

Albany, Georgia-Tools for Change  
W.K. Kellogg Foundation  
New Tools, New Visions 2 Project

Year 3 Evaluation Summary Report

**2011**

**Albany, Georgia – Tools for Change**

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**W.K. Kellogg Foundation**

*New Tools, New Visions 2 Project*

**Year 3 Evaluation Summary Report**

*Spring 2011*

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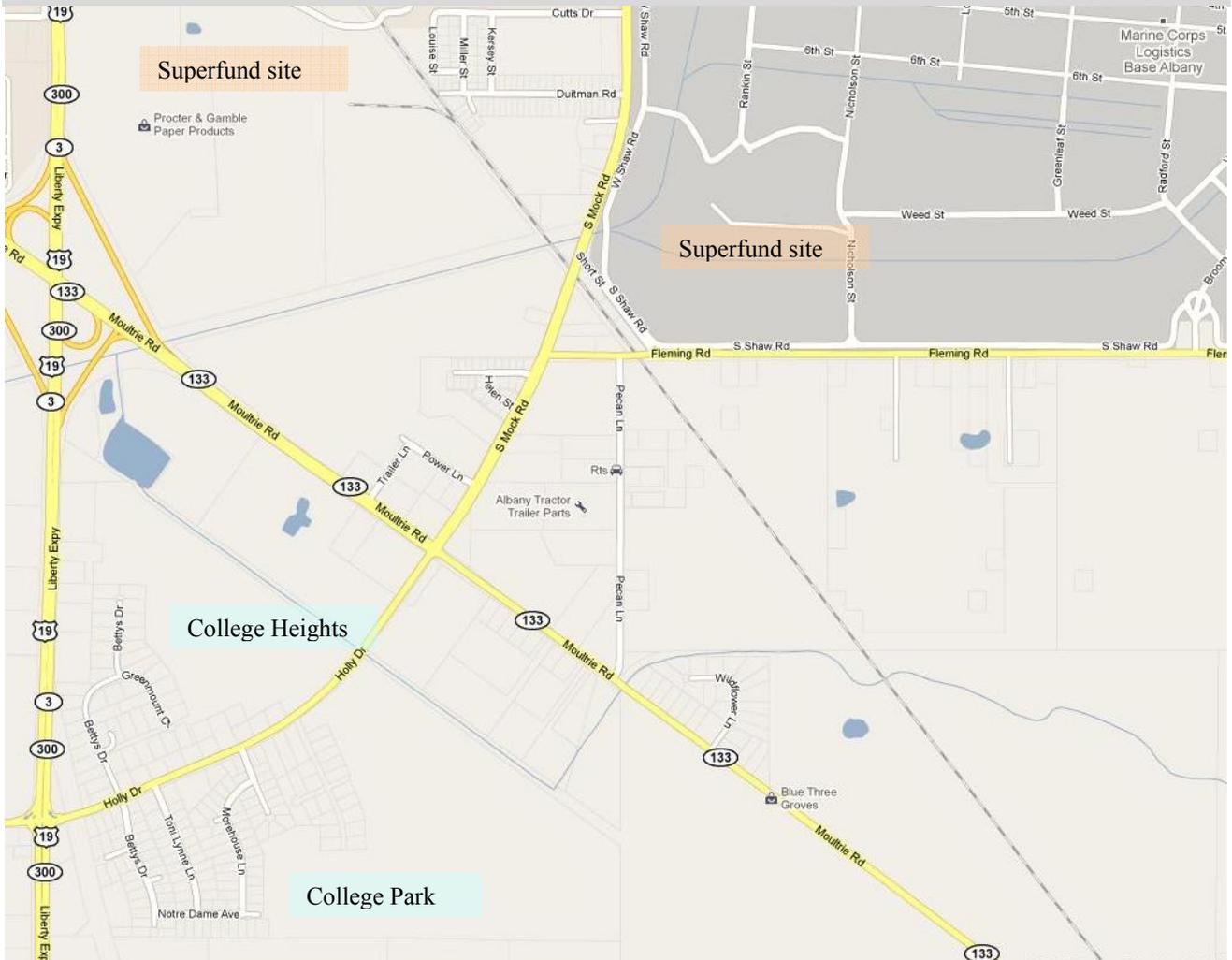
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## Table of Contents

