

## Capacity-Focused-Community Building\*

by Vivian Vasallo, Consultant,  
Leadership Initiative

Building a community requires a strong foundation upon which to develop neighborhoods into thriving productive areas. Frequently, community leaders tend to dwell on the problems and deficiencies of their communities as the basis for producing a strategic plan to guide neighborhoods and individuals in building their community. Communities are studied for these problems and subsequently become consumers of human and social services, rather than investors in their own energies and assets.

Often before embarking on a new project, a needs assessment is undertaken to identify and determine the specific needs of a target group or community so that a program can properly be structured to meet those needs. Organizations are accustomed to focusing on the "gaps" in the community and addressing those related needs. Much of the funding directed to lower income communities is based on the problem-oriented data collected

in needs assessments. Targeting

resources based on deficiencies directs funding not to residents but to service providers. This mentality can also have a negative effect on the nature of local leadership. If, for example, one measure of effective leadership is the ability to attract resources, then local leaders are, in effect, being forced to belittle their neighbors and their community by highlighting their problems and deficiencies, and by ignoring their capacities and strengths. This direction should be regarded as one of the root causes of the sense of hopelessness that pervades discussions about the future of local communities. Typically, this has been the most common strategy. However, a foundation based on deficits makes it difficult to realize the goals of a strong community.

This *NCLR Leadership Bulletin* introduces an alternate method for rebuilding communities. By comparison, the second method insists on beginning with a clear commitment to discovering a community's capacities and assets. This method is referred to as **capacity-focused community building**.

A shift to capacity-oriented development is a concept that should

be emphasized by community leaders. Past experiences indicate that significant community development takes place when local community individuals are committed to investing themselves and their resources in a joint effort. Another reason for accentuating the development of the internal assets of local urban neighborhoods is the dismal prospect for outside help. It is highly unlikely that in light of recent budget constraints and fiscal uncertainty that job-providing industrial or service corporations will be locating in lower-income neighborhoods, nor is the outlook for significant federal grants encouraging. Passive action — the "sit around and wait" syndrome — has been exhausted. Development must start from within the community. The key, then, to neighborhood regeneration is to locate available local assets and begin connecting them with one another in ways that multiply their power and effectiveness, and to begin harnessing local institutions that are not yet available for local development purposes.

Each community has a unique combination of assets upon which to begin building its future. This com-



\* Much of this article is based on John Kretzmann and John McKnight, *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Mobilizing A Community's Assets*, Chicago, Illinois: ACTA Publications, 1993.

## ASSET-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

- A community development strategy starts with what is present in the community, the capacities of its residents and workers, the associational and institutional base of the area — not with what is absent, or what is problematic, or what the community “needs.”
- The asset-based process is “internally focused.” The development strategy concentrates first upon the agenda building and problem-solving capacities of local residents, local associations, and local institutions. A strong internal focus is intended to simply stress the primacy of local definition, investment, creativity, hope, and control.
- An asset-based, internally focused process is also relationship driven. Thus, one of the central challenges for asset-based community development leaders is to constantly build and rebuild relationships between and among local residents, associations, and institutions.

bination may be regarded as the foundation of the community and includes an inventory of the gifts, skills, and capacities in three major categories: individuals, associations, and local institutions. Local leaders soon discover a vast and often surprising array of individual talents and productive skills, few of which are being mobilized for community-building purposes.

### Individual Capacities

It is apparent that every individual has needs or deficiencies. It is also clear that every individual has gifts and capacities. This reality can be compared to the proverbial glass of water, which is half full and half empty. Similarly, individuals have capacities and deficiencies. Often, the community is viewed as a group of local residents who act as clients “needy” of certain services, rather than as citizens with gifts and talents. It is the citizen who is a member of building a community. Therefore, the basic information needed to develop strong communities is an inventory of the capacities of its residents. To be powerful, a com-

munity must have people who are citizens and producers.

In order to focus on the capacities of community members, it may be necessary to use a new tool that does not focus on needs. This tool is called a *Capacity Inventory* and focuses on assessing the strengths and gifts of individuals, rather than the needs and deficiencies.

