

# Differential Effects of Strategic Planning on Community Change in Two Urban Neighborhood Coalitions

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**Abstract** Community coalitions represent a promising approach for addressing the interrelated and multiply-determined issues affecting urban neighborhoods of concentrated poverty. The literature suggests a number of community processes that may affect coalition efforts to change and improve communities. This study uses an interrupted time-series design to examine the effects of a strategic planning intervention on community change in two urban neighborhoods in the Kansas City metropolitan area. Results showed that strategic planning was associated with increased rates of community change in the two urban neighborhood coalitions. Under appropriate conditions, such as the presence of consistent leadership, strategic planning may be a particularly effective mechanism for stimulating community change and addressing locally-determined goals in urban neighborhoods.

**Keywords** Coalition · Strategic planning ·  
Community change · Urban

## Introduction

Community coalitions are a prominent strategy for community change and improvement related to substance abuse, crime and safety, and other urban development issues (Berkowitz 2001; Roussos and Fawcett 2000; Wolff 2001). These collaborative engagements often involve multi-sector alliances of individuals and groups that promote change

through citizen-based involvement (Roussos and Fawcett 2000; Wolff 2001; Zakocs and Edwards 2006). They are a promising approach for addressing issues that are complex, interrelated, and determined by multiple factors (Roussos and Fawcett 2000; Zakocs and Edwards 2006). Community coalitions provide enhanced resources for community members to define and solve problems with the potential to be powerful enabling systems for community change (Chavis et al. 1992; Wolff 2001; Zakocs and Edwards 2006).

The emerging empirical literature suggests a number of processes or factors that may affect the ability of community coalitions to facilitate community change and improvement (e.g., Roussos and Fawcett 2000; Zakocs and Edwards 2006). Empirical case studies and experiential knowledge suggest core community processes or factors, such as planning or leadership, which can facilitate the community change process by enhancing the capacity of community coalitions (Feinberg et al. 2004; Paine-Andrews et al. 1997; Roussos and Fawcett 2000; Zakocs and Edwards 2006). In recent years, there has been mounting support for not merely adopting “best practices” or topic-specific interventions, but also using “best processes” to plan and implement comprehensive interventions in and with communities (Green 2001; Wandersman 2003).

Yet, there is relatively little known about the effects of particular factors or community processes in facilitating changes in collaborative efforts (Feinberg et al. 2004; Zakocs 2006). Despite increasing knowledge regarding the internal process of coalition building (e.g., membership participation, leadership), there is very little systematic measurement of coalition effectiveness in changing communities and attainment of related outcomes (Berkowitz 2001; Butterfoss et al. 1993; Kreuter et al. 2000; Roussos and Fawcett 2000; Zakocs 2006). The study of coalitions is

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further challenged by the limited systematic examination of individual processes, such as planning, which may enable coalition effectiveness (Berkowitz 2001; Feinberg et al. 2004; Roussos and Fawcett 2000; Streib and Poister 1990). To better understand the development and functioning of community coalitions, it is important to systematically examine the effectiveness of promising processes that could be used by community coalitions to promote change.

### Strategic Planning as a Key Community Process

Strategic planning is a fundamental community process facilitated by many coalitions to enable community change and improvement (Fawcett et al. 2000; Roussos and Fawcett 2000). This process outlines how the community can move from its vision and mission to changing the environment to attain objectives. The strategic planning process consists of integrated steps that guide the initiative in determining what it hopes to accomplish—its vision, mission, and objectives—and how it will get there, its strategies and action steps (KU Work Group for Community Health and Development 2006). Strategic planning supports an empowerment-based process for engaging multiple and diverse stakeholders in planning, implementing, and evaluating community-determined interventions (Wandersman 2003). The planning process should include those most affected by the issue, such as residents who may traditionally lack power, as well as those in a position to effect needed changes such as leaders in business and government. The development of an action plan is an important component of the strategic planning process that helps to focus groups on prioritized goals by promoting responsibility (i.e., who will do what) and accountability (i.e., by when) for determining and facilitating the specific community and systems changes (i.e., new or modified programs, policies, or practices) to be sought in the community (Fawcett et al. 1997; Fawcett et al. 2000; Roussos and Fawcett 2000; Streib and Poister 1990).

Despite the common application of strategic planning by community-based efforts, there is limited empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of this process on community change and improvement (Streib and Poister 1990). Several case studies have found that the implementation of action plans, a component of strategic planning, by coalitions has been associated with increased rates of community change (Paine-Andrews et al. 1997; Roussos and Fawcett 2000). Yet, there is a need for further research to help understand whether and under what conditions strategic planning effects community change and improvement.

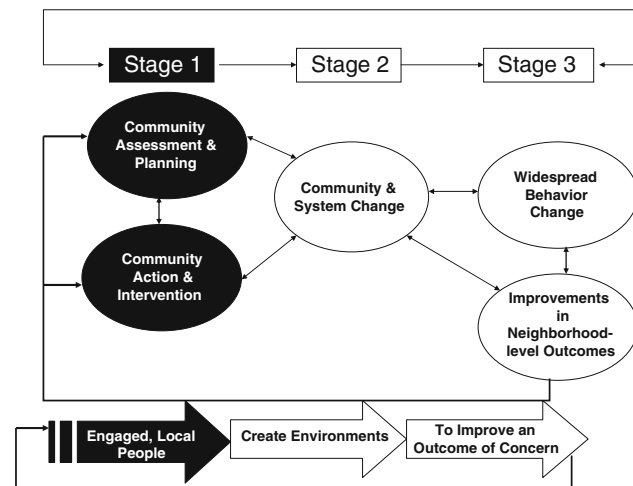
### Strategic Planning in Urban Settings

Communities in urban settings have a long history of being engaged in planning processes. The facilitation of

strategic planning has often been considered to be a vital process in environments prone to political, economic, and social change (Streib and Poister 1990). Since the 1960s, there have been many community-based approaches to planning in urban areas, such as through neighborhood associations and community development corporations (Barton 1996; Gotham 2001). Governmental institutions and private foundations have supported coalitions and partnerships in community-based planning efforts to address issues affecting communities of concentrated poverty (Kreuter et al. 2000; Roussos and Fawcett 2000).

