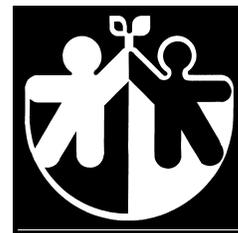




Successful Neighborhood Self-Help: *Some Lessons Learned*



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Some Lessons Learned

Prepared for

**The McKnight Neighborhood Self-Help
Initiatives Program
The Minneapolis Foundation**

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Introduction

In September 1981, The McKnight Foundation announced the contribution of \$5 million to The Minneapolis Foundation to establish the McKnight Neighborhood Self-Help Initiatives Program (MNSHIP). The Program “will have a 10-year life and will develop and expand ways to connect the vitality of neighborhood self-help efforts to the planning, resources, and institutional capacity of the larger community.

Six months later, a community-based Advisory Committee to the program articulated its grant guidelines: “A Central principle of this program is the conviction that the neighborhood can be one of the most effective structures which people think, act and work to address their own needs.

“MNSHIP has been created not only to support specific neighborhood programs, but also to:

- ∞ create an atmosphere that will encourage, support and increase the participation of residents in neighborhood self-help efforts and encourage participation that reflects the racial, ethnic and economic diversity of the Twin Cities.
- ∞ foster cooperation among existing and emerging neighborhood groups and organizations, and among neighborhoods and other institutions in the community.
- ∞ facilitate the free-flow of neighborhood information among neighborhoods, private grantmakers, and other institutions.
- ∞ foster the ongoing development of neighborhood leadership which has the ability to understand the public and private institutions of our community and to use that understanding to influence the decisionmaking of those institutions.”

Since the first MNSHIP funding cycle in September 1982, over 150 organizations have submitted 201 requests for MNSHIP support. The program has awarded 83 grants totaling \$2,042,862 to 51 organizations in Minneapolis (29), Saint Paul (21), and Burnsville (1). Over 90% of all neighborhoods in the Twin Cities have benefited from direct MNSHIP support.

Since its inception, however, MNSHIP has been more than simply a grantmaking program. Foundation staff, its Distribution Committee and Advisory Committee, and Rainbow Research (an independent organization contracted by the Foundation for evaluation services) have expended numerous hours conducting site visits, workshops on self-monitoring, in-depth neighborhood studies, conferences of neighborhoods, and planning technical assistance. Gathering and sharing information about effective neighborhood self-help is as central to the MNSHIP concept as is quality grantmaking.

During the past two years, a number of lessons have emerged as important to understanding successful neighborhood self-help. This paper presents these lessons, along with the experiences of a number of neighborhoods. We hope that some can be alerted to certain potentially troublesome situations before they progress, and that others can assure themselves that there is a good basis for their actions.

This is not a “how-to” paper on organizing a neighborhood, nor is it a “how-to” paper on managing a neighborhood organization, though insights into both topics are contained throughout the sections on different “lessons learned”.

Structure of this Paper

The paper is organized into two parts:

PART II. INVOLVING RESIDENTS concerns the necessity of thoroughly involving neighborhood residents in defining the issues, shaping the agenda, doing the work, running the project or the neighborhood organization, and ensuring that a broad base of residents is included or represented.

PART II. ORGANIZING AND MANAGING THE WORK focuses on making neighborhood self-help happen in ways that are effective and that keep the neighborhood and its organization together. Good background research, cooperating with other organizations, setting realistic goals, being consistent, knowing when to get outside assistance and using public resources wisely are each discussed as contributing to neighborhood effectiveness.

The lessons presented in this paper surfaced after observing and talking with a wide variety of neighborhood groups. These organizations were new and old, staffed and unstaffed, focused on a single issue and focused on several projects at once.

So far, we have reason to think these lessons apply to all types of resident-controlled organizations, regardless of how long they've been around or how formally-structured they are. Borrowing some distinctions noted by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, neighborhood resident-controlled organizations differ in how they are organized, and formally structured.

1. At the loosely-organized end is the emerging neighborhood group, often a city block or group of blocks organizing to create change around a single issue or condition faced by neighborhood residents.
2. In the middle is the organized neighborhood association, usually with its own office and copy machine, monthly meetings that consider several projects or issues, and an elected board of directors, residence council, or district delegates.

3. At the highly-structured end is the community development corporation, typically working to build or rehabilitate affordable housing, develop businesses that provide needed goods and services, and create employment opportunities for neighborhood residents.

In this paper we use the terms “neighbor group” and “neighborhood organization” without distinction. We don’t want to prejudge how a neighborhood should best organize or structure its self-help efforts. That issue is taken up in the section called “Build Stability Into the Organization.”

The content and format of the paper was greatly improved with the suggestion and advice of Ron McKinley, Senior Program Officer for The Minneapolis Foundation, and by two groups: a Response Group convened by us for that purpose, and MNSHIP’s Advisory Committee, whom we gratefully acknowledge.

