

# SAVI to Sharpen Data “Snapshots”

**SAVI, the high-tech tool with the very long name** (Social Assets and Vulnerability Indicators), is preparing to mark its 20th anniversary with enhancements to the visual “snapshots” it provides of some 2,000 Hoosier communities. A new dashboard function will package information in a way that users will find easy to consume and digest. And that’s only the beginning: “We’re also working on a feature within SAVI that adds commentary and analysis of the data,” says Demetrius Glover, director of research and information resources at United Way of Central Indiana (UWCI). “It will put words and comments as meat around the bones of the statistics.”

The statistics in question include data gathered from dozens of sources such as government agencies, faith-based groups, social service organizations and census reports. When fed into the system at The Polis Center at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis—which contracts with SAVI data providers and develops and maintains the database—the information produces a detailed glimpse of the social, physical and economic conditions in a given community, neighborhood, zip code or other geographic location. Users gain insights into an area’s resources and needs and can make data-informed decisions based on those insights.

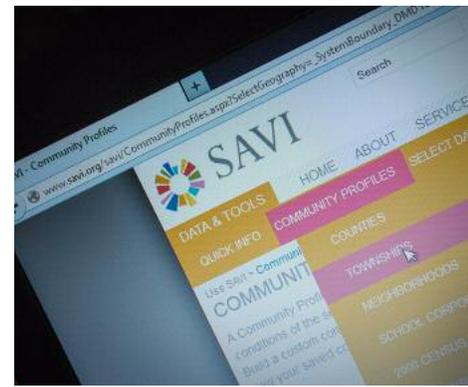


“Nonprofit organizations today are expected to support their assumptions and beliefs with hard facts,” says Glover, who describes UWCI as the bridge between the professional researchers at The Polis Center and the nonprofit sector. “SAVI helps nonprofit groups know if they are targeting the right people in the right neighborhoods with the right services.” Agencies that can present “hard facts” to validate the impact of their work have an edge when competing for donor dollars, according to Glover. “The nonprofit agency that builds the best argument is likely to do better in a competitive funding market.”

Currently, 62 percent of UWCI agencies maintain SAVI accounts and regularly use the online database. An additional 23 percent frequently contact Glover’s research department for assistance in using SAVI’s higher-level functions. Those numbers are likely to increase because UWCI has earmarked part of a recent Endowment grant to support efforts to boost awareness of SAVI within and beyond central Indiana. The Endowment, an initial SAVI funder, has invested \$3.6 million in the database over the past 20 years. “We want to educate more people on how to access and use the tool,” says Glover. UWCI also plans to add data analysis to the curriculum of its Nonprofit Training Center that teaches organizations how to operate more efficiently. “Understanding community-level statistics is helpful as agencies make decisions and engage in strategic planning.”

**A longtime user of SAVI** is the Indianapolis Neighborhood Housing Partnership (INHP), a 25-year-old organization that works with several partners to increase housing opportunities in the city and serves as a catalyst for neighborhood development and revitalization. Of particular value is the dynamic nature of the data that SAVI provides. Because new information constantly flows into the system, INHP and its partners—lending institutions, real estate agents, economic development groups—have an up-to-date snapshot of an area. Partners can use the snapshot to determine needs, resources and investment potential.

“You can go to SAVI and access data about a community’s housing stock, the rate of home ownership, the age of the population and income statistics,” says Moira Carlstedt, president of INHP. “You can learn an awful lot about a neighborhood, and you can use that information to identify challenges and opportunities and make decisions. To be able to turn to SAVI is incredibly valuable. We see it as a community asset that helps us reflect on yesterday, understand today and prepare for tomorrow.”



(LEFT) Up-to-date information from SAVI helps Moira Carlstedt, president of the Indianapolis Neighborhood Housing Partnership, analyze opportunities and challenges in the communities INHP serves. (ABOVE) A screenshot of the SAVI database.