### Conceptual Framework for Neighborhood Change and Improvement

Adapted for urban neighborhood work, Fig. 1 provides a conceptual framework for community coalitions based on the Institute of Medicine's framework for collaborative public health action in communities (Boothroyd et al. 2004; Fawcett et al. 2000; Institute of Medicine 2003). As shown in Fig. 1, this theory of change outlines three basic stages of implementation with community coalitions. Stage 1 consists of engagement of local people in: (a) assessment of the community context in which problems or goals are identified and community planning is facilitated related to defined problems or goals and (b) community action and intervention to facilitate community change and eventual improvement in the community. In the collaborative



**Fig. 1** A framework for community planning, action, and change in urban neighborhoods. Adapted with permission from *Community development: enhancing the knowledge base through participatory action research* (p. 39), by R. I. Boothroyd, S. B. Fawcett, & P. G. Foster-Fishman. in L. A. Jason, C. B. Keys, Y. Suarez-Balcazar, R. R. Taylor, & M. I. Davis (Eds.), *Community Research: Theories and Methods in Action*, 2004, Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association

planning phase, individuals and organizations from multiple sectors with varied interests, experiences, and resources gather to help clarify and develop the initiative's vision, mission, objectives, strategies, and action plans (Fawcett et al. 1995; Wolff 2001). The strategic plan should indicate both short-term and intermediate steps for achieving community-determined goals. Stage 1 is critical to assuring necessary resources and supports for the implementation of community change efforts in Stage 2, and for improving desired outcomes in Stage 3.

The aim of collaborative assessment and planning and targeted action (Stage 1) is to effect changes in the community related to the group's goals (Stage 2). Community change refers to new or modified programs, policies, or practices facilitated by partners and related to the group's mission. Community changes provide an intermediate marker of success; and, under some conditions, may be associated with improvements in population-level outcomes (e.g., decreased crime rate, decreased unemployment, increased graduation rates) (Fawcett et al. 2000; Paine-Andrews et al. 1996). The strategic planning process is intended to function as a catalyst for the identification and facilitation of community change.

#### Purpose of this Study

This study examines the facilitation of community change by coalitions in two urban neighborhoods. It uses a quasi-experimental design, an interrupted time-series design with switching replications, to analyze the effects of strategic planning on rates of community change. It is hypothesized that strategic planning will lead to increased rates of community change facilitated by the coalitions to address identified issues of concern (e.g., crime and safety, youth development). This study uses both quantitative and qualitative methods to document and analyze effects of the strategic planning process in two distinctive urban neighborhood settings.

In this report, the process of the development and implementation of a strategic plan by the (a) Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council and (b) Northeast Coalition is described. The strategic planning process in both neighborhoods consisted of the implementation of a five-step process known as VMOSA (vision, mission, objectives, strategies, and action plans). Its implementation included: (a) a one-day (6-hour) strategic planning session to support the development of the vision, mission and broad objectives, (b) ongoing consultation by the KU Work Group (the technical support provider) in refining the objectives and developing strategies and action plans, and (c) continued support by the KU Work Group in collaboratively reviewing, amending, and evaluating implementation of the strategic plan.

## Method

### Collaborative Partnership

#### *Grant Maker*

The Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, a Kansas City-based philanthropy, was the major funder and catalyst for the development of this initiative. The selection of targeted neighborhoods was based on an internal process facilitated by the Foundation. Foundation staff members collected demographic and socioeconomic data for multiple neighborhoods in the Kansas City metropolitan area where the Foundation already had existing investments. Although the Foundation selected three urban neighborhoods to concentrate its efforts one of the neighborhood coalitions chose to not fully participate in all phases of planning. This study focused on the two neighborhood initiatives selected by the Kauffman Foundation that completed the strategic planning process. Table 1 presents a chronology of events that supported the strategic planning process for this initiative.

The goal of the grant maker was to support the development, implementation, and evaluation of the strategic planning process. The Foundation provided indirect resources (e.g., training facility, training materials) and supports

**Table 1** Chronology of events for the Kauffman neighborhood strategic planning efforts

- *1999*—Kauffman Foundation implemented a place-based “healthy neighborhood” development strategy to support youth development outcomes
- *1999*—Foundation staff members selected several urban neighborhoods to target concentrated efforts, including the Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council and the Northeast Coalition
- *August 1999*—Kauffman Foundation requested the assistance of the KU Work Group to provide technical assistance and evaluation support for the strategic planning process
- *May 2000*—Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council began the strategic planning process. Approximately, 85 participants engaged in the 1-day strategic planning workshop
- *November 2000*—Ivanhoe completed the development of the strategic plan, with a specific vision, mission, objectives, strategies, and action plan
- *December 2000*—Northeast coalition received funding for staff to support the development and implementation of the strategic plan
- *May 2001*—Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council received funding for staff to support the development and implementation of the strategic plan
- *June 2001*—Northeast Coalition began the strategic planning process. Approximately, 100 participants engaged in the 1-day strategic planning workshop
- *June 2002*—Northeast Coalition completed the development of the strategic plan, with a specific vision, mission, objectives, strategies, and action plan
- *December 2002*—Foundation terminated funding for the neighborhood-based initiative

(e.g., technical assistance) to both neighborhood groups throughout the strategic planning process. The Foundation provided direct financial support (e.g., staff funding) to the Northeast Coalition in December 2000, and to the Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council in August 2001, to support the development and implementation of the strategic plans. In December 2002, following a shift in priorities, the Foundation stopped providing funding for implementation of the strategic plan in these neighborhood coalitions.

#### *Technical Support Organization*

The Kauffman Foundation funded the Work Group for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas (KU Work Group) to provide technical assistance and evaluation support for the strategic planning process. The Kauffman Foundation contracted with the KU Work Group to serve as the intermediary contact for the granting agency and the neighborhoods. Based on principles of empowerment and participatory research, the support organization sought to engage community participants in all phases of the project from community assessment and planning to project implementation and evaluation (Fawcett et al. 1995; Fawcett et al. 2003). The goal of the technical assistance was to support a strategic planning process that would enhance local capacities to facilitate, implement, and evaluate environmental changes in the community (e.g., Mitchell et al. 2002).