Uses of this paper

We hope this paper will be useful to people directly involved in neighborhood work and to those who support that work. For those in the neighborhoods, the paper can be used as a guide through the difficult and often demanding maze of trying to organize a neighborhood to take action on crucial issues. For those who support or want to support that work, the paper can provide a framework for assessing the degree to which neighborhood organizations pay attention to the lessons learned by others doing this kind of organizing.

Some ways neighborhood organizations can make use of this paper are:

- ∞ Give each new board member a copy of the paper as part of an orientation.
- ∞ During each board meeting discuss one section of the paper and what it means to the organization.
- ∞ Take a board retreat and spend a day discussion the paper and its implications for the organization’s current situation.
- ∞ Use the framework of this paper to outline how the next neighborhood project will address each lesson area.
- ∞ When evaluating a past project, critique how the project did or did not take into account the lessons learned.
- ∞ Develop a checklist using the lessons in this paper that can be used on an ongoing basis to monitor projects and keep them on track.

PART I. INVOLVING RESIDENTS

Effective neighborhood self-help efforts begin by involving the residents of the neighborhood. Most neighborhood efforts can't really get off the ground until residents are involved in several different ways.

Neighborhood organizations have found that success depends on four key areas for involvement:

- ∞ ***INVOLVE RESIDENTS IN DECIDING THE PRIORITIES FOR NEIGHBORHOOD SELF-HELP EFFORTS.***
- ∞ ***PROVIDE A VARIETY OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT.***
- ∞ ***INVOLVE RESIDENTS IN RUNNING THE NEIGHBORHOOD'S SELF-HELP EFFORTS AND KEEPING THE ORGANIZATION ACCOUNTABLE TO RESIDENTS.***
- ∞ ***ENSURE THAT A BROAD BASE OF NEIGHBORHOOD RESIDENTS IS INCLUDED IN THE ORGANIZATION.***

INVOLVE RESIDENTS IN SETTING PRIORITIES

One of the first jobs of neighborhood self-help is to define the issues and priorities of the neighborhood.

To be seen as legitimate by neighborhood residents, a neighborhood group has to be working on issues that residents care about.

Neighborhood organizations have learned several things about developing a list of issues for neighborhood action:

- ∞ For neighborhood projects to succeed, they must have the support of neighborhood residents.
- ∞ Discovering the issues of neighborhood happens best when all residents are encouraged to contribute their opinions.
- ∞ Residents need to recognize that the priorities set for the neighborhood were determined by the residents themselves. Otherwise, it could look like a project was pushed on them from the outside or from a select few within the organization.

EXAMPLES

A coalition in Saint Paul of resident associations, business associations and other organizations within the official city planning district had very little direct citizen input into planning the priorities of the group. A concerted effort to organize block clubs resulted from resident concerns about the safety of children in the neighborhood. Residents control the block club program and now bring issues in addition to safety to the attention of the coalition through the block club structure.

**Block-level
input**

∞ ∞ ∞

A south Minneapolis neighborhood association recruited residents to conduct a doorknock survey of the neighborhood, to find out if the major issues targeted for action were accepted throughout the neighborhood. Thirty residents interviewed 288 people. The survey got residents actively involved, publicized the neighborhood association, and produced results that helped confirm the existing issues agenda.

**Door-to-
door sur-
veys**

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A north Minneapolis community council planned their usual annual fall social event. After investing money and volunteer time in preparation and publicity, a gala evening was put on with soft dinner music and a pot luck dinner. Unfortunately, the older members of the council neglected to take into account the changing demographics of the neighborhood. Only four people showed up for the event as the "Harvest Fest" failed to attract the newer younger residents of the neighborhood.

**Attention to
demo-
graphic
changes**

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A development organization operating in eight neighborhoods in Minneapolis is governed by a board of directors of two representatives elected from each neighborhood. Yearly, the board goes through a planning process that sets the priorities and agenda for the organization. Task forces are then formed to deal with projects in each priority area. The task forces consist of board members, residents and professionals from the neighborhoods.

**Elected
Board**

PROVIDE SEVERAL AVENUES FOR INVOLVEMENT

The more ways there are people to get involved, the more people with different skills, interests, and commitments can find an opportunity to participate in and get involved with helping the neighborhood.

Neighborhood groups have learned that interest won't be maintained for long if committee work is the only opportunity for involvement. While some committee work is necessary to conduct almost any project, it doesn't stay appealing to a broad base of residents.

The neighborhood group should take pains to make use of the variety of skills and interests in the neighborhood, and should treat everyone wanting to get involved with respect.

In short, neighborhood projects should invite meaningful participation for anyone choosing to become involved in the life of the neighborhood.

Opportunities for involving residents include:

- ∞ Projects that offer residents the opportunity to feel pride in themselves, each other, and their neighborhood.
- ∞ One-time events that involve many residents for a short period and give them a chance to try working together.
- ∞ Projects that use residents' talents and knowledge, or that offer them opportunities to learn new skills.
- ∞ Projects that promote greater reliance on themselves, and less dependence on impersonal or outside institutions.

