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Foreword

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In order to build a foundation for our community development work, the Community Affairs Department has produced a set of new reports entitled "environmental assessments" for each of the nine states in the Twelfth Federal Reserve District. We approached this project with many questions, most of them focused around whether the community development challenges in our district differed significantly from those faced by our colleagues across the country. For example, does our district's rapid growth shield us from the economic problems faced by "rust belt" states? Do the vast amounts of land in our district prevent the affordable housing problems experienced along much of the Eastern Seaboard? Do small businesses thrive here, given the traditional entrepreneurial spirit of the West? How do we compare to other areas in levels of poverty and asset accumulation? And, what special community development issues do the district's sizeable native and immigrant populations face?

In the process of seeking answers to these questions, we gathered an enormous amount of data and information and learned a great deal about our nine states, although in the end we may still be left with more questions than answers. In particular, the reports themselves only begin to touch on these issues on a local rather than a statewide level. Nevertheless, we believe that these reports represent a starting point, providing the information necessary to dig deeper into the issues and help find those

answers. Specifically, we believe that what we have learned will force us to rethink our current priorities and find ways to help make the banking industry more responsive, non-profit capacity stronger, government programs more effective, and foundation activity more focused on essential community development activities. This year, we hope to build on this knowledge, probe these questions, and work with each of you in our vast district to improve the low- and moderate-income communities we serve.

A broad overview of the major conclusions of these environmental assessments is provided in this article, and brief two-page summaries for each state are included in the special supplemental insert to the magazine. The complete environmental assessments can be accessed from our website. We encourage you to read them and look forward to hearing your feedback.