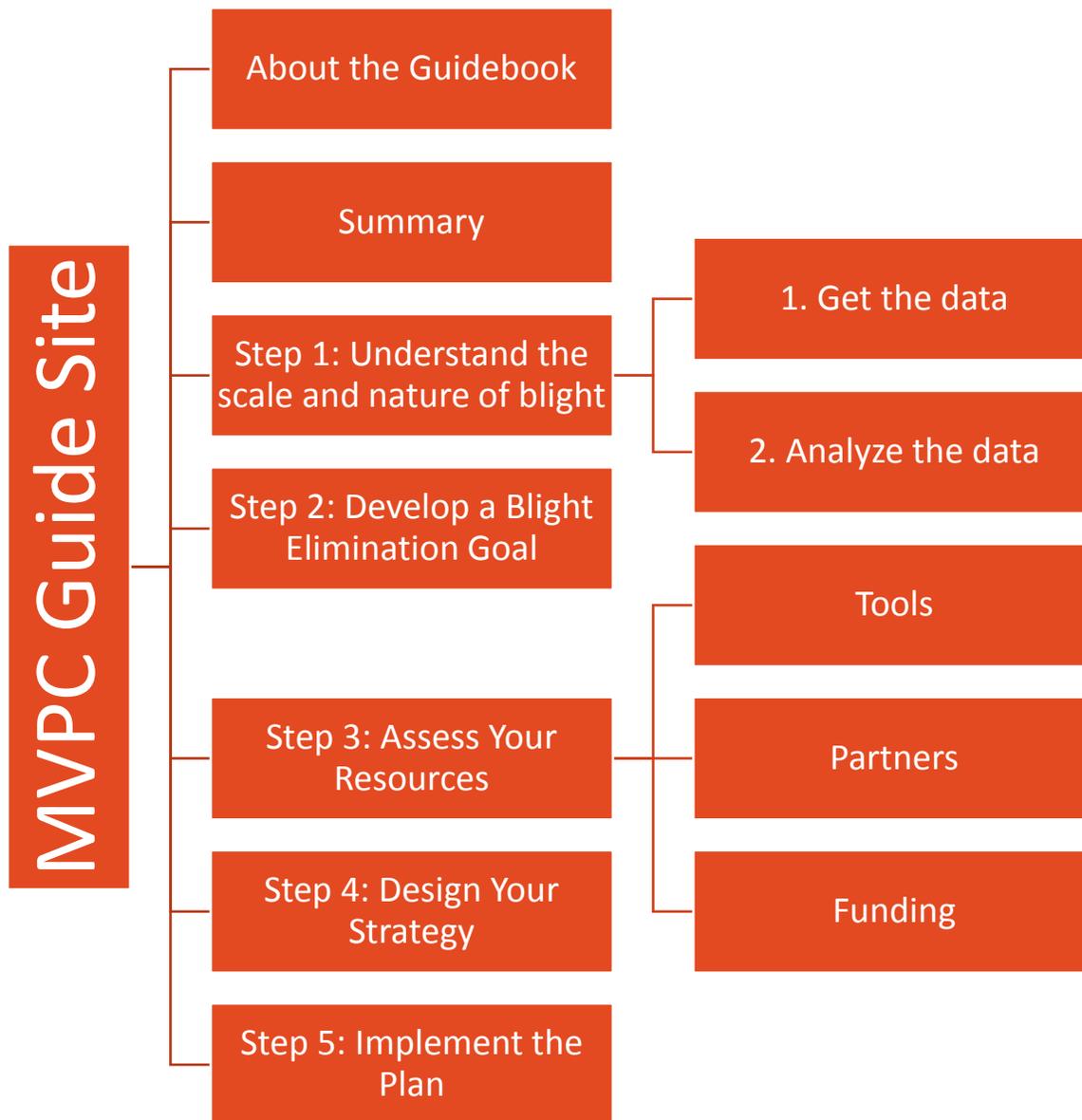

MVPC Blight Elimination Planning Guidebook Website Map



About the Guidebook

The Michigan Blight Elimination Planning Guidebook serves as a primer for Michigan communities interested in developing a strategy to more effectively address blight with limited resources. While this Guidebook will not address every blight issue a community is facing, it's meant to help local leaders identify a starting point and create a plan to eliminate blight. Every community is different and this guide is designed to provide municipal leaders with a variety of blight elimination resources and lead them through the development of a blight elimination plan. It also can help communities prepare for potential funding opportunities for blight elimination plan implementation, which may become available through the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA), the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), foundations, and other local or national entities.

The Michigan Vacant Property Campaign (MVPC) created this guidebook under the leadership of MSHDA and its advisors. MSHDA is working to prioritize funding for communities that have complete blight elimination plans.

Communities creating a blight elimination strategy through this resource are encouraged to reach out to MVPC partners, MSHDA community development specialists, or Community Assistance Team leaders at MEDC for assistance.

About the Michigan Vacant Property Campaign

The Michigan Vacant Property Campaign (MVPC) was established in 2012 and strives to efficiently and effectively meet the needs of state leaders committed to turning their communities' vacant properties into assets. The MVPC is a collaboration between four partners who each address blight and vacancy issues in unique ways:

- [Center for Community Progress](#) (Community Progress) is a national organization, headquartered in Michigan, specializing in vacant, abandoned, and problem properties. Community Progress offers technical assistance, education, research, and policy development to cities across the country.
- [Community Economic Development Association of Michigan](#) (CEDAM) provides policy and advocacy work, technical assistance, and education opportunities to Michigan nonprofit organizations involved in community economic development.
- [Michigan Community Resources](#) (MCR) works to empower low-income communities through technical assistance and pro-bono legal resources, and is also the home of the Detroit Vacant Property Campaign.
- [Michigan Municipal League](#) (MML) provides advocacy, training, information, and technical assistance to municipalities.

Summary

This website serves as a guide for Michigan municipal leaders interested in developing a strategy to more effectively address blight with limited resources. It outlines the major steps to create a blight elimination plan and centralizes many resources on blight elimination tools, partners, and funding sources.

A process to develop a blight elimination plan will generally follow these five steps in order to develop answers to the related key questions.

Step 1. Understand the scale and nature of blight

- How many properties are vacant?
- What is the physical condition of vacant properties?
- How many properties need to be boarded?
- How many properties need to be demolished?
- Who is responsible for the vacant properties?
- What areas show market strength or instability?
- Where have vacant or problem properties been increasing or decreasing?

Step 2. Establish a blight elimination goal

- What does the community seek to achieve through the elimination of blight?

Step 3. Assess your resources

- What legal or programmatic tools are being used currently to address blight and which could be enhanced?
- Who is currently implementing blight elimination work and at what scale?
- How much would it cost to fully address the blight?
- How much funding is currently being allocated to the issue?
- What sources of funding or partnerships could be enhanced to increase the scale of blight elimination work?

Step 4. Design your plan

- What types of resources should be deployed to better address blight?
- Where should they be deployed and during what timeframe?

Step 5. Implement and evaluate

- Who will coordinate the implementation of the blight elimination strategy?
- What role will other partners play in implementing the blight elimination strategy?
- How will new resources be secured?
- Who will evaluate success?

Graphic: Blight Elimination Planning Steps



Step 1: Understand the scale and nature of blight

The first step in the development of a blight elimination plan is to understand the specific scale of blight and how the property conditions and market are trending in your community.

After completing this step, you should be able to answer these key questions:

- *How many properties are vacant?*
 - *What is the physical condition of vacant properties?*
 - *How many properties need to be boarded?*
 - *How many properties need to be demolished?*
 - *Who is responsible for the vacant properties?*
 - *What areas show market strength or instability?*
 - *Where have vacant or problem properties been increasing or decreasing?*
-

Why does this step matter?

Some leaders may feel like the data gathering and analysis step is unnecessary because “we already know where the issues are.” Despite the sense that these blighted areas are already “known,” the data gathering and analysis step should not be skipped. Beyond being able to quantify the scale of the problem, this step is vital since it:

- **Sets context.** This step provides information to better understand blight trends and contributing factors. Simply knowing where vacancy exists does not provide enough information for plan development. You must build your plan based on an understanding of how blight and destabilizing factors are trending in a neighborhood, rather than just based on a single snapshot in time, in order to develop an appropriate response.
- **Builds consensus.** This step ensures that there is a common understanding about what the “problem” is. Inside and outside of government, people may have varying definitions of what qualifies as a problem property. Taking time to ensure a shared understanding will reduce the likelihood of unmet expectations at the end of the planning process.
- **Minimizes partiality.** A variety of factors, including daily and historic experience, shape an individual’s understanding of blight. If a decision-maker lives on the north side of a city, that person may have a good handle on what’s been happening with blight as it relates to those neighborhoods. However, he or she may not have as clear an understanding of what’s happening on the south side of that city. This may lead the decision-maker to disproportionately allocate resources to the north side. A thorough examination of trends will provide a more impartial assessment on which to base decisions.
- **Expands collaboration.** Gathering data from existing departments or initiating a survey provides opportunities to engage partners inside and outside of government through concrete projects. This allows for new partnerships to be formed—for example, with a local college, foundation, or nonprofit—at the start of the planning process, which may then continue into the implementation phase.
- **Sets a benchmark.** This step develops benchmarks for blight from which blight elimination progress can be evaluated during the implementation phases. Having a clear and specific calculation of the scale of blight at a given point in time will enable you to better measure the success of implementation in the future.

1. Get the data

Before a goal can be set for the blight elimination plan, you must get as clear and up-to-date of a picture of blight as possible. It's important to understand trends and to be able to quantify the scale of blight at the parcel, block, neighborhood, and city or county level. In order to accomplish that, you need to gather three main categories of data:

- 1) Vacancy data
- 2) Property condition data
- 3) Market data

In addition to the three main categories above, you can also gather information on a variety of other neighborhood stability indicators. This guide does not detail every source of information that may be relevant; rather, it provides an overview of key sources. For further information on neighborhood indicators, see these resources:

Organizations:

- <http://www.neighborhoodindicators.org/>
- <http://www.urban.org/index.cfm>

Publications:

- <http://www.urban.org/strengtheningcommunities/>
- <http://www.federalreserve.gov/communitydev/files/data-driven-publication-20111212.pdf>

The table below displays existing sources of data that can be used to better understand vacancy, property condition, and market information in your community. This is not a comprehensive list; it displays some of the more common or readily accessible sources of information. Not all of these sources of information need to be used. Since vacancy and condition change almost daily in every community, layering multiple data sources can provide a more complete picture of vacancy and conditions. At the very least, choose the source of information for each category that is the most reliable. Ideally, use data at the parcel-level since it can be aggregated to higher level.