New Tools, New Visions 2 .....	4
Evaluation Overview .....	4
I. Albany Health Context .....	5
II. Albany, GA - Tools for Change – History, Structure, Process.....	6
III. Creating Sustainable Community Change – Goals, Strategies and Progress .....	9
AGTFC Goals and Vision .....	9
AGTFC Organizational Development .....	10
Capacity Building.....	11
Community Assessment.....	12
Community Building through Neighborhood Events.....	12
Community-based Participatory Research .....	13
IV. Community Impact and Sustainability.....	13
V. Challenges and Lessons Learned .....	17
VI. Conclusions and Recommendations.....	19

**Albany, Georgia**  
**Tools for Change**  
**College Heights and College Park Neighborhoods**



## New Tools, New Visions 2

### *New Tools, New Visions 2*

In 2008, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation directly funded four community-campus partnerships in the state of Georgia through the *New Tools, New Visions 2* Project. The intent of the funding was to build capacity among community residents and Historically Black Colleges and Universities to partner and develop community-based participatory research projects that would achieve significant and measurable impacts on the health of African American communities. This report is about one of the grantee organizations *Albany, Georgia Tools for Change, Inc.*

### *Evaluation Overview*

The purpose of this third and final *Albany, Georgia Tools for Change, Inc. (AGTFC)* Evaluation Summary Report is to present the findings of a two-day evaluation site visit, describe the context of the organization, its strengths and challenges, and progress toward meeting its goals, and the structure and strategies that facilitated the work as it applies to the Kellogg Foundation evaluation questions for the *New Tools, New Visions 2* Project (NTNV2) (see box at right).

Recommendations for continuing to strengthen *AGTFC* for sustainability are included.

Utilizing a participatory evaluation approach, the NTNV2 Evaluation Team from Georgia Southern University sought input from the *AGTFC* Board of Directors to determine the Year 3 evaluation plan; identify relevant assessment questions; and reach consensus about findings, conclusions and recommendations prior to the dissemination of the results. A

### **W.K. Kellogg Foundation New Tools, New Visions 2 Project Evaluation Questions**

1. In what ways have community organizations and community participants become more capable and ready to lead campaigns to improve their health and eliminate health disparities?
2. What specific changes have occurred, or are likely to occur, in the community health profiles (for each site) as a result of partnerships created through the program?
3. What conceptual and practical skills have been acquired to work through ethical questions and leadership challenges?
4. What are the indicators (qualitative and quantitative) that community representatives are developing skills and capacities for community-based participatory research and action on health disparities?
5. How have community representatives expanded their use of community-centered, collaborative research methods in Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU)? What specific ways has this improved the effectiveness of the HBCUs as a common institution to serve the members of African American neighborhoods and organizations?

## New Tools, New Visions 2

mixed methods design was comprised of key informant interviews, and a Partnership Assessment<sup>1</sup>.

During February 2011, face-to-face and telephone interviews lasting about 45 minutes each took place with 20 key *AGTFC* partners. Eighteen people (16 community partners and two academic partners) completed the Partnership Assessment. All participants self-selected to take part in the evaluation and represented *AGTFC* staff, and members of the Board of Directors, *NTNV2* Steering Committee members and local partners. The majority of the participants had been involved with *AGTFC* and/or *NTNV2* for two years or less.

### ***I. Albany Health Context***

Located in southwest Georgia, Albany is the ninth largest metropolitan area in the state and the county seat of Dougherty County. Population estimates for 2009 suggest that Albany has approximately 75,616 residents; 69.3% of whom are African American.

Common industries in Albany include Marine Corps Logistics Base, large corporations (e.g., Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital, Proctor and Gamble and Miller Brewing Company), and institutes of higher learning such as Albany State University (ASU) which has 148 full-time faculty, and approximately 4,176 students in 40 academic programs (ASU, 2010). A majority (80.0%) of the Albany population 25 and older has at least a high school education. A fifth (20.0%) of the population however, has less than a high school education (U.S. Census, 2009).

The estimated median income for a household in Albany is about \$29,981 (compared to Georgia \$47,590). As of February 2011, the unemployment rate was 10.7% (slight above the state-level rate of 10.2%) (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). Over a fourth (27.9%) of the city's population lives below poverty level, including 38.0% of those under the age of 18 and 19.0% of those people 65 and older (U.S. Census, 2009). The public school Free and Reduced Lunch Program is a common poverty indicator. In 2008, 77% of the Dougherty County school children participated in the Program (New America Foundation, 2008).

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<sup>1</sup> The Assessment was adapted from the Julie Bell-Elkins Community-Campus *Partnership Assessment* located on the Community-Campus Partnerships for Health website [www.ccph.info](http://www.ccph.info) and the Thriving Communities Partnership's community capacity questionnaire.

