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September 2020

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The use of data to contain the spread of the coronavirus has been well-documented. But it can also highlight disparate Covid-19 impacts and influence better planning decisions for recovery, as ANHD's Barika Williams tells *flow*

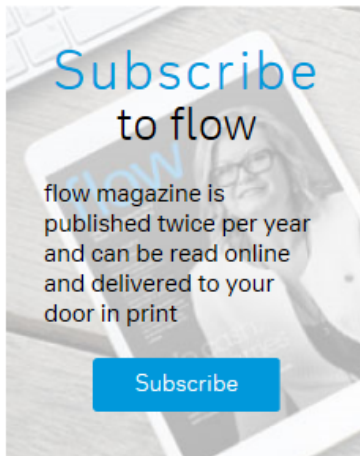
New technologies giving access to massive data sets are playing a part in the reopening of pandemic stricken economies and the management of social distancing policies. For example, the Deutsche Bank Research team uses geolocation, travel and financial data, among other data sets, to track close contacts of infected people in an effort to contain the spread of Covid-19.¹

A report by the UK-based Commission for Equality in Mental Health used data to show that the severity of the impact of the pandemic depended on individual circumstances, with Covid-19 bringing social inequalities into sharp focus.² The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement is highlighting racial disparities that span all aspects of society. BLM has catapulted diversity and inclusion to the top of corporates' list of environmental, social and governance priorities since the onset of the crisis.³

Given the societal impact of the pandemic, and the increasing focus on diversity and inclusion, the New York City-based Association for Neighborhood & Housing Development (ANHD) is employing a data-informed approach to address these inequalities.

This umbrella organisation of more than 80 non-profit affordable housing and economic development groups serves as the connector between its community development partners, including affordable housing developers, tenants' rights groups, economic development bodies and service providers. ANHD supports member associations with "grassroots organising" to build equity and justice in their neighbourhoods and city-wide.

Connecting community with data



Helped by its neighbourhood analyses and mapping, as well as its unique position as an umbrella body, early on in the pandemic ANHD was able to consider how Covid-19 was going to impact individual neighbourhoods in different ways. Deutsche Bank's Community Development Finance Group has supported ANHD's data work as part of its funder collaborative, and it was also an early supporter in the Association's Displacement Alert Project (DAP) Map tool, which was part of an initiative launched in 2016.⁴

Barika Williams, the Executive Director of ANHD, recalls that informal conversations with members on various issues and data points impacting neighbourhood housing helped guide the data indicators that ANHD used to qualify displacement risk. "The organisations needed a tool where we could harness data to see displacement coming and to be able to utilise that data as evidence that more resources should be directed towards a particular neighbourhood," she says.

Additionally, a US\$35,000 grant from Deutsche Bank is enabling the Association to produce further educational resources, data visualisations and analyses of neighbourhood-level data to help show both the challenges of, and opportunities for, community development. The grant is also helping ANHD to convene and work with member groups and other community development practitioners, including allied housing and economic justice direct service providers, policy and legal services providers, other private sector funders, and city and state officials and agencies, with the goal of creating and preserving affordable housing.

Williams says: "During these times, some of the direct housing service providers, including government bodies, financial institutions and philanthropists, who are not necessarily rooted in neighbourhoods, are reaching out to ANHD because our connection with their members allows us to provide an understanding of housing trends in a variety of neighbourhoods across the city."

Data to improve planning

ANHD has leveraged its unique position across communities and its data-informed analysis to highlight inequalities in housing and the public benefits of development by non-profit, mission-driven developers.

This research helped to convince city government officials to support the building of more than 3,000 housing units, by ANHD mission-driven developers, on New York City public land in the next few years.

It was also the first coalition of community development groups to use data to map Covid-19 cases to specific neighbourhoods. An analysis of the data, released in a blog on the association's website in April 2020, showed how planning priorities contributed to disparate impacts of Covid-19.⁵ A data map of the virus's spread and hospital closures showed that the majority of cases fell in lower-income communities. Citing research on Covid-19 deaths and ethnicity, the blog noted that "black and Latino workers are dying of Covid at twice the rate of white residents".⁶

3000+

units of affordable housing to be created on New York City public land following an ANHD analysis of the public benefit of non-profit, mission-driven development