Technical assistance consisted of (a) facilitation of the strategic planning process (e.g., initial 1-day strategic planning workshop), (b) ongoing committee support (e.g., assistance developing community-determined objectives), (c) consultation and training for the neighborhood partners (e.g., support in identifying and gathering baseline data), (d) on-site visits (e.g., staff support in implementing and updating the plan), and (e) resource materials (i.e., strategic planning guide for neighborhood development). Participatory evaluation support consisted of (a) training and use of an online documentation system to track the unfolding of the community-based intervention (e.g., community change), (b) implementation and analyses of surveys and other assessments of neighborhood-level indicators, (c) personal consultation (e.g., telephone conversations, face-to-face visits) and (d) the provision of feedback regarding using community change data to assess progress and make adjustments. KU Work Group staff provided monthly feedback, primarily to coalition committee chairs and staff members, and quarterly feedback to the action committees (e.g., for housing, crime and safety).

#### *Neighborhood Partners*

*Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council* The Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council serves the Ivanhoe neighborhood, which is

located in the urban core of Kansas City, Missouri. The Ivanhoe Neighborhood is 95% African-American, with an estimated population of 8,869 (U.S. Census 2000). Nearly, 35% of the population in Ivanhoe lived below the poverty level, which is more than twice the poverty level (14.0%) for the city (U.S. Census 2000). Slightly more than 36% of adult neighborhood residents had not completed high school and less than 7% of adult residents had obtained a Bachelor's degree (U.S. Census 2000).

The Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council was established in 1967. During the 1980's, both the neighborhood and the organization began to experience drastic decline due to urban flight and transitions in leadership. In the mid 1990's, the worsening conditions of the neighborhood resulted in the emergence of new neighborhood leaders who became active in addressing block-level problems and concerns. In February of 1999, the Kansas City, Missouri Planning and Development Department conducted a needs assessment that included a workshop and focus group with neighborhood residents. The focus group served as the initial basis for later planning efforts and engagement of community partners that was facilitated by the Kauffman Neighborhood Initiative.

*Northeast Coalition* The Northeast Coalition serves the Northeast area of Kansas City, Kansas. The Northeast area is nearly 86% African-American, with an estimated population of 10,256 (U.S. Census 2000). According to the 2000 Census data, approximately 32% of the population in Northeast Kansas City, Kansas lived below the poverty level, which was nearly twice the poverty level (16.5%) for the city (U.S. Census 2000). Approximately 31% of adult neighborhood residents over 25 years of age had not completed high school and less than 5% of adult residents had obtained a Bachelor's degree (U.S. Census 2000).

The formation of the Northeast Coalition, Inc. resulted from a study conducted by the Urban Land Institute (ULI), which was partially funded by the Kauffman Foundation. In the summer of 1999, the Urban Land Institute provided consultation to assist the Northeast area in identifying strategies to revitalize the area (Urban Land Institute 1999). A major recommendation from the ULI report was to establish a strong neighborhood-based organization in the Northeast to be responsible for developing a common vision, a clear action plan, and a neighborhood coalition to coordinate planning and development efforts in the area. In 1999, the Kansas City, Kansas branch of the Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC) convened a meeting with over 60 representatives of organizations and institutions in the Northeast, which resulted in the formation of the neighborhood coalition, known as the Northeast Coalition.

## Measurement

This study used several evaluation methods and related measures to assess the effects of implementation of the strategic planning process on the facilitation of community change by each initiative. It used a documentation system to record discrete instances of community change over time. It also used qualitative methods (e.g., interviews) and surveys to further assess the strategic planning process.

### *Documentation of Community Change (Intermediate Outcome Measure)*

The theory of change for this neighborhood development effort guided the assessment of the effects of the strategic planning process on increased rates of community change. Based on the theory of change, the collaborative planning process would result in the development of a strategic plan to establish the vision, mission, objective, strategies and action steps for the coalition. The specification of action steps would lead to the identification of appropriate methods of community action, such as calls to city officials, to guide the implementation of community change by the coalition and collaborative partners. It was hypothesized that the targeted action plans (with specified community changes to be sought) would promote responsibility and accountability by the community coalition and partners in implementing the strategic plan.

The primary unit of measurement for the coalition change efforts was instances of “community and system change” (i.e., a new or modified program, policy, or practice facilitated by the initiative and related to its goals and objectives) (Fawcett et al. 1995; Francisco et al. 1993). Community changes represent the *product* of planning and action; for instance, rather than attempting to measure every instance of calls and contacts made to public officials, it refers to the result of those efforts evident by

discrete occurrences of new or modified programs, policies, or practices. Written scoring instructions were used to further clarify instances (and non-instances) of community changes relative to neighborhood and organizational goals. Table 2 provides examples of community changes facilitated by coalition partners in each neighborhood. KU Work Group’s Online Documentation and Support System (ODSS) was used to record instances of community change facilitated by the two neighborhood partnerships. The ODSS, an internet-based data reporting and measurement tool, made it easier to document and provide feedback on progress (Fawcett et al. 2003; Francisco et al. 1993).

In this participatory evaluation process, the community change data collected in the documentation system were based on a review of archival records and self-reports from community documenters who represented the organization (i.e., committee chairs, staff members). Community changes facilitated by the initiative were gathered through data collection that was both retrospective (for 1999) and prospective (from 2000–2002). Retrospective data collection, prior to the facilitation of the strategic planning process used semi-structured interviews with community partners (e.g., LISC) and a review of archival records (i.e., meeting minutes, newspaper articles) to establish a baseline rate of community change. Prospective data collection used the documentation system; either through direct input in the internet system or completion of manual log forms by organizational representatives (i.e., committee chairs, staff).

