

# GREAT *Indy* NEIGHBORHOODS

## **Great Indy Neighborhoods Initiatives (GINI): A Comprehensive Approach to Community Development**

Indianapolis has always been a city of diverse neighborhoods, with a rich history of grassroots community leadership. For decades, neighborhood leaders throughout the city have worked with community development and service organizations to make their communities better places to live, work, and raise families.

Indianapolis has also been home to extraordinary public/private partnerships that have helped communities grow and thrive. Downtown Indianapolis has experienced a rebirth as a clean, vibrant urban center. Innovative public schools, including charter schools and magnet schools, have helped drive education initiatives. Such projects as the greenways system, the Cultural Districts, and the Cultural Trail have spurred the development of public spaces. And the success of such projects as Fall Creek Place has prompted communities to take a fresh look at how large-scale revitalization projects can change distressed communities for the better.

Yet the success of these initiatives has not always resulted in improved coordination between leadership at the grassroots level and the resources available through strong public/private partnerships. In fact, Indianapolis' last review of community development activities was in the early 1990s. The reality is that the enthusiasm and day-to-day support for comprehensive community development inevitably dwindles unless neighborhoods' priorities are developed and implemented by grassroots stakeholders working in collaboration with civic leaders.

The need for this kind of cooperation led to the Great Indy Neighborhoods Initiatives (GINI). GINI is a program that encourages neighbors to get involved in their neighborhoods, decide on neighborhood priorities, and work together to implement meaningful change. The program includes two initiatives: the *Engagement Initiative*, which seeks to get neighborhoods actively engaged in getting organized and thinking about what their community can be; and the *Demonstration Initiative*, which helps neighborhoods put their plans in motion. Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), along with the City of Indianapolis and the Indianapolis Neighborhood Resource Center (INRC), supports neighborhood efforts with staffing, planning, and project seed funding.

Today, GINI is actively working in six key Indianapolis neighborhoods—and other neighborhoods across the city are developing plans to go from good to great.

### *The Beginning: A Summit of Community Leaders*

GINI traces its roots to the early months of 2004, when local community development corporation leaders, through the Indianapolis Coalition for Neighborhood Development (ICND), met with Mayor Bart Peterson to discuss a renewed vision for neighborhood improvement in Indianapolis. These leaders decided they could maximize their efforts by

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getting even more people involved in developing a vision for community development, and implemented a series of focus groups with additional neighborhood leaders. The focus groups generated so much interest that an even larger gathering seemed in order.

So on October 9, 2004, ICND and Mayor Peterson convened the first-ever Indianapolis Community Development Summit. More than 400 neighborhood leaders attended to discuss strategies for creating healthy neighborhoods, current neighborhood issues, and a vision for the future. It was clear that the participants wanted a comprehensive approach to community development that addressed not only housing, but also education, safety, health, and many other issues.

As a result of the summit, a diverse group of civic leaders known as the Community Development Strategy Group was formed. The group's mission was to continue exploring key community development concepts in the interest of formulating a plan to bring a coordinated, comprehensive community development effort to Indianapolis.

In the spring of 2005, the Community Development Strategy Group sponsored open community forums on developing a vision for community building and collaboration across boundaries—each attended by more than 150 interested participants. In July, the group traveled to Chicago to learn more about the New Communities Program, Chicago's nationally recognized and celebrated approach to comprehensive community development. The strategy group also studied a number of other efforts, both local and national, to engage in comprehensive community development, including the Comprehensive Community Revitalization Program in the South Bronx; the Neighborhoods in Bloom initiative in Richmond, Virginia; and, closer to home, such programs as the Pew Charitable Trust's work in the development of the CAFE program (Community Alliance for the Far Eastside) through the Neighborhood Preservation Initiative; Southeast Neighborhood Development's work to revitalize the near southeast side, Martindale Brightwood's Making Connections program on the north side, and the work to develop Washington Community School on the near west side. These and other efforts helped the group gain a clearer picture of the challenges and opportunities for Indianapolis neighborhoods—and spurred the creation of GINI.

## *The Eleven Principles of Healthy Neighborhoods*

Among the Community Development Strategy Group's most important accomplishments was the articulation of the Eleven Principles Of Healthy Neighborhoods. These principles are not revolutionary. But by identifying them and agreeing on their importance, the group took a meaningful step toward developing the processes neighborhoods needed to go from good to great.

