighborhood.

Selection is also one of the early steps in determining whether residents are interested in and supportive of Weed and Seed. As detailed in chapter 7 in this manual, the ability to mobilize residents to participate at different levels of the Weed and Seed process can determine the success of a local strategy.

One way to think about the selection process is as an investigative endeavor to uncover elements in the community that can be addressed, challenges that might affect the success of the strategy, and the depth of community leadership needed to move the strategy forward. What if all the stakeholders are not interested in Weed and Seed? Is this enough to justify selecting another neighborhood? Maybe there is more to be considered. Remember this process involves looking at all the possible elements. You may find that what has been defined as a neighborhood can be expanded to encompass more than one neighborhood to more appropriately meet the needs of the Weed and Seed strategy.

As an investigative process, you will undoubtedly uncover additional resources that can be leveraged or stakeholders who have a particular expertise that was not widely known. The possibilities are unlimited, but you must go through this process to uncover them—even if you think

you have already selected the neighborhood for Weed and Seed.

Who should be involved in the selection process? Generally, the initial Planning Committee carries out these tasks. The Planning Committee may be broadened to include additional resource professionals or residents; however, every effort should be made to control the size of the committee. Ideally, the committee should be limited to 10 individuals. Remember, this is not the Steering Committee, so the roles and responsibilities will be more flexible. People on the committee should be able to contribute needed information to compare against the criteria. The committee will not discuss budgets or funding at this point in the process; it should concentrate on the tasks of evaluating the feasibility of the proposed site.

Once this process is completed, the committee should have more information available to make informed and appropriate choices in the selection of a site. For some sites, the selection of the designated Weed and Seed areas is considered one of the Planning Committee's most significant tasks. In the retail industry, the three most important characteristics in operating a successful business are location, location, and location. Although the selection of the Weed and Seed neighborhood is probably not as dramatic, it helps determine how the overall strategy is implemented and whether it is successful. The following discussion can help identify information relevant to selecting among candidate neighborhoods and to documenting conditions in the designated Weed and Seed site.

## Implementation Process

### Step I: Compare Data Collected on the Potential Site With EOWS Criteria for Neighborhood Selection

To assist you in the neighborhood selection process, EOWS has developed criteria that must be used in choosing a Weed and Seed neighborhood. The focus of Weed and Seed is to assist

neighborhoods that are experiencing economic and social challenges coupled with crime. The ability to clearly identify economic, social, and criminal justice challenges will also contribute in the development of the overall strategies used to address these challenges. Therefore, the information collected and analyzed will also play an important role in the development of neighborhood-specific strategies for implementation.

There are many signs that indicate a neighborhood is experiencing stress. Most of the signs are visible on inspection of the neighborhoods being considered for designation.

Ten criteria should be considered. If a neighborhood being considered meets more than half of these criteria with at least 50 percent crime-related criteria, it will meet the overall requirements for designation. You may incorporate additional criteria into your neighborhood selection component; however, you must provide supportive documentation.

To compare your site with these criteria, the Planning Committee gathers and analyzes information from public sources. Several general sources can be helpful in gathering information to select the designated neighborhood for Weed and Seed. Today, most of this information can be obtained through the local library, city departments, and the Internet. Generally, this type of information is free.



In addition to the library, information can be obtained from a local university. Most public universities have extensive libraries and departments, such as urban planning, that have detailed information on city neighborhoods. If a representative from the local university is not on the Planning Committee, this might be the time to solicit the school's involvement. Another critical resource that educational institutions can provide is student labor. Through internships or work study, students are looking to gain experience that can help them on graduation. Assistance in collection and analysis of data can be assigned to a student.

The following types of data should be collected:

#### **Census tract data**

All cities are divided into census tracts. Although most people do not know what tracts make up their community, this information is easy to find. Census tracts are useful because they contain important information about the demographics (facts and statistics by category) related to Weed and Seed. The census tracts, however, will not necessarily conform to community-defined boundaries. In fact, it is not uncommon for the tracts to be larger than the potential site. If the site is dramatically different from the census tract boundaries, you may have difficulty acquiring the data needed to thoroughly analyze the area for site selection. You may need to broaden the boundaries to conform either to all or portions of census tracts or some other readily identifiable designation such as police precincts.

#### **City's master plan**

Although the ultimate goal with Weed and Seed is to develop a local strategy that can be effectively implemented, this will not be the first type of planning tool developed for the community. Obtain a copy of the city's master plan to find out what city leaders have drafted. Although there may be a small cost, this plan is important because it identifies the activities to be accomplished over a period of time. To the extent the

plan includes detailed activities for the potential site area, it is important to know what these plans are and how residents and other stakeholders will be affected.

Knowing the plans for specific areas can assist the Planning Committee in setting its sights on neighborhoods that are slated to receive resources. These plans are helpful in understanding how the city proposes to address a particular section's [problems?] and justifies why one area is selected over another. This can help the Weed and Seed effort to leverage the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and other Federal and non-Federal funding.

#### **Police calls for service and crime data**

Which police beats or zones are showing the highest rates of crime and calls for service? Another useful information source is citizen complaints. Depending on the size of the local police department, additional data may be collected, including a breakdown of the type of crime committed. Your goal in reviewing this type of data is to see whether there is a trend or an increase or decrease in the types of crime reported.