KU Work Group staff (the first author) provided training with individual community documenters in using the definitions for community change, scoring instructions, and a protocol for entering data using the ODSS. Then, for the first several months of coalition implementation, the KU Work Group staff member provided in-person contact and support to the community documenters when entering data or completing manual log forms to enable immediate data entry and scoring clarification. Staff consistently provided

**Table 2** Illustrative community changes facilitated by the neighborhood coalitions

Illustrative community changes	Strategic plan goal area
1. Policy change: Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council established a collaborative partnership between law enforcement and Ivanhoe residents resulting in blocked expansion of a night club and denial of an amusement license for the owner.	Crime and safety
2. Program change: Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council partnered with a local faith-based community organization and a neighborhood church to implement a summer program for at-risk youth.	Youth development
3. Practice change: Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council worked with the Prosecuting Attorney’s office to assign an Assistant Attorney to regularly attend neighborhood meetings and to brief the coalition on pertinent cases that may affect the neighborhood.	Crime and safety
4. Program change: Northeast Coalition facilitated a new program, Christmas in October, to provide minor home repairs for residents needing housing assistance.	Housing
5. Program change: Northeast Coalition helped to establish Wyandotte Works and Workforce Investment programs to provide on-the-job worksite training to residents by local industrial firms.	Economic development

monthly feedback to community documenters (i.e., committee chairs, staff, partners) through either phone calls or personal interviews to clarify recorded entries and codes and to assess the completeness of system entries.

#### *Reliability and Verification of Documented Events*

The reliability for scoring of community change was based on the individual scoring of reported events by two independent observers. The community documenter (e.g., staff, committee chair) served as the primary observer and a KU Work Group staff member (the first author) served as the secondary observer. Interobserver reliability was calculated by dividing the number of agreements (between the two observers) by the total number of instances (agreements and disagreements) and multiplying by 100. The standardized level of interobserver reliability for scoring of discrete instances of community change by two independent observers was set at 80% or above. Each month, the KU Work Group staff member and the community observer clarified levels of interobserver agreement and discrepancies in scoring. The KU Work Group staff member and the community observer(s) engaged in intensive feedback and review of the scoring definitions any month the scoring reliability between the two independent observers was less than 80%. The accuracy of recorded events was verified by the researchers based on informal examination of correspondence between reported events and other documents such as archival records (i.e., meeting minutes) and informal reports by community members and partners (e.g., coalition members).

#### *Qualitative Assessment of the Strategic Planning Process*

**Qualitative Interviews** Qualitative interviews were conducted with organizational representatives to further assess the strategic planning process, coalition impact, and overall lessons learned. The qualitative interviews also helped to identify critical events associated with the facilitation of the planning process. Semi-structured interviews ( $N = 18$ ) were conducted with key staff and organizational representatives from the partnering organizations that participated in the initiative, including the Kauffman Foundation, the KU Work Group, the Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council, and the Northeast Coalition. Qualitative interview data from members of the community coalitions responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of the strategic plan were particularly important in assessing the value of the planning process.

**Participant Surveys** *Survey of the Utility of the Strategic Planning Workshop* The KU Work Group administered a survey at the conclusion of the 1-day strategic planning

workshop to help assess the utility of this component of the strategic planning process. Workshop participants in both neighborhoods completed a survey rating the “helpfulness” of the workshop training session and the workshop materials in developing a strategic plan for the neighborhood coalition. The survey was based on a three point Likert-type scale (i.e., 1, not helpful to 3, very helpful).

*Survey of the Importance of the Strategic Planning Process and Participant Satisfaction* The KU Work Group also conducted a survey with designated community members and organizational representatives. Organizational board members and staff completed a survey rating the facilitation of the community change processes by the initiative over the three-year period (1999–2002). Survey participants completed a questionnaire for the Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council and the Northeast Coalition. Survey participants were asked to rate the importance of the overall strategic planning process. Participants were also asked to rate their satisfaction with the development and implementation of the strategic plan. Finally, survey participants rated the impact of the strategic planning process on the facilitation of community change by the respective initiative. The survey was based on a five-point Likert-type scale (i.e., 1, no impact to 5, great impact).

#### **Intervention—Implementation of Strategic Planning**

The strategic planning process facilitated by the KU Work Group was consistent across both neighborhoods. There was staggered implementation of the strategic planning intervention across the two participating neighborhoods, with the planning intervention being delivered first with the Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council and then with the Northeast Coalition. There was a 13-month delay between the onset of the intervention in the two neighborhoods. Coinciding with the termination of Foundation funding, strategic planning implementation concluded in both participating neighborhoods in July 2002.

A one-day strategic planning session (six hours) was initiated in each neighborhood, with staggered dates of implementation. The organizational leaders recommended key neighborhood leaders and partners to invite to the strategic planning workshop. An invitational letter was sent to community residents and partners to request their participation. These included representatives of agencies (e.g., local government), organizations (e.g., youth organizations, community organizations), and institutions (e.g., school representatives) that were either located in the neighborhood or supported efforts in the neighborhood.

The strategic planning session used the VMOSA process (Vision, Mission, Objectives, Strategies, and Action plans). The VMOSA process is a five-step process that focuses on: (a) establishing a clear vision for the community, (b)

defining a concise mission that states the overall aim of what is to be accomplished and why, (c) identifying measurable objectives as markers of success that indicate “how much” of “what” is to be accomplished by “when,” (d) determining strategies or methods for attaining the objectives, and (e) developing action plans that identify specific community changes (e.g., a new program or policy) to be sought and that indicate what is to be done by whom to facilitate the priority changes in the community (KU Work Group for Community Health and Development 2006). During the 1-day workshop, the KU Work Group team explained the VMOSA process to the community partners and began the facilitation of the planning process.

The KU Work Group provided each participant with its planning guide, “Promoting Urban Neighborhood Development: An Action Planning Guide for Improving Housing, Jobs, Education, Safety and Health, and Human Development” (Fawcett et al. 2001). This consisted of 100 pages of information explaining the VMOSA process and providing illustrative examples (e.g., mock vision statements such as “safe streets, safe neighborhoods”), prompts (e.g., specific examples of programs, policies, and practices that could be implemented to address different neighborhood goals), and cues (e.g., instructions for developing strategies and action plans). Portions of this guide were used to provide examples and supports for different parts of the workshop (e.g., developing a vision and mission).

During the strategic planning session, the group developed and gained consensus for the vision, mission, and broad objectives. Individuals who participated in the planning session were asked to participate on action committees that were organized around community-prioritized issues (e.g., beautification, crime and safety). They worked together to develop measurable objectives, specific strategies, and related action plans. The KU Work Group provided monthly consultation to each goal-focused action committee (e.g., crime and safety, youth development). Consultation helped further develop specific plan components (e.g., objectives, strategies) with guidance from the action planning guide. The KU Work Group provided ongoing support to the action committees in developing action plans, which identified community changes to be sought and related action steps to be taken, around priority areas identified by the group.

