

### Research Proposal

**Background:** Hamilton County can be proud of unparalleled growth rates each of the past three decades. Folks take pride in living here because we offer good schools, great neighborhoods, access to shopping and jobs, and more. Our communities face major competition and we are doing all we can to attract investment so our communities can continue to offer a high quality of life of their residents now and in the future.

While there are many who benefit from the new amenities and increasing property values, there are also those who struggle and have a hard time maintaining quality, affordable housing. We know that 40% of the calls for assistance to the 211 Connect-2-Help are for housing assistance, and most of those needs are unmet. For this reason, HAND wishes to conduct a research project to better understand the characteristics of those who are burdened with housing costs. The central questions are *what causes folks to be 'upside down' in their monthly finances, and what effect does this have on our communities?*

This project focuses on housing because this is a primary driver in our personal and public economics. A good investment in housing can have positive effects on not only the individual or family, but also the neighborhood where the housing is located and the city where those residents live. However, to be done well, HAND needs to better understand the context of these investments (ie. what works in Arcadia may not be appropriate in downtown Carmel, or vice versa).

Therefore, this analysis will take into account both household characteristics and trends, but also the relationship between these households and the communities where they reside. Ultimately, this information will be used to guide HAND's future actions as it seeks to "create and promote quality, affordable housing" to benefit the residents of Hamilton County.

**Process:** HAND will work with a consortium of stakeholders to formulate the most pertinent research questions and sources of data. This group will include planners, staff and volunteers from several communities. HAND will include these stakeholders in the entire process to make sure the most relevant findings are collected and to lead to the possibility of future joint ventures.

**Consultant:** A professional real estate and public policy firm will conduct research and analysis called for in this proposal. The primary contract will be with HAND and the content of the report will be owned by the organization. The consultant will have permission to use the data and subsequent analysis with other clients, just so long as it does not detract from the original purpose.

**Partners:** HAND will form a consortium of stakeholders to prepare and finalize the research questions in consultation with the Consultant. The Noblesville Social Services Task Force, Noblesville Housing Authority, Habitat for Humanity, and others will be invited. The Consultant will meet with this group in January and March to review the methodology and findings.

**Methodology:** The Hamilton County Housing Needs Assessment, prepared in 2009 by the Noblesville Housing Authority serves as a template for much of this analysis. While this information needs to be updated, the methodology can be followed to gather much of the demographic data.

**Section 1: Update the demographic sections of the Housing Needs Assessment**

- Community Profile: Demographic and Population Trends
- Demographic Profile of the Housing Supply: Housing Market Conditions, Affordable Housing Inventory, Services Supporting Affordable Housing.

**Section 2: Community characteristics**

This stage of this analysis will look at the characteristics of individual towns and communities and the particular strengths and weaknesses they offer. For example, we may find a community wants more rental properties but there is no available land with zoning to allow multi-family development, or an area with high homeownership rates is experiencing high foreclosure rates. The purpose is to develop a more nuanced assessment of Hamilton County to better inform developers and policy makers how best to structure their investments.

- Census Tract Data – What trends do we find in different areas?
- Strengths – Community plans, The housing market and community amenities
- Key assets – Employers and jobs
- Major challenges – Disinvestment, credit

**Section 3: Best Practices**

This is intended to be a best practices section that highlights activities working across the country and the trends identified by leading trade groups. Proposals for potential interventions (policy and practice) that could be considered as communities and organizations move forward.

**Deliverable:** An Executive Summary and report with 3 sections will be published and delivered. All data files and auxiliary information will be submitted electronically to HAND, along with a powerpoint summary of the research and findings. The Consultant will make a presentation to the Board of Directors Meeting in February and in April.

**Outcome:** HAND will use the findings from this report to update the organization's strategic plan and for future funding applications. The report is a major piece of our preparation for a Board Retreat in April. The other activities we will be running concurrent to this research process include:

- 1) Qualitative Interviews and Outreach
- 2) Constituent Surveys
- 3) Board Evaluation of Mission and Values
- 4) SWOT Analysis for HAND