THE FUTURE OF GRASSROOTS AMERICA:
LOCAL PERSPECTIVES ON CURRENT AND EMERGING ISSUES
FACING URBAN, SUBURBAN AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

A Report Commissioned by the
National Neighborhood Coalition

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Project Funded by

Metropolitan Life Foundation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Community-based organizations are rarely asked for their views on their neighborhoods, including what is or isn't working and what issues they find most pressing. These organizations represent a critical component of day-to-day life in neighborhoods across the country, and identifying and responding to their concerns and challenges is critical. The National Neighborhood Coalition, a network or national, state and local organizations committed to promoting vital, healthy neighborhoods, commissioned research by the Loyola University Chicago Center for Urban Research and Learning (CURL), a center which focuses on collaborative university-community research, to determine what neighborhood groups see as most important issues now, and what issues are emerging for urban, suburban and rural communities in the United States.

Over 250 survey respondents and focus group participants participated in a national study which provides a perspective from leaders of large and small local organizations addressing issues ranging from affordable housing and community economic development to health services and general social services. Unlike most surveys of U.S. public opinion, this was not a survey of individual attitudes, but of community leaders who regularly addressing pressing problems in our communities–particularly our low-income communities. CURL collected data between February and May 2003. The findings from this study are a direct expression of what community leaders see, hear, and struggle with on a daily basis. As such, the research has important implications for NNC members, who must determine the best ways to create programs and policies that will help community organizations increase their effectiveness and expand on their progress in addressing problems in low-income neighborhoods.

Survey respondents were provided a list of 40 issues and asked to indicate whether or not these are a "current issue," an "emerging issue," or "not an issue" in their communities. Among the 40 issues listed, one-third were considered current issues by 50 percent or more of the community leaders with clusters of housing issues, community development issues, and economic issues among the most widely recognized current community issues. These are "bread and butter" issues that are necessary for a functioning, vital neighborhood; unless basic human needs are met, communities cannot function well. There were three issues that the majority of organizational leaders in all four community settings agreed were currently facing them: job creation, lack of affordable housing, and health care. In other issue areas the responses of leaders in central cities and metro areas differed significantly from those of suburban and rural leaders.

There was less consensus among community groups regarding emerging issues. A moderate percentage--between one-fourth and one-third of community leaders–saw community development issues, government issues, and civic engagement issues as emerging issues. In general, emerging issues in the suburbs are already current issues facing cities and metropolitan areas. This reflects the changing character of suburbs–particularly inner ring suburbs– that are experiencing race, ethnicity, age, and income changes as well as economic challenges related to aging housing stock, job retention, and economic development.

Civil rights issues were viewed as non-issues by a high proportion of communities surveyed. Although "race and ethnic group issues" was listed as a current issue or emerging issue by close to two-

thirds of respondents. Immigrant rights, disability, gender, and age-specific issues were not seen as current and emerging issues.

Reporting on factors influencing the emergence of issues in their communities, seven out of ten respondents and focus group participants stated that *local* economic conditions were "very important." Only four out of ten reported that economic conditions in the nation were "very important." While recognizing the national economic, political, and social context within which they function, local leaders repeatedly emphasized that their local, day-to-day work gives them a keen awareness of the people and institutional forces that positively or negatively influence the opportunities available to low-income families.

Local leaders provided a number of challenges facing their communities and community organizations in their work to bring about positive social change:

a) *Building organizational and community capacity* – Organizations feel challenged to find time and resources for organizing residents around important community issues while carrying on the daily work of the organization.
b) *Leadership development, particularly youth leadership development* – Opportunities to train new leadership and to plan for organizational leadership succession are critical. Increased isolation and declining civic engagement of neighborhood residents – particularly youth – is troubling to local leaders.
c) *Getting the attention of national policy makers* – Local organizations struggle to get their issues on the agenda of national policy makers, particularly in a time of shifting federal priorities. Organizations must compete with each other for the attention of policy makers and funders.
d) *Funding for local initiatives* – Local organizations face the challenge of trying to find money for programs in an environment of heightened competition for declining resources.
e) *Juggling scarce resources both to meet immediate needs and organize the community to give it more voice and influence* – Community-based organizations are responsible for a wide range of activities on their neighborhoods. They feel pressed for time, and small organizational size makes it a challenge to meet community needs.
f) *Fostering an understanding of local issues among national decision-makers and advocates* – A number of local groups observed that viewing policies and programs form the vantage point of a community resident produces a holistic picture of real needs and the effectiveness of public and private initiatives to meet those needs. There is a challenge in getting regional, state and national policy-makers to see both the commonality of the challenges and the unique nature of each community.

Among the suggestions that local leaders made in meeting these challenges were: a) creating stronger ties with national organizations; b) establishing more effective community-anchored policy research; c) building local and regional coalitions; d) building a popular movement able to mobilize larger segments of the population; e) developing strategies to encourage residents engagement in community institutions and decision-making; and f) recognizing differences in the political cultures of cities, suburbs, and rural communities and adapting grassroots organizing strategies accordingly.

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Despite the tradition of America being a nation of organizations, a nation of joiners, and a nation of community activists, local organizations are rarely asked for their views on their neighborhoods—what's working, what's broken, and what they need in order to do their work more effectively. In a political polling culture that spends more time obsessing on percentage point shifts in presidential popularity ratings than it does on capturing a full picture of the needs of all American communities–from rich to poor–it is not surprising that community-level attitudes and priorities are glossed over. While major city newspapers may from time to time run front-page headlines shouting that the president's, the governor's, or the mayor's approval rating has just dropped and he or she is in trouble in the next election, it is a rare front-page headline saying that "90 percent of low-income families say health-care for their children is inadequate." The motivation for most polling is to gauge local citizens' views with an eye to future elections and how to frame the political agenda in order to maximize candidate appeal. In contrast, the purpose of this research project was to ask community leaders what issues they are dealing with today, what issues are on the horizon, and what challenges they face as they try to address current and emerging issues.

Because such a wide variety of organizations fall within the label "community organizations" and there are no comprehensive listings of this population, deciding which types of organizations to include in a survey is a challenge. Typically there are higher densities of such organizations in central cities, particularly large central cities. Suburban communities are more likely to have governmental or quasi-governmental organizations working on issues like housing, the environment, transportation, and other policy issues. Rural organizations are more likely to be regional in nature, simply because of the need to define a wider geographic catchment area in order to create a more cost effective organization.

There are other factors as well. Community level organizations are typically not large. As our survey shows, the major of such organizations have fewer than ten full-time paid staff. Polling these organizations is like polling small businesses–from the one-person entrepreneur to the storefront that just opened. Finally, even where there are lists of local organizations held by national organizations, there can be some protectiveness of such lists. Because they are often used for fund-raising and membership drives, lists of local-level organizations are a protected resource among regional, statewide, and national organizations, making a comprehensive collection of such organizational names across different issues difficult.

Despite these obstacles to polling community-level organizations, the views of their leaders need to be assessed. As social scientists as far back as Alexis de Tocqueville have noted, local organizations and local initiatives are critical in shaping our society. As we begin a new century, community organizations continue to represent a critical component in the day-to-day life of residents in communities across this nation. We need not only to record the unique perspective on community conditions offered by these organizations, but also to find ways to respond to their concerns and challenges. In this research, we give voice to their views on contemporary community life.

Are community organizations declining?

Relevant to the discussion of how do we measure community-level priorities is the decade-long debate over whether or not Americans' engagement in community organizations has changed. In the center of this debate is Harvard public policy professor Robert Putnam whose book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* purports to document a pattern of declining engagement in

community institutions over the past 25 years; as this happens, the local organizations become less effective. As Putnam puts it: "The ebbing of community over the last several decades has been silent and deceptive. We notice its effects in the strained interstices of our private lives and in the degradation of our public life" (402-403). If one follows the logic of his argument, then the answer to the question of measuring community-level priorities is that it is increasingly difficult to measure these because local organizations have been disappearing from the American landscape.

While a minor intellectual industry has developed to counter Putnam's "Bowling Alone" thesis, former Roper Center for Public Opinion Research Executive Director Everett Carll Ladd challenged the Harvard professor's claims most directly in his 1999 book, *The Ladd Report* (Ladd 1999). Aptly subtitled "Startling New Research Shows How an Explosion of Voluntary Groups, Activities, and Charitable Donations is Transforming Our Towns and Cities", Ladd points out that while membership in organizations like the PTA has declined, parent-teacher involvement has expanded dramatically. New churches are experiencing increased membership despite the decline of mainline denominations. Directly challenging Putnam, Ladd states:

> The engagement of individual citizens in a vast array of groups and voluntary service and charities is generating social capital as never before. This capital is now being spent to meet community needs in every town and city in America. If we better understand what's already being done, we will be energized to do even more. Publics are less likely motivated by alarmist calls that the sky is falling than by the sober assurance that they are doing much that's right. In any case, when it comes to civic engagement it's just not true that the sky is falling. The stars are in their place, and the sky is pretty bright. (5)

Without a doubt, the debate will continue, but for those in the community development field, the bottom line remains that low-income neighborhoods and communities of color must be engaged in social discourse and decision making, otherwise, the conditions in their communities will never be improved.

Neighborhoods matter

Neighborhoods matter because neighborhood processes and organizations build trust and common ground among residents. Taking part in neighborhood activities and belonging to local institutions pays off in terms of neighborhood stability and shared experiences among local residents. Despite the fact that local organizations hold a central role in civic life, the complex nature of that role is largely unexplored. As pointed out by a panel of sociologists convened by the American Sociological Association (ASA) in 2001, "there has been a paucity of social science data that directly measures neighborhood social processes" (Sampson et al 2001). This has also been argued by other prominent social scientists, such as Susan Mayer and Christopher Jencks in their *Science* article "Growing Up in Poor Neighborhoods: How Much Does it Matter?" (Mayer and Jencks 1989). However, in recent years new studies have documented neighborhood-level processes such as trust among neighbors, networks of social support, informal social control of disorder, maintaining stable racial/ethnic diversity, and fighting lending redlining (Cook et al. 1997; Elliot et al. 1996; Furstenberg et al. 1999; Nyden et al. 1997; Nyden et al 1998; Sampson et al. 1997; Squires 1997).