EXAMPLES

A Saint Paul community group has organized residents into block clubs. While initially focused on crime, the group council has involved residents in clean-up drives and exterior housing rehabilitation. People cleaned up vacant lots and got mini-grants to fix up and paint the outsides of their homes. In addition, the block club meetings have given people a chance to feel involved.

**Fix-up/
clean-up**

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A highly transient inner-city neighborhood in Minneapolis has involved people in cultural celebrations in the neighborhood. Residents have read poetry, presented crafts projects, danced and played music. Residents brought their own ethnic foods into the celebrations and helped to set up and clean up after the events. These celebrations revitalized the group, which had almost closed its doors the year before.

**Cultural ac-
tivities**

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At a Minneapolis public housing project there are two paid part-time staffers, one from the city and one from a social service organization. Despite major neighborhood problems, most residents just sit back and let the “professionals” run the council. Neither staff nor residents have developed ways to involve residents in addressing the problems of the neighborhood.

**Avoiding
over-
reliance on
staff**

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A Minneapolis community council recruits residents to be “mediators” who help disputing neighbors come to a mutually-agreeable solution to their problem. Resident mediators are trained in communications and dispute resolution, skills useful in a number of settings. Over 50 people from the neighborhood signed up for the training and 20 residents are currently mediating disputes.

**Skill-
learning
opportuni-
ties**

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Over the years, an established neighborhood group in Minneapolis has managed several different projects for residents to get involved in. Residents can choose from working on crime prevention, researching options for rehabilitating deteriorating apartment buildings in the neighborhood, participating in an economic development project or a youth employment business venture, or recruiting other people for the group.

**Multiple
projects**

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An emerging organization in a stable moderate-income neighborhood in Minneapolis offers a series of workshops in home maintenance to residents, most of whom have lived in the neighborhood for many years. The workshops will teach basic skills and will increase the organization’s visibility.

**Neighborhood
workshops**

INVOLVE RESIDENTS IN RUNNING THE GROUP

It's critical that neighborhood leaders and the neighborhood group itself remain accountable to neighborhood residents.

If the purpose of neighborhood organizations is to empower residents for greater self-governance, then participation in neighborhood activities cannot be simply "token" — it must offer opportunities to residents for governing the affairs and projects of the neighborhood.

To keep power and authority from collecting in the hands of just a few, new people have to be encouraged continually to take part in neighborhood projects.

When a project is highly technical, such as developing housing or businesses, the mastery of obscure bureaucratic regulations can mean the difference between success and failure. Not everyone wants to get involved with painstaking procedural work, or to stay with it for the required time (though these skills are definitely useful in many contexts).

For these reasons, it is difficult to maintain the balance between making progress on a drawn-out complicated project AND maintaining resident control. There is the risk that many people become shut out of the process, and that information about progress slows to a trickle.

Some key lessons learned include:

- ∞ The organization or project has to provide different kinds of opportunities for residents to give input, or else they'll be left out of the action.
- ∞ It's not always obvious to residents that they are the ones responsible for running their neighborhood organization — education about their role helps.
- ∞ Technical projects present special obstacles for broad-based involvement.

EXAMPLES

On the northside of Minneapolis, the 20-member board of a development organization is elected from 10 districts covering three different neighborhoods. The representatives hold regular meetings in their districts to hear the concerns of residents. The representatives take that information to Board meetings where the committee structure of the organization works on issues raised at the district meetings.

Direct and frequent communication

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A neighborhood development corporation has a community-oriented Board including members from the major resident organizations in the neighborhood. But, the only opportunity for resident input is through annual election of representatives — there are no mechanisms for regular and direct resident input to the organization. As a result, people are slightly suspicious of the organization, and the organization does not fully benefit from resident support.

More than annual contact

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The resident council within a south Minneapolis housing partnership greets each new resident with a fruit basket and a handbook about tenant rights and responsibilities. A welcoming committee talks with new residents about the opportunities for involvement and responsibilities of residents as owners and operators of the housing complex.

Active orientation of new residents

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One Minneapolis neighborhood group hired an outside technical assistance provider to help them develop a neighborhood playground. The residents didn't want to or need to worry about how to do technical drawings or how to order the right amount of dirt or the right kind of trees and shrubs. They still approved all of the various phases of the project and were briefed on what options they had. The T.A. provider consulted with individual members of the oversight committee and was available at neighborhood gatherings to answer questions directly from other residents.

Selective outside technical assistance

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Another residents' group holds block meetings and "design fairs," where neighborhood residents can review the plans and preliminary drawings of neighborhood housing developments. Residents input is passed on to the community development corporation which develops the housing projects. Residents maintain control through the annual election of a board of directors who either work or live in the neighborhood.

Regular local review of housing design

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A Saint Paul group had organized itself around the issues of crime and fighting prostitution. The city encouraged them to rehabilitate some neighborhood housing. Instead of taking the project on by themselves, the organization entered into a partnership with a non-hab project with regular review and input from neighborhood residents.

