

CURA RESOURCE COLLECTION

**Center for Urban and Regional Affairs
University of Minnesota
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**The "How To's" of Citizen
Involvement**

**Minneapolis Training Program for Neighborhood
Organizers Program Evaluation**

January 2003–May 2003

Prepared by Bina Thompson Nikrin
Research Assistant
University of Minnesota

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Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA)
University of Minnesota
330 HHH Center
301—19th Avenue South
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455

Phone: 612-625-1551

Fax: 612-626-0273

E-mail: cura@umn.edu

Web site: <http://www.cura.umn.edu>

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Introduction

After decades of community organizing for a vast array of causes, organizers can still be heard to say, "I've tried everything and the same five people come to our meetings; how do you really get people involved?" From January 2003 to May 2003, we looked closely at four neighborhood organizing efforts in the Twin Cities to find answers to this question. By using the context of specific community projects, these case studies describe how community organizers worked to successfully get citizens involved.

The Minneapolis Training Program for Neighborhood Organizers (MTPNO), a program of the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) at the University of Minnesota, has a strong commitment to Twin Cities' neighborhood organizations, believing they can have a powerful impact on the condition of neighborhoods and the quality of life of families living there. However, many neighborhood organizations either lack sufficient citizen involvement in community efforts or lack sufficient organizational leadership capacity (i.e., community organizers) to design and implement strategies for community improvement. Community organizing places its faith in the value of people working together for common ends and in what they can do if given appropriate guidance and opportunity. Community organizers facilitate and empower people to lead. As one commentator has noted,

The goal is to encourage people to feel and be more powerful. This is typically as important as achieving substantive change. Until the people recognize that it is they who must do something about their own problems, and that it is only THEY who can be trusted to do the right thing—and until they realize that only if they organize enough power in their community that something can be done about these things, nothing will get done.¹

Jay Clark, MTPNO director and trainer, uses ongoing, in-depth group training; individual follow-up sessions; and networking groups to prepare neighborhood community organizers to build community leadership and a solid foundation for neighborhood organizations. He works side-by-side with organizers, modeling skills covered in his trainings, to help them reach a broad spectrum of their constituents.

Training techniques and content address the specific needs of the organizers, including increasing participation by under-represented groups, recruiting volunteers, and building leadership skills of volunteers.

This study is intended to illustrate the “how” of community organizing techniques and strategies.

¹ Carl Tjerandsen, *Education for Citizenship*. Santa Cruz, CA: Emil Schwarzhaupt Foundation, 1980, p. 240.

Methodology

This evaluation uses illustrative case studies to learn how citizens become engaged in community organization projects and why. It is a multiple-case design with the purpose of demonstrating how these techniques are manifested in different community projects. Clark identified these four cases as a purposive sample of best cases based on past knowledge of the community organizer and current knowledge of the project. The unit of analysis was community projects.

The key research question was, "What do effective community organizers do to develop successful neighborhood involvement in projects identified as concerns of the neighborhood?" This evaluation describes successful projects and community organizer methods in detail. Although each community has unique needs and issues, the case studies in this evaluation can provide other organizers with specific ideas they could use in similar community work.

The qualitative data were collected concurrently from multiple data sources to capture the complexity and essence of what was said or done. Triangulation of methods of collecting data included the following procedures:

1. informal informational interviews to get a feel for the program
2. observation of individual organizer sessions with Clark
3. observation of project meetings and events
4. review of neighborhood meeting minutes and written materials, including newspaper articles, flyers, letters, meeting agendas, and minutes
5. formal in-depth interviews with organizers and community members

Program Context

The projects considered in this evaluation occurred in the Twin Cities metropolitan area, two in Minneapolis and two in St. Paul. All four community organizers who led the projects were students of MTPNO. The varying contextual conditions surrounding the organizers' work means that there were a large number of variables to consider. For example, there are varying representations of economic and ethnic populations in each community, political and environmental issues are diverse and ever changing, organizers must work through neighborhood-specific social interactions, and organizational efforts must respond to varying community concerns. All these conditions make community organizing a complex arena in which to do an evaluation. Analysis was aided by the use of flow charts, which are included for each case study.

Case Study I: Emergency Interpretation Card

Location: North Minneapolis

Project: Hmong collaboration to implement the Emergency Interpretation Card, 2003

Organizer: Nhia Lee

Question: How did North Minneapolis Southeast Asian Initiative (NMSEAI) involve Hmong residents in developing and implementing the Emergency Translation Card?

North Minneapolis has a large Southeast Asian population, predominantly Hmong. In 1998, the community organizer in the Hawthorne neighborhood in north Minneapolis realized the neighborhood's Hmong residents were not becoming involved in neighborhood issues. He contacted organizers from surrounding neighborhoods to see if they had better results involving these residents. Organizers from three neighborhood organizations—Hawthorne Area Community Council, Cleveland Area Neighborhood Association, and Jordan Area Community Council²—met to discuss the challenges of involving Hmong residents and found they were having similar difficulties. They also learned that there was one organization in the area—the Southeast Asian Community Council (SEACC)—doing a good job of serving the Hmong community in their neighborhoods. Since 1985, SEACC has provided direct social services and has sponsored programs on youth development, parenting empowerment, health education, and leadership. Their mission, however, does not include community organizing.

The neighborhood organizers began talks with the executive director of SEACC. After many conversations, they found resources at the University of Minnesota to help write a grant to form a new coalition called North Minneapolis Southeast Asian Initiative (NMSEAI). Primary funding came through contacts with two local corporations, General Mills and Medtronic Corporation.

² Cha Lee, "Interpretation Cards Project," *SEACC Speaks: The Newsletter of the Southeast Asian Community Council* (Spring 2002), accessed online May 17, 2003, at www.seacc-mn.org/news/new02-2.html.

Funding for NMSEAI paid for a Hmong organizer. His first assignment was to interview 150 Southeast Asian residents in north Minneapolis to identify the needs and issues that concern residents and to begin developing relationships within the community. He obtained a mailing list from SEACC, looked for local addresses in the Hmong phone book, and asked block club leaders from the three neighborhoods to identify Hmong residents on their block. The organizer made phone calls to set up interviews in the homes of Hmong residents, when possible speaking with the man of the house, which is the traditional Hmong way. Armed with surveys, he began to conduct the interviews, distributing brochures from the participating organizations as he went.

