

The Resident Specialist Model

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An enduring strategy at the Center for Community and Economic Development (CCED) is that of the *Resident Specialist*. Working in distressed communities over the past 50 years, CCED faculty have found that a “Resident Specialist” model has been one of the most effective and efficient ways to enact our principles. Resident Specialists have foundational understandings and competencies gained from long-term engagement with the communities they serve. Foundational understandings include deep knowledge of wicked problems, asset-based community development, collaboration – or stages of working together, and their community’s demographics. Competencies include cultural competency, intersectionality, inclusive communication, systems thinking, collaboration and partnership building, advocacy and policy change, capacity building, data analysis and evaluation, reflection and self-critique.

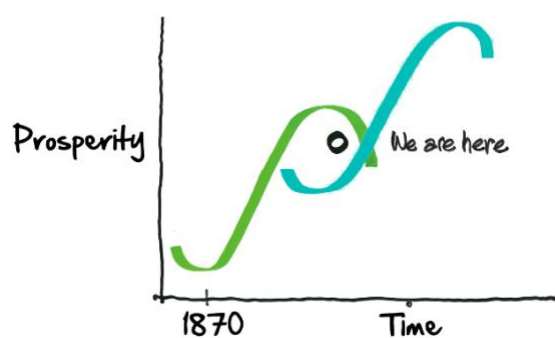
Bob is the Resident Specialist for the greater Flint area. As a lifelong community development practitioner, he has unique foundational understandings and competencies gained from working and living in Flint for over 45 years. At the CCED, his work is situated within three major socio-environmental understandings of distressed and marginalized cities:

First, distressed communities experience a wide range of wicked problems embedded in complex systems. Wicked problems are social or cultural problems that are very difficult to solve because:

- There is no one source of the problems. If there were a single source, a solution would probably already have been implemented. Rather, there are multiple contributing factors that make it hard to figure out exactly what is driving the problems and how to respond.
- A new program or individual initiative will not make a significant difference. There may be a number of ideas about things that would be helpful, but there is no simple panacea at hand.
- No single organization – *much less a single individual* – can play the superhero role to bring about a happy ending. The scale of the issue(s) is such that communities must find ways to effectively work together in order to address the challenge.

Second, distressed communities are legacy cities which are defined as older, industrial urban areas that have experienced significant population and job loss, resulting in high residential vacancies and diminished service capacity and resources. Legacy cities tend to be areas of disinvestment with populations frequently viewed as disposable.

Third, development and change occur along an S-curve. An S-curve is a graph depicting data points plotted against a timeline. Please see the example provided below.



The chart looks at the United States economy. Currently, Americans are between two S-curves – or “grandfathers’ vs. grandchildren’s” economies. Our grandfathers’ S-curve was the golden age of industrial growth. As industrial growth began to decline the next S-curve of globalization and information began to take off. Some communities are able to make the transition more smoothly than others. Some are left behind. Flint, Detroit, Benton Harbor, and other similar communities are and continue to be largely left behind.

Additionally, the lower S-curve (left) from a community and economic development perspective is characterized by problems to solve such as: funding driven; agency and program centered; professionals and experts who operate “the system”; clients needing help; expert knowledge informing solutions; operating plans; strategic plans, and; multiple facets of self-interested collaboration. This curve is on the decline. It doesn’t work well in the context of wicked problems.

The right S-curve is characterized by: opportunities to realize; relationships driven; people and neighborhood centered; viewing the neighborhood as a system operated by residents; people building capacity; community wisdom and science informed; gifts (assets) and generosity; networks; strategic doing; authentic and deep collaboration. This curve is beginning to rise and is critical to addressing wicked problems.

Ultimately, community and economic development are moving from the left curve to the right curve. This means we are moving out of the current context as it wears out and becomes increasingly less valid. In contrast, we are moving toward innovation and transformation, moving upwards on the S-curve. Resident Specialists help community members understand and embrace this transition.



One example of this work on the ground in Flint is focused on building safe neighborhoods. Bob works with community-based organizations to help generate conversation around very hard topics, ignite action and collaboration among neighborhood residents and organizations, and most importantly supports work that can give hope and relief to youth and families living in historically disinvested neighborhoods. Collectively,

staff have done this at the Center in the past, in the present and will continue to do so into the future by:

- Convening residents to take action;
- Strengthening those relationships between residents and community leaders;
- Bridging the gap between law enforcement and neighbors;
- Enacting violence reduction and prevention strategies;
- Creating safe places for children and youth, and;
- Connecting Faith, Time, Talent, and Treasures



Thank you to Kenyetta Dotson, Director of WOW Outreach in the City of Flint, for permission to use these photos. Kenyetta says, “What an Amazing day! We cleaned a lot in a high traffic areas, walked through the neighborhood, provided resources, offered prayer, hope, and even distributed ice cream & cold water - with young people leading the way as part of larger revitalization efforts.”