
The New Barn-Raising: Sustaining community and civic assets in Minneapolis–St. Paul, Detroit and Baltimore

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is the author of a new free toolkit to sustain community and civic assets that have traditionally had high levels of public funding (such as parks, libraries and museums). Entitled *The New Barn-Raising*, the toolkit was published in May 2014 by the Washington DC-based think-tank, the German Marshall Fund of the United States. He is now founding a non-profit-making group, also called *The New Barn-Raising*, to take this forward.

Abstract This account distils the key messages from a free online toolkit, *The New Barn-Raising*, published in May 2014. The toolkit draws on the author's research in three US cities — specifically Baltimore, Minneapolis–St. Paul and Detroit. The focus of the research was ways to sustain community and civic assets that have long received a great deal of financial support from government — notably parks, libraries, recreation centres, senior centres, theatres, art galleries, and museums. The paper looks at the raising of three things — awareness, money and (volunteer) help. On awareness, the assertion is that asset support groups can best make the case for assets continuously and collectively rather than simply pursuing 11th-hour protests against cuts. The asset offer should also be marketed to the public. On money, there are many tax mechanisms available to US local government/voters to support assets, but there are benefits for assets of support also coming from communities, business and charitable foundations. Such partnerships can bring increased awareness, innovation and governance. On help, there are some possibilities to fill jobs that have had their funding cut, but there are various limits on what volunteers can do. Volunteers can supplement but not supplant professional staff.

Keywords: *Assets, devolution, volunteering, co-production, giving, corporate social responsibility*

INTRODUCTION

In many countries, particularly post-industrial ones, funding for parks, libraries, museums, theatres and other such community and civic assets has been under threat from: government spending cuts; reductions in business's ability to spend on community activities; reductions

in charitable foundations' endowments; outmigration; and/or falling property values that lower local tax revenues. There are also ideological challenges to certain things being funded by the public sector, even when public finances are healthy. The use of assets more generally is also under threat from changes in lifestyle such as

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reduced exercise, increased private socialising and greater use of the internet and social media.

In the author's home country, the UK, there was also a move, after the election of a Conservative-led Coalition Government in mid-2010, to champion what Prime Minister David Cameron referred to as the Big Society. This had three key pillars: greater powers for local government and communities; greater encouragement for giving and volunteering; and opening up public services to delivery by civil society organisations, such as employee-led cooperatives. Essentially, what was being advocated was something more akin to a US system. Assets seemed to be prime targets for this Big Society.

With this in mind, the author secured a Research Fellowship to look at how several US metro areas were sustaining their assets. The New Barn-Raising title is a reference to the practice of barn-raising in frontier North American agricultural communities in the 19th and early 20th centuries (and still today in Amish and Mennonite communities). The practice involves local citizens pulling together to construct buildings that, in addition to their economic (agricultural) role, also often served as the focal point for communal celebrations.

The primary output of the research is a free online toolkit for use by any country facing these issues. More specifically, it is intended to be of use to: national and local government leaders; non-profit bodies (from civic-scale asset support groups through to neighbourhood and resident-driven organisations); charitable foundations; individuals with an interest in defending public assets or giving more generally; socially responsible businesses; and trade unions. Lastly, it is of use to urban and public services researchers, for whom it offers many findings and suggestions for further research.

The toolkit, also called the New

Barn-Raising,¹ is broken down into three types of raising: awareness around the benefits of assets; money to support the assets' capital and running costs; and help from volunteers to deliver asset-related services and to raise awareness and money. This trinity forms the three main sections of the toolkit and is used as the structure for this paper. These are now considered, after a brief interlude to outline the research methods a little more clearly.