#### **School data**

Which schools have the highest dropout and truancy rates, and which ones have the greatest violence, crime, and drugs? This information can be obtained at either the local or district level. These data should also be compared with census information to monitor the increase or decrease in school-age children in the area.

#### **Voices from the community**

Sometimes, data do not tell the full story. Information may be skewed depending on who is collecting the data and on their intended use. One source of information that cannot be skewed is the voice of the community. Engaging residents, business owners, and community leaders in discussions of the condition of the community is an excellent source of data. How

do you collect these data? Ask area ministers to hold meetings in their churches and target their membership (if most of their residents live in or near the community). In addition, look to block clubs or other social organizations to schedule discussion sessions so that you can ask questions and solicit feedback. You must ensure, however, that the respondents' names are not being recorded. People may be leery of responding to your questions if they believe their names will be used.

#### Social service data

Information on welfare, public housing, and other forms of public assistance should be used to select the designated neighborhood. The Census Bureau documents most of this information, as do various agencies within the city. Depending on the area to be considered, it may extend into the county's jurisdiction, which may have additional data. Connecting with county officials may also help bring resources to the Weed and Seed effort.

#### Economic development data

Various organizations, including universities, financial institutions, and community development corporations, may have economic development data about planned development projects, microloan funds, technical assistance resources, and entrepreneurial training programs designed to encourage increased business development. These programs and resources are key indicators of economic potential. Again, gathering data from these sources may help draw them into the Weed and Seed coalition.

### Step 2: Analyze the Data

Analysis is not difficult. It may be best to separate the Planning Committee into smaller groups to handle different aspects of the data. These smaller groups should look at the information and ask the following questions:

- Has there been an increase in identified problems during the past few years?

- Has there been a decrease in these problems during the past few years?
- Do certain data stand out above the rest?
- What might be happening to explain the increase or decrease in problems in the area?
- Was there anything happening in the community that can be identified that might explain the changes in numbers (for example, of arrests, school dropouts, certain crimes, truancy, abuse/neglect cases, or unemployment)?
- Do the numbers tell a story (for example, was a problem with graffiti affected by the new art program for homeless teens)?

The answers to these questions constitute the analysis of the data. More extensive forms of data analysis exist, but the goal is to determine only whether a potential Weed and Seed neighborhood meets at least half of the 10 criteria.

### Step 3: Look for Indicators of Neighborhood Potential

Although numerous signs can indicate that a neighborhood is experiencing undue stress, they also can show its potential.

Sometimes, the signs are not so visible, so you may have to investigate to identify them. Remember, it is as important to select a neighborhood that has signs of potential as it is to identify a neighborhood that has challenges. Again, you can look to the collected data to help determine potential. The following are examples of "neighborhood potential":

- **Economic potential.** The designated neighborhood must have a distinct potential for economic revitalization. If commercial opportunities (shops, stores, or businesses) do not exist in the neighborhood, economic resources will be drained from the community.

- **Community organizations.** Community-based organizations, which include faith-based and secular groups, are the lifeblood of Weed and Seed initiatives. Effective Weed and Seed strategies require the involvement of and collaboration with community organizations. Even the best conceived programs cannot function effectively without the benefit of resident and community organization involvement.
- **Identifiable area.** The designated neighborhood must be sufficiently distinguishable from nearby neighborhoods to constitute a defined focus for concentrated action. This element is important because the area designated must be evaluated for measurable changes such as reduced crime and unemployment.
- **Resident capacity.** Residents are the lifelines of neighborhoods. Traditional economic development efforts have often limited the role and significance of residents; however, successful Weed and Seed strategies require resident involvement. The fact that residents have already begun to organize themselves through neighborhood associations, resident councils, or other organized bodies is an indication that they have a basic understanding of their role as stakeholders in the revitalization of their community. Many residents have experience or expertise in one of the

four components of Weed and Seed (law enforcement; community policing; prevention, intervention, and treatment; and neighborhood restoration).

Can you identify any or all of these potentials? Although having all the neighborhood potentials listed above is not required, you should try to have as many as possible. The more challenging the identification of potential areas, the more difficult the implementation of the Weed and Seed strategy.

#### Step 4: Make the Decision

After collecting the relevant information, the Planning Committee should meet to make a final decision on the neighborhood(s) to be selected. Although it is understood that sometimes a neighborhood or neighborhoods are preselected as potential Weed and Seed sites, this process should be completed to ensure that the area identified is the correct site for Weed and Seed. The following questions should be considered before making the final selection:

- Do you believe Weed and Seed can positively affect the selected neighborhood?
- Is the selected neighborhood readily identifiable by residents?
- What were the most pressing factors that led to selection of the neighborhood?

Based on the decision, changes to the size of the potential site may have to be made. Sometimes, sites must be reduced or enlarged based on the information collected. The goal is to identify a site that will have the greatest chance of success and one that has a clearly identified need for Weed and Seed.

#### Implementation Issues

Although this phase of the process is critical, there are only a few implementation issues. First, getting people who have the experience



or expertise to assist with this process can be challenging. Some committee members may have decided what the boundaries of the site should be and may not want to proceed with the process. Encourage them to complete the process, even if it only confirms their recommendations.

The time needed to complete the process may also be a challenge. Taking the time to seek out

free resources that can help collect the information needed for data analysis will cut down tremendously on the time needed. If the process continues too long, people may get discouraged and lose their motivation to participate. The process is intended only to ensure that you have selected a site or sites that have strong potential for success. Consider this time an investment in the future.