The principles are:

1. *Leadership.* Healthy neighborhoods value and cultivate skilled leadership and an active citizenry. Healthy neighborhoods possess a complement of local

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- organizations, civic associations, religious communities, and/or community development corporations composed of the diverse, local array of racial, ethnic, and economic constituencies.
2. *Vision.* Healthy neighborhoods foster the creation of a "future community vision" and develop a holistic set of neighborhood strategies to achieve that vision. The ability to collaborate across barriers and sectors to successfully implement these strategies is recognized and valued.
  3. *Collaboration.* Healthy neighborhoods exist within a metropolitan setting where governments and the private, philanthropic, and independent sectors value and provide coordinated support for neighborhood association formation and growth, local leadership development, and holistic community development initiatives.
  4. *Services.* Healthy communities maintain the highest standard of health and human services.
  5. *Education.* Healthy neighborhoods place a high value on intellectual and moral education. All local institutions and social structures take extraordinary measures to provide support to local schools. Parents and adults actively participate in the education of children. Children and young adults are involved in neighborhood associations and other local leadership forums that offer civic responsibility training.
  6. *Culture.* Healthy communities offer a wide and varied array of artistic, cultural, recreational, and spiritual programs and venues to enrich the quality of life, nurture local talent, and foster creativity.
  7. *Safety.* In healthy neighborhoods, police and citizens partner together to create a safe, crime-free environment. Healthy neighborhoods create safe and nurturing venues for children.
  8. *Environment.* Healthy communities manage and invest in local properties and the common environment to maintain the community's aesthetic and physical quality.
  9. *Housing.* Healthy communities offer attractive housing as a community asset and a wealth-building opportunity for local families.
  10. *Business Diversity.* Healthy communities possess a complement of retail and professional services.
  11. *Economy.* Healthy communities have an integrated economic relationship with the surrounding region that provides both producers and consumers and generates economic opportunity. Healthy neighborhoods provide a setting where individuals can participate in the economy, either in the workforce or through entrepreneurial activity.

Guided by these principles, the strategy group began a process of identifying strategies that would foster greater engagement and support for a more comprehensive approach to neighborhood development in Indianapolis.

What exactly is comprehensive community development? It's an approach to community development activities that integrates civic, economic, physical, and human development to create healthy neighborhoods. It recognizes that in order to transform neighborhoods,

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development efforts must include the physical spaces, human services, and relationships in the places we live, work, raise our families, and participate in our community.

Comprehensive community development approaches neighborhood life as a whole and encourages neighborhood-based, multi-faceted, and cooperative improvement efforts. These collaborative neighborhood efforts give residents and stakeholders more control over the direction of their communities. Behind this approach is the conviction that the community accomplishes more when it is an active partner in decision-making.

With all of this research and strategic thinking in place, the next step was to put a plan into action. So the strategy group developed GINI—and it was introduced to Indianapolis neighborhood leaders in October of 2005.

## *The Launch of a Great Idea*

GINI's goal is to help support Indianapolis neighborhoods by encouraging neighbors to work together across traditional boundaries. The program helps neighborhood residents, businesses, and community organizations get organized and involved in the neighborhood, decide on neighborhood priorities, and act on their plans to drive meaningful change.

The initiatives were based on three core ideas:

- **Community building:** great neighborhoods start in the neighborhood, with local people who take responsibility for making their communities better.
- **Quality-of-life planning:** a process in which residents and stakeholders envision what they want their neighborhood to become and develop a plan to get there.
- **Convening stakeholders to accomplish the vision:** neighborhoods grow through collaborative efforts that cross geographic and organizational boundaries.

From these ideas came two initiatives that allow neighborhoods across the city to participate at a level that matches their current needs. The *Engagement Initiative* seeks to help neighborhoods across Indianapolis identify and develop leaders, connect neighbors with resources, and communicate the strength of Indianapolis neighborhoods to the rest of the community. This initiative provides training, technical assistance, mini-grants to support neighborhood-driven programs, and enhanced communications among and about neighborhoods.