A FEW WORDS ABOUT METHOD

The bulk of the research was undertaken in the summer of 2012, funded through an international Urban and Regional Policy Fellowship from the Washington DC-based German Marshall Fund of the United States. The three case-study areas had earlier been selected following a very wide canvassing of US urban and community organisations. The areas (the Twin Cities of Minneapolis–St. Paul in Minnesota, the Detroit metro area in Michigan, and Baltimore in Maryland) do not represent the definitive 'top three' cities in terms of asset sustenance — merely an attempt, for logistical purposes, to limit the research to the three metropolitan areas that seemed to have a critical mass of interesting policies and projects.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with over 160 individuals — spread roughly evenly between the three areas — from local government, foundations, neighbourhood non-profit-making group and academic institutions. The author also completed an extensive literature review during and after the interviews. A much longer period of write-up and ongoing correspondence and phone interviews ensued — ending in late 2013. The near-final draft of the toolkit was also then circulated to the interviewees and to organisations and initiatives mentioned but not interviewed.

AWARENESS: SUSTAINABILITY STARTS WITH A POWERFUL, SUSTAINED CASE NOT AN 11TH-HOUR PROTEST

The media is full of 11th-hour campaigns to save assets, but seldom of ongoing promotion that starts when public finances are healthy. The research highlighted the value of proactively and continuously making the case around why an asset is worthy of funding or volunteer time. For example, in St. Paul, the Advocacy Committee of the Friends of St. Paul Public Library meets annually with the mayor and councillors to present a concise case for the library and its needs in the budget process.

The case for assets, whether to politicians, foundations or other prospective sources of money and time, needs to stress how the assets can support mainstream civic concerns such as crime reduction, improved race relations and improved educational performance by school pupils (particularly for underserved and low-income students). It is especially impressive if advocates show how assets can deliver a return to the funder by saving money in the medium-long term. In St. Paul, again, a small non-profit called Frogtown Gardens produced a strong evidence-based case, and the City of St. Paul government duly agreed to support materially the group's efforts to secure a new neighbourhood park and urban farm. The case was made using a framework provided by the national non-profit Trust for Public Land and was prepared by a local volunteer university student. The work highlighted, among other things, the reduced water-pollution clean-up that would result from the trees and plants that the project would bring.

In terms of style, the case needs to be concise, visual and human. Successful advocacy materials use concise summaries of the benefits and demonstration of need for an asset. This, in turn, can benefit from

good easy-to-grasp visuals such as maps to show how some areas or cities compare against others in terms of investment, levels of assets and need. Also desirable is a 'killer stat', short, easy-to-grasp data that greatly helps a case. A human dimension, in the shape of quotes from supporters, pictures of people using the assets and audio/video testimonies, have also been part of successful campaigns. In their effort to restore a public pool in a city-owned recreation centre, a small non-profit called Minneapolis Swims has used all these to secure financing from the state.

A range of people can help make the case. A community can make the case itself — politicians and voters can see a human angle to a case if it comes from those likely to benefit. Making a case to government benefits from having allies that know their way around the corridors of power; in Minneapolis, local State Representative Karen Smith has played this role for the East Phillips neighbourhood group, which has successfully lobbied for state money to build a new public recreation centre. Unions can also help make the case to their members, as occurred with votes on dedicated property taxes for the Detroit Zoo and Detroit Institute of Arts. If asset supporters can afford to, they may need to bring in lobbying expertise and, if very large amounts of money are at stake, hire an advertising and public relations/affairs outfit.

Asset supporters have the greatest impact when they jointly make the case for assets. A classic case in point is the non-profit Minnesota Citizens for the Arts (MCA) that joined forces with other groups and coalitions to get an amendment to the state constitution that funds the arts and 'the great outdoors' from a state-wide sales tax, the first of its kind in the USA. The message for the UK seems to be less library protests and more joint protests by supporters of different types of assets.



