ARTICLE

MEASURING SOCIAL CAPITAL: AN EXPLORATION IN COMMUNITY–RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP

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Large numbers of social policy initiatives and community organizations are currently engaged in "community building" efforts that seek, in part, to strengthen informal relationships and the organizational infrastructure of communities and to build the capacity of communities to manage and foster community change. One critical requirement for improving such practice is for communities to have greater access and capacity to use information for planning, advocacy, and assessment. There are, however, a number of challenges to this, especially as it concerns understanding complex, sometimes elusive, dimensions of community circumstances and dynamics—the level of community "social capital," for example—that are of central interest to those involved in community-building efforts. The authors describe what was learned through a community–research partnership that attempted to test practical options for community-based organizations (CBOs) to measure aspects of community social capital for their own purposes and within the constraints of budget, time, and skills under which they work. © 2006 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

In recent years, *community* has reemerged as a critical arena for addressing a range of social problems, a kind of "modern elixir for much of what ails American society" (Sampson, 1999, p. 241). Throughout the 1990s in particular, and continuing today, a large number of efforts have been launched that focus on promoting community change through a range of community development, organizing, and community-building strategies. Community building here refers to the goal of going beyond community-based service provision or production (e.g., of housing, commercial activity, jobs) to strengthen informal relationships and the organizational infrastructure of communities, and to build

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the capacity of communities to manage and foster community change (Chaskin, Brown, Venkatesh, & Vidal, 2001; Kingsley, McNeely, & Gibson, 1997; Kubisch et al. 1997, 2002).

One critical requirement for improving community-building practice is better information about communities and community-change processes. Indeed, there has been mounting interest in learning from community-change efforts, bringing to bear information and analysis to inform them, increasing information access, and building local capacity to use information to strengthen communities' hands in pursuing their community-change goals (Connell, Kubisch, Shorr, & Weiss 1995; Kingsley, 1998; Kubisch, Fulbright-Anderson, & Connell, 1998; Sawicki & Craig, 1996). There are, however, a number of challenges to this agenda.

One set of challenges concerns the nature and availability of data about communities and neighborhoods. Existing data are of differing quality and are collected based on different units of analysis (e.g., census tracts, zip codes, police precincts, service catchment areas) and over different periods of time, sometimes (as with the decennial census) quite infrequently. Although tools and techniques for aggregating, mapping, and analyzing small-area data have improved dramatically over recent years (Coulton & Hollister, 1998), access to these tools and the capacity to use them is generally beyond the reach of most community organizations. Furthermore, much information relevant to understanding community circumstances and dynamics—resident perceptions, behaviors, and relational networks, for example—is not available through existing data sources. Importantly, it is often these more elusive dimensions of communities—the level of community "social capital," for example—that are of central interest to those involved in community-building efforts (Chaskin, 2002; Kubisch et al., 1998).

A second set of challenges concerns the inclination and capability of community actors—organizations and individuals—to collect and use information. First, actors outside the community, such as government agencies, universities, and private organizations, hold much of the data that exist. Gaining access to this information often requires time-consuming, sometimes difficult, and not always successful, negotiation with agency personnel. In addition, community actors differ in their resources and capacity to ask researchable questions, work with existing information, and engage in various data-collection strategies to collect information not available through existing sources.

In this article, we describe what was learned through a community-research partnership that attempted to test practical options for community-based organizations (CBOs) to measure aspects of community social capital for their own purposes and within the constraints of budget, time, and skills under which they work. It provides an in-depth case study of one such partnership with two CBOs organized around this particular problem, and explores, in some detail, the approach to, and lessons derived from, the two components (twin goals) of the project: establishing a community–research partnership and testing CBO-friendly approaches to data collection and measurement of what can be an elusive, but nonetheless important, construct of relevance to CBOs engaged in local community change.

A significant literature on community-based research, participatory research, and community–research partnerships has evolved at least since the 1970s (and drawing on earlier work by Kurt Lewin, Jurgen Habermas, Paolo Friere, and others; see Wallerstein & Duran, 2003 for an historical overview), and its influence and application is increasing. Although sometimes ideological or focused on the distillation of concise action principles to guide such work, the literature includes some significant theoretical work and some empirical reflections of participatory research in practice. The case-study analysis presented in this article extends and enhances this literature by providing a nuanced, detailed, and candid ("warts-and-all") exposition and assessment of the partnership process and what resulted from it. In this respect, each of the twin goals noted above is important, because the exploration of the one (CBO-accessible methods and measures) in the context of the other (community–research partnership) grounds the analysis in the particular in an important way, and because the dynamics explored and findings on these two fronts provide both a practical assessment of particular measurement tools and approaches and highlight the potential complexity of partnership dynamics, even under the conditions of relative trust, mutual commitment, long-term relationships, and dialogue that are often cited as key variables in successful community–research partnerships (e.g., Israel et al. 2003; Wilson, 2004).

The article is organized in four parts. First, we outline the constructs measured and their relevance for informing community-change strategies and understanding their effects. Second, we describe the research methods and data sources used, outline our approach to data analysis, and summarize the research process in which we engaged with our community partners. Third, we present our findings, both about the methods and measures used, and about the community–research partnerships in which we were engaged. Finally, we offer some conclusions based on what was learned and some suggestions for future practice.

THE CONSTRUCTS

Community-building efforts often focus on identifying, supporting, and developing the kinds of indigenous resources and mechanisms that can be mobilized to determine and address community needs and priorities. This often includes a significant focus on the informal—relationships, interactions, and dynamics among community members—and the capacities for problem solving and community change they represent. Efforts to promote the positive use of these aspects of social structure and interaction are referred to as building community "social capital" (e.g., Gittell & Vidal 1998; Saegert, Thompson, & Warren, 2001; Warren, 2001).

The concept of social capital has gained tremendous currency over the past 15 years. Along with its rise in popularity has come a proliferation of uses and meanings. Coleman (1988), for example, defines three "forms" of social capital—norms, information channels, and collective obligations and expectations—that operate through, and are facilitated by, relational networks. Individuals within the structure of relations have the ability, by virtue of these connections, to achieve ends not otherwise possible (Coleman 1988; 1990). Putnam (1993, 2000) focuses on trust, norms, and networks and emphasizes the central role of civic engagement in a broad range of associations that can facilitate collective action. Several scholars, building on the social network literature around network closure, "weak ties," and "structural holes" (e.g., Burt, 1992; Coleman, 1988; Granovetter 1973, 1974; Sampson, 1999) have explored a distinction between social capital that inheres in internal, exclusive relations ("bonding capital") and external, inclusive relations ("bridging capital"). Bonding capital is seen to promote solidarity and reciprocity within a community or group; bridging capital is seen to provide access to resources and information beyond the group (Putnam, 2000; Saegert et al., 2001; Vidal & Gittell, 1998; Warren, 2001). Similarly, Woolcock (1998) focuses on embedded relations ("integration") and autonomous relations ("linkage") at the microlevel (social integration within and social ties beyond a community or group, respectively) and their counterparts (organizational integrity and synergy) at the macrolevel. Burt (2000; 2001) discusses social capital as a broadly accepted "metaphor about advantage" that explains how people who are better connected can benefit from those connections. He elaborates some of the specific network configurations—and the ways in which individuals or firms can strategically engage in such networks—that promote their advantage by linking actors to resources through relations within networks and, especially, across "structural holes." These are the gaps between "nonredundant contacts" that link individuals to those connected with networks other than their own; they provide additional access to information, resources, and opportunity (Burt 1992).

The notion of social capital has also been criticized on several grounds, among them its appropriation and translation of social dynamics and values into economic ones (Cohen & Prusak, 2001); the tendency of social-capital analyses to elide conflict and depoliticize the nature of poverty and the appropriate responses to it (Foley & Edwards, 1997); the tendency to assume that social capital is unambiguously good, rather than recognizing its potential to promote inequality (given its uneven distribution) or to constrain individual advancement in light of membership obligations within groups (Portes & Landolt, 1996; Woolcock, 1998); and the fact that, given its broad appeal across the ideological spectrum, social capital can be invoked in support of vastly different public-policy responses (Woolcock, 1998).

