

NEIGHBORHOOD CAPACITY BUILDING

CDAD

Community Development Advocates of Detroit (CDAD)  
440 Burroughs Street, Suite 340, Detroit, Michigan 48202  
[cdad-online.org](http://cdad-online.org) – [info@cdad-online.org](mailto:info@cdad-online.org)

## Introduction

While the past few years have seen an infusion of capital, resources, and opportunity to Detroit, many Detroiters in our disinvested neighborhoods remain untouched by these developments. Instead of waiting for a rising tide that might or might not lift all boats, the community development industry is exploring innovative approaches to transform Detroit neighborhoods from within.

We need not look far to see the strength of the industry. Joy Southfield CDC, for example, is pairing homeownership and support, gardening, foreclosure prevention, preventative healthcare, and local economic development strategies, in a multipronged effort to restore the quality of life on the far west side of Detroit. Additionally, Restore NED, in partnership with ArtPlace, Allied Media Projects, and The Work Department, has established Create Northeast Detroit ("Create NED") to encourage residents to use art, design, and technology to make their vision for northeast Detroit tangible and sharable with the broader public. Through community-wide festivals, they are presenting a vision for the community's development that may be incorporated into the City of Detroit's Master Plan. Another CDAD member, Grandmont Rosedale Development Corporation, is renovating vacant homes, assisting local homeowners, and organizing beautification projects in northwest Detroit. Their work to strengthen commercial corridors and support small businesses in commercial space is serving as an innovative model for Detroit's community development industry. Other CDAD members continue to advance community revitalization, leadership development, and equitable development efforts despite many social, economic, and environmental hurdles.

CDAD, its members, and partners aim to be the catalyst for the transformation of Detroit neighborhoods. In the past few years, CDAD has reevaluated its relationship with a host of community development entities. CDAD recognized that, in addition to Community Development Organizations (CDOs), others such as block clubs, neighborhood associations, urban farmers, artists and designers, community advocates, and other local change agents are all part of the community development ecosystem within neighborhoods and across the city. These actors play a critical role in a multifaceted approach to community development – one that takes on issues such as land-use, social justice, and economic development supporting comprehensive community development efforts. In 2012, CDAD expanded its membership to include neighborhood improvement organizations and community groups as voting members. This shift to include neighborhood change agents of all shapes and sizes demonstrates CDAD's understanding that a healthy neighborhood is one in which many layers of activity and types of organizations work collectively to support resident driven goals. Expanding the focus of CDAD's programming to serve a range of organizations allows us to be more flexible and responsive, and better positioned to be a catalyst for neighborhood transformation.

A core element of CDAD's work is to foster "capacity" within Detroit's neighborhoods, specifically by supporting neighborhood-based organizations that improve quality of life. In this sense, neighborhood capacity refers to the knowledge, abilities, skills, power, and influence required to activate local neighborhood revitalization efforts. CDAD's approach to neighborhood capacity building is based on a fundamental belief that Detroiters have the right to be the authors of their own future.<sup>1</sup> In the following pages, we explain our perspective of community development and neighborhood capacity, and how building it from within neighborhoods – by

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1 Deborah, Eade (2005). Capacity-building: an approach to people centered development. UK and Ireland: Oxfam UK and Ireland. pp. 30–39. ISBN 0-85598-366-3.

putting community-based organizations and residents in the driver's seat - best serves Detroiters and the city as a whole.

### **CDAD's Position Statement**

CDAD believes that every Detroiters has a right to safety, a healthy environment, access to good jobs and quality education, community ownership, and the power to influence positive change in their community. These are conditions needed for people to survive and thrive; and they are conditions that are fundamentally shaped by where someone calls home.

Transforming the City of Detroit into a healthy place for all of its residents to live cannot be accomplished without continuing to build on the competencies, influence, and power of Detroit residents. Residents of Detroit have the energy, vision, and sense of ownership that are needed to rebuild our neighborhoods. Community development organizations, neighborhood improvement organizations, and community groups are a fundamental link between families and the resources, those made available through city, state, corporate, and/or philanthropic entities, that can improve their community and their lives. These organizations have an ingrained knowledge of the people, places, and history that amount to every neighborhood's distinct culture and identity. Building the capacity of these organizations to serve their community – and the people that make up these communities - is the first step to a more promising and equitable future for all Detroiters.