Figure 1: A replica painting outside a public building — an example of the Detroit Institute of Arts' 'Inside|Out' programme

Source: Detroit Institute of Arts' Facebook page

AWARENESS: ASSETS CAN BE MARKETED IN THE SAME WAY THAT THE PRIVATE SECTOR MARKETS ITS GOODS AND SERVICES

The aim of all of the money and help raising is enjoyable/rewarding use of the assets. So it is also important to let prospective users know what awaits them. For example, the Detroit Public Library puts up huge roadside billboards; the Detroit Institute of Arts places replicas of its artworks around the metro area (see Figure 1) accompanied by talks and events. Similarly, Baltimore's Maryland Zoo has a 'zoo-mobile' that takes smaller animals out to schools. Other strategies include taking people on tours of assets, including virtual ones on YouTube or Vimeo, and using various 'maps and apps' that let people know what they can see. People can also be drawn into an asset

with concerts, runs, walks and bicycle rides.

Assets can also include, or be included within, a wider range of attractions. Urban designers and land-use planners can help in bringing this strategy to fruition. For example, Baltimore's new Highlandtown library deliberately included a cafe space in the design to make a better and more popular asset, while also ensuring a steady income stream from the tenants. Similarly, at Owings Mills in neighbouring Baltimore County, the asset (again a library) is being built within a private mixed-use development that includes residential, shopping and leisure uses.

Public sector professionals can be encouraged to promote the benefits of assets. At Springdale Green Park in Detroit, a local non-profit-making group has made a small sign, directed at walkers

and joggers, saying that nine times around the park are equal to one mile. Nationally, there are examples of doctors prescribing walks in parks.² Given that assets have benefits for education, well-being or sociability, government could consider actively encouraging public-sector art teachers, mental health professionals, social services staff, police or youth agencies to promote their respective assets. Similarly, teachers worried about the learning environments at certain pupils' homes might direct them to homework clubs at local libraries.

The time individuals spend online, watching television programmes or listening to the radio means that these media are all good ways to reach them with a message. This message could be a case for assets or an announcement about something they can find if they visit the asset. The Detroit Institute of Arts, for example, created TV ads for a major campaign in 2012. Less costly routes include short videos that can be made on smartphones or camcorders and circulated via email and social media.

Grant applications could include a budget line and plan for case-making and marketing. In many cases, non-profit-making groups managing an asset undertook the most case-making and marketing in support of that asset. This all suggests that making the case for assets and marketing them could be seen as a legitimate cost by grant-makers and donors. At present, not all foundations are comfortable funding general operating/core costs for non-profit-making groups that they want to support.

It does not have to all be the city government either. Friends groups and non-profit-making groups helped with some of the examples mentioned above and more besides. Some of the methods were very cheap and cheerful — such as buttons/badges and witty sandwich boards

— important for times of austerity. Pro bono help from local business can help too. A library in metro Detroit had benefited from a genial award-winning campaign by a local marketing firm — explained in a three-minute video.³ The firm was able to market its wares and won several major design awards for doing so.

It is not enough just to tell people about assets — it is also important to keep developing new things to market. The research highlighted numerous examples of innovations around assets. For example, the Baltimore public library system and the city's health department now operate 'virtual supermarkets' in three library branches located in 'food deserts'. Local residents can order fresh food online (at home or from the library) and then collect it from the library at a prearranged time. In St. Paul, the library and recreation departments have just started Library after Dark one night per week in two public library branches, whereby the libraries open their space to teens for a few hours after it closes to the general public.

MONEY: REALISE THE MANY LOCAL TAX-RELATED MECHANISMS THAT CAN SUPPORT ASSETS

The three case-study areas have not escaped public spending restraints or cuts and nor have they found a magic bullet to address these. But whether a city is run by Tea Party members or proverbial 'Tax and Spend Liberals', the US does offer a menu of taxes and tax-related mechanisms to help sustain assets.

In fiscally and politically centralised countries such as the UK, decisions around public funding for assets instead often depend greatly on what amount of tax revenue is 'repatriated' by central government to local government. This situation is much different in the USA.

Examples of US taxes that can and do support assets include: General property

taxes, property tax dedicated to specific spending areas (in Michigan, such taxes are voter-approved ‘millages’ that typically last for ten years); Retail and services sales taxes; Real estate sales tax; Special Tax Districts; Business Improvement Districts (BIDs).