Despite these critiques, social capital continues to serve as an important construct, offering a way to conceptualize an important source of capacity in communities: the "resource potential of personal and organizational networks" (Sampson, Morenoff, & Earls, 1999). Central to this notion is the role (for good or ill) that social structure—the concrete networks of relations among individuals and institutions that define the shape of social interaction—plays in providing access to information, opportunity, and support. It is through these relationships, and the associational action they make possible, that social capital operates.

In operationalizing key aspects of social capital for the purpose of measurement at the neighborhood level, we concentrate on three dimensions of associational action—"collective efficacy" (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997), neighborhood activism, and involvement in voluntary associations. We focus on these three constructs in particular for several reasons. First, they speak to different dimensions of civic engagement on the part of community residents in community affairs. This includes their informal relations and the context of social interaction among residents, their engagement in different aspects of political action in response to neighborhood problems, and their more formal involvement through organizational membership. Second, there are theoretical arguments and some empirical evidence that would lead us to expect a relationship between high levels of these constructs and certain aspects of community well-being. Collective efficacy, for example, has been shown to be strongly associated with lower levels of neighborhood violence, personal victimization, and homicide, and to partially mediate the effects of neighborhood social composition (e.g., poverty, race and ethnicity, residential stability) on violence (Sampson et al., 1997). Organizational involvement has been argued to foster democratic activism and community development (Putnam, 1993), perceptions of personal efficacy (Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988), and to be associated with social control and lower levels of social disorganization (Sampson & Groves, 1989; Shaw & McKay, 1942). Third, and perhaps more relevant to CBOs, these constructs speak to the presence of reservoirs of neighborhood strengths that can be harnessed for collective purpose and suggest potential responses to their absence. Community-based organizations that are aware of the level and distribution of functioning interpersonal networks and neighborhood activism can apply this knowledge strategically to make decisions about how, where, and through what mechanisms to intervene. Finally (and very pragmatically), good survey measures exist for each of these constructs, and survey data is available (described below) that measures them in Chicago neighborhoods and allows us to compare the findings of CBO-accessible methods of data collection with those from a random-sample survey.

Data, Methods, and Community Process

Our approach to testing community-accessible techniques for measuring these constructs focused on the use of strategic convenience sampling methods. By strategic convenience sampling (to be described in more detail later), we mean deliberately selecting sites, based on considered local knowledge of community characteristics and dynamics, which are likely to provide access to informants that may approximate a representative sample. We tested the viability of these methods by comparing the findings from survey data collected as part of the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods (PHDCN)[1] with those provided by community surveys we administered in partnership with two community organizations in the city of Chicago and with the city's Youth Mapping project.[2] Our analysis of the community–research partnerships and the usefulness and challenges of the project for the community organizations with which we worked is based on our experience with them and their reflections on our work together. Both organizations are well-established CBOs in their respective communities that have been in existence for over a decade. One is an organization focused on youth development, youth organizing, and advocacy operating in an ethnically diverse community in Chicago's southwest side; the other is a health and human service agency offering a range of programs serving over 10,000 participants annually in a primarily African American community on the city's west side.

Survey Data

The Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods, initiated in 1994, is a major study of children, youth, and the social characteristics of neighborhoods in Chicago. As part of this project, a survey of neighborhood residents over the age of 18 was conducted in 1995 and replicated in 2001 to understand issues related to the social fabric of different Chicago neighborhoods. We received permission to use findings from the PHDCN survey to provide the comparison measures against which we test the potential for strategic, nonrandom approaches to neighborhood survey administration that CBOs might conduct.

The community surveys we developed were constructed in consultation with our community partners, building from items contained in the PHDCN community survey. In addition to the three constructs described above, our community survey included measures of social support, existing programs and organizations, intergenerational relations, neighborhood violence, location of respondents' residence, and respondent demographics. These questions responded to other central interests of our community partners.

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[1] Information on PHDCN can be found online at www.hms.harvard.edu

[2] The Youth Mapping project was run by the Youth Services Division of the Chicago Department of Human Services. The project works with local organizations (YouthNets) to train young people to collect data on the characteristics of their neighborhoods. For purposes of analysis, we have relied on these data solely to provide a comparison of the reliability of the measures at the individual level and in neighborhoods beyond the two communities in which our CBO partners work.

Surveys were self-administered with the assistance of CBO staff or volunteers in each community at a variety of targeted public venues, including supermarkets, schools, community events, barbershops, and hair salons.[3] Questionnaires were formatted so that completed surveys could be electronically scanned to reduce data-input time and error. Respondent demographic characteristics—race, education, employment status, home ownership, household size, length of residence in current home—were summarized and compared to demographic data provided by the U.S. Census Bureau (2000) to gauge the degree to which respondents were generally reflective of the demographic profile of the community as a whole. This analysis was conducted for each venue in which surveys were collected to understand which venues were more likely to provide information from particular segments of each community's population.

Neighborhood Selection and Definition

The problems of neighborhood definition are legion, and there is a broad range of ways they are defined for research, service delivery, planning, and to inform the day-to-day actions and interactions of residents (Chaskin, 1997, 1998). For this project, we looked at neighborhoods in two ways. First, we used the PHDCN definition of Chicago neighborhoods, in which clusters of Census tracts were aggregated by socioeconomic status (SES) and race/ethnicity, taking into account major geographic factors (such as highways), to create neighborhoods that are "geographically contiguous and socially similar" (Morenoff, Sampson, & Raudenbush, 2001, p. 6; Sampson et al., 1997). This permitted us to compare our survey findings with those of the PHDCN community survey at the neighborhood level and to aggregate to larger units of analysis.

Second, we aggregated PHDCN neighborhood clusters to conform to the neighborhood definitions provided by the community organizations with which we worked. This permitted us to present findings to our CBO partners at the unit of analysis most broadly relevant to them and to provide within-community analyses at smaller neighborhood levels. In one case, the neighborhood was defined by the CBO as the relevant Chicago Community Area, North Lawndale (Community Area 29). In the other case, the neighborhood was defined as a cluster of Community Areas known as the Southwest Side, which includes West Elsdon, Gage Park, Chicago Lawn, West Lawn, and West Englewood (Community Areas 62, 63, 66, 65, and 67, respectively).[4]

Community Partnerships: Rationale and Approach

Community-embedded, practical research grew up with the profession of social work (as a fundamental part of the work of the early Settlement Houses) and was a hallmark of early sociological inquiry, though the evolution of these fields has entailed an increasing separation of researcher from practitioner roles, bodies of knowledge, and modes of operation (Deegan, 1990; Harkavy & Puckett, 1994; Mayfield, Hellwig, & Banks 1999). Still, since at least the 1970s, there has been an increasing interest and a range of both theoretical arguments and tactical approaches—from participatory action research to empowerment evaluation—to reconnecting research to practice (and researchers to practitioners) in direct ways (e.g., Chavis, Stucky, & Wandersman, 1983; Fetterman, Kaftarian, & Wandersman, 1996; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003; Rapoport, 1970; Richards, 1985; Stoeker & Bonacich, 1992; Susman, 1983; Whyte, 1991; Whyte & Whyte, 1998). In part, this interest stems from a recognition of research as "a political resource" that can be wielded to challenge and pressure institutions and community organizations to act in certain ways (Nyden & Wiewel, 1992, p. 44); in part, it stems from a desire to enhance the capacity of communities and organizations to engage in effective, evidence-based planning (e.g., Argyris & Schön, 1978; Bailey, 1997). Different approaches to engaging in community participatory research can be seen, as Nina Wallerstein and Bonnie Doran suggest, on a kind of continuum between "utilization-focused" approaches, which structure researcher–community (or –practitioner) partnerships to conduct action research geared toward contributing to the solution of a particular social problem, and "emancipatory" approaches, in which such research partnerships are structured with an explicit recognition of power and in support of communities achieving social justice through their own praxis (Wallerstein & Doran, 2003).

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[3] In the case of the Youth Mapping project, young people working as summer interns also walked through targeted neighborhoods in the city and approached other young people and adults and asked if they would be willing to fill out the surveys.

[4] Community Areas were defined in Chicago in the 1920s by researchers at the University of Chicago. They are composed of aggregations of Census tracts, with boundaries designed to define an area that has "a history of its own as a community, a name, an awareness on the part of its inhabitants of common interests, and a set of local businesses and organizations oriented to the local community" (Chicago Fact Book Consortium, 1984).