One of the principal purposes of the *Capacity Inventory* is to help a particular person contribute. It should **not** be designed to do a study of neighborhood residents that will primarily result in tables and charts showing numbers and skills. The groups involved in asking the questions should have an outline for connecting the individual to local community groups and activities which provide a match for that individual’s skills to the “needs” of certain associations.

The *Capacity Inventory* is comprised of four sections: Skills Information, Community Skills, Enterprising Interests and Experience, and Personal Information.

- ❖ **Skills Information** lists many skills which individuals have acquired in the home, community,

or workplace. One part of this section lists priority skills, where the person being interviewed is asked to identify their best skills. This part usually brings the most important information because that person is usually best able to assess their own abilities and thus, be most likely to feel confident about these skills. Therefore, they are probably more willing to contribute them to the community or sell them in the marketplace.

- ❖ **Community Skills** identifies the kinds of community work a person has participated in and then asks what kind of work they would be willing to do in the future. The work the person is willing to do in the future is the “raw material” for community building. Connecting these potential gifts with local community groups is vital work for local leaders and asset building organizations.
- ❖ **Enterprising Interests and Experience** seeks two types of information. Individuals are questioned as to whether they have considered starting a business or are presently engaged in a business of any kind. Business is defined as any money-making activity, such as babysitting, sewing, making repairs, etc. By identifying barriers which a person feels prevents him/her from starting an enterprise, as identified in this part, local leaders can help remove those barriers and there by encourage launching of successful business enterprises in their communities.
- ❖ **Personal Information** includes the minimum information necessary for follow-up such as name, telephone number, and address.

The sample Capacity Inventory provided below is taken from the book, *Building Communities from the Inside Out*, and is reprinted with permission from the Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research. A more extensive version of the Capacity Inventory is available in the book.

## Capacity Inventory

Hello. I'm with (local organization's name). We're talking to local people about their skills. With this information, we hope to help people contribute to improving the neighborhood, find jobs or start businesses. May I ask you some questions about your skills and abilities?

### Part I-Skills Information

Now I'm going to read to you a list of skills. It's an extensive list, so I hope you'll bear with me. I'll read the skills and you just say "yes" whenever we get to one you have.

We are interested in all your skills and abilities. They may have been learned through experience in the home or with your family. They may be skills you've learned at church or in the community. They may also be skills you have learned on the job.

#### Health

Caring for the Elderly  YES  NO

Caring for the Mentally Ill  YES  NO

Caring for the Sick  YES  NO

Caring for the Physically Disabled or Developmentally Disabled  YES  NO

(If yes answered to items 1, 2, 3 or 4, ask the following:)

Now, I would like to know about the kind of care you provided.

Bathing  YES  NO

Feeding  YES  NO

Preparing Special Diets  YES  NO

Exercising and Escorting  YES  NO

Grooming  YES  NO

Dressing  YES  NO

Making the Person Feel at Ease  YES  NO

#### Office

Typing (words per minute\_\_\_\_\_ )  YES  NO

Operating Adding Machine/Calculator  YES  NO

Filing Alphabetically/Numerically  YES  NO

Taking Phone Messages  YES  NO

Writing Business Letters (not typing)  YES  NO

Receiving Phone Orders  YES  NO

Operating Switchboard  YES  NO

Keeping Track of Supplies  YES  NO

Shorthand or Speedwriting  YES  NO

Bookkeeping  YES  NO

Entering Information into Computer  YES  NO

Word Processing  YES  NO

Construction and Repair  YES  NO

Painting  YES  NO

#### Maintenance

Window Washing  YES  NO

Floor Waxing or Mopping  YES  NO

Washing and Cleaning Carpets/Rugs  YES  NO

Routing Clogged Drains  YES  NO

Using a Handtruck in a Business  YES  NO

#### Food

Catering  YES  NO

Serving Food to Large Numbers of People (over 10)  YES  NO

Preparing Meals for Large Numbers of People (over 10)  YES  NO

Clearing/Setting Tables for Large Numbers of People (over 10)  YES  NO

Washing Dishes for Large Numbers of People (over 10)  YES  NO

## Child Care

- Caring for Babies (under 1 year)  YES  NO  
Caring for Children (1 to 6)  YES  NO  
Caring for Children (7 to 13)  YES  NO  
Taking Children on Field Trips  YES  NO