Particularly novel is Tax-Base Sharing. The Twin Cities are known internationally for their metropolitan approach to urban development. For the last 40 years, the Fiscal Disparity Law has used growth in the metro-wide business property tax base to help needier areas. Because it lessens areas’ need to have their own business property base, it also encourages open space.

The advantage of these different mechanisms is that asset managers do not have to rely on an individual income stream. So, for example, even when property values are falling, revenue from sales taxes may still bring in money. The ability to vote on such mechanisms also helps to raise awareness. Most mechanisms are introduced following a vote of residents, usually at the city-wide level, but sometimes at higher and lower levels. Votes on certain taxes help raise awareness further, as they attract attention and debate in the media. The buzz in the local media around the Detroit Institute of Arts millage vote, which occurred during the research phase, was considerable.

Other tax-related mechanisms that allow local and state government to attract finance to assets — that have then to be repaid from taxes — include: Municipal bonds; Tax Increment Finance (TIF) and tax breaks for donations to non-profit-making groups.

Contrast all of this with the UK, where the new powers to have a public referendum on raising Council Tax (the only real local tax) by over 2 per cent have not even been tried.

For all this impressive localism, the USA has seen scant federal efforts to help

poorer cities aside from a recently closed urban parks fund⁴ — so, if at least rudimentary libraries and parks are seen as rights, residents in such places may find themselves ‘asset-deprived’. It is somewhat ironic, then, that the UK, with its centralised public funding, still has an arts spend that is so unfavourable to cities outside the capital.⁵ There needs to be a balance between the US and UK models it seems.

MONEY: (DONE WELL) TRANSFER OF CITY-OWNED ASSETS TO NON-PROFITS CAN IMPROVE ASSETS

City-owned assets can be run by non-profit-making groups. The term ‘run’ is here used to mean managed, resourced and programmed. This arrangement has the potential advantage of opening up assets to: management by social enterprises that have a public service ethos allied to a business/enterprise mind-set; competition for foundation grants and donations from philanthropists and the general public; and private investment, in the case of theatres and golf courses, which have the potential to make money.

There are numerous instances of city-owned assets being taken on and run by non-profit-making groups in the case-study cities; it is by far the main direction of travel in terms of asset operation moving between public, private and non-profit sectors. Examples include Clark Park and Eastern Market in Detroit, Rec Centers in St. Paul, and neighbourhood markets and golf courses in Baltimore.

City governments can take a number of steps to facilitate the ownership transfer. For example, they are typically leased on very low rents, may get a lump sum on start-up or get assistance with building or programme management issues. They may retain a seat on the board or they may stipulate what general type of activities



Figure 2: Soccer sessions run by the non-profit service partner at St. Anthony Rec. Center, St. Paul

Source: Joy of the People

can take place in the asset. It is for this reason that such shifts are typically described by city officials as partnerships.

Sometimes the moves have been described in local media as privatisations rather than partnerships, on the grounds that assets were disposed of to remove costs from city accounts and/or as the only alternative to closure. Privatisations are much more likely in areas characterised by poorer locations, declining populations and older assets.

An ideal scenario is for dynamic non-profit-making groups to be contracted by city government to deliver core asset services and also then generate additional funding and innovation — as occurs, for example, with the YMCA of Central Maryland's management of many leisure facilities in prosperous Baltimore County, which surrounds the city of the same name.

Not everything has to be sub-contracted to one organisation. In St. Paul, 12 Rec Centers were transferred to separate non-profit-making groups. One such example, Joy of the People, runs an innovative soccer programme (see Figure 2) from its centre: it accesses various grants and fees (balanced with bursaries) to sustain itself. It will be up to individual cities to decide whether they wish to sub-contract to a larger provider, several smaller providers or something in-between.