The organizer's second assignment was to hold informational forums on four main topics identified during the interviews: housing (43 attended), education (91 attended), crime and safety (120 attended), and business opportunities (postponed). Advertisements for these meetings included public service announcements on KFAI Hmong Radio, personal phone calls to those who had been interviewed, bilingual flyers distributed to Hmong children through their schools, and a mailing to the SEACC mailing list.

A key to attendance at these informational forums was providing information and people who could help with issues of concern in residents' lives. For the meeting on crime and safety, for example, the advertisements announced experts would be present to discuss gangs, the 911 emergency system, property crime, and personal safety. City council members and the precinct police inspector were also present. When asked why people came to these meetings, Nhia Lee, the NMSEAI organizer in spring 2003, said that the elders came because the 23-year-old SEACC had established relationships with many of them already. Lee said that Hmong people need to see someone many times to feel they really know the person. It is also very important not to lose their trust once established.

In keeping with Hmong tradition for social gatherings, a traditional Hmong meal was included at all of the forums. Organizers showed government representatives to tables interspersed throughout the room and placed a bilingual volunteer at the same table. The volunteer prepared some questions ahead of time to use to stimulate conversation between residents and the official during dinner. Some tables even had

small signs (table tents) to designate the topic of that table's discussion. For the crime and safety forum, for example, if residents were interested in a particular issue—such as the legal system, property crime, or car problems—they could choose to sit at the appropriate table and discuss that topic over dinner.

This was perhaps the first opportunity for most Hmong residents to talk with their council members and police on issues that concerned them. Because Hmong society is hierarchical, it is natural for them to want to talk with the top officials. Also many Hmong men in the United States served the U.S. military in Thailand, so they understand that American society is also hierarchical. Interpreters worked continuously translating in Hmong and English. Government officials gave information and Hmong residents asked questions and described some of their experiences. During the crime and safety forum, for example, residents shared stories about being awakened in the middle of the night by police who took a family member away, the difficulty of getting information the next day from police because no one at the precinct spoke Hmong, and dialing 911 in an emergency only to have someone arrive hours later and say, "Well, what do you expect when you live in north Minneapolis?"

Again and again, both in the initial interviews and at the crime and safety forum, Hmong residents voiced their concerns about communication problems with police when they were stopped for a minor traffic violation or involved in a fender bender. The large numbers of residents attending the forum on crime and safety also indicated to organizers that this was an issue that people cared about and would respond to with their own time and effort. The NNSEAI organizer, volunteers, and community leaders planned a series of community meetings to involve residents in developing solutions to the problems identified by residents. In these subsequent meetings, participants brainstormed 20 possible solutions. These solutions were listed on large sheets of paper and participants voted on the solutions by placing stickers next to their favorites. The four most popular solutions identified were

1. have a 911 emergency line in Hmong;
2. provide training for police on Hmong culture;
3. translate documents into Hmong, such as the 911 Emergency Packet and the Community Crime Prevention (CCP) Safe Accident Report Form; and
4. develop a legal aid card with information about legal rights and defense.

After several more weeks of discussion, NMSEAI staff and volunteers decided to start with an adaptation of the legal aid card. The card would list ways to contact a Hmong interpreter and would be made available to residents free of charge. Eventually the card was developed and funded with the help of elected officials. The card has a place to write the name and phone number of a close relative who speaks English, and includes phone numbers for the NMSEAI interpreter and the AT&T Language Line. The AT&T Language Line is for police use only and the department incurs a charge for every use. A city council member volunteered to set aside money from her ward budget to cover the cost of using this service. A major distribution campaign was planned and implemented to distribute the new Minneapolis Emergency Interpretation Card (Figure 1-1).

MINNEAPOLIS EMERGENCY LANGUAGE INTERPRETATION CARD

I would like to talk to you, but I don't speak English. I speak Hmong.

Please call one of the following phone numbers for interpretation:

() _____ Evening

Name: _____ at () _____ Day

Southeast Asian Community Council (612) 377-0778; M-F 8:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m.

Minneapolis 911 Emergency Communications Center (612) 348-2345 "MPLS Police Only"

My Name is: _____

Pilot Project Cd # _____

Figure 1-1. Minneapolis Emergency Interpretation Card. This wallet-sized card is printed in English on one side and Hmong on the reverse side.

To protect the cards, NMSEAI purchased a laminating machine that was small and easy to transport. The staff took it to meetings, celebrations, and the Hmong Soccer Tournament. They went back to visit the homes of the people they had interviewed

earlier and signed them up for the card. They put news releases in the *Hmong Times* and the *Asian Pages* notifying residents that they could stop by the NMSEAI office to get a card. As of June 2003, 300 people had signed up for the card.

As NMSEAI continued to listen to the Hmong community, people began reporting that police and other emergency workers were not responding to the card, often refusing to use it. One person was told, "You live here, you should speak English, otherwise go back where you came from." Nhia Lee knew it was important for the community to feel successful in their efforts, so NMSEAI went back to the elected officials and police contacts who had participated in the community forums to push for use of the card. They also sponsored a series of events to promote the use of the card, including the following:

- A candidates' forum³ for a city council seat vacated after the general election, attended by 70 people. The candidates were asked specifically about their position on the Minneapolis Emergency Interpretation Card. In addition, NMSEAI organized a get-out-the-vote campaign.
- A meeting with police officials attended by a representative of the Minnesota State Patrol, a Hmong Department of Natural Resources officer, and city council members (one elected after the candidate forum). Noticeably absent was the Minneapolis Chief of Police, who had promised to attend but was unable to do so due to illness. This was quite a disappointment to the 100 or so attendees. Residents raised their concerns and shared stories of officers refusing to use the card. They asked their elected officials what they could do to help. The Minnesota State Patrol representative announced that officers statewide had received a copy of the card and had been instructed to use it, if possible (a cell phone was needed to make a call to any of the individuals or organizations listed on the card). Organizers also announced that the nearby city of Plymouth had heard about the card and shared it with their officers as well.
- The mayor and chief of police for Minneapolis attended a follow-up meeting. Residents shared their concerns and stories once again. Nhia Lee and the mayor's community outreach aide developed a memorandum of agreement for

³ Maiva Lee, "North Minneapolis Hmong Community Members Meet with Third Ward City Candidates" *Asian American Press*, January 24, 2003, n.p.

the meeting (Figure 1-2). The memorandum was signed at the meeting in front of about 100 people while Minnesota Public Radio recorded the proceedings. Lee said that the memorandum just “scratched the surface,” but after what seemed insurmountable odds, this was more than a symbolic success.

