ASSESSING AND PROMOTING OPPORTUNITY IN LOW- AND MODERATE-INCOME COMMUNITIES:
Executive Summary

Allison Freeman, Mark McDaniel, and Mat Despard
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The center’s in-depth analyses help policymakers, advocates, and the private sector find sustainable ways to expand economic opportunity to more people, more effectively.

ROBERTO G. QUERCIA
DIRECTOR

MATHIEU DESPARD
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The UNC Center for Community Capital (CCC) partnered with JPMorgan Chase & Co. (JPMC) for an in-depth investigation into the intersecting roles of housing and place in linking low- and moderate-income (LMI) families to opportunity in sites in San Francisco and New Orleans. The goal of the study was to develop a mixed-methods approach to understanding opportunity that could be used in any U.S. city to help inform community development efforts.

In this report, opportunity is understood as “access to good-quality amenities, services, and institutions that might improve and enhance LMI families’ quality of life,” and the goal of the study was to assess both the availability of opportunity within each community – i.e. the spatial distribution of resources – and to uncover what factors enable or inhibit people’s engagement with opportunities that are available to them. The assessment of opportunity looked at the relationship between housing and four specific domains of individual and community well-being: health and healthcare, economic stability, education, and social and community context.

For this eighteen-month long investigation, CCC developed a mixed-methods Opportunity Assessment that took a twofold approach: first, the creation of a data-driven index of place-based opportunity; and second, the use of community-level research to identify the gap between perceived opportunity and actual, realized opportunity. The Area Opportunity Index created for this study helps assess the spatial distribution within communities of critical quantitative indicators of well-being that reflect present and past access to opportunity. Findings from the 52 stakeholder and resident interviews conducted for this study help explain what enables or inhibits people’s full engagement with opportunities that are available to them.

CCC’s work in each city centered on a site that has either undergone or is in the process of undergoing conversion from public to mixed-income housing. The two sites – Columbia Parc in New Orleans and Potrero Terrace and Annex in San Francisco – are very different from one another, both in terms of their stages of development and in terms of the broader area in which they lie. Columbia Parc (formerly the St. Bernard public housing development) is completely renovated, with a waiting list for each type of housing, while Potrero Terrace and Annex only broke ground in 2017, with no renovated housing yet available for its LMI residents. In terms of setting, Columbia Parc sits in the midst of a lower-income neighborhood, where 57% of households are classified as poor, while Potrero Terrace and Annex lies within a well-resourced and wealthy community, where 58% of households are affluent. These disparate settings help shed light on which aspects of access to opportunity are universal – i.e. seem to be present regardless of setting – and which are more a matter of local particularities.

We offer here an overview of our assessment of opportunity in New Orleans and San Francisco, providing findings and recommendations for each site. We close with two important considerations that apply to both Columbia Parc and Potrero Terrace and Annex and that might be broadly applicable to other low- and moderate-income communities.
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NEW ORLEANS’S COLUMBIA PARC: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The reconstruction of the St. Bernard Development into present-day Columbia Parc was spearheaded by the Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) in 2009. Together with local nonprofit Bayou District Foundation, national mixed-income housing developer Columbia Residential, and Atlanta nonprofit consulting firm Purpose Built Communities, HANO modeled the St. Bernard redevelopment after redevelopment of the East Lake neighborhood in Atlanta, Georgia. Today, Columbia Parc is complete and offers 685 mixed-income rental apartments: of these units, 229 are public-housing assisted apartments, meaning that their occupants receive an income-based rental subsidy; the remaining 456 units are either “affordable,” with rents based on area median income, or are market rate. The site currently offers an internet café, business center, resident movie theater, fitness center, pool, and playground; amenities planned for the future include schools, a recreation facility, retail services, and a library. Columbia Parc occupies a 52-acre site that lies within what we are calling the St. Bernard Area of Orleans Parish. East of City Park and directly north of I-610, the St. Bernard Area occupies a small parcel of land – just one-third of a square mile – in the northern portion of the Mid-City planning district.