Table: Common vacancy, condition, and market data sources

Source	Vacancy	Condition	Market	Data set: Description
City				
Assessor				<u>Assessment Data</u> : The Assessor's dataset will have information at the parcel-level on lot vacancy, property values, owner-occupancy, and owner name.
Buildings Dept				<u>Dangerous Buildings List</u> : Most buildings departments will have a list of dangerous buildings, depending on your local ordinances, these may be vacant buildings flagged for demolition. <u>Code Violations</u> : The list of maintenance code or blight violations will provide information on the condition of properties. <u>Vacant Property List or Registration</u> : Depending on your local ordinances, the building department will likely have a list of vacant residential structures. In addition, they will also have a list of municipally owned vacant properties. <u>Demolitions List</u> : A list of properties that have been demolished.

			<u>Rental Registration</u> : Depending on your local ordinances, you may have a list of registered rental properties which can be used to understand ownership type.
Fire Dept	■ ■		<u>Dangerous Buildings List</u> : Some fire departments will survey vacant properties and either keep a list of the vacant properties and the severity of their condition or may physically mark the property. <u>Fire Damaged Buildings</u> : A list of properties with fire damage or arson incidents can indicate condition and vacancy.
Water Dept	■		<u>Shut Off List</u> : A list of water shut offs or disconnects will typically indicate vacancy. <u>Low Usage</u> : When a physical shut off has not yet occurred on a property, looking at properties with significant drops in usage may indicate vacancy.
County			
Treasurer	■ ■		<u>Tax Delinquency, Forfeiture, and Foreclosure List</u> : The Treasurer will have a list of properties in stages of tax foreclosure which is an indicator of market instability. <u>Vacancy Data</u> : A Treasurer may have knowledge of which properties are vacant from posting foreclosure notices on properties. <u>Auction List</u> : The Treasurer will have a list of properties that sold at the tax auction, which provides an indication of market activity and ownership information.
Register of Deeds		■	<u>Last Deed of Record</u> : The ROD has a wealth of market information, but focusing on the last deed of record will provide you with information on the owner type (important for understanding who has the responsibility for property maintenance) and sales price. <u>Mortgages</u> : Looking at recorded mortgages can give you an understanding of market activity.
Land Bank	■ ■ ■		<u>Demolitions</u> : Your local land bank will have a list of properties they have demolished or need to demolish. <u>Sales</u> : The land bank will have sales price and owner information for properties they have sold. <u>Vacancy</u> : The land bank will have a list of the vacant lots and structures in their inventory.
Federal			
USPS	■		<u>USPS data</u> : The postal service collects data on vacant addresses which is accessible through the HUD user portal. This is generally distributed at the census block group level. Working with HUD, you may be able to obtain parcel-level data. Accessible at: http://www.huduser.org/portal/usps/index.html
Census	■ ■		<u>American Community Survey Data or Census Data</u> : ACS and Census data provides information on housing, including vacancy, occupancy, value, and mortgage, as well as population, such as age, income, and tenure. This data is available at census geography. ACS data is released more frequently than Census. Accessible at: http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml
HMDA		■	<u>Home Mortgage Disclosure Act Data</u> : HMDA data provides information on mortgage applications and loan activity at the census tract level, which can be an indicator for market activity. Accessible at: http://www.ffiec.gov/Hmda/hmdaproducts.htm
Non-governmental			
Gas Company	■		<u>Shut Off List</u> : A list of gas shut offs or disconnects will typically indicate vacancy. <u>Low Usage</u> : When a physical shut off has not yet occurred on a property, looking at properties with significant drops in usage may indicate vacancy.
Electricity Company	■		<u>Shut Off List</u> : A list of electricity shut offs or disconnects will typically indicate vacancy. <u>Low Usage</u> : When a physical shut off has not yet occurred on a property, looking at

		properties with significant drops in usage may indicate vacancy.
MLS	■	<u>Multiple Listing Service</u> : MLS provides a variety of relevant pieces of information on the market including, properties for sale, days on the market, properties that have sold, and the type of sale. MLS is accessible to real estate professionals.
CBOs	■ ■ ■	<u>Vacancy and Condition Lists</u> : Many Community-Based Organizations, such as neighborhood associations and Community Development Corporations, keep active lists of vacant properties and their condition. <u>Ownership and Sales</u> : CBOs may also have a list of the owners of vacant properties and information on sales that may not be represented in some standard datasets.

If the data sources you can access do not have up-to-date and reliable information on vacancy or property condition, you may want to create a new source of data through a windshield survey. Property surveys can vary greatly in terms of complexity, cost and duration. Minimally, the survey should gather information on the address, lot or structure vacancy, and exterior condition. For an example of a property survey and survey tutorial, see <https://motorcitymapping.org/blexting-basics.pdf>. While surveying vacant properties may seem like a daunting task, by leveraging partners and technology, it is an increasingly simple and inexpensive process.

Partners: If government resources alone are not enough to complete a survey, nonprofits and universities can serve as great partners to develop, manage, or staff a survey. Some municipalities, like the City of Flint have been able to complete surveys relying almost solely on volunteers.

Technology: Recent surveys have leveraged handheld technology like smart phones to identify properties, complete data entry, and upload photographs from the field. There are a number of organizations that provide platforms for property survey work using smart phones, such as Local Data <http://localdata.com/> and Loveland Technologies <https://makeloveland.com/>.

2. Analyze the data

Once data on vacancy, condition, and markets have been collected, the next step is to analyze the information. An analysis should look at multiple sources of data to identify, at a minimum:

- 1) Spatial patterns,
- 2) Trends, and
- 3) Areas with similar characteristics.

The goal of the analysis is to get a better understanding of how the individual points of data, such as the addresses of vacant structures, relate to each other and how these points of data have been shifting over time. The analysis will provide you with a deeper understanding of stability in each neighborhood and which neighborhoods share similar characteristics.

Later in Step 3, you will develop a plan for how to deploy blight elimination tools based on the needs of each type of neighborhood. For example, for neighborhoods that are experiencing recent spikes in vacancy where market sales still occur, you may want to deploy creative home purchase incentives to rapidly reoccupy those properties. In order to tailor the specific intervention to each neighborhood type, you need to first understand what the dynamics are of that neighborhood. This stage of data analysis will provide you with an understanding of those neighborhood dynamics.

Below is a list of sample questions you can consider to guide your analysis, please note this is not inclusive of every potential questions, but is intended to serve as a jumping off point:

Spatial patterns: Where are issues located?

- Where is vacancy clustered?
- Do property condition issues follow the spatial pattern of vacancy?
- Are the demolition-condition properties in one geography or multiple?
- Are there areas where vacancy is minimal?
- Where are the highest and lowest numbers of property sales? The highest and lowest sales prices?

Trends: Are things getting better or worse?

- Has the rate of vacancy been going up or down and at what rate?
- Are there areas where vacancy has increased or decreased faster than the general rate for the municipality?
- Are sales numbers and prices increasing or decreasing and at what rate?
- Have property conditions been trending up or down?
- Are there areas where property conditions have steeply declined or improved?

Areas with similar characteristics: What areas have similar vacancy, condition, and market patterns?

- Do neighborhoods fall into clear intervals of vacancy (e.g. low, medium, high)?
- Do neighborhoods with a similar rate of vacancy also have similar physical conditions? Are there neighborhoods with high vacancy but good conditions, or vice versa?
- Do neighborhoods with a similar rate of vacancy also have similar market conditions? Are there neighborhoods with high vacancy but strong market conditions, or vice versa?

When you are developing your analysis, it's important to have it reviewed and validated by multiple stakeholders. Datasets can be out-of-date or wash over important geographic variation depending on the level of analysis. These factors may impact the on-the-ground accuracy of your analysis. Make sure to check in with a wide variety of stakeholders to see if what the data and analysis is showing "feels right" to them given their on the ground knowledge and experience.

Examples

Listed below are examples of residential and commercial analyses that created typologies using combinations of vacancy, condition, and market information:

- Residential Housing Market Analysis
- Maximizing Community Impact Tool: <http://report.timetoendblight.org/guide/>
- Framework Zones: http://detroitfuturecity.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/DFC_LandUse_2nd.pdf
- Commercial Market Analysis: [Redeveloping Commercial Vacant Properties in Legacy Cities: A Guidebook to Linking Property Reuse and Economic Revitalization](#)

Resources

Data collection and analysis may seem like an overwhelming task if you have limited capacity, but it is very manageable if you use software or partner resources. A basic analysis can be performed internally with a combination of simple excel spreadsheets and a mapping tool. If you do not have access to a GIS specialist, there are a number of online platforms that can provide you with mapped information:

- **Geocoding services.** There are a number of different services online that will take a list of addresses in a dataset and display them on a map. Batch Geo is one example of this service that is free for datasets under a certain length. <https://batchgeo.com/>
- **Policy Map.** Provides an interactive map that displays a variety of vacancy, condition, and market datasets. <http://www.policymap.com/>
- **American Fact Finder.** Provides a platform to create maps based on Census and American Community Surveys data. http://factfinder.census.gov/legacy/create_map.html

There are also a number of different entities that may be able to assist you. Most local governments or counties have GIS specialists in their planning or information technology departments that can be tapped for this analysis work. Beyond local government, most universities and many colleges also have this capacity in their urban planning schools or separate data analysis divisions, which you may be able to tap for discounted or free service.

Lessons for success

A number of communities in and outside of Michigan have performed vacant property and market analyses and established systems to survey and track this information on an ongoing basis. While each community's experience is different, there are some common themes that emerge for successful efforts:

- **Rely on strong political leadership when possible.** Obtaining data, even within the government from other departments or jurisdictions, can prove to be challenging depending on your local policies for data sharing. You may be met with a reluctance to share because of concerns of confidentiality, data quality, or lack of control. These concerns can be overcome but often require strong support and push by a local leader, such as a mayor.
- **Think creatively about partnerships.** Data collection and analysis provides a number of opportunities to readily attract and use additional capacity. If you have staff or funding constraints, this step is a perfect opportunity to secure new partnerships that have an opportunity to last through implementation. Generally speaking communities that used partnerships with nonprofits, for profits, or universities to complete the collection and analysis work were able to complete this step more thoroughly, at a faster pace, and lower cost than if they were to complete it alone.
- **Leverage new technology.** With the increasing accessibility of smartphones and tablets and high-powered wireless networks, communities have been able to cut down the amount of time and cost it takes to complete survey work by performing data entry in the field using smart devices. Using new technology, a surveyor is able to snap a picture of a property, fill out survey information, and upload that information which then immediately appears on an interactive map, thereby drastically cutting down on the number of hours those activities would have traditionally taken. Beyond advances in survey technology, there are a number of new online mapping tools that enable everyday users to easily display data on a map. New technology has

enabled many communities to cut down on costs and improve data quality and accessibility of information.