Leadership is important; when community residents assert their voices it can be influential and lead to constructive changes. The ASA panel notes, "Evidence from social science can be capitalized on to design and evaluate neighborhood-based prevention programs and strategies for building community capacity" (Sampson et al. p. 40). They point to a community-based research on HIV that resulted in significant reductions of high-risk sexual behavior as a result of recruiting "opinion leaders" from the local community in designing intervention programs (Sikkema et al. 2000). Similarly a coalition of

neighborhood churches working, in partnership with researchers, developed a policy that resulted in reductions in youth violence in a Boston neighborhood (Berrien and Winship 1999). The ASA panel concludes that, "Neighborhood-based prevention strategies may thus yield payoffs that complement the traditional individual-specific approach of most interventions" (Sampson et al., p. 40).

Much of the policy research on low-income communities doesn't typically include any comprehensive collection of data from community leaders themselves. In an earlier CURL research project on what resources Chicago community leaders thought were needed to promote the community's voice in policy research, Arvis Avarette, Executive Director of Dearborn Homes Resident Management Corporation, which served residents in one of the Chicago Housing Authority's housing developments, said that there should be a survey research organization that regularly solicited information from low-income community members about their attitudes and needs (Avarette 1993). This is not to fault such research, but rather to point out that the typical policy research book generally includes little input from the communities that would be affected by such policy. Similarly other researchers and authors advocating for more resources for low-income communities, for communities of color, or for local communities in general do not have available to them data from an annual poll on "what do communities think?" (Etzioni 1993; Slessarev 1997; Hochschild 1995). This current project is a small step toward collecting such information directly from community organization leaders.

WHO DID WE STUDY?

In identifying participants for both segments of for this study, CURL worked closely with the NNC staff. The groups and organizations whose leaders provided answers to our questions should not be seen as representative of all community-level organizations nationally.[1] Rather, they reflect a cross-section of NNC member organizations. For this reason, the perspectives of housing and community development organizations are more strongly represented than those of environmental, educational or labor organizations. At the same time, participants in the focus groups and respondents of the survey were drawn from many different types of organizations, of varying size, working in different types of community areas and having multiple roles that combine service work, organizing, and advocacy.

The 55 individuals who participated in the five regional focus groups tended to be veteran organizational leaders with in-depth knowledge of issues, close contacts with community members and local officials, and an understanding of the decision-making process.[2] They came from a variety of organizational settings, with slightly more than one-fourth (27%) drawn from housing organizations and another 21 percent coming from community development corporations. The remainder represented community-based organizations (16%), social service agencies (11%), miscellaneous groups (9%), community action and community advocacy groups (7%), faith-based and government agencies (4% each). Their organizations operated in different community settings, from central city neighborhoods, to metropolitan and regional areas, to rural districts.

Among the 216 individuals who completed the longer, mailed survey, nearly one-half (45%) were located in community-based organizations, while slightly less than one-third (31%) were working in community development corporations. Local, state, and federal government agencies, including a number of public housing authorities, represented about three in ten (31%). Smaller percentages came from social service agencies (17%), advocacy groups, including community action agencies (15%), regional organizations (9%), faith-based groups (2%), and some Indian tribal government agencies (1%). Finally,

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[1] For information on how participants were selected, see Appendix 1 for a description of the methodologies used.
[2] Regional focus groups were held between mid-March and late April in the following cities: Baltimore, MD; San Francisco, CA; Albuquerque, NM; Chicago, IL; and Atlanta, GA.

there was a random assortment of respondents who could not be easily placed into one of the preceding categories (9%), including a museum, unspecified non-profits, an alternative high school, or a community college training program.[3]

While the size of surveyed organizations varied, smaller organizations, as measured by the number of full-time staff, reflected the largest category. Thirty-six percent of the groups reported having four or less full-time staff, with another 21percent having between five and nine, 22 percent had between ten and 49, and 20 percent had fifty or more full-time staff. These smaller organizations were also more likely to make use of part-time paid staff; 37 percent of the smallest organizations, those having less than five full-time staff, also had some part-time paid staff. The small size of organizations is significant, as these are organizations charged with a lot of responsibilities and expectations.

One of the goals of the research was to compare the issues and challenges facing organizations that work in different types of communities. In the survey, respondents were asked to identify the type of geographical area in which they carry out their work. Based on the information provided, four different categories of communities were created. The first category includes only those respondents who identified their geographical area as either neighborhood or central city or a combination of both. The second category is composed of only those respondents who chose suburbs. The third category is made up of those respondents who chose rural. The final category, metropolitan area, includes any combination of the first three. For example, if an individual checked "neighborhood and metro" or "central city, suburb, metro, rural" this was classified as metropolitan area. Clearly, the sample is heavily weighted towards central city and metropolitan area, with 29 percent and 30 percent respectively. At 14 percent, the rural group is approximately the same size as the rural population of the United States today. The category that is under represented is the suburban category, with only 9 percent of the cases included. As we discuss later in the report, this may be due to the absence of singularly suburban organizations and not any shortcomings of the current research; the level of community organization may not be as high in the suburbs as it is in central cities or broader metropolitan areas.

These differences in geographical area are important in terms of the types of organizations that operate in the different environments. More than one-half of the organizations that functioned in neighborhoods/central cities and metropolitan areas identified themselves as community-based organizations, while less than one-third of suburban and rural organizations were of this type. On the other hand, more than one-third of suburban and rural organizations identified themselves as government agencies. The following table provides a full breakdown of organizational types by geographical area:

Organizational Type	Central City	Suburban	Metro Area	Rural
▪ Government agency	16%	35%	14%	33%
▪ Community-based organization	53	30	56	30
▪ Social Service agency	11	5	28	7
▪ Regional organization	3	0	15	10
▪ Community development corporation	37	25	28	17
▪ Advocacy organization	13	0	14	10
▪ Coalition	46	0	5	7
	(62)	(20)	(64)	(30)

These geographical differences clearly have important consequences for the development of local organizations and their ability to achieve their objectives. The larger and more densely settled population

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[3] Because respondents could check more than one category, percentages add up to more than 100%.

in urban areas has facilitated the development of community-level organizations as well as an array of more specialized citywide or metropolitan area-wide organizations. For example, in Chicago, in addition to a strong network of community-based organizations, specialized citywide groups such as the Community Media Workshop (giving technical assistance to community organizations in using media attention to promote local political agendas) and the Chicago Rehab Network (doing research and statewide lobbying on reinvestment without displacement initiatives) provide considerable support and resources to community-level organizations.

Compared to central city organizations, suburban organizations face challenges related to lower population density, lower density of community-level organizations, and issues of larger distances between communities. In suburban areas–typically divided into multiple government jurisdictions–fewer independent community organizations exist. As this suggests, whether it is a matter of organizing constituencies to advocate for social change or just figuring out the logistics of service delivery, suburban organizations experience difference challenges from city organizations. On the one hand, the smaller scale of suburban communities suggests that community-level organizations addressing the needs of low-income residents might have easier access to decision makers. On the other hand, the difficulty of developing a critical mass of members and resources makes organizing activities within a particular suburb more of a challenge.   Also, given patterns of economic segregation–creating rich and poor suburbs–those suburbs where community organizations serving the interests of low-income residents are able to organize and influence local government are more likely to be the suburbs with limited resources to give. This has pushed community organizations in suburban areas to consider coalitions as an avenue of increasing their influence over policy development. Additionally, as our survey found, local government agencies are more likely to operate in this environment. Where community-initiatives take root, if it is not local government itself that spearheads the "community initiative," independent local agencies often work closely with these local government agencies.

Low population density in rural areas, as well as the distance between communities and between organizations, represents special challenges for rural community organizations. Those working in rural areas explained that the community-based organization infrastructure is typically not as well developed as in city or suburban areas. The head of an Atlanta-based technical assistance resource center was concerned that "large areas of Georgia are not represented by a non-profit organization looking out for the social and housing needs of the lower income folks...." She explains that, "Rural areas do not have a lot of technical assistance providers to go the area and work with the inexperienced nonprofits that are there to help them to learn how to do housing development and owner rehab and social service provision. That piece needs to be [developed]." A staff member of a Georgia faith-based organization noted that the absence of non-profit organizations able to advocate for or provide services to rural residents who are homeless was so problematic that a state agency had to "step in" and do organizing work because no other organization was available to provide this function.

Problems often take on a different character in rural areas. As a leader of a statewide supportive housing organization in Illinois pointed out, "homelessness looks different" in rural areas–where a homeless individual may not be visible on the street, because he or she is using marginal shelter in outlying areas. Often, basic services need to be met before community organizations can even start to address issues such as affordable housing needs. In discussing the dilemmas of addressing issues in rural areas, the same Illinois executive director noted that: "it's cheaper to buy housing in Southern Illinois, but it's a two hour drive for a case manager to serve the families. Transportation is a huge issue in rural areas." A housing authority leader working in rural New Mexico talked about replacing a "crisscrossed" web of aging water lines that had haphazardly developed over the course of decades in a rural pueblo. Strategic planning took the form of installation of 18 new control valves so that water could be rerouted

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and new lines more effectively installed to serve these low-income communities. These are issues that do not typically arise in cities or older suburbs.