The *Demonstration Initiative* takes comprehensive community development to the next level, initially providing targeted support for six neighborhoods that includes funds for staffing, technical support, assistance in organizational development, and seed funding for implementing a neighborhood quality-of-life plan. It's a three-year program designed for neighborhoods that are ready to become great examples of the power of comprehensive community development.

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GINI was presented to neighborhood leaders across the city through a series of community workshops that took place in the fall of 2005 and winter of 2005-06. At this point, with the basic program developed and its principles and initiatives in place, the GINI strategy group became the Great Indy Neighborhoods Steering Committee with the responsibility of overseeing the implementation of the program. Neighborhoods were invited to participate in an application process that would help the Steering Committee choose the six neighborhoods for the Demonstration Initiative.

## *The Program Begins*

The Steering Committee had its work cut out for it: 17 neighborhoods representing a broad cross-section of the city of Indianapolis, applied to become part of the program. In the summer of 2006, after much deliberation with the committee, Mayor Bart Peterson introduced the six neighborhoods that would participate in the Demonstration Initiative.

- The Near-East Side, representing 40,000 residents, hopes to identify and engage new leaders, develop a comprehensive quality-of-life plan, and develop its potential as a vibrant retail and commercial corridor. Convening agency is the John H. Boner Community Center.
- The North-East Side, representing 35,000 residents, will focus on continued streetscape enhancements, revitalizing vacant commercial properties along its main corridor, and strengthening and diversifying its leadership base. Convening agency is Binford Redevelopment and Growth.
- The South-East Side, representing 30,000 residents, seeks to strengthen youth programming, increase job training and workforce development opportunities, and continue its successful economic development efforts in and around Fountain Square. Convening agency is Southeast Neighborhood Development.
- The Near-West Side, representing 14,500 residents, wants to develop a single neighborhood vision with the help of several neighborhood organizations, build on recent after-school program and affordable housing successes, and continue to improve community safety. Convening agency is Hawthorne Community Center.
- The North-West Side, representing nearly 32,000 residents, seeks to revitalize commercial and residential areas by engaging its increasingly diverse citizenry in projects that include residents, businesses, and community organizations. Convening agency is Crooked Creek Northwest Community Development Corporation.
- The South-West Side, representing 10,000 residents, intends to build upon its history of strong resident leadership and implement its quality-of-life plan through strategic planning, an improved communication system, and the formation of a community fund. Convening agency is West Indianapolis Development Corporation.

In addition, GINI has created a number of tools, including a Neighborhood Resource Guide and a step-by-step guide to creating a quality-of-life plan, to help neighborhood leaders get organized and revitalize their communities.

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## *A Collaboration of Collaborators*

Just as collaboration is important in comprehensive community development, so is it critical to launching and supporting a plan to make neighborhoods better across a large American city. Partners in overseeing this important work include:

- *Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC)* is a national, nonprofit organization that helps communities as they improve the physical and economic condition of their neighborhoods. LISC supports neighborhood-based community organizations and their immediate partners as they serve as critical vehicles in the neighborhood revitalization process.
- *Indianapolis Neighborhood Resource Center (INRC)* provides information and support to residents and neighborhood-based organizations. It offers technical assistance and various training opportunities to help grassroots neighborhood organizations address issues that impact the quality of life in their neighborhoods.
- *The City of Indianapolis - Marion County* is committed to the ideas of the Great Indy Neighborhoods Initiatives, including quality-of-life planning. The Division of Planning can provide information on demographics and information about neighborhood assets, and can help with land use and zoning issues. The Mayor's Neighborhood Liaisons connect residents with city and county government, other community groups, and businesses across Indianapolis.
- *Great Indy Neighborhoods Steering Committee* is a diverse group of civic leaders representing the private, public and nonprofit sectors with a variety of civic, social, physical and economic ties to Indianapolis neighborhoods. This Committee governs the initiatives and promotes the Principles of Healthy Neighborhoods across the city.

## *Conclusion*

Creating great neighborhoods is not a goal, but a process. Comprehensive community development never really ends—it continues to help neighborhoods look to the future, define what they want to be, and work together to achieve their vision.

GINI is an ongoing process, too. Right now, this program is helping neighborhoods across the city create quality-of-life plans and realize the visions they've set forth. Today, Indianapolis understands what it takes to help neighborhoods go from good to great. And more neighborhoods than ever before are on their way.