- **Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good.** Even with technological advances, practically speaking, it is impossible to get 100% accurate data on blight since 1) physical conditions on properties can change on a daily basis and 2) many of the data sources gathered are imperfect. Some departments have antiquated systems for tracking information and have little capacity for quality control and, as a result, the data they can supply may be messy or inaccurate. A blight planning process should not be stalled because of a lack of perfect data. By using multiple sources of data and engaging on the ground stakeholders in data validation, you can get a solid understanding of conditions even without perfect data.

Step 2: Develop a Blight Elimination Goal

After you develop a clear and up-to-date understanding of the scale of blight in your community, and the surrounding market and physical condition trends, the next step is to develop a clear goal for your blight elimination efforts. The goal should provide clarity on

- 1) What outcome this work is trying to achieve, and
- 2) Within what timeframe.

After completing this step, you should be able to answer this key question:

- *What does the community seek to achieve through the elimination of blight?*
-

Why does this step matter? We know we want to eliminate blight.

Some leaders may feel that the goal is inherent in the work, simply, “to eliminate blight”. However, spending some diligent time to develop consensus on a specific goal statement is a critical step because it:

- **Provides guidance for decision-making.** A simple goal of “blight elimination” does not provide you with guidance on how to set priorities for blight elimination actions. Having a goal statement that specifies why you are trying to eliminate blight or “to what end”, will provide you with clear and consistent direction when making decisions about how to prioritize activities in the plan development stage.
- **Sets expectations.** An impetus for developing a blight elimination plan is the recognition that you likely have insufficient resources to address the full spectrum of blight in an instantaneous manner. Outlining the timeframe in which this work will occur and the scope of impact for the plan’s implementation is important to set clear expectations for partners and residents.

A well-crafted goal statement should make the outcome and timeline for the blight elimination work clear.

Outcome

Eliminating blight can achieve a variety of outcomes – e.g. spurring economic development, increasing property tax revenue, attracting or retaining residents, addressing safety concerns, or improving environmental conditions. With limited resources to fully address the spectrum of blight in the short-term, honing in on which outcome is of primary importance for your community is important so you can make consistent decisions in the planning process and clearly articulate to staff and the public the rationale for focusing resources and strategies.

Making the primary outcome clear in your goal statement does not mean that the blight elimination work will not also achieve other outcomes. For example, if your community’s priority for blight elimination work is to spur economic development, you may, as a result, focus on interventions that clean up and beautify key vacant commercial buildings. In completing that work, you may also reduce criminal activity in those areas, though crime was not your primary focus. The intention of setting a clear outcome for your blight elimination work is to provide you with overarching guidance on how to make decisions about which interventions to pursue first.

Timeframe

In order to help focus the deployment of resources during the planning process and set clear expectations, establish a timeframe for the blight elimination efforts. This timeframe should take into account the scale of blight while also setting an aggressive goal for elimination. Part of the need for a planning process is that existing efforts aren't happening quickly enough, so the plan should set a deadline for elimination that is more aggressive than what is achievable within current constraints. This helps to provide a vision for attracting and leveraging additional resources.

Example

Flint's *Beyond Blight: Blight Elimination Framework's* goal is "To stabilize Flint's population by eliminating blight in neighborhoods and improving the quality of life for residents." The plan encompasses a five-year timeline.

Lessons for success

Beyond the structural elements of a good goal statement mentioned above, more broadly successful goals statements:

- **Incorporate input from other stakeholders.** The development of a goal statement is a great opportunity to engage other stakeholders in the planning process. You can provide them with an up-to-date understanding of the scale of blight, which you completed in Step 1, and use that as a jumping off point to narrow in on what the other departments, residents, or business leaders view as the most critical outcome of blight elimination. If you are able to build consensus on the overarching goal statement, using their input, you will position your plan for more successful implementation.

Step 3: Assess Your Resources

Now that you have a clear goal for your blight elimination work and a clear understanding of the scope of the problem, there's one more step before the development of a plan of action—assessing your resources. Having a clear understanding of the current resources available to address blight and the potential for new resource generation is critical since you may be facing a situation in which the level of blight in your community outweighs the resources available to address it. Resources include:

- 1) Programs and legal tools,
- 2) Partners, and
- 3) Funding sources.

This section provides an overview of common resources used to address blight and connects you to information to improve or maximize the resources in your community. Once you have a clear picture of the resources currently being used and those that could be created or leveraged, you can develop a strategy to more effectively deploy those resources in Step 4.

After completing this step, you should be able to answer these key questions:

- *What legal or programmatic tools are being used currently to address blight and which could be enhanced?*
 - *Who is currently implementing blight elimination work and at what scale?*
 - *How much would it cost to fully address the scope of blight?*
 - *How much funding is currently being allocated to the issue?*
 - *What sources of funding or partnerships could be enhanced to increase the scale of blight elimination work?*
-

Why does this step matter?

Some leaders may feel like the resource assessment step is unnecessary because “we already know what our department is doing” on blight elimination work. While you may have a good sense of what your department or your municipal government is doing on blight elimination, there is often siloed or incomplete knowledge of all blight elimination work being done in and outside of government. This step is vital since it:

- **Develops a single, comprehensive inventory.** Since blight elimination work happens at a variety of levels, typically there is not an accurate understanding of all the blight elimination activity happening at any period in time. This can lead to a misalignment of activities and missed opportunities for leverage. For example, by generating this complete inventory you may find out that there are five different entities mowing grass on vacant lots in one area but no entities mowing in another area. With that information, during plan development, you may suggest that one of the entities focus on mowing in an unserved area. Typically what
- **Generates a total cost for blight removal.** Getting a clear understanding of the scale and cost of current blight elimination activities through the assessment process will allow you to extrapolate out to a total cost of full blight elimination. Having an understanding of your full funding gap is important to express your needs and attract future funding sources.
- **Identifies gaps and barriers.** Through the assessment process, you will gather information on the barriers to bring blight elimination work to scale. Having a better understanding of these gaps will allow you to develop a strategy to address them in the planning phase. For example,

you may find out that a local nonprofit boards up 100 houses a year but has the capacity to board 200 houses if they had access to donated plywood.

Tools

The list of tools for addressing a blighted property is expansive and varied. Some of these tools take the form of legal action; others involve physical mitigation. Some are designed to compel action from the private property owner; others require government intervention on a property. Generally speaking, these tools will fall into the following six interconnected categories based on area of primary focus:

- 1) **Prevention:** tools that primarily aim to prevent vacancy (e.g. mortgage foreclosure prevention)
- 2) **Maintenance:** tools that primarily aim to preserve the physical condition of a property or to ensure the property condition does not get worse (e.g. boarding)
- 3) **Security:** tools that primarily aim to remove immediate physical threats to a resident (e.g. structure removal)
- 4) **Restoration:** tools that primarily aim to improve the physical condition of a property (e.g. home repair)
- 5) **Reoccupancy:** tools that primarily aim to attract a resident back into a vacant property (e.g. neighborhood marketing)
- 6) **Reuse:** tools that primarily aim to reuse a vacant lot for an alternative purpose (e.g. environmental cleanup)

First, assess which tools are currently being used in your community within each category: who is deploying the tool, at what scale, and in what geography? Additionally, identify tools that are available but unused, or underused: what number of properties do those tools each address and what are the barriers or limitations restricting their full use? It's critical to take a comprehensive view of the range of actors that may be using blight elimination tools. In many communities, the government may take the lead in these activities, but the nonprofit sector also contributes significant work toward blight elimination. It's important to assess all blight elimination work underway to understand the scale of work that could be leveraged in the strategy development phase.

This spreadsheet provides a sample guide for organizing this assessment.

Below you will find a list of common blight elimination tools used by communities and additional online information for each tool.

Prevention

Tool	Common Implementation Lead			
	City	County	State	NGO
<u>Mortgage Foreclosure Prevention</u>	■			■

Mortgage foreclosure can be a driving force in some neighborhoods for escalating vacancy rates. Providing resources to prevent mortgage foreclosure and the subsequent loss of the occupant can be an effective blight prevention tool. There are a variety of programs that focus on mortgage foreclosure prevention; many of these focus on increasing communication between the lender and the borrower with the goal of a modification to the mortgage. While these programs may be available to many homeowners, some may not be aware or may be afraid to take advantage of these programs. So, nonprofits and cities have focused on door-to-door campaigns and targeted outreach.

More information about programs or organizations focused on mortgage foreclosure prevention:

- <https://www.fhlbi.com/housing/Foreclosure.asp>
- <https://www.fhlbi.com/housing/AMPprog.asp>
- <http://miforeclosureresponse.org/mortgage-foreclosure/>
- <https://www.stepforwardmichigan.org/>
- http://www.mshda.info/counseling_search/
- <http://www.995hope.org/>

Tool	Common Implementation Lead			
	City	County	State	NGO
<u>Tax Foreclosure Prevention</u>	■	■		■

As with mortgage foreclosure, tax foreclosure can be a driving force in some neighborhoods for escalating vacancy rates. While state law does not mandate an eviction following a tax foreclosure, many occupants vacate the property during the foreclosure process. Since tax foreclosure is carried out by a governmental unit, in most cases, the county may have more direct local control over prevention activities than with mortgage foreclosure prevention. There are a variety of tax foreclosure prevention programs including exemptions, extensions or deferrals, payment plans, and education or counseling. Generally these start with the local unit of government providing any abatements or reductions in taxes due to the taxpayer. Then when taxes are delinquent, the county can offer payment plans or extensions, as permitted by state law. Local units and counties generally lead education and awareness programs for foreclosure prevention but nonprofit entities also play a large role in some communities.