ISSUES IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

A primary objective of the survey was to identify current and emerging issues facing local communities today. Survey respondents were provided a list of 40 issues and asked to indicate whether or not these are a "current issue," an "emerging issue," or "not an issue" in their communities. Analysis of their responses reveals a number of patterns by issue; there are also striking differences depending on whether the organization defined itself as serving city, suburban, metropolitan, or rural areas.
Key findings can be summarized as follows:

- Among the 40 issues listed, one-third were considered current issues by 50 percent or more of the community leaders, with clusters of housing issues, community development issues, and economic issues among the most widely recognized current community issues. These are "bread and butter" issues that are necessary for a functioning, vital neighborhood; unless basic human needs are met, communities cannot function well.
- There was less consensus among community leaders regarding emerging issues. A moderate percentage--identified as between one-fourth and one-third of community leaders--saw community development issues, government issues, and civic engagement issues as emerging issues.
- There were three issues that the majority of organizational leaders in all four community settings agreed were currently facing them: job creation, lack of affordable housing, and health care. In general, the responses of leaders in central cities and metro areas differed significantly from those of suburban and rural leaders.
- In general, emerging issues in the suburbs are already current issues facing cities and metropolitan areas.
- For the most part, civil rights issues were viewed as non-issues in many of the communities surveyed.
- Housing issues, especially the availability of affordable housing, was mentioned most frequently as the number one, two or three issue facing local communities today. In terms of emerging issues, those related to employment and the economy were slightly more likely than housing issues to be viewed as the top emerging issues, with government issues following closely behind these.

Current Issues in Local Communities

Of the 40 issues listed on the survey, 13 were identified as current issues by 50 percent or more of the community leaders[4]. *Affordable housing* received the highest proportion of responses of all current issues–78 percent; that this remains an issue in many communities today is significant, given the fact that the community development movement has been working hard to address the shortage of affordable housing for the last 30 years. Among direct housing issues, 60 percent or more of the respondents listed *condition of housing stock* and *homelessness* as current issues in their community. Clearly, community leaders see these issues as connected; they notice the need for more housing production at affordable prices, more quality housing, and more access to that quality, affordable housing. Finally, there were a number of other community development and community economic equity issues on which at least one-half of the organizations recognized as current issues--*residential neighborhood revitalization*,

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[4] See Appendix 2 for a complete listing of how respondents rated each of the issues in terms of current issues, emerging issues, and non-issues.

commercial revitalization, *commercial development*, *addressing concentrations of poverty*, and *land use and zoning*.

Keeping in mind that there are a higher proportion of housing and community development organizations among NNC's members' constituent organizations, particularly significant is the high portion of respondents (2 out of 3) who listed *job creation* and *education* as current issues. For so many respondents who are particularly focused on housing and community development issues to raise these as current issues along side affordable housing suggests just how central both of these issues are to the quality of life in their communities. It also speaks to the interconnections between issues–particularly issue areas directly related to skill development and sustainable income.

Other issues that were identified as current issues by a majority of leaders include *health care*, *child care*, and *welfare reform*. All of these issues relate to the day-to-day functioning of a community and the quality of life of its residents and families. While some of these issues may be seen as being controlled from outside of the community, survey respondents provided a clear message that they are relevant to their organization's goals and successes.

Emerging Issues in Local Communities

The patterns for emerging issues are different from those of current issues[5]. Local leaders showed less consensus in regard to which issues they considered as emerging ones in their communities. None of the issues was identified by a majority as an emerging issue, and only four were identified by at least 25 percent as being an emerging issues (*gentrification, transportation as a development tool, homeland security,* and *youth civic engagement*). With only 28 percent of the responses, *youth civic engagement* led the list. Along with *leadership development*, listed by 24 percent of respondents, this suggests that community organizations are concerned with present and future resident involvement in their communities, as well as with present and future leadership in the community and their organizations.

There was some clustering within issue categories. The issues of *displacement of low-income families, gentrification, community safety*, and *transportation as a development tool* were listed by between 22 and 26 percent of respondents as emerging issues. *Transportation* as a general issue along with *energy* and *environment* also were listed by 21 to 25 percent of all survey takers. These responses not only provide insights into what they think is happening within their communities, but more importantly, the holistic perspective many local community leaders take in making connections among a variety of issues.

Government issues, which had not appeared as current issues, do appear as emerging issues. *Regional equity, tax equity*, and *homeland security* were checked off as emerging issues by 22 to 26 percent of respondents. It should be noted that while homeland security was among the more frequently mentioned emerging issues, 42 percent of the respondents also identified it as not being an issue for them.

Current Issues Facing City, Suburban, Metropolitan Area and Rural Communities

Some very interesting patterns emerge when the responses of leaders in different types of communities are compared. There were three issues that were considered current issues by 50 percent or more of organizational leaders in all four types of communities: *Job creation, Affordable housing*, and *Health care*. Beyond this, there were significant differences, with central city and metro organizations showing a pattern similar to one another, but different from suburban and rural organizations. For

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[5] See Appendix 2.

instance, the list of current issues identified by the majority of leaders in city and metropolitan organizations is significantly longer than those for suburban and rural areas. Leaders of metro organizations identified 23 issues and city leaders identified 19 issues as current. On the other hand, only five issues in the suburbs and six issues in the rural areas were identified by more than one-half of the organizational leaders as current issues.[6] This may reflect a greater spread of issue areas in the suburbs and rural area as well as a greater range of perspectives among organizations located in suburban and rural communities. In no case did the proportion of suburban or rural leaders responding that an issue was "current" exceed the proportion of either city or metro organizations that made that response.

In many instances, issues currently facing leaders of city and metropolitan-area organizations were viewed as emerging by leaders of suburban organizations.[7] For instance, one-third of the leaders of city organizations identified *gentrification* as a current issue, while only 11 percent of suburban leaders did. However, one-third of these suburban leaders went on to identify it as an emerging issue. In another instance, 42 percent of city leaders indicated that *access to technology* was a current issue, while none of the suburban leaders saw it as a current issue. However 38 percent of suburban leaders did list it as an emerging issue. What this suggests is that many of today's current issues in central cities can be viewed as tomorrow's issues in the suburbs. Over the past two decades there has been considerable research done on the changing face of America's suburbs.   Older, inner-ring suburbs are looking more and more like central cities, in terms of population profiles (e.g. race, ethnicity, age, and income) and in terms of challenges (e.g. aging housing stock, job retention, and economic development) (Orfield 1997). As their character and composition change, so does the nature of the issues they face.

Emerging Issues in Cities, Suburbs, Metropolitan Areas, and Rural Communities

Although we have already discussed overall patterns for emerging issues identified by community leaders and some differences among city, suburb, metro, and rural organization in terms of current issues, it is helpful to also provide some discussion of emerging issues by geographical areas. Keep in mind that what leaders have identified as an emerging issue, others viewed as a current issue. So "emerging" can mean the increased importance of an existing issue in some cases and a "new" issue in other cases. Also, since city and metro organizations tended to list more issues as current issues, the proportion of these leaders identifying an issue as an emerging issue is less than the proportion of suburban and rural issues identifying issues as emerging.

Examining the level of agreement among leaders of the four geographical areas over what are emerging issues, we see again less consensus than we saw when we examined the same patterns for current issues. Across geographical areas, there were no emerging issues that were identified by at least one-third of the leaders in all four, or even three, of the geographical areas. Five issues were identified by two of the four: *gentrification* (suburbs/metropolitan areas); *access to transportation* (suburbs/rural communities); *energy* (suburbs/metropolitan areas); *homeland security* (suburbs/rural communities); and *access to technology* (suburbs/metropolitan areas).

None of the issues identified by city leaders as emerging issues show up when we use a cut-off of at least one-third. In looking at emerging issue responses from city organizations we need to recognize that at least one-half of these organizational leaders had already listed nearly one-half of the issues as current ones. However, when current issues are added to emerging issues, there are 13 issues for which the combined percentage exceeds 80 percent; these issues are related to community development and

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[6] Appendix 3 provides a listing of current issues identified by at least 50 percent of local community leaders in cities, suburbs, metropolitan areas, and rural communities.
[7] See Appendix 4.

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revitalization, jobs and the economy, and housing.[8] In most cases, the percentage of leaders who consider these current issues far outweighs those who consider them emerging issues. At the same time, four of the issues that were assessed by more than 50 percent of the leaders as current issues were also considered by more than 25 percent to be emerging issues, suggesting that they are continuing to expand. These include *affordable housing, homelessness, youth civic engagement,* and *leadership development.*

The cluster of civil rights issues identified as by the leaders of city organizations as emerging–immigrant rights, race and ethnic group issues, and age-specific issues speaks to a heightened awareness of and concern about population changes in city neighborhoods.   With American cities experiencing a rapid growth of immigrants and experiencing increased racial and ethnic diversity, these reports are consistent with current population trends. The rise in interest on age-specific issues is undoubtedly also related to the youthfulness of many of these new immigrant groups at the same time as the growing number of older residents–particularly low-income residents in American cities–is producing new needs.

As noted earlier, many emerging issues in the suburbs are mirroring some of the current issues identified by city leaders. Most of the emerging suburban issues identified by at least one-third of the leaders could be classified as urban planning and economic development issues. *Access to transportation, transportation as a development tool, land use and zoning, commercial revitalization, commercial development or redevelopment, general transportation issues, energy, homeland security*, and *access to technology* are either "bricks and mortar" issues or traditional bailiwicks of local government units. Absent from emerging suburban issues are civil rights, just as they were largely absent from its current issues list. Also, issues that might be best described as related to service delivery or needs of low-income populations are not prominent on suburban leaders top ten list. *Gentrification* and *welfare reform* would be the only two issues that clearly fall into this category. *Land use and zoning*, *affordable housing*, and *health care* represent combined current and emerging issues that are identified by more than 80% of suburban leaders; in particular, 100 percent of the suburban leaders recognized affordable housing as an issue, either current or emerging.

Among the leaders of metro organizations, only three issues were identified by one-third or more as emerging issues: *gentrification, energy*, and *access to technology*. When combining emerging *and* current issues, 80 percent or more of metro leaders identified eleven different issues. These showed a pattern similar to that for central cities, with clusters around community development, affordable housing, health care, education, and child care**.** Disability rights stands out as a distinctive metropolitan area issue. Thirty-four percent of metro leaders ranked this as a current issue with 29 percent rating it as an emerging issue. The fact that almost two out of three metro leaders identifies this as a current or an emerging issue partially relates to the fact that disability issues tend not to be geographically-based. Also since the more regionally-based transportation issues–particularly access to transportation–are so intertwined with disability issues, it is not surprising to see this as listed as an emerging issue by metro leaders.