#### *Implementation of Strategic Planning with the Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council*

In May 2000, the KU Work Group began to facilitate the strategic planning process with the Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council. Project Neighborhood (Move-Up), a community-based organization, served as the lead partner in helping to mobilize the local neighborhood organization in the urban

core, and to engage partners (e.g., residents, community leaders) in the strategic planning process. The strategic planning workshop, involving approximately 85 residents and partners, further expounded on the issues and concerns identified in the earlier FOCUS Neighborhood Assessment conducted by the Planning and Development Department of Kansas City, Missouri. During the workshop, the community participants identified four main goal areas to guide future work: beautification, housing and economic development, crime and safety, and family and youth development/education.

Through ongoing consultation the KU Work Group team supported the committees in developing specific objectives, strategies, and action plans for each goal area. For example, for the goal area of crime and safety the committee identified: a) specific objectives (e.g., By December 2002, there will be a 40 percent increase in the number of block contacts who regularly communicate with persons from the law enforcement network to reduce area crime) and b) strategies (e.g., Distribute cards of assigned neighborhood police officers to block contacts to enhance police outreach). Although the coalition completed the strategic plan in October 2000, the KU Work Group continued to provide consultation and support to the committees in collaboratively reviewing, amending, and evaluating implementation of the plan. By January 2001, the partnership had integrated the review of facilitated community changes related to the action plan into the regular agenda of each monthly committee meeting. This helped to guide the work of the committee and ensure ongoing updates, feedback, accountability and adjustments in the partnership’s efforts to implement the overall strategic plan.

#### *Implementation with the Northeast Coalition*

On June 16, 2001, the Northeast Coalition began the strategic planning process through the facilitation of a one-day planning session. LISC served as the lead partner in helping to mobilize the neighborhood organizations and local agencies around the strategic planning process. The strategic planning workshop, involving approximately 100 residents and partners, further clarified the issues and concerns identified through the earlier Urban Land Institute report. During the planning session, eight action committees were formed: Child, youth, and adult development; Community capacity; Culture; Economic development; Education; Health; Housing; and Safety. The action committees continued to meet monthly to develop strategic plan components, including specific action plans, with the assistance of technical support from the KU Work Group. The coalition experienced challenges in completing the strategic plan due to internal conflicts (e.g., staff and board transitions). However, in June 2002, the group finalized its

**Table 3** Components and elements of the strategic planning process

Planning components	Specific planning elements
Assess the planning context of the organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify the planning needs of the organization</li> <li>• Identify internal and external resources and supports that can help to facilitate the strategic planning process</li> <li>• Assess the readiness and capacity of the organization for planning</li> </ul>
Assess the planning context of the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review and integrate existing neighborhood plans</li> <li>• Research past planning efforts in the community</li> <li>• Assess the readiness and capacity of the community for change efforts</li> </ul>
Foster the community partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify and involve key stakeholders (e.g., residents) that should be involved in the strategic planning process</li> <li>• Establish partnerships with organizations that can help (e.g., technical assistance providers, consultants)</li> <li>• Use a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to set conditions for shared work among the funder, evaluator, and coalition</li> </ul>
Facilitate a strategic planning workshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats</li> <li>• Provide a planning guide to give prompts for plan development</li> <li>• Establish or renew a common vision and mission for the initiative</li> <li>• Establish and gain consensus on basic goals of the initiative</li> <li>• Establish a mechanism for ensuring ongoing work on the plan</li> </ul>
Develop and use the strategic plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify internal and external resources and supports to assist in plan development (e.g., technical assistance)</li> <li>• Develop or refine strategic plan components (e.g., objectives, community changes to be sought, strategies, and action plans)</li> <li>• Determine a mechanism (e.g., committees) for reviewing plan progress</li> <li>• Ensure ongoing communication and development of the plan</li> <li>• Formal adoption of the strategic plan by the organization</li> <li>• Support early implementation of the strategic plan by facilitating specific activities identified in the action plan</li> </ul>
Implement the action plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine a mechanism (e.g., staff, committees, partners) for implementing the action plan</li> <li>• Review and integrate reporting on the plan (e.g., monthly) into routine functions of the initiative (e.g., meetings)</li> <li>• Ensure provision for technical assistance in implementing the plan</li> </ul>
Evaluate implementation of the strategic plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide regular (e.g., quarterly) and ongoing evaluation of the implementation of the comprehensive strategic plan</li> <li>• Regularly (e.g., monthly) review the completion of activities (e.g., community changes) identified in the action plan to assess the implementation of the strategic plan</li> </ul>
Renew the strategic plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Celebrate small wins (e.g., a new program or change in policy) achieved in implementing the plan</li> <li>• Ongoing recruitment of partners and resources using the plan</li> <li>• Annual review and update of the strategic plan components</li> </ul>

strategic plan with prioritized community change goals identified by the committees and board of directors.

Table 3 describes the core components and specific elements of the strategic planning intervention used in each neighborhood with technical support from the KU Work Group. These components refer to both processes (e.g., assess community context) and products (e.g., the resulting action plan). In practice, the components are iterative, interconnected, and sometimes facilitated simultaneously. For example, evaluation of strategic planning efforts may indicate a need for a more inclusive set of partners. Efforts to gain increased partners from the

targeted community helped to identify historical barriers of racial discrimination and social exclusion experienced by African-American members of the community in prior planning efforts.

#### Experimental Design

To address the primary research question, an interrupted time-series design with switching replications (i.e., multiple baseline design) across neighborhood groups was used to examine the effects of strategic planning on rates of community change. This design enabled the examination of

rates of change (dependent variable) associated with the staggered implementation of strategic planning (the independent variable). The interrupted time series design allows the impact of the strategic planning intervention to be examined by assessing the slope or level of the dependent variable (i.e., cumulative rate of community change) pre and post-intervention, over multiple observation points (Shadish et al. 2002). The switching replication feature of this interrupted time series design permits the robustness or generality of the intervention to be examined by allowing each participant/setting (neighborhood coalition) to serve as its own control or comparison (Bailey and Burch 2002; Shadish et al. 2002).

