# WHITE HOUSE COUNCIL ON STRONG CITIES, STRONG COMMUNITIES

*Final Report*
*January 2017*

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## WELCOME FROM THE EXECUTIVE AND DEPUTY DIRECTORS

Dear readers of our final SC2 report,

Whether you're one of our active local or federal stakeholders working in or with one of the Strong Cities, Strong Communities (SC2) communities, someone interested in federal-local partnerships, or a member of the American public curious about this initiative and the use of taxpayer dollars, we welcome you and thank you for your time on behalf of the entire SC2 team. If you are new to SC2, the first section of the report provides an overview of the initiative with its mission and work components. When all of SC2's work concludes by summer 2017, this initiative will have partnered with more than 70 diverse cities spread across our great nation to move the needle on economic development challenges and ultimately coordinate taxpayer dollars more efficiently and effectively.

Each SC2 city shares a common narrative. Despite having faced tremendous economic and demographic challenges for the last few decades, local leaders and stakeholders have a strong vision for change and seek a better federal partner. This is the core of SC2—how the federal government can collaborate and coordinate across federal agencies, partner with states and localities, coordinate resources, and use evidence-based data to support a community's vision and serve as a better, more responsive federal partner. It may seem intuitive, but this is an approach that has real efficacy. Through SC2's experiences over the last five years, the testimonials of many mayors and local stakeholders of all political stripes, and external evaluations, we know that this approach works and makes common sense and business sense. This team has taken lessons learned from SC2 and worked with our federal agency partners to formalize this approach by helping to design an interagency Community Solutions Council. This Council offers a framework that captures key lessons learned from stakeholders for the next President to continue this "listening-based" approach to better federal coordination and partnership with communities.

We would also like to acknowledge the leadership and contributions of so many who have made our work a success: all of the local leaders, city staff, and partners in the cities we work with who have the vision and desire to bring positive change to their communities; our SC2 co-chairs HUD Secretary Julián Castro and Domestic Policy Director Cecilia Muñoz; former SC2 Executive Director Mark Linton and Deputies Kate Reynolds and Tricia Kerney-Willis; all the federal partners on the SC2 Council who run through the bureaucratic red tape and connect the dots; all SC2 team leads and federal team members who do the hard work on the ground in the cities we serve; all the federal staff who have served on the SC2 HQ team to keep operations running smoothly; the SC2 National Resource Network team, led by David Eichenthal, that traveled to so many cities to lend their expertise; former SC2 co-chair, OMB Director Shaun Donovan, and two former appointees instrumental to the creation of SC2, Erika Poethig and Derek Douglas; and to our interns who helped with this report and many other projects. Thank you for your time and interest in this important work.

Best regards,

Patrick Pontius, Executive Director, and Kate Dykgraaf, Deputy Director

# OVERVIEW OF STRONG CITIES, STRONG COMMUNITIES (SC2)

This overview provides a high level summary of SC2 and its four primary work streams. For more information on our work beyond content in this report, please visit the SC2 website.

## SC2 Background and Approach for Supporting Communities

In 2012, President Obama established the White House Council on Strong Cities, Strong Communities (SC2) as an innovative approach for supporting cities experiencing population and job loss, persistent poverty, capacity constraints, and similar challenges in an era of ever dwindling resources. Through SC2, 19 federal agencies work together in partnership with committed city leaders as they implement locally-driven economic visions. SC2 seeks to support each of its cities by increasing federal-local collaboration and improving how the federal government invests in and delivers technical assistance to advance locally-driven economic development and job creation goals. SC2 consists of four components and will ultimately work with more than 70 cities via:

1. SC2 Deployed Federal Community Solutions Teams
2. SC2 National Resource Network
3. SC2 Fellows and AmeriCorps VISTA Members
4. SC2 Economic Visioning Challenge

## (1) SC2 Deployed Federal Community Solutions Teams

In this 14-city pilot, a career civil servant from the federal government relocated and embedded in a mayor's office to serve for two years and coordinate a federal, interagency SC2 Community Solutions team to support the city's vision. These federal SC2 teams functioned as a nimble, solutions-oriented partner, cutting through federal red tape and leveraging resources to advance the city's economic development goals. SC2 launched two cohorts with deployed teams working in: Brownsville, TX; Macon-Bibb County, GA; Flint, MI; Rockford, IL; Gary, IN; Rocky Mount, NC; St. Louis, MO; Youngstown, OH; Detroit, MI; Memphis, TN; Chester, PA; New Orleans, LA; Fresno, CA; and Cleveland, OH. At the time of publication, all engagements have concluded except for Brownsville, TX, which will have a federal team until March 2017.

## (2) SC2 National Resource Network

To scale and develop the SC2 model further and reach up to 70 additional cities, the SC2 Council established the SC2 National Resource Network (SC2 NRN). With the oversight of the SC2 Council, and in coordination with a consortium of private sector, non-profit, and academic experts, the SC2 NRN provides:

- On-the-ground technical assistance accessible through a simple, rolling application
- Remote technical assistance accessible through a 311 for Cities feature
- Peer-to-peer city networking opportunities
- A one-stop interagency federal technical assistance clearinghouse and curated resource library
- Policy analysis and development

The consortium launched its one-stop resource platform and first-in-the-nation 311 for Cities service in May 2014,

available to more than 500 cities [on the SC2 NRN's website](#). Direct technical assistance engagements and the 311 service will continue through June 2017.