Finally, emerging issues identified by at least one-third of rural community leaders contain a larger proportion of community service delivery or needs issues. These included homelessness, disability issues, race and ethnic group issues, community safety, and child care.   In addition, more than one-third saw tax equity, access to transportation, and homeland security as emerging issues. When current and emerging issues are combined, 80 percent or more of rural community leaders identified five issues.

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[8] Specifically, they include *community safety*, *residential neighborhood revitalization*, *commercial revitalization*, *addressing concentrations of poverty*, *commercial development*, *job creation*, *condition of housing stock*, *homelessness*, *affordable housing*, *youth civic engagement*, *leadership development*, *education*, and *child care*.

These were job creation, condition of housing stock, homelessness, affordable housing, and child care. In rural areas, homelessness appears to be a major emerging issue, with almost one-half of rural leaders identifying it as such.

There also are a number of rural issues that appear to be emerging, but are not prominently listed as current issues. Most notable among these is *community safety*.   Only seven percent of rural leaders see this is a current issue while more than one in three (37 percent) sees this as an emerging issue. Similarly *homeland security* was not seen as a current issue by any rural leaders, but was viewed as an emerging issue by 37 percent of rural respondents.[9] For the issues of *tax equity, disability rights*, and *race and ethnic group issues* there are more than two or three times the rural leaders identifying these as emerging issues as current issues. This also indicates significant shifting issue interests in these areas.

A Divide on Importance of Civil Rights Issues

What stands out when one looks at the "not an issue" responses is that with the exception of *race and ethnic group issues*, all of the issues listed as *civil rights interests* were more likely to be considered "not an issue" than either a "current" or an "emerging" one.

	Currently an issue	Emerging as an issue	Not an Issue	Don't know or Missing
Civil Rights Interests				
▪ Disability issues	24%	22%	35%	18%
▪ Immigrant rights	23	18	42	16
▪ Race and ethnic group issues	39	24	28	8
▪ Gender issues	19	13	51	17
▪ Age-specific issues	20	21	41	18

There are a number of explanations for this perception of civil rights issues as less important. First, it is likely that a portion of the respondents feel that gains in each of these areas has reduced the centrality of the issue in their community.   Second, there is a degree of specialization among organizations in addressing these issues. Women's organizations, disability rights groups, senior citizen advocacy groups, fair housing organizations and various ethnic and immigrant rights organizations have traditionally served as advocates and watchdogs around issues particularly relevant to these communities. These can often be non-geographically based issues that cut across all communities. Hence, when geographically-based organizations, such as the groups that are heavily represented in the surveyed population, are polled, these civil rights issues may not be perceived as prominent issues.

When the sample was separated into city, suburban, metropolitan area, and rural area locations, organizations that indicate that they serve the entire metropolitan area are more likely to list disability and immigrant issues as current issues (34 and 36 percent respectively on these two issues) and less likely to

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[9]Of course, since the issue described as "homeland security" did not exist until after September 2001, so the growth of this issues area might be the product of semantics. We cannot tell from the data whether leaders define this issue as emerging because they are concerned about "terrorism" in their communities or are concerned that the rise of this issue and the concomitant government budgeting to support it will adversely affect money flowing to rural areas. This would be the case for suburban and metropolitan leaders who also have ranked homeland security among their top emerging issues.

list them as "not and issue" (26 and 33 percent respectively).[10] On race, gender and age issues, both metropolitan area organizations and city organizations are more likely than rural and suburban organizations to indicate that these are current issues (see the appendix for specific tables on race, gender, and age tables by organizational geographic areas).   The most striking difference is on responses to the race as an issue question; 50 percent of metropolitan area groups and 52 percent of city groups list this as a current issue, while only 22 percent of suburban and 21 percent of rural groups list this as a current issue.

Further analysis of the responses of the issue "immigrant rights" reveals a divide between metropolitan area and city groups on the one hand, and suburban and rural groups on the other. Fifty-six percent of metropolitan area groups and 48 percent of city groups list immigration as a current or emerging issue. Rural groups report a somewhat lower figure, 39 percent, while suburban groups clearly report immigrant rights as a non-issue; only 17 percent of this latter group identified it as a current or emerging issue.   This may reflect the higher awareness of immigration as an issue by city and metropolitan-area wide organizations, both of which will be familiar with, and sensitive to, established immigrant communities in the central cities.   Although there has increasingly been growth of immigrant groups in the suburbs, as with other suburban settlement patterns, settlement trends have been characterized by segregation (Bullard et al. 1994; Winnick 1990). Therefore this may not be visible as a "suburban" issue, but rather an issue only in specific suburbs with high concentrations of immigrants. Hence, the majority of suburban respondents will not report it as a significant issue.

The Top Issues in Local Communities

The preceding discussion on issues facing local communities was based on a survey question asking respondents to indicate, from a list of forty different issues, which were currently issues in their geographical area, which were emerging as issues, and which were not issues. Following this, they were asked to rank the top three current and emerging issues in their communities. The broad categories of issues reported in question 7 were used in analyzing these responses.

A combination of housing issues was most frequently mentioned as the number one, number two, and number three currently facing the communities studied.[11] Within this broad cluster, the availability of affordable housing was specifically mentioned by 32 percent as the number one issue, but by 17 percent as a number two issue, and by 10 percent as the number 3 issue. A distant second were issues surrounding employment and the economy; respondents cited concerns over job creation and job training, as well as adequate income levels and the national economy. Other issues that were mentioned by a number of respondents as top issues in their communities were health care and education. In terms of the top two issues facing these communities, four out of the five organizations in the survey report that they are currently working on the number one issue they cited and two in three organizations are working on the number two issue they cited.

Turning to emerging issues, slightly more respondents ranked employment and the economy as the number one issue than housing issues (24% as opposed to 20%). Government issues, especially issues related to funding, followed with 16 percent of the responses. Among other important community issues, six respondents each cited health care and education as their number one emerging issue. Community development issues, employment and the economy, housing, and the constellation of issues "environment/energy/transportation" were fairly evenly distributed across the second ranked emerging issue. Both community development issues and housing issues were most frequently mentioned as the

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[10] Refer to Appendix 4.
[11] Information on top current and emerging issues is found in Appendix 5.

number three emerging issue in communities today. Slightly more than one-half (54%) indicate that they are planning on working on the number one emerging issue they mentioned and less than one-half (45%) say they are planning on tackling the number two emerging issue.

FACTORS AFFECTING THE EMERGENCE OF ISSUES

The community leaders who participated in this study, both as members of focus groups and as respondents to the survey, clearly see local economic conditions are very important in terms of (1) how they constrain or help their organization's effectiveness in addressing community needs, and (2) what issues are emerging as important ones in their local communities. While they recognize that all communities function within the broader national economy, it is the day-to-day economic realities of the local community that affect housing choices, the tax base, the quality of schools, access to jobs, and other quality of life issues. In the survey, 70 percent of respondents indicated that local economic conditions were "very important" in affecting the emergence of issues in their community. Only 44 percent responded that, "economic conditions in the nation" were "very important." The following table provides information on the percentage of respondents who considered different factors "very important" in the emergence of issues.

Local economic conditions	70%
State government priority shifts	61
Federal government priority shifts	59
Community-wide discussions or actions	48
Local government priority shifts	47
Recent population changes	45
Local government priority shifts	44
Economic conditions in the nation	44

This pattern was consistent across geographic groups. At the same time, these leaders are very cognizant that national economic conditions, national policy priorities, state policy priorities, and other factors outside the community also shape the emergence of issues in their local communities.

Most of the focus group participants were keenly aware that problems facing American communities today are not the result of aimless and abstract forces. A leader of a Baltimore regional organization emphasized that there are people and organizations with the power to make conscious, self-interested decisions that negatively impact low-income communities. She states: "there is intentionally less money [for low-income communities]. You can't blame it all on the economy. Real people are making real decisions and take money from poor people." This was echoed by one of the local leaders in the survey, who wrote that "regions are controlled by suburbs and higher income people who believe that low-income families are undeserving of help."

THE CHALLENGES OF ADDRESSING ISSUES

During the course of our research, we focused considerable attention on community organization identification of specific issue areas facing their organization and their community. Similarly, when talking with representatives of regional and statewide organizations, we asked then to identify key issues across city, suburban, and rural areas. However, this is only part of the picture of what faces local organizations today. In order to "flesh out" the discussion, it is necessary to consider the multiple challenges these organizations face as they attempt to address the issues. These challenges include the need to: build organizational and community capacity, gain the attention of national policy makers, find funding for local initiatives, carry out the work of the organization in the context of limited resources, and

foster greater understanding and awareness among national policy makers about the complexities associated with the day-to-day realities of life in their communities.

Building Organizational and Community Capacity

Many of the focus group participants could point to successes in their local communities or cities. These activities ranged from addressing the poverty of colonias in New Mexico to supporting a statewide initiative to provide equitable school funding in all of Maryland's communities–whether moderate- or low-income. While acknowledging the successes, focus group participants in the Northeast, Midwest, Southeast, Southwest, and West pointed to the need for strengthened community organization capacity. One aspect of this is organizing local residents into a political force. As organizations work on their issues, as they create opportunities for low-income residents, and as they work for social change, the need to organize emerges as a logical part of the process. However, the challenge is to find time to do this and carry on all the other work of the community organization. As a community leader in Albuquerque explains

> when we start to do things like get into development, we start to leave the organizing piece behind. We get involved in just doing housing. And then we run into a problem, and then it's like "Dang! We really got to work on our membership! We really got to get these people out!" Because that is what we end up with--we end up with the same struggle that got us there in the first place. ....You can't say enough about [organizing] because the other communities are organized: the business community is organized, …the financial community is organized. Just go to the state and see how organized they are… .

Even when it comes to the immediate issues of providing services to the local communities, organizing local residents is synonymous to getting the word out on job opportunities or getting the word out on how to protect yourself against unscrupulous bankers. A San Francisco community leader underscored this,

> I think the biggest problem we have is getting people who are isolated and getting them to take advantage of programs. There are a lot more program activities than there are participants within the program. Many of the people that we can serve are isolated and they're using predatory lenders when we could serve them. Because of the isolation we are finding it harder to get them.

