

# Innovating to End Urban Poverty Conference

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## Panel 5: What role place Summary

### *Authors*

**Margery Turner**, Vice President for Research, The Urban Institute

**Alan Berube**, Senior Fellow, Deputy Director, Metropolitan Policy Program, Brookings

### *Respondents*

**Angela Blanchard**, President and CEO, Neighborhood Centers, Inc.

**Philip Tegeler**, President, PRRAC

### *Moderator*

**LaVonna Lewis**, Professor, Diversity in Healthcare Leadership Initiative, USC Sol Price School of Public Policy

### *Tackling Poverty in Place: Principles for a Next Generation of Place-Conscious Interventions*

#### Considerations

- Place, regional context, and conditions matter to the well-being of families and their children. Conditions in very severely distressed neighborhoods undermine the long-term life chances of parents and their children.
- Interventions that specifically target distressed neighborhoods need to be a part of a larger strategy that is trying to move the needle on poverty, especially if it is concerned about families of color.
- Historically, many efforts trying to overcome the negative effects of neighborhood conditions on families have primarily focused on changing conditions within the boundaries of a distressed neighborhood.
- However, place-conscious strategies recognize the importance of place and target the particular challenges of distressed neighborhoods, but they are much less constrained by narrowly defined boundaries and are more open to alternative ways of thinking about how neighborhoods might function for their residents

#### Lessons distinguishing place-conscious approach from previous place-based efforts

- Best geographic scale for tackling a problem varies across policy domains (e.g., a block-level solution may work well in some cases, but a region-level approach may be more appropriate in other instances). Regional context and conditions are important.
- Services and opportunities are often located outside the neighborhood. It is therefore important to connect people to those opportunities.
- No single organization can transform a distressed neighborhood. One organization can play a coordinating/leading role as a facilitating organization.
- Agreed-upon and measurable goals enable organizations and service providers to hold each other accountable and align their work.

## Updating the War on Poverty for a Suburban Age

### Considerations

- We have a lot more poor individuals in the United States today than we did at the dawn of the War on Poverty
- Poverty is found in more kinds of places today than 40 to 50 years ago. A lot of those places are not in cities and inner city neighborhoods; they are outside of cities and in particular, they are in suburban communities in our major metropolitan areas.
- Over the past decade, low income populations in suburban communities overall grew by 65 percent.
- There is a lack of political, philanthropic and private sector focus and engagement that one might see in cities around some of these issues (e.g., job loss, the immigration of low-income families, and so on).

### What is needed

- Work around place and make place less relevant for addressing poverty. Alternatively, make our place-based interventions more relevant for suburban communities (e.g., give people cars instead of focusing on public transportation).
- It is important to not think about this as suburbs versus cities, but rather that this is a regional phenomenon and something that is happening across entire regions that are growing from the city out into suburban communities.
- Make enterprise level investments in high capacity organizations instead of simply dealing at the program- and transaction-level of organizations.

### Discussion

- Place allows us to talk about what the choice set is in those spaces.
- People in need are neither helpless nor hopeless.
- Poor neighborhoods need the same things that any neighborhood needs: secure financial institutions, good schools, and so on. They do not need entirely different resources.
- Suburban poverty may spread the burden of poverty and increase the visibility of families and the political support for anti-poverty programs. However, there is a danger of the re-concentration of poverty. We need to support diverse places with place-based interventions (e.g., a Choice Neighborhoods program for the suburbs: comprehensive community development and infrastructure investment).
- Tensions between place-based policy and housing mobility: it is wrong to require families to stay in a particular place in order to receive services.
- The housing policy that exists today may be moving families to lower-opportunity places.
- How do we integrate low-income families into the same services that high-income families receive (as opposed to programs like Head Start, where low-income students are separated from high-income students)?
- What often forces us to keep starting over with new programs: lack of stability and/or institutional memory; political interests. Individual programs will not end poverty. Problems are structural, systemic, and are multi-faceted.