## (3) SC2 Fellows and AmeriCorps VISTA Members

The 14 pilot cities with SC2 Federal Community Solutions teams also received additional capacity from philanthropically funded fellows and AmeriCorps VISTA members.

Flint, MI was selected to be part of CNCS's Operation AmeriCorps program, which will support up to 80 AmeriCorps members through 2017.

Thanks to generous funding by the Rockefeller Foundation, with management by the German Marshall Fund of the United States, Cleveland State University, and the Virginia Tech Metropolitan Institute, the first six SC2 cities with deployed SC2 teams received mid-career, non-federal SC2 fellows to complement the work of the federal teams. More than two-thirds of the fellows remained in their local positions beyond the two-year term of the fellowship. The German Marshall Fund completed a [final report on the fellowship](#)

[program](#) in 2015. AmeriCorps VISTA members also provided additional capacity in several of the cities with deployed SC2 teams, thanks to AmeriCorps waiving the matching funds requirement for two VISTA members in each SC2-designated city.

## (4) SC2 Economic Visioning Challenge

The SC2 Economic Visioning Challenge (SC2 EVC) was a prize competition that the Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration (EDA) managed. The SC2 EVC produced comprehensive economic development blueprints in Greensboro, NC; Hartford, CT; and Las Vegas, NV.

*"The city is honored to have received six economic development strategies to accelerate job growth and business expansion, and we congratulate the winning team for its Global Opportunities Center concept. Those ideas will pave the way for the economic growth of our city."*

*-Jim Westmoreland, Greensboro City Manager*



**SC2 Cities, 2012-2017**

- 🟢 Community Solutions Team
- 🔴 Economic Visioning Challenge
- 🔵 National Resource Network
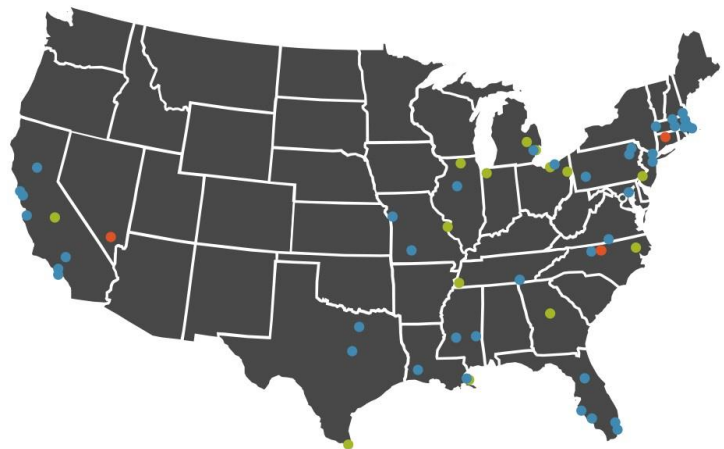
## THE VALUE ADDED: WHAT SC2 BRINGS TO THE TABLE

The Strong Cities, Strong Communities Initiative (SC2) has substantial evidence from ongoing work in more than 70 cities demonstrating the value of the SC2 approach. Mayors, city staff, local partners, federal agencies, and many more stakeholders attest to the efficacy of complementing a locally driven vision with the support of a coordinated, interagency federal team. These anecdotes are supported by quantitative data reported to the Office of Management and Budget as part of agency annual performance reporting and an evaluation from Abt Associates of the first six SC2 cities. Finally, SC2 has planned a final evaluation focused on the SC2 National Resource Network, forthcoming from the Urban Institute in late 2017.

*"Fresno has benefited from the Obama Administration's [multi]-agency Strong Cities, Strong Communities initiative, which helped Fresno with downtown development, transportation and workforce development…Fresno has substantially supported and improved as a result of the work and our partnership with the Obama Administration."*

-Ashley Swearengin, Mayor of Fresno, January 21, 2016

In particular, SC2 adds value by providing:
1. A better federal partner that supports local communities through stronger coordination, resulting in improved communication, local understanding of federal programs, and utilization of federal resources and stewardship of taxpayer dollars.
2. The power of convening and connecting resulting in new opportunities for collaboration and lasting partnerships across multiple sectors and all levels of government.
3. Enhanced capacity at the local level for constrained local governments.
4. Information, tools, and data that communities can use to make more informed decisions.

# 1. A BETTER FEDERAL PARTNER

The challenges many cities face are multi-dimensional and do not fall entirely within the purview of one agency or one federal program. However, multiple federal agencies have traditionally worked with local governments independently from one another, resulting in fragmented efforts and a limited scope for problem-solving. Further, the federal government has a history of often taking a one size fits all, top-down approach when working with local communities. The key innovation of the SC2 model is that it coordinates the efforts of 19 agencies to help communities use the resources available to them more effectively and find creative ways of meeting their local goals. All the communities with which SC2 works, no matter how challenged or capacity-constrained, come to the table with a locally developed vision and a request for this type of federal partnership.