## Transportation

- Driving a Car  YES  NO  
Driving a Van  YES  NO  
Driving a Bus  YES  NO  
Driving a Taxi  YES  NO  
Driving a Tractor Trailer  YES  NO

## Operating Equipment & Repairing Machinery

- Repairing Radios, TVs, VCRs,  
Tape Recorders  YES  NO  
Repairing Other Small Appliances  YES  NO  
Repairing Automobiles  YES  NO  
Repairing Trucks/Buses  YES  NO  
Repairing Auto/Truck/Bus Bodies  YES  NO

## Supervision

- Writing Reports  YES  NO  
Filling out Forms  YES  NO  
Planning Work for Other People  YES  NO  
Directing the Work of Other People  YES  NO  
Making a Budget  YES  NO

## Sales

- Operating a Cash Register  YES  NO  
Selling Products Wholesale or  
for Manufacturer  YES  NO  
(If yes, which products?) \_\_\_\_\_  
Selling Products Retail  YES  NO  
(If yes, which products?) \_\_\_\_\_  
Selling Services  YES  NO  
(If yes, which services?) \_\_\_\_\_

## Music

- Singing  YES  NO

Play an Instrument  YES  NO  
(Which instrument?) \_\_\_\_\_

## Security

- Guarding Residential Property  YES  NO  
Guarding Commercial Property  YES  NO  
Guarding Industrial Property  YES  NO  
Armed Guard  YES  NO  
Crowd Control  YES  NO

## Other

- Sewing  YES  NO  
Tailoring  YES  NO  
Moving Furniture or  
Equipment to Different Locations  YES  NO  
Managing Property  YES  NO  
Assisting in the Classroom  YES  NO  
Hair Dressing  YES  NO  
Hair Cutting  YES  NO

Are there any other skills that you have which we haven't mentioned?

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## Priority skills

**1. When you think about your skills, what three things do you think you do best?**

- a) \_\_\_\_\_  
b) \_\_\_\_\_  
c) \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Which of all your skills are good enough that other people would hire you to do them?**

- a) \_\_\_\_\_  
b) \_\_\_\_\_  
c) \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Are there any skills you would like to teach?**

- a) \_\_\_\_\_  
b) \_\_\_\_\_  
c) \_\_\_\_\_

**4. What skills would you most like to learn?**

- a) \_\_\_\_\_
- b) \_\_\_\_\_
- c) \_\_\_\_\_

**Part II-Community Skills**

Have you ever organized or participated in any of the following community activities? (Place check mark if yes)

- Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts
- Church Fund-raisers
- Bingo
- School-Parent Associations
- Sports Teams
- Camp Trips for Kids
- Field Trips
- Political Campaigns
- Block Clubs
- Community Groups
- Rummage Sales
- Yard Sales
- Church Suppers
- Community Gardens
- Neighborhood Organization
- Other Groups or Community Work?

Let me read the list again. Tell me in which of these you would be willing to participate in the future. (Place check mark if yes)

**Part III-Enterprising Interests and Experience**

**A. Business Interest**

**1. Have you ever considered starting a business?**

- Yes  No

If yes, what kind of business did you have in mind?

\_\_\_\_\_

**2. Did you plan to start it alone or with other people?**

- Alone  Others

**3. Did you plan to operate it out of your home?**

- Yes  No

**4. What obstacle kept you from starting the business?**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**B. Business Activity**

**1. Are you currently earning money on your own through the sale of services or products?**

- Yes  No

**2. If yes, what are the services or products you sell?**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**3. Whom do you sell to?**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**4. How do you get customers?**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**5. What would help you improve your business?**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Personal Information

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_ (If a precise age is not given, ask whether the person is in the teens, 20s, 30s, etc.)