With these organizations offering a direct line to residents, they are well positioned to discharge and implement citywide programs at the neighborhood level, making them key agents that not only help to rebuild their own communities, but provide a system of connectivity to help revitalize the city as a whole. We believe strongly that the best way to empower Detroit residents is to bolster the work of community development organizations, neighborhood improvement organizations, and community groups, strengthening their ability to lead in the revitalization of their own neighborhoods.

### **Defining Community Development**

The community development sector is made up of community development organizations, neighborhood improvement organizations, and community groups that engage, empower, and improve the well-being of people that make up our neighborhoods. Community development centers both on (1) place-based activities that improve the built environment, foster affordable housing, and re-purpose vacant property and (2) building active and sustainable communities that have the influence to reshape longstanding power structures and remove the barriers that prevent people from participating in the issues that affect their lives. Community development can center on, but is not limited to, a range of work in public policy; community and civic engagement; environmental, economic, and social justice; the built environment, placemaking, and other sectors that contribute to the health of neighborhoods.

## Neighborhoods with Capacity

A neighborhood with “capacity” is one that has access to the resources needed to rebuild its social, physical, and economic fabric. The great challenges of reconstructing this fabric, in addition to scarce financial resources, can include isolation from key decision makers, formal leadership and institutions, and lack of connectivity among and between residents. Tangled up in these challenges are issues of community ownership, equity, and justice.

It is a combination of knowledge, skills, relationships, influence, and power that are essential to transforming the physical, social, economic, and environmental conditions in a community.<sup>2</sup> A neighborhood – and its people - with these assets, we believe, has the coordination, resources, relationships and influence essential to redirect its future.

## Neighborhood Capacity Building

Neighborhood capacity building can be described as the process of reviving existing strengths, and/or introducing new resources that help build the knowledge, skills, relationships, influence, and power of neighborhood stakeholders. While capacity building takes various forms, CDAD’s programs and activities are guided by principles of engagement, community ownership, individual empowerment, and social and economic justice. These principles focus CDAD’s capacity building initiatives on enhancing the skill sets within community development organizations, neighborhood improvement organizations, and community groups to help construct a stronger community development infrastructure. The intended outcome is that community development actors are better equipped to address the root causes and systemic barriers of inequality and exclusion; and develop creative solutions to issues of population loss, vacant property, and a diminishing pool of affordable housing.

Initiatives that build neighborhood capacity foster local ownership of ideas, strategies, and partnerships and expanding the leadership base in neighborhoods. For example, capacity building initiatives might aim to improve internal operations of community development organizations, neighborhood improvement organizations, and community groups by building on existing professional competencies – such as, coaching or trainings on innovative resource development, team management, board management, or leadership development – that improve the resiliency of these organizations. Other forms of capacity building might center on core community development competencies like community organizing, conflict resolution, policy advocacy, civic leadership, neighborhood planning, or forging local partnerships. With a city as large as Detroit - made up of neighborhoods with different sets of competencies, different combinations of community development actors, and distinct modes of collaboration - capacity building efforts are designed to meet neighborhood-based organizations where they are, creating a tailored system of engaging and empowering community development stakeholders.

With community development organizations, neighborhood improvement organizations, and community groups hard at work in Detroit neighborhoods, CDAD is working to engage these practitioners in the development of strategies to strengthen their impact. Particularly when thinking of building capacity in Detroit neighborhoods, CDAD is developing smart, innovative, and viable ways of advancing the existing efforts of these organizations.

