

The Minneapolis Center for Neighborhoods
presents
The Fifth Annual State of the Neighborhoods Address

**The Role of Citizens in Public Decision-Making:
A Critique of the Minneapolis Citizen Participation System**

Wednesday May 31st, 2000, 4:30pm-6:30pm
At the **Zurah Shrine Center**,
2540 Park Ave South, in Minneapolis

Background

Minneapolis and St. Paul neighborhoods have rich histories of citizen involvement. Over the past 10 years civic activity has greatly increased in Minneapolis through neighborhood participation in NRP. As neighborhood volunteers are now offering their feedback on how to structure the second phase of NRP, it is vitally important for both neighborhood leaders and their public partner to look at the broader system of citizen participation of which NRP is a part. Vastly greater public funds are being invested in Minneapolis neighborhoods through the annual budgets of city agencies than through NRP. Likewise, neighborhood residents and stakeholders are also involved with many formal and informal avenues of civic participation in addition to the neighborhood NRP process. We believe that by reflecting on the larger citizen participation system in Minneapolis that residents and public staff can more wisely mobilize and invest public, private and community assets to meet common goals.

AGENDA

4:30 **Reception/ Refreshments**

5:00 **State of the Neighborhoods Address**

Joe Barisonzi, President, Minneapolis Center for Neighborhoods

5:30 **Breakout Discussion Groups**

- **Measuring effective citizen participation**

- Why is it important for neighborhoods to measure their success at creating effective citizen participation processes?
- Does effective citizen participation lead to better project outcomes?
- How can neighborhoods start measuring the success of their citizen participation efforts, and how can this learning opportunity strengthen their efforts?

- **Involving diverse cultural and economic perspectives**

- What are current disincentives that discourage residents of color from being involved in neighborhood organizations?
- How are residents of color currently getting involved through formal and informal networks?
- How can cultural communities and neighborhood associations benefit from stronger collaboration?
- What are emerging successful strategies to broaden participation to include renters, low income residents, residents of color and new immigrants.
- What do neighborhoods need to be more effective at bringing diverse cultural and economic perspectives into the community dialogue?

- **Creating a framework for improved public citizen input process**

- Are the public participation forums hosted by the Park Board, NRP, and MCDA at cross purposes?
- How can city agencies foster meaningful public participation earlier in the decision making process?

- **Strengthening peer to peer mentoring between neighborhoods to build participation skills**

- What forums are neighborhood volunteers and staff currently using to learn from one another?
- What new opportunities could we create to foster peer learning among busy staff & volunteers?

6:15 **Summary Remarks**

Background on the MCN

- **Mission** to serve as a catalyst and a resource to promote and encourage ideas, alliances, policies and actions that strengthen neighborhoods and their capacity to preserve the livability and vitality of the community by *convening* and facilitating discussions, providing *policy analysis*, and through *direct support*.
- **Vision-** to enhance neighborhood organizations to ensure their long term livability, to mobilize residents as citizen leaders, to foster a culture of civic involvement and ensure that it is realized and strengthened, especially in low income communities.

Contact Information

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Overview of MCN Projects to Strengthen Citizen Involvement in Public Decision Making

Success Measures for Citizen Participation

- **Background-** Neighborhood associations and Community Development Corporations value and provide many opportunities for community residents to shape re-development efforts in their community. However, many funders focus narrowly on “bricks and mortar units of production” when they evaluate a project’s success. Through the MCN’s Success Measures Project, neighborhood associations will get to say how & why citizen participation makes a difference, and will develop easy-to-use tools to document the impact of their citizen participation efforts for project funders.
- **Goals-** volunteers and staff from Minneapolis and St. Paul neighborhood groups are developing clear goals and success measures for citizen participation efforts, to guide their own efforts, hold other institutions and organizations accountable to community process, and build a common language between funders, public and private partners, and community groups. We are finding ways to measure the benefits of having meaningful involvement by community members in the development of projects.

Best Practices for Inclusive Organizing in Neighborhoods

- **Background-** Over the past ten years Minneapolis and St. Paul have seen dramatic changes in the racial and ethnic composition of urban neighborhoods. Many new immigrant populations such as Southeast Asians, East African, and Hispanic /Latino/a communities have located in sections of our city, further diversifying the cultural backgrounds and language barriers. Neighborhood and community-based organizations have been largely unsuccessful in drawing these minority and immigrant populations into their work. As our neighborhoods become more diverse, racial divides exist on almost every block. To build healthy communities, it is critical that we learn to bridge our differences and celebrate the richness of diversity through community-building strategies
- **Goals-** neighborhood staff and volunteers from Minneapolis and St. Paul are guiding a consultant, Doroth Mayer to collect success stories from local and national initiatives that are effectively involving low income residents, renters, communities of color and new immigrants in three areas of interest: organizing models, organizational structure and methods of collaboration. Neighborhood leaders will then meet to discuss these lessons and plan ways to further the learning process through the work in their own neighborhoods.

Creating a framework for improved public citizen input process

- **Background**
- **Goals**

Technical Assistance Program for Neighborhoods

- **Background-** neighborhood associations in Minneapolis and St. Paul are increasingly being asked by community residents, city departments and private funders to fulfill greater roles including; facilitating citizen participation in community policing efforts, making land use decisions, strengthening families and doing comprehensive planning. With frequent turn over of boards and staff in many neighborhoods it is vital that neighborhood volunteers and staff get access to the training and support they need to effectively carry out their responsibilities.
- **Goals-** The MCN’s Technical Assistance Program for Neighborhoods matches neighborhood staff and volunteers with the existing city and non-profit resources they need to build strong community organizations, though a resource clearinghouse, technical assistance grants, peer mentoring networks, and a vendor improvement program.
 - On-line resource clearinghouse- a comprehensive and current listing of what kinds of resources are available to neighborhoods and case studies, and contact names for projects other neighborhoods have undertaken.
 - Peer-mentoring opportunities for neighborhood staff and volunteers. Encouraging participation in face-to-face events through an on-line training calendar. Publicizing on-line networks, Facilitating one-on-one matches between neighborhoods that need advice or help and those that can provide it, on a temporary or long term basis.
 - Small Grant Fund for one-time management consulting services for neighborhoods.