



WHITE HOUSE COUNCIL ON
STRONG CITIES, STRONG COMMUNITIES

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The Strong Cities, Strong Communities Initiative (SC2)

was an innovative approach for supporting cities experiencing population and job loss, persistent poverty, capacity constraints, and similar challenges in an era of dwindling resources. Each SC2 city shared 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.

Under SC2, communities including St. Louis, MO, received intensive technical assistance from federal interagency Community Solutions Teams that work in city hall to support the city's vision for economic development.

Through a cooperative partnership of federal, state, regional and local partners, community leaders and local residents, the City of St. Louis and SC2 were able to make progress on each of their four identified goals.

MAJOR SC2 ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN ST. LOUIS

- Catalyze the revitalization of North St. Louis
- Align programs that address education, crime prevention, homelessness, and health care needs
- Increase job creation and entrepreneurship opportunities
- Develop a citywide vacancy and blight plan

CATALYZE THE REVITALIZATION OF NORTH ST. LOUIS

Holistic Planning through HUD's Choice Neighborhoods Program

The City of St. Louis worked with the SC2 federal team to leverage the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Choice Neighborhoods program for maximum impact on the distressed Near North Side. Located directly north of downtown, the Near North Side is cut off from downtown by warehouses, vacant parcels, and the distressed Preservation Square project-based Section 8 housing development. With a FY2014 Choice Neighborhoods Planning Grant, the city, consultant Urban Strategies, and their partners created a plan to revitalize the Near North Side. In December 2016, HUD awarded the a \$29.5 million Choice Neighborhoods Implementation Grant to take the plan to reality. Through this investment, the city and their partners will create 695 new mixed-income housing units; re-purpose historic but blighted properties into housing, retail, and commercial uses; increase access to loans for small businesses and homeowners; improve access to healthy foods; and offer evidence-based education and employment opportunities.

This community-strengthening work was also a critical component in the city securing the commitment to retain the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency, a major employer in the region, in St. Louis, which was announced in April 2016.

Removing Barriers to Redevelopment of the Former Pruitt-Igoe Housing Site

Through the SC2 team, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) used contract resources to complete a risk assessment and soil management plan for the former Pruitt-Igoe public housing site, leading to the issuance of a "Certificate of Completion" by the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, certifying

that environmental hazards were not present and clearing the path toward redevelopment. EPA also completed a topographic and boundary survey of the property. This work represents the largest step in removing barriers to Pruitt-Igoe's redevelopment since its demolition in 1972 and led to the site recently being purchased by a private developer who has plans to construct a hotel and medical clinic on the property.

Creating an Environmentally Sustainable Historic District in North St. Louis

Using a technical assistance award from EPA's Office of Sustainable Communities, the SC2 team supported the Old North St. Louis Restoration Group as it developed a plan for a historic district that prioritizes environmental sustainability. This included strategies that the city and community residents can undertake to increase energy efficiency and implement green infrastructure elements that will increase the environmental sustainability of this historic neighborhood. Many of the strategies identified through this process are transferrable to other historic neighborhoods in the city.

The SC2 team helped identify EPA's technical assistance resources for the city and worked with city and Old North St. Louis stakeholders to tailor the technical assistance to local needs. EPA used \$120,000 to hire private-sector experts to lead a community visioning process, do initial planning, and the develop of actionable strategies in for a historic district in North St. Louis that also focuses on environmental sustainability.

Bolstering Federal-Local Collaboration on a Key Transit Connection

One of St. Louis' top priorities is developing a North-South mass transit corridor to connect the economically challenged north side of the city to jobs, education, and other opportunities downtown and in St. Louis County. The initial process for a north-south MetroLink extension line was completed more than 10

years ago, producing three locally preferred route alternatives, completing 10% design work for each alternative, and identifying next steps to move the project forward. Still, development of the transit expansion had not progressed due to funding constraints and lack of cohesive support in the region.

SC2 team members from the U.S. Department of Transportation, along with the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) and HUD worked with local transportation stakeholders, providing technical assistance for the project to prepare it for consideration for the Federal Transit Administration's Capital Investment Grant pipeline. Efforts included convening East/West Gateway, the Mayor's Office, Bi-State Development, and relevant city department heads to develop a strategy to restart this work.

Two factors were holding this effort back: the expiration of previous studies beyond DOT's 5-year requirement, and the high cost of implementation. Through convening and peer-learning, the SC2 team helped St. Louis mitigate these concerns by exploring local, state, and federal funds available for implementation. Stakeholders began to understand that, despite the high price tag, this effort could move forward with a creative funding structure. The city Treasurer provided \$2 million to update the previous North-South transit studies. The updated study will take approximately two years to complete. Even after the conclusion of the SC2 designation, north side project work will continue as part of the St. Louis Promise Zone.

Using Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Areas to Target CDBG Funds

To further support investment in the Near North Side, the city's Community Development Administration identified five areas as Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Areas (NRSA) for HUD's Community Development Block Grant program (CDBG). The NRSA designation provides greater flexibility in the use of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds in targeted locations. The city was not using the NRSA designation prior to SC2's involvement and most of the new NRSAs are located on the Near North Side.