## New Tools, New Visions 2

According to the Georgia Department of Community Health's Minority Health Report (2009), health disparities in Dougherty County are high, with the only exception being primary health care. With the presence of Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital and federally qualified community health centers, the county has above average primary care access. Otherwise, African American residents have over two times the rate of emergency department visits for diabetes, blood pressure and asthma when compared to white residents. The low birth rate for African Americans is almost twice that of whites. The rate of adult diabetes in Albany is 14.1% (compared to Georgia 10.4%). The adult obesity rate is 31.1% and the preschool obesity rate is 15.7% (compared to Georgia 27.8% and 14.6% respectively) (City-data.com). About 20% of Dougherty County residents (17% of whom are children) have no health insurance coverage (City-data.com). Because AGTFC's focus is on environmental toxins it is important to note that according to the EPA, Albany has had at least 20 superfund sites within its borders. Currently, there are four that are near the College Heights and College Park communities; General Motors Delco, Proctor & Gamble Paper Products Company, U.S. Marine Logistics Base, and Wye Delta Electric Company, Inc. All who were interviewed agreed that environmental health issues to be some of the leading areas of concern for resident of Albany.

### ***II. Albany, GA - Tools for Change – History, Structure, Process***

#### **History**

Initiated by community and academic partners in the mid-1990s, *AGTFC* has a long history, beginning as a grassroots organization and growing to the 501(c)3 that it is today. For many years, residents in the College Heights and College Park areas sensed that “something wasn't right in the environment, maybe something in the water, which was causing high rates of cancer.” According to their website (<http://www.agtfconline.org/>), the *AGTFC* mission is:

*“to empower residents of the College Park, College Heights, and the Country Club Estates communities in Albany, Georgia with respect to effectively enhancing their physical, emotional and mental health and well being by improving communication, information and access to health resources and eliminating environmental toxins and pollutants.”*

## New Tools, New Visions 2

Over three-fourths (77.7%) of those who completed the Partnership Assessment agreed or strongly agreed that members can correctly describe the partnership's mission and goals to others.

In 2008, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation awarded *AGTFC* \$255,000 in funding for the *NTNV2* project. The purpose of the three year grant was to help build the capacity of community and academic partners to collaboratively work together and utilize community-based participatory research (CBPR) approaches to address health and health care disparities. Table 1 outlines the principles of CBPR<sup>2</sup>.

**Table 1: Principles of community-based participatory research**

- Recognizes community as an unit of identity
- Builds on strengths and resources within the community
- Facilitates collaborative, equitable involvement of all partners in all phases of the research
- Integrates knowledge and intervention for mutual benefit of all partners
- Promotes a co-learning and empowering process that attends to social inequalities
- Involves a cyclical and iterative process
- Addresses health from both positive and ecological perspectives
- Disseminates findings and knowledge gained to all partners
- Involves long-term commitment by all partners.

About the same time *AGTFC* was awarded the Kellogg Foundation funding, the organization also received Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Community Action for a Renewed Environment (*CARE*) Level I grant. The purpose of the EPA grant is to provide technical assistance and capacity building to community residents who are interested in mobilizing around environmental justice issues. Both the *NTNV2* and *CARE* projects help to advance the overall mission of the *AGTFC*.

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<sup>2</sup> Israel, B., Schulz, A., Parker, E., Becker, A. (1998). Review of community-base research: Assessing partnership approaches to improve public health. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 19, pp. 173-202.

## New Tools, New Visions 2

### **Structure**

*Albany Georgia Tools for Change, Inc.* is led by a Board of Directors whose President is also the CEO of the organization. The two *AGTFC* staff members (i.e., Administrative Officer and Project Assistant) work with a Technical Advisor to provide day-to-day oversight for the projects. The Technical Advisor, an Epidemiologist with the Southwest Georgia Public Health District 8-2, devotes 30% of her time (paid in-kind) to supervise the *NTNV2* and *CARE* Community Coordinators, a Health Analyst, and one public health student intern. The Southwest Georgia Public Health District 8-2 also provides in-kind office space for the Health Analyst and intern. The Dougherty County Health Department provides monthly meeting space for the *AGTFC* Board of Directors.

The *AGTFC* Board of Directors meets monthly and reviews the proposed plans and activities for the projects. The Board is made up of a diverse group of health care executives, retired teachers and counselors, one ASU faculty member who is the designated liaison appointed by the University President, and the Steering Committee presidents for *NTNV2* and the *CARE* projects. All members on the Board have voting power. The *NTNV2* Steering Committee is made up of residents from the College Heights and College Park neighborhoods and is coordinated with the assistance of a full-time *NTNV2* Community Coordinator.