Federal Funding Used More Effectively Due to SC2 Technical Assistance by Agency, FY15-16

$59,543,558

USDA
DOC: EDA
DOL
HUD
DOT
HHS
EPA
Other
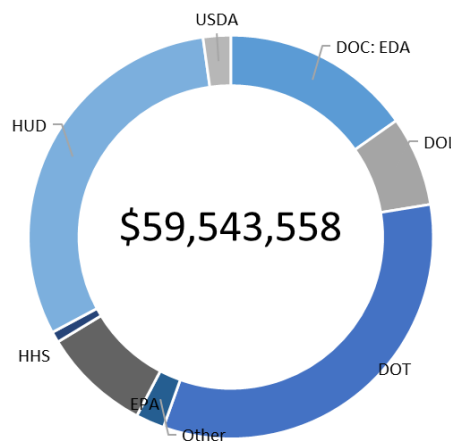
The achievements in SC2 cities demonstrate how the federal government can be a better, more coordinated, and responsive partner with local communities, supporting their local visions for economic prosperity by building capacity, collaborating on strategic visioning, and nurturing partnerships to better position cities for future federal grants. Bringing together traditionally disconnected federal agencies and efforts in a non-top-down, comprehensive manner that responds to a community's vision is a defining advantage of the SC2 approach. Some of the results of these improved federal-local partnerships include tapping into underutilized technical assistance and creatively blending funds from different sources in order to solve the most intractable problems, as the following examples demonstrate:

With the interagency coordination of SC2, **Gary, Indiana** was able to better leverage technical assistance and funding from EPA's Great Lakes Shoreline Cities Grant and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Chi-Cal Rivers Fund. Using this targeted technical assistance and over $600,000 in existing funding, the city developed a citywide green infrastructure strategy. This partnership began by incorporating green infrastructure on every U.S. Treasury Hardest Hit Fund

demolition site, and will expand to include greening the city's gateways and managing ongoing neighborhood-scale stormwater issues.

Similarly, SC2 team members in **Rocky Mount, North Carolina** built a Farm School by working across the USDA's Farm Service Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Services, the U.S. Department of Commerce, the North Carolina Department of Agriculture, the USDA Extension Service, the Forest Service, and the U.S. Small Business Administration to unlock almost $100,000 in Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) funding and a Matching Funds Agreement. The vision of the project is to provide year-long training in farming skills, business and marketing planning, partner relationship-building, and land and resource management, leaving students equipped to start their own businesses in the agriculture industry.

By bridging the efforts of different federal agencies, SC2 teams helped several cities overcome regulatory barriers that kept development from moving forward. One regulatory success was at the former Pruitt-Igoe housing site in **St. Louis, Missouri**. The EPA, the Army Corps of Engineers, and the City of St. Louis worked together to begin remediating the long abandoned site. This work led the State of Missouri Department of Natural Resources to issue a Certificate of Completion, clearing the path for future commercial redevelopment. The SC2 team continued work on the site by identifying further methods for remediation, strategies to address debris piles on the site, and resources to make it ready for redevelopment. With the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency's new western headquarters being built

directly to the north and a Choice Neighborhood Implementation Grant recently awarded to the east, major steps have been taken to position the site for future redevelopment.

An SC2 team also took an interagency approach to help a city move past regulatory obstacles in **Gary, Indiana.** The long-abandoned Sheraton Hotel had been a symbol of blight for over 30 years in the city's downtown. Building on the work of the Partnership for Sustainable Communities and coordinating the efforts of HUD, DOT, and EPA, the SC2 team helped realize the city's goal of demolishing the building in October 2014. The demolition served as a catalyst for neighborhood-supported revitalization and an opportunity to engage the community on future use of the site. SC2 also helped the city lead a community charrette to develop a vision for the site's reuse.

SC2 also helped **Macon-Bibb County, Georgia** to leverage funding from EPA to jumpstart downtown development. The county has several contaminated brownfield sites, many clustered in downtown Macon. The cost to the city alone of assessing and cleaning these sites is prohibitive. Through the SC2 engagement, EPA provided technical assistance and guidance on the county's past unsuccessful applications, resulting in its first successful application for a $400,000 EPA brownfields assessment grant in May 2015. Using this federal funding, the county is conducting assessments in a prime industrial corridor adjacent to the burgeoning downtown. These brownfields assessments will create more certainty for developers interested in investing in the area.

## Spotlight on the National Endowment for the Arts as a Better Federal Partner

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) is one of the nineteen federal agencies President Obama called on to collaborate in the SC2 Council, yet is one that often does not immediately come to mind as an important player in local redevelopment efforts. However, the NEA has a tremendous amount to offer. The NEA's funding, support, and partnerships foster arts learning, the celebration of America's rich and diverse cultural heritage, and also works to promote equal access to the arts in all communities. As an integral SC2 federal partner, the NEA has contributed significantly to the work in Rocky Mount, North Carolina and Macon-Bibb County, Georgia.

The **City of Rocky Mount, North Carolina** envisioned a rails-to-trails project originating at the redeveloped downtown train station and connecting the city's extensive parks and greenways system. SC2 convened NEA, EPA, USDA Rural Development, and Health and Human Services to work with the city on this project. As a result of collaboration with NEA, the rails-to-trails project will feature cultural and education sites including a plaza honoring Rocky Mount native Thelonious Monk, the Imperial Centre for the Arts and Sciences, the local library, and a new Brew Mill complex. EPA funded a feasibility study and convened local stakeholders to imagine the project—now named the Monk to Mill trail.

