

Kids Matter Here

An Analytic Review of the 10-Year Good Neighborhoods Initiative

by Tom Burns with Prue Brown, Marie Colombo and Siobhan O’Laoire

Improving the Places Where Detroit’s Kids Live

The Skillman Foundation’s Good Neighborhoods Initiative (GNI) was a 10-year, place-based investment strategy to measurably improve the lives of kids living in six Detroit neighborhoods where some 65,000 children lived – nearly one-third of city’s youth population.

Drawing inspiration from other efforts underway in communities across the country, the Foundation committed to directing at least \$100 million in grant resources – the majority of its available grant dollars – toward the initiative from 2006-2016. By concentrating its investments in communities where Detroit’s children live and learn, it sought to bring greater intensity and strategic focus to its work. The overarching goals of GNI were to ensure that children living in

the selected neighborhoods were “safe, healthy, well-educated, and prepared for adulthood.”

Understanding GNI’s results and lessons. In 2016, the Skillman Foundation embarked on a year-long Analytic Review to help inform the Foundation’s work going forward and make GNI’s results and lessons available to local and national audiences. Numerous products of the Analytic Review – including a Summary Report and more than a dozen other reports and essays – are available on the Foundation’s website. These documents capture how this decade of work evolved, what it accomplished, and what lessons it offers for the field. This Executive Summary highlights key findings from the Analytic Review.

Highlights of What GNI Accomplished

Education

- High school graduation rates increased from 65% to 81% in GNI neighborhoods, a greater rate of increase than citywide.
- A cross-sector coalition formed, focused on revamping Detroit’s education system. The work of the coalition resulted in \$667 million from the State to address the fiscal health of Detroit Public Schools and restored local control to Detroit citizens.

Expanding Opportunities for Youth

- Youth development opportunities increased from 10,000 to 14,000 from 2010 to 2014.
- Summer youth employment opportunities increased from 2,500 slots available citywide in 2008 to 8,000 paid jobs with training in 2016, through a broader public-private collaboration the Foundation helped to create.

Resident capacity and leadership

- New networks were formed among resident leaders, increasing their capacity to influence local conditions on behalf of children.
- Newly established governance groups provided a vehicle for articulating and taking action on neighborhood priorities in five GNI neighborhoods.
- Over 800 small grants were awarded for resident-led projects that helped to address community priorities and needs.

Safety and Blight Elimination

- Crime rates declined by 40% in all GNI neighborhoods over the years 2009 to 2016.
- Youth victimization rates decreased by 47% in GNI-designated areas from 2009 to 2016.
- Early support for targeted blight removal in one GNI neighborhood informed an expanded approach involving 12,000 projects, the most aggressive blight removal effort to date in Detroit.

How the Good Neighborhoods Initiative Evolved

The initiative evolved over three phases:

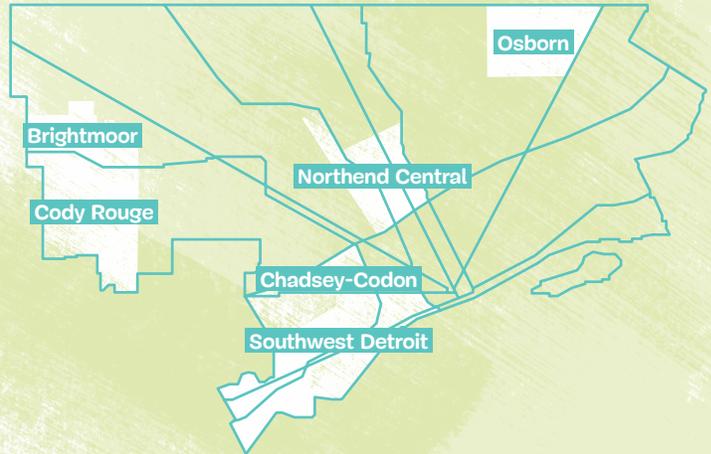
- A 2-year period of community planning - Engaging residents and building trust within the target neighborhoods.
- A 3-year readiness phase - Significant capacity investments made in neighborhood resident leaders, grant partners and intermediary organizations.
- A 5-year implementation phase - Review and reset of the Foundation's course, adopting a mega-goal of improving high school graduation rates, and a more integrated strategic framework.