Partnership with housing development

INCLUDE A BROAD BASE OF NEIGHBORHOOD SUPPORT

A credible neighborhood group is one that represents the different racial, ethnic, and economic population of the neighborhood, each of which has a stake in improving the neighborhood's conditions. The best way to see this representation is in the membership of the organization and its governing board.

Participation by only a few people or by always the same people is a sure sign of problems. Low participation can mean that the organization is working on issues of little concern to a broad base of the neighborhood. It can also mean that whole segments of the neighborhood's residents feel their participation is not valued.

Some lessons that organizations have learned are:

- ∞ The neighborhood organization should be in frequent communication with its residents, to provide information about its plans and to receive the concerns of residents.
- ∞ Getting a broad base of resident involvement usually requires "affirmative out-reach", systematically calling on individuals, particularly those who are not used to involving themselves.
- ∞ When a neighborhood group is controlled by a broad base of residents, it increases its credibility with other institutions.
- ∞ Minorities and renters seem to be left out of many neighborhood group in which they should be active, even in neighborhoods where they make up a majority.

EXAMPLES

Despite the presence of three community newspapers, a Saint Paul neighborhood group was continually frustrated by the lack of coverage of its issues and organizations in each of those papers. The solution was to start up their own newsletter and deliver it door-to-door in the neighborhood. Residents responded positively and became more involved in the organization. Attendance at community meetings has gone from an average of 10 to an average of 70 people.

Starting a newsletter

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To recruit mediators for a neighborhood dispute resolution service, the project organizer showed residents photographs of the San Francisco version of this service. These pictures showed the project working, and with participants of all colors and ages.

Using photography

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A few years ago, the residents' council in a Saint Paul public housing project was mostly white women. Minority people, especially Asians from Laos, were moving into the neighborhood in great numbers but not getting involved in the organization. By concentrating on issues that affect the minority population, having cultural exchanges, translating their newsletter into Hmong and having an interpreter at general meetings, the council gradually has increased minority participation.

Actively including minority residents

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One Minneapolis organization is in a transient inner city neighborhood with a large proportion of minorities, renters and single parent families. However, each of these groups is severely under-represented in the organization. The organization's priorities are real neighborhood issues, such as rehabilitating the commercial strip or converting a former school into a community center. But they don't include minority issues such as the drop-out rate of Indian children, or renters' problems with absentee landlords, or single parents' concerns with affordable day care. The organization now is torn apart with charges of racism.

Not ignoring issues critical to a majority of residents

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One downtown Minneapolis neighborhood group has been able to increase its minority membership by actively involving minority residents in a variety of cultural events. People have gotten to plan and perform in Martin Luther King Day celebrations, an Indian poetry readings and the annual All Peoples Celebration.

Celebrating different cultures

PART II: ORGANIZING AND GOVERNING THE WORK

We've seen that getting residents involved is critical to launching and sustaining neighborhood self-help efforts.

What's also needed is to organize the work in a way that's fair and effective, to ensure that the human energy committed will not be wasted.

Regardless of how organized and how structured the self-help project or the neighborhood group itself, success depends on how well the group can do a number of other things:

- ∞ ***BUILD STABILITY INTO THE ORGANIZATION***
- ∞ ***KNOW THE PUBLIC POLICIES AND PROCEDURES THAT AFFECT THE NEIGHBORHOOD***
- ∞ ***SET REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS***
- ∞ ***COOPERATE WITH OTHER NEIGHBORHOODS***
- ∞ ***INVOLVE OTHER NEIGHBORHOOD INSTITUTIONS***
- ∞ ***USE THE RESOURCES OF THE GOVERNMENT***
- ∞ ***KNOW WHEN TO USE OUTSIDE ASSISTANCE***

BUILD STABILITY INTO THE ORGANIZATION

It's important that the neighborhood group stay on track with its plans and projects. Stability and predictability are important ingredients to effective teamwork. Without those qualities, the project or organization is literally "out of control."

To provide stability and predictability, some neighborhoods have developed formal organizations with an elected board of directors and written policies and procedures so that people can know the operating ground rules of the organization.

Other neighborhood organizations are more informal, where people play whatever roles work best at the time and where the ground rules are negotiated among the participants on a project-by-project basis.

Both types of organizations have their advantages and disadvantages, and it is impossible to say automatically which is the more stable. While there is a tendency for organizations to develop rules and procedures to keep things under control, those rules and procedures aren't necessarily good, and they aren't necessarily followed.

Developing good, fair, and effective procedures requires considerable skill, time and attention to good process, all of which can distract the organization from the neighborhood issues it wants to tackle. Some organizations run well informally, others run badly even with rules.

Rather than focus on rules and procedures, it is more to the point that a neighborhood group run on principles of cooperation, consistency, and clarity.