Memorandum of Agreement

Between North Minneapolis Southeast Asian Initiative, members of the Southeast Asian community and Mayor R.T. Rybak on May 7, 2003

I agree to work with the North Minneapolis Southeast Asian Initiative and the Southeast Asian community in the City of Minneapolis on the following issues and concerns communicated on May 7, 2003:

- 1. Bridging the communication and cultural gap between the Southeast Asian community and the City of Minneapolis.*
- 2. In accordance to police procedure, Chief Robert K. Olson, will acknowledge and hold accountable Minneapolis police officers for the use of the Minneapolis Emergency Language Interpretation Cards when they are presented.*
- 3. I agree to meet with the North Minneapolis Southeast Asian Initiative and the Southeast Asian community on a quarterly basis. If I am unavailable, my community outreach policy aide will represent me and keep me abreast of the issues.*

Mayor R.T. Rybak

SE Asian Initiative/SE Asian Community

Police Chief Olson

Figure 1-2. Memorandum of Agreement

Communication at these meetings was tailored to the Hmong community. To help people get involved, organizers used methods similar to those from the early stages such as public service announcements on KFAI Hmong radio. The multitiered bilingual approach also included

1. direct mailings to 400 people who signed in at previous meetings;
2. phone calls to more than 200 Minneapolis Emergency Interpretation Card cardholders;
3. flyers at grocery stores and other neighborhood stores;

4. advertisements in the *Asian American Press*, a local Asian community newspaper; and
5. announcements to board members of the four NMSEAI collaborative partners.

As Lee explained, “We always present our meeting programs in Hmong and English, which makes everyone feel included.” The SEACC youth group, many members of which are bilingual, staffed a registration table, passed out agendas, signed up newcomers for the emergency card, and led children’s activities. The latter is particularly important because Hmong parents may not attend community events unless they can bring their children with them. Based on analyzing the sign-in sheets, Lee stated that she believed only one-quarter of meeting participants were repeats; the rest attended for the first time, and many came specifically to receive the emergency card. This created an ongoing situation where she and the planners had to train residents in how to speak and interact with public officials to move forward the goal of empowering Hmong people to participate in the democratic process.

Organizers also had to be aware of cultural sensitivities. Nhia Lee is Hmong, speaks Hmong, and grew up in the community. She has a bachelor’s degree in management information systems from Augsburg College and has held professional leadership roles in nonprofit organizations. Her brother is executive director of the Southeast Asian Community Council. One might assume she would have no difficulty organizing in this community, but she did confront challenges, especially working with older Hmong people. As she explained,

If I am presenting information to elders, I want to make sure they feel they’re respected. . . . Humbleness is respected in a presenter. Even if I know I am right, I might be incomplete or miss something in fact or language. I would start the conversation with, “Excuse me if I may say something that is wrong or incorrect or might offend you. Pardon me, I am young and new, and please correct me if I say something wrong.”

Lee realizes her life experiences have been very different from those who grew up in rural Laos. She overcomes these challenges by being consistent, dependable, and respectful. For example, when the police chief canceled the first time, I asked Lee if she

didn't just wish all 400 attendees at the meeting would write him a letter expressing their dissatisfaction with him not showing up or sending a representative. She said,

This is how we are different than other groups of Americans. We wouldn't do this because we are interested in long-term relationships, such as our relationship with the [precinct] inspector. This has been a positive experience for three years now and it is based on steady communication on his side and on ours.

Lee's style is to build trust in relationships for and with the Hmong community through persistence, respect, and consistency.

Conclusion

The most striking aspect of the success of this project was the collaboration among the three neighborhood organizations and an established social service organization (SEACC) that already served the community the neighborhood groups wanted to reach. There were two primary benefits. First, the neighborhood groups learned culturally sensitive ways to involve people—for example, don't depend solely on written materials just because they're translated, have present at meetings interpreters who speak the language(s) of people or groups you want to involve, serve traditional food at meetings, provide childcare, etc. The collaboration also facilitated hiring a community organizer who understood these cultural concerns, including recognizing and respecting appropriate communication style with Hmong elders. Second, the Hmong community was open to being involved because of their previous positive relationship with SEACC. This provided the "in" for the newly formed NMSEAC to get Hmong leaders and residents to participate in interviews and meetings, and to work to identify issues that the community really cared about.

Case Study II: Light-Rail Transit

- Location:** Longfellow neighborhood, south Minneapolis
- Project:** Light-Rail Transit community meetings
- Organizer:** Patricia Patche
- Question:** How did Longfellow Community Council (LCC) involve residents on questions around light-rail transit?

Longfellow Community Council (LCC) in Minneapolis faces some unique challenges from the light-rail transit project because there are multiple neighborhoods and multiple jurisdictions affected. The council includes four smaller neighborhoods: Longfellow, Cooper, Howe, and Hiawatha. (Minneapolis lists the Seward neighborhood as part of the Longfellow Community Council, but Seward has a separate neighborhood organization and is not officially part of LCC.) The large geographic area encompassed by LCC, as well as the individual identities of the member neighborhoods, makes it difficult to organize, especially on an issue that has the force of a regional transportation plan like light-rail transit (LRT). The LRT line is being built along Hiawatha Avenue (Highway 55), which is also the western edge of this community. Eventually the line will run from the Mall of America in Bloomington, south of the Longfellow neighborhood, all the way to downtown Minneapolis, which is north of Longfellow. Neighborhoods on the other side of Hiawatha have their concerns, too. People in the area had been talking about LRT for several years, but had been making few decisions about how to respond until construction actually started. The annual LCC survey of participants at the 2002 Longfellow Summer Street Fest—which attracts as many as 3000 people—identified LRT as one of the main concerns of area residents. A specific concern of many respondents was that LRT planners had made no accommodations for parking. Accordingly, LCC organizer Patricia Patche, along with LCC volunteers, created a plan to get residents involved in further defining the parking issue and identifying any other LRT-related concerns they had. The broader goal was helping impacted neighborhoods find an effective voice in the larger arena of regional politics.

First, staff and volunteers formed an LCC team. The team surveyed residents most likely to be affected by LRT, namely those within a two-block radius of the three

planned rail stations at Lake Street, 38th Street, and 46th Street. The survey included general questions about the neighborhood, as well as the following questions specific to LRT:

1. What are your concerns about the LRT stops?
2. What do you know about parking plans around LRT stops?
3. How do you expect parking on your block to be affected?
4. Where do you plan to go on the LRT?

