

# From Theory to Practice: Guiding Community Development Principles



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As part of Michigan State University (MSU), the premier land-grant institution, the Center for Community and Economic Development (CCED) was established in downtown Lansing, Michigan in 1970. In keeping with the land-grant tradition of creating and applying knowledge to address the needs of society, CCED is committed to:

*“...creating, applying, and disseminating valued knowledge through responsive engagement, strategic partnerships, and collaborative learning. We are dedicated to co-creating sustainable prosperity and equitable economies with communities.”*

Since its establishment, the CCED has expanded through strategic partnerships its scholarly outreach to communities throughout Michigan and has a statewide capacity to initiate and support innovative problem-solving strategies intended to improve the quality of life in Michigan's communities.

A society's ability to successfully address the problems that confront distressed communities largely depends on their intellectual capacity to understand the causes of these problems and to conceive of and effectively implement strategies that eliminate or minimize the sources of distress. Few institutions in modern society have both the capacity and the responsibility to generate and apply new ideas to address what are called in planning practice “*wicked problems*,” i.e., those problems in which there is a lack of consensus as to their causes and which lack obvious solutions.

*Wicked problems* are complex and persistent. They require both a capacity to build a broad community consensus on the nature and scope of a problem and, to the extent that they may already exist, identify evidence-based methods that may be feasibly implemented to address the concern. The professional and organizational capacity to conduct a broadly participatory process to identify, design, implement and assess the impact of new tools, models, policies and programs intended to mitigate the negative impacts of *wicked problems* is a role higher education is often well positioned to undertake.

Government agencies and non-profit organizations that risk piloting untested tools, models, policies, and programs may run the risk of failure and face dire consequences as a result. The private sector, driven in large part by competitive market forces, may have greater incentive to try new ideas and take risks but only in those situations where there is a likely “profitable” outcome. However, where there exists no reasonable expectation of profitability, the capacity of private sector institutions to develop and test new methods declines. This is particularly true in areas of social and community development. It is in this context that the unique role of universities to identify, develop, and implement evidence-based interventions becomes extremely valuable to addressing *wicked problems* in society.

In carrying out our mission as a research and outreach unit of MSU committed to addressing society's *wicked problems*, CCED adheres to a set of *Community Development Principles*. These principles have been developed and refined over several decades by scholars and practitioners in the field of community development and provide a framework for CCED in co-creating with community partners well informed innovative tools, models, policies, and programs that address some of our most challenging 21<sup>st</sup> century issues. ###

The **Community Development Society** has established and embraces the following **Principles of Good Practice** for the field of community development:

## Co-Learning

Engage in mutual learning and capacity building among professionals and community members through reflective practice, experiential knowledge, professional development, and scholarship.

## Collaboration

Bridge boundaries of place, sector, discipline, identity, and interest to integrate diverse perspectives and resources in shared decision-making and co-creation.

## Community-Driven Practice

Center those most directly impacted in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of community initiatives, policies, programs, and research that affect their lives.

## Community Power

Respect the ability of community members to develop and sustain a strong self-image, create shared power, and think and do for themselves.

## Dignity within Diversity

Practice and foster cultural humility, nonjudgmental listening, and accountability for any harm done.

## Economic Autonomy

Strengthen local ownership and stewardship of community assets and wealth building opportunities.

## Social Justice

Identify, resist, and dismantle systems of oppression experienced by both historically marginalized groups and emerging social identities.

## Sustainability

Practice and foster careful deliberation of the cultural, social, economic, and environmental impacts of actions and inactions over time.