Everyone who completed the Partnership Assessment, including *AGTFC* Board members and *NTNV2* Steering Committee members stated that they understand their role in the partnership and how it relates to the roles of others. The majority (83.3%) agrees, or strongly agrees, that the partnership builds on the strengths of its members and that everyone shares credit for the work (77.7%) that is taking place, leadership is shared (66.6%) and everyone has the appropriate training to do the work (72.2%).

### **Process**

The process that partnerships use to get their work done refers to communication, decision-making and how and when tasks get completed. It also refers to the dynamics of the relationship between community and academic partners. The majority (83.3%) of those who completed the Partnership Assessment agrees or strongly agrees that *AGTFC* uses an established process for making decisions. The *AGTFC* Board of Directors, staff, and *NTNV2* Steering Committee

## New Tools, New Visions 2

president meet monthly. The NTN2 Steering Committee members also meet monthly. Partners communicate via email and telephone between meetings. A little over half who completed the Partnership Assessment agree or strongly agree that there is an open exchange of ideas (55.5%), that everyone respects each other's points of view (66.6%), and even if they disagree, the majority of members feel comfortable asking questions if any information is unclear (88.8%). Sixty-six percent of those who completed the Partnership Assessment felt that the partnership makes decisions and follows up in a timely manner, and works together to solve issues that arise within the partnership. A third felt that they have a voice in determining agenda items, and three-fourth have adequate knowledge of the budget. About 45% stated that they would like more input into how the partnership's resources are distributed.

The partnership with ASU was perceived as not being as strong as they had originally hoped. A little less than half (47.0%) agree, or strongly agree, that community and academic members equally provide services and support to the partnership; with 77.7% stating community partners and 44.7% stating academic partners demonstrate their commitment to the partnership through their attendance at meetings and events. The reason for this perception may be due to there being only one ASU faculty member from the College of Business who is actively involved as a *AGTFC* Board member. Though a memorandum of understanding is in process, to date, there are no other ASU faculty members who have been able to consistently participate in *AGTFC* and *NTN2* activities. However, there has been a presence of at least five ASU student interns working on the NTN2 project. Overall, however, three-fourth (77.7%) expressed that they are generally satisfied with the partnership.

### ***III. Creating Sustainable Community Change – Goals, Strategies and Progress***

#### **AGTFC Goals and Vision**

Over the past three years, *AGTFC* has spent a tremendous amount of time building relationships and collaborating with community stakeholders to plan and implement strategies to reach their goals of addressing environmental pollutants and toxins in the College Heights and College Park neighborhoods. Almost everyone who was interviewed shared that *AGTFC* is making great strides toward fulfilling the goals that were proposed for the NTN2 project.

## New Tools, New Visions 2

Those interviewed acknowledge that initially progress was slow because there was limited understanding of how to address the environmental health issues. For example, the original goal was to conduct soil testing research. However, by Year 2 the *AGTFC* staff and Board members recognized that preliminary research was necessary prior to conducting soil sampling research. Now that *AGTFC*'s structure has stabilized and they have increased their focus, there is a consensus that "the organization is solid" and they are now in a position to conduct research.

### **Community Change Strategies and Progress**

Since its inception, *AGTFC* has stayed focused on environmental health. The primary area of uncertainty over the last three years was how to go about meeting their goals. By utilizing community organizing strategies to engage and mobilize residents in College Park and College Heights around some of the neighborhoods concerns related to flooding and safety, *AGTFC* has been able to keep residents actively involved in the work of *NTNV2*. Table 2 summarizes the status of the initially proposed strategies and what is currently being implemented in Albany. Strategies are grouped into five dimensions: organizational development, capacity building / community organizing, community assessment, and community-based participatory research. And additional strategy that was not included in the original proposal is community building through neighborhood events.

### **AGTFC Organizational**

#### **Development**

The Kellogg Foundation grant funding has provided an opportunity for the *AGTFC* Board of Directors to sharpen its focus on how to address environmental health issues in the community, and develop research capacity among local residents. To this end, they have hired knowledgeable staff, recruited influential Board members, and reflective of CBPR principles they

Over the last three years, *AGTFC* collaborators have included:

- Dougherty County Public Works
- College Heights and College Park residents
- Georgia Cancer Coalition
- Southwest Georgia Public Health District 8-2

## New Tools, New Visions 2

have aligned themselves with community partners and neighborhood residents who have important skills and spheres of influence that contribute to the success of the organization's work (e.g., grant administration, community organizing skills, public health, Board experience). Almost all (94.4%) who completed the Partnership Assessment believe the work that the organization is doing has resulted in other health and human service agencies in the area knowing about *AGTFC*.