Thus, the goals behind, and the nature of, the "partnership" between researchers and community actors may vary widely. In some cases, community–research partnerships are structured such that researchers play a consultative role to help facilitate the completion of a community research agenda. In other cases, researchers act as technical functionaries who carry out the research tasks on behalf of community actors in service of such an agenda. In yet other cases, community actors act to facilitate a researcher agenda, providing some combination of access, insight, and information in return for access to the data and analysis to use for their own purposes (cf. Stoeker, 2003 on researchers as "initiators," "consultants," or "collaborators" in participatory research).

In this project, we attempted to engage in collaborative research in the sense suggested by Nyden and Wiewel (1992), in which researchers and community partners each had a role to play in shaping the research and in collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and using the data for their respective purposes. In doing so, we sought to ensure that the information collected was both of interest and of practical value to the organizations; worked with them to systematize the kind of convenience sampling techniques they generally rely on; and tried to leverage the organizations' knowledge of community dynamics and circumstances to inform the data-collection strategies and questions asked.

Our approach to working with community partners was highly pragmatic. We sought to engage them in ways that would make best use of their resources and expertise while minimizing the amount of time they would be required to dedicate, and without overtaxing staff capacities. Given this orientation, the community partners played a critical role in the project in three respects. First, they provided consultation on the design of the work. In this respect, they contributed to the development of the survey instrument, suggested practical ways to administer the surveys, and identified particular venues to target for administration. The choice of venues was driven by community partners' sense of where we would have the best chance at capturing both sufficient numbers of respondents and a relatively representative cross-section of the population.[5] Second, they coordinated and administered the data collection. This included negotiating with the organizations in which surveys would be administered, providing staff and volunteers to conduct survey administration (during which passersby and participants in particular settings—supermarkets, barbershops, community meetings—would be informed of the purpose of the survey and invited to fill one out), and delivering completed surveys to the researchers for input and analysis. Finally, they acted as consumers of the data collected, as interpreters of the data, and as evaluators of the process and products developed during the course of the work. In this regard, they both reflected and provided feedback on the process, value, and challenges of the partnership and the data collected, and they used the data to inform their strategic planning and organizational activities.

The assessment of this process provided here is drawn from a "reflection-in-action" (Schön, 1983) orientation to the work in which participant observation, documentation, semistructured interviews with community partners, and periodic feedback discussions provided the means for an iterative review and analysis of project implementation and community–researcher interaction. In addition, CBO partners reviewed and commented on our written analysis of findings regarding both methods and measures and the nature and value of the partnership.

FINDINGS

This section provides an examination of our findings. We begin with an analysis of the methods and measures used. The purpose of this analysis is to provide evidence of the extent to which it proved possible to generate sound data using strategic convenience sampling methods through CBO survey administration. The substantive findings about levels of social capital in the neighborhoods, while useful to our community partners, are not the subject of concern in this article. We then turn to an analysis of the community–research partnership, in which we explore the successes and challenges confronted during the processes of collaborative planning, survey administration, and the reporting and use of findings.

Methods and Measures: Comparing Survey Results

First, to understand how the demographic characteristics of the respondents generated by our strategic convenience sample reflected the demographic make-up of the two communities, we compared the characteristics of respondents with data from the U.S. Census Bureau (2000), aggregated to the Community Area level.[6] The only significant differences between our community respondents and the community demographic profile provided by the Census data for both North Lawndale and the Southwest Side communities were that survey respondents tended to live in larger households than the general population and tended to be somewhat better educated than the general population.

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[5] For example, based on their prior success with this method, we used one of our partner's experience collecting data on short paper-and-pencil forms in supermarkets (supported by a small respondent incentive) as a core strategy across communities. We then targeted other venues—schools, community meetings, libraries, barbershops, hair salons—to target particular subpopulations (e.g., youth, men, women, people from different geographic parts of the community) and to gather additional completed surveys.

[6] We were able to map the approximate location of respondents' residences through their response to a question asking for the cross-streets nearest their home. We asked the question in this way, rather than asking for a specific address, because we were concerned that respondents would be reluctant to provide a specific street address. About 22% of respondents in North Lawndale and about 47% of respondents in the Southwest Side did not answer this question and so do not figure into our neighborhood-level analyses.

Next, to determine how well our community partners' data reflected the findings of the PHDCN survey, we compared the measures of collective efficacy, neighborhood activism, and membership in voluntary associations provided by each data source. Collective efficacy is a summary measure of two 5-item scales, one measuring social cohesion and trust (which asks questions regarding the degree to which respondents believe they live in a close-knit neighborhood and the extent to which people in the neighborhood are willing to help their neighbors, get along with one another, share the same values, and can be trusted) and the other measuring informal social control (which asks whether people in the neighborhood are likely to intervene if children or youth in the neighborhood were seen acting out of line, skipping school, spray-painting graffiti or fighting, or if a local fire station was threatened with budget cuts) and has a reliability score of .85 (Sampson et al., 1997; Raudenbush & Sampson, 1999; Sampson & Morenoff, 2004). (Reliability for the component measures in our community survey were .72 and .80, respectively.) The neighborhood activism measure consists of a 5-item scale asking whether the respondent or a member of the respondent's household has spoken with a local politician, talked to a person or group causing a problem in the neighborhood, attended a meeting of a neighborhood group about a problem, talked with a local religious leader, or gotten together with neighbors to do something about a problem in the neighborhood. The voluntary association measure consists of six items asking the respondent whether he or she or a member of his or her household belongs to a church or other religious organization, neighborhood watch program, block club or community council, business or civic group, ethnic or nationality club, or local political organization. PHDCN has not published reliability scores for either the neighborhood activism or voluntary association measures; from our community survey, the scores were .77 and .43, respectively. Given that the latter measure is composed of responses to membership in a range of specific organizations, however, and that most people would not belong to all (or even many) of them, we would not expect it to be a particularly cohesive scale.

We examined the findings from each data source both at the individual level and at the neighborhood cluster level. At the individual level, we conducted analyses to determine (a) how different our sample was from that of the PHDCN project, and (b) whether differences between the two samples led to statistically significant differences in the measures. At the neighborhood level, we compared PHDCN and community survey scores on the three constructs in each neighborhood cluster for which we have completed questionnaires from more than 10 respondents (based on place of residence).[7]

Individual-Level Comparison. Our convenience sample, in which respondents generally answered questions by filling out a pencil-and-paper format questionnaire provided to them in public places, was quite different from the PHDCN sample, a random digit-dial

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[7] It should be noted that the PHDCN data was collected in 1995 and our survey data was collected in 2002/2003. Although we controlled for community and individual characteristics, we cannot adequately control for the difference in the historical time. The PHDCN survey was readministered in 2001; however; we intend to do a new comparison of our community sample with the new PHDCN data when it becomes available.

Table 1. Comparison of the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods (PHDCN) and Community Survey Respondents

	PHDCN	*Community survey*
Employed	53.35%	71.45%
Own their own home	41.53%	33.50%
Black or African American	40.66%	48.63%
Latino	22.86%	27.58%
Census tract poverty rate	22.02%	25.91%
Mean age	42.66	37.58

telephone survey with the sample drawn from the entire population of Chicago (see Table 1). For example, the age range was broader in our community survey, our sample consisted of more individuals of color, and more respondents from our sample were employed.

To determine whether these differences led to significantly different scores on the measures, we compared the community survey's individuals' scores with their predicted scores from a model using the PHDCN data. To do this, we developed a regression model of the social capital measures using the PHDCN data that incorporated a range of respondent demographic variables (race, age, employment, education, home ownership). We then ran the same model using the characteristics of the community survey respondents. When we compared the measures of collective efficacy at the individual level controlling for the characteristics of our convenience sample, we obtain virtually the same score, on average, as the PHDCN project measured scores. Even with the differences between the two samples, we found that the community survey and PHDCN measures of collective efficacy were not statistically different.[8]

The comparison between the community sample and the PHDCN was not as good, however, with the neighborhood activism and voluntary association constructs. The measures from our community sample were significantly higher than those from the PHDCN sample were; that is, the community survey overestimated the levels of neighborhood activism and voluntary association compared to the predicted levels from the PHDCN survey (see Table 2).