IMPROVE AND ALIGN PROGRAMS THAT ADDRESS EDUCATION, CRIME PREVENTION, HOMELESSNESS, AND HEALTH CARE

Facilitating Connections between the City and Non-Profit Groups

The SC2 team, through the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), worked with a variety of health and youth focused entities to identify a common project for the potential deployment of AmeriCorpsVISTA volunteers. This partnership among the city's Health Department, the Incarnate Word Foundation/YouthJobs, and Gateway Greening resulted in a joint VISTA application to further develop capacity in these organizations.

Providing Federal-Local Matchmaking Opportunities

The SC2 team utilized the Mayor's Commission on Children, Youth, and Families as a venue to connect various local social service providers and organizations with relevant federal programs, such as those from U.S. Health and Human Services (HHS); small business resources from the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA); capacity building resources from CNCS; and on the ground support through AmeriCorps. This work has also created connections among local groups to further their collective impact.

Engaging Anchor Institutions on Key Community Issues

The SC2 Federal Team facilitated conversations between the city and the St. Louis Federal Reserve Bank, the Calvert Foundation, Third Sector, Center for Community Progress, and United Way. This work became part of a new city strategy to engage local anchors in community-based issues called Project

Connect. Project Connect aims to create better collaborations with anchor institutions and coordinate public investments around nodes of strength—specifically the city's near-north side neighborhoods. This effort will build on the momentum of several ongoing projects in the north side of St. Louis, including implementation of the Choice Neighborhoods Planning Grant, the construction of the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency's new western headquarters, future transit investments and private real estate development.

Using Data to Better Target City Investments in Crime Prevention

The SC2 team connected the city with the U.S. Department of Justice's Diagnostic Center. This technical assistance will aid St. Louis in developing a data-driven process in their programing and decision-making as it relates to crime prevention and reduction. To date, the Department of Justice, and their contractors, have been to St. Louis to interview several relevant stakeholders and elected officials. DOJ's work will continue after SC2 leaves St. Louis.

INCREASE JOB CREATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Supporting Regional Economic Development between the City and St. Louis County

The SC2 team facilitated the creation of a joint City/County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) using EDA funds used by the St. Louis Economic Development Partnership. EDA also provided technical assistance to two local business incubators, resulting in those entities receiving feasibility and planning grants of more than \$100,000 to explore options for scaling up operations, develop strategies to retain businesses, and better integrate

into the community by understanding local employment opportunities, the skill level and expertise of current residents, and the ability of incubators to improve access to employment.

Streamlining Business Licensing to Increase Entrepreneurship

The city used a \$40,000 prize from the SC2 team member U.S. Small Business Administration to digitize the process of applying for and approving many of the licenses in the License Collector's Office, including business licenses. As funds become available, the city intends to build on this foundation and continue to streamline and digitize further business-related functions.

Supporting Transit Investments to Link People to Jobs

DOT's Federal Transit Administration awarded the City of St. Louis a TIGER grant of \$10.3 million to construct a MetroLink light rail stop at the Cortex Innovation Community, a 200-acre innovation hub and technology district representing a collaboration with many St. Louis anchor institutions. This investment allows those who rely on transit access to jobs at the more than 250 companies located in the innovation district.

DEVELOP A CITYWIDE VACANCY AND BLIGHT PLAN FOCUSED ON SUSTAINABLE REUSE AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Conducting an Assessment and Update to the Policies and Practices of the City's Land Bank

The city's land bank launched in 1971 and was, at the time, the first of its kind in the country. EPA hired a consultant to conduct an extensive review of the operations and procedures of the land bank. The final assessment report includes specific, actionable recommendations regarding the need to hire additional staff; develop a marketing strategy; and become more strategic in managing land bank properties.

Surveying Vacant Lots and Buildings

The SC2 team connected the city to the CNCS's AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) program to collaborate on a comprehensive data collection effort on vacant and blighted parcels in the city. More than 30 NCCC volunteers surveyed over 30,000 parcels during a four-month period. Additionally, the NCCC volunteers worked with the Forestry and Refuse Departments and saved the city more than \$50,000.

Collaborating with Metropolitan Sewer District on Green Infrastructure

The SC2 team facilitated collaboration among the city, the Missouri Department of Conservation, and EPA to study green infrastructure solutions on vacant lots in

the Wells Goodfellow neighborhood that are being targeted by the Metropolitan Sewer District under their consent decree with the EPA.

Peer Learning through the Center for Community Progress

The SC2 team made the city aware of the 2015 Community Progress Leadership Institute on Vacant Spaces at Harvard University. The city applied and was selected to send a small team. This introduced the city to peer communities, including Kansas City, Missouri, which continues to collaborate with St. Louis on common issues around land banking and vacancy.

Technical Assistance for Brownfields

The city worked with Kansas State University through EPA's Technical Assistance to Brownfields program to conduct internal strategic planning with various city departments around vacancy and blight. As part of this work, the city collaborated with the landscape architecture/urban planning studio at Kansas State University to study and identify typologies of vacant land and associated intervention strategies.