More information about programs or organizations focused on tax foreclosure prevention:

- <https://makeloveland.com/assets/pdf/Tax%20Foreclosure%20Resource%20Guide.pdf>
- <http://miforeclosureresponse.org/tax-foreclosure/>
- <https://www.stepforwardmichigan.org/>
- http://www.michigan.gov/taxes/0,1607,7-238-43535_55601---,00.html

Maintenance

Tool	Common Implementation Lead			
	City	County	State	NGO
<u>Vacant Structure Boarding</u>	■			■

Most local property maintenance codes require open points of entry on vacant properties be secured by the property owner. Despite this, many properties are not properly secured. Beyond open points of entries, some communities prefer that all accessible windows and doors are further physically secured. The goal of this activity is to maintain and preserve the physical assets of the property from destruction by vandals, squatters, and animals until the next owner can occupy the property. There are a variety of materials and methods that can be used to secure a property. While plywood is the most common, painted or vinyl covered plywood, Plexiglas, and steel are also used by some communities. If an owner does not secure his or her property, generally speaking, the local unit of government can step in to secure the property. However, given the constrained resources many local governments have, many community groups and local institutions have stepped up to implement boarding efforts.

More information about programs or organizations focused on vacant structure boarding:

- <http://secureviewusa.com/>
- <http://www.homeillusions.net/index.php>
- <http://www.set-products.com/>

- <http://www.vps360.com/>

Tool	Common Implementation Lead			
	City	County	State	NGO

Vacant Property Cleanup



Both vacant lots and vacant structures can become sites for trash accumulation and illegal dumping if not properly maintained. As with vacant structure boarding, property maintenance activities are the responsibility of the property's owner. However often city and community actors will step in to clean up a property and ensure that the grounds are properly maintained. These activities may require simple brush cutting and litter removal or may be far more involved and require roll off dumpsters or abandoned vehicle or boat removal. Due to limited resources, many cities have relied on volunteer and nonprofit actors to lead the cleanup initiatives and support them through the provision of donated material or dumpsters, free tipping, or bulk curbside pickup.

More information about other cities' or organizations' vacant property clean up strategies:

- <http://flintservice.org/pages/Cities-Of-Service>
- <http://www.detroitmi.gov/DepartmentsandAgencies/MotorCityMakeover.aspx>
- http://www.mml.org/RESOURCES/sample_docs/ordinances/blight/league-publications/operation%20clean%20sweep%20review-janfeb2013%20warren.pdf
- <http://www.wkkf.org/resource-directory/resource/2005/06/how-to-organize-a-neighborhood-cleanup>
- <http://www.salemhousing.org/pro-serv-tlshd.htm>

Sample ordinances for trash accumulation:

- [Brooklyn \(GLV, pop. 1,206\)](#)
- [Niles \(HRC, pop. 11,600\)](#)

Sample ordinances for inoperable vehicles:

- [Cass City \(GLV, pop. 2,428\)](#)
- [Fowlerville \(GLV, pop. 2,886\)](#)
- [Otsego \(HRC, pop. 3,956\)](#)

Tool	Common Implementation Lead			
	City	County	State	NGO

Vacant Property Mowing



Many communities have ordinances requiring grass on properties to be maintained under a certain height. While this responsibility is the property owner's, this responsibility often falls to the local government, either due to the owner's neglect or due to the government owning the land, costing millions of dollars each year, for some communities. Local governments have used creative mowing techniques, such as only mowing the first few feet of a property off the sidewalk, called a "mow strip", which saves costs while still creating a cared-for appearance, and partnerships, such as providing local nonprofits with small stipends, to perform grass maintenance throughout the city. In addition to adaptive mowing strategies, communities have started to use alternative seed mixtures and plants to minimize the vegetation growth rate on vacant lots, and therefore future maintenance costs.

More information about other cities' or organizations' vacant property clean up strategies:

- http://www.thelandbank.org/clean_green_prog.asp

- <http://www.mowergang.com/>
- <http://www.loldetroit.org/>

Sample ordinances for weed growth:

- [Corunna \(HRC, pop. 3,497\)](#)
- [Lincoln Park \(HRC, pop. 38,144\)](#)
- [Mayville \(GLV, pop. 950\)](#)
- [South Rockwood \(HRV, pop. 1,675\)](#)

Security

Tool	Common Implementation Lead			
	City	County	State	NGO
<u>Structure removal</u>				

When a structure's physical integrity has severely deteriorated and the cost to repair that structure far exceeds the market value of those repairs, a municipality will step in, when the owner does not, and remove the structure. The primary goal of this activity is to protect the safety of surrounding buildings and residents. The most common method of structure removal is demolition, however different levels of deconstruction are also used to minimize the volume of recyclable material going into a land fill and/or to resell the physical assets in the property, like hardwood floors. In some communities, nonprofits or institutions have stepped in to lead structure removal efforts in their areas.

More information about demolition best practices and guidelines:

- [Demolition Tools](#)
- [Using Data and Technology to Prioritize Demolition, Cleveland](#)
- [On the Road to Reuse](#)
- [US Department of Housing and Urban Development: Demolition Toolkit](#)
- [Demolition and Deconstruction to Promote a Sustainable Future](#)
- [Bonner v Brighton: Demolition of Unoccupied Structures Under City Ordinance](#)
- [Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program: Laying the Groundwork for Change](#)
- [Greater Ohio Policy Center: Redeveloping Commercial Vacant Properties in Legacy Cities: A Guidebook to Linking Property Reuse and Economic Revitalization](#)
- [Michigan Community Resources: Vacant Property Toolbox, Second Edition](#)
- [Blight Busters: Sending Out a Detroit Ripple](#)

Sample ordinances for unsafe structures:

- [Newago \(HRC, pop. 1,976\)](#)
- [Petoskey \(HRC, pop. 5,670\)](#)

Sample ordinances for demolition:

- [Bad Axe \(HRC, pop. 3,129\)](#)
- [Fraser \(HRC, pop. 14,480\)](#)
- [Grand Rapids \(HRC, pop. 188,040\)](#)
- [Kingsford \(HRC, pop. 5,133\)](#)
- [Montrose \(HRC, pop. 1,657\)](#)
- [Portage \(HRC, pop. 46,292\)](#)
- [Ypsilanti \(HRC, pop. 19,435\)](#)
- [Zeeland \(HRC, pop. 5,504\)](#)

Restoration

Tool	Common Implementation Lead			
	City	County	State	NGO

Code enforcement

Blight is the result of an owner's neglect of property maintenance. Local governments have a powerful tool to compel private property action on a property through the use of code enforcement. When strategically deployed, code enforcement has the ability to stem the spread and severity of blight through a community. There are a variety of code enforcement tools and ordinances that can be used to compel an owner to improve and maintain his or her property. The goal of code enforcement activity is to have the owner reach compliance with property maintenance standards. Effective code enforcement programs will use a combination of carrots and sticks to reach compliance.

More information about code enforcement best practices and guidelines:

- [Strategic code enforcement tools](#)
- [Dealing with vacant property owners](#)
- [Self-Evaluation Checklist for an Effective Strategic Code Enforcement System](#)
- [Just, Smart: Civil Rights Protections and Market-Sensitive Vacant Property Strategies](#)
- [Local Vacant Property Registration Ordinances in the U.S.: An Analysis of Growth, Regional Trends, and Some Key Characteristics](#)
- [Municipal Prosecution Distribution of Fines and Costs](#)
- [Restoring Michigan Communities Building by Building](#)
- [MML One-Pager-Plus on Civil Infractions](#)

Sample ordinances for blighted property (generally and residential):

- [Ann Arbor \(HRC, pop. 113,934\) – General](#)
- [Harper Woods \(HRC, pop. 14,236\) – General](#)
- [Farmington \(HRC, pop. 10,372\) – Residential property](#)
- [Mount Clemens \(HRC, pop. 16,314\) – Residential property](#)
- [Detroit \(HRC, pop. 713,777\)](#)
- [Northville \(HRC, pop. 5,970\)](#)
- [Plymouth \(HRC, pop. 9,132\)](#)
- [Rochester Hills \(HRC, pop. 70,995\)](#)
- [Saint Charles \(GLV, pop. 2,054\)](#)
- [Berrien Springs \(GLV, pop. 1,800\)](#)
- [Farmington Hills \(HRC, pop. 79,740\)](#)
- [Paw Paw \(GLV, pop. 3,534\)](#)

Sample ordinances for blighted property (commercial):

- [Berrien Springs \(GLV, pop. 1,800\)](#)
- [Farmington Hills \(HRC, pop. 79,740\)](#)

Sample ordinances for civil infractions for property violations:

- [Dexter \(GLV, pop. 4,067\)](#)
- [Elk Rapids \(GLV, pop. 1,642\)](#)
- [Ferndale \(HRC, pop. 19,900\)](#)
- [Harper Woods \(HRC, pop. 14,236\)](#)

Sample ordinances for abandoned or vacant property registration:

- [Eastpointe \(HRC\) – Pop. 32,442](#)
- [Muskegon \(HRC\) – Pop. 38,401](#)
- [Trenton \(HRC\) – Pop. 18,853](#)
- [Warren \(HRC\) – Pop. 134,056](#)

Sample registration applications, guidelines and FAQ for abandoned or vacant property registration:

- [Dearborn \(HRC\) – Pop. 98,193](#)
- [Keego Harbor \(HRC\) – Pop. 2,970](#)
- [Muskegon \(HRC\) – Pop. 38,401](#)
- [Trenton \(HRC\) – Pop. 18,853](#)

Tool	Common Implementation Lead			
	City	County	State	NGO
<u>Nuisance abatement</u>	■			■

Similar to code enforcement, the goal of a nuisance abatement action is to compel the property owner to remediate the blighted condition of his or her property. Using state law, a municipality, and, in some instances, a community group, can file a legal action against a property owner to compel that owner to fix up his or her property. If the owner fails to do so, the court can terminate the ownership right for that owner and award it to the filing party, enabling them to remediate the blight.

More information about programs or organizations focused on nuisance abatement:

- <http://www.buildingdetroit.org/our-programs/nuisance-abatement/>
- [Michigan Municipal League: Community Driven Nuisance Abatement Case Study](#)

Tool	Common Implementation Lead			
	City	County	State	NGO
<u>Landlord incentives</u>	■			

While blight is often thought of only as a problem occurring on vacant properties, occupied properties are often sites of property maintenance neglect. Many of these issues can be addressed through traditional code enforcement programs. When municipalities have a high level of rental properties, they may develop specific programs tailored for landlords. Code enforcement tools can deliver punitive measures on landlord properties that are neglected; however, there should also be measures put in place to illicit good behavior and attract and retain high quality landlords. Landlord incentives can take a variety of forms such as fee, inspection, or training incentives.