This difference, upon reflection, is not particularly surprising. We might expect to have more success at measuring collective efficacy than neighborhood activism and voluntary association using a convenience sample of individuals who are "out and about," especially at our survey sites. Individuals who avoid public places or who would avoid or refuse to complete a survey when approached in a public venue to which she or he had come for specific, personal reasons (to buy food, to wash clothes) may be, by inclination, less involved in neighborhood activism and less likely to be active participants in voluntary associations. Their absence in the community sample would thus skew scores for these measures in the opposite direction. However, these same individuals would not necessarily have a different assessment of the collective efficacy of their neighborhood—the degree to which their neighbors share values and would be likely to intervene in neighborhood affairs. Their absence from the sample is thus less likely to have an effect on this score.

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[8] Because our community survey sample included a substantial number of youth, we conducted this comparison with both our full age-range community sample and the portion of the sample that matched the PHDCN age range and came up with similar results.

Table 2. Community Survey Scores Versus Predicted Scores

	Average survey score	*Average predicted score*	*SE*	*T-Score*	*P stat*
Collective efficacy	3.279	3.312	0.687	0.044	0.965
Neighborhood activism	0.353	0.202	0.333	–8.829	0.000
Voluntary association	1.276	0.329	1.275	–2.291	0.022

Neighborhood-Level Comparison. The comparisons at the neighborhood level are analogous to the comparison for the entire sample. For each neighborhood cluster for which we had more than 10 respondents on our community survey, the mean collective efficacy score was not significantly different from the predicted score from the PHDCN model. However, as with the individual-level analysis, the neighborhood activism and voluntary association membership measures from the community survey were significantly different from the predicted values for all neighborhood clusters. The differences were in the same direction for all neighborhood clusters, with the community survey measures in every neighborhood cluster showing higher levels of neighborhood activism and voluntary association membership than the PHDCN predicted levels. This provides more credence to our hypothesis that our community survey respondents were systematically different on the neighborhood activism and voluntary association measures, whereas there was no systematic difference on the collective efficacy measures. It is possible that the difference in scores is related to the difference in timing of survey administration (1995 for PHDCN; 2002/2003 for the community survey); however, the consistency of these differences at the individual level and across all neighborhood clusters suggests instead a systematic bias in the sample.

Although the scores for these measures are different, the general *pattern* of their values by neighborhood cluster within each community was similar (see, e.g., Figure 1), and the predicted values of neighborhood activism and voluntary association were strongly correlated with ours. Although not perfect, these patterns do suggest where pockets of relatively higher neighborhood activism and voluntary association membership exist within the target communities and may yet provide a useful basis for planning and community action. (We will discuss this further when we turn to our findings regarding community-research partnerships, below.)

Thus, with the limitations described above, we conclude that it is possible for CBOs to get good measures of collective efficacy through strategic convenience sampling methods and within the research-capacity constraints under which they often work. In addition, although measures of neighborhood activism and voluntary association membership were overestimated, the relatively consistent geographic pattern of responses suggests that such findings may still have some utility for CBO planning.

METHODS AND ADMINISTRATION: COMMUNITY RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS

The partnerships with CBOs in conducting this research yielded both positive results and specific challenges; both the positive and the negative aspects of this work are, we believe, instructive. Below, we review this experience, and some of the lessons suggested by it, by considering the processes of research planning, survey administration, and reporting and what they yielded.

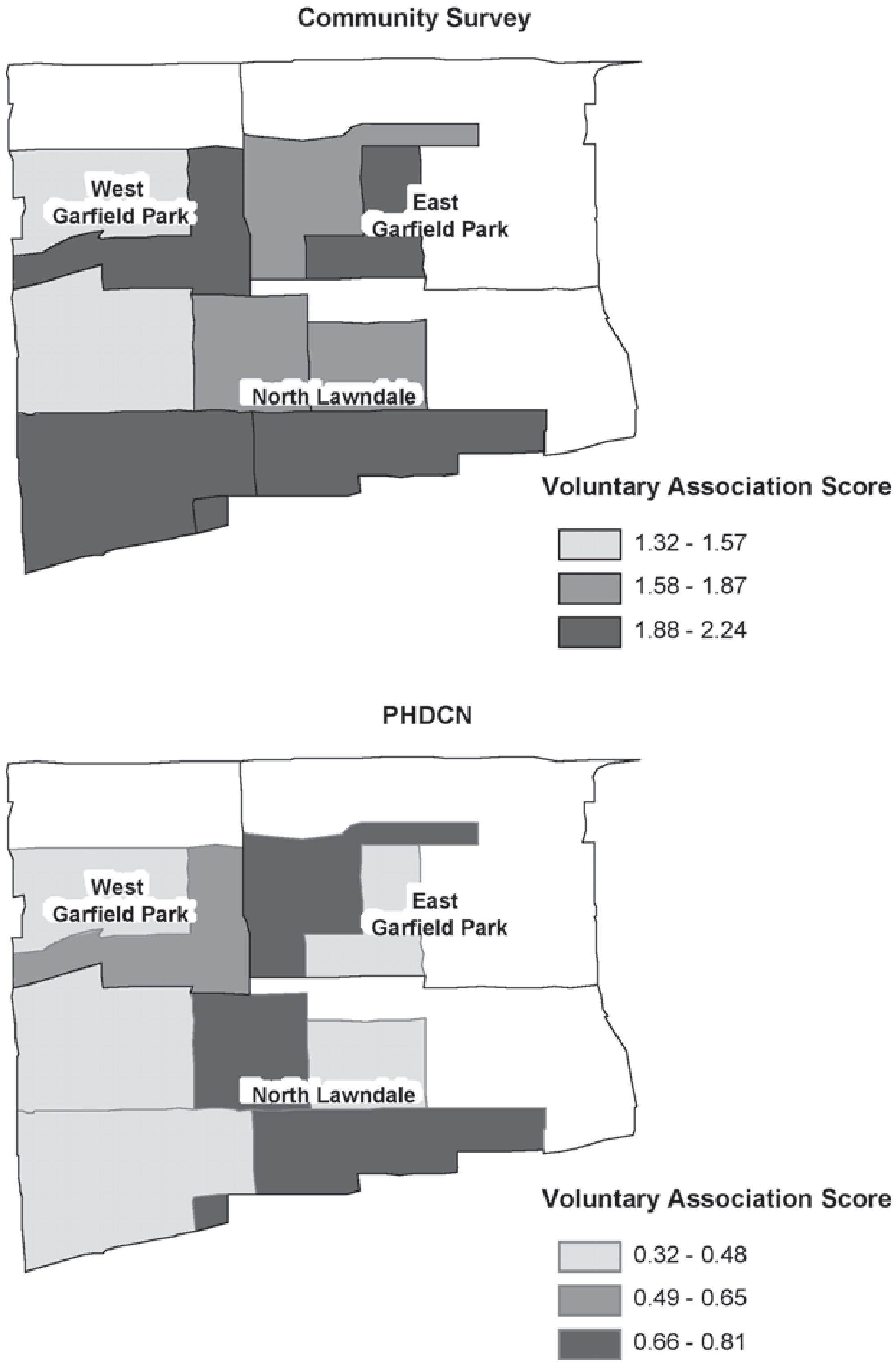
Community Survey
West Garfield Park
East Garfield Park
North Lawndale
Voluntary Association Score
1.32 - 1.57
1.58 - 1.87
1.88 - 2.24
PHDCN
West Garfield Park
East Garfield Park
North Lawndale
Voluntary Association Score
0.32 - 0.48
0.49 - 0.65
0.66 - 0.81

Figure 1. Voluntary association scores in North Lawndale by neighborhood cluster.

Planning

The process of planning for the research with our community partners was relatively straightforward. It should be noted that our work with CBO staff in each case was facilitated by prior connections and, in one case, a history of interaction of more than 10 years. These connections provided an important foundation of familiarity and trust on which to build. This is particularly important given the complex history of interaction between researchers and communities, especially communities of color (Mayfield et al., 1999; Chavez et al., 2003). Equally important is that despite this foundation, other factors intervened to complicate the partnership in particular ways.