Another aspect of capacity building involves leadership development, particularly youth leadership development. Community organizations understand the importance of this, as it was a theme that ran throughout the focus group discussions. It is also consistent with the significant proportion of survey respondents who saw youth civic engagement and leadership development as key emerging issues (cited earlier in the report). Despite the substantial work pressures on community-based organization, opportunities to train new leadership and to plan for organizational leadership succession are critical. This is a two-pronged issue. On the one hand, it is a matter of grooming new leadership to help run the community organization. On the other hand, it is a matter of developing general leadership in the community so that there are strong voices that can effectively communicate grassroots issues and needs to all community institutions. The increased isolation and declining civic engagement among residents in their communities–particularly youth–alarmed focus group participants. A series of comments during the San Francisco focus group captures this. One participant reacts to an interchange about isolation among community residents:

> To follow on your comment on isolation, I think that's a real issue. I think that people feel, families feel, very isolated and disengaged and sort of desperate for connections. I think that it

sort of permeates down to the kids. It's a real problem. And the anxiety now with cuts and war, and general pervasive distancing people from the government is something that is really going to have a huge impact in our neighborhoods.

Getting the Attention of National Policy Makers

Many of the local leaders spoke about the challenges of getting national policy makers to pay attention to the pressing issues in their communities. Some felt that national policy makers (elected officials and leaders of national advocacy organizations) do not really want to hear what local communities have to say, that they do not care about the issues that confront these local organizations on an daily basis. Others pointed to the possibility that national policy makers already have their agenda set and do not have room for additional issues.

Looking at government officials specifically, local organizations believe that government priorities have shifted away from local issues to national and international issues such as the conflicts in the Middle East and the federal budget issues have taken priority over local concerns. As one person put it, "the needs of the poor are not currently in fashion. [There is a] need to refocus or be able to sustain focus on more than one issue area at once, [and this is] something Americans are not good at doing." Another commented that there is "a growing desire to remove the federal government from what some perceive to be state or local issues, a desire to cut social programs, a belief that social programs, including recreation, affordable housing, and medical programs are handouts that do not help anyone but simply create a dependency."

Community leaders are very aware that they are competing with one another not only for the attention of national policy makers but also funding.   In talking about the challenges of trying to address local issues, this was a concern expressed by many of the respondents to the survey. For some, their location or size represent obstacles that have to be overcome before they can reach national policy makers. As one local leader wrote, "we are located in a rural area and represented by very conservative members of Congress and the state legislature. It is sometimes challenging to get their support for our issues."   Others, who operate in smaller communities within larger metropolitan areas, spoke about having to first get out from under the shadow of the larger, adjacent cities before they can bring their issues to decision-makers.

Funding Challenges

Intertwined with local organization leaders' discussion of pressing issues facing their communities was the perpetual awareness that they have to find ways to run stable organizations and address problems in their community within a context of limited funding.   One Chicago community leader complained that "if we could 'plow the energy' that is currently being used for fund raising into our direct services and real work, than we would be much more effective."   More than one focus group participant commented that "mature" and "talented" leadership was spending time raising money rather than using their talents in providing direct services and developing effective new programs.

Not unlike other gatherings of non-profit, community-based, and regional civic organizations, focus group participants took aim at some foundation and granting agency practices that long frustrated them. The lack of funding to sustain the core staff of community organizations was cited more than a few times by focus group members and survey respondents both. What community leaders see as "fickle" funding practices by foundations came up a number of times in all five cities.   One executive director of a Bay Area jobs training program spoke of the constant pressure on organizations to come up with new and innovative ideas, even though there are basic, clearly identifiable unmet needs evident in

their communities that they can solve if provided adequate resources. Reacting to a foundation's rejection of an idea to provide limited language training for Asian immigrant workers–but enough to get them a job that would pay the rent and put food on the table–the director recounted that the foundation did not find the program "innovative enough." As he put it, funders want community organizations to be on this "sexy [idea] treadmill. You've got to change everything; you've got to call it something different every year even if its not…."

In another case, a board member of a social service organization providing comprehensive services to low-income residents in a mixed-income neighborhood on Chicago's northern lake front, spoke of the double-edged sword when a foundation does decide to provide longer-term support for a particular local community. She comments that "adopt-a-community approaches are OK, but then you get tagged as a X foundation community and no one else is going to give you money." She added that, "there is no accountability on the part of foundations." This was met with immediate nods of agreement of all focus group participants around the table.

There was also a keen awareness that they operate in an environment where there are many organizations competing for funding. This is true not only when it comes to foundations, but more importantly when it comes to funding from government agencies. A number of survey respondents mentioned the challenge of trying to find money for their programs in an environment of heightened competition for declining resources.

Limited Resources

Many of the local leaders who responded to the survey noted the challenges of trying to address issues in the face of stretched organizational resources more generally. In addition to direct funding, local leaders also brought up the issue of time as a resource—time that was needed in order to get the work of their organization done. This is particularly pressing given all the activities for which local organizations are responsible in the community. Another limited resource was staffing. Echoing the concerns of many small organizations, one local leader wrote that with "only one employee, [we] do not have to time to dedicate to lobby policy makers." Others cited their small organizational size as a challenge in connection with organizing and sustaining advocacy efforts.

Fostering Understanding of Local Issues at the National Level

In trying to bring local issues to the attention of regional and national elected officials and the heads of umbrella advocacy organizations there was a common perception that these non-local individuals do not have a clear understanding of the realities of day-to-day life in local communities, they don't see the whole picture because they are missing so much of the details. This runs counter to the prevailing wisdom that the higher up you go the more holistic view you have. Organizations and leaders at the national level are generally seen as having a better vantage point to view the "bigger picture." But a bigger view does not necessarily mean a more holistic view. A number of focus group participants made the same point when they observed that viewing policies and programs from a the vantage point of a community resident or family living in their community produces a more holistic picture of real needs and the effectiveness of private and public initiatives to address those needs. As a leader of a citywide Baltimore public school initiative put it:

> When you think about community development, you have to think about all the things together. [But when it gets to the advocacy stage and moves to state government] it gets defined to pieces. From the point of view of families, we constantly struggle to work across issue areas. We really have to take off the 'categorical' hats" and look at policies holistically.

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One of the survey respondents put it this way: "[It is a challenge] getting regional and national policy makers to see both the commonality of challenges and the unique nature of each community. [They need to understand how] to formulate programs with broad goals and sufficient flexibility to recognize specific local issues."

The challenges that many local leaders face as they try to increase elected officials' understanding of local realities has to do with the unrealistically short time frame for change that is often imposed by these far-removed policy makers. As one leader put it, the "sound byte mentality" has infected the development of programmatic time lines. Rather than viewing issues such as education or children's health as matters that need to be in place for a generation in order to be effective, the full impact of programs is expected to take place within the time frame of a politicians two, four, or six year term of office, or the foundation's five-year initiative time frame before it moves on to the next new initiative.

RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGES

As local leaders discussed the challenges, they also offered some strategies for responding to them. These are seen as ways in which to be more effective in doing what it is they do, especially in the current political, economic and social environments of diminished resources.

Creating Stronger Ties with National Organizations

In the focus groups, there was clear recognition of the need for effective national organizations and networks if local initiatives were to ultimately be successful. As one Chicago focus group participant pragmatically put it: regional, statewide, and national coalitions can produce two kinds of resources. First, they can help identify new policy ideas through research, demonstrating successes of existing initiatives, and making the case for policy changes through "numbers." Second, they can help obtain--from foundations or government--financing for those ideas (although this was seen as happening less frequently). A participant in the Atlanta focus group stressed the importance of national organizations, "anything that can be done to make sure that there is a consistent communication and linkage between legislature and nonprofits through a trade association, not just at the state level but leading up to the national level would be essential to making sure that we do promote policy because they are experienced with it...."

A Maryland community leader stated that national organizations are essential to guard against local community organization "isolation." He added that local organizations "…can become too focused on local issues" and need national organizations to provide a needed national context.

However, a qualifier that was often placed on these comments was the need for national organizations not only to provide information and assistance to local organizations, but also to listen to and be responsive to the needs of those local organizations as national organization priorities and activities are being shaped. Talking specifically about advocacy work at the national level, one Albuquerque focus group participant explained that, "you need a state and then national trade organizing for nonprofits that can do the lobbying. That's their job – listen to all of us and then do!" National organizations are likely to experience even more support from grassroots organizations when they are sensitive to these community perceptions as they organize across the nation and as they work to provide the technical assistance.

More Effective Community-Anchored Policy Research

In an environment of austerity, there was heightened sensitivity to using government, foundation, and university research and policy development resources more effectively.   This was stated a number of ways. First, a San Francisco Bay Area community leader complained that there is a "disconnect" between "think tank staff" engaged in "policy initiatives" and the population that they "are supposedly developing solutions for."   He added that, "it would be nice if there was a more clear... linkage between the people that are actually doing the work and people who are creating the policy." Another person in the same focus group described "an academic approach to problem solving [where] the academic writes the grants and proposals to get the money to do the research and much of the research is not useful because they've never been out in the field delivering services. .…There's a fundamental problem… [with this approach if] research [is] to be to helpful, useful to the people who are delivering services."

This points to the need for more effective use of policy research, needs assessment, and evaluation research capacity in local communities.   The capacity to do research may reside in local universities or in independent community-oriented policy research organizations.   There are effective models of university-community collaborative research that actively involve community organizations at all stages of research (Nyden et al 1997; Nyden 2003; Strand et al 2003). A participant in the Albuquerque focus group described efforts to better connect university research capacity with community needs:

> I work with an organization within UNM (the University of New Mexico); it's called the Office for Community Learning and Public Service. We've been in existence for over seven years and we have been partnering with neighborhoods, especially within ... pockets of poverty around Albuquerque, but we also had some statewide projects.
>
> This year we came to the realization that we need to start looking inward, within UNM, to capitalize a lot of the resources that are in the university. I sort of switched roles and became ... a faculty liaison. One of my roles is to listen to ... [the community] concerns that you are voicing here and try and organize the faculty and ... university [resources] to try and make these issues into some kind of reciprocal arrangement that could mean something. In this state UNM is the only research university and we believe that it is necessary to link research and teaching to action and policy. Our idea is to become an intermediary within UNM so that we can start making those issue more visible.

