

Rules & Tools for Good Gap Work

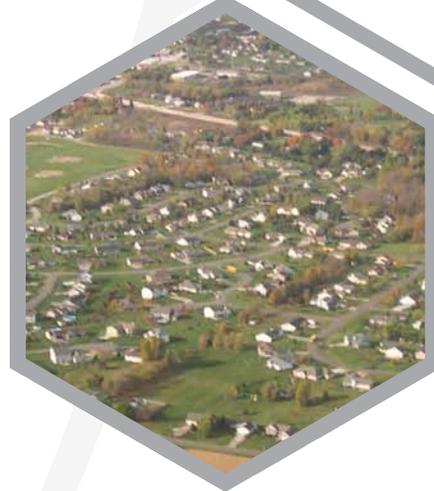
A summary of the October 28, 2016 ECWRPC Miniconference, “Working in the Gap: Exploring the White Space between Stronger Neighborhoods and Local Institutions”



City of Oshkosh

NEIGHBORHOOD PARTNERS
A program of Goodwill Industries of North Central Wisconsin

UW Extension
Winnebago County



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East Central Wisconsin
Regional Planning Commission
ECWRPC
Calumet • Fond du Lac • Menominee • Outagamie
Shawano • Waupaca • Waushara • Winnebago

BACKGROUND

On October 28, 2016 the East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, in partnership with the City of Oshkosh, Winnebago County UW-Extension, and Goodwill Industries NCW's Neighborhood Partners program hosted a half-day learning workshop on "working in the gap" which was put in the context of strengthening neighborhoods.

The concept of "the gap" is directed at people who work for a public or private institution that associates with, or supports, neighborhood groups or other citizen-led efforts. City departments (government), religious institutions, school districts, and other non-profit organizations are just a few examples of entities which often require their staff to work within this "white space" between institutions and citizen led efforts. Elected officials are also working in the gap on a regular basis as their decisions will typically affect these activities in some way. A lot has been done to explore how we create stronger grassroots efforts as well as stronger institutions, but not a lot has been done to define the principles and practices essential to these two building blocks of communities as they relate to each other.

Most folks who work in the gap have never really thought about it. They are caught between the requirements of their respective institutions and the neighborhoods they work in. This ground breaking workshop focused on and explored the "gap" that exists between strong neighborhoods and the institutions/people that work with, and within, them. The workshop was attended by over 40 individuals who freely discussed and shared their thoughts in order to frame and define the shift in the WHY and WHAT "gappers" do, while helping us to develop a new mental model for strengthening our region's neighborhoods and similar citizen led efforts.

WORKSHOP SUMMARY

This report condenses and summarizes the results of four separate questions which were asked of the participants during the morning long session. While these focused on 'neighborhoods', they could apply to nearly any grassroots, citizen led initiative:

1. What does working the gap mean for you / your role / your relationship with the residents/neighborhoods/community that you serve?
2. What could your role look like if you applied the principles of good gap work to your relationship with residents/neighbors/community?
3. If we were to get better at being a gapper, what would we continue to do? What would we stop doing?
4. What structures or systems would need to be in place, improved, or modified to be a more successful gapper?

Small group sessions resulted in a wealth of responses, opinions and suggestions on how we can be better define "the gap" and methods by which we can better work within it (see Appendix A for the raw exercise results). The data showed patterns which lead to the overall categorization of the results into a series of ideas and thoughts on "rules" (what gappers need to be cognizant of when engaging neighborhoods), and a set of ideas related to "tools" (techniques and resources which may help to facilitate engagement and positive change). Other thoughts lent themselves naturally to a "stop doing this....and start doing this" type of mantra. While the summary is simplified to a great degree, an extensive amount of work could be put into many of

the points to further flesh out the actual “best practices” which need to be employed in order to be effective at facilitating positive change in our neighborhoods.

HOW WILL THIS INFORMATION BE USED?

The core planning team felt that this feedback provided a solid foundation for moving forward with efforts that could change the entire paradigm of “neighborhood planning”. Efforts that could fundamentally shift the relationships between institutions and neighborhoods so that they (neighborhoods) serve as “co-producers” of their futures, not just recipients of services.