The interrupted time series design with switching replications allows each intervention group (neighborhood coalition) to receive the intervention at different times, in a staggered sequence. This design enhances external validity by allowing the effects of the intervention to be observed with two intervention groups (neighborhood coalitions), at two different periods in history, and in two different settings (Shadish et al. 2002). The interrupted time series design with switching replications is a strong quasi-experimental design that helps to rule out history or other correlated events, such as new funding or other training, which might explain observed effects. This is possible since the intervention (strategic planning) is staggered across multiple participants (neighborhood coalitions) over a series of observation points (Shadish et al. 2002). In this study, the implementation of the strategic planning process was staggered by 13 months across the two coalitions.

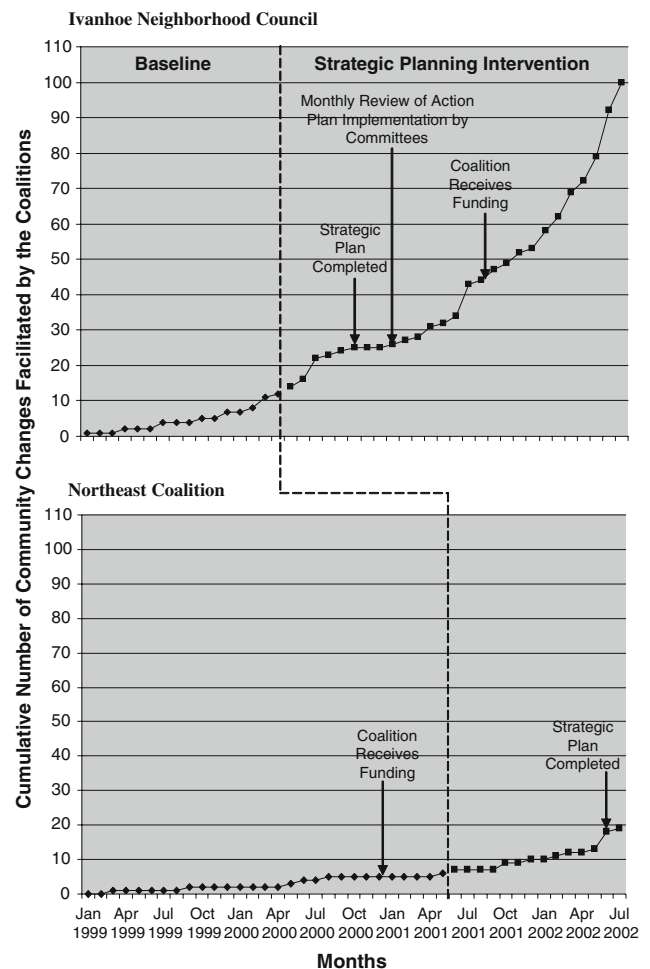
## Results

### Documentation of Community and System Change

Figure 2 shows the unfolding of community changes over time as a cumulative record to depict the continued development of the initiative. In a cumulative graph, each new event (i.e., each new program, policy, or practice change) is added to all previous events: a flat line indicates a low rate of community change; a steeper slope represents a higher rate of change. In Fig. 2, the staggered implementation of the strategic planning intervention in the neighborhoods is used to examine the effects of strategic planning on rates of community change.

#### *Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council*

Figure 2 shows that the Ivanhoe initiative facilitated 100 community changes, between January 1999 and July 2002. The initiative facilitated a steady rate of community change over this period, with a higher pace of community change



**Fig. 2** Cumulative number of community changes documented before and after strategic planning in two urban neighborhood coalitions (1999–2002)

(47%) during the last half-year of implementation. The initiative fostered the majority (75%) of community changes in the last 1.5 years of implementation, from January 2001 to July 2002.

Figure 2 shows that fewer documented community changes (25%) were initiated in the earlier phase of the initiative (1999–2000). In 1999, the initiative was involved in Phase 1 activities such as community and organizational assessment (e.g., FOCUS Neighborhood Assessment). There is a somewhat marked increase in the rate of change between May and July 2000 associated with the beginning of the strategic planning process. A more marked increase in the rate of community change was noted following February 2001, associated with the initial implementation of the strategic plan following its completion (in October 2000). A particularly marked increase was observed between March and July 2001, associated with the implementation of the action plan (i.e., taking action to bring about planned changes) through functional action committees. During this full implementation, reviewing and

updating the action plan (i.e., reporting progress in bringing about targeted changes) was integrated into the monthly meetings for each committee and the overall neighborhood initiative as a standard agenda item.

The community documenters recorded 100 instances of community changes; that is, discrete occurrences of new or modified programs, policies, or facilitated by the coalition or collaborative partners. Interobserver agreement was calculated based on the independent scoring of discrete events reported by the primary observer (e.g., community documenter, coalition staff) and also scored by a secondary observer at the KU Work Group (the first author). The obtained value of Kappa was .9146 with a standard error of .084. Observed agreement (96.45%) was significantly higher ( $z = 10.86$ ) than agreement expected by chance (58.46%).

#### *Northeast Coalition*

Figure 2 shows that between January 1999 and July 2002, the initiative facilitated 19 documented community changes. The initiative experienced a slow rate of community change over this period, with a somewhat increased rate of community change (53% of changes) during the last half-year of implementation. Figure 2 shows that this somewhat higher rate of community changes may have been associated with implementation of the strategic plan, nearing the completion of the development of the plan. The slower rate of community changes (11%) facilitated during Phase 1 of the initiative (1999–2000) was related to efforts to support community and organizational assessment (e.g., focus groups). Interobserver agreement was calculated based on the independent scoring of reported events. The obtained value of Kappa was .9211 with a standard error of .148. Observed agreement (96%) was significantly higher ( $z = 6.2106$ ) than agreement expected by chance (49.28%).