In all, the team surveyed 35 residents using the door-knocking technique (going door-to-door and talking to whomever answers the door). Most residents surveyed said they believed that people would drive from other areas of the city or from suburbs to take the LRT from their neighborhood. Organizers planned four meetings. Three identical meetings were to be held at the location of each station, about eight blocks apart. The planners hoped that smaller, more informal meetings would encourage more input and discussion from participants. The goals of these meetings were to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of LRT, voice concerns about LRT, brainstorm solutions to anticipated problems, and get a feel for the priorities of residents. The fourth meeting was intended to bring together neighbors of all three LRT stops to talk with their elected officials about their LRT-related concerns. The LCC team used the door-knocking survey results to develop a meeting flyer. The flyer identified the top concerns of residents, which were commuter parking, economic development near the stations, traffic congestion, pedestrian safety, and crime.

Communication is key to involving the people most likely to care about a particular issue. Generally, LCC has used the neighborhood newspaper, *The Messenger*, to publish general advertisements for community meetings. However, they could not use this approach for these meetings because of the difficulties coordinating the timing of meetings with the once-per-month deadlines of the newspaper. The following methods were used to identify and communicate with citizens who were likely to be most concerned about the LRT project:

1. E-mail was sent to those who previously had registered with LCC—for example, by signing in at a prior community meeting and indicating that they wanted to be informed about community issues by e-mail. The e-mail notice was mailed at the same time the flyer was distributed.
2. Neighbors who had asked to be kept informed about the LRT issue—such as those who had attended previous meetings on related subjects or those identified in the original door-to-door survey— were phoned. Members of two LCC committees with related interests, the Environment and Transportation Committee and the Neighborhood Development Committee, were also notified by phone of the upcoming LRT meetings.
3. A “buffer zone” was identified within which flyers announcing the neighborhood meetings were distributed. This area was intended to include those most affected by the LRT line and was defined as six to eight blocks around the planned rail stations. The Longfellow Community Council has a partnership with the University of Minnesota that gives LCC access to GIS mapping software. The LCC team used this technology to pinpoint residences closest to “the problem,” and then contacted local park staff to ask if some of their volunteers would help to distribute flyers. Ultimately three groups, each composed of five youth volunteers and an adult chaperone, helped deliver flyers door-to-door to residents in the buffer zone.
4. The evening of the meeting, the LCC team did “door-knocking,” delivering flyers and talking with people within a one- to two-block radius of the meeting place.
5. At each LRT meeting, LCC took a moment to ask participants if they would agree to distribute flyers on related issue four times per year on two blocks in their neighborhood. The team passed out a sign-up form (Figure 2-1) at the meeting and organizers collected them right away. Generally, half of those present completed the form.

_____ I can pass out flyers on two blocks four times a year						
_____ I want to help explore development options for 46th/Hiawatha						
_____ Keep me informed on 46th/Hiawatha developments. I am interested in:						
<table> <tr> <td>Cub Foods</td> <td>Pedestrian Safety</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Development</td> <td>Parking</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Traffic</td> <td>Crime</td> </tr> </table>	Cub Foods	Pedestrian Safety	Development	Parking	Traffic	Crime
Cub Foods	Pedestrian Safety					
Development	Parking					
Traffic	Crime					
NAME _____ PHONE _____						
ADDRESS _____						

Figure 2-1. Volunteer Sign-up Form Distributed by the Longfellow Community Council at Light-Rail Transit Meetings

At a later date, LCC called on those who signed up to distribute flyers to help notify residents about a public meeting organized by the City of Minneapolis to get citizen input on a proposal to build a Cub Foods store near the 46th Street LRT stop. There was very little lead time to advertise the meeting, so Patche contacted the people who had completed the flyer distribution sign-up form. The results were stunning with more than 230 residents attending the meeting. In preparation for a later meeting, 120 volunteers distributed flyers to 7,000 households.

The Lake Street meeting was the last of the station-specific meetings. About 36 residents attended this evening meeting, which was held at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church just off Hiawatha and Lake (See Figure 2-2). At the door, an organizer greeted people and asked them to fill out a nametag and sign a sign-in sheet. Getting everyone to sign in helped Patche expand her communication efforts to include all those who cared enough to attend a meeting.



Longfellow Community Council

Serving Longfellow, Cooper, Howe & Hiawatha neighborhoods

MAKE OUR LIGHT RAIL TRANSIT STOPS NEIGHBORHOOD FRIENDLY!

At various LRT community meetings the Longfellow Community Council organized, neighbors have said that their top concerns at 46th Street, 38th Street and Lake Street LRT stations are:

- **Commuters parking in the neighborhood**
- **Traffic congestion**
- **Pedestrian safety**

HELP US FIND SOLUTIONS TO THESE CONCERNS.

WHERE: Holy Trinity Church, 2730 E. 31st Street
(Library room)

WHEN: Tuesday, April 15, 2003
7:00–9:00 PM

WHO: LRT neighbors and anyone else

For more information contact Patricia at LCC at 612-722-4529

Figure 2-2. Flier Announcing the Lake Street Community Meeting

There were eight handouts available at the meeting, containing information that the organizers thought the participants would want to refer to during the meeting. The handouts included the following:

- a meeting agenda
- a map of the Hiawatha Line
- "Hiawatha LRT Parking Management," by the Community Working Group. This city-organized group is made up of citizens from a variety of neighborhoods along the LRT line. Three people from Longfellow, including Patche, were involved in the group and were invited to the LRT station meetings and provided with minutes. The handout detailed five options for parking management: (1) work with businesses to explore metered parking; (2) implement time-of-day parking restrictions to address long-term park and ride issues; (3) create critical parking areas; (4) tow after 72 hours; and (5) address event parking issues and weekend parking needs.
- copies of two newspaper articles titled "MNDOT May Raise Limits along Hiawatha Avenue" and "Speed Limit May Rise on Hiawatha Avenue"
- a comment form from Metro Transit titled "Your Comments Are Needed"

The medium-sized meeting room had folding chairs set in rows with an aisle in the middle. This made it easy for people who might come late to find a seat. As people took turns going around the room to introduce themselves, it was clear they were mostly business owners and homeowners. To give residents a broad base of information, several people had been invited to come to the meeting and make presentations. First, a local man who has designed parking projects in the past outlined the parking challenges to the neighborhood posed by LRT. He highlighted the business district at Hiawatha and Lake where the new LRT station was being built and shared current plans for that intersection. Plans included the existing Target and Blockbuster Video stores, as well as new commercial and residential developments. Although the scheduled presenter from the City of Minneapolis did not attend the meeting, a representative from Metro Transit fielded some questions that likely would have been posed to the city representative. The Metro Transit representative also noted

that MTA was considering service changes, and encouraged attendees to express their concerns and questions on the Metro Transit comment form distributed at the meeting.