*“The Board and Steering Committee members are a better connected, stronger leadership [structure]. They are now going in the same direction toward something greater.”*

### **Capacity Building**

Some of the primary goals of the Kellogg Foundation's *NTNV2* project are to enhance a grantee community's own abilities to address health and health disparities utilizing a CBPR approach. The *AGTFC* Board and *NTNV2* Steering Committee members acknowledged that they have personally grown and learned skills during trainings (e.g., survey training) and conferences (e.g., American Public Health Association). Almost all (94.4%) who completed the Partnership Assessment state that their own understanding of health issues, especially cancer and environmental toxins, increased because of their involvement in the *NTNV2* project. It is important to note however, that those interviewed did lament that the decision by the Kellogg Foundation to not hold its annual training or maintain a Technical Assistance Provider resulted in a dearth of capacity building trainings opportunities.

Reflective of CBPR principles, community engagement and community organizing has been one of the primary strengths of *AGTFC* and has resulted in important outcomes above and beyond the environmental research. With the guidance of the Community Coordinator, a community holding pond drainage project which was advocated for over 10 years ago is almost completed. Additionally, a neighborhood petition has resulted in the recent installation of street lights. By organizing and building capacity among residents about the issues, they have learned more about their neighborhood and the resources within the community (e.g., what the health department offers, who to contact at the County or City level). Also, by utilizing community organizing techniques such as recruiting and assigning block captains to segments of the neighborhood, they are developing community leaders in the effort to address the concerns of the residents in

## New Tools, New Visions 2

College Park and College Heights. Those who were interviewed shared that because of their involvement with *NTNV2*, they have increased their civic participation and are now more vocal at county commission meetings and in the community at-large.

### **Community Assessment**

The goal of a community assessment is to identify the assets of a community, concerns that it faces, and input about potential solutions. The proposed *AGTFC* goal of holding community dialogues and reviewing medical records was amended in 2009 to holding house parties to inform community members about the environmental issues of concern. Now, *AGTFC* is preparing for a formal community assessment process. In January 2011, the *NTNV2* Evaluation Team conducted a workshop with *AGTFC* staff and *NTNV2* Steering Committee members on how to conduct door-to-door household health assessments. Those who attended the workshop evaluated it with high marks. The asset mapping and needs assessment approach to research is an excellent way to gather baseline data about the health of the residents in the College Heights and College Park neighborhoods and is reflective of CBPR principles. Engaging everyone in this way will help to ensure community residents feel useful in the process and not make them feel like they are research subjects.

### **Community Building through Neighborhood Events**

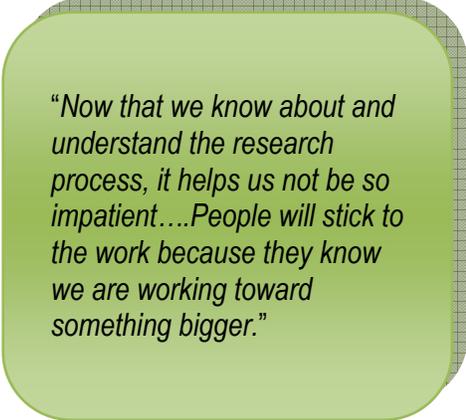
An innovative strategy that the *NTNV2* Steering Committee has been using to create interest among residents is educating neighbors about environmental concerns during neighborhood events and block parties. They have also addressed other achievable, short-term goals in the community. For example, during this past year, they 1) raised donations for Liberty House, a local shelter for families who are victims of domestic violence, and 2) worked with Dougherty County Public Works to address a flooding issue in the neighborhood. This strategy demonstrates that the *NTNV2* Steering Committee is interested in and willing to work on other issues of concern in the community as well as the planned *NTNV2* activities. Having achievable short-term goals that they can celebrate, while simultaneously working toward long-term goals, may keep people engaged. Often times, people grow impatient with waiting for long-term goals to be achieved. Having short-term, easy to accomplish goals bring people to the table. Simply showing up, being present and giving back to the community can be a unique strategy to get the

## New Tools, New Visions 2

word out about issues of importance and raise awareness about the work of the *NTNV2* Steering Committee and *AGTFC*.