The impetus for the project was a Request for Proposals (RFP) provided by a small grants program of the Aspen Institute's Roundtable on Community Change. Our initial approach to our community partners was by telephone, at which point we provided a brief description of the intent of the project and an invitation to join us in responding to the RFP. This call was followed by a face-to-face meeting at which we explained in detail our interest in testing the quality of survey approaches tailored to their capacities and constraints against the findings of a large-scale, random-sample survey that had already been conducted across Chicago neighborhoods. We said that in working with them, we would seek their guidance on which questions covered by the PHDCN survey were of greatest interest to them, as well as on any other questions they would like to ask as part of the project. We indicated the scales that we considered most central to the question of measuring the associational aspects of social capital, and that we were prepared to privilege other measures that they found more compelling. We also discussed our hope that they would help us to determine where and how to administer the survey, and that they would do the actual administration. We, in turn, would analyze the data and present our findings to them, seeking further advice as to what findings were of most interest and what methods of reporting were most useful to them, as well as whether additional analyses should be performed. Subsequent to this meeting, we shared a draft of our proposal for the project and solicited feedback on it, particularly on our characterization of the partnership and the roles we each would play.

Once funding for the project was secured, we met with staff of each CBO three or four additional times to review and refine the survey instruments and to consider survey administration strategy. Most of these meetings were held at the CBOs' offices, though we met a few times on the campus of the University of Chicago. Coordinating these meetings was sometimes difficult due to time constraints and conflicts on both ends, and on several occasions, we were forced to reschedule. Between meetings, we made use of occasional fax and e-mail communications to share revised questionnaire drafts.

To provide a foundation for discussion about the questionnaire, we furnished sample questions drawn from the PHDCN community survey on several topics, including voluntary association membership, social control, intergenerational closure, reciprocated exchange, neighborhood organizations/services, kinship/friendship ties, neighborhood activism, social cohesion and trust, perceived neighborhood violence, and personal victimization. Discussions around the draft questionnaire revealed our community partners' broad interest in the range of questions, as well as some concrete suggestions for additions and changes. For example, our partners stated an interest in measuring social support and in determining whether the associational memberships of residents were located in the neighborhood or outside it. In addition, they expressed concern about the length of the questionnaire, but we had difficulty narrowing CBO priorities among the questions. Partners also provided input on the questionnaire in the form of refinements to the language of particular questions to make them more accessible or meaningful to neighborhood respondents, additional response choices to reflect the demographic diversity of the neighborhood, or reducing the number of response options to particular questions. In the Southwest Side, CBO staff also suggested that the questionnaire be translated into Spanish and did the translation. Ultimately, we produced a survey questionnaire of 77 items that included the core measures of the associational aspects of social capital described above and reflected the range of additional issues identified by our partners, including a set of concluding demographic questions.

In addition to the development of the survey instrument, we worked together in the planning process to identify the strategic use of neighborhood venues to reach a cross-section of community residents that our community partners felt would, taken together, be most likely to yield a nearly representative sample. We began by discussing the rationale for random sampling and its difficulties as a CBO strategy and then talked about the places in the neighborhood where different segments of the population were likely to congregate. Based on the earlier experience of one partner collecting information from residents through short surveys at a local supermarket, we discussed the likely yield of such an approach and began to consider other possible venues to complement a supermarket-based strategy. We discussed the pros and cons of a range of different venues. Churches were ultimately removed from consideration based on the belief that the majority of congregation members no longer lived in the neighborhood. Different venues of the same type were considered in light of the nature of the subpopulations they were likely to attract. Some health clinics and the WIC office in North Lawndale, for example, were removed from consideration because they largely cater to Latinos, most of whom live in the community immediately to the south. Similarly, one supermarket in the Southwest Side was viewed as more likely than the other two to attract patrons from the neighborhood. Ultimately, each CBO chose a supermarket and a school, in addition to one or more community meetings and a set of different venues, from barbershops to libraries. In the actual administration of the data collection, however, success varied significantly from venue to venue (see Table 3).

Survey Administration

In contrast to the relative smoothness of the planning process, more difficulties arose in the administration of the surveys. Complications stemmed from a combination of available CBO staff time and competing priorities, challenges in negotiating with potential venues to arrange for survey administration, and questionnaire length. In addition, a couple of the venues tended to capture respondents mostly from surrounding neighborhoods and, in the case of the Youth Forum in the Southwest Side, young people from across the city. The grocery stores, barbershops, hair salons, and laundromats were the most effective in capturing residents from each target neighborhood (see, e.g., Figure 2).

Perhaps the most central challenge concerned CBO staff time and attention. The project was structured to keep the stress on CBOs to a minimum by relying on their staff only for those tasks that most directly related to their mission, capacities, and connection to the community. They were centrally involved in the development of the instrument and sampling strategy, in working with community actors to collect the data, and in using the findings for their own community-change purposes. However, the tasks they performed relating to survey administration—selecting and making arrangements with local organizations to conduct the survey, staffing data-collection events, identifying appropri-

Table 3. Surveys Completed by Venue

Venue	*Number of surveys*	*%*
North Lawndale Area		
Dominick's Grocery Store	65	18.31%
Home Interview	28	7.89%
Hope Barber Shop	17	4.79%
Kim & Larry's Unisex Salon	16	4.51%
Schools (Manley H.S./Melody Elementary)	148	41.69%
Town Hall Mailing	17	4.79%
Wash Tub Laundromat	64	18.03%
Total North Lawndale	**355**	**100.00%**
Southwest Side		
Home/Phone Interviews	23	9.27%
Nativity Elementary—Parents	30	12.10%
Rio Valley Grocery Store	99	39.92%
Youth Forum	96	38.71%
Total Southwest Side	**248**	**100.00%**

ate incentives, monitoring survey administration—still required CBO staff to stretch beyond the range of tasks already on their plate, or reallocate staff responsibilities to make room for the requirements of the survey, or find additional help by tapping into their volunteer labor pool. Although the funding provided by this project allowed for hiring some additional staff, the short-term nature of the funding along with the time required to recruit staff, the need to cover existing salaries, and the desire to build this work into that of core staff prevented CBOs from pursuing new staff for the project. Within this context, the pressure on CBO staff time led to delays in implementation, lags between decisions and action steps, and a shifting perceived balance between the benefits and costs of participation in the project for the CBOs. The length of time between planning, implementation, and reporting stages also contributed to this shifting balance, because the findings of the work, which was the point at which clear benefits were ultimately realized, remained so far from the initial asking of the questions.

A second challenge emerged in the process of negotiating appropriate venues for survey administration. There were two main kinds of challenges in this regard, one around efforts to leverage existing forums (e.g., town meetings, youth events) as opportunities for data collection; the other around making arrangements with businesses to allow for survey administration on their premises.

For the most part, efforts to leverage meetings and events as data-collection opportunities were problematic because it was difficult to incorporate the survey administration into the event without taking too much time or shifting too much of the focus away from the main purpose of the event. In one case (a town-hall meeting), there was too little "down-time" to allow for responding to the survey, and no respondent incentives were offered. Because of this, out of a participant group of about 180, only 17 completed surveys were returned. In another case (a youth forum), the event was quite successful in producing completed questionnaires, both because there was more time during the course of the event for respondents to fill out the questionnaire and because a movie pass