A two-tiered strategy focused on neighborhoods and systems.

The Foundation remodeled its staffing structure to support direct involvement in planning and program implementation. It also reached outward to intermediaries and implementing partners for substantive expertise and technical support.

Perhaps even more significant, the Foundation recognized that to accomplish GNI's goals, it would have to work on children's issues at both the neighborhood and systems levels. Thus it began exploring how to draw more fully on its non-grant resources – including its staff and board networks, deep local knowledge, civic reputation, professional expertise, access to national resources, and political capital. No longer could it be primarily a grantmaker; instead it had to become an effective changemaker.

Selecting neighborhoods. The Foundation chose six neighborhoods with high concentrations of children and levels of need: Brightmoor, Chadsey-Codon, Cody Rouge, Northend Central, Osborn and Southwest Detroit.



Four strategy areas. Beginning in 2011, as the Foundation transitioned to its final implementation phase, its strategy became more sharply focused on a mega-goal to increase graduation rates among schools serving children within GNI neighborhoods. By 2014, the initiative evolved to aligning efforts across four strategy areas – Education, Youth Development, Safety and Community Leadership – to achieve this goal.

Four GNI Strategy Areas

Education

- Increase school quality through capacity building
- Build infrastructure to support parent and student advocacy on school options
- Strengthen infrastructure to identify and scale high-performing school operators
- Make citywide education investments to strengthen human capital, advocate for system change, and increase availability and use of data

Youth Development

- Ensure accountability and capacity for quality and scale
- Build public will for youth development
- Develop infrastructure for a coordinated youth development system

Community Leadership

- Build capacity and infrastructure to support equitable partnerships
- Support leadership development pathways for community residents
- Facilitate network weaving and create collaborative platforms
- Strengthen critical community assets

Safety

- Create safe pathways to schools
- Support community-embedded policing
- Transform community culture and attitudes around safety
- Support additional youth violence interventions

What the Good Neighborhoods Initiative Accomplished

Expanded community engagement and leadership. Investment in resident participation and leadership expanded and connected a network of caring adults working on behalf of Detroit's children.

Improved youth programs. Thousands more kids living in GNI neighborhoods are now served by a continuum of higher quality, better coordinated neighborhood youth programs. A growing number of youth living in GNI neighborhoods and impacted by the Foundation's investments have stepped into new roles as emerging leaders now better able to contribute to Detroit's comeback.

Educational gains. Some school-based educational improvement efforts have improved outcomes for kids in GNI neighborhoods. Graduation rates among schools serving children in GNI neighborhoods have outpaced citywide levels. However, the breadth of institutional challenges facing Detroit schools limited GNI's potential impact.

Improvements in safety and blight. As a result of improved community relationships and better use of data and technology, crime rates dropped by 40 percent across all GNI neighborhoods – outpacing trends for the city as a whole. Youth victimization rates were nearly cut in half from 2009 to 2016. Blight removal efforts within the GNI neighborhoods informed citywide efforts to clear blight.

Leverage of additional public and private investments. The Foundation's concentrated investment approach helped the GNI neighborhoods become magnets for additional public and private investments equal to 10 times the Foundation's GNI investments.

Social innovation investments. Later in GNI, the Foundation began to incorporate a social innovation investment approach that used financial tools such as program- and mission-related investments (PRIs and MRIs). These investments totaled around \$4 million, of which 80 percent have been capacity-building and seeding grants.

Civic leadership efforts. Over the course of GNI, the Foundation became more intentional about building productive working relationships, not only with community residents but also with a wider range of potential allies. This included its dealings with the business community and levels of government from municipal all the way to the White House. Its pursuit of an expanded civic leadership role led to changes in public policy, new or expanded partnerships, and better alignment of dollars to benefit of Detroit's youth.

Notable examples of the Foundation's civic leadership included:

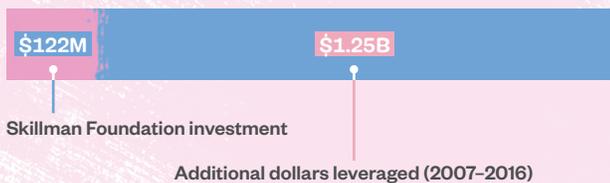
Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren. The Foundation played a lead role in shaping a cross-sector coalition to address the financial and structural challenges facing Detroit's underperforming public school system.