Perhaps because the group was relatively small and informal, participants were quick to ask questions and voice their concerns. The facilitator helped bring form to the participants' ideas and concerns. He started by leading a brainstorming session on possible solutions to the problems that were identified. As ideas were mentioned, he was careful to record each on a large pad of newsprint so everyone could see. He took any and all suggestions, not evaluating them or allowing others to criticize them, which might have discouraged people from speaking up. Then he asked participants to narrow their ideas down to their main concerns. It did not take long to focus in on the following issues:

- Traffic should be able to get in and out of the commercial area easily.
- The plan should be pedestrian friendly.
- Parking should be convenient and should not interfere with the traffic flow.
- Ugly orange barrels currently used to mark traffic flow should be removed.

Then the facilitator resumed helping the participants brainstorm solutions, again writing them down on newsprint for all to see. He used humor to discourage people from monopolizing the floor. At one point, he went around the room and asked each person in turn to make suggestions, thus assuring everyone the opportunity to have their say. When the list was complete, the facilitator passed out small sticker dots and everyone was asked to "vote" for their favorite four suggestions by placing a dot next to their choices. Finally, the facilitator led the group in a meeting evaluation. The pluses included the facilitator's humor, which kept the meeting interesting and fun; the overall facilitation and time management, which kept things moving; and plenty of time being allowed for questions. One person commented that it was good that "someone came to my door to tell me about the meeting" that evening, but that it was too bad she didn't hear about it earlier. Either way, she was glad she came. Scheduled presenters who didn't show up was mentioned under minuses. Then participants talked about next steps. All were invited to the fourth meeting, in which residents who had attended the

previous meetings would come together with elected officials to ask questions and voice their concerns.

The fourth meeting occurred on Saturday, March 15, 2003 (see Figure 2-3). Prior to the meeting, Patche compiled a 35-page packet for the elected officials to update them about the work citizens had already done at the first three meetings and to help them prepare for the meeting. The packet included the following items:

- feedback on the five options for parking management, including a summary of factors and issues to be considered and samples of e-mail comments received
- minutes and fact sheets from previous LRT community meetings
- fact sheets and results from the LRT community survey
- feedback on the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) proposal⁴ to increase the speed limit on Highway 55, including copies of a signed petition opposing the increase.
- a letter from the LCC Environment and Transportation Committee to Amr K. Jabr, Assistant Division Traffic Engineer and a member of the Community advisory study group for MnDOT. The letter expressed concern that any new speed limits be instituted well after the LRT began operation. It recommended that MnDOT should work to make the corridor not only safe for pedestrians, but also welcoming to them, and that decision makers should consider the effect of noise and air pollution on the adjacent communities.
- samples of letters received from residents concerned about the LRT plan

Six elected officials attended the meeting, including two state representatives, a state senator, and the Hennepin County commissioner who represented the district. Also in attendance were staff from Metro Transit and two representatives from the MnDOT study group that recommended changing the speed limit on Highway 55. All of these individuals could affect the specific policies that concerned residents of the affected neighborhoods.

⁴ "Speed Limits May Rise along Hiawatha Avenue," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, November 21, 2002, pp. B-1 and B-6.



**Longfellow
Community
Council**

Serving Longfellow, Cooper, Howe & Hiawatha neighborhoods

COMMUNITY MEETING TO DISCUSS

- **THE IMPACT OF THE LIGHT RAIL TRANSIT AT 46TH ST, 38TH ST AND LAKE ST STATIONS**
- **LRT & PARKING PERMITS FOR RESIDENTS**
- **THE SPEED LIMIT ON HWY 55**

THE PURPOSE OF THE MEETING IS:

1. To discuss the above issues and give updates;
2. To report community input to elected officials
3. To provide an opportunity for residents and businesses to give more input on these issues.

Our guests include:

- Council Member Sandy Colvin Roy
- Council Member Gary Schiff
- State Representative Jean Wagenius
- State Representative Jim Davnie
- Hennepin County Commissioner Peter McLaughlin
- Senator Wes Skoglund

WHEN: Saturday, April 15th
1:00 to 3:00 PM

WHERE: East Lake Library
(2727 E. Lake Street)

WHO: Residents, businesses and others

COME AND BE HEARD!

For more information contact Patricia at LCC at 612-722-4529

Figure 2-3. Flier Announcing the Fourth Community Meeting

More than 45 residents attended the meeting. They presented the four most frequent concerns that came out of the three neighborhood meetings. Once again, the facilitator helped those in attendance brainstorm solutions and identify their priorities. Because different people attended each event, it was important to provide such opportunities for input at each meeting. This helped to avoid the impression that a few people had come up with these ideas. It also prevented a lone, vocal individual from defining the issues at each meeting. Overall, the results from the four meetings were quite consistent. At this fourth meeting, elected officials and residents heard and saw first-hand the concerns of residents and their preferred solutions, and could speak with each other directly about them.

Conclusion

Door-knocking interviews provided the information necessary to involve residents in this project, and were used for two main purposes. First, organizers used door knocking to help frame the issues and let people know about upcoming meetings. Because the residents most likely to be affected were those living around the three LRT stops, their input helped the organizers frame the issues in ways most likely to be relevant to other neighborhood residents. Organizers used this information to design the flyers announcing the neighborhood meetings. Second, the organizers used the door-knocking technique to advertise the issue to other stakeholders in the area, such as business owners, homeowners, and renters. To do this, Patche and her team went door knocking prior to each meeting in the neighborhood immediately surrounding the meeting place to let people know what was happening and encourage them to attend. This personal connection helped ensure the project's continued authenticity.

The LCC team used several other techniques effectively. First, keeping careful lists of participants and creating a seasoned team of organizers enabled LCC to respond quickly and effectively when it learned of the meeting about the Cub Foods proposal.⁵ Second, although the number of attendees at the first four meetings was not particularly large, the meetings nonetheless captured the concerns of those most directly affected by

⁵ "Overflow Crowd Signals Strong Disapproval of Cub Foods Store Plans on 46th Street," *Nokomis Messenger*, April 2, 2003, n.p.

the LRT plans, ensuring that the information generated enabled organizers to address effectively the concerns of a larger group of stakeholders. Finally, by getting residents involved in one issue of immediate concern, LCC was able to recruit some of these participants for other LCC projects.