More information about landlord incentive best practices or programs:

- [Good Landlord Incentives](#)
- [MSHDA Property Improvement Program for Landlords](#)
- [Ogden Utah Good Landlord Incentive Program](#)

Tool	Common Implementation Lead			
	City	County	State	NGO
<u>Home repair and rehabilitation programs</u>	■		■	■

Many owners of blighted property have a desire to improve their property but lack the financial means to do so. Other prospective purchasers may have some financial resources to fix up a property but the

scale of improvements outweigh their available resources. For these reasons, home repair and rehabilitation incentives are a critical component to a code compliance system. Financial assistance programs are available at the state and local level, additionally in some communities, anchor institutions and foundations have created additional programs to provide financial resources to repair or rehabilitate blighted properties.

More information about home repair or rehabilitation programs:

- http://www.michigan.gov/dhs/0,4562,7-124-5453_5531_62128---,00.html
- [Home Repairs](#)
- [Homeowner Program](#)
- https://www.michigan.gov/mshda/0,4641,7-141-49317_50737---,00.html
- http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mshda/PIP_Lender_List_County_417648_7.pdf
- http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mshda/PIP_Community_Agent_List_County_417647_7.pdf
- [List of Michigan Home Repair Programs](#)
- [Rural Repair and Rehabilitation Loans and Grants](#)
- <http://www.detroithomeloans.org/>
- <http://auctions.buildingdetroit.org/Financing>
- http://auctions.buildingdetroit.org/Content/files/Liberty_Bank_Home_Restoration_Program_Information.pdf
- [Neighborhood Improvement Plan](#)

Reoccupancy

Tool	Common Implementation Lead			
	City	County	State	NGO
<u>Home purchase incentives</u>	■		■	■

Increasing the level of owner occupancy for vacant properties will deter blight and stabilize or strengthen the private market in an area. Given the amount of improvement needed on a property, perceived or real financial risk of purchasing in a market with vacancy and blight, and limited resources of a purchaser, home purchase incentives are a critical component of a reoccupancy program. Home purchase incentives are provided by the local, state, and federal government. Additionally, in some communities, nongovernmental entities have created additional financial incentive programs to entice individuals to purchase homes.

More information about home purchase programs:

- [Community Housing Network: Home Modifications and Repairs Resource List](#)
- [Federal Home Loan Bank](#)
- [Homeownership Opportunities Program](#)
- [Michigan Community Action Agency Association](#)
- [Homebuyer Programs](#)
- <http://auctions.buildingdetroit.org/Financing>
- http://auctions.buildingdetroit.org/Content/files/Liberty_Bank_Home_Restoration_Program_Information.pdf
- http://www.livemidtown.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/140424_LIVE_Midtown_Guideline.pdf
- <http://www.livemidtown.org/incentives>

- <http://www.detroitlivedowntown.org/incentives/>
- <https://www.michigan.gov/mshda/0,4641,7-141-45866---,00.html>

Tool	Common Implementation Lead			
	City	County	State	NGO
<u>Neighborhood marketing</u>	■			■

In addition to homebuyer and rehab incentive programs, developing and executing marketing strategies for neighborhoods can be an effective tool to spur market demand and attract new residents. These programs are often implemented by local units of government or nonprofits.

More information about neighborhood marketing programs:

- [Neighborhood Marketing Program](#)
- [Presentation: Neighborhood Marketing to Build Market Demand](#)
- [Michigan Main Street Program](#)
- [Love Muskegon Case Study](#)
- [National Trust for Historic Preservation Main Street](#)
- <http://www.eastenglishvillage.org/tour/>

Tool	Common Implementation Lead			
	City	County	State	NGO
<u>Property acquisition</u>	■	■		

Property acquisition whether voluntary (e.g., through purchase or receipt of donation) or involuntary (e.g. through reversion), is a tool that can serve many blight elimination goals like lot reuse, demolition, and reoccupancy. In ideal circumstances, a government would want to minimize the amount of property it takes ownership of. However, in order to ensure a blighted or vacant property is reused in a way that improves the physical properties on that site and the surrounding community, a local unit of government or county land bank may need to take proactive steps to acquire property.

More information about programs or organizations focused on property acquisition:

- <http://www.communityprogress.net/land-bank-headquarters-pages-446.php>
- http://action.communityprogress.net/p/salsa/web/common/public/signup?signup_page_KEY=8120
- http://action.communityprogress.net/p/salsa/web/common/public/signup?signup_page_KEY=7641
- [Center for Community Progress: Understanding Sites](#)
- [Michigan Municipal League: Land Acquisition and Preparing for the Agency's Condemnation Case](#)
- [National Community Stabilization Trust](#)

Tool	Common Implementation Lead			
	City	County	State	NGO
<u>Property disposition</u>	■	■		

There are a wide variety of disposition programs a local unit or county land bank can implement in order to ensure a property is either occupied or reused in a way that enhances the property and surrounding community. For structures and lots, these programs may take the form of discounted sales prices, property swaps, leases, or prioritized purchasers.

More information about programs or organizations focused generally on property disposition:

- <http://www.communityprogress.net/land-bank-headquarters-pages-446.php>
- http://action.communityprogress.net/p/salsa/web/common/public/signup?signup_page_KEY=8120
- http://action.communityprogress.net/p/salsa/web/common/public/signup?signup_page_KEY=7641

More information about programs or organizations focused on land disposition:

- <http://auctions.buildingdetroit.org/sidelots>
- <http://www.thelandbank.org/sidelot.asp>
- <http://www.thelandbank.org/vacantland.asp>

More information about programs or organizations focused on structure disposition:

- http://www.buildingdetroit.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/DLBA-City-Employee-Discount-Program-Rules_FINAL.pdf
- <http://www.buildingdetroit.org/our-programs/auction-program/>
- <http://www.inghamlandbank.org/see-current-properties>
- <http://www.thelandbank.org/residential.asp>

Reuse

Tool	Common Implementation Lead			
	City	County	State	NGO
<u>Vacant lot reuse</u>				

There are an expansive number of options for the reuse of a vacant lot, which range from active uses like agriculture to more passive uses like a rain garden. Some reuse treatments occur at the single lot level, others require multiple lots for implementation. Local and county governments as well as nonprofits play a significant role in implementing reuse strategies.

More information about vacant lot reuse best practices or programs:

- [Delta Institute: Starting a Farm in Your City](#)
- [Earth Day Coalition: Reimagining Cleveland Vacant Land Reuse Pattern Book](#)
- [LaSalle Placemakers: An Innovative Pop-Up Partnership in New Orleans](#)
- [Natural Resource Defense Council: Greening Vacant Lots: Planning and Implementation Strategies](#)
- [The Greening of Detroit: Keep Growing Detroit Treatment Guide Land Management](#)
- <http://www.communityprogress.net/reuse--pages-104.php?id=80>

Tool	Common Implementation Lead			
	City	County	State	NGO
<u>Environmental assessment or cleanup</u>				

The former use of a piece of vacant land may be a significant barrier to getting the property reused, whether for new development or alternative land use due to the lingering environmental contamination of the site. Local and county governments implement environmental assessment and cleanup programs through their brownfield redevelopment authorities and land banks.

More information about vacant lot reuse best practices or programs:

- [Brownfield Redevelopment](#)
- <http://www.michiganbusiness.org/cm/files/fact-sheets/brownfieldredevelopmentauthoritypa381.pdf>
- <http://www.michiganbusiness.org/cm/files/brownfields/3-brownfield-redevelopment-authorities-directory.pdf>
- http://www.thelandbank.org/downloads/chevy_commons_design_plan_final_012815_low rez.pdf

Partners

When assessing the resources you have available to address blight, beyond the legal and programmatic tools you have available, you should also look at the partners you have or could leverage to assist in the blight removal efforts. Since many communities are faced with a scale of blight that exceeds traditional resources, finding opportunities for expanded or creative partnerships is a key aspect of strategy development. Generally speaking, these partners will fall into the following three categories:

- 1) Government
- 2) Community or faith-based organizations and residents
- 3) Anchor institutions
- 4) Businesses

First, assess which partners are currently carrying out blight elimination activities – what activity, at what scale, and in what geography. Additionally, look at what the potential is for that partner if they are not currently doing blight elimination – what scale of properties could they address or what role could they play?

This spreadsheet provides a sample guide for organizing this assessment.

Below you will find a list of common blight elimination partners.

Partner

Government

Governmental entities typically lead the blight elimination efforts in a community. Often these activities are spread across a series of departments and levels. Each different department has a potential role to play in implementation. Getting an understanding of each partner’s specific activities is important to understand the full scale of opportunities for blight elimination.

Potential implementation partners at the municipal level:

- Mayor
- City Council
- Buildings Department
- Community Development Department
- Economic Development Department
- Planning Department
- General Services or Public Works Department
- Legal Department

- Finance Department
- Assessor
- Environmental or Health Department
- Department of Administrative Hearings
- Fire Department
- Police Department
- Brownfield Redevelopment Authority

Potential implementation partners at the county level:

- County Executive
- County Prosecutor
- County Commission
- Treasurer
- County Land Bank Authority
- Register of Deeds
- Economic Development
- Circuit court
- Planning Department
- Community Development Department
- Economic Development Department

Potential implementation partners at the state level:

- Michigan State Housing Development Authority
- Michigan Land Bank Authority
- Michigan Economic Development Corporation

Partner

Community or Faith-Based Organizations and Residents

Beyond governmental institutions, community or faith-based organizations and individual residents are likely the second group of partners doing the most work on blight elimination. Look broadly at the spectrum of potential partners to get an understanding of the current activities and potential roles they could play.

Potential community or faith-based implementation partners:

- Block clubs
- Neighborhood associations
- Community Development Corporations
- Children-focused nonprofits
- Health or food-focused nonprofits
- Secondary schools
- Local congregations
- Volunteer or service organizations

Partner

Anchor Institutions

Anchor institutions are those entities that are heavily linked to a physical area through real estate and cultural investment. These are entities for whom it would be very difficult to pick up and move to

another community. Since they are typically major employers and entrenched in an area, they can play a significant role in blight elimination.

Potential implementation partners:

- Universities or colleges
- Hospitals
- Arts or cultural institutions
- Major sports venues

Partner

Businesses

Other businesses in the community, whether major employers or smaller businesses may have a vested interest in blight elimination for purposes of improving their business or employment climate. Additionally they may have technical resources or expertise to provide in blight elimination.

Potential implementation partners:

- Major employers
- Real estate-related businesses
- Technology-related businesses

Funding

Insufficient funding is the most common barrier to implementing the full spectrum of blight elimination tools needed. While funding will continue to be a persistent challenge in most communities due to the sheer scale of blight, there are a variety of funding resources that can be used to support this work.

