

# Settings and Framework

THE FIRST SECTION OF THIS BOOK introduces social workers to the field of community economic development (CED), also known as community building, and features four case studies of community development corporations (CDCs) that demonstrate CED principles in action. We first examine definitions of CED and then trace its four “waves,” during which its methods have grown more sophisticated and have evolved in response to policy and sociopolitical changes. The case of the Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation—one of the earliest CDCs in the country and still going strong today in Brooklyn, New York—highlights how CDCs can adapt and shift strategies over time to meet changing community needs.

Next, we discuss why CED is important to social workers and the field of social work. What roles do social workers play in community-based organizations using a CED approach? What skills and training do social workers need to be effective at creating change at the neighborhood level in the face of poverty and other social problems? Monsignor William J. Linder, the founder of New Community Corporation—a highly successful CDC in Newark, New Jersey—was a social worker at heart. The case study of his work to launch New Community Corporation after civil unrest in Newark in 1967 illustrates the skills needed to effectively practice CED.

Because so much of CED work takes place in urban settings (though CED has roots in rural areas as well and is currently being applied in rural areas), we then trace how cities and their geographic building units—neighborhoods—came into existence in the United States. Understanding how and why these cities and neighborhoods grew and flourished and then declined and deteriorated is crucial to implementing CED effectively. The case study of the Warren/Connor Development Corporation, a CDC operating in Detroit, Michigan, since 1984, well reflects the rise and fall and revitalization of cities as “white flight” changed cities’ population composition and the United States shifted to a service economy.

From here, we explore the long history of CED in the United States and why understanding the policies and politics underpinning CED is so important to this field of practice. The case of Chicanos por la Causa, one of the oldest CDCs in the country, provides an excellent example for understanding the role of politics and a changing political and policy climate. Originally focused on meeting the needs of Chicano residents of South Central Phoenix, Arizona, Chicanos por la Causa has taken advantage of evolving policies and funding opportunities to become a statewide CDC and a provider of comprehensive services to all individuals regardless of ethnicity.