

COPPC CENTRAL

FALL 1999



Engaged Universities Are Central to Strong Communities

Colleges and Universities Work Well With CDBG

For the past 25 years, states and localities have taken advantage of the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)—the nation's most effective and successful block grant program—to create jobs, expand business opportunities, develop decent affordable housing, and provide services to the most vulnerable U.S. families. Created by the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, CDBG allows states and localities discretionary use of funds to address local needs. Recognizing the importance of this flexible, but stable, funding stream, colleges, universities, and their community partners are using CDBG funds to leverage private investment and conduct community development and revitalization projects in distressed neighborhoods.

Colleges and universities across the country use CDBG to undertake a wide array of activities. Combined with university resources, CDBG funds promote homeownership, entrepreneurship, and community revitalization. Increasingly, local governments are distributing their CDBG funds to nonprofit organizations for affordable housing development and community building. In partnerships where universities lend their academic and research expertise, nonprofits

are developing low-income housing, making repairs to elderly housing, and providing counseling to first-time homebuyers. Universities and nonprofits also form partnerships to conduct community cleanups and train residents to become community leaders. In East St. Louis, Illinois, the Community Outreach Partnership Center (COPC) of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign opened a one-stop shop for neighborhood associations, nonprofit developers, and residents to access university resources. The staff at this Neighborhood Technical Assistance Center offers design assistance for housing developments, and leadership training for residents, and organizes faculty and students to help residents complete community projects.

Although rehabilitation of affordable housing has traditionally been the largest single use of CDBG funds by local governments, the program has also become an important catalyst for economic development activities to expand job and business opportunities for low-income families and neighborhoods. Working with their partners, universities design economic development plans to increase neighborhood investment, reclaim brownfields, and reduce unemployment.

COPCs, such as East Tennessee State University and Kean University, use university resources and CDBG funds to set up small business incubators and job-training centers where faculty and students can help residents become entrepreneurs, earn GEDs, and develop job skills. The Kean University COPC is setting up a virtual business incubator and filling the need for childcare services by training residents to be childcare providers.

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"From major metropolitan cities to small rural communities, the CDBG program has been the driving force and often the only source of grant funds behind housing rehabilitation, neighborhood improvements, and local economic development activities."

Secretary Andrew Cuomo

COPC LEVERAGES CDBG FUNDS TO EXPAND COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

Rev. Matthew Barber's congregation at the Open Door Tabernacle worked for years to shut down a bar that peddled alcohol, drugs, and prostitution in its Johnson City, Tennessee, neighborhood. When the bar finally closed earlier this year, Barber convinced the building's absentee landlord to deed the property to the church. He then called Dr. Jerry Leger at nearby East Tennessee State University (ETSU).

Barber needed help repairing his newly acquired building and turning it into a community center that could house small businesses owned by neighborhood residents. He predicted that Leger, principal investigator for ETSU's Keystone University Partnership Center (KUPC), could help.

Barber was right. Leger agreed to represent Keystone on the Wilson Avenue Task Force, a committee formed to decide the building's future. He also introduced neighborhood entrepreneurs to Tom Anderson, director of the Southern Appalachian Community Development Corporation (SACDC). SACDC, established in the summer of 1999, is a Keystone-sponsored program that provides loans and technical support to start-up businesses like those planned for Barber's building.

"We will be a little easier to deal with than a bank because we understand the situation these small business owners are in," says Anderson. "We'll be helping them make a go of it, not just handing them money and walking away."

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COPC LEVERAGES

Johnson City provides \$15,000 a year in Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to pay a portion of Anderson's salary. Funds for SACDC's loan pool come from local banks and foundations. Anderson anticipates hiring student interns from ETSU's College of Business to help him run SACDC programs. Professors in the university's Small Business Development Center are currently working with SACDC to develop loan applications and design its technical assistance program.

SACDC is one of many programs made possible by Leger and Keystone Director Dr. Judith Hammond, who have an uncanny ability to leverage COPC grant funds and garner in-kind contributions from university departments. For example, Johnson City's \$15,000-a-year contribution to SACDC prompted the nearby city of Bristol to contribute \$10,000 in CDBG funds to make the corporation a regional enterprise. Earlier this year, KUPC used COPC funds to support a dental clinic for low-income residents that ETSU's School of Dentistry operates with the help of local volunteer dentists and ETSU dental hygiene students. The students rotate through the clinic as part of their course in dental hygiene.