The NEA also identified the Arts+Agriculture Conference hosted by Art-Force, a national nonprofit, as an opportunity for the city's Imperial Centre for Arts and Sciences. Rocky Mount hosted the Arts+Leadership: Powering Rural Economies conference in March 2015.

In **Macon-Bibb County, Georgia**, a partnership with the NEA strengthened the Macon Arts Alliance's current efforts to develop an arts village as an adaptive reuse strategy for the Fort Hawkins neighborhood, known as the "Birthplace of Macon." By collaborating with SC2, the NEA provided capacity-building activities to the Arts Alliance on place-making programs, while EPA helped secure $40,000 for the Arts Alliance to host a sustainable design and community visioning workshop for this new Mill Hill arts village project.

These efforts resulted in the Art Alliance's first successful application for an NEA Our Town grant totaling $134,000 in July 2015. The grant will be used to develop an artist residency program in the neighborhood, prepare a cultural plan for Mill Hill, and implement ideas from the EPA-funded workshop.

## 2.    THE POWER OF CONVENING AND CONNECTING

Many communities face challenges when trying to convene and establish lasting relationships with important regional stakeholders from multiple sectors. SC2 harnesses the neutral convening power of the federal government to bring diverse stakeholders together. Specifically, the SC2 initiative develops and leverages partnerships with non-federal entities such as philanthropies, anchor institutions, businesses, and non-profit organizations to help cities and regions tackle complex problems with comprehensive, collaborative solutions. This ability to convene local leaders and organizations ensures the right people are at the table sharing relevant information with each other. However, SC2 does not do this unilaterally or in isolation. The cities SC2 works with actively want SC2 to play this role and commit themselves to ensuring lasting collaboration at the local level beyond the SC2 engagement.

*"Federal government is a 'neutral convener' to bring factions together at the local level. This is especially relevant in the Kansas City and St. Louis areas where there are state boundaries that create political boundaries in shared markets."*

-Kevin Muesenfechter, St. Louis Federal Team Member

SC2 has helped cities form new partnerships, revive old connections, and instill a culture of inclusion. As a convener and collaborator, SC2 opens up possibilities for innovative approaches to solving persistent local challenges.

SC2 Community Solutions Teams
New or Improved Partnerships, FY15-16
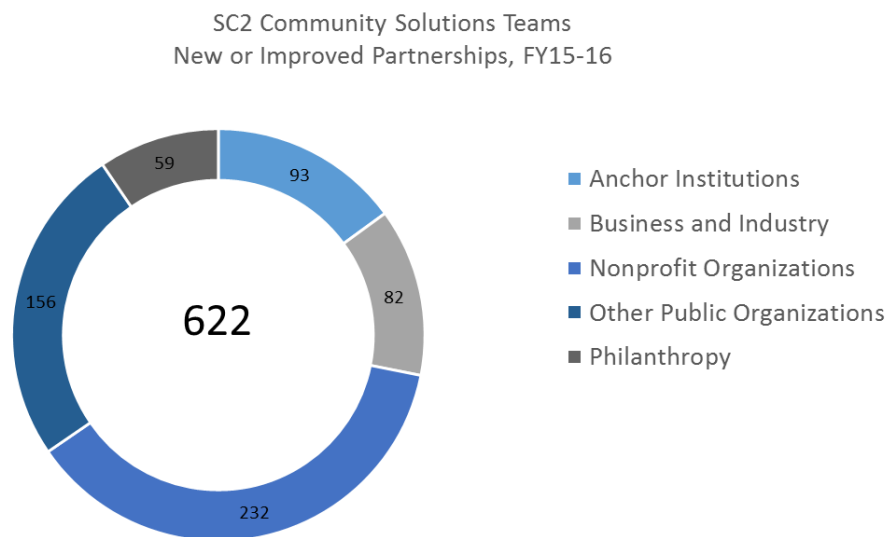


The following examples illustrate how SC2 has applied its federal convening role to bring new players to the table and support local collaboration:

The SC2 National Resource Network's project in the area of **Salinas, California** is a regional effort to improve workforce development outcomes throughout the Salinas Valley. The cities of Greenfield, Gonzales, King City, and Soledad are working in partnership with Salinas, convened by the SC2 NRN. The Salinas Valley economy is driven by the agriculture sector (farming, harvesting, produce processing, and shipping), which has been implementing increasingly innovative forms of agriculture technology. However, low education and skill level make it difficult for employers to find the labor they need. The SC2 NRN is working with the five cities, workforce training providers, schools, and employers to launch a long-term, coordinated, regional workforce development initiative with the goal of improving the community's ability to connect residents to higher-skilled, higher-paid jobs. As a result of the SC2 NRN engagement, Salinas and its neighboring cities have now partnered to fund a local workforce program clearinghouse at a local community college.

The SC2 initiative spurred vital connections with anchor institutions such as universities, medical centers, and hospitals. Anchor institutions are often the largest non-governmental employers in their regions, and importantly for economically challenged cities, prime real estate developers. However, many local governments lack relationships and regular communication with anchor institutions. SC2 has connected many cities with anchor institutions to establish meaningful collaboration involving the identification of shared interests and creation of joint goals.

