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# St. Louis NEIGHBORHOOD MARKET DrillDown

**Better Data = Better Investment  
Better Numbers = Better Neighborhoods**

Monday, Oct. 31, 2011

## Overview

The St. Louis Fed was the site of the release of the new St. Louis Neighborhood Market DrillDown, a tool that can be utilized to reveal hidden community strengths and help impact access to healthy food, financial services, economic opportunities and more. The event was attended by a wide array of interested parties, including community development professionals, nonprofit leaders, education representatives, lenders, investors, business leaders, government officials, foundation leaders, policy developers, health and food security researchers, and graduate students.

Informative presentations set the stage for the initial release of this new study for St. Louis City and North St. Louis County. Speakers shared their unique experiences and personal insight, encouraging continued dialogue about these important topics.

## Data! What Is it Good For?

In the opening presentation, **Timothy Bray**, director of the Institute for Urban Policy Research at the University of Texas at Dallas, provided an energetic start to the day ([watch video](#) | [view presentation](#)). His presentation—"Data! What Is It Good For?"—emphasized that while the type of data revealed in the DrillDown is empowering, what is truly important is what people do with the data. And most people don't know what to do with data by itself.

The DrillDown is a data initiative that can be used to create an action plan, empowering transformation. The data unlocks a neighborhood's economic potential because it enables communication about what's really going on in a given area in terms that are important to lenders and policymakers. The data allows communication in the standard of our time—by equating issues with dollars. Data can be used to inform policy change, turning data into information, which in turn becomes knowledge. And knowledge is what powers transformation, not the data itself. DrillDown data will allow the true needs and desires of residents to be recognized.

The most important factor that drives community change is the community. Successful data initiatives

embrace community engagement, allowing locally derived conclusions and recommendations as much as possible. The data should be tied to the stories of the neighborhood residents. Problems should not just be tracked; something should be done about them.

Putting data online does not necessarily "democratize" it—true democratization requires data to be accessible and usable. "Accessible" doesn't mean just available; it means that people truly understand what the numbers mean in order to know what to do with the data. To be "usable," the data should be applicable to solve a problem. Sharing data fuels innovation and change, so it must be shared in a way that can be understood by most people. It needs to be communicated correctly, expressed in plain English so it's accessible to everyone involved (e.g., foundations, community groups, nonprofits, government agencies, academic organizations).

Support is key—financial, programming, and communal. Data collection must be funded, and the information must be adopted and used to drive decision-making in the neighborhood. Community champions play a key role, encompassing messaging, marketing, branding and strategic planning, but not analysis of the data. Partnership, a common purpose and working toward a community's real potential are the keys to realizing the vision beyond the initiative.

## Data Enlightens and Ignites Ideas

Four short presentations followed Bray's kickoff, explaining how data is igniting and motivating change in the St. Louis community.

**Faith Sandler**, executive director of the Scholarship Foundation of St. Louis, spoke about the importance of educational opportunities ([watch video](#) | [view presentation](#)). St. Louis is struggling in this area. Graduation rates are a problem at many area colleges; getting in is only the first hurdle. Low-income students are much less likely to graduate; having money matters too much. Degree completion in the region must be boosted. The foundation's goal is that 50 percent of adults in the area will have a

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postsecondary degree by 2020. They have created a community network to address this issue in a coordinated way. Three specific strategy areas are targeted: coordinating delivery of services, addressing affordability of college through advocacy, and persistence programs to ensure successful program completion.

**Timothy Breihan**, senior urban designer and project manager at H3 Studio, spoke about form-based planning as a tool for sustainable development ([watch video](#) | [view presentation](#)). Most development occurs as a result of zoning codes, which results in inflexible building types that are designed to produce only one use and one mode of access (e.g., cars), making them harder to re-use. So, they sit empty, driving down property values, until they're demolished. Form-based coding specifies the form of a place rather than its use, creating a flexible development that supports multiple uses, giving buildings life beyond what is initially envisioned.

**Sultan Meghji**, vice president of analytics applications at Appistry, talked about making data understandable and directly actionable to regular people who have no interest in reading rows of numbers ([watch video](#)). Appistry sells solutions to specific problems. St. Louis has tremendous IT and biotech entrepreneurial communities. The company tried to figure out some of the biggest problems in these areas and come up with solutions using technology.

**Laverne Carter**, founder, president and chief project director at REESSI, talked about problems and possible solutions for North St. Louis, especially regarding healthcare options ([watch video](#) | [view presentation](#)). Using data, REESSI informed the community and its leaders, and created the Healthy North St. Louis Collaborative and a comprehensive strategic healthcare plan. They are working through data and collaboration to rebuild North St. Louis.

## The St. Louis Neighborhood Market DrillDown

Event co-chairs **Eric Friedman**, Housing and Community Solutions, and **Stephen Acree**, Regional Housing and Community Development Alliance, explained the genesis, history and funding of the St. Louis DrillDown and thanked the project's partners and financial supporters ([watch video](#) | [view presentation](#)). The DrillDown data is the foundation for moving forward and creating solutions for North St. Louis City and County. The data can bring power and people together to solve problems. Getting different groups with various interests together to solve problems based on the data is the real point of this initiative.

**Alyssa Lee**, president and CEO of Social Compact, presented the initial DrillDown data. She spoke about the opportunities available in urban communities and the responsibility of business communities to respectfully engage with these areas ([view video](#) | [view presentation](#)). While there is a lot of data available, much of it is negative and will not drive the conversation forward. The positives of these communities should be stressed, allowing a different perspective and framing the question in a positive



Left to Right—Front row: Eric Friedman, Mary McMurtrey. Second row: Stephen Acree, Clifton Berry, Timothy Bray, Sultan Meghji, Royce Sutton, Alyssa Lee, Laverne Carter, John Weidman.

way. Many communities have inherent value that isn't recognized. Information gaps perpetuate negative circumstances in these communities and can create a cycle of neglect. Risk and negative perception creates a lack of economic impact (disinvestment) in a community. Partnership on a shared basis is critical; information (data) can be this basis. Creating a dialogue around this information can actually change the environment of a place. Data can correct these information gaps.

The St. Louis DrillDown study area included the entire city and a part of the county, divided into 26 different groupings of neighborhoods and activities. Information will be seen at this neighborhood level; broad data sets don't create action.

The DrillDown will not be completed without the interaction of St. Louis residents, particularly those who understand data and information. There has to be a shared consensus.

Lee discussed the importance of documenting informal economic activity, work that is not captured by traditional economic estimates. She shared some of the broad, high-level data collected to date in St. Louis. She also discussed the DrillDown impact in other areas of the country.

## Panel Response

A panel of four respondents (**John Weidman**, The Food Trust; **David Carroll**, North Grand Neighborhood Services; **Royce Sutton**, Fifth Third Bank; **Mary McMurtrey**, Gateway Center for Giving) answered questions following the presentations ([watch video](#)).

## Discussion Groups

After lunch, participants joined discussion leaders in one of four groups: Financial Services, Retail/Business Environment/Entrepreneurship, Philanthropy, or Food Access.

