



Defining Social Infrastructure and Its Structural Components in the Context of Escambia County's RESTORE Act Advisory Committee's Adopted Project Evaluation Criteria and Selection Processes

Overview of DPA's Recommendation to the RESTORE Act Advisory Subcommittee

The lack of social infrastructure planning activities by the RESTORE Act Advisory Committee highlight the integrative functions of social infrastructure and physical infrastructure that are critically needed in order to create 'transformational' outcomes for Escambia County's disadvantaged neighborhoods to be derived from RESTORE Act funding. The RESTORE Act Advisory Committee should adopt policy statements and RESTORE Project evaluation criteria and selection process that promotes and makes provisions for approving funding for social infrastructure projects and "those institutions which are the building blocks of civil society, the places where the community sector functions, where there is support for organizations to form and grow and where social capital gets created."

The contrast between communities with "strong" infrastructure and ones with "weak" infrastructure is clearly demonstrated throughout the United States. Municipalities developing 'strong' infrastructure will integrate physical and social planning and development and will invest adequately in both. In contrast, 'weak' infrastructure will indicate a continuing separation of the physical and social requirements of a community. Thus, for a strong infrastructure to exist in Escambia County it is critical that there is adequate investment by RESTORE Act funding in both physical and social types of infrastructure.

Defining Social Infrastructure

Social infrastructure is defined as, "a complex system of facilities, programs, and social networks that aims to improve people's quality of life. These services, networks and physical assets work in tandem to form the foundation of a strong neighborhood."

The social infrastructure of Escambia County can be provided within disadvantaged neighborhoods (internal infrastructure) or provided to disadvantaged neighborhoods by a source that is located or operates from outside of the neighborhood (external infrastructure). The types of organizations and institutions that make up this infrastructure range from issue-based organizations which focus broadly on specific issues such as youth rights; neighborhood membership-based organizations such as residents' and tenants' associations; direct service organizations that support human development such as health clinics, child care programs and multi-services centers; faith and spiritual organizations and/or religious congregations that provide community space and may provide programs/projects/facilities; and public common places that offer opportunities for adults and youth to enjoy social and recreational activities. Also included are local businesses and other local institutions that have an intimate stake in the well-being of the neighborhood in which they are located.

Categorizing Social Infrastructure: Six Clusters

Escambia County's "quality of life" in disadvantaged neighborhoods is influenced by three significant factors:

1. The community programs/projects/facilities offered within the community,
2. The social relations among residents, and
3. Other participants in the community and the physical environment of the community.

This section of this report focuses specifically on the continuum of programs/projects/facilities that work to improve the quality of life of community members, how these programs/projects/facilities interact with each

other, and the impact they have on both social relations and the physical environment within the communities they serve.

Researchers in various disciplines studying the regeneration of cities and the factors associated with neighborhood well-being identify a similar range of services, facilities and networks that are part of “comeback cities” and neighborhoods that have reduced poverty and overcome adversity. However, these services, facilities and networks may be categorized differently.

Escambia County lacks a broad range of community programs/projects/facilities that are similar to that are demonstrated in these “comeback cities” and neighborhoods. Escambia County’s community programs/projects/facilities do not work inter-dependently within communities and across communities and are provided by a non-integrated mixture of community organizations, faith groups and various levels of government.

This report classifies the type of social infrastructure that the RESTORE Act Advisory Committee should make provisions for in their RESTORE Project evaluation/selection criteria and process into a six-pronged typology that emphasizes how they seek to contribute to the quality of life in their community, as follows: (1) Quality of physical life; (2) Human development; (3) Services designated for specific populations; (4) Rights and advocacy; (5) Local economy; and (6) Physical environment.

Cluster One – Quality of Physical Life

The quality of physical life cluster is comprised of organizations and institutions that secure basic health, emergency, housing and sustainability in each neighborhood. An essential part of the social fabric that builds strong neighborhoods is an effective and coordinated system of health programs/projects/facilities, emergency programs/projects/facilities and housing programs/projects/facilities. Examples of these types of programs/projects/facilities include:

1. Community-based health programs/projects/facilities (incl. community health and mental health)
2. Public health programs/projects/facilities
3. Emergency and crisis programs/projects/facilities (incl. food banks, fire and emergency medical services)
4. Social, affordable and emergency housing (incl. shelters and support to homeless people)

Cluster Two – Human Development

Neighborhoods provide public common spaces in which human development is nurtured. For the very young, seniors and people with disabilities, the neighborhood is often the primary public common space in their lives. This cluster includes programs/projects/facilities that combine a broad mix of public, private and community organizations working with families and individuals with the goal of strengthening the future as well as present assets of the community. Examples of these types of RESORE Projects include:

1. Child and family project/facilities (including child care, family resource centers)
2. Recreation and wellness project/facilities
3. Community arts and cultural organizations
4. Public schools (K-12)
5. Public libraries with “technology centers”
6. Post-secondary education (including colleges, universities, apprenticeship institutions)
8. Adult education, workforce training and employment programs/projects/facilities

Cluster Three – Cross-Community Support Programs/projects/facilities

The cross-community support programs/projects/facilities cluster includes programs/projects/facilities that are provided to specific populations within neighborhoods. Often these programs/projects/facilities are provided by organizations serving a broad constituency that spans many neighborhoods. For example, the YMCA, a county-wide agency, provides programs/projects/facilities for citizens in many parts of the county. Examples of such RESORE Projects include those designed for:

1. Women
2. At-Risk Youth
3. Lesbian/Gay/Bi-sexual/Trans-gendered people (including parents and families)
4. People with disabilities
5. Seniors
6. Ethno-cultural and ethno-racial groups

Cluster Four– Rights and Advocacy

Social relations among community members are complex and often reflect many dimensions of inequality. As a response to conditions of inequality, some organizations may see the need to expand their direct programs/projects/facilities beyond their neighborhoods and beyond their core services to promote systemic change through civic engagement and advocacy efforts. Multi -service agencies work with a wide range of constituents and often provide leadership and support to networks and coalitions. Examples of such organizations/groups include:

1. Consumer/Environmental protection agencies
2. Networks, coalitions and advocacy groups (may have a local and/or issue focus)
3. Civic engagement organizations (including school councils, social planning councils, neighborhood associations)
4. Legal programs/projects/facilities (including legal aid clinics, tenant associations)
5. Multi-service agencies.

Cluster Five – Neighborhood Economy

The fifth cluster of social infrastructure includes the small businesses and labor organizations that have programs/projects/facilities that provide an intricate link to the neighborhood economy. Key players are organizations that promote the quality of work environments within their neighborhoods and public and non-profit organizations that seek to provide a safety net for those members of the community that fall between the cracks in the labor market. Examples of such programs/projects/facilities include:

1. Business Improvement Associations/Better Business Bureaus
2. Small businesses and cooperative associations
3. Labor groups (including local unions)
4. Asset-building strategies (Individual Development Accounts, community economic development and social economy initiatives)

Cluster Six – Physical Environment

For neighborhoods to prosper they must be seen as safe places that are aesthetically pleasing and encourage social interaction among residents and stakeholders within the community. The physical environment cluster includes the programs/projects/facilities and institutions that promote harmonious social relations in neighborhoods. Examples of these types of programs/projects/facilities include:

1. Parks and public spaces
2. Initiatives to ensure accessibility (including design features and services)
3. Mobility services (including ECAT) and public transportation
4. Community safety (Crime Stoppers, community policing, safety audits)
5. Neighborhood Revitalization Projects