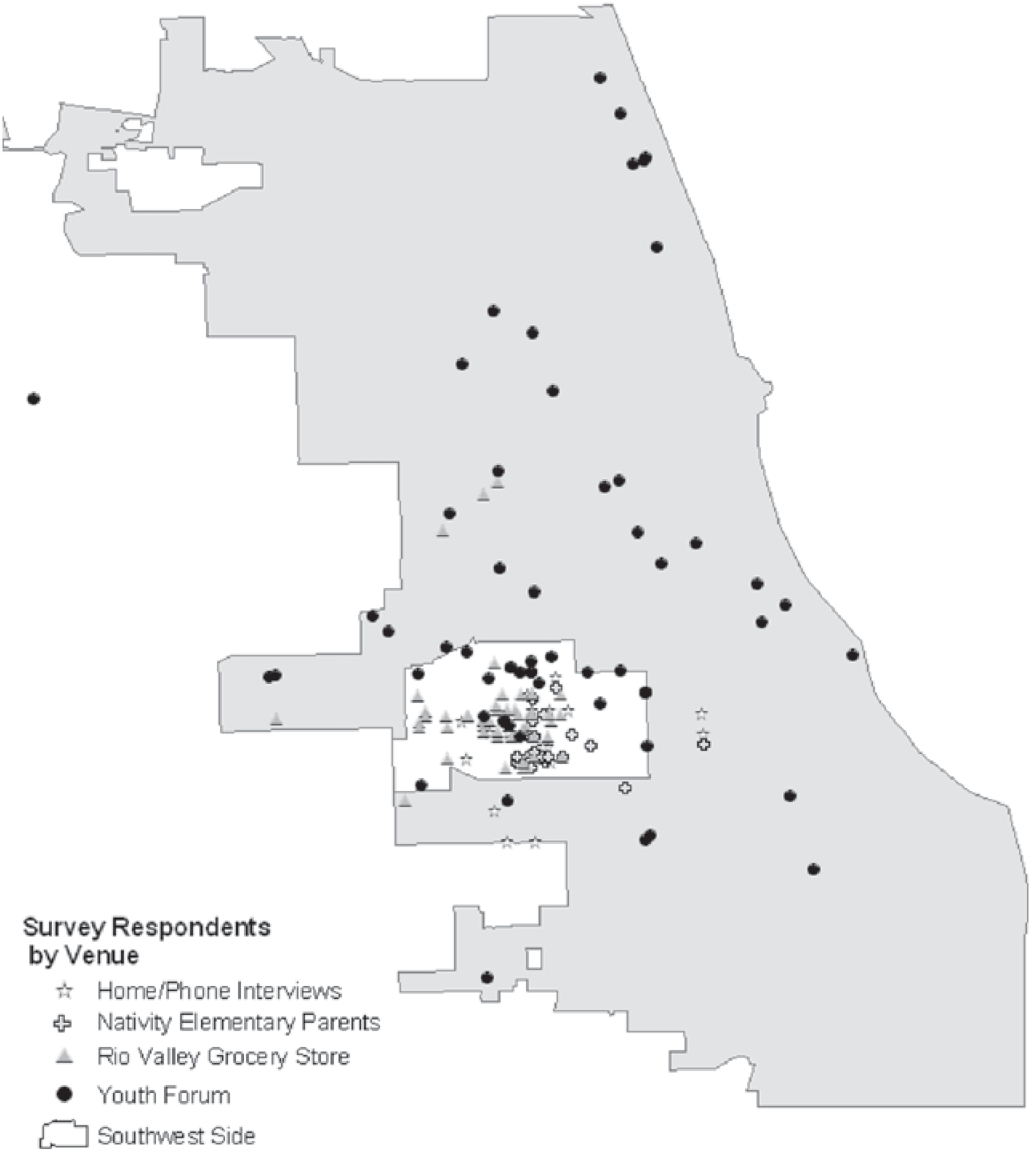
Survey Respondents by Venue
☆ Home/Phone Interviews
✚ Nativity Elementary Parents
▲ Rio Valley Grocery Store
● Youth Forum
Southwest Side

Figure 2. Survey respondents by venue.

was provided as an incentive to everyone who completed a survey at the event. Unfortunately, because the Forum drew participants from all over the city, it yielded a relatively small number of neighborhood respondents, and was completed by both youth and adults at the event.

There were also some difficulties encountered in establishing arrangements with neighborhood businesses and organizations to administer the surveys on their premises. In North Lawndale, prior experience with the local supermarket—and an agreement to purchase gift coupons from the store to use as incentives provided to respondents—made the negotiations relatively straightforward. The main issue to negotiate in this case was the appropriate date for survey administration. In the Southwest Side, however, there was no prior experience or relationship with the stores, and two of the supermarkets proved unworkable. One was perceived as having a poor relationship with the community, so the CBO rejected it as a viable venue; the other refused to allow the survey to be administered on their premises. The grocery store that ultimately participated is a local firm, not part of a larger chain or franchise, and was willing to work with the CBO to make the project work. Although it did not have coupons of its own, it agreed to accept payment and to honor coupons created by the CBO.

A third challenge concerned the length of the survey questionnaire, which, at seven pages, was daunting to some potential respondents, even with an attached incentive valued at $10 and redeemable for items chosen to be attractive to the population and appropriate to the venue (e.g., groceries at the supermarket; movie vouchers for the young people). For the most part, those who chose to respond did complete the entire questionnaire; although in both communities we had difficulty hitting our target of 400 completed surveys.

In reflecting on this difficulty, CBO staff administering the survey noted that respondents commented on its length. In response to CBO concerns, we tested whether a shorter questionnaire would be easier to field by developing short versions of the survey that included only the measures of collective efficacy, neighborhood activism, and membership in voluntary associations and some core demographic questions, and placed them in small, targeted venues. These included a laundromat, a hair salon, and a barbershop, each of which was approached for permission through personal contact with the owner by a friend connected to our partner CBO. (Libraries were also targeted in the Southwest Side but were ultimately abandoned as we ran out of time.) In all cases, administration ran quite smoothly, and this approach required substantially less CBO staff time to implement and oversee. As an added potential benefit, those administering the survey reported that the shorter version generated some interesting discussion by respondents about the questions being asked. Thus, the short surveys may provide an opportunity not just for data collection, but also for outreach and engagement of community members around issues of importance.

Much of the foregoing describes the challenges faced by the community partners in the survey-administration phase. During this time, the researchers' main roles were to procure incentives for payment to respondents, keep abreast of progress in survey administration, and help to troubleshoot as difficulties arose. Biweekly telephone conversations were scheduled to ensure consistent communication between our community partners and us, and additional communications (by phone or face-to-face) were scheduled as necessary.

As time went on and complications arose in the implementation, communication also became somewhat more difficult, and further delays resulted. This was due, in part, to a subtle tension arising within the partnerships. We came to our community partners with generally trusting relations and a history of working together and with the notion of engaging together in a project designed to answer questions of interest to each community and tailored to the capacities and priorities of the CBOs. We also sought to follow their lead with regard to survey administration opportunities and strategies. However, because this was a piece of funded research with resources provided by an outside organization to which we were accountable, our partnership was organized around a subcontract arrangement that defined particular, mutually agreed-upon targets for the number of venues and completed surveys sought. Within this context, our interaction with our community partners was insufficient to maintain priorities on testing the viability of specific approaches to data collection and conducting the survey administration in ways consonant with the CBOs capacities. Over time, our partners felt increasing pressure to complete the agreed-upon 400 surveys within the (increasingly short) time remaining as the driving factor behind this work. As complications arose, maintaining open communication was more difficult and showed the extent to which our efforts to create an equal partnership, organized around an agreed-upon division of labor, was somewhat limited. The project remained, ultimately, "our" project rather than theirs (we were the prime grantees; we invited their participation), though the expectation that the products of this work would redound to the benefit of the community remained alive.

Reporting

A number of benefits were realized by our CBO partners' participation in this project, including learning about research design and data-collection methods and trade-offs, the most effective venues to get good information from community members, and the potential benefit of short surveys for information gathering and outreach. Nevertheless, the principal benefit of this project for our community partners was to come with the presentation of findings from our research. Reporting on the research had three main purposes: (a) to provide our community partners with information and to assist in their use of that information in the community where desired and possible; (b) to reflect with them about the meaning of particular findings—to understand how, to what extent, and in what ways the fruits of the research were useful to them; and (c) to draw from their perspectives and experience appropriate ways of interpreting the data and their possible implications for the CBOs' work. Finally, we hoped to draw particular lessons concerning the most effective ways to organize and present findings for use by community actors.

The reporting process was initially organized around a meeting with each partner, at which researchers provided key staff from our partner CBOs with analyses of the data collected provided in a range of different formats—maps, graphs, tables, summary text. We then talked through the findings and discussed the relevance, meaning, and possible implications of the findings for our community partners and their work.

We first reviewed data on who actually completed the surveys, the extent to which they seemed to reflect the broader community along some key demographic characteristics, and the geographic distribution of respondents within and beyond the neighborhood. We also discussed the relative success of data-collection efforts at different venues.