Generally speaking, funding falls into two main source categories:

- 1) Public
- 2) Private

First, assess the funding sources that are currently being used in your community within each category: who is deploying the funding, at what scale, and in what geography? Then, examine the potential for unused or underused funding sources: what scale of properties could those funding sources address and what are the barriers or limitations that restrict their full use?

This spreadsheet provides a sample guide for organizing this assessment.

Below you will find a list of common blight elimination funding sources communities use and additional online information.

Public

Funding	Implementation Actor			
	City	County	State	Federal
<u>General Fund</u>				

A local unit or county may opt to use a portion of its general fund to address blight elimination needs through a whole host of activities, such as vacant lot clean ups, demolition or boarding. Given the ongoing fiscal stress many Michigan municipalities and counties incur, this source of funding may be

particularly constrained. However, it should be examined as a potential source of funding, especially for highly visible blighted properties that may impede economic development within the city or county.

Funding	Implementation Actor			
	City	County	State	Federal
<u>Community Development Block Grants</u>	■	■	■	

MSHDA as well as some local units of government and counties receive an annual grant of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding directly through HUD. This grant funding can be used for a variety of blight elimination and community development activities, including code enforcement, blight removal, and structural rehabilitation.

More information about CDBG:

- <http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/states/michigan/community/cdbg>
- <http://www.michiganbusiness.org/cm/files/fact-sheets/cdbg.pdf>
- http://www.michiganbusiness.org/cm/Files/Community_Development/MSF.2012.6.27.CDBG.Financial.App.Guide1.pdf
- [Managing CDBG: A Guide to Sub-recipient CDBG Management](#)

Funding	Implementation Actor			
	City	County	State	Federal
<u>HOME Investment Partners Program</u>	■	■	■	

In addition to MSHDA, some Michigan local units of government and counties receive HOME Investment Partnerships Program grant funds. This grant funding can be used for a variety of activities specific to blight and housing rehabilitation.

More information about HOME:

- <http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/states/michigan/community/home>
- http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/comm_planning/affordablehousing/programs/home/

Funding	Implementation Actor			
	City	County	State	Federal
<u>Delinquent Tax Revolving Loan Fund</u>		■		

When delinquent property taxes are returned from a local unit to a county for collection, the county will make the local unit “whole” by advancing them the amount of taxes due. If a county has opted to create one, that funding is provided out of the county’s Delinquent Tax Revolving Loan Fund (DTRLF). When delinquent taxes and interest are paid off, or when a property sells at auction, the proceeds will go into the DTRLF, thereby replenishing the fund. Those funds can be used to reimburse the county for a number of activities related to the sale or management of tax-foreclosed properties, such as boarding up, securing, or demolishing properties.

More information about DTRLF:

- [Delinquent Tax Revolving Loan Fund](#)

Funding	Implementation Actor			
	City	County	State	Federal
<u>Land Bank</u>		■		

A land bank may have financial resources to implement blight elimination activities. Many have been able to attract state and federal resources to fund blight elimination activities such as Hardest Hit Funds, Blight Elimination Grants, and EPA Brownfield Grants. Beyond state and federal resources, land banks also have the authority to bond, which can be an additional source blight elimination financing.

More information about land banks:

- [Land Bank](#)
- [38 land banks](#)

Funding	Implementation Actor			
	City	County	State	Federal

Blight Elimination Grants



MSHDA provides financial assistance to communities to make physical improvements to residential neighborhoods through blight removal of vacant residential structures that are publically owned.

More information about MSHDA's blight elimination grants:

- http://www.michigan.gov/mshda/0,4641,7-141-5564_14770-322232--,00.html

Funding	Implementation Actor			
	City	County	State	Federal

Homebuyer Grants



Using the Housing Resource Fund, MSHDA awards grants to community-based nonprofits or local units of government to implement programs that promote homeownership for low-income families.

More information about MSHDA's homebuyer grants:

- [Homebuyer Program](#)

Funding	Implementation Actor			
	City	County	State	Federal

Homeowner rehabilitation program



MSHDA's Community Development Division (CDD) funds homeowner rehabilitation programs offering deferred loans to low-income homeowners with an income at or below 80 percent of the area median.

More information about MSHDA's homeowner rehabilitation program:

- [Homeowner Program](#)

Funding	Implementation Actor			
	City	County	State	Federal

Community Revitalization Program



MEDC provides project specific funding for rehabilitation or demolition of buildings in urban or downtown areas.

More information about MEDC's community revitalization program:

- <http://www.michiganbusiness.org/cm/files/fact-sheets/communityrevitalizationprogram.pdf>

Funding	Implementation Actor			
	City	County	State	Federal
<u>Obsolete property tax credit</u>				

MEDC provides a tax incentive to encourage the redevelopment of obsolete buildings, many of which are blighted abandoned buildings.

More information about MEDC's obsolete property tax credit:

- <http://www.michiganbusiness.org/cm/files/fact-sheets/obsoletepropertyrehabilitationact.pdf>

Funding	Implementation Actor			
	City	County	State	Federal
<u>Brownfield loans and grants</u>				

MDEQ provides grants and loans for environmental assessment and cleanup of contaminated properties.

More information about MDEQ's brownfield loans and grants:

- http://www.michigan.gov/documents/deq/deq-rrd-BRWN-factsheetcontactmap_348474_7.pdf?20131217151232
- http://www.michigan.gov/deq/0,4561,7-135-3311_4109_29262---,00.html

Funding	Implementation Actor			
	City	County	State	Federal
<u>Scrap tire grants</u>				

MDEQ provides grants for the cleanup of scrap tires in addition to the development of markets for scrap tire use.

More information about MDEQ's scrap tire grants:

- http://www.michigan.gov/deq/0,4561,7-135-3307_3515-314505--,00.html

Funding	Implementation Actor			
	City	County	State	Federal
<u>Brownfield revolving loan fund</u>				

The EPA offers funding to local Brownfield Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) programs to clean up brownfield sites, including demolition and site remediation. Since all properties owned by a land bank are classified as brownfields, leveraging a RLF may allow communities to demolish and clean up many blighted properties.

More information about EPA's brownfield revolving loan fund:

- [Brownfield Revolving Loan Fund](#)
- [brownfield sites](#)
- <http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/applicat.htm>

Funding	Implementation Actor			
	City	County	State	Federal
<u>Hazard mitigation grants</u>				

Communities may be able to apply for one of FEMA's hazard mitigation assistance grant programs. Grants are for hazard, pre-disaster, and flood mitigation. Each opportunity has specific eligibility

requirements, but generally speaking, these funds are available for areas where frequent flooding has caused property damage and where FEMA funds could prevent future loss.

More information about FEMA's hazard mitigation assistance:

- <https://www.fema.gov/region-v-il-mi-mn-oh-wi#Contact>
- <https://www.fema.gov/hazard-mitigation-assistance/mitigation-grant-programs-fact-sheet#4>

Private

Funding

Philanthropic funding

Funding from philanthropic sources has been integral to many communities' blight elimination activities. There are a wide variety of philanthropic institutions in the state of Michigan. While most philanthropic organizations do not have a mission specific to blight elimination, many focus on relevant giving areas like community development, economic development, child health and safety, food systems, and environmental sustainability.

More information about philanthropic entities in Michigan:

- [Council of Michigan Foundations](#)
- [Michigan Community Foundations](#)
- [Philanthropy News Digest](#)

Funding

Community Reinvestment Act funding

Beyond traditional lending, banks can play a role in supporting blight elimination work through the use of CRA funding. Banking institutions use their CRA funding to reinvest back into the local markets they serve, which may include supporting community development and blight elimination efforts.

More information about CRA:

- [Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System](#)
- [National Community Reinvestment Coalition](#)

Lessons for success

Each community's assessment of resources will look a bit different based on the makeup of the community, but some general considerations as you being your assessment:

- **Work with network leadership.** Gathering a complete picture of all blight activity can take some time given all of the different organizations and departments you will need to approach. If you do not have the time or capacity to complete all of information gathering on a one-on-one basis, look for leaders of networks that could coordinate the gathering of this information for their constituent organizations. For example, you could ask one point person from the City and County to coordinate and gather all of the relevant information from their respective departments, then you could ask the community development corporation leads to work within the neighborhoods they serve to gather information about blight elimination work from the block clubs or neighborhood associations, and so forth.
- **Don't underestimate the value of volunteers.** In many communities volunteer efforts, whether on an individual basis or through nonprofit coordination, have ramped up the level of blight

elimination work they are doing as a response to the decline of property maintenance. In these communities, volunteers are truly the unsung and sometimes unseen heroes of blight elimination. Being able to get an understanding of the work that this group of stakeholders is doing in your community and being able to estimate an in-kind value of their service is helpful to both recognize publically the value of their work to your municipality and project out the impact that work could have if it was further leveraged through additional support like donated materials such as plywood or lawn mowers.

Step 4: Design Your Plan

After assembling the data needed to properly measure the scope of your community’s vacancy problem and the resources available to address the issue, you may find that resources are insufficient to make a community-wide impact. Resources may be mismatched (e.g. there is funding for the physical removal of structures, but not for vacant lot maintenance) or inadequate (e.g. community may struggle with illegal dumping, but have only enough funding to remove a fraction of that waste). Your community may also have limited capacity to address the problem (e.g. a community may have a large problem with property maintenance, but too few code enforcement inspectors to write tickets).

To design the blight elimination plan:

- 1) Determine the most effective blight elimination intervention for each area as informed by that area’s future land use and current market and physical conditions
- 2) Considering available or projected resources, set the priorities for implementing the interventions.

After completing this step, you should be able to answer these key questions:

- *What types of resources should be deployed to better address blight?*
 - *Where should they be deployed and during what timeframe?*
-

Why does this step matter?

Given the scale of the challenge and constraints on resources, you must make decisions about where and how those resources are deployed. The purpose of this step is to develop a blight elimination plan in order to help you make those decisions intentionally, strategically, justifiably, efficiently, and transparently. This step is the core of the blight planning process.

- **One size never fits all.** Neighborhood conditions within a community are not uniform; some neighborhoods have a lot of houses open to trespass, others have major dumping issues on vacant lots, and some only have blight issues at a handful of houses. The causes of blight and vacancy vary in each of those neighborhoods, so the solutions must be tailored to meet each neighborhood’s individual needs. For example, aggressive code enforcement and ticketing will not result in significant improvements in a neighborhood with severely depressed property values because the cost of repairs may be several times more than the value of the property.

