

LISC

MAPPING FOR CHANGE: USING GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

This report, published by the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), and written by LISC and PolicyLink, documents the many ways in which GIS can support community development efforts. It also shares the hard-won lessons of those who have pioneered the use of this technology in the community development field, including in-depth case studies of mapping projects in Richmond, Virginia and Minneapolis, Minnesota.

INTRODUCTION

Increasingly, the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) and our partners have been tapping into the power of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to convey information in a concise and compelling manner through maps and to analyze data geographically. Although academics and professionals in the fields of environmental science, geography and cartography have been using GIS for decades, it is relatively new to the community development field. Our experience to date has convinced us that GIS is a powerful tool for community development planning, advocacy, organizing, fundraising, and evaluation. However, we have also learned that the barriers to effectively using GIS - including access to technology, data, skilled users, and resources - are significant, and frequently underestimated by new users.

LISC has prepared this publication to document the many ways in which GIS is furthering community development efforts and to share the hard-won lessons of those who have pioneered the use of this technology in our field. LISC hired PolicyLink - a national nonprofit research, communications, capacity building, and advocacy organization - to research and help write and produce this report. PolicyLink's research included a brief literature review and detailed interviews with 30 community development practitioners, LISC staff, GIS data intermediaries, and university faculty and staff.

Section I of the paper provides a brief background of GIS and describes the spectrum of GIS functions, which range from simply displaying data to analyzing it. In Section II, we provide models and sample maps to illustrate how GIS is currently being used for:

- *Planning*
- *Organizing and Advocacy*
- *Partnership Building*
- *Evaluation and Marketing*

Based on these examples, in Section III, we offer the following broad conclusions:

- *GIS is a powerful resource for community development;*
- *GIS should be used as an analytical as well as a data display tool;*
- *Careful planning and partnerships are crucial for building GIS, due to the complexity of GIS applications.*

There are also more detailed recommendations in Section III regarding specific steps and considerations involved in planning for feasibility, data needs and sustainability, and for building appropriate partnerships. Following the conclusions, we offer detailed case studies of GIS partnerships in Richmond, Virginia, and Minneapolis, Minnesota. This paper focuses on how the community development field can use GIS applications to promote neighborhood development, rather than how practitioners can become experts in producing GIS applications.

More information about the examples included in this paper and about GIS technology can be found on the LISC Online Resource Library at www.liscnet.org/resources and in PolicyLink's Community Mapping tool at www.policylink.org/EquitableDevelopment. Additional sources of information on GIS and Community Development are included in Appendix A.