Case Study III: Job Corps Property Use

Location: Como Park neighborhood, St. Paul

Project: Job Corps property use and green space issues

Organizer: Sue McCall, community organizer for the District 10 Community Council

Question: How did District 10 get neighbors involved in influencing the use of the Job Corps site in their neighborhood?

This project centered around a neighborhood land-use issue that involved federally owned property and that had plagued the neighborhood for more than 20 years. A few blocks from the Minnesota State Fair Grounds, the Hubert H. Humphrey Job Corps Center encompasses an entire city block in the Como Park neighborhood. The Job Corps is a federal program to teach job skills to young people who have difficulty finding a job. The Humphrey Job Corps Center first moved into the neighborhood in 1980. Neighbors protested immediately because they thought the young people were criminals. The District 10 Community Council—one of 19 community councils in St. Paul designed to facilitate citizen participation—helped neighbors work with Job Corps authorities, who subsequently guaranteed no felons would participate in the Job Corps program at this location. Difficulties also stemmed from racial/ethnic differences between the center's neighbors, who were mostly white, and the youth participating in the program, who were mostly people of color. In the 1980s, there were many complaints from neighbors of the center about partying, drinking, and break-ins. The District 10 Community Council's efforts resulted in the St. Paul mayor setting up the Neighborhood Advisory Committee (NAC), which was comprised of residents from the surrounding community. Their job was to act as a conduit for neighborhood input regarding problems between the Humphrey Job Corps and the surrounding neighborhood. The federal government allocated funds for staff, meeting expenses, and communications. The advisory committee was directed to work with Humphrey Job Corps staff, who are employees of Vinell Corporation, a firm that contracts⁶ with the Department of Labor to provide education and job training services through the Job

⁶ This is a renewable contract that goes through a competitive bidding process.

Corps program. Resident concerns were brought to the attention of the new Humphrey Job Corps site director, who agreed to preserve existing green space around the center, establish a phone line for neighbors to call if they had issues with the Humphrey Job Corps center or program participants, and send out security patrols. Over time, things began to settle down. During the 90's, NAC gradually lost its independence from the Humphrey Job Corps director. The committee's membership dwindled and their leadership stagnated.

In spring 2002, neighbors began contacting Sue McCall, the District 10 community organizer, about rumors that construction plans for the Humphrey Job Corps site called for making the tennis court park into a parking lot. McCall and the District 10 Community Council investigated and confirmed that the rumor was true. Unfortunately, NAC had not shared this information with the neighborhood. Quickly, the District 10 Community Council expanded their regular board meeting agenda to include the Humphrey Job Corps green space issue. Because the council's board meetings are typically held at various locations throughout the district, it was a simple matter to hold this meeting at the Humphrey Job Corps site and invite Job Corps staff to attend. The goal was to have the Job Corps share its construction plan publicly and to find out residents' feelings about it. McCall and the community council needed to be sure they were really listening and that they were hearing similar concerns from substantial numbers of residents. This would be especially critical if they needed to ask public officials to influence federal decisions.

To get neighbors involved, McCall and District 10 leaders built on established relationships and practices. Initially, McCall went door knocking at the houses across the street from the Humphrey Job Corps property to identify the closest neighbors' main concerns. She then framed the issues strategically to motivate people to attend a meeting on the issue. This included a letter stating that the Job Corps was planning to make the park into a parking lot. McCall mailed out about 400 letters, signed by both District 10 Community Council and St. Paul City Council representative Jay Benanav. Using Benanav's database, McCall mailed letters to all residents who lived within a 10-square-block area around the Humphrey Job Corps site.

About a week before the meeting, McCall posted large signs near the street where the meeting would be held inviting people to attend. The evening of the meeting,

volunteers stood on the street holding signs encouraging people to attend and waving them into the proper parking lot.

At the first meeting, the Humphrey Job Corps staff asked attendees to complete a sign-in sheet. McCall knew she would need the list to contact attendees and encourage them to attend future meetings, so she asked to borrow it until the next day. During the next several months, she sent out five mailings to these residents and to others who called or who attended future meetings.

At the first meeting, McCall asked for volunteers to play the role of "point person." She wanted help with communication and, as it turned out, about twelve attendees wanted to be kept up-to-date on even the "small stuff." For most of the attendees, e-mail made this easy. Whenever anything happened on the Job Corps issue, McCall sent out an e-mail or made a phone call and the one dozen volunteers spread the word around the neighborhood. They also kept McCall informed about what people were saying and told her when they thought it was time to call another meeting.

Between meetings, McCall maintained communication with neighborhood residents. After each meeting she sent an update letter to everyone who had attended any of the Job Corps meetings. She also published updates in the District 10 newsletter, *Como Park News*. During the summer when things were quiet, she sent out postcards saying, "Nothing's shaking. I'll let you know when something happens."

One hundred and twelve residents and many Humphrey Job Corps staff attended the June 2002 District 10 Board Meeting. Although not enforced rigidly, the chair of the District 10 Board runs meetings using parliamentary procedure. In addition, she has a ground rule that everyone can speak once before anyone can speak twice. These practices contributed to involving as many people as possible and prevented any one person from monopolizing the discussion. The chair also gave her usual statement about treating people with "civility" and respect at meetings. For the Job Corps meeting, an additional rule was that only the physical plant of the Humphrey Job Corps was up for discussion. If anyone brought up the behavior of students or other issues, she simply said, "This is not part of what we are discussing here."

The demographics in the Como Park neighborhood are fairly stable and many residents who attended the June 2002 board meeting were familiar with previous issues with the Humphrey Job Corps. "There was no problem getting people to talk," McCall

said. Residents' concerns ranged from bad upkeep of the property to \$52,000 of NAC money budgeted for communication that neighbors never received. Their emotions were flamed when the Humphrey Job Corps assistant director said that he had instructions not to share certain basic information with them, such as the name of the developer, and refused to answer most of their questions. People were angry and the meeting closed without a constructive resolution.