### **Community-based Participatory Research**

Initially, the primary area of research considered by *AGTFC* was soil sample testing to build a case about how environmental toxins may be connected to cancer rates. Over the last couple of years, the research agenda has evolved into a more comprehensive assessment of the College Heights and College Park neighborhoods. Once the *NTNV2* community household data are collected and analyzed, the *AGTFC* Board and *NTNV2* Steering Committee will enter into a new phase that will require reflection and strategic planning in order to move the research findings into next steps for action and intervention phases.



*“Now that we know about and understand the research process, it helps us not be so impatient....People will stick to the work because they know we are working toward something bigger.”*

### ***IV. Community Impact and Sustainability***

Impacting the community health and addressing health disparities are the intended long-term outcomes of the Kellogg Foundation funding. The *AGTFC* strategies for improving health in the College Heights and College Park neighborhoods primarily involves actively outreaching and engaging community residents and building their capacity to address the environmental concerns within their community. Additionally, they build alliances with decision-makers and local partners in work toward creating solutions to resolve any ongoing concerns (i.e., flooding, drainage, street lights, heavy traffic). The use of these strategies holds promise for impacting the health in the communities in Albany. The findings from the Partnership Assessment show that over three-fourths (77.7%) of the partners agree or strongly agree that *AGTFC* builds on its accomplishments each year and that the partnership has been effective in achieving the proposed *NTNV2* goals (83.3%).

## New Tools, New Visions 2

**Table 2**

**Status of AGTFC Strategies in from the Proposed Scope of Work Years 1-3**

Dimension	Strategy	Status To Date
AGTFC Organizational Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to develop the capacity of AGTFC Leadership by fully organizing and provide CBPR training for new board members along with training in GIS and in the use of other data producing systems.</li> </ul>	Completed CBPR training, other part of goal amended
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Select, orient and train project leadership, project coordinator, support personnel and acquire resources needed including office space and equipment.</li> </ul>	Accomplished
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build organizational rapport and create partnerships with local entities such as the chamber of commerce, health departments, area physicians, nonprofits, churches, local government officials including elected council members and local media.</li> </ul>	Accomplished
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create a technology/website workgroup.</li> </ul>	In process
Capacity Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build and train network of resident work teams within the specified communities in East Albany through the use of Resident Team Leaders.</li> </ul>	Accomplished
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop work groups within each of the subject communities through the use of Team Leaders.</li> </ul>	Accomplished
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Educate elected officials and other policy makers about health issues, about identified environmental impacts on health and recommend and implement strategies to overcome obstacles to improved health</li> </ul>	Accomplished
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop educational materials and programs to enhance the knowledge of community members on health hazards in their neighborhood</li> </ul>	Ongoing
Community Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct "Dialogue Sessions" and surveys and access medical records of area hospitals, physicians, and schools.</li> </ul>	Goal amended
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Formulate feasible strategies to address community health issues and concerns.</li> </ul>	Ongoing
Community-based Participatory Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage local researchers in the project identifying faculty members, students and others, including governmental agency experts.</li> </ul>	Ongoing – SWPHD epidemiologist is the AGTFC Technical Advisor
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage researchers in the activities, including federal, state and local agencies, environmental agencies, ASU faculty members and students</li> </ul>	Ongoing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify research opportunities as guided by community input and directions</li> </ul>	Accomplished
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify research questions and methods of approach guided by community input and direction</li> </ul>	Accomplished
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify a "control neighborhood" with comparable demographics.</li> </ul>	Goal Amended
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Document historical testing and, as required, begin water, soil, and air testing for hazardous chemicals.</li> </ul>	Goal Amended
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue determination of environmental exposures throughout East Albany using historical information and water, soil and air testing for hazardous chemicals with emphasis on College Heights and College Park</li> </ul>	Goal Amended

## New Tools, New Visions 2

To produce measurable neighborhood-level change in the environmental and health concerns in College Park and College Heights, the community household health assessment must represent a substantial fraction of community residents and ultimately affect changes in community-level environmental policies. The findings from the Partnership Assessment show that well over half (66.6%) agree, or strongly agree, that *AGTFC* has been effective in informing policy makers and key government officials about their work. To date, the *NTNV2* Steering Committee has successfully worked with City and County officials to create some changes in the area (e.g., addressing the flooding issue, encouraging the City to notify residents about its work to correct the problem). These efforts may not have affected policy per se, but the City and County now knows who *AGTFC* is and personally knows the residents who belong to the *NTNV2* Steering Committee. This is evidence of movement toward impacting change at a broader organizational and community level.