Areas of concern for neighborhood organizations should include:

- ∞ Regardless of how formal or informal the organization, its purposes and direction should be clearly and consistently communicated to residents. This doesn't mean that leadership should remain in the hands of the same people year after year. Instead, it means that the organization's direction and responsiveness to residents' interests not be seen as erratic and confused.
- ∞ When launching a new project, questions about who is in charge will emerge. These questions have to be settled or conflicts over control, authority or credit can subvert the entire effort.
- ∞ People with active roles in a neighborhood project should have a clear understanding of their responsibilities and authority, whether they are paid or not. In informal organizations, regular meetings among those doing the work can keep things clear. In more formal organizations it can be done with job descriptions and appropriate supervision and evaluation.

- ∞ One of the most significant events for a neighborhood group is hiring the first paid staff person. Boards seldom realize that their own roles and responsibilities change at that time, shifting from one of doing all the work to one of governing the work. It is easy for residents to lose control of their organization by sitting back and letting the new staff person do all the work without Board supervision.
- ∞ The Board of Directors plays a key role in defining the stability of neighborhood group. Being a good board member takes skill and perseverance. A good orientation session that explains the purposes of the organization and its ground rules is a necessity. The better the board knows how to translate the neighborhood's interests into effective staff work, the more successful and stable the organization.
- ∞ An influx of new participants or residents without a knowledge or appreciation of the history of the neighborhood, or the project's development, can also cause strains.

EXAMPLES

Revived interest in one community council, resulting from the success of a new project, led several people to run for the board to gain control of the project. Disruption of the board followed, and board/staff relations soured. Some staff left, and outside help was needed to restore some semblance of order.

Clear procedures for board election

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Resident leaders of another organization had a feeling that their newly hired-staff person was not working effectively. There was no formal job description or procedure for tracking performance, which complicated the situation. After concluding the staff person's job performance wasn't good enough, the board fired him. To avoid similar future problems, they then wrote job descriptions and personnel policies to specify duties and standards for staff.

Clear personnel policies and job descriptions

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The few active members of a north Minneapolis residents' group felt that the loss of their city-funded staff person was the main reason for their organization's decline. When asked what they wanted a staff person to do, the residents replied that the staff person would tell them what to do. The residents wanted the staff person to be the leader of the group, instead of an employee of the group.

Leadership by the board of the staff

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New housing was organized as rental co-ops, in the tradition of one Minneapolis neighborhood. These co-ops are being cultivated as sources of new neighborhood leadership. However, most of the new residents come from other neighborhoods, and don't automatically follow the ideas of the original organizers.

Adaptation to interests of new residents

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A Saint Paul community group has videotaped neighborhood events in an effort to build a publicly-available community library of experience. The tapes also can be used to orient new members of the community.

Shared history on videotape

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A Minneapolis housing co-op pays board members a small stipend to defray personal expenses incurred while attending meetings or performing board duties. This helps to achieve a continuity of effort.

Small stipends for board members

KNOW THE PUBLIC POLICIES AND PROCEDURES AFFECTING THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Every neighborhood project crosses paths with city or state regulations, whether to get a parade permit or approval of land-use rezoning. Elected and appointed governmental bodies make decisions every day that affect the life of the neighborhood. Some of these decisions are publicized and other are not, but they all carry official weight. One of the most important aspects of neighborhood work is dealing with the variety of government agencies that have a stake in the neighborhood.

Neighborhood organizations have discovered:

- ∞ The ability to make progress on a neighborhood project is directly tied to the extent the neighborhood organization is aware of the people, policies and procedures that affect that project.
- ∞ It pays to find out early in the life of a project the different private and public players, and to get to know what the official and unofficial rules are, so that the neighborhood can learn best how to work with them.
- ∞ Doing one's homework and researching the issue gives an organization credibility, which is a valuable commodity in effectively advocating neighborhood issues.

EXAMPLES

A non-profit housing developer in a low-income, working class Saint Paul neighborhood was trying to develop a sweat-equity housing project on an abandoned school site. Unfortunately, the city had different plans for the site. A more thorough preliminary examination of the situation could have helped the organization develop more realistic expectations about compromise with the city.

Do effective preliminary research

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To build a small neighborhood playground on part of a school parking lot, a neighborhood group worked with several different agencies that had jurisdiction over or an interest in the site. They garnered support from the neighborhood school staff and PTA, the school board, the park board, area businesses, the city council, various city departments and neighbors living in close proximity to the site.

Develop coalitions

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A residents' group representing people living in two suburban mobile home parks has gained city designation as a CDBG-eligible neighborhood. Elected officials have come to rely on the organization for information. The organization now has a reputation for being well-versed on laws and regulations affecting mobile homes. Doing good homework has allowed them to effectively rebut criticism of their proposed law changes.

Keep up with good homework

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Much of a small Minneapolis neighborhood has been designated a historic district. In order to renovate some of the older buildings, the neighborhood organization had to get the approval of the park board, the community development agency and the commission for historic preservation. The residents' research and advocacy persuaded the park board to buy land from the development agency, and the agency to earmark that money for renovation of the buildings. Finally, the commission for historic preservation approved the deal.