COPC funds also helped to expand eligibility requirements for an existing welfare-to-work job-training program operated by the university and funded by the Tennessee Department of Human Services and the Private Industry Council. The training program can now serve all interested neighborhood residents even if they are not former recipients of Aid to Families With Dependent Children. The city also committed \$24,000 in CDBG funds over the next 3 years to establish a career resource room where local residents can research new careers, write resumes, and find job openings.

KUPC operates its job-training program, career resource room, dental clinic, and SACDC from the old Keystone School, a city-owned one-stop service center located approximately 2 miles from campus. Local residents, who come to the Keystone School for one service, are likely to take advantage of others because the building's tenants work closely together and refer clients to one another. The former elementary school houses the city's offices of community development and fair housing as well as its mortgage assistance programs. Good Samaritan Interfaith Ministry operates a food pantry, a clothing closet, and other aid programs. The local hospital runs an adult daycare center and a health clinic for the elderly. A domestic violence center supports women living in troubled households and the Johnson City public school system offers adult basic education courses onsite. Organizations located in the center receive staff support with the help of KUPC's learning liaison who matches college students with internships in the community. Students not only earn college credit for these experiences but they also learn how each organization serves the community.

Working with these partners has been the most rewarding aspect of the COPC grant for Hammond, who has been a full professor in the university's department of sociology for 20 years. "It's really a neat place to be," says Hammond about KUPC. "It gives faculty members and students the opportunity to be treated as partners, not just by other faculty members and students, but by community organizations like the chamber of commerce. It's fun out here."

For additional information, call Dr. Judith Hammond, Keystone University Partnership Center, at (423) 232-5733. ■

CDBG Funds Community Development Programs at Kean University

Public housing residents in Elizabeth, New Jersey, will be moving into new homes over the next few years thanks to a \$28 million HOPE VI grant the city received in 1997. The Kean University Community Outreach Partnership Center (COPC) is playing a key role in ensuring that those residents and their neighbors in the city's Elizabethport neighborhood have access to job opportunities along with the new housing units. The city of Elizabeth has allocated \$50,000 in Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to Kean to support the effort.

Once a thriving industrial area, Elizabethport is the city's oldest neighborhood—the one most in need of revitalization and repair—according to Alfred J. Faella, Elizabeth's director of Neighborhood Services. Per capita income of the neighborhood's

four census tracts averages \$8,700 per year.

"The HOPE VI grant will help us build a lot of new housing," says Faella. "But housing is not the only issue we need to address in this neighborhood. There are human needs, such as getting people from where they are to where they want to be. That's where Kean comes in. It has the professional expertise to help us fill many of the gaps that the HOPE VI project can't address."

Among those gaps are jobs, childcare, and economic development—all identified as neighborhood needs by a coalition of community organizations called the Neighborhood Empowerment Council (NEC). In response to NEC's assessment, the Kean University COPC is gearing up to establish the Family Daycare Network and the Virtual Business Incubator



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CDBG Supports Dynamic COPC Center in East St. Louis

In the early 1990s, East St. Louis, Illinois, watched as businesses and industries left the city, unemployment climbed to 30 percent, and tax rolls shrank as residents moved to the suburbs. Nonetheless, long-time residents remained committed to their community. That commitment has paid off and community revitalization projects are underway in many neighborhoods. These projects are guided by the Neighborhood Technical Assistance Center (NTAC) established by the East St. Louis Action Research Project (ESLARP)—the COPC of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Located in downtown East St. Louis, NTAC provides residents with easy access to university resources, professional expertise, and technical assistance services.

Created in 1995 using \$90,000 in HUD COPC grant funds and \$90,000 in CDBG funds, NTAC often is the first place residents go for advice on a project. The idea for NTAC developed as professors and students from the university's architecture, landscape architecture, and urban and regional planning programs worked with eight of the poorest neighborhoods in East St. Louis to create development plans. After completing the plans, it was clear that residents had many ideas for redeveloping their community, but they needed technical guidance to implement their plans.