The majority (94.1%) of *AGTFC* staff and Board members and *NTNV2* Steering Committee members who completed the Partnership Assessment state they plan to continue participating in the partnership, even after the Kellogg Foundation funding ended. There is a sense among those interviewed that *AGTFC* finally has “the right mix of people” (i.e., community residents and advocates; and representatives from government, public health and health care) to get things done. Because of this mix, there is a certainty that the work will continue even if there is a lag in funding.



*“We go to county commission meetings...They (county representatives) have taken notice and have come out to talk with us. If we didn’t have Tools for Change and the *NTNV2* Steering Committee they wouldn’t have done that.”*

A request to the Kellogg Foundation for a no cost extension has been approved. *AGTFC* is making plans to write and submit more grants (e.g., Environmental Protection Agency Community Action for a Renewed Environment (CARE) Level II), but in the immediate future funding is expected to decline and other strategies will need to be sustained using other

## New Tools, New Visions 2

resources. It is important to note, that sustainability should be considered at two different levels. One level of sustainability is *AGTFC* and the other is *NTNV2*.

*AGTFC* sustainability - Partners shared that it is important for *AGTFC* to consider working on health and environmental justice issues at a broader, county-level beyond the College Park and College Heights neighborhoods. By broadening their mission to include areas beyond two neighborhoods, partners shared that additional funding opportunities (e.g., National Institutes of Health, EPA – CARE II, Children’s Health Network) may open up to *AGTFC* and result in a more sustainable organization.

*NTNV2* sustainability - Sustainability of the work is expected by residents of College Heights and College Park, because they feel a great deal of ownership of the *NTNV2* project. The only area of concern is whether there is a need to have someone available to do the day-to-day work. The Steering Committee is passionate, but much of the work has been accomplished with the assistance of the *AGTFC* Community Coordinator and *NTNV2* funding. The seeds have been planted and there is increased capacity and understanding of the issues and how to create the changes the community is seeking. Though there is a sense that the project will continue well beyond the current funding, some thought needs to be given to how things will be structured once the Kellogg Foundation funding ends.

The findings from the Partnership Assessment show that *AGTFC* has adequate structures in place and that the partnership with ASU is strong enough to maintain the partnership over time (61.1% agree or strongly agree to both questions). However, the ultimate impact of *AGTFC* will depend on how the work impacts the goals of addressing environmental toxins and pollutants and health disparities. The *AGTFC* Board of Directors and the *NTNV2* Steering Committee members strongly believe the work is sustainable. However, plans to continue to leverage other funding opportunities and forming stronger, broader alliances with Albany State University and others (e.g., government entities, non-profit organizations) may be needed to create lasting community-level changes.

The *NTNV2* project is beginning to affect the culture of the College Park and College Heights neighborhoods. Those interviewed during the evaluation site visit shared that working on the environmental issues has brought people in the neighborhoods closer together. By engaging and

## New Tools, New Visions 2

mobilizing residents and getting them pointed in the same direction, *AGTFC* is poised to impact critical issues that perpetuate health inequality in the Albany area.

### *V. Challenges and Lessons Learned*

A number of challenges have emerged for *AGTFC* over the past three years of implementing the *NTNV2* project. The lessons learned while responding to these challenges may be useful for other communities undertaking similar projects. Some key challenges included group dynamics, university capacity and readiness for CBPR, and community capacity and readiness for creating change.

#### **Group Dynamics**

Anywhere passionate people gather to address community concerns; there will likely be different agendas and opinions about how things get done. This section relates to how partnerships operate; specifically as it relates to the core value of creating equitable partnerships. Many of those who were interviewed felt that the key strength of the *AGTFC* is the people – their collective knowledge, creativity, and talent. At the same time, a theme that emerged from the interviews was that there has been friction at times when there were differing opinions or expectations among staff, Board and/or Steering Committee members about the direction of the *NTNV2* project, how decisions get made, and who participates in the decision making process. Some differing expectations included: 1) wondering if *NTNV2* Steering Committee members who sit on the *AGTFC* Board have voting power; 2) wanting *AGTFC* Board members to attend all *NTNV2* project activities; and 3) making day-to-day decisions for the *NTNV2* project that affect the budget.