Focus on relevant agencies

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A coalition in Saint Paul was concerned about quality coordinated neighborhood recreation. After learning about the Park Board's designation system and process, the Group had been able to influence the designation of parks within the coalition neighborhoods. They have used effectively their knowledge of the system to bring petitions to meetings, call Park Board commissioners, and other grassroots tactics, to help steer the Park Board to decisions that help their neighborhoods.

Know the decision-making process

SET REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

It is easy for a neighborhood group, particularly a new one, to overestimate what it can do. Knowing the organization's capacities can keep the project do-able, and can help build a successful track record that makes more ambitious projects become possible.

∞ There is nothing more helpful than planning things out. Thinking through the major steps, who needs to be involved at different points along the way, the resources needed, the timing of events, and the tangible products that signify progress are all important to resolve before moving the project along.

∞ Planning things out as a group can improve the quality of the plan, clarify everyone's expectations so there won't be confusion, and let the ownership of the results be shared. If only a small group does the planning, then a larger group should review and approve it.

∞ Technical projects have to be planned in a way that considers all the public offices involved in it. Housing and job development programs tend to come under the jurisdiction of several city, state, and federal offices with different rules, requirements, guidelines, and schedules. The time needed to work through them has to be factored into the planning.

∞ Bureaucratic delays are a fact of life. Sometimes they can't be predicted, however, and whole projects can grind to a halt. Thorough investigation at the beginning of a project may help minimize delays.

EXAMPLES

Despite many years of operations, a north Minneapolis community council still exhibited the characteristics of an emerging residents' group. For the 20 to 30 current members, the most important objective was to establish a storefront office, which they felt would attract new members to the organization. Before the money was in hand, they committed to too much office space. As a result, budget problems overwhelmed other organizing efforts.

Don't over-extend the budget

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Two committees of a Saint Paul community council decided to develop a shared housing project within the neighborhood to link older and younger residents in common housing units. After examining materials from other similar projects around the country, and assessing resources available and the complexity of the project, the council decided on a less ambitious but more appropriate role for itself. It will act as a referral and information source for other shared housing programs.

Know the organization's capacities

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One north Minneapolis community council went from \$400 in their checking account to a budget of \$90,000 within two years. Board and staff members aggressively applied for grant monies regardless of whether the proposals fit the plans of the organization. The search for money guided the organization and attracted people without the same sense of direction as the older members. Disputes ensued between old members and new. Some staff left and the residents' council has had to decrease its budget, re-group, and take time to define better their goals.

Develop goals, then write proposals

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An emerging residents' group in a middle-income inter-racial neighborhood in north Minneapolis, was encouraged to apply for MNSHIP money and submitted a year-long action plan for youth programs, senior programs, crime prevention, housing and economic development programs. Their proposal was denied and they were advised to scale back their first-year plans. They surveyed the neighborhood and discovered a consensus around six priority areas. While still ambitious, the revised plan better reflected residents' concerns and the organization's capacities.

Balance plans with available funds

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A youth employment program was designed and ready to go, to do maintenance work on a commercial strip to be revitalized by a federal UDAG grant secured by a Saint Paul organization. Unfortunately, the revitalization project was delayed for 1½ years because of turnover (twice) in the local HUD office and the youth employment program hasn't yet happened

The wheels of government grind slowly

COOPERATE WITH OTHER NEIGHBORHOODS

Neighborhood groups have learned that by cooperating with other neighborhood groups they can avoid wheel re-invention in planning their projects. Chances are that other neighborhood organizations have done something similar to a project being planned.

Cooperation can be initiated by any neighborhood group, and can take the form of informal meetings, coalition-building efforts, information-sharing conferences, articles in neighborhood newspapers or community development-focused trade papers, brochures or flyers, linkages with people in allied movements, cross-neighborhood projects, etc.

Many groups have realized that:

- ∞ Cooperation has increased the political effectiveness of neighborhood groups as they try to advance their issues with governmental decision-making bodies and businesses.
- ∞ Sharing lessons learned among neighborhood groups means that fewer groups have to make old mistakes, and that scarce resources will go further.
- ∞ Cooperation on one project builds trust and can lead to sharing resources and information in other areas.

EXAMPLES

When the county government decided to place a garbage burning facility in one north Minneapolis neighborhood, the resident organization joined with three other groups to sponsor an open community meeting on the subject. A working committee of representatives of the four organizations was formed, which developed a legislative agenda to stop the county from building the plant in the neighborhood. The committee got the state legislature to pass a law prohibiting the building of a garbage burner without a 4/5's majority of the city council. This effectively killed construction of the plant in the neighborhood.

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When a new staff member was hired at a Saint Paul neighborhood association, she began a block club organizing campaign. Because training in block club organizing is hard to find, she invited other block organizers in Saint Paul to form a "network" group to share information, expertise, and resources. The group's goals is to achieve the best possible block organizing in Saint Paul; the fledgling group seems to be growing in appeal.