Coalition Building

The majority of focus group participants see that coalitions can be effective tools in strengthening community voice in regional, statewide, and national political venues. The importance of coalitions to community organizations is also evident among survey respondents.   Ninety-three percent of respondents answered "yes" to the question, "Do you think there is a need to work in coalition with other organizations around certain policy issues now or in the future?" When asked if their organization currently works in coalition with other organizations around certain policy issues, 155 of 193 (or 80 percent) who responded to the question said that their organization was currently involved in a coalition.

Coalitions can serve the function of helping to coordinate services, supporting legislative action, or advocating for more financial resources to local communities. There are examples of a number of successful advocacy-oriented coalitions provided by focus group participants. Among the coalitions cited was the Chicago Rehab Network and its research and advocacy for inclusionary zoning and affordable

housing set-asides to legislatively mandate that a certain proportion of new housing stock be affordable housing.   The Human Needs Coordinating Council in New Mexico is a coalition of non-profits throughout the state.   According to one community leader in Albuquerque, the Council has been effective in prioritizing issues and lobbying for state legislation. In Maryland a coalition of community organizations was key in the creation of the Thornton Commission, a state body exploring ways of reducing quality and resource inequities among Maryland's public schools.   Also in Maryland, Rally for the Region was able to organize over 2,500 people from over 100 organizations to focus on legislative issues ranging from improved public transit to more affordable drug treatment centers.

Although we can point to the many successful past and present coalitions, there is skepticism about some coalitions. One participant in the Chicago focus group bluntly stated that his organization will only get involved in coalitions if there is likely to be a direct payoff for his organization: "It is a matter of self-interest." Smaller community organization resources are too limited to spend staff time on coalitions when there are local community issues to be addressed and needs to be met. Community organizations often feel that the larger organizations controlling many coalitions end up getting more of the resources coming out of the collective work.

Despite the reservations and cautiousness about coalitions, most community leaders did see benefits to coalition work. They saw three kinds of resources potentially coming out of coalitions: policy ideas (policy research, data documenting community needs, and data that can be used in justifying existing programs and activities), legislative initiatives, and additional financing to local communities to address pressing issues. Success in getting new resources into the local communities, typically as the result of new legislation and state expenditures was clearly valued.   There were more reservations about policy research alone.   As one San Francisco community leader put it "academic ideas" are of less value to communities that the documentation of successful programs and innovations that can increase community capacity to address pressing problems.   This further reinforces the potential of collaborative university-community policy research partnerships where community members are involved in defining the research agenda–an agenda that often has been defined by university-based disciplines.

While statewide coalitions typically include rural partners, leaders of rural organizations spoke of the difficulty of creating and maintaining coalitions that help protect their interests. The lack of organizational density in non-metropolitan areas is a significant factor.   Rural areas find it difficult to create the kinds of specialized support organizations and coalitions found in metropolitan areas, such as those providing technical assistance for media relations, alternative technology, or computer technical support. Even more basic coalitions–those advocating for affordable housing, better public transportation, or improved investment in public education–are also difficult to sustain in rural areas. One community leader at the Atlanta focus group recognizes the importance of coalitions but laments the lack of such networks in rural areas in her state:

I am from rural South GA and there is nothing there; no advocates. There [isn't] even any [organizational] diversity in rural problems with coalition leadership in each respective area. There is a gap outside the walls of the [Atlanta] Metro area as far as coalitions are concerned, as far as anything is concerned. There definitely needs to be some more activity there. For the sake of getting bills passed, a coalition is critical to effect change. Everyone is understaffed and overworked as far as getting that together, there needs to be from a national level more money for building coalitions.

CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

Examining information from both focus group discussions and survey respondents, community-level organizations identified a number of the challenges facing them in the months and years ahead. Some of these issues are persistent issues that have been present for years; others are new or emerging challenges.

Develop a "popular movement"

A strong theme running through the focus group discussions was the need for more effective grassroots organizing and political organizing that would produce a stronger voice for low-income families and organizations advocating for economic justice issues. It was actually a staff member from a government agency at one of the focus groups who articulated this issue well:

> We can complain about that and that is the way it is going to be. We complain about the [corporate] PAC [Political Action Committees], but we don't think about how we can support the politicians who we think can speak for us. We don't put candidates out there, and we don't work on promoting them for public office. We occasionally give politicians the opportunity to come to a groundbreaking. I don't think we are as savvy in the non-profit community about how to gain political support and influence. We hide under the guise that non-profits cannot support politicians, but we are each voters.

This is not to suggest that a popular advocacy movement would supplant work done by grassroots organizations or national organizations, rather it is suggesting the need for a full array of advocacy, organizing, political educational, and research efforts if social change is to be successful. A Chicago government official with a deep personal history of involvement in the civil rights movement recently underscored the frustration that he, as a policy maker, faces when national organizations produce research underscoring growing inequities, but then there is no popular movement to follow up on this and pressure elected officials. Commenting on a Children's Defense Fund report released in May 2003 documenting an increase of 746,000 to 932,000 African-American children living in extreme poverty in only one year between 2000 and 2001 (a 20 percent jump), this local government leader asked "where's the outrage? It is stunning that there is no popular movement" that can capitalize on this research and put pressure on national and local elected officials (Wood 2003).

While there were no specific questions in either the focus groups or the survey on forms of communication among grassroots organizations or between grassroots organizations and regional/statewide/national organizations, the potential of developing more effective communication systems among organizations exist. Recent discussion of organizing tactics within the anti-war movement has highlighted the effectiveness of using computers and even cell phones. Dubbed "smart mobs" by Howard Rheingold, these technologies may be not be accessible to low-income families, but they certainly are accessible to many organizations that could use these to increase grassroots voice. (Rheingold 2002; Pariser 2003) Networks of neighborhood organizations could use such technologies more effectively and national organizations could create better developed two-way communication links to local groups in communicating national initiatives as well as listening to ongoing local needs. One participant in the Baltimore focus group did point to a recent example where a citywide organization had effectively used web-based communications strategies to communicate to a constituency that was largely accessing the information through library-based computers. This is an underdeveloped area, but something that clearly has potential.

Addressing Disengagement

As already implied by some of the focus group participant comments listed above, community resident disengagement from neighborhood life, community institutions, and the political process was a theme running through a significant portion of the discussion. This issue raised by community leaders is also reflected in the ongoing national debate over how to address declining civic engagement. The need for youth civic engagement was clearly identified on the survey. "Youth civic engagement" was the one issue listed most frequently as an emerging issue (listed by almost 28 percent of all respondents) by community leaders. In addition to this perception of the increased importance of this issue, 38 percent of respondents listed this as already a "current issue." Related to this is the fact that leadership development was also among the issues identified by a significant number of community leaders as an "emerging issue;" approximately one in four respondents felt this way.

Differences in the Political Cultures of Cities, Suburbs, and Rural Communities

As noted earlier, a relatively high proportion of suburban and rural organizations addressing "community" issues were government agencies; thirty-five percent of suburban survey respondents and 33 percent of rural respondents worked for the government. Adding this reality with observations from the focus groups on the scarcity of community-based organizations in rural areas and other comments on the difficulties faced by service organizations in the suburbs (and the apparent movement of government agencies into this vacuum), there appears to be a different political culture in the suburbs and rural areas. Urban areas, particularly large urban areas in the U.S. have a history of community-based organizations consciously developing a voice for the voiceless. Ranging from Saul Alinsky's Industrial Areas Foundation (past and present) to the settlement house movement and anti-political machine coalitions, there is an established track record of advocacy and even confrontation with elected officials and other institutions seen as standing in the way of community needs. While there certainly are exceptions, this more activist, confrontational model may not have filtered into the suburbs.

As the suburban population continues to grow, what implications does this have for national organizations trying to strengthen their presence in these areas outside central cities? What implications does it have for community organization networks within regions in terms of communicating with each other and coalescing around issues and organizational strategies? Is the suburban (and apparently rural) political culture likely to continue to nurture more cooperative community-government relations and direct government involvement in "community organizing" or is the more grassroots-based, confrontational model in cities likely to become more prominent.

CONCLUSIONS

This report represents the tip of the iceberg in understanding the perspectives and activities of a broad range of community level organizations. There is additional collected and analyzed data not included in this report because of space constraints, that will certainly be used by the National Neighborhood Coalition and its partners in understanding other details and nuances of local-level issue development and issue priorities. Given the tens of thousands of local level organizations functioning in urban, suburban, and rural communities throughout our nation, there is also a massive underutilized resource out there that can be used in understanding current and emerging issues.

This is a local resource that also has potential, if effectively combined with national resources, to meet many of the challenges facing American communities in upcoming years. While we frequently talk about "capacity building" for local community organizations, a major issue at hand is capacity building

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for the entire nation, where local and national organizations are more effectively brought together to address local needs.   Increasing the capacity of combined local and national networks and coalitions would represent a social and political resource in this era of scarce resources. An enhanced understanding on the part of both local and national organizations of day-to-day needs and how they link to national trends would bring the holistic perspective that both local and national organizations talk about into better focus.

The hope is that the material contained in this report and the data collected through this research project will be a stimulus for work informed by local community needs and perspectives. The hope is also that there will be continued efforts to collect ongoing information on community perspectives on current and emerging issues. If there is a front line in addressing the real challenges facing low-income families and communities today, it is along the residential blocks of our inner cities, along the struggling retail districts in aging suburban communities, and around quiet town squares in rural America.   The success in meeting the needs and challenges identified by leaders and residents living and working on and around these blocks, districts, and town squares is ultimately the true measure of success in providing opportunity for all citizens.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

METHODOLOGY

The information for this study was gathered using two complementary research methods. Over a six-week period from mid-March to late April, focus groups were conducted in five different locations: Baltimore, MD; Chicago, IL; San Francisco, CA; Albuquerque, NM; and Atlanta, GA. NNC selected the participants for each group. Overall, 55 individuals were involved, with an average size of 11 participants per session; groups ranged in size from six in Chicago to 17 in Atlanta. Participants were drawn from a variety of local organizations, including community development corporations, local housing groups, faith-based advocacy groups, social service agencies, and economic development organizations. The facilitators for each group were members of the CURL staff and they explored a fixed set of questions with participants.