The SC2 NRN worked in **Meridian, Mississippi** to help the city initiate and solidify strong working relationships with two of its largest employers—Rush Foundation Hospital and Anderson Regional Medical Center—and produce a comprehensive framework for the development of a Health District that would improve connections to downtown. The plan helps the city continue the momentum behind revitalizing downtown to the area around the hospitals, and it supports future growth of one of the city's most important sectors. In addition, the plan helps the city facilitate discussions with hospitals and other potential investors in the area by defining a vision for the Health District, ultimately providing a roadmap for implementation that will help the city apply for city and state incentives. Mayor Percy Bland has noted that the SC2 NRN's engagement has been a catalyst for large-scale downtown economic development in Meridian.

The SC2 NRN is also convening a broad array of stakeholders to work on poverty reduction in **Springfield, Missouri**, where poverty rates are significant and increasing. The city's higher education institutions and medical anchors are important economic engines with untapped potential to drive growth, contribute to upward mobility, and provide leadership—alongside government—in implementing specific efforts designed to reduce poverty. The SC2 NRN is working with the city government and its principal universities and hospitals to develop shared goals and action steps to formalize this partnership with a community compact.

Through a Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration technical assistance grant identified by SC2, the City of **Youngstown, Ohio**

partnered with the Youngstown State University (YSU) Center for Urban and Regional Studies to create a Citywide Economic Development Strategic Plan. The Plan identifies a vision and action plan, including a branding initiative fostered by the YSU Design Works. Additionally, the city has partnered with Kent State University's School of Design to create community charrettes for future downtown planning activities, and with Mercy Hospital Systems, the Western Reserve Transit Authority, and the Western Reserve Port Authority to hire a consultant to design a master plan for the downtown.

The SC2 team in **Rocky Mount, North Carolina** helped the city align educational institution resources with local government priorities through EPA's College/Underserved Community Partnership Program. This initiative develops a network of local colleges and universities to provide ongoing technical assistance to Rocky Mount and other rural towns in the region on a range of issues from general management to specific policy priorities. Participants include Nash Community College, Edgecombe Community College, North Carolina Wesleyan College, Barton College, East Carolina University, and North Carolina State University.

In **Brownsville, Texas,** SC2 helped to start a conversation with the community

colleges and school districts about curricula that support current and future workforce needs. SC2 and the Texas Workforce Solutions hosted a local convening between advanced manufacturers, local economic corporations, community colleges, and school districts. This was a second dialogue that resulted from a previous roundtable convening hosted by the U.S. Department of Energy, U.S. Department of Commerce, and U.S. Small Business Administration in hopes of continuing to jumpstart community partners to understand what federal assessment data and tools are available to leverage future opportunities.

In September 2015, the SC2 NRN published the report, *Striking a (Local) Grand Bargain: How Cities and Anchor Institutions Can Work Together to Drive Growth and Prosperity*. The report, which draws on successful and unsuccessful efforts in cities where SC2 has worked, offers strategies on the role of anchor institutions and their potential as major partners in economic and community development. The report concludes that negotiation must occur at the local level, based on shared goals and a mutually determined vision. The report also outlines three steps as a blueprint for creating mutually beneficial partnerships: establishing the bargain, leveraging supportive mechanisms, and maintaining an ecosystem for collaboration.

## Spotlight on Collaboration with the Federal Reserve System

SC2 invited the Federal Reserve to serve as an important partner and co-convener with the ability to bring lending and financial institutions to the table. The Federal Reserve's regional banks in St. Louis, Chicago, and Dallas provided tremendous value to the cities of Memphis, Gary, Rockford, and Brownsville. The new relationship with the Federal Reserve brought new partners to the table in each city, importantly partners with lending ability.

**Rockford, Illinois** partnered with the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago to host a Lenders' Convening in April 2015 as part of a larger strategy to advance four local priorities:

establishing a regional land bank; forming Rockford's first Treasury-certified Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI); developing a workforce training center in a distressed neighborhood; and supporting the Rockford Promise, which works to remove financial barriers to Rockford Public Schools graduates in attaining post-secondary education.

The Lenders' Convening had more than 100 attendees, including 14 financial institutions; federal staff from HUD, Department of Labor, FDIC, Federal Home Loan Bank, Office of the Comptroller of Currency, HHS, U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), the Chicago Federal Executive Board, U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs, FEMA, and EPA; academic institutions; Rockford Public Schools; faith-based leaders; non-profit organizations; and local, county, and state representatives. This landmark convening has given the city lasting relationships it continues to use as it works to address the four priorities.

In **Gary, Indiana**, the city, in partnership with the SC2 team, Fifth Third Bank, and the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, convened a Banker's Roundtable in January 2015. Community, regional, and national financial institutions with a market footprint in Gary and Lake County were invited to attend. City officials and the SC2 team presented shovel-ready investment opportunities in Gary that had the potential to qualify for credit under the Community Reinvestment Act.

# 3.   ENHANCED CAPACITY FOR CONSTRAINED LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

With constrained budgets and often stagnant population growth, the local governments SC2 supports face overwhelming challenges. SC2 helps to bridge the capacity gap in a number of ways. Federal SC2 Community Solutions team leads offered an immediate increase in the capacity of city hall, while AmeriCorps VISTA members and SC2 Fellows provided additional bandwidth. Cities with SC2 NRN engagements benefitted from broad external technical expertise. Whatever the form of the support, SC2 teams focused on root problems rather than their symptoms, bolstering the capacity of the local government.