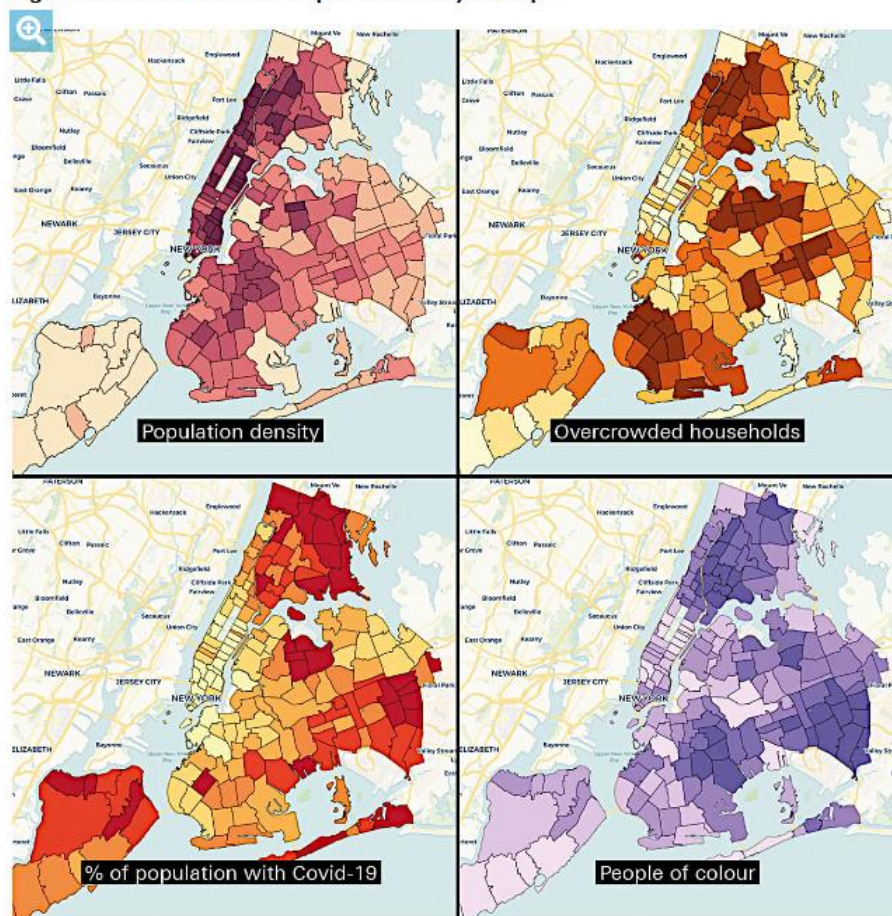
ANHD combined neighbourhood-level data with data on concentrations of people of colour, where service workers live and where residents are forced to pay more in rent than they can afford. The Association used the analysis to call for city government officials to provide relief to renters and propose some immediate policy actions, including a moratorium on commercial and residential evictions.⁷

A separate neighbourhood-level analysis of Covid-19 cases in NYC revealed that density alone has little correlation with the impacts of the pandemic.⁸ However, correlation with high rates of Covid-19 is apparent in overcrowded households, especially in communities of colour, “a metric that directly reflects the history of segregation and inequity in our city,” the blog noted.

“Looking at the data, it became very clear in those early days of Covid that the issue was not density. In fact, the densest parts of the city are those with the lowest numbers of Covid cases, including predominantly white areas with higher rates of access to healthcare,” says Williams. “The Covid cases are actually tied to overcrowding in communities of colour, where there are lots of people living in a small flat, for example.”

Figure 1: ANHD’s Covid-19 Impact and Analysis Maps

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Source: ANHD

Data sharing in action

The DAP Map tool has an interactive portal, allowing ANHD member organisations and partner organisations to enter information by neighbourhood and by various districts. This information can be specific incidences in an individual building or a block that need resources, or trends occurring consistently within neighbourhoods, which organisers can use to intervene.

For example, an ANHD group member in the Bronx has been using the tool to gather the data evidence to show that a building's residents are not being provided with essential services. The DAP project pulls data from numerous sources, including from constituent services and residents' complaints, and brings those systems of information together as a case to address the issues as required.

Since New York State extended its temporary eviction moratorium to October 2020, ANHD is able to use the data to see where new filings to evict tenants are coming from and how (together with tenants' rights groups, economic development bodies and legal services providers) it could be in the best position to respond.³

Data in the tool is customised, integrated and adjusted as needed. "It enables us to seamlessly generate interactive maps from new and old data, including time-lapses of past and present events, to influence future planning," says Williams. She explains that back-end coding creates interfacing frameworks that allow ANHD to upload new datasets and information data points onto the portal, to inform the analysis that is generated by the tool. "This brings value for both community organisations and elected officials, because it provides the critical information to convince city-and state-level officials to support and fund housing protections and understand potential threats to affordable housing in their districts."

"Private-sector partners enable us to launch the needed initiatives and demonstrate the impact"

Barika Williams, Executive Director, ANHD



Affecting future planning

Using the data, ANHD is equipped to drive awareness of how land use decisions taken by urban planning agencies and infrastructures, which approach these decisions in a particular way, have extensive consequences.

“We’re in constant conversation with non-profit organisations that work around planning and land use and have been pushing for a more comprehensive approach to planning,” says Williams. “So we’re in a unique position to look at data and assess what is missing in a neighbourhood, and what we can more intentionally plan for.”

For example, a planning programme in NYC incentivises changes to the zoning code that create grocery stores in areas without access to fresh food. Another initiative ANHD has worked on with partners, including Deutsche Bank, supports industrial and manufacturing businesses that create jobs and provide critical direct services and materials.