The second method was a national survey of local organizations. The goal was to obtain approximately 200 completed surveys. Using a list of approximately 8400 names supplied by a selected number of NNC-affiliated organizations, a sample of 1200 potential respondents was selected (see list of organizations that provided their membership lists at end of this section). Each potential respondent received an initial letter from NNC announcing the June summit in Washington, D.C., describing the research, and encouraging the recipient to participate in the survey. This was followed up with a letter and survey from the Center for Urban Research and Learning.

In drawing the sample, particular care was taken to include individuals from all regions of the country. For this reason, the master list was broken down into six regional lists; names were selected off of these lists using a random sampling strategy involving random starts and fixed sampling intervals for each state within the regional groupings. The following table provides information on the regional breakdown of the sample.

Regional groupings	Organizations Listed		Organizations Sampled		Organizations Responding	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
• New England	631	8	57	5	8	4
• Mid-Atlantic	1,561	19	198	17	36	17
• South	2,397	29	296	25	38	18
• Mid-West	1,803	22	272	23	34	16
• Southwest	840	10	132	11	18	8
• West	1,093	13	236	20	51	24
Undetermined responses	--	--	--	--	31	14
Total	8,325	101%	1,191	101%	216	101%

Participants were sent a stamped, addressed envelop in which to return the completed survey, but they were also given the option of filling out the survey on-line at a specially designed website. The initial mailings were followed up with telephone calls and email messages to those individuals for whom this information was available; in most cases, CURL staff attempted three follow-up contacts for those individuals who did not immediately return the survey.

Of the 1,191 surveys that were mailed out, 33 were returned because of insufficient mailing information. In calculating an overall response rate, this number was subtracted these from the total

number of surveys initially mailed out; based on 1,158 delivered surveys, the overall response rate was slightly less 20 percent. Traditionally in survey research, the expectation is that response rate for surveys should be as close to 100 percent as possible. It has been argued that as the response rate falls, the sample becomes less representative of the larger population under study. A biased sample produces less reliable data.   However, recent research suggests that the response rate is unrelated to the accuracy of findings and in fact, low response rates may provide *more* accurate results than higher response rates. (Visser et al 1996). The explanation focused on the characteristics of respondents; as researchers worked harder to contact potential respondents, in order to boost the response rate, they ended by recruiting individuals who were less informed about the topic under study and ended up providing less accurate responses. In the case of this research, while the response rate is low, we are nevertheless confident that the 216 cases reflect a cross-section of NNC membership.

Source Organizations for the NNC Master List of Survey Participants

AFL-CIO: List of central labor councils. Because the list was not electronic, NNC selected two councils from each state that had a list of members for inclusion in their master list.
Council of State Community Development Agencies: Separate lists of local organizations that are members or recipients of TA/aid provided by the following state chapters: Alaska, Iowa, Massachusetts, Maryland, Nevada, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Wisconsin.
Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development: List of members.
Catholic Campaign for Human Development:
Coalition for Community Schools: List of members, including educators, youth groups, community service agencies, etc.
Chicago office of Local Initiatives Support Corporation: List of local partner organizations.
Development Training Institute: List of TA and training recipients, local partners.
Enterprise Foundation: List of local offices and TA and training recipients.
Federal Home Loan Bank of Atlanta: List of local aid recipients/local partners?
Housing Assistance Council: List of local rural community development and housing organizations.
Metropolitan Housing Coalition: Mailing list for the Louisville area.
National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials: List of local/regional housing authorities.
National Housing Conference: Mailing list with a mix of local and national housing groups.
National Neighborhood Coalition: Membership list
Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation: List of local community development groups and recipients of TA and training.
National Trust for Historic Preservation: Mailing list of local preservation/community development groups and Main Street program officers as well as some national organizations.
Sustainable Racine: Regional group working on planning/sustainability in Racine, WI.
U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops: List of Catholic dioceses in the United States plus local Catholic social justice/community service organizations.

APPENDIX 2

ISSUES IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Percentage of respondents indicating that an issue is one that they are currently facing, one that is emerging, or one that is not an issue (N=216)[12]

Issue	Currently an issue	Emerging as an issue	Not an Issue	Don't Know or Missing
Community Development Issues				
▪ Banking and lending	38%	18%	33%	11%
▪ Displacement of low income families	41	24	26	9
▪ Gentrification	21	25	39	15
▪ Community safety	48	21	22	9
▪ Access to transportation	43	20	28	9
▪ Transportation as a development tool	27	26	28	19
▪ Land use and zoning	50	18	16	17
Revitalization Issues				
▪ Residential neighborhood revitalization	55	18	19	8
▪ Commercial revitalization	54	20	16	9
▪ Addressing concentrations of poverty	51	19	18	12
Jobs and the Economy				
▪ Commercial development or redevelopment	61	18	12	9
▪ Job creation	66	12	14	8
▪ Labor issues	37	17	33	13
Housing issues				
▪ Fair housing	41	15	33	10
▪ Condition of housing stock	64	12	14	10
▪ Homelessness	60	19	12	8
▪ Affordable housing	78	11	4	7
Environment/Energy/Transportation				
▪ Transportation	45	21	23	11
▪ Energy	24	24	36	16
▪ Environment	35	23	30	12
Government Issues				
▪ Responsiveness to local communities	42	19	26	13
▪ Regional equity	41	22	22	14
▪ Tax equity	35	23	26	16
▪ Homeland security	16	26	42	17

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[12] For "current issues," cells that are shaded represent those issues identified as current issues by 50 percent or more of the respondents. For "emerging issues," cells that are shaded represent those issues identified as emerging issues by 25 percent or more of the respondents.

ISSUES IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY, continued

Issue	Currently an issue	Emerging as an issue	Not an Issue	Don't know or Missing
Civil Rights Interests				
▪ Disability issues	24%	22%	35%	18%
▪ Immigrant rights	23	18	42	16
▪ Race and ethnic group issues	39	24	28	8
▪ Gender issues	19	13	51	17
▪ Age-specific issues	20	21	41	18
Other Important Community Issues				
▪ Access to technology	19	18	19	43
▪ Criminal justice/legal issues	23	13	18	46
▪ Prison reform	24	17	43	16
▪ Youth civic engagement	38	28	20	15
▪ Leadership development	39	24	23	14
▪ Health care	60	17	14	9
▪ Prescription drug reform	45	20	20	14
▪ Welfare reform	51	14	22	13
▪ Food and nutrition	37	19	27	17
▪ Education	66	12	12	10
▪ Child care	56	22	11	12

APPENDIX 3
ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY 50 PERCENT OF MORE OF LOCAL COMMUNITY LEADERS, BY GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

Central city community issues	Suburban community issues	Metropolitan area issues	Rural community issues
Condition of housing stock (81%) Education (80%) Commercial development (79%) Affordable Housing (78%) Community safety (76%) Residential revitalization (76%) Job creation (76%) Commercial revitalization (71%) Addressing poverty (67%) Homelessness (63%) Government Responsiveness to local communities (63%) Welfare reform (63%) Childcare (63%) Youth engagement (59%) Race (53%) Health care (57%) Land use (52%) Leadership development (52%) Labor issues (51%)	Affordable housing (72%) Health care (65%) Job creation (50%) Prescription drug reform (50%) Education (50%)	Affordable housing (92%) Homelessness (81%) Education (79%) Job Creation (73%) Land use/zoning (72%) Condition of housing stock (71%) Health care (69%) Commercial development (64%) Addressing poverty (64%) Residential revitalization (63%) Child care (63%) Community Safety (62%) Commercial revitalization (60%) Displacement of low-income families (57%) Transportation (57%) Welfare reform (55%) Access to transportation (54%) Tax equity (54%) Government Responsiveness to local communities (53%) Regional equity (53%) Banking and Lending (52%) Prescription drug reform (51%) Race and ethnic issues (50%)	Affordable Housing (79%) Job creation (61%) Commercial development (59%) Condition of housing stock (59%) Commercial revitalization (52%) Health care (50%)

ISSUES IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES BY GEOGRAPHICAL AREA
Percentage of respondents indicating whether an issue was one that they currently faced in their
community, one that was emerging as an issue, or one that was not an issue for them

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

Banking and Lending					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	45%	11%	52%	28%	40%
Emerging as an issue	18	28	20	17	16
Not an issue	34	56	23	48	37
Don't Know	4	6	5	7	8
(N)	(56)	(18)	(60)	(29)	(38)

Displacement of Low Income Families					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	45%	44%	57%	32%	29%
Emerging as a issue	26	22	22	25	34
Not an issue	28	33	18	39	29
Don't Know	2	0	3	4	8
(N)	(58)	(18)	(60)	(28)	(38)

Gentrification					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	32%	11%	23%	7%	21%
Emerging as an issue	25	33	35	15	21
Not an issue	41	39	28	67	47
Don't Know	2	17	13	11	10
(N)	(59)	(18)	(60)	(27)	(38)

Community Safety					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	76%	22%	62%	7%	46%
Emerging as an issue	16	22	22	38	24
Not an issue	9	56	13	48	27
Don't Know	0	0	3	7	3
(N)	(58)	(18)	(60)	(29)	(37)

Access to Transportation					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	36%	27%	54%	37%	63%
Emerging as an issue	19	33	20	37	10
Not an issue	43	39	23	26	21
Don't Know	2	0	3	0	5
(N)	(58)	(18)	(61)	(27)	(38)

Transportation as a Development Tool					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	25%	17%	38	36	24%
Emerging as an issue	30	39	18	21	37
Not an issue	37	39	27	29	21
Don't Know	9	6	17	14	18
(N)	(57)	(18)	(60)	(28)	(38)

Land Use and Zoning					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	52%	35%	72%	44	50
Emerging as an issue	16	47	12	22	24
Not an issue	21	12	8	26	21
Don't Know	11	6	7	7	5
(N)	(56)	(17)	(57)	(27)	(38)

