

City and Community Inquiry

A great way to engage the city and collaborate among multiple churches and sectors is to observe together – with compassionate eyes and listening ears – the city or community around you. This involves *research*. City inquiry requires great patience, passionate engagement, and a steadfast willingness to learn everything there is to know about the city or the community in which you live, work, and play, *so that* you can better love and serve that community.

There is no one-size-fits-all when it comes to community research. And by research, we do not mean complicated, academic, armchair analysis. Rather, what is needed is a practical, learn-as-you-go approach that is flexible and adaptable to your context. Additionally, a good approach to city and community research should help the church to cultivate relationships and involve the community's residents and stakeholders in the process.

Below are a few ways to get started. For more information about how your church and churches in your particular municipality can participate in a community research study, please contact Travis Vaughn at travisv@perimeter.org or at 678.405.2148.

Simple Research Tools

These are some research steps you can take to help you build new relationships in the community and serve the community in meaningful ways.

Research that has already been conducted

Someone has probably studied your community before. Take advantage of the research that already exists! Here are three tips for compiling research that has already been done:

- 1) Develop a list of reputable resources for information on your community, including people who are experts and "insiders" in key areas.
- 2) Good starting places for sources include universities, city planning offices, public agencies, newspapers, and (sometimes) the internet.
- 3) Look not only for needs and challenges but also for assets and strengths.

Develop a community database

Develop a list of people in the community who play an active role in the community. These are people who care about the health and well-being of the community, and they will be people you will want to talk with.

Interviews

Who should be interviewed? A good place to start is by interviewing residents in the community, as well as leaders in the community who serve in each sector (public, private, social sectors) of the community. What can you ask them? Some good questions could include:

- 1) What do you think are the greatest strengths here in this community?
- 2) What do you think are the biggest challenges in this community?

3) How do you think that people who care about this community could build on the strengths and help to meet needs?

Survey the churches

There are probably other churches in your area already doing great work in the community. Your goal is to find out who they are and what they are doing. A simple survey could ask churches the following types of questions:

- 1) How is your church serving the community? What ministries within your church exist to help meet specific needs in the community?
- 2) Can you list the ministries (non-profit and social organizations and groups) your church is involved with in the community in order to serve the community?
- 3) How long has your church been in the community and what changes have you seen take place in the community?

Focus Groups

A focus group is a small group of people strategically chosen and brought together to discuss a particular issue with the goal of applying their collective ideas to the need or situation at hand. You might consider the following types of questions to ask a group:

- 1) What do you think makes a great community?
- 2) What is one dream or goal for your community that you have, or that you have heard expressed by your neighbors and coworkers?
- 3) What are some ways that you would like to see your church, neighborhood, or organization help to make this a great community?
- 4) What is one thing you heard someone else share today that you found especially meaningful? What is one idea from today that you would like to follow up on?