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<sup>2</sup> Building Neighborhood Capacity Resource Center [www.buildingcommunitycapacity.org/what](http://www.buildingcommunitycapacity.org/what)

**CDAD is currently engaged in the following capacity building activities:**

1. Building competencies and providing technical assistance for Block Clubs and Neighborhood Associations: In partnership with Michigan Community Resources (MCR), and with the generous support of JP Morgan Chase, CDAD provided technical assistance to fourteen (14) block clubs/neighborhood associations. After completing the program, seventy five (75) percent of participants reported strong or very strong facilitation skills; eighty one (81) percent reported strong or very strong skills in creating effective collaborations; and sixty nine (69) percent reported strong or very strong organizing and community engagement skills.
2. Promoting peer-to-peer learning exchanges: Since 2013, CDAD has been organizing a Brown Bag Lunch Series that facilitates conversation and engagement among peer organizations. These events spur interaction amongst CDAD members, often resulting in new ideas, approaches, or partnerships in community development. Topics for Brown Bags have included property acquisition, racial equity, safety in Detroit, blight abatement, resource development, business development, crowdfunding, and storytelling.

The JP Morgan Chase capacity building program mentioned in item one utilized peer-to-peer learning to share lessons learned, best practices, and innovative strategies in community development amongst the fourteen (14) participating block clubs and neighborhood associations.

3. Developing organizing and planning skill sets through the CDAD Strategic Framework neighborhood planning process: While the Strategic Framework is largely about neighborhood planning, an important element of the process is to outfit residents with information and skills to better activate change in their neighborhood. Residents learn about community organizing and resident leadership development, data and how to use it. They begin using a common language centered on urban planning and land use typologies. For each neighborhood that engages in the planning process, a group of steering committee members are taught skills for community engagement, establishing consensus, educating residents with different learning styles, facilitating meetings, and conflict resolution. They are taught to develop and execute a community engagement plan; and they study city departments to better understand how to utilize public resources. The competencies that are taught through the Strategic Framework are empowering residents by giving them the tools they need to envision and execute a neighborhood plan.

To date CDAD has facilitated four Strategic Framework planning processes with the Lower Eastside Action Plan (LEAP), Urban Neighborhoods Initiative (UNI) in Springwells Village, Brightmoor Alliance, and Restore NED in northeast Detroit. Over 5,000 residents have been engaged through the Strategic Framework planning process.

4. Bridging the gap between neighborhood stakeholders and key decision makers: CDAD draws key officials to present valuable policy related information to members of its network. These events have included a listening session with Congressman Dan Kildee, a “how to talk with legislators” session, and a meet and greet with representatives of the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA). Over 200 people have attended these events.
5. Convening members to facilitate a broader awareness of key issues: CDAD convenes a quarterly membership meeting at which a range of community stakeholders come together to learn about timely issues in community development and public policy. Some speakers at membership meetings include: Juanita Jones, Detroit Land Bank Authority; Jerry Paffendorf, Loveland Technologies; Councilmembers Raquel Cansteneda-Lopez and James Tate; Erica Raleigh, Data Driven Detroit (D3); Nicole Brown, M1-Rail; Brad Frost, Detroit Corridor Initiative; Angela Reyes, The Coalition for the Future of Detroit’s

Schoolchildren, Arthur Jemison, Director of Housing and Revitalization for the City of Detroit; and Christine Sauve, Welcoming Michigan.

6. Generating local trainings to strengthen community development competencies: With the generous support of The Kresge Foundation, and in partnership with the Project for Public Spaces, CDAD hosted two workshops about placemaking and the specific challenges and opportunities associated with projects that are rolled out in the Detroit context.

Those CDAD members that are categorized as community development organizations, have access to discounted trainings that are offered by the Community Economic Development Association of Michigan (CEDAM) trainings.

7. Outreach and communications: Regularly, CDAD connects members with information and resources via social media and a regularly scheduled newsletter. Content includes updates on trainings, conferences, events, funding opportunities, and more.

**Additional Near-Term capacity building projects are likely to include:**

1. Leadership development for community development practitioners and volunteers to strengthen the influence and power required to make sustainable changes to their neighborhood.
2. Organizational assessment followed by direct technical assistance to help community development organizations to better serve the community.
3. Relationship building to improve access to key decision makers.
4. Advocating for citywide policy changes and empowering neighborhood based organizations to lead local advocacy efforts.
5. Supporting the work of local organizations by strengthening the community development brand.
6. Attracting talent to staff Detroit's community development organizations.

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