The following examples demonstrate how SC2 has increased communities' ability to address local challenges:

In **Providence, RI**, the SC2 NRN team worked with city leadership to develop a 10-year financial plan to balance budgets and provide for key investments, while better integrating governmental departments. The SC2 NRN also worked with the city to bring community stakeholders into the process, including colleges, universities, business organizations, nonprofits, and foundations. The approach has received praise from local leaders, as well as local and national media. In November 2016, the city's credit rating was raised by Fitch Ratings, due in part to the progress they made implementing the SC2 NRN's recommendations in the 10-year plan.

Experts in the SC2 NRN are also supporting efforts of city finance staff in **Richmond, California** to balance the budget. Richmond is one of the most economically challenged cities in California. Without a multi-year approach to budgeting, Richmond risked continued credit downgrades and an inability to address other pressing challenges such as affordable housing. The SC2 NRN engagement helped the city develop a five-year financial plan that avoids fiscal distress and starts this Bay Area city on the road to prosperity.

*"These discussions will move from providing information to making public policy decisions that will…. get us to a balanced budget in June. This is not the end, but is the beginning. As we move forward, these discussions are going to get more detailed and more contentious, and hopefully we will hold together and do the right thing."*

– Mayor Tom Butt, Richmond
(Source: December 15, 2015 Council presentation of Budget Model)

In **Brownsville, Texas**, SC2 increased capacity of local leadership by pairing city employees with federal counterparts for professional development. The city recognized that they had limited human capital and wanted to strengthen their organization and relationship with the federal government. As part of the initial stages of understanding the SC2 initiative, the city manager invited city employees to a strategic planning session and asked them to partner with the federal SC2 team. SC2 and the City of Brownsville facilitated a series of five internal

workshops that culminated in a two-day session between the city and the federal SC2 team members in November 2015. The SC2 team facilitated the work sessions and provided technical assistance to the selected work areas that the city government and community of Brownsville outlined in a draft workplan. The result was the organization of efforts that were focused, holistic, and maximized the goals of both local and federal organizations.

*"I think much of what we do is changing the way that localities do their regular business. We could give cities funding, but if they don't have the capacity to administer and utilize the funding, it will be in vain. In this way, SC2 is an important first step: capacity building needs to be in partnership with funding."*

-Laura Gomez, Brownsville, TX SC2 Team Lead

The SC2 NRN built capacity with the Unified Government (UG) in **Kansas City, KS** to implement their plan to create a downtown health campus. The project is simultaneously a community revitalization strategy and an effort to improve the city's last-place ranking statewide in overall health outcomes. The SC2 NRN provided expert technical support to the UG in its selection of a Healthy Campus project manager, including drafting the job description, creating the applicant review framework, helping to evaluate the responses, and participating in the selection interviews as a non-voting member. The SC2 NRN also helped the city develop a strategy for engaging private developers, and worked with staff to develop performance metrics and milestones for the Healthy Campus.

*"[The Network has been] wonderful [and] offered great suggestions and sophisticated analysis [in development of the Healthy Campus]"*

*– Kansas City Mayor Mark Holland*
(Source: Wilkes Barre Times Leader, June 14, 2015)

In **Danville, Virginia**, the SC2 NRN supported revitalization strategies through the establishment of a nonprofit community development corporation (CDC) focused on issues such as housing, health, and neighborhood economic development. In conjunction with civic leaders and community stakeholders, the SC2 NRN helped identify: initial funding for the organization, appropriate neighborhoods for targeted investment, and an initial direction and strategies for the CDC that will be supported by a multi-year commitment from the city and the Danville Regional Foundation.

In **Waco, Texas**, the SC2 NRN helped the city implement a collective impact framework for fighting poverty. When the SC2 NRN landed in Waco, the city and civic leadership in Waco had come together to focus on a community-wide effort to reduce the city's poverty rate, called Prosper Waco, but were not sure where to start on their nine goals focused on improving education, health, and financial security. The SC2 NRN provided intensive, cross-cutting implementation support to the city and Prosper Waco to help them prioritize goals, develop specific implementation steps, and benchmark and track progress. The SC2 NRN focused on aligning city budget resources with their priorities, developing a downtown development strategy that incorporates surrounding low- and moderate-income communities, and developing and implementing specific

strategies and pilot programs focused on employing hard-to-employ young people.

*"There was a tremendous appeal to us for the Network because of the technical expertise going into an area that we had not been. We have done a really good job of developing the community awareness of our needs and our challenges, but because of the scope and complexity of it, we really didn't know how to target specific strategies. … We need to now hit the ground running with specific strategies, and we need somebody that's been there before to guide how we develop these. … We felt like the National Resource Network would help us."*

– Mayor Malcolm Duncan, Jr., Waco
(Prosper Waco interview with Mayor Duncan and SC2 NRN Executive Director David Eichenthal, http://wccc.tv/videos/view/140823907)

# 4.  EQUIPPING CITIES WITH INFORMATION, TOOLS, AND DATA TO INFORM DECISION-MAKING

Beyond lending a hand where it is needed, SC2 also provides cities with valuable information, tools, and data that they can use to shape their strategies moving forward. As data become more widely available, their use becomes an increasingly important tool for cities in program planning and implementation. City budgets must continue to do more with less in the aftermath of the recent recession. Information technology systems are an important tool for lowering costs and increasing efficiency. Further, city leaders need to know whether new programs and policies are achieving the intended impact.