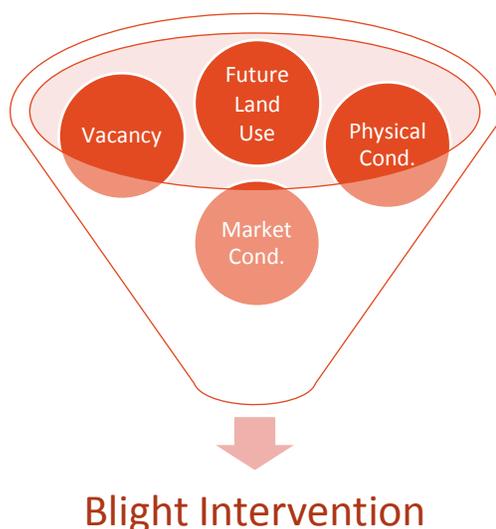
Developing the plan framework

Tailoring blight elimination plans to meet neighborhoods’ varying needs does not mean you’ll need to develop 20 different strategies. Generally speaking, when looking at a community’s neighborhoods, many will exhibit similar conditions, which can be examined as a single category or typology. During the analysis portion of Step 1, you should have developed an understanding of the different types of neighborhood conditions in your municipality based on commonalities of vacancy, physical condition, and market condition. Of the three, market condition is the most important. Understanding how a neighborhood’s real estate market has been changing provides a good indication of how property condition and vacancy will trend. This is important for understanding what—if anything—can compel an owner to address their blighted property and, therefore, the type and level of government intervention needed.

While market information is helpful, it is not enough information to develop a blight plan. For example, there may be a set of blocks along the edge of a city's river that consist largely of vacant lots and a few fire-burned structures. There is no remaining market activity in that area, which, with market information alone, would then be a very low priority for intervention given the level of investment needed and presumably minimal return, if any. However, if the area was planned to be a large public park, it may move to the top of the priority list since minimal demolition is needed and the park has anticipated positive economic impacts.

You can identify information about future land use your master plan. Master plans take into account the assets of a neighborhood and the community, economic, and infrastructure needs. It is critical to factor in the future land use of a neighborhood and for the municipality at large because blight elimination efforts will have an impact, either supporting or hindering, the realization of that future land use vision. The future vision for a neighborhood combined with market, physical condition, and vacancy trend information serve as the framework for blight elimination plan development.

Graphic: Factors informing a blight intervention



While every community varies, generally speaking, for communities that have lost population and are struggling with blight, neighborhoods generally fall into four types:

- Neighborhoods with strong or functioning market where the future land use vision is a traditional residential land use
- Neighborhoods with market instability but where indications are trending up or are flat and where the future land use vision is for traditional residential land use
- Neighborhoods with market instability where indications are flat or trending down and where the future land use vision is for less dense residential use given the amount of population loss
- Neighborhoods with a very weak market where the future land use vision for the neighborhood is no longer residential given the amount of population loss

Are these descriptions consistent with the general types of neighborhoods in your municipality when you look at future land use and market trends? If not, how would you generally characterize different

types of neighborhoods looking at these factors? Is there a type of neighborhood that is not represented?

Establishing a clear framework for the different types of neighborhoods is the first step in designing your blight elimination plan, next you will pair the interventions that best address each type of neighborhoods' needs and set priorities for implementation.

Pairing interventions to neighborhood types

Since each municipality is different, in terms of neighborhood types, this Guidebook does not provide an exclusive map of interventions and priorities that should be used in each community. For example, the blight elimination strategy that works well in Detroit may not work well in Marquette. While both cities have blight, the scale of the issue, the future land use, and the types of markets are different, and so accordingly each city's blight strategy should be different.

For illustrative purposes, below, the Guidebook outlines how interventions and priorities could be assigned for the neighborhood types listed in the previous section. This is intended to provide you with an example of how you think through the development of interventions and priorities based on your community's needs.

Strong/Functioning Market, Future Vision is Traditional Residential (SMTR)

In SMTR neighborhoods, issues with blight are usually recent and a result of mortgage foreclosure or decreasing housing values. These areas usually see the lowest levels of vacancy, blight, and public ownership but communities shouldn't minimize problems in SMTR neighborhoods since they're usually an indication of more troubling instability.

Interventions

A blight strategy in SMTR neighborhoods should focus on interventions that preserve the housing stock, catalyze the return of the private market, and strengthen home values. To that end, communities may consider a combination of the following interventions, detailed more in Step 4.

Prevention	Foreclosure prevention
Preservation	Code enforcement Nuisance abatement Maintenance Home repair
Reoccupancy	Home rehabilitation Neighborhood marketing Purchase incentives Commercial revitalization

Prioritization

Prioritizing blight intervention in these neighborhoods is critical since blight elimination costs will only increase, if they become further destabilized, and they hold the core of property values for the city so it's imperative to preserve that property tax revenue. As compared to higher-level vacancy areas, a small amount of investment in SMTR neighborhoods has the potential to fully address the vacancy and blight challenge.

Limited-Market (Stable or Trending Up), Future Vision is for Traditional Residential (LMTR)

LMTR neighborhoods may have struggled with encroaching blight and vacancy for longer than SMTR areas or mortgage foreclosure may have hit these neighborhoods harder. In either scenario, LMTR neighborhoods have higher vacancy rates, decreased maintenance, less investment, and more vacant lots. Despite this instability, there may still be signs of market activity or opportunity. For example, properties in these areas may sell infrequently to homeowners, but do sell to landlords for rental. Despite challenges, LMTR neighborhoods have enough housing stock in fair condition to support a future land use vision that consists of traditional, residential development.

Interventions

The strategy in LMTR neighborhoods should focus on interventions that preserve and reestablish the housing stock, catalyze the return of the private market in either homeownership and/or well-managed rental, and strengthen home values. To that end, communities may consider a combination of the following interventions, detailed more in Step 4.

Prevention	Foreclosure prevention
Preservation	Code enforcement Nuisance abatement Vacant lot maintenance Home repair Landlord incentives Demolition
Reoccupancy	Restoration Home rehabilitation Acquisition Disposition Infill development Neighborhood marketing Purchase incentives Commercial revitalization

Prioritization

Though LMTR areas maintain elements of stability, governments, philanthropic, and nonprofit partners will likely need to make important, collaborative investments to stabilize and revitalize the neighborhood residential core. Low-cost interventions, like marketing and code enforcement, will not be enough to fully restore occupancy. Higher cost interventions, like incentive programs and rehabilitation, and longer-term interventions, such as infill development, will likely be required. Depending on community characteristics, LMTR communities may be the most threatened, in terms of potential value loss, without adequate levels of involvement.

Limited-Market (Trending Down), Future Vision is for Green Residential/Reuse (LMGR)

As with the other limited-market areas, LMGR neighborhoods may have been struggling with blight and vacancy for a few years and foreclosure may have hit these neighborhoods the hardest. What differentiates these neighborhoods from other limited-market neighborhoods is these areas have less intact housing stock, a significant number of vacant lots, and fewer marketable amenities. There may still be some market activity, but many properties have already transitioned to public ownership. The amount of demolition necessary will likely result in significantly decreased residential density, without the private market demand or government capacity to support infill development. LMGR neighborhoods

will be less dense but can still offer a good quality of life for residents if they are adequately secured and maintained.

Interventions

Intervention strategies in LMGR neighborhoods should focus on securing and maintaining properties and communities should consider a combination of the following interventions, detailed more in Step 4.

Security	Code enforcement
	Nuisance abatement
	Home repair
	Landlord incentives
	Demolition
	Vacant lot maintenance
Reuse	Vacant structure boarding
	Vacant lot reuse
	Acquisition

Prioritization

Addressing immediate health and safety threats, such as burned structures and open points of entry, is critical to ensuring safety and wellbeing for residents. To that end, a deeper level of investment, through demolition and boarding, will likely be necessary in LMGR areas. Decisions about where to demolish or board first should be based on where these interventions could have the most impact for residents; for example, along a school route or at a busy intersection. Given the scale of the issues and limited government funding, communities should create a volunteer- or nonprofit-led group to maintain infrastructure. There are a number of ways the government and philanthropic communities can support this work, such as building community toolsheds and organizing bulk trash pickups.

Weak or No Market, Future Vision is for Green Reuse (WMGR)

WMGR neighborhoods have been struggling with vacancy and blight for a long period of time. These issues are not a result of a recent drop in housing values or uptick in foreclosure, but rather historic or longstanding disinvestment. Given the high rate of lot and structure vacancy, sustained lack of market activity, and higher levels of public ownership, it's highly unlikely that local governments will be able to generate enough resources to redevelop these areas while simultaneously stabilizing the residential markets in other neighborhoods. As a result, the future land use for these neighborhoods will likely be an alternative green use. The government and other local partners will need to take an active role in facilitating change in WMFGR communities and support the intentional transition from formerly residential properties to alternative use.

Interventions

Blight strategies in WMGR neighborhoods should focus on securing and repurposing properties. Communities should consider a combination of the following interventions, detailed more in Step 4.

Security	Demolition
	Emergency home repair
	Vacant structure boarding
Reuse	Vacant lot reuse
	Acquisition

Prioritization

As with other limited-market neighborhoods, communities should address immediate health and safety threats, such as fire-damaged structures and open points of entry. Decisions about where to demolish or board properties should be based on where interventions could impact the most residents, like in the most populous blocks. Local governments should consider offering incentives for residents who would like to voluntarily relocate to another area with more amenities. Transitioning land to an intentional alternative use, such as a biofuel crop, forest, or urban farm, requires significant dollar and capacity investment. Communities should identify philanthropic, nonprofit, and for-profit partners to ensure the level of investment needed for implementation. As those partnerships are lined up, communities should prioritize public acquisition to enhance efficiency and reduce speculation.

Examples

Detroit, MI: *Detroit Blight Removal Task Force Plan* (<http://report.timetoendblight.org/>)

Flint, MI: *Beyond Blight: Blight Elimination Framework* (<http://cityofflint.com/planning-and-development/blight-elimination-and-neighborhood-stabilization/>)

Lessons for success

As was previously mentioned, each community's blight plan will be different because of the variations of conditions and the scope of each blight planning process, but some general considerations as you begin your assessment:

- **Every neighborhood with blight should receive an intervention.** Tailoring and prioritizing blight elimination should never mean that some areas of the municipality get all of the blight elimination interventions and other areas get none. The point of the planning process is to make sure that the type of intervention responds to the needs of the neighborhood and that partnerships and funding sources are being fully leveraged.
- **Focus on whole-block outcomes, not parcel-level outcomes.** Plans that focus on addressing the "top" parcels in a particular category, such as the 10 worst burnt-out structures or top five negligent property owners, are not usually structured around geography. Because of this, communities rarely see change at the neighborhood-level with this approach since it diffuses the impact across a wide area. Though a municipality may have successfully removed the 10 worst fire-damaged properties, if one of those properties is on a block with two other burnt-out properties, the stability and attractiveness on that block has not changed. Plans to address blight should focus on achieving whole-block outcomes, not parcel-level outcomes.