The most striking difference is that the US non-profit-making groups all seem to be charities (501c(3)s — tax-exempt non-profit organization in the USA), whereas the UK, dating back two decades to when the London Borough of Greenwich contracted out its sport and leisure facilities, has seen some of the non-profit asset managers taking the form

of employee-led cooperatives. Understanding this difference is an area for further US–UK exchange.

MONEY: FUNDRAISING BY THE PUBLIC CAN RAISE AWARENESS AND ENSURE MORE EYES ON ASSETS

Securing donations and raising money through events and services can also raise awareness of assets by serving as a reminder to donors of what is (or could be) available to them. Fundraising events also often involve bringing people into the asset, so they get to see what the offer is.

The amounts raised also serve as a (crude) barometer of the asset's popularity. While the wider state of the economy and peoples' personal wealth/circumstances will invariably affect donations, a medium-to-long-term view of an asset's fundraising success can give some indication of the value that local residents place on it. Success should prove attractive to other funders.

In the same way, increased awareness should serve as a form of governance for assets — the more people that are giving to assets and visiting them, the greater should be the interest in how they are managed.

MONEY: A CITY-WIDE APPROACH HAS BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN SEVERAL CITIES

Baltimore's Parks and People Foundation, set up in 1984 by the then Mayor to raise funds for parks improvements and programming, has grown to become a *de facto* second parks department for the city and a recognised national leader. Like others in the US, such as the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy and Friends of St. Paul Baseball, it has seen a civic-level response, so not just small friends' groups that fight

it out for donations, but an over-arching civic body — the alternative being a New York-style arrangement where parks in the richest neighbourhoods get most money. This is not to say that local efforts cannot also play a role — merely that there are economies of scale and scope to be had by having a city-wide organisation battling it out to raise funds and awareness for their assets.

Money: Technology is increasingly important for accessing potential donors

Crowd-resourcing sites are increasingly used to fund assets — with smaller non-profit-making groups being the principal campaign organisers. Sites being used include Kickstarter, Indie GoGo and Razoo. More generally, the USA also now has Citizeninvestor and Neighbor.ly, crowd-resourcing sites, which attempt to co-/fund local government projects. Impressive though these latter are, they all see the UK's Spacehive organisation as the pace-setter in the crowd-resourcing of assets.

While they may never be the main way to levy funding for assets, online platforms can bring in enough resources for specific purchases for use in/on an asset. For example, the non-profit Baltimore Green Map organisation has crowd-resourced the US\$9,500 needed to produce several thousand copies of the Druid Hill Park Passport, a child-friendly booklet highlighting features of interest in one of the city's public parks.

A key aspect of crowd-resourcing sites is the short promotional videos that fundraisers produce to persuade donors. These videos are often good at engaging internet and smartphone users. Links to such videos can be easily distributed via Facebook, e-mail and Twitter. The videos can also be used for awareness-raising more generally. Asset support groups may

well need to seek help with the making and editing of such videos — a relatively easy ask of tech companies and younger volunteers.

MONEY: CHARITABLE FOUNDATIONS ADD A VALUABLE DIMENSION TO THE ASSET LANDSCAPE

Charitable foundations add a valuable dimension to the asset landscape in terms of their capacity to innovate, to build on/'top-up' existing public assets, and to take a longer-term view than politicians, who often have one eye on the next election or higher office. Examples include: McKnight Foundation's support for the consultancy work that led to creation of the St. Paul Parks Conservancy; Baltimore Community Foundation's support for community groups to show outdoor films in parks in the summer; Detroit foundations' support for physical links between assets, such as the Dequindre Cut that links the Eastern Market and the (foundation-funded) riverfront walk; and the Miami-based James S. and John L. Knight Foundation's support for the Detroit Institute of Art's Inside-I-Out programme that installs replicas of its artwork around southeast Michigan.