Data collection and analysis can inform and improve governments' efforts to address their most critical challenges. Many cities find the process of identifying, collecting, and maximizing these tools and data daunting and expensive.  Data-driven decision-making is an easier prospect than it may at first seem, and the federal government has the authority to collect and analyze large data sets that are not always easily accessible to local governments. SC2 teams have helped cities harness this potential through partnerships with the Department of Justice Diagnostic Center, the SC2 National Resource Network's Municipal Health Data for American Cities project, and HUD's Office of Policy Development and Research, among others.

## Technical Assistance Clearinghouse and Resource Library

The SC2 NRN provides the country's only one-stop source for identifying best practices and federal technical assistance programs offered to local governments and communities. Currently, the clearinghouse is an exhaustive list of federal resources that help local economies turn around, with plans of growing to include resources from state and local agencies and non-governmental organizations. Since launching in February 2014, thousands of visitors have conducted searches among hundreds of best practices and valuable resources on in the library.

## Spotlight on Using Data to Advance Local Priorities

Often an important step to any successful economic development initiative is to reduce crime. Data-based decision-making plays an especially critical role in public safety, as robust local and federal crime statistics can inform policing strategies. SC2 has connected the Department of Justice (DOJ) and its Office of Justice Programs (OJP) with the local police and other community partners to build their local capacity to track and reduce crime in a focused and effective way.

Police staff in **Youngstown** worked with OJP's Diagnostic Center to refine their protocols for addressing crime. Rather than only reacting to crime reports, Youngstown Police Department staff learned to use crime data to measure and understand community needs better, recognize trends, establish baselines, and determine data-driven strategies, as well as proactively deploy available community resources. The Diagnostic Center is now working

with the Youngstown Police Department to institutionalize best policing practices. The Diagnostic Center delivered a train-the-trainer course in Community Policing to more than 30 participants, including representatives from the Youngstown Police Department, community, municipal departments, and the Youngstown University Police Department. Analysis of pre- and post-surveys administered to participants indicated an increase in knowledge by participants across six assessment areas of the community policing curriculum. Youngstown Police Department trained 12 sworn staff to serve as community policing trainers. In the fall of 2016, Youngstown Police Department delivered community policing training to 126 YPD officers as part of its annual in-service training.

Similarly, **Rockford's** partnership with the Diagnostic Center helped local partners to develop data-driven strategies for reducing violent crime, with a specific focus on decreasing gun violence and heroin use. The partnership also provided recommendations to the city for enhancing police-community relations. DOJ's Diagnostic Assessment Report included a crime data analysis, as well as a set of findings based on stakeholder interviews identifying the city's strengths, evidence-based solutions to address some of the gaps, and recommended implementation strategies. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services helped DOJ establish public health responses and adopt best practices to address the challenges contributing to violent crime and heroin abuse. The report's findings led the city to pull together a steering committee to implement the recommendations. DOJ will partner with the steering committee to develop an implementation plan. This work will tie in closely with the Tri-County Reentry Coalition's efforts, which seek to support citizens returning to the region after serving prison sentences.

## Municipal Health Data for American Cities Pilot

With funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the SC2 NRN equipped four cities—Flint, MI; Kansas City, KS; Providence, RI; and Waco, TX—with the first-ever municipal-level health data dashboard to inform local decisions and measure the impact and effectiveness of local programs and priorities. Prior to this intervention, health data was often captured at the county-level, which made it difficult for city leaders to gain a clear picture of the state of public health within their boundaries. Led by the SC2 NRN, in consultation with federal data providers and health experts, city leaders selected which indicators to include in the dashboard and track moving forward.

This initiative requires cities to examine their chronic health problems, share knowledge with peer cities, and develop innovative ways of describing and interpreting the state of health of in their communities. With a clear and comprehensive view of their health landscapes, the city leaders in this pilot are better equipped to take municipal-level action for health.
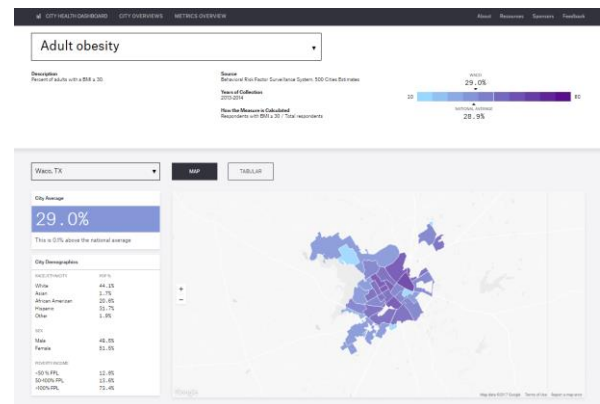
## Mapping for Impact

GIS and other mapping technologies provide cities with the ability to spatially track data related to several common municipal issues. Many SC2 cities do not have a planner on staff, or lack the capacity to use GIS in a sophisticated way. SC2 has helped cities identify opportunities to develop or improve mapping systems that can bolster their data-driven decision making efforts, especially with regard to blight, vacancy, and development opportunities.