#### Qualitative Assessment of the Strategic Planning Process

##### *Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council*

A post-intervention survey was used to assess several dimensions of the strategic planning process including importance, impact, and participant satisfaction. Based on the qualitative assessment of key organizational leaders, the development of a strategic plan was rated as “very important” by approximately 75% or more of the survey respondents ( $N = 9$ ) from the Ivanhoe initiative. Nearly 78% of survey respondents from the Ivanhoe initiative indicated that strategic planning had a “great impact” (5) on the facilitation of change by the Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council. Approximately 78% of the survey respondents

indicated that they were “satisfied” with the overall strategic planning process.

A survey of the utility of the strategic planning workshop was used to gather information about the usefulness of the training and materials (e.g., action planning guide) provided in the 1-day workshop. At the conclusion of the workshop, approximately 39 participants (46% response rate) returned a completed survey. Approximately 74% of the survey respondents indicated that training in the VMOSA process was “very helpful”. Slightly more than 78% of the respondents indicated that the training provided in the 1-day workshop was “very helpful” in progress towards the development of a strategic plan. Nearly 76% of survey respondents indicated that the action planning guide was “very helpful.”

Qualitative interviews with organizational leaders of the Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council indicated that the strategic planning process was initiated during an appropriate period of the group’s organizational and neighborhood development. One interview participant indicated that “the strategic planning process helped Ivanhoe by giving them a more clear direction of what they wanted to do, which helped them to leverage alternative funding and additional resources.” Another interview participant stated, “Ivanhoe is very proud of their plan. Ivanhoe wanted, needed, and was ready to go through a [planning] process. It was perfect timing for the folks in Ivanhoe to go through the process. It’s really a grassroots organization and most of the people that were part of the process really didn’t have the expertise.”

During the interviews, conducted between May and July 2005, interview participants informed the KU team that the neighborhood coalition had implemented many of the community change goals proposed in the strategic plan. At the time of the interviews, the group was beginning to engage in another intensive planning process to internally update and renew the strategic plan. After that time, the Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council amended and renewed the strategic plan, which was officially approved by the City Council in September 2005. The Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council was sustained and has continued to implement the strategic plan after the Kauffman Foundation ceased providing formal supports through funding and technical assistance.

##### *Northeast Coalition*

Based on the post-intervention survey, the development of the strategic plan was rated as “very important” by approximately 63% of the survey respondents ( $N = 8$ ) from the Northeast Coalition. Only 38% of survey respondents indicated that strategic planning had a “great impact” (5) on the facilitation of change by the organization. Only 25% of the survey respondents indicated that they were “satisfied” with the strategic planning process.

A survey of the utility of the strategic planning workshop was used to assess the 1-day workshop. Forty participants in the strategic planning workshop (40% response rate) responded to the survey. Approximately 75% of the survey respondents indicated that training in the VMOSA process was “very helpful.” Slightly more than 83% of the respondents indicated that the training provided in the 1-day workshop was “very helpful” in progress towards the development of a strategic plan. Nearly 72% of survey respondents indicated that the action planning guide was “very helpful.”

The qualitative interviews with key coalition leaders in the Northeast suggested that the overall strategic planning process was not timed to be responsive to the immediate and more pressing needs of the organization. An interview participant indicated that the Northeast Coalition was “dealing with political stuff and they were planning during the midst of a power struggle on the board. It made no sense to action plan and try to motivate committees because they had much larger issues.” It was further indicated in the interviews that the strategic planning model that guided the process may not have been the most appropriate format for the Northeast Coalition. The interviews indicated that before formal engagement in the Kauffman Initiative the organizational leaders had identified another planning process and facilitator, but later redirected their planning efforts to align with the Kauffman initiative. During the key leader interviews, it was indicated that the Northeast Coalition did not recover from internal conflicts that continued through the planning process. The coalition dissolved soon after the Kauffman Foundation ended supports.

## Discussion

The strategic planning process had differential effects on the rates of community change facilitated by the two participating urban neighborhood coalitions. The Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council served as a more effective catalyst for community change following completion and use of its strategic plan. The process of developing and later implementing the strategic plan appeared to be associated with a marked increase in documented rates of community change. The implementation of the strategic plan by functional action committees was a key variable that appeared to spur community change, especially after the integration of reported progress on the action plan into the routine process of the committees. The use of reports of community changes related to the action plan to guide committee functioning may also have served as prompts for collaborative action and set the occasion for positive feedback and partner accountability (Johnston et al. 1996; Kegler et al. 1998; Roussos and Fawcett 2000). Further,

Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council members indicated their high satisfaction with the development of the strategic plan and the corresponding facilitation of community change in the neighborhood.

The Northeast Coalition served as a more limited catalyst for community change following strategic planning. The results showed that the beginning of the strategic planning process was not associated with an increase in rates of community change; and there was no evidence of full implementation such as through the regular use of the plan for accountability by action committees in Ivanhoe. Qualitative interviews and ratings suggested that Northeast Coalition members were not satisfied with the process or its impact. The interviews further suggested that the form and timing of the planning intervention may not have been appropriate for the Northeast Coalition while it was dealing with internal conflicts.

More significant increases in the rates of community change were associated with the completion and fuller implementation of the strategic plan. The time costs of collaborative planning may have limited the capacity of the initiative to facilitate change during planning, especially within the high-turnover context of leadership in the Northeast Coalition. Efforts of the Northeast Coalition to fully implement the strategic plan were further disrupted by the cessation of funding by the Kauffman Foundation following changes in Foundation priorities. Therefore, it was not possible to determine whether continued (and fuller) implementation of the plan would have eventually resulted in greater facilitation of community change.

## Limitations and Strengths

There are a number of limitations and strengths of this study. First, the study found markedly different effects of the strategic planning process on the facilitation of community change in different neighborhood contexts. Although the KU Work Group facilitated the same basic planning process with both neighborhood groups, there may have been variations in fidelity of implementation. Next, without a more extended study period, it is not possible to draw conclusions about whether community changes were sufficient to affect widespread behavior change and improvement in population-level outcomes (e.g., in levels of crime, adequate housing). This is a frequent challenge for interrupted time-series designs in community contexts since unequal delays and broader features of the environment (e.g., community readiness and leadership) can influence the longer-term effects (Shadish et al. 2002). Further, funders and researchers may underestimate the time necessary to effectively engage multi-sector partners with varying degrees of commitment, expectations, trust, and collaborative history.