Citywide youth employment partnership. Building on efforts that began under former Detroit Mayor Dave Bing, the Foundation worked closely with his successor, Mayor Mike Duggan, to lead the development of a public-private partnership providing over 8,000 summer jobs to Detroit youth by 2016.

Expanded opportunities for young men and boys of color. The Foundation played a lead convening role for then-President Obama's My Brother's Keeper initiative in Detroit.

New civic data capacity. The Foundation worked with the Kresge Foundation to establish Data Driven Detroit as a new citywide data resource. It also helped the City build needed infrastructure to access and deploy more federal and state funding, and supported improvements in how the Detroit Police Department utilizes data and technology in neighborhood policing.

GNI Grant Investments and Leverage



The Good Neighborhoods Initiative ranks among the largest and longest multi-site place-based efforts to improve children's lives within any single US city.

GNI's Broader Lessons

Better results can be achieved through improved strategy alignment at the community level. The Foundation's community partners have achieved better results when strategies and activities have been intentionally aligned within smaller geographies.

Localized educational performance gains proved hard to sustain in the face of intractable system-level challenges. The Foundation's increasingly powerful citywide education leadership role has had a positive influence on the education landscape. However, its numerous investments in school-based educational quality improvement tended to be overwhelmed by larger system dysfunctions. For an understanding of Detroit's challenges during 2006-2016, visit www.skillman.org/GNI.

Changemaking can be a strong complement to place-based grant investments. The adoption of a changemaking role that fully deploys all a foundation's available assets can greatly enhance what could be accomplished relying on grant dollars alone. Combining deep engagement in neighborhoods with broader policy and systems change investments improved results at both levels.

Civic leadership strategies require new and different investments. While potentially powerful in supporting a funder's mission and goals, civic leadership calls for unique skills and is challenging and time-intensive.

New investments in data and measurement can deliver wide-ranging benefits. All aspects of strategy and execution can be greatly improved through such investments – not only internally, but also in building capacity of grant partners and other stakeholders.

Sharing performance results can enhance accountability. By making measurement results widely available, foundations can best model accountability for results throughout the sectors in which they invest.

Organizational values and culture can be critical assets in sustaining the work. A foundation's norms and other cultural attributes can be a source of continuity within a longer term initiative, especially in times of staff change and environmental uncertainty.

Was GNI Worth it?

When judged on the basis of program accomplishments, the initiative provides reasons for the Skillman Foundation and its partners to celebrate the progress made – especially when those results are viewed in the context of the disruptive changes that occurred within the wider Detroit context during the same period. All the same, GNI was not successful in accomplishing all it aimed for. Stability has not been achieved in all of the neighborhoods, and in some instances, strong countervailing trends have led to a worsening of some conditions. GNI's human capital investments have expanded youth opportunities, grown the ranks of adult and youth leaders, and left most neighborhoods with more governance capacity. However, less synergy has resulted across the Foundation's diverse program investments – a result that might have been partly remedied by selecting smaller neighborhoods and connecting program strategies more intentionally from the start within the Foundation and on the ground.

Internally, the Foundation built new capacities and a stronger platform for working on behalf of Detroit's youth. It became more savvy and effective in its changemaking work and better at attracting corporate investments. The relationships and increased social capital accrued through GNI have opened new forms of collaboration with local and state governments as well as with other funders investing in Detroit.

All in all, the Foundation's decade-long effort improved conditions for many Detroit children and laid important groundwork for future investments in these and other Detroit neighborhoods.

“Seeing young people flourish through the neighborhoods initiative has been a tremendous experience. They are the legacy of this work.”



—Tonya Allen,
President & CEO of the Skillman
Foundation and architect of the
Good Neighborhoods Initiative

View the full summary of Kids Matter Here: An Analytic Review of the 10-Year Good Neighborhoods Initiative, as well as supplementary reports, at:
www.skillman.org/GNI