Step 5: Implement and Evaluate the Plan

With a plan for deploying blight elimination resources in your community, the final step is to develop an infrastructure for implementation. Without a solid implementation plan, even the best crafted strategies will likely fail. Your implementation approach will be specific to your blight elimination plan and, as such, each community's will be different. In the development of your plan, you may want to think through the following considerations.

- 1) Coordination
- 2) Securing new funders or partners
- 3) Work plan development
- 4) Evaluation

After completing this step, you should be able to answer these key questions:

- *Who will coordinate the implementation of the blight elimination strategy?*
 - *What role will other partners play in implementing the blight elimination strategy?*
 - *How will new resources be secured?*
 - *Who will evaluate success?*
-

Coordination

Communities struggle with communication breakdowns, differing goals, and a lack of understanding between different organizations, departments, and residents all working on blight elimination. Engaging each actor, leading productive work sessions, and jointly addressing blight is the best way to develop a practical and easy-to-implement plan.

This, however, is not an easy task. Building partnerships and coordinating efforts among governmental units, residents, business owners, nonprofits, faith-based organizations, community institutions, and other stakeholders is often a time-intensive and sometimes frustrating process. The payoff, though, is worth the struggle. A collaborative blight elimination plan and implementation will lead to a stronger approach, community buy-in, and smoother implementation. Engagement and coordination can take a number of forms, from a formal steering committee to informal community meetings, but a plan must be in place to involve community stakeholders in the process from the beginning of strategy development through plan implementation.

The Michigan Municipal League recently worked with representatives across the state to develop a civic engagement guidebook, accessible at placemaking.mml.org/engagement, which outlines:

- The importance of community engagement,
- Best practices for engagement,
- Case studies exhibiting great engagement strategies, and
- Additional engagement resources, readings, and examples.

The MML engagement guidebook can be used both when thinking about engagement in advance of the development of a strategy and during implementation planning. Additionally, the MiPlace Partnership (<http://www.miplace.org/>) has trainings on community workshops and other forms of community engagement.

The important part to remember is that all stakeholders of the community can offer insight and assistance on blight elimination efforts and should be afforded an opportunity to engage in the process. Those planning for blight elimination must minimize the barriers to participation, such as hosting meetings in local schools or community centers, and hosting meetings at different times to allow for the widest participation possible. With limited capacity, some communities may be challenged to offer as many individual engagement opportunities as they may want. If this is the case, consider focusing engagement efforts on those entities with the broadest reach, such as neighborhood association, faith-based, or business leaders or networks.

Securing new funders or partners

As discussed in Step 3, there are a number of partners and funding sources that you may not be fully leveraging in your current blight elimination efforts. During strategy development, you likely identified potential areas or roles for new funding or partners. Now that you have an idea of what your needs are, you need to secure those resources:

- 1) Decide who to ask,
- 2) Make the ask, and
- 3) Communicate with supporters

Decide who to ask

First you need to decide who to ask for partnership or funding support. For a complete list of potential resources, see Step 3: “Assessing your Resources.” From the list of potential resources, you will need to prioritize who you will focus on first, and so on.

Make the ask

Once potential support partners are recognized, be strategic in making partnership requests. You should:

- **Come prepared** - Before attending a meeting with a potential supporter, you should know about the entity/individual you’re requesting support from and focus the conversation on relationship building and identifying the entity/individual’s interest in offering support. Offer a clear implementation strategy for the blight elimination plan, identify other partners already committed to supporting the cause, and provide the entity/individual with materials that further explain the topic of the visit.
- **Have a clear ask** - In the meeting with a potential supporter, make a clear, tangible ask for support. For example, know what kind of support to request (financial, in-kind, etc.), how much support to request, and what, as specifically as possible, the support will go towards.
- **Identify specific next steps** - Organizers should be able to outline the date by which the support is needed, how the supporter will be recognized, and expectations or roles for supporters.

Carefully planning and preparing for interactions with potential supporters is the best way to ensure partners or funding sources will be confident in their contributions.

Communicate with Supporters

Once someone has agreed to be a supporter, financially or otherwise, keep the communication channels open. Communications should demonstrate milestones, updates, successes, challenges, and how the supporter’s resources are being used. Be clear about methods and frequency of communication with the

supporter, which could include face-to-face meetings, phone calls, public events, newsletters, emails, texts, and social media outlets.

To keep partners engaged and to illustrate progress, it's important that blight leaders celebrate project successes with partners and the greater community. Residents and partner agencies often suffer from planning fatigue—make sure to highlight and celebrate major milestones and success stories.

Lessons for success

- **No money? No problem.** When you are approaching an organization for potential funding support, such as a business or nonprofit, think creatively about the types of contributions you may be able to use. Some organizations may not have unrestricted funding to provide; however, they may be able to offer you volunteers, free meeting space, tools, or in-kind donations of technical expertise. While direct funding may be the ideal form of support, you must be able to think creatively and adapt when traditional funding is not an option. Being able to build a new partnership and secure additional support is an opportunity that should not be passed up.
- **Leverage existing relationships.** You will likely have a laundry list of potential supporters to approach for funding or partnership. It's unlikely that you will have good, preexisting relationships with all of them and will not likely have enough time to build all of those relationships. To address these issues, consider employing the assistance of your current supporters such as the mayor, council members, or business leaders who already have those relationships. Ask them to reach out to your list of potential supporters to, at the very least, get them up to speed on the work and make an introduction. If those supporters have the ability, they can make the ask for you.
- **Know your audience.** To some, blight elimination strategy development and implementation can seem like a jargon-filled, bureaucratic process with unclear relevance for broader community goals. For example, you may hear from a foundation that your work is outside of their funding area since they only focus on childhood development. Anyone who lives or works in a community experiencing blight issues is in some way impacted by that blight and has an inherent interest in seeing the issue resolved. Make sure that you understand the interests of the entity or department that you are approaching and present the blight elimination ask in a way that is relevant to their work. There are a variety of programs, reports, and studies that connect blight or vacancy to issues of childhood welfare, environmental sustainability, wealth accumulation, jobs, and property values. See <http://www.communityprogress.net/publications-pages-396.php> or <http://vacantpropertyresearch.com/> for publications and pieces of research. Use existing pieces of work or concepts to connect blight to your supporter's key issue area.

Develop a Work Plan

Your blight elimination strategy should be paired with a work or implementation plan that details:

- Clear action steps
- Timelines
- Costs
- Funding sources, and
- Lead implementer

Having these items clearly outlined, with the understanding that things will most certainly shift, allows for additional transparency and accountability and minimizes the possibility of miscommunication.

A work plan can be as simple as a basic excel spreadsheet (an example can be accessed here) or as sophisticated as a cloud-based project management platform. There are many work plan templates available online as well as management platforms. Some of these include:

- <https://www.wrike.com/>
- <https://basecamp.com/>
- <https://trello.com/>
- <https://products.office.com/en-us/project/project-and-portfolio-management-software>
- Overview of multiple platforms: <http://www.capterra.com/project-management-software/>
- Overview of multiple platforms: <http://www.idealware.org/reports/2014-field-guide-software-nonprofits>

Although time-consuming to create, detailed work plans provide many benefits to a blight mitigation strategy. Work plans:

- Clearly state goals, objectives, and tasks
- Keep participants on track
- Build transparency for those not directly involved in the project
- Develop opportunities for more people to get involved in implementation, and
- Ensure continuity, even if volunteers or coordinators leave their position in the project

Though the development of a work plan may be a collaborative effort, there should be one single entity charged with overseeing the coordination of the implementation. This entity will be responsible for tracking progress and updating the work plan as implementation progresses.

Evaluate the Work

Along with the work plan milestones, a blight elimination strategy should include measures for evaluation. These can be a combination of quantitative (numbers-based) and qualitative (opinions-based). The measures for evaluation will vary based on each community's blight elimination plan but should be set to allow for iterative measurement as the implementation occurs to ensure that if a strategy is not being employed effectively it is adjusted to meet the plan's goal.

For example, if the blight elimination plan goal for a community is to ensure the stabilization of the population and property value base in the next ten years, the community could look at these measures of evaluation, in addition to basic counts of blight and vacancy:

- **Population:** Has population increased, decreased, or remained fairly constant generally across the community and at what rate? Are there some neighborhoods where population has increased or decreased at a rate faster than the community average? Have the neighborhoods with the most population growth also seen the largest drop in blight?
- **Property Value:** Have property values increased or decreased generally across the community and at what rate? Are there some neighborhoods where property values have increased or decreased at a rate faster than the community average? Have the neighborhoods with the greatest gains in property value also seen the largest drop in blight?
- **Related measures:** Was there a decrease in the property crime rate? Was there a decrease in arson? Was there a decrease in the average number of days on market for a property listed for sale? Was there an increase in the rate of homeownership?

Example

New Orleans began implementing its blight elimination strategy in 2010, here are two different examples of how they have evaluated the work:

- http://www.datacenterresearch.org/reports_analysis/benchmarks-for-blight/
- https://www.nola.gov/getattachment/Performance-and-Accountability/Initiatives-and-Reports/BlightSTAT/Blight-Report_web.pdf/

Communicating progress

As major accomplishments and measureable progress are made towards the elimination of blight, it is critical that you communicate this work with stakeholders. Formal reports, op-eds, photo stories, public events, and newspaper articles are some ways to document and communicate progress towards a blight elimination goal.

As leaders would in any project, it's important to evaluate the effectiveness of each partners' involvement, project processes, communication methods, and community engagement strategies. Stakeholders, including partners, funders, and residents, should receive documentation and information reporting back on how their resources made the accomplishment possible.

Conclusion

Across the state, communities large and small struggle with blight and vacancy issues. There is no quick and easy resolution to these challenges, but this guidebook should offer assistance, direction, and resources to make the process clearer. By assessing blight, setting goals, gathering resources, developing, and implementing a blight elimination strategy, leaders will be able to overcome significant challenges and create stronger, less vacant, communities.

Do not hesitate to reach out to MVPC partners for more information, assistance, and to offer feedback on this guidebook. This tool should be an ever-changing document with the most up-to-date information, new links, and new resources. Please feel free to share resources, challenges, success stories, and anything else by emailing the MVPC coordinator, Julie Hales Smith, at julie@michiganvacantproperty.org.