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A number of Saint Paul community groups formed an energy consortium to raise money from the utility company for conservation projects in the neighborhoods. When the groups' only link was joint fundraising, mutual distrust made discussion about programs difficult. Lately, through a concerted effort at planning and interaction in other neighborhood efforts, the organizations are working together more effectively through a defined structure. The coalition has successfully raised money from the utility to set up a city-wide comprehensive conservation program.

**Develop
coalitions**

**Pool in-
formation
and re-
sources**

**Define
structure
and pur-
pose for
collabora-
tion**

INVOLVE OTHER NEIGHBORHOOD INSTITUTIONS

While residents' concerns rightly dominate the goals of a neighborhood organization, institutions located in the neighborhood can be encouraged to contribute to the accomplishment of neighborhood goals.

Businesses, banks, human service agencies, community service organizations, churches, all have a vested interest in stronger and healthier neighborhoods, although this may have to be pointed out to them.

Neighborhood self-help organizations are discovering the following:

- ∞ Neighborhood-based service organizations (Lions, Shriners, Girl/Boy Scouts) can provide volunteer labor, such as newsletter delivery, child care during meetings, or escort service.
- ∞ Businesses will help if they see that their economic well-being is linked with residents' economic well-being. More money circulating in the neighborhood helps the local business community. They can be enlisted to help with business development and job development efforts for neighborhood residents.
- ∞ Businesses also are helped by neighborhood clean-up, lower crime and vandalism, and improved living conditions in the neighborhood. They can support neighborhood work with donated building materials, prizes for special events, subsidized training costs for the neighborhood leaders, reduced costs for such services as printing the newsletter, etc.
- ∞ Human service agencies, churches, and neighborhood organizations can share evidence or testimony about local conditions that can be helpful in public presentations, coalition-building, and grant requests.
- ∞ If the goals of local businesses, human service organizations, and churches are compatible with the goals of neighborhood residents, their input into neighborhood plans and projects can help to secure their participation and support.

EXAMPLES

The local Boy Scout troop delivers the monthly newspaper for a north Minneapolis residents group. In turn, the neighborhood group donates money to the troop and highlights its activities in the newspaper.

**Involve
local youth
groups**

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In an inner-city Minneapolis neighborhood, an advisory committee of businessmen helps a neighborhood job bank place unemployed people in jobs. The advisory committee provides the job bank with information about job openings. The neighborhood group screens and matches applicants with the job openings and helps them get to their job interviews.

**Work with
businesses
on job
banks**

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In one Saint Paul neighborhood, a local bar owner proposed adding nude dancing to his establishment. The neighborhood was concerned about the negative impact this would have on the community. Neighborhood block clubs began a petition-signing campaign. The local civic and commerce association started a letter-writing campaign. The local ministers informed church-goers about the proposal and encouraged response. The unified action convinced the bar owner that the community, as a whole, was united against nude dancing.

**Enlist
support of
churches
and busi-
nesses**

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As part of a new housing development in a Minneapolis neighborhood, the community development corporation sponsored a “welcome wagon” for new residents. A long-time resident assembled a gift package of special coupons from neighborhood businesses, a directory of local human service organizations, bus schedules, day care services, and other useful information. When she called on new residents and gave them this gift package, she also discussed the history of the neighborhood and the opportunities for resident involvement.

**Inform new
residents of
local re-
sources**

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In an attempt to control pilfering and shoplifting, two large stores affiliated with national chains adopted abrasive control practices that deeply offended neighborhood residents. The board of a group within the neighborhood wrote letters to the store managers about the abuses, noting the fact that residents could take their business elsewhere. This opened communication between the community and the merchants. The stores changed their security policies and also began to support children’s activities through donations. Their community efforts, in turn, were acknowledged in the neighborhood newspaper.

**Maintain
open com-
munication
with local
businesses**

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One Minneapolis group has arranged discounts on home maintenance hardware at local hardware stores for those residents who take part in neighborhood-sponsored workshops on fixing up older homes in the neighborhood.

**Encourage
residents to
shop lo-
cally**

USE THE RESOURCES OF GOVERNMENT TO THE EXTENT POSSIBLE

There are plenty of city, state, and federal programs that deal with housing, business, job development, crime prevention, and all the issues confronting citizens at the neighborhood level.

The city, state, and federal offices that administer those programs each publish and distribute material of use to neighborhood groups.

Elected representatives to city, state and federal office should be expected to help neighborhood groups to meet their goals.

Neighborhood organizations have discovered the following:

- ∞ While units of government are set up to help, they can be slow to recognize the legitimacy and value of neighborhood groups. But strong neighborhood groups and coalitions of neighborhoods recently have been able to make their issues an important part of the political agenda in Minneapolis and Saint Paul.
- ∞ City agencies can be resources. They often help neighborhood organizations overcome obstacles by providing information and direct assistance.
- ∞ Negotiating the bureaucratic maze can be greatly helped with the leadership or intervention of local elected officials.

EXAMPLES

The goals of a community council have been endorsed by Saint Paul Mayor George Latimer, who has helped ensure that the organization's issues are not lost in downtown offices.