Sex:  F  M

**Thank you very much for your time.**

Source \_\_\_\_\_

Place of Interview \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer \_\_\_\_\_

## Promote your Success!

*The NCLR Hispanic Leadership Bulletin* is expanding to include submissions from NCLR Leadership Subgrantees, NCLR Affiliates, and Leadership Network members. We would like to include articles submitted by organizations that are carrying out leadership development in their communities. Topics may include:

- ❖ Innovative programs - using unique approaches, or serving special populations.
- ❖ Personal success stories from program groups or individual participants.
- ❖ Tips, pointers, and lessons learned for others involved in leadership development.
- ❖ Other topics and issues relevant to leadership development in the Latino community.

To submit articles, contact: Marco A. Davis, Senior Leadership Development Specialist at (202) 776-1741. The deadline for submissions to the Fall 1997 Bulletin is June 30, 1996.

## Local Associations and Organizations

One of the best vehicles for mobilizing individuals' gifts is the association. Associations are groups of *citizens* with power who come together with a vision for a common goal. They serve as an effective tool for revitalizing the community. Similar to the *Capacity Inventory*

conducted to assess individual needs, a comparable analysis of the associations in a community should also be undertaken. An inventory of local associations is a basic step in mobilizing the power of the community.

*"Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions constantly form associations... Among the laws that rule human societies there is*

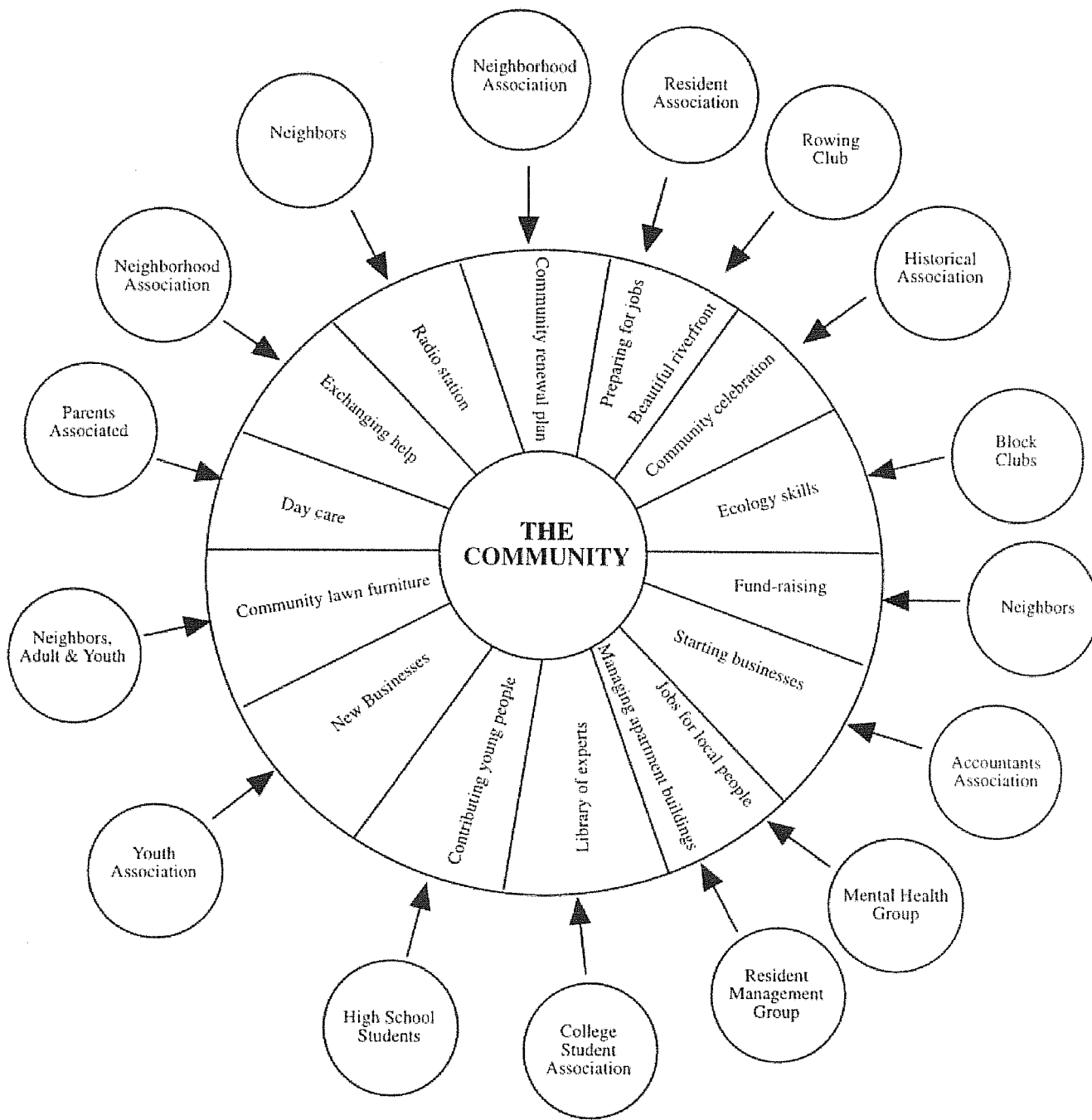
*one which seems to be more precise and clear than all others. If men are to remain civilized or to become so, the art of associating together must grow and improve in the same ratio in which the equality of conditions is increased."* —Alexis de Tocqueville from *Democracy in America*