Connecting the community

As a community connector, ANHD leverages its reach to tap into membership organisations representing communities from different ethnic backgrounds and to engage officials. For example, NYC Government representatives approached ANHD and its small business coalition – United for Small Business NYC – to engage a wider segment of small businesses, including manufacturers, street vendors and mobile food carts, to help connect with this community that is not reached by traditional business associations or chambers of commerce.

In another event, in December 2019, ANHD joined forces with the Urban Manufacturing Alliance – a national coalition that aims to develop manufacturing economies fit for the 21st century – to host a two-day workshop with sponsors including Deutsche Bank. This aimed to help community development stakeholders gain the resources and knowledge they need to create more space for urban manufacturers.

“At ANHD we want to work with sponsors with whom we share a belief in the value, goals and intentions of community development and investing in marginalised communities. With partners like Deutsche Bank, we can move forward with investments and programmes that are a proof of concept for governments to understand why equity-focused inclusive growth is something they should invest in,” says Williams. “Private-sector partners enable us to launch the needed initiatives and demonstrate the impact. We are then in a position to engage government officials, providing them with the evidence for future projects with the backing of ANHD, our members, and the support of a private-sector partner that is invested in the goals of the project.”

Since Covid-19, with the help of ANHD, the NYC government has turned to many small manufacturing businesses to deliver personal protective equipment and various other products that are unavailable from the traditional international supply chains.

“It’s been an interesting conversation with government officials, who are now rethinking this sector’s involvement in the recovery,” says Williams. “As part of ANHD’s industrial work, we partnered with the Urban Manufacturing Alliance to create an industrial development toolkit through which the City should put finance, planning and land solutions in place.”

Connecting virtually

Since lockdown, ANHD has convened its members virtually to provide holistic recommendations to communities in need. “We’ve used digital tools to talk to our members, financial institutions, governments and leading researchers,” says Williams. “Using these virtual platforms, organisations are able to bring their communities – including their community leaders, who are working with their neighbours or other small businesses – into dialogue.”

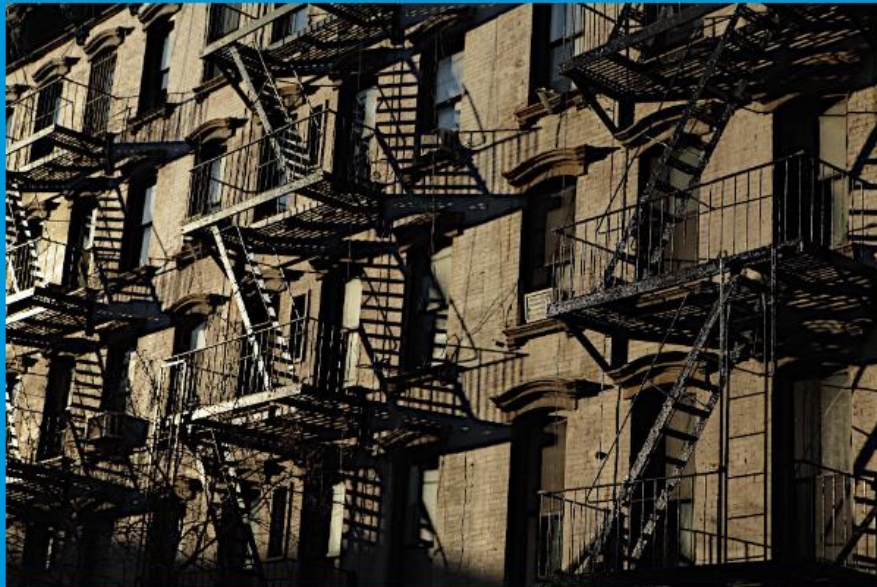
Virtual platforms have also given ANHD an opportunity to host conversations with small non-profit entities, members and partners, and with similar organisations globally, to share best practices on using data more effectively in neighbourhood planning. It is re-envisioning its annual forum – which is usually held in person – as a digital panel series to advance its community dialogue with local and international bodies.

“If there’s someone in London or New Delhi, for example, who has already tackled a housing issue, we want to be able to have those conversations with them, rather than seeing everything through the lens of NYC,” says Williams. “Moving to a more digitally connected environment has afforded us the opportunity to have those global conversations.”

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- An umbrella non-profit member group founded by eight of the earliest local affordable housing development groups in New York City in 1974
- Works across city neighbourhoods to ensure the development and preservation of affordable housing
- Supports and collaborates with 80+ non-profit members on housing, economic development and targeted community services for low-income residents
- Offered training to 568 housing and economic justice practitioners in 2019, helping staff from local community organisations
- Its research and analysis on the public benefit of mission-driven developers has led to the apportionment of 3,000+ units of affordable housing to be created by ANHD members on city public land in the next few years

– Published 47 resources on its resource library in 2019,¹² including data and analysis visualisations. These expanded the information, scope of research and analysis available on affordable housing and equitable economic development