The SC2 team in **Flint, Michigan** established a unique partnership between the city government and HUD to provide powerful new data on vacant housing. In 2012, the city developed a database of all residential parcels in Flint—including information about the condition of structures—but was faced with the constant challenge of identifying the occupancy status of any particular building. With the help of data from the U.S. Postal Service, HUD's Office of Policy Development and Research augmented the database, identifying homes likely to be vacant. HUD then created an online interactive map for Flint's Police and Fire Departments and the Code Enforcement Office, and updates it annually. This tool provides the city with the information it needs to target blight elimination and focus police and fire resources.

SC2 involvement has also created a mapping initiative in **St. Louis, Missouri**. SC2 made the city aware of the 2015 Community Progress Leadership Institute (CPLI) on Vacant Spaces at Harvard University. The city applied and won a scholarship for their employees to attend the training. Since then, the city has received ongoing technical assistance from CPLI on tax foreclosures and an overall strategy on comprehensive vacancy reduction, including identifying and mapping all vacant land parcels in the city. St. Louis deployed two teams of VISTA members that surveyed over 30,000 land parcels during a four-month period. The work will be continued by the St. Louis Economic Development Partnership, the sponsor of the St. Louis Promise Zone, and a new team of VISTA members will survey additional land within the Promise Zone footprint in both the city and county portions of North St. Louis.

**Brownsville, Texas** is one of the many vulnerable communities along the US-Mexico border when considering climate change and public health. The EPA is working to understand the most pressing needs of the community through programs such as ENVIRO-Atlas and Citizen Science. Through the SC2 designation, the EPA invited Brownsville to collaborate with researchers in its Office of Research and Development on extramural research around engaging citizens and community partners on temporal-spatial analysis of mosquito breeding habitats and mitigating vector-borne diseases. This is a collective partnership between federal, local, and community organizations to enable the community to be educated, engaged, and solution-oriented when it comes to understanding the environment in which they live. Federal and local communities will be able to better mitigate and be better prepared for emergency threats and natural disaster affects.

## 311 for Cities

The technical assistance that the SC2 NRN provides is unique in its applicability to a broad range of issue areas. Typically, a single federal agency provides technical assistance on a single issue, such as homelessness or education. However, most cities face multiple, complex, and

inter-related challenges that may exacerbate one another. The SC2 NRN allows cities to present multi-faceted problems to experts who work across disciplines to find innovative, interdisciplinary solutions. The NRN's 311 for Cities feature connects cities with its consortium of public, private, and non-profit partners to receive quick answers on cross-cutting issues. Cities from around the country have used the 311 for Cities service to obtain answers and policy options for their most pressing needs. The NRN has answered questions on such wide ranging topic as IRS tax liens on abandoned properties, public health strategies, and incentives to support main street economic development. A catalogue of responses can be found in the SC2 National Resource Library.

## LOOKING AHEAD

As our nation transitions to a new president, SC2 will wrap up its remaining work and our staff will be ready to share lessons learned and assist the incoming administration. Brownsville, our final active city of the 14 cities with deployed SC2 Federal Community Solutions teams, will complete its two-year engagement in March 2017. The SC2 NRN's many ongoing direct technical assistance engagements will continue through June 2017, when the current cooperative agreement ends. Although all SC2 direct engagements will come to a conclusion by summer 2017, so much of what we have learned in this pilot will live on and inform the future work of the federal government as well as the expectations of local communities.

Our team continues to hear from stakeholders in cities where we have worked and federal staff who have served on our teams just how much the SC2 experience has changed their expectations of federal-local partnerships. The federal government can be a better, more responsive partner to communities that want the government involved and come to the table with a local vision and the resolve to see it through. The federal government can do a better job of collaborating and coordinating across federal agencies to more effectively steward taxpayer dollars that help communities achieve real results on the ground. It simply makes sense.

We know that this model works. In addition to the qualitative testimonies and the 2014 evaluation from Abt Associates, the Urban Institute will complete an evaluation later in 2017 assessing SC2, with a specific focus on the SC2 National Resource Network technical assistance program. Federal agencies have realized the value of this type of coordination and delivery of services. SC2 has shaped two recent developments that will have a lasting legacy. At HUD, one agency deeply involved in SC2 that has a long history of working with communities and a robust field infrastructure in place, staff looked to emulate the SC2 model so employees can better serve communities. Building from the SC2 model, HUD established new performance standards, staffing functions, and training resources to enable HUD staff to be active, supportive partners to the communities they serve. In order to capture the lessons and best practices of SC2 and related work, the Obama Administration has created a Community Solutions Council to streamline and reconfigure the way the federal government works with communities to improve outcomes.  The Council is just one tangible manifestation of leaving the federal government in a better place, and, as the work of government continues, the Council will equip leadership with an important tool as the federal government inevitably listens more to local communities and undertakes resulting new policies and initiatives.

The success of the SC2 pilot proves that we can strengthen partnerships between federal and local governments for the benefit of the American people. This approach is ready for further action on a larger scale by new federal and local leaders. In order to leverage these lessons at scale, new leadership will need to invest in continuing and expanding these strategies. The vast majority of SC2 team members are career federal staff who will remain in federal service and stand ready to share what they learned and support this approach.