The District 10 Community Council had the leverage they needed to bring in the decision makers. Dealing with the bureaucracy of the Job Corps was difficult because it was hard to know who was responsible at the Department of Labor and the Vinell Corporation. The neighbors needed their elected officials to help clarify who made what decisions. In the following weeks, McCall worked with the District 10 Community Council leadership, neighbors, and the neighborhood's city council representative to develop a strategy that included who to call, what letters to write, when to meet, what to place on meeting agendas, and who to invite to the meetings. The plan included the following:

1. Four or five neighbors would write letters to their elected officials. One of these letters was copied to the Department of Labor.
2. Because the mayor of St. Paul was responsible for appointing NAC members, the city council representative would update the current mayor and discuss possible solutions for addressing the ineffectiveness of NAC. The representative would begin by driving the mayor through the neighborhood to show him the situation.
3. McCall and the District 10 Community Council planned a second neighborhood meeting for early July where they would ask neighbors to set priorities for what they did or did not want in the Humphrey Job Corps site redesign.
4. In the meantime, residents would be asked to contact their Congressional representative and two senators, telling them about the issue and asking for their support.
5. After the second neighborhood meeting, the city council representative would write a letter to the regional director of Job Corps summarizing the

neighborhood's priorities. This letter would be copied to the center director, the Vinell Corporation director, the mayor of St. Paul, the chair of the District 10 Board, McCall, and the neighborhood's Congressional representative and two senators.

6. Residents would ask one of their elected officials (it turned out to be Senator Paul Wellstone) to write a letter to the secretary of the Department of Labor, who oversees the Job Corps program.

The second meeting was held July 11 and was run by the District 10 Board. The goal was to bring together elected officials (or their representatives) and residents to define and prioritize the neighborhood's concerns. Fifty-eight people attended the meeting. By now, the Humphrey Job Corps had planted flowers and cleaned up the property quite a bit. The Job Corps regional director attended the meeting, along with the area's city council representative and District 10 Community Council members. The mayor did not attend, but the groundwork had been laid for his future involvement. The absence of NAC members, however, was significant. At this meeting, the Job Corps regional director and his staff seemed more cooperative. Neighbors voiced their concerns and decided on their priorities. After the meeting, the city council representative summarized residents' five priorities in a follow-up letter to the Job Corps regional director. As stated in the letter, the priorities included the following:

1. Neighbors are united in their desire to see the current recreational space maintained for that purpose.
2. Neighbors are united in their desire to have the Job Corps make a final resolution of the vacant buildings #3 and #7, whether it is redevelopment for the proposed cafeteria or child development center, re-use, or demolition.
3. Neighbors are united in the desire that any new buildings complement the existing buildings on the campus by the use of similar materials, design, and architectural detail.
4. Neighbors are united in their desire that a surface parking lot not be developed on the residential block currently occupied by the center's recreational facilities.

5. Neighbors are united in their support of the students, and the program and mission of the Hubert Humphrey Job Corps Center.

As planned, this letter was copied to the Humphrey Job Corps director, the Vinell Corporation representative, the mayor of St. Paul, the District 10 Community Council chair, the area's Congressional representative and two senators, and McCall. Next, the late Senator Wellstone wrote a letter to Secretary Chao at the U.S. Department of Labor dated September 9, 2002. He told her about the community's concerns, referred to the meeting, and enclosed a copy of the city council representative's letter.

District 10 called a third meeting in November 2002 in response to a letter from the Assistant Secretary of Labor to Senator Wellstone. The letter said that the Job Corps had conducted a technical review of the redevelopment plans and had several options to present to the neighborhood. The letter went on to say, "As the planning process continues, we will keep the community apprised of our progress." Wellstone's representative attended the November meeting, along with the Job Corps regional director, representatives from the Department of the Labor, and the Chicago Job Corps executive. Sixty residents attended the meeting. Once again, no members of NAC attended. At the meeting, the Job Corps regional director announced that the groundbreaking schedule had changed from 2003 to 2004. The neighbors discussed the options and once again voted in favor of the preferences they had expressed at the second meeting. The Job Corps agreed to rework their design, again keeping the neighbors' preferences in mind. Furthermore, before construction, the Job Corps agreed to submit their plan for a St. Paul Site Plan Review which, as a federal agency not bound by local building code or permitting rules, they were not required to do. This concession was seen as progress by McCall, the District 10 Community Council, and neighborhood residents.

At this point, the mayor of St. Paul placed the ineffective NAC under the control of the District 10 Community Council Board. In addition to the Humphrey Job Corps' administrators and broader neighborhood representation, District 10 added two seats for students. With ongoing support from the city council representative, increased support from the mayor, and new members, for the first time in several years NAC was once again raising significant questions (and receiving fairly direct answers) on a

variety of neighborhood concerns. In addition, NAC began looking for ways for Job Corps students and teachers to interact with the neighborhood to build more positive relationships. The hope is that this will contribute to greater understanding and increase the likelihood that future conflicts can be worked out locally. For example, NAC is now supporting opportunities for students to be placed at neighborhood agencies and businesses for internships. Students also helped with the annual neighborhood cleanup day. The new NAC has resulted in many fewer charges from students that "these people just don't want us here."

Due largely to the contract renewal process and budget uncertainties, Vinell still had not brought forward the final construction plans when this report was written. However, McCall continues to keep neighbors updated through the *Como Park News*, as illustrated by the following update published in the September 2003 issue:

Job Corps Center: In May of 2002 the Job Corps Center presented plans for a new cafeteria and childcare center. Part of the plan involved turning the tennis courts south of Arlington into a large parking lot. There were concerns regarding the density and esthetics of the proposed project. Unhappy neighbors worked with Ward 4 council member Jay Benanav, Humphrey Job Corp staff, and the District 10 Community Council on a compromise building plan.⁷ The compromise plan includes the rehabilitation of two buildings, a new cafeteria and at the north end, increased parking with new landscaping. It leaves the tennis court area intact. This plan was presented to the community in fall of 2002, and generally was well received. In the coming months, the Job Corps will submit the revised plan to St. Paul's Licensing, Inspections, and Environment Department (LIEP). After site plan review, the plans will be presented at a Neighborhood Advisory Committee meeting, hopefully some time in fall of 2004.

Conclusion

The District 10 Community Council was effective in this project because they were very sensitive to the history of Job Corps issues in the neighborhood and because they worked very hard to identify the right people in the federal bureaucracy who could influence the decisions being made. One of the most difficult things, McCall said, was

⁷ "Job Corps Center," *Como Park News: District 10 Newsletter*, September 2003, n.p.

“guarding my personal opinions because that is not my role. Instead, I work to empower neighbors to clarify their own concerns. My input is generally limited to asking, ‘What do *you* want?’” The District 10 Community Council empowered and organized neighbors so they could express their specific concerns and ideas to both local and national government officials, and these residents responded in large numbers.