Demographic characteristics were displayed in several different ways, including summary bullet points, tables, bar graphs, and pie charts. Graphic displays, particularly maps, proved particularly useful, and discussion around these findings led community partners to think about a range of issues. For example, it raised questions about the relationship between household size and respondent's position in the life course because the sample includes many youth who are more likely to live in larger households. It also catalyzed discussion about the possible value of targeting senior housing to learn more about those who live alone and were underrepresented in the community survey. In some cases, findings were initially surprising and generated discussion to make sense of them, and then further discussion of neighborhood circumstances of concern. The high level of home-ownership in the Southwest Side, for example, was ultimately reconciled to CBO perceptions by recognizing the relationship between the geographic concentration of respondents in particular parts of the community and the

Table 4. Kinship/Friendship Ties—North Lawndale Community Survey

Not counting those who live with you…

	None	*One or two*	*Three to five*	*Six to nine*	*Ten or more*	*Don't know*
1. How many relatives or in-laws live in your neighborhood?	19.77%	18.22%	19.77%	13.57%	21.71%	6.98%
2. How many friends do you have in your neighborhood?	8.95%	14.79%	15.56%	13.23%	42.80%	4.67%
3. How many friends do you have who live outside of your neighborhood?	6.69%	9.06%	16.14%	11.02%	43.31%	13.78%

nature of the housing there but led to a broader discussion of increasing numbers of foreclosures and the impact of escalating violent crime and gang warfare on stability in the area. This discussion helped sharpen the CBO's focus on strategic action around these issues and inform their future plans.

The demographic findings provided a foundation for some discussion; much more discussion was generated, however, around the survey responses to questions around social support, collective efficacy, organizational involvement, and neighborhood activism. In some cases, findings led largely to a process of interpretation, in others to the generation of new questions, and in yet others to suggestions for action. With several issues, discussion included elements of each.

For example, findings on the numbers of kinship and friendship ties and reciprocated exchange in North Lawndale, presented in a simple table of reported responses to survey items (Table 4), generated some surprise at the high levels of reported connections given, for example, the amount of crime in the neighborhood. It also generated a set of new questions. In the words of a CBO executive:

> It really shows you're not alone. . . . [But] we didn't ask about the *quality* of this. Do you keep a neighbor's child because the parents didn't come home at night or because you're just helping out? Do you know your neighbors because they fight all the time?

Combined with findings suggesting relatively low levels of trust, our community partner wanted to know more about the nature of relationships among neighbors—perhaps through focus groups with particular subpopulations (gang members, the elderly, youth)—to think about ways to support positive community interactions.

Similarly, a review of the ways in which varying levels of collective efficacy were patterned in the Southwest Side (Figure 3) led first to a detailed discussion about the possible reasons for such differentiation. A neighborhood cluster in the middle of Chicago Lawn with a low collective efficacy score was identified as an area with large numbers of apartments, high population transience and demographic changes, increasing numbers of mortgage foreclosures, and a diminishing local organizational infrastructure (including recent closings of the YMCA and weakening of two major churches). This discussion also led to the identification of questions for further exploration, such as the desire to map incidents of crime to see the relationship between criminal activity and areas of low collective efficacy. Finally, critiques of existing programs (such as a current gang-intervention program) and early ideas for other kinds

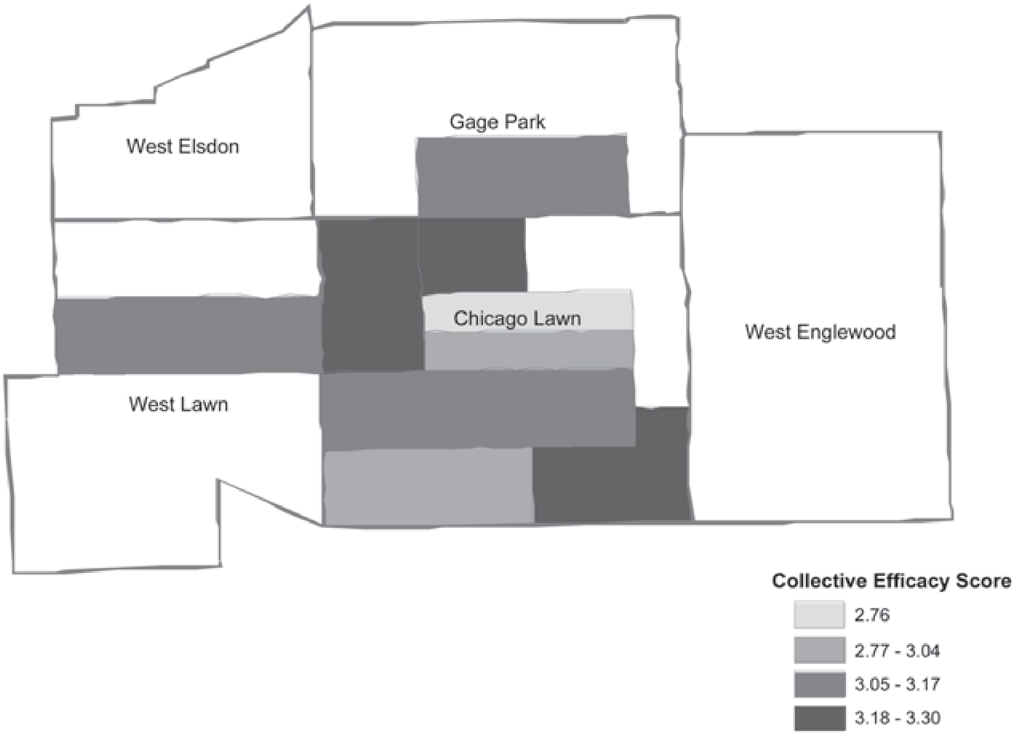

Figure 3. Collective efficacy scores in the southwest side by neighborhood cluster.

of strategic action (away from reliance on “outside” youth workers and toward “back to basics” strategies, such as block-club organizing) began to be raised.

In connection with this, the pattern of resident involvement suggested by the mapping of neighborhood activism and association membership scores (Figure 4) provided some thoughts about where to focus organizing activity based on where “the potential for leadership” seemed to be concentrated. Data and discussion about how to interpret the data thus led to energized consideration of action, connecting the questions posed with the strategic agendas of the CBOs. The actual strategies that our community partners are likely to adopt in response to these issues, let alone their potential effectiveness, are, of course, unknown at this point. However, it is clear that the data served to catalyze both careful consideration of neighborhood circumstances and discussion of possible responses.

This process was not unmediated, however. It emerged in the course of conversation organized around reviewing the data and a series of questions and responses regarding what the data suggest. The different formats used to present the data served an important purpose, and the maps and graphs were particularly useful in making clear and accessible some key patterns suggested by them. Rather than just sitting on the page, the presentation of the data in the context of a conversation dedicated to its consideration was an important element in making it useful, and in both communities the interest and expectation of using these materials to guide a broader community discussion is strong. Consistent with the literature on knowledge utilization (see Hutchinson & Huberman, 1993 for a review), this has implications for the importance of interactive approaches to the dissemination and consideration of research findings.