There are benefits of trying to encourage more individuals and companies to establish local foundations and to build-up community foundations. Both types can benefit assets but, as the US examples show, community foundations have strong knowledge of local needs, an ability to draw in funds from wealthy local people, and the ability to involve these individuals through what are known as Donor Advised Funds (DAFs). This presents an opportunity, and a challenge, for countries such as the UK that have a smaller and more national-level foundation landscape. The UK Government has, in recent years,

endeavoured to grow the size of community foundations through its Endowment Match Challenge.

While they typically have much more money than their UK counterparts, US charitable foundations are not an inexhaustible reservoir of funding that can pick up the tab for government cuts — they have existing commitments, and much of their funds are invested endowments. For most foundations, even spending their entire endowments would still be much less than many city asset budgets for a single year.

MONEY: ENLIGHTENED BUSINESSES SEE THEIR LOCAL AREA AS A KIND OF DE FACTO INVESTOR/SHAREHOLDER

Enlightened businesses see a connection between their success and asset quality. Twin Cities' corporations have a long tradition of seeing their civic and community assets, not necessarily just city-owned ones, as good for business, particularly attracting and retaining workers and customers. In many ways, these companies (which include 19 members of the Fortune 500) see their local area as a kind of *de facto* investor/shareholder. So, for example, the Twin Cities' corporate sector has a long-established club that allocates a percentage (up to 5 per cent) of annual pre-tax profits to charitable causes. This club uses and reinforces connections among its members and, crucially, creates professional and social norms that incoming CEOs feel they need to be part of. Admittedly, as the businesses have become increasingly global, so too has their definition of community expanded, but the Twin Cities still do very well out of their strong business base. The key thing is that money comes from pre-tax profits, so the companies only give when profitable.

MONEY: BUSINESS CAN BEST SUPPORT ASSETS BY USING ITS OWN CORE SKILLS, GOODS AND SERVICES

As was seen earlier with the case of Troy Public Library, business can lend skills that can make a positive impact and then benefit the firm's own marketing. The same is true of companies' donation of goods. A good example is where a non-profit group that has drawn heavily on volunteers to renovate Detroit's Romanowski Park secured money, products and staff volunteers through Home Depot — including its monthly online 'Aprons in Action' competition. The company has a strong brand in home and garden improvements, and so benefits from informally promoting this.

Aprons in Action itself was also interesting, as it was one example of many, where large companies run an online competition, similar to crowd-resourcing projects, for community-based projects seeking funding to submit a video to a competition page on the company website and encourage supporters to vote for them. This effort helps to raise awareness of issues further even if the 'ask' of individuals is small.

HELP: THE IDEAL SCENARIO IS VOLUNTEERS THAT ADD TO THE ASSET'S APPEAL

The research showed that volunteers can improve assets in that they are a useful alternative to paid unskilled staff; can demonstrate the value that the public place on assets; are useful when temporary and/or unpredictable work is required; may bring local knowledge to bear as asset users and people who know other users; can increase an asset's community and civic connections; or can increase a community and city's sense of ownership over assets. It may also be a way of contributing to citizenship education

(where school pupils volunteer) and professional development (university students volunteering).

In instances where there have been substantial public-sector job losses, volunteers can step in and do some of the tasks previously performed by paid staff. In Detroit, for example, some 75 of the city's 300-plus parks, almost invariably smaller ones, are now tended by local groups and business (a few even run programmes such as yoga and sports). A couple of non-profit-making groups help out with ride-on mowers and weed-whackers. This is especially impressive, given the city's depopulation issues.

Such 'supplanting volunteering' is, however, limited by two key factors. One is the scale of the task: some work is simply too large, and the equipment required to do them comes with liability issues — larger parks are a classic case in point. The other is the skill needs of many posts. Many asset management roles require at least a specialist university degree such as park management or museology. So, for example, Baltimore's wonderful non-profit run Village Learning Place — which grew out of a closed city branch — has its share of volunteers, but still needs a professional librarian.

