Revenue Sharing with the Community Sector?

The case studies conducted by the National Commission on Neighborhoods provide concrete illustrations of how residents can act together to improve their neighborhoods. A consistent theme throughout these cases was the importance of voluntary activities, which included:

- The numerous hours contributed by community leaders and residents
- Membership dues, donations, and other fundraising efforts
- Contributions of staff or facilities by local church groups or private welfare agencies

These voluntary activities are the essence of American citizen participation. The appropriate federal role should be to stimulate rather than thwart such activities.

**IMPORTANCE OF THE COMMUNITY SECTOR**

As a whole, these voluntary activities may be considered part of the community sector in American life, by which is meant the collection of citizens and institutions that make significant contributions to neighborhood life.


The commission, created by Congress in 1978, operated for eighteen months.

R. K. Yin, *Conserving America's Neighborhoods*  
© Plenum Press, New York 1982
The importance of the community sector may be observed in many commonplace ways. For instance, municipal officials know that, when residents no longer sweep their stoops or take care of their immediately surrounding sidewalks, no amount of municipal sanitation service can compensate to make the neighborhood clean again. Similarly, residents must usually take the initiative to monitor the need for housing repair, to take care of family needs and childrearing, and to make their neighborhoods livable. All of these efforts, enhanced by voluntary helping institutions (including business contributions and social welfare agencies), constitute the community sector. The community sector has assumed significant economic proportions that in part can only be measured when municipal or federal services are needed to replace goods or services previously provided by the community sector. Such replacement may be more costly but less effective, and thus the long-term goal should be to promote a viable and healthy community sector rather than displacing it with government-directed efforts.

**THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS**

Community organizations are a major set of institutions in the community sector and are the main vehicle through which government can support the community sector. For this reason, the Commission on Neighborhoods conducted a series of forty case studies to determine how such organizations operate and how they might best be supported in the future.

As a group, the case studies illustrated the diversity of community organizing that exists across the country. In most instances, however, the case studies covered groups that

- Had been largely founded by residents or organized by the local ministry
- Were about five years old
- Had made significant contributions to neighborhood improvement, either working with or independently of city government
- Had continued to grow and to confront new neighborhood problems

The case studies were unable to document fully the membership and financial resources available to each of these organizations over time. However, it should be pointed out that in most instances the work of these community organizations has been known at a national level even though the organizations have not been dominated by support from the Ford Foundation or federal government funds. (A list of the organizations that were studied is given at the end of this chapter.)