One example of McCall’s ability to listen effectively is the way she structured the involvement of the twelve volunteer “point persons.” District 10’s established relationship with their city council representative was also critical to the success of this project. He didn’t just listen; he worked with McCall and the leadership to develop strategies for how to influence the Job Corps’ decisions. His letter had a huge influence on the message that Senator Wellstone sent to the Department of Labor. The plan was clearly a collaborative effort among McCall, the District 10 Community Council, neighborhood residents, and the city council representative. Recognizing that there would be future issues between the neighborhood and the Humphrey Job Corps, they also worked together to create a long-term plan to reinvent and improve NAC. One of the main stakeholders, youth who participated in the Job Corps program, had not been at the table before. By bringing two youth representatives onto NAC, both the accuracy and effectiveness of NAC’s work has improved. With District 10 overseeing an expanded membership in NAC, the future is promising for relationships between the neighborhood and the Humphrey Job Corps.

Case Study IV: School Change

- Location:** West Side, St. Paul
- Project:** Latino outreach on School Choice
- Organizer:** Rainbow Hirsh, West Side Citizens Organization
- Question:** How is the West Side Citizens Organization involving the Latino community in expressing their educational concerns to the St. Paul School District?

When West Side Citizens Organization (WSCO) hired Rainbow Hirsh, she was given the task of organizing in the Latino community on St. Paul's West Side. Although she's not Latino herself, she speaks Spanish fluently and had worked in the neighborhood while she was in college. Her first weeks with WSCO were spent conducting one-on-one interviews with people from a long list of contacts she received from WSCO staff and board members, a list of contacts from her former job, lists of other neighborhood nonprofits, and referrals she was given along the way. During her interviews, Hirsh discovered three people with very similar missions:

1. Derek Johnson, another Anglo American also fluent in Spanish, worked for Neighborhood House, a community center whose mission includes meeting essential human needs and facilitating active participation in community life. Neighborhood House has a long and successful history of providing services to the Latino community in West St. Paul and, more recently, to Somali, Hmong, and other immigrant residents as well. Johnson also worked part-time for Jane Addams School.
2. Nan Kari, one of the founders of Jane Addams School (JAS) for Democracy. Although modeled after Jane Addam's Hull House in Chicago, JAS is not a place, but a community. Immigrants of all backgrounds—especially Latino, Hmong, and Somali—come to JAS to learn English and to study for the American Citizenship Test. The school began as a collaboration among the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, the College

of St. Catherine, and WSCO. Kari is also cofounder of the Neighborhood Learning Community.

3. Kari Denissen, who staffed the Neighborhood Learning Community. Housed at WSCO, the organization works mainly with families and youth to develop learning opportunities on the West Side. Nan Kari and Nan Skelton, as well as other staff from the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at the University of Minnesota, formed the organization to create a citizens' learning community on the West Side.

These three organizations—Neighborhood House, Jane Addams School, and the Neighborhood Learning Community—shared WSCO's commitment to the immigrant communities in the area. Hirsh felt she should look for ways to collaborate with them as part of her goal of organizing in the Latino community. Johnson, Kari, Denissen, and Hirsh began to meet weekly. As they talked, an issue and an opportunity around schools quickly presented itself. Johnson and Kari explained that when state legislators recently visited JAS, parents had asked them how budget cuts would affect their children's schools, as well as school services such as busing. They expressed concern because news reporters were saying that the city's school district budget was going to be cut to send more money to suburban schools. At the same time, the St. Paul School District had announced neighborhood meetings all around town to collect public opinion from parents about continuing with "school choice." This is the policy of allowing students to attend any school, not just their neighborhood school.

Two years previously, Nan Kari had been involved with a neighborhood group called Partners for School Change. They had made some movement to engage neighborhood parents of all ethnic backgrounds in a discussion about the education of their children, but that effort had lost steam. Now Kari, Johnson, Denissen, and Hirsh wanted to see if this movement should be resurrected. They each began asking neighborhood parents of all ethnic backgrounds about their concerns regarding schools and education. When the collaborators met on January 31, 2003, they shared what they had found.

- Parents knew that if they sent their children to a different school, they would be provided busing, whereas if they went to their neighborhood school, often they did not receive busing. Therefore, busing seemed an important reason for supporting school choice.
- Parents were concerned not about overall school policies, but rather what their child was going through at the moment, such as being teased on the bus.
- Parents didn't feel comfortable entering the school to talk about their concerns with school personnel.
- Parents did not seem aware of the school programs available to teach their children their native language, such as the Hmong program at Phalen Lake School.
- Parents were concerned that the food their children were offered in school was not culturally appropriate.
- Parents felt there should be more "education assistants" who could translate in classrooms and translate for parents during interactions with teachers and school administrators.

Together, the four collaborators and two college students (one Hmong and one Latino) who volunteered to help, looked for ways to help parents bring their concerns to the District School Choice Forum. The greatest challenge in this type of work, according to Nan Kari, is that our system has "socialized people into giving and receiving services; there is a problem modeling the culture of [how to create change]." Referring to this project as Partners for School Change, the activists' goal was to assist people who wanted to influence school policies. As Kari expressed their philosophy, "the training goal is to help people feel a sense of accomplishment when they get the idea that they can help make change." The guiding principals of their work included the following:

- Everyone's voice is equal.
- This is a community-wide conversation, not a prescription for change.
- Citizens/ parents will identify personal issues and frame them in public terms.

The group devised a plan to hold a pre-forum workshop just before the neighborhood District School Choice Forum on February 27th. Their goals included the following:

1. 35–40 parents will attend the training. (Sign-in sheets were used to ensure ongoing communication after the meeting.)
2. Of those attending, 10 will commit to working on future issues. (Participants who were interested in future training or in working on future school choice issues could sign a commitment sheet.)
3. Participants will agree to voice their concern or question at the District School Choice Forum.

During the next few weeks, each collaborator sought ways to get the word out about the pre-forum workshop. Hirsh connected with the Latino community in a few key ways.

1. She knew the pastor of San Martin Lutheran Church through her previous work while the pastor was a member of the Twin Cities Religion and Labor Network Board. When she had begun her one-on-one interviews through WSCO, she called him. San Martin serves Spanish and English speakers. Hirsh told the pastor about the issue of school choice and he invited her to come and share information about the pre-forum workshop and district forum with his congregants.
2. Hirsch had begun attending moderate- to advanced-level English language classes for Spanish speakers in the neighborhood offered through Chicanos Latinos Unidos En Servicio (CLUES), another West Side service organization. The highly motivated adult students who participate in the classes engage in conversation to learn and practice English. In this way, Hirsch began to get to know people from the Latino community and to build relationships. The teacher, an AmeriCorps volunteer, helped Hirsch to develop a discussion in class on school choice and civic engagement. When it was time to promote the workshop,

Hirsch attended all the