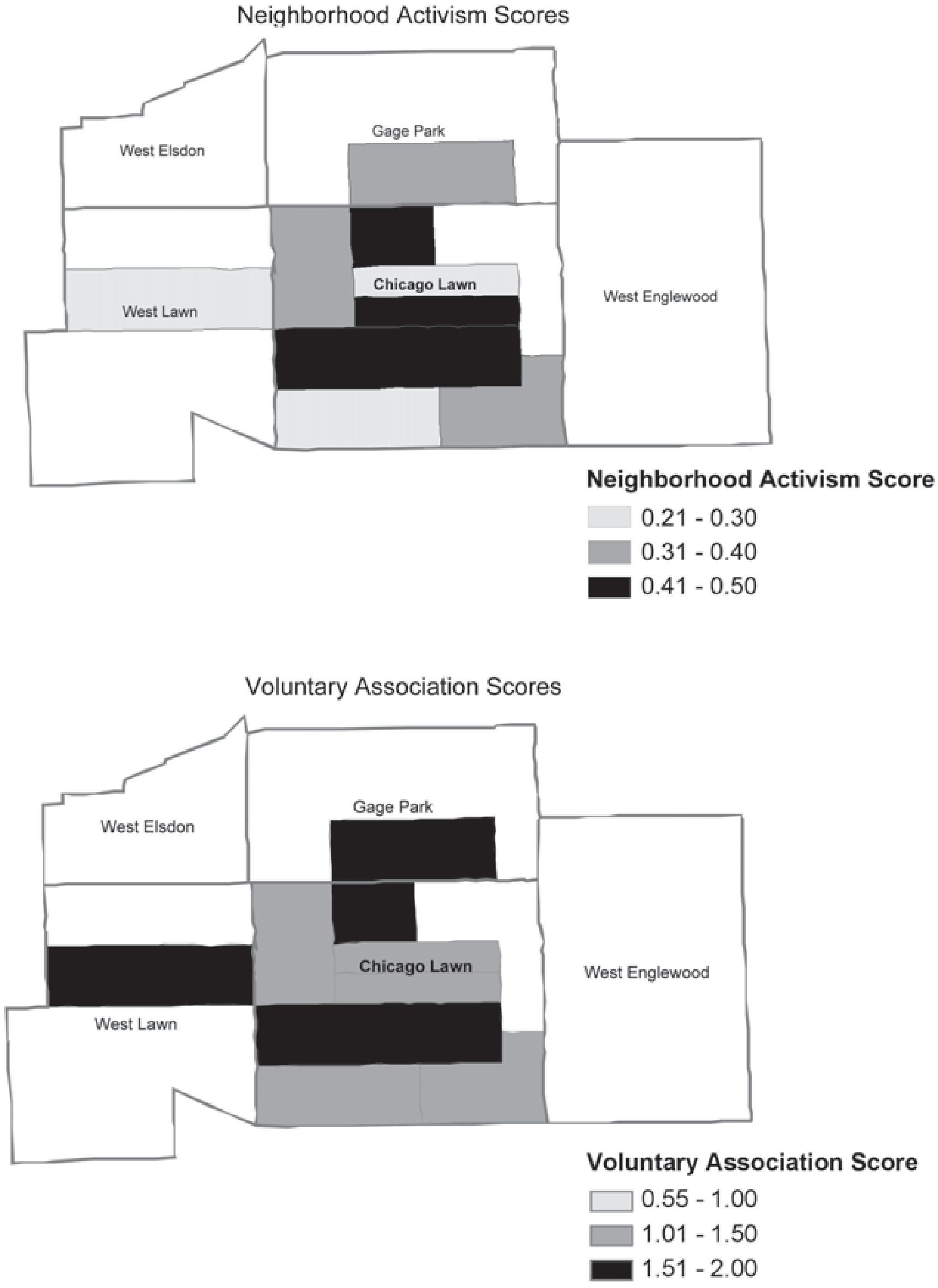
Neighborhood Activism Scores
West Elsdon
Gage Park
Chicago Lawn
West Lawn
West Englewood
Neighborhood Activism Score
0.21 - 0.30
0.31 - 0.40
0.41 - 0.50
Voluntary Association Scores
West Elsdon
Gage Park
Chicago Lawn
West Lawn
West Englewood
Voluntary Association Score
0.55 - 1.00
1.01 - 1.50
1.51 - 2.00

Figure 4. Neighborhood activism and voluntary association membership in the southwest side by neighborhood cluster.

CONCLUSIONS

In this article, we describe an exploration of whether it is possible to measure aspects of social capital in partnership with CBOs seeking to use such measurement to inform their understanding of community dynamics and to enhance their thinking about service provision and community action, within the constraints of time, budget, and research capacity under which they generally work. Embedded within this statement are a number of questions. There are questions about the nature and usefulness of the constructs themselves, particularly from the perspective of community actors, such as CBOs. There are also questions about the possibility of adequate measurement using nonrandom survey-administration methods. Finally, there are questions about the viability of researcher—community partnerships and the capacity of CBOs to engage independently in this work. Although generally positive, the answers to these questions provide mixed lessons.

Regarding the constructs themselves, our community partners had a clearly grounded understanding of the most basic aspects of social capital and a strong interest in better understanding it in the context of their communities. Their orientation was largely framed by broad notions of the community's "social fabric"—the ways in which community members connect with the neighborhood and interact with one another, the role of organizations and institutions in supporting and promoting positive interactions and quality of life, and the environmental conditions that have an impact on positive community functioning in these regards.

Regarding the viability of the methods and measures we used, we found that some measures translated better than others did to the kinds of methods more generally accessible to CBOs. The collective efficacy measure proved particularly robust. Despite the nature of our convenience sample and some clear differences in the characteristics of our community survey respondents as compared to those randomly sampled by the PHDCN study, there were no statistically significant differences either in the way individual members of our sample responded to survey items measuring collective efficacy or in the collective efficacy scores calculated at the neighborhood level. Measures of neighborhood activism and voluntary association membership, however, were overestimated in our community survey, which we believe is due to a systematic sampling bias in favor of more active and engaged residents. Interestingly, despite the fact that it overestimated the *level* of activism and belonging, our convenience-sampling approach was still able to detect with some accuracy geographic *patterns* of relative levels of these dynamics across different neighborhood clusters within the communities of interest. As with collective efficacy, this provided some guidance to CBOs seeking to use this information for strategic purposes.

We also found that some public venues seem to be more promising for collecting data from residents as part of a strategic convenience-sampling plan than others. Supermarkets, in particular, apparently offer both access to a good cross-section of the local population and an efficient mechanism for collecting relatively high numbers of completed surveys. Small, informal settings, such as hair salons, barbershops, and laundromats, were also promising (libraries are another venue worth exploring), though each targeted smaller subsets of the neighborhood population and, in our efforts, were used only with the short versions of the survey. Furthermore, incentives were offered in every case, and resources to provide incentives are not always available to CBOs seeking to collect data for a particular purpose. It may be, however, that very short surveys would be viable in these venues without cash or in-kind incentives, or with very modest ones. If that turns out to be the case, CBOs could consider serial data-collection strategies, in which they target a few key questions at different points in time. As noted above, this may have the additional benefit of providing a mechanism for community outreach and engagement in the course of data-collection activities. Although promising access to potentially large numbers of people, the use of public forums, such as community meetings, however, provided a set of particular challenges that makes their use problematic. To be able to effectively use these events as part of a data-collection strategy, it is critical both to carefully consider the likely nature of the turnout at such meetings (who, from where) relative to your data-collection goals and to explicitly build in time, space, and incentives for the completion of survey instruments as part of the event.

The issue of CBO capacity and the viability of researcher–community partnerships is a significant one, and one which requires further work. Because CBOs often work under severe resource constraints, and because their core capacities are generally around practice—service provision, organizing, community development—rather than research, our expectations for building their research capacity through this project were modest. We assumed that they would contribute to the project in ways that best reflected their strengths: knowledge of the community, access to community venues, targeted interests to guide research questions and practice, and on-the-ground staff to administer data-collection activities.

We also assumed that participation in this project would help them in several ways. First, it would sharpen their ability to ask researchable questions that can be applied to their work. Second, it would serve to refine their understanding and organizational capacity to field new data-collection activities. Third, it would foster a better understanding of the trade-offs inherent in using different kinds of data and data-collection strategies. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it would sharpen their abilities to work with researchers as both partners and consumers (and ours to work with them), so that they can better shape researchers' activities in their communities and capture from them information that is useful to them.

We found that largely these assumptions held true. However, the level of effort, resources, coordination, and attention required to garner these benefits was taxing given the significant pull of CBO core activities, emerging and shifting priorities, and the day-to-day pressures governing staff-allocation choices and possibilities. In addition, in part, because the initiation of the project came from the researchers in response to an RFP, the balance of influence and direction never quite shifted to the community. Although the partnership was established within a general context of trust and a division of labor was established that made good use of the relative interests and capacities of each organization, this balance was complicated by the time-line and accountability pressures of external funding as they came up against the quotidian pressures of CBO activities and other demands on their time and resources. The combination of these factors suggests that to strengthen CBOs' ability to gain access to, and use research for, the purposes of planning, fundraising, advocacy, and assessment, capacity needs to be built explicitly for this purpose beyond their core organizational structure that will give them access to data, technical assistance, and analytic support and on which they can call for their purposes and on their terms. Such an arrangement may come in the form of a "special relationship" with a researcher, research organization, or university, but the pressures on those potential partners to conduct particular kinds of work to serve their own audiences and priorities may compromise their availability. Furthermore, such a relationship is dyadic, and the resources (data, expertise, assistance) transferred are not generally available to other CBOs with similar questions or similar needs.

Another option to support this agenda is through the creation of local "data intermediaries" that can serve as a resource and broker of support, research tools, and analytic capacity (e.g., Skyles, Campbell, Goerge, & Lee, 2001). Several organizations have developed over the last decade or so that attempt to fill this role; more investigation on models and approaches, and on their relative benefits, may well be worthwhile.[9]

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[9] Examples include MCIC in Chicago, the Urban Strategies Council in Oakland, and the Local Learning Partners associated with the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Making Connections initiative in several cities in the United States.

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