The Neighborhood Partners 2 effort has decided to further develop these concepts and approaches in the hopes that four short-term outcomes will result:

1. The creation a “Gappers Network”, comprised of interested institutional staff from throughout region, which meets regularly to receive training and information vital to changing the way they engage, interact with, and support their neighborhoods. This could include learning sessions ranging from asset mapping to leadership styles;
2. The creation of the “Gappers Network” also as a forum for the exchange of information and experiences pertaining to ‘best practices’ (tools) for neighborhood planning and engagement;
3. The creation of community specific “Change Teams” who will champion these approaches internally within their institutions. These Change Teams could be comprised of municipal department heads who seek to improve policy and service delivery to neighborhoods, or a faith-based organization who attempts to provide assistance to systemic problems that may be present within our neighborhoods.
4. The creation of a more detailed “Guidebook” to assist those who work in the gap. The guidebook would be based on the framework and organization of this report. It would contain much more detail on how and why the “rules” apply, as well as lengthier lists of “tools” and where more resources can be found on how to use or leverage them.

The core team feels that many other communities and institutions, no matter how large or small, can learn and benefit from this developing approach. As such, we hope you join us and participate meaningfully in its growth and success.

The East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission gives great thanks to our partners on this collaborative and innovative effort which will hopefully have long lasting effects on the quality of our region’s communities. Please feel free to contact East Central or any of its partners for more information about this effort, or to offer information or opinions which might further this work

12 RULES FOR “GOOD GAP WORK”

1. Focus on assets, not needs
2. Plan with people, not for people (co-producers of neighborhood change)
3. Understand social structures and do not inhibit the natural association of citizens
4. Go to them, do not ask them to come to you
5. Build trust & relationships
6. Embrace diversity in all respects and encourage interaction
7. Be proactive, not reactive
8. No preconceived ideas / be flexible / create new paradigm
9. Realize that policy can get in the way
10. Collaborate & integrate
11. Keep positive & have fun
12. Take risks

TOOLS FOR GAPPERS

ENGAGEMENT CONCEPTS

- Asset mapping
- Ask neighbors their story
- Reframe conversation
- Adaptive change
- Storytelling
- Find new ways to reach out
- Food is very helpful for bringing people together

PERSONAL SKILLS

- Communication
- Balancing
- Listening deeper
- Connecting
- Listening / Understanding
- Align efforts with assets/gifts of clients

COLLABORATION

- Seeking partners
- Networking with others
- Outreach
- School involvement - working on changing ways teachers/admins interact with kids

EDUCATION & TRAINING OPPORUNITIES

- Trained neighborhood coaches
- Aces training
- Leadership training & development
- Tenants need to know their rights and responsibilities
- Effective program design

SOCIAL

- Family, mentoring program
- Mental health assistance
- Encourage conversations between neighbors
- Teach codes of behavior that are not being taught by parents
- Increasing understanding of other cultures
- Succession in neighborhoods is important

PHYSICAL

- Branding and neighborhood identity
- Try to figure out where “neighborhood” boundaries lie
- Infrastructure design dictates interaction
- Library is a connecting point

POLICY & OPERATIONS

- Improve policies for open meetings/public hearing
- Leadership support
- Interdepartmental cooperation. (INTERNAL / EXTERNAL)
- Create buy-in programs
- Strategic plans → to integrate gap work
- Need more flexibility to be a person in an institution and not be constrained by city rules

PROGRAMS

- Habitat “Rock the Block” Program
- “National Night Out” Program

FUNDING

- Cost sharing
- Funding resources
- Public & private increased funding
- Regular engagement of foundations/donors

MEASUREMENT

- Performance indicators, output measures
- Success stories
- Need a list of projects/ideas on the docket
- Action: need to show results and fruits of their labor

Guidance for Good Gap Work

STOP doing this.....	START doing this.....
Expecting people to come to you/us	Going out into the neighborhood, having a true presence
Being too prescriptive	Listening and absorbing
Doing needs assessments	Doing asset inventories
Figuring out what you can do for the neighborhood (advocating as staff)	Figuring out what the neighborhood can do for itself (empowering people/neighborhoods)
Focusing on outputs (# of projects, \$ spent, # of people involved)	Focusing on outcomes (what were the results?)
Having meetings in government spaces	Utilizing existing social centers within the neighborhood
Expecting rapid change	Being ok with incremental change
Believing we have all the solutions	Seeking solutions from within the neighborhood
Trying to solve all of the big picture problems	Focusing on the priorities that matter to the neighborhood
Making excuses	Making progress
Doing things that aren't working	Being more creative
Accepting that "this is how things have always been"	Being open to trying something new
Being rigid and inflexible	Being more accommodating and adaptable