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One Minneapolis group conducted workshops for residents on how to make homes more secure and less attractive to burglars. They raised \$20,000 of city funds and gave that money in the form of \$50-worth of security hardware to each workshop participant.

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Residents in a suburban trailer park next to a major industrial park, were experiencing problems with dust and excessive diesel fuel smells as the city bulldozed the land to make way for new buildings. Residents invited the city engineer to talk with them as the bulldozers continued to work.. While the city engineer choked on the dust and fumes, residents explained their complaints. As a result, the city engineer became an ally and changed the grading policy to take into account wind conditions and other factors affecting residents' lives.

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In response to increased spring and early summer vandalism within a housing cooperative, the board of the residents' group responded with a three-part strategy. First, they contracted with a private guard service. Second, they contacted the local police precinct and community crime prevention offices for additional assistance. Third, they called a community meeting with representatives from the three agencies to answer residents' questions and give suggestions for self-help initiatives. Their efforts successfully reduced the level of vandalism in their area.

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In another neighborhood of Saint Paul, a housing project that required HUD approval was running one year behind schedule, waiting for that approval. Finally, a delegation went to Washington, DC, and met with the Assistant Secretary of HUD in a meeting called by Senator David Durenberger. Approval soon followed.

**Obtain
mayoral
support**

**Apply for
appropriate
city funds**

**Invite city
officials to
visit the
neighbor-
hood**

**Involve all
public
agencies
who can
help with a
problem**

**The
squeaky
wheel gets
greased**

KNOW WHEN TO USE OUTSIDE ASSISTANCE

While many groups acknowledge that outside assistance can help a group to develop its potential and capacity to work effectively as a neighborhood-based organization, all will admit that it is difficult to know exactly WHEN to ask for help.

Some lessons:

- ∞ It is important to find a resource who “fits” with the organization, in terms of values and style, as well as knowledge and skill as a consultant.
- ∞ Technical projects can usually benefit from consultation by people who have already done such a project.
- ∞ Other areas for outside consultation include such organizational development issues as board/staff development, planning, financial management, and operating policies and procedures.
- ∞ Often the best consultant is someone from another neighborhood group. Other neighborhood groups can also suggest consultants, or be references for consultants.

EXAMPLES

One organization had relied on the same core group of members to guide the organization and shape its agenda. An outside technical assistance provider was able to infuse new energy into the board by taking them through a long-range planning process. The process helped them plan ways to expand the involvement of new people in the organization.

**For
long-range
planning**

∞ ∞ ∞

A Saint Paul coalition had always been a one-project organization until they got a MNSHIP grant to start a block club organizing effort in the neighborhood. With the start of a new project, more sophisticated means for keeping track of the money were needed. Aided by a non-profit financial advisor, the coalition changed its accounting system to keep better track of different project budgets.

**To improve
accounting
systems**

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Two neighborhood councils hired a full-time staff person to assist in “re-building neighborhood identity and to coordinate the development of new methods to provide for the needs of the neighborhood.” At first, decisions between the two groups were made easily, although without clear procedures for decision-making. However, the process for making decisions became difficult and confrontative. Early outside advice on clear procedures could have helped avoid a breakdown in communication between the two groups.

**To develop
procedures
for shared
resources**

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A south Minneapolis housing co-op sends its new board members for training in being a board member. This helps them to know what to expect and what is expected of them, as well as to provide them with specific skills.

**To provide
board train-
ing**

Conclusion

We have tried to illuminate the major lessons learned by Minneapolis and Saint Paul neighborhood groups as they involved residents in solutions to neighborhood problems. Rather than cover the entire spectrum, we have tried to highlight the major themes that seem important to successful neighborhood self-help efforts.

The neighborhood movement has traveled far in the last twenty years. In the 1960's and 1970's many organizations began projects designed to make neighborhoods "effective structures through which people think, act and work together to address their own needs" (to quote again from the MNSHIP Guidelines). Those efforts are starting to pay off in the eighties.

We hope that this paper can help others short-cut that road to success. Not all lessons have to be learned through experience. By sharing this paper with neighbors, with potential funders, and with others helping neighborhood groups accomplish their goals, more people will understand the potential of neighborhoods. Sharing the burden and being conscious of what everyone can do to help, can make neighborhoods stronger and better places to live.

Our mission is to help increase the effectiveness and impact of socially concerned organizations in responding to social problems. We work in support of organizations and communities to help them achieve their goals.

Your organization and community can experience these results from participation in Rainbow Research activities – tailored studies, workshops, and partnerships – and use of our tools and publications.

We can help you to:

Improve your understanding of key program elements that contribute to program effectiveness.

Improve program impact through integrating principles of program effectiveness into day-to-day operations.

Improve management of resources to achieve program purposes.

Improve the fit between your organization's activities and your community's needs and opportunities.

Improve commitment of staff and Board to your organization's mission.

Improve communication between your organization and its various stakeholders and publics.

Improve linkages between your organization and other like-minded organizations.

Improve access to tools and support services that strengthen program performance.