Research about the extended network of local neighborhood groups is the beginning of the Association

The Local Associations Map provided below is also taken from the book, *Building Communities...*, and is reprinted with permission.

### Diagram

Local Associations and Their Community Building Work





*Inventory.* Some methods that are successful in assembling this list are newspapers, directories, and other printed sources; talking to people at local institutions, such as churches, hospitals, and schools; and conducting telephone surveys of local residents. An inventory of local associations will not necessarily reveal the nature of all the community work the groups may do. Therefore, an effective inventory must also identify the various kinds of activities undertaken by local associations — formal and informal.

## Local Institutions

The third tool useful in community building is the power of local institutions. As with individuals and associations, it is necessary to assess this component of a community and address how to “capture” these institutions as part of the community-building process. Every community hosts some combination of more formal public, private and not-for-profit institutions. These organizations represent significant concentrations of resources. Local leaders should realize and tap the potential, often unused, capacity of these institutions to contribute to the social, physical, and economic health of their neighborhoods. Foundations such as schools, parks, libraries, police stations, social service agencies, and hospitals are an excellent place to access such resources. Since an important step in the development process involves the identification of all of the neighborhood’s assets, a complete inventory of local institutions will provide vital information. What proves useful to the community is an inventory not just listing the institutions but containing a collection of assets such as physical facilities, materials and

equipment, financial capacity, and purchasing power.

A challenge in capturing the capacity of local institutions in community building is that often these local organizations are bound to larger institutional forces which may lie outside the immediate area. A relationship must be built between local residents and associations and the local institution. There must be an understanding of mutual interest in the neighborhood and that building cooperative relationships can benefit everyone. This concrete, mutually beneficial relationship building lies at the center of the asset-based development process. Furthermore, building bridges between local institutions and resources outside the community enhances the opportunity of a local institution’s links with larger systems, and its potential as a magnet for financial and other resources.

## Rebuilding The Community Economy

One of the biggest obstacles facing local leaders today is revitalizing the economic life of a community. As a result of various cutbacks and downsizings, smaller neighborhoods and communities have been virtually “unplugged” from the mainstream economy. In order to “re-enter” the economy, communities need a major commitment to economic reconstruction. A creative approach works best in situations where traditional methods of economic construction don’t work.

Questions to consider. . .

- ❖ How might community builders recognize and capture the full economic development potential of all local institutions and organizations?

- ❖ How can community builders capture local savings and expand the availability of vital capital and credit for community building purposes?
- ❖ How can local development leaders maximize the creative uses of all of the physical assets of the community?

Even in the most devastated neighborhoods there exist materials needed to construct a path toward economic well-being. It is necessary to harness the underutilized economic power of local institutions. “Non-economic” institutions have the potential to be key players in building stronger, healthier economies depending on how they use their fiscal resources. Local institutions which invest in a neighborhood demonstrate a commitment to the economic health and well-being of the neighborhood.

In general, there are eight basic methods for local institutions to invest in building their community.