Supplementing is more about willingness than skills. So it is: serving on user panels or as docents/interpretive guides in art museums (see Figure 3); book-shelvers and receptionists in libraries; teachers of classes in recreation centres; sports coaches with city park sports teams; supervisors of recreational games in senior centres; assisting reading in local libraries; helping the elderly at local senior centres to Skype relatives; or co-managers of assets with city government. Volunteers also work in friends' groups and conservancies that support many assets, such as, for example: board members; fundraisers; or neighbourhood watch members.



Figure 3: A docent talks with students about Degas' 'Little Dancer', Baltimore Museum of Art

Source: Howard Korn/Baltimore Museum of Art

HELP: VOLUNTEERING WITH ASSETS REQUIRES A SUPPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

All volunteering needs managing, which, in turn, requires investment of some description. Many cities have introduced infrastructure to encourage voluntarism. The Mayor of Baltimore's stepUP programme recruits volunteers to supplement the work of city staff. The most relevant element of the programme, Power in Dirt (PiD), encourages community groups and organisations to tend or even buy city-owned vacant lots with potential as smaller community gardens and spaces.

This, and stepUP more generally, is overseen by a Chief Service Officer who, aided by a small team, enlists support from key city departments. With PiD, this includes working with City Housing staff to ensure good online maps of available lots that residents may want to manage or buy and with Public Works to ensure City

water is available for lots that are adopted.

Baltimore is one of hundreds of cities to participate in the Cities of Service (CoS) programme, which is a national non-profit network that has successfully championed Mayor-led supplementary volunteering initiatives across the USA. The Mayor of London has already adopted the approach, and seven other English cities are to follow suit. There is still time for these English cities to include an assets element — either one city focusing on this or a strand through all seven.

Several other excellent national non-profit models for encouraging volunteering have also been adopted in the study cities. Notable here are Business Volunteers Unlimited, which matches managers with non-profit boards, and Habitat for Humanity's CEO Build, which gets CEOs out into communities once a year to build a home collectively. The national model that is perhaps most

relevant here is the non-profit ToolBank, which, through several local affiliates, lends tools and equipment (from drills to hoes) to non-profit member groups.

Some local volunteering recruitment and management initiatives have sought to plug into social networks: for example, neighbourhood football teams in Detroit that have a community service competition running alongside the city-wide neighbourhood football league.

MONEY AND HELP: PEOPLE CAN BE PERSUADED TO FUNDRAISE AND VOLUNTEER BY AN APPEAL TO THEIR WELFARE

The research also showed how the wellbeing aspects of fundraising can help persuade people to do them — a connection back to the barn-raising of old. First, the act of fundraising creates/reinforces networks and/or friendships. In Detroit, for example, a foundation-funded Citizen Philanthropy programme is drawing on and creating social ties to raise funds. A local committee identifies social enterprises and other worthy projects (which can include assets), and these selected projects are championed by interested locals, who give their own money and tap into their networks of friends, often via social media. There are similar examples for volunteering. People get to meet new friends while also doing good things for others.

Well-being aspects also help people to support fundraising. Fundraising events, such as discos and fairs, can be key dates in local calendars — the antithesis of people reluctantly dipping into their pockets to support something. Some organisations, usually smaller ones, call them ‘fun-raisers’ where the ‘enjoyment to fundraising ratio’ is especially high.

CONCLUSIONS

This research offers some hope of a future in which UK local government might be given more power, while cautioning, on the grounds of equity, against a complete devolution that could see some of the poorest areas unable to meet basic asset needs. It shows, too, that there can be a more productive involvement in the delivery of community and civic assets — involving business, social enterprise, non-profit-making groups and volunteers augurs well for better assets. And finally, the research has helped to show that assets need to be continually promoted, with end-user groups playing a key role, and that they can be marketed in innovative ways (admittedly, the marketing aspect needs more evidence on impact rather than novelty of approach).

The findings are valuable for almost any political scenario in that the mechanisms outlined can be applied to a situation where public support for publicly funded assets is high or one where a very residual public-sector involvement is the desired course of action. The research has shown the advantages, whichever course is pursued, of involving a range of different partners.

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