

[Chicago's gun violence, finding solutions](#)

Over the last decade, a number of technology folks have begun to work with cities around the country to make all kinds of data (including on violence, health disparities, campaign financing and street cleaning routes) more accessible. The data has been used to create maps and other visualization tools so people can zoom in and find what they need.

"When I started this, it wasn't to help parents and kids understand where the programs were, but to help leaders such as ministers, business folks, and even the media use it as a planning tool," Bassill said. "We needed to identify what was out there so that we could identify the voids, but also what had been duplicated."

A former ad man for Montgomery Ward, Bassill started volunteering and leading a tutoring program in the 1970s. But it was a news story on the 1992 murder of 7-year-old Dantrell Davis — killed in gang crossfire while walking to school — that inspired Bassill to step up his efforts

"At the time, the story was just horrible and I felt like I had to build on my (tutoring and mentoring) work," he said. "I'd been collecting information on neighborhoods over the years but I felt like it was time to organize it and see what was being offered, the age groups served and where."

Bassill said a librarian suggested he use geography as a way to map information. But he also knew from his advertising background that the key to getting people to buy a product or buy into an idea was via a sustained marketing effort.

"News stories were well-written, passionate and made people feel something, but they were less successful in motivating them to act," he said. "They didn't close the deal. The maps gave people something concrete to see and then a way to follow through. They could pick a neighborhood and get involved."

A one-stop-shop website, a repository of sorts, that aldermen could maintain and update would be ideal for people inside and outside the community who want to make a difference.

The type of information that Bassill collects is related to poverty, poor-performing schools, tutoring and mentoring. But aldermen could use data based on the needs of their communities, and then hire someone to create a mapping platform that would be used on, say, the ward's web page.

I use Bassill's work only as an example of what can be done. He said he ran out of funding, so his map project continues to struggle. But he has a wealth of information from which people can learn. You can find his work at www.tutormentorexchange.net.

I love this mapping idea because the challenges in beleaguered communities always seem so unwieldy and intractable. But if we can see what's needed, we can do a better job of meeting those needs. And we might not feel so overwhelmed.

The goal is to pull people together and build a deeper understanding of the problem to come up with solutions.

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