Some who were interviewed attributed confusion about roles and expectations to high turnover that plagued the Board early into the project. Though it is more stable now, the *AGTFC* Board still struggles with members not attending meetings regularly. Those interviewed felt that lax attendance policies resulted in members not always knowing or understanding what is happening or what the expectations are for *AGTFC* or the *NTNV2* project. *AGTFC* is currently creating a formal Board member orientation and plans to hold a Board retreat to continue to build the team. This process should help to clarify roles and expectations and dispel confusion. As new members come on board, they need to understand that *AGTFC* is the fiscal agent for a variety of

## New Tools, New Visions 2

projects and that the Board (with input and voting of all members) makes decisions related to what is proposed by the respective project Steering Committees. It might be helpful for the Board to look at the roles and activities of other community Boards and Steering Committee to fully develop the roles and responsibilities of Board members.

### **University Capacity and Readiness for CBPR**

One of the primary goals of the *NTNV2* project was to create, or enhance, the partnership between community and campus to conduct CBPR. To date, the community-campus partnership for research with ASU has been limited to one faculty member appointed by the University President who sits on the *AGTFC* Board, student interns, and at one time, a campus-based office space. There were other faculty members, who had expressed interested in working with *AGTFC* in the past, who have not been fully engaged in the partnership primarily due to heavy course teaching loads and their uncertainty about how their research interests may fit into the *AGTFC* plans. In order to be a full partner with *AGTFC*, there needs to be a conversation that thoroughly addresses what *AGTFC* needs and wants from ASU as a research partner (e.g., grant writing, health-related research design or statistical expertise, develop interventions), and what ASU faculty may need (e.g., publications about research projects, course release) and why (e.g., tenure and promotion). Any agreement should be outlined in a memorandum of understanding. There should also be continued capacity building at the faculty level about community-based participatory research, as faculty members in general are not always educated in the principles and ethics of this type of work.

Because it has been a challenge to get ASU faculty actively engaged in the research, *AGTFC* developed a strong partnership with the Southwest Georgia Public Health District 8-2. This relationship has been beneficial to *AGTFC* and helped them reach the *NTNV2* project goals. One principle of CBPR is “transparency” and fully understanding everyone’s agenda and expectations, and what they need in order to come to and stay at the table is a lesson learned.

### **Community Capacity and Readiness to Create Change**

Though the *NTNV2* project has had many successes, those interviewed stated that getting people involved remains an ongoing challenge. The College Heights and College Park neighborhood makes up a large geographic area. Additionally, each of the neighborhoods has a different

## New Tools, New Visions 2

demographic make-up; one is made up primarily of young, working families who rent their home, and the other community is primarily made up of retired residents who are long-term owners of their home. The current economic realities and the time and energy commitments of the *NTNV2* project, means that there are differences in level of involvement in the project activities. One strategy to keep people involved is to disseminate the community assessment findings relatively quickly. Meetings about the findings will be a way to gather input about the next phase of the *NTNV2* project and how residents want to continue to be involved.

### ***VI. Conclusions and Recommendations***

*Albany Georgia Tools for Change, Inc.* has evolved from being a group of concerned citizens to a force to be reckoned with in the Albany community. A lot has been learned over the last three years by the *AGTFC* members, at both personal and professional levels, about environmental toxins and health; group dynamics, roles and expectations; and how to engage partners and organize residents to address community concerns. Through the *NTNV2* project, they have increased the capacity of and confidence among College Heights and College Park residents to be community leaders who inform others about environmental health issues of concern in their community, work with City and County representatives, conduct research, and get things done.

As the *NTNV2* community household health assessment moves forward, both the *AGTFC* Board and the *NTNV2* Steering Committee need to determine how the findings from the study will be disseminated. For example, a formal town hall meeting may provide a venue for the community (including policy makers) to be informed about the findings and begin to develop solutions and partnerships around issues of concern in the community. After potential solutions or interventions are determined, the assessment findings could be used to leverage additional community support and funding to continue the work that has taken place over the last three years.

The ultimate impact of *NTNV2* and *AGTFC* on health disparities in Albany may take years to determine. Once the community assessment is complete, any health priorities that emerge will need to be addressed and evaluated. Partnerships with public health, Dougherty County government and other institutions will need to be sustained. The relationship with ASU will

## New Tools, New Visions 2

need to be developed further to build upon the seeds that have been planted over the last three years.

*AGTFC* is finding its niche through productive partnerships where everyone gains. By shifting to community outreach that seeks ongoing resident input to active community engagement and mobilization, they are now able to move toward CBPR with the ongoing technical assistance of Southwest Georgia Public Health District 8-2. The community household assessment will build a good foundation toward creating a program of research that could potentially play a substantial role in shaping efforts to address health and health disparities at a broader level.