REVITALIZATION ISSUES

Residential neighborhood revitalization					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	76%	22%	63%	38%	56%
Emerging as an issue	8	28	16	31	28
Not an issue	15	50	16	28	14
Don't Know	0	0	5	3	3
(N)	(59)	(18)	(62)	(29)	(36)

Commercial Revitalization					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	72%	27%	60%	52%	51%
Emerging as an issue	17	33	19	18	30
Not an issue	10	39	14	26	16
Don't Know	2	0	6	4	3
(N)	(59)	(18)	(62)	(27)	(37)

Addressing Concentrations of Poverty					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	67%	28%	64%	36%	47%
Emerging as an issue	16	22	18	32	21
Not an issue	15	44	7	25	29
Don't Know	2	6	12	7	3
(N)	(58)	(18)	(61)	(28)	(38)

JOBS AND THE ECONOMY

Commercial Development and Redevelopment					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	79%	44%	64%	59%	57%
Emerging as an issue	16	33	18	10	30
Not an issue	5	33	10	28	11
Don't Know	0	0	8	3	3
(N)	(58)	(18)	(61)	(29)	(37)

Job Creation					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	76%	50%	73%	61%	71%
Emerging as an issue	10	22	12	21	10
Not an issue	12	28	12	18	15
Don't Know	2	0	3	0	3
(N)	(59)	(18)	(60)	(28)	(38)

Labor Issues					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	51%	28%	47%	29%	24%
Emerging as an issue	16	28	18	14	22
Not an issue	30	39	27	50	43
Don't Know	4	6	8	7	11
(N)	(57)	(18)	(62)	(28)	(38)

HOUSING ISSUES

Fair Housing					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	47%	28%	47%	31%	56%
Emerging as an issue	18	22	18	19	8
Not an issue	32	44	34	50	33
Don't Know	4	6	2	0	3
(N)	(57)	(18)	(62)	(26)	(36)

Condition of Housing Stock					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	81%	33%	71%	59%	72%
Emerging as an issue	3	11	18	26	11
Not an issue	10	50	8	15	17
Don't Know	5	6	3	0	0
(N)	(58)	(18)	(62)	(27)	(36)

Homelessness					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	63%	44%	81%	33%	72%
Emerging as an issue	25	22	11	48	8
Not an issue	10	28	7	19	19
Don't Know	2	6	2	0	0
(N)	(59)	(18)	(62)	(27)	(36)

Affordable Housing					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	78%	72%	91%	79%	84%
Emerging as an issue	15	28	5	14	5
Not an issue	7	0	0	3	11
Don't Know	0	0	3	3	0
(N)	(59)	(18)	(60)	(29)	(37)

ENVIRONMENT/ENERGY/TRANSPORTATION

Transportation					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	41%	29%	57%	44%	57
Emerging as an issue	20	35	21	26	19
Not an issue	34	35	18	30	13
Don't Know	5	0	3	0	11
(N)	(59)	(17)	(61)	(27)	(37)

Energy					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	25%	11%	28%	18%	33%
Emerging as an issue	19	33	33	26	25
Not an issue	46	56	28	52	28
Don't Know	10	0	12	4	14
(N)	(59)	(18)	(61)	(27)	(36)

Environment					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	33%	28%	45%	31%	42%
Emerging as an issue	26	11	27	21	25
Not an issue	38	61	23	45	14
Don't Know	3	0	5	3	19
(N)	(58)	(18)	(62)	(29)	(36)

GOVERNMENT ISSUES

Responsiveness to Local Communities					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	63%	39%	52%	21%	28%
Emerging as an issue	16	22	15	31	28
Not an issue	19	39	25	45	31
Don't Know	2	0	8	3	14
(N)	(57)	(18)	(61)	(29)	(36)

Regional Equity					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	48%	33%	53%	29%	38%
Emerging as an issue	24	28	23	25	22
Not an issue	19	39	14	39	27
Don't Know	9	0	10	7	14
(N)	(58)	(18)	(62)	(28)	(37)

Tax Equity					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	41%	33%	54%	11%	25%
Emerging as an issue	21	28	18	37	31
Not an issue	26	39	16	48	33
Don't Know	12	0	12	4	11
(N)	(58)	(18)	(61)	(27)	(36)

Homeland Security					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	17%	22%	25%	0%	17%
Emerging as an issue	19	33	30	37	28
Not an issue	53	44	39	56	33
Don't Know	10	0	7	7	22
(N)	(58)	(18)	(61)	(27)	(36)

CIVIL RIGHTS ISSUES

Disability Rights					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	21%	17%	34%	19%	32%
Emerging as an issue	21	24	29	35	14
Not an issue	46	53	26	38	38
Don't Know	11	6	11	8	16
(N)	(56)	(17)	(62)	(26)	(37)

Immigrant Rights					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	22%	11%	36%	14%	24%
Emerging as an issue	26	6	20	25	13
Not an issue	40	78	33	57	47
Don't Know	12	6	12	4	16
(N)	(58)	(18)	(61)	(28)	(38)

Race and Ethnic Group Issues					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	52%	22%	50%	21%	34%
Emerging as an issue	27	17	19	38	29
Not an issue	20	56	27	41	26
Don't Know	0	6	3	0	10
(N)	(59)	(18)	(62)	(29)	(38)

Gender Issues					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	30%	6%	22%	11%	16%
Emerging as an issue	10	6	18	15	19
Not an issue	54	76	45	74	49
Don't Know	5	12	14	0	16
(N)	(57)	(17)	(62)	(27)	(37)

Age-specific Issues					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	25%	18%	24%	18%	19%
Emerging as an issue	26	18	23	29	14
Not an issue	42	65	31	54	54
Don't Know	7	0	23	0	14
(N)	(57)	(17)	(62)	(28)	(37)

OTHER IMPORTANT COMMUNITY ISSUES

Access to Technology					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	42%	0%	30%	31%	29%
Emerging as an issue	28	38	33	21	43
Not an issue	30	63	27	41	19
Don't Know	0	0	10	7	10
(N)	(43)	(8)	(30)	(29)	(21)

Criminal Justice and Legal Issues					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	49%	17%	47%	17%	40%
Emerging as an issue	19	31	27	31	15
Not an issue	23	41	23	41	25
Don't Know	9	10	3	10	20
(N)	(43)	(8)	(30)	(29)	(20)

Prison Reform					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	38%	17%	30%	7%	17%
Emerging as an issue	10	17	25	17	22
Not an issue	40	67	38	66	44
Don't Know	12	0	8	10	17
(N)	(58)	(18)	(61)	(29)	(36)

Youth Civic Engagement					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	59%	11%	41%	34%	27%
Emerging as an issue	28	44	26	28	32
Not an issue	12	39	20	31	22
Don't Know	2	6	13	7	19
(N)	(58)	(18)	(61)	(29)	(37)

Leadership Development					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	52%	22%	47%	31%	33%
Emerging as an issue	29	22	26	24	22
Not an issue	17	50	14	34	31
Don't Know	2	6	13	10	14
(N)	(58)	(18)	(62)	(29)	(36)

Health Care					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	57%	65%	69%	50%	74%
Emerging as an issue	20	24	23	20	5
Not an issue	21	12	8	27	10
Don't Know	2	0	0	3	10
(N)	(56)	(17)	(62)	(30)	(38)

Prescription Drug Reform					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	45%	50%	51%	45%	53%
Emerging as an issue	25	17	26	14	18
Not an issue	23	28	16	34	13
Don't Know	7	6	7	7	16
(N)	(56)	(18)	(61)	(29)	(38)

Welfare Reform					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	63%	17%	55%	45%	63%
Emerging as an issue	7	33	14	31	5
Not an issue	23	44	23	21	18
Don't Know	7	6	8	3	13
(N)	(57)	(18)	(62)	(29)	(38)

Food and Nutrition					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	47%	11%	45%	30%	40%
Emerging as an issue	19	28	23	20	16
Not an issue	26	56	20	43	22
Don't Know	9	6	12	7	22
(N)	(58)	(18)	(60)	(30)	(37)

Education					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	80%	50%	79%	47%	68%
Emerging as an issue	11	17	13	17	13
Not an issue	7	33	2	37	10
Don't Know	2	0	7	0	8
(N)	(55)	(18)	(62)	(30)	(38)

Child Care					
	City	Suburbs	Metro	Rural	Unspecified*
Currently an issue	63%	39%	63%	43%	68%
Emerging as an issue	19	28	24	40	14
Not an issue	14	28	3	17	11
Don't Know	4	6	10	0	8
(N)	(57)	(18)	(62)	(30)	(37)

*"Unspecified" includes all those organizations (N=40) that did not answer Question 3 of the survey, "How would you describe the geographical area in which your organization carries out its work?"

THE PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS INDICATING AN ISSUES WAS ONE OF THE TOP THREE CURRENT AND EMERGING ISSUES IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

	Number 1 current issue	Number 2 current issue	Number 3 current issue	Total responses for issue
CURRENT ISSUES				
Community Development Issues	8%	6%	8%	7%
Revitalization Issues	7	5	5	6
Jobs and the Economy	17	22	15	18
Housing issues	46	30	23	33
Environment/Energy/Transportation	3	9	7	6
Government Issues	4	7	5	6
Civil Rights Issues	<1	<1	0	<1
Health Care, including Prescription Drug Reform	2	6	15	8
Education	8	5	6	6
Other Important Community Issues	4	7	15	8
Sub-total	(206)	(190)	(190)	(586)
EMERGING ISSUES				
Community Development Issues	11%	13%	19%	14%
Revitalization Issues	4	7	4	5
Jobs and the Economy	24	14	9	16
Housing issues	20	17	18	18
Environment/Energy/Transportation	5	14	2	10
Government Issues	16	9	7	11
Civil Rights Issues	3	1	2	2
Health Care, including Prescription Drug Reform	5	5	10	7
Education	4	8	5	6
Other Important Community Issues	9	11	14	11
Sub-total	(149)	(148)	(120)	(417)