The one-stop service center provides local residents, neighborhood associations, religious institutions, social service agencies, and municipal agencies with a full line of community development

assistance services. "Anyone who has an idea can drop by the center. The staff helps determine if the idea is feasible and what resources the community can use to develop the project," comments Ken Reardon, associate professor in urban and regional planning at Illinois.

In 1998 more than 40 East St. Louis organizations received help in areas such as comprehensive planning, affordable housing development, small business assistance, community organizing, leadership development, and nonprofit management. Support for these services is provided through CDBG funds from the East St. Louis Community Development Corporation and the East St. Louis Enterprise Community Program.

Since the creation of NTAC "demand for services has skyrocketed," says Reardon. He attributes the demand to NTAC's commitment to community-based planning and to its staff, which includes an architect, a planner, a nonprofit manager, and a community organizer. Eleven East St. Louis neighborhoods have taken advantage of NTAC's services. Residents have developed community gardens using designs prepared by NTAC staff. Neighborhood organizations applying for HOME funds use the center to develop affordable housing plans and cost estimates. NTAC also assists nonprofit developers in designing low-income housing developments.

"NTAC does not replace campus-based involvement,"

that will serve all Elizabethport residents by fall 1999.

The Family Daycare Network is an ambitious effort to support both working parents and daycare providers. The program will recruit and finance certification training for local residents who are interested in establishing 1 of 45 family daycare centers in the neighborhood. COPC will rely on students and faculty in several university departments to provide advanced childcare training to providers and establish a mentoring program for working parents, many of whom will be making the transition from welfare to work. The students will work 8 to 10 hours a week and receive small stipends and college credit. The Family Daycare Network, expected to serve 225 children, received \$22,500 from CDBG, which will be used to purchase equipment for providers.

The Virtual Business Incubator, which received \$9,400 in CDBG funds, will help fledgling small businesses in the neighborhood start up and remain viable,

says COPC Director Dr. Susan S. Lederman. CDBG funds will purchase office and computer equipment to which small business owners will have access.

Incubator staff will work closely with the university's Small Business Development Center, a 10-year-old university program that will review business plans and lend its expertise to specific incubator activities. In addition, undergraduate cooperative education students in Kean's School of Business, Government, and Technology will receive college credit and a stipend to spend a full semester recruiting participants and providing business plan and technical assistance to fledgling businesses. Undergraduate interns will also receive college credit for serving as mentors in the incubator's Youth Entrepreneurship Program, which will place high school students in apprenticeships at local small businesses.

For more information, contact Dr. Susan S. Lederman, Kean University, at (908) 629-7269. ■

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CDBG Supports Dynamic

comments Reardon. It provides a convenient, central location for community leaders to request assistance from the University. Once a request is received, the NTAC staff works with the campus-based ESLARP faculty and staff to determine how to optimally meet requests. In some cases, ESLARP and NTAC work together to organize volunteer weekend community improvement projects. University faculty, students, and neighborhood residents work side by side to clear trash-filled lots, prepare community gardens, set up the East St. Louis Farmers' Market for the season, and make minor repairs to the homes of low-income families.

During each semester, neighborhoods also receive help from students to devise and update their 5-year stabilization and revitalization plan. In the spring 1999 semester, 50 architecture, landscape architecture, and urban and regional planning students worked with the Alta Sita neighborhood to complete its strategic plan. The community planning process taps the knowledge of residents and allows the students to witness firsthand the revitalization efforts of a distressed neighborhood.

For more information, contact: Cathy Klump, Director, Neighborhood Technical Assistance Center, East St. Louis, Illinois, (618) 271-9605. ■

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Colleges and Universities

Localities allocate their CDBG funds according to their consolidated plans, which include comprehensive housing and community development needs assessments and strategies, updated every 3 to 5 years. Grantees must also develop annual action plans that show how CDBG and other block grant funds will be used to address those needs. Consolidated planning, instituted under HUD Secretary Andrew Cuomo, provides communities and residents a greater role in determining how to use HUD funds. University faculty and students play an important part in developing the community needs assessments by conducting local surveys. COPCs also offer technical

assistance for strategic development and evaluation in many cities and towns.

The CDBG program serves the needs of low- and moderate-income families from rural communities, urban areas, and metropolitan communities across the nation. This issue of *COPC Central* illustrates some of the ways COPC grantees are using CDBG funds in their communities to meet important revitalization needs. ■

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