## WELCOME

*NCLR welcomes...*

**Adriana Gonzalez,**  
Program Associate  
to the Leadership Initiative.

Adriana joins the NCLR staff from the National Hispana Leadership Institute, where she served as Program Director, and she is originally from San Antonio, Texas.

They are:

- ❖ local purchasing
- ❖ freeing potential productive economic space
- ❖ local investment strategies
- ❖ mobilizing external resources
- ❖ creating alternative credit institutions
- ❖ hiring locally
- ❖ developing new business
- ❖ developing human resources

Another method that can be utilized to rebuild community economies is to begin looking at physical liabilities and devise alternatives for how they can be transformed into assets. Communities can begin by reclaiming vacant lots and abandoned spaces. This process involves four basic steps.

**Step One:** Make an inventory of vacant and abandoned space.

**Step Two:** Acquire the space, using a variety of approaches, often with the help of partners.

**Step Three:** Initiate and develop an appropriate project.

**Step Four:** Maintain a viable, ongoing project.

## Whole Community Mobilization

Concentrating on maximizing local assets and generating new relationships is not enough. The real challenge presents itself in developing a comprehensive asset-based strategy, one which might involve virtually the entire community in the complex process of regeneration. Whole community mobilization may

be envisioned and may begin being implemented by a five-step process. These steps include:

1. Mapping completely the capacities and assets of individuals, citizens' associations, and local institutions.
2. Building relationships among local assets for mutually beneficial problem-solving within the community.
3. Mobilizing the community's assets fully for economic development and information sharing purposes.
4. Convening as broadly representative a group as possible for the purposes of building a community vision and plan.

5. Leveraging activities, investments and resources from outside the community to support asset-based, locally-defined development.

All together, these steps comprise the process of achieving an asset-based, internally focused and relationship-driven community. Of course, in addition to internal resources, external resources are needed. A different strategy is needed for asset-based development. Establishing a capacity-oriented funding strategy differs from the traditional needs-based statement.

The following guide may assist community leaders in fundraising efforts that are capacity-oriented.

## A GUIDE TO CAPACITY-ORIENTED FUNDING

- Clearly identify the skills, abilities, capacities, and assets which local residents will contribute to the proposal. How will local residents' capacities be used to address the issues identified? Have you developed an inventory of the capacities and skills of local residents to help guide this process?
- Clearly identify the capacities of your community's citizens associations, and indicate how they will be involved in both governance and problem-solving in your proposal.
- Indicate how this project will mobilize, utilize, enhance and expand these local capacities.
- Indicate how this project will contribute to building the local economy by, for example, employing community residents, enhancing local purchasing, capturing public budgets for local use, etc.
- Show evidence of significant investments of resources and time by local residents and organizations before funding is initiated.

## NCLR Announces..... Its Improved Publications Department

The National Council of La Raza (NCLR) has improved its publications fulfillment department. As of February 1995, all NCLR publications orders will be fulfilled by the NCLR Distribution Center. Since NCLR now has a higher volume of requests, the Distribution Center was created to handle large orders, as well as increase the efficiency of response to publication requests. If you wish to order, please call (301) 604-7983 or write to P.O. Box 291, Annapolis Junction, MD 20701-0291.

**Ways of ordering publications:** ❖ Phone orders ❖ Pre-paid orders ❖ Purchase orders

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QUANTITY	NAME OF PUBLICATION	DATE	PRICE
	Untapped Potential: A Look at Hispanic Women in the U.S. (R21)	February 1996	\$ 10.00
	Racing Toward Big Brother: Computer verification, ID Cards, and Immigration Control State of Hispanic America 1995. (M43)	August 1995	\$ 15.00
	Using Data, Assessing Needs: A Guide for Community Members of HIV Prevention Community Planning Groups (Q33)	April 1995	\$ 12.00
	NCLR Publications Guide (Publications Update 1995)	1980 - 1994	FREE
TOTAL Order:		\$	_____

### Join the NCLR Leadership Network

The *Leadership Bulletin* and other resources for leadership development programs serving Hispanics are sent free to members of the NCLR Leadership Network. Membership is free; members provide information on their leadership efforts and agree to share information with NCLR and other network members.

To join the network, or for more information about the Leadership Initiative, contact:

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