Although consistent protocols were used for measuring community change, instrumentation changes are a common threat for longitudinal studies since the resources and conditions for measurement may change over time (Shadish et al. 2002). This study attempted to ensure a consistent measurement instrument across observers throughout the study through standardized training and routine feedback on inter-observer agreement to community observers and researchers. Yet, self-reports of community change data by coalition leaders may affect the accuracy and completeness of documented information. The use of retrospective data through interviews to obtain baseline levels of community change may limit accuracy and completeness of reporting (e.g., selective memory) for the earlier period. Further, the small number of participant neighborhoods severely limits the generality of the findings. This study systematically assessed the strategic planning process in two neighborhood coalitions that had similar socioeconomic characteristics and were selected by the Foundation to participate in this initiative. This selection bias limits the generality of the findings to these particular communities.

There may also be limitations regarding the form of the strategic planning process facilitated in this study. The strategic planning process was chosen by the researchers and the grant maker before engagement with the partnering neighborhood coalitions. Although the coalitions did not select the particular form, they had control in the determination of their own particular vision, mission, objectives, strategies, and action plan. Results suggest that the 1-day strategic planning workshop was “very helpful”. However, the study findings are less clear about whether and how the workshop, training, materials, and follow-up consultation supported the ongoing strategic planning process (e.g., development and use of action plans) or enhanced the knowledge and ability of workshop participants to bring about change (e.g., facilitation skills by committee chair). Similarly, the effectiveness of the follow-up support for planning implementation (e.g., site visits, technical support) was not systematically examined. Finally, the costs of this planning process, with technical support for implementation, may limit the number of neighborhoods that could benefit from this form of strategic planning.

Despite these potential limitations, this study has a number of apparent strengths. The use of systematic measures and a strong quasi-experimental design permitted a clear examination of the effects of strategic planning, a commonly used but rarely analyzed type of community consultation. This time-series design helped to control for many threats to internal validity, such as history or other correlated events, which may have affected the neighborhoods (Shadish et al. 2002). The use of a consistent measure of community change is an improvement over many purely

descriptive reports of the process of coalition efforts (e.g., the number of people attending meetings). A noted strength of this study is its attempt to analyze the effects of strategic planning on facilitated rates of community change. Systematically introducing a well-defined strategic planning intervention enhanced our understanding of how and under what conditions the implementation of the strategic planning process may affect community change.

A particular strength of this study is that it contributes to our understanding of the setting conditions that enable the facilitation of effective community-based processes in urban core communities. This study supports the necessity of facilitating appropriate conditions (e.g., developed leadership) that help ensure the effective implementation of strategic planning in the community. It also suggests the importance of enhancing the evidence base for strategic planning, a commonly used, but rarely analyzed community-based process. This could help extend our understanding of the more effective and efficient forms of strategic planning, particularly under different conditions (e.g., varying levels of readiness and leadership).

#### Emerging Lessons for the Facilitation of Strategic Planning

The following emerging lessons about the development and implementation of the strategic planning process may help guide future research and practice with community coalitions and collaborative partnerships.

1. The strategic planning process should be flexible and adaptive to ensure effective development and implementation of the plan in complex and fluid environments. For instance, in the Northeast, a delay in planning until after organizational issues were resolved may have improved the effectiveness of the strategic planning process.
2. An inherent component of establishing a strategic plan is to ensure the development of a shared vision and mission to guide the planning process. As evidenced by its ongoing use in Ivanhoe, the strategic planning process must be owned and adopted by the community.
3. It is important to maintain focus on the process of strategic planning, as well as the planning product (i.e., a completed plan). For example, the Ivanhoe Neighborhood Council was able to facilitate an efficient collaborative planning process that resulted in a finalized plan within a relatively short time period.
4. There is often a delay between the development of the strategic plan and the facilitation of accelerated rates of community change fostered by a collaborative effort. As the Ivanhoe effort illustrates, it is important that the planning process affords the initiative ongoing

opportunities to engage in change efforts (i.e., immediate implementation of action steps) to help maintain participation and momentum.

5. The integration of the action plan into the routine functions of the organization (e.g., reports on progress as part of Ivanhoe's regular meeting agenda) can help to provide ongoing feedback and accountability for collaborative efforts.
6. The effectiveness of the strategic planning process may be associated with broader environmental conditions. For instance, the absence of consistent leadership and a clear organizational structure impeded implementation of the plan in the Northeast.
7. There may be stages of organizational development (e.g., developed leadership, defined organizational structure) and community-readiness (e.g., established trust) that may affect the effectiveness of strategic planning.
8. Although planning is a critical process for the facilitation of community change, it may be ineffective or even harmful (e.g., by contributing to further conflicts). Adverse effects may be more likely in the absence of appropriate conditions (e.g., clear organizational structure, developed leadership) and necessary supports (e.g., technical assistance, collaborative partners) that help to ensure coalition success (Roussos and Fawcett 2000).

## Conclusion

This study examined the effects of a strategic planning intervention on community change in two participating urban neighborhood coalitions. It used a rigorous quasi-experimental design (i.e., interrupted time-series design with switching replications) to analyze the function of strategic planning on rates of change. The use of community change as a systematic measure of the intermediate outcome was important for assessing the effects of the strategic planning process. Strategic planning may be an effective mechanism for community coalitions to facilitate community change and improvement, especially when enabled by the appropriate setting conditions (e.g., cohesive leadership, clear organizational roles and responsibilities, technical assistance). This study provides evidence for strategic planning as a key community process to facilitate environmental change. It also suggests the need for additional research regarding the different forms and functions of strategic planning in different settings and contexts, including those with less developed leadership and fewer external resources and supports for planning.

Many urban core neighborhoods across the United States have experienced periods of dramatic decline and disinvestments. This is often attributed to factors outside of

community control, suggesting that community members may have little influence in changing local conditions. However, this study suggests collaborative partners, using appropriate processes, can facilitate changes in the community related to their identified goals. By extending the evidence for community processes, this study provides guidance for support organizations and funders about setting conditions for success in community-based planning and action. Using emerging evidence about community processes, local people may be empowered to create the conditions in urban core neighborhoods that promote the quality of life their residents deserve.

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