Findings

The St. Bernard Area performs below Orleans Parish overall on all of the quantitative indicators of well-being that reflect present and past access to opportunity: its median household income is $20,149 (compared to $36,792 for Orleans Parish), only 44% of adults have pursued education beyond high school (vs. 62% for Orleans Parish), 61% of adults have health insurance (vs. 78% for the parish), 70% of area households spend more than 30% of their income on housing (compared with 50% of households being housing-cost burdened in the parish overall), and its concentration of lower income households makes it score well below the parish in terms of economic integration (see Methods for full details on the Rescaled Index of Concentration at the Extremes).

Barriers to Opportunity

The residents and stakeholders we spoke with about access to opportunity by LMI people in the St. Bernard Area and in New Orleans overall identified the following as barriers to opportunity:

1. A lack of affordable housing in the city;
2. A lack of jobs that provide a living income and a career trajectory;
3. A lack of equal access to quality education within the city’s charter school system;
4. Systemic racism and its effect on access to business and political leadership opportunities;
5. Systemic racism in the city’s criminal justice system and its effect on black men in particular;
6. Proximate to the Columbia Parc site, insufficient retail (especially food-related), financial, and health services;
7. A lack of real community participation in planning and development processes affecting LMI families’ lives.

What Residents and Stakeholders Would Like

The residents and stakeholders we spoke with called for the following changes to help improve access to opportunity by LMI people in the St. Bernard Area and New Orleans more generally:

1. Criminal justice reform;
2. Access to better paying jobs;
3. More support for minority owned businesses;
4. Increased minority political representation;
5. More focus on child and youth development;
6. Stronger mentoring and social networks;
7. Improved financial and technical capacity on the part of the city’s nonprofits;
8. Better collaboration on the part of the city’s nonprofits;
9. Better access to information on what services and programs are available to serve LMI people;
10. Improved empathy and cultural competency on the part of service providers.

How Community Actors Might Respond

In response to findings from the Area Opportunity Index and from interviews with residents and stakeholders in New Orleans, community actors might consider working to:

1. Support local criminal justice system reforms;
2. Support efforts that use social network and relationship-based strategies to help lower-income residents access jobs and other economic opportunities;
3. Determine how education, job training, and job search resources through New Orleans’ five opportunity centers could be easier to access and use;
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1. Encourage key anchor institutions in close proximity to the St. Bernard Area to recruit and hire neighborhood residents;
2. Ensure that single parents looking for work have access to affordable early care and education;
3. Support and build capacity of the Mobilization Fund, a public-private partnership to increase access to capital among disadvantaged business entities;
4. Encourage a partnership between Columbia Parc and local economic empowerment organizations to make financial coaching services more accessible to area residents;
5. Support continued efforts to strengthen the health and human services ecosystem in New Orleans.

SAN FRANCISCO’S POTRERO TERRACE AND ANNEX: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In 2007, a partnership between the Mayor’s Office and the San Francisco Housing Authority led to the creation of HOPE SF, an initiative to redevelop four of the city’s most distressed housing projects, including Potrero Terrace and Annex. The redevelopment team selected to complete the Potrero project – including nonprofit developer BRIDGE Housing, an architecture and urban design firm, and a consulting firm – created a master plan in 2010. Subsequent updates to that plan propose a community that will include 619 public housing units, approximately 200 affordable units (40-60% area median income), and approximately 800 market-rate units. The plan also proposes the creation of a community center, approximately 3.5 acres of public open space, and the inclusion of retail services. The Potrero Terrace and Annex development lies within the Potrero Hill neighborhood, which occupies just over one square mile of land on the eastern side of San Francisco County on the San Francisco Bay. The actual redevelopment of Potrero Terrace and Annex broke ground in early 2017.

Findings

Potrero Hill, the neighborhood within which Potrero Terrace and Annex lies, performs in the top half of all San Francisco County neighborhoods on almost all the quantitative indicators of well-being that reflect present and past access to opportunity: its median household income is $147,726 (compared to $81,294 for the county), 90% of adults have pursued education beyond high school (vs. 74% for San Francisco County), 92% of adults have health insurance (vs. 89% for the county), and just 32% of households spend more than 30% of their income on housing (compared with 42% of households being housing-cost burdened in the county overall). Where the neighborhood falls close to the bottom for the county is in its performance on economic diversity: Potrero Hill’s concentration of affluent households leads it to score poorly in terms of economic integration (see Methods for full details on the Rescaled Index of Concentration at the Extremes).

The residents and stakeholders we spoke with about access to opportunity by LMI people in Potrero Hill and in San Francisco more generally identified the following as barriers to opportunity:

1. A lack of affordable housing in the city, which confines many lower-income people to public housing;
2. Divergent quality of public schools in the city and LMI people’s limited knowledge of how to use the school choice process to their full advantage;
3. A mismatch between the needs of San Francisco’s booming economy and the skill sets of LMI people;
4. Insufficient public transportation to the Potrero Terrace and Annex site;
5. Proximate to Potrero Terrace and Annex, insufficient access to affordable financial services and affordable healthy food options;
6. Within Potrero Terrace and Annex, violence and a lack of personal safety;
7. Trauma and its effects, including addiction, mental health issues, and limited trust on the part of LMI people;
8. Within the city of San Francisco, a broader culture of marginalizing, isolating, and ignoring LMI people;
9. Within the city of San Francisco, a lack of coordination among agencies serving LMI people.

What Residents and Stakeholders Would Like

The residents and stakeholders we spoke with called for the following changes to help improve access to opportunity by LMI people in the Potrero Hill neighborhood and in San Francisco more generally:
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1. Greater investment in young people;
2. Psychosocial support to address issues that stem from trauma;
3. Resident empowerment by engaging residents with meaning-of-life questions;
4. Moving beyond case-focused counseling to goal-setting coaching;
5. A less-siloed service delivery environment;
6. Improved access to data by service providers;
7. Improved empathy and cultural competency on the part of service providers;
8. Improved outreach and communication on the part of service providers.

How Community Actors Might Respond

In response to findings from the Area Opportunity Index and from interviews with residents and stakeholders in San Francisco, community actors might consider working to:

1. Support youth-serving organizations that might offer programs at Potrero Terrace and Annex; promote greater awareness among residents of existing local resources for children and families;
2. Promote awareness among residents of existing asset-building resources for adults and the full range of health and human service programs listed within the Bay Area 211 system;
3. Encourage the San Francisco Health Network to integrate or better promote behavioral health services at the Potrero Hill Health Center; support efforts to make the health center more accessible to residents;
4. Support strategies to help residents access jobs and other economic opportunities;
5. Increase access to workforce development services and resources, including for individuals with significant barriers to employment;
6. Encourage key anchor institutions in close proximity to Potrero Hill to recruit and hire neighborhood residents;
7. Partner with the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency to bring public transportation to Potrero Terrace and Annex;
8. Explore access to a LISC Financial Opportunity Center for Potrero Terrace and Annex residents;
9. Support post-conversion initiatives to build community among residents of different incomes and racial and ethnic backgrounds.

UNIVERSAL ELEMENTS OF OPPORTUNITY

Our analysis revealed two important considerations that apply to both Columbia Parc and Potrero Terrace and Annex and that might be broadly applicable to other low- and moderate-income communities:

1. Friction of distance, which takes into account the amount of effort required to complete a journey and which implies that even a short journey can be perceived as daunting. This has relevance in each site, where interviews revealed that even when services and amenities were in close proximity, residents did not perceive resources to be accessible. Investments to help overcome friction of distance include:
   a. Leveraging technology to make it easy to find services; ensuring that information about services is easy to understand;
   b. Integrating services and co-locating services into mixed-income housing communities;
   c. Significantly reducing the amount of effort it takes to apply for assistance;
   d. Ensuring services and resources are offered in culturally relevant ways.
2. Lack of voice was raised in both sites by interviewees who expressed concern about residents’ limited participation in the decision-making processes that affect their lives. To promote resident voice, community actors might:
   a. Select place-based partners that actively seek to incorporate resident perspectives and that evidence a tangible commitment to resident inclusion;
   b. Amplify residents’ voices by directly supporting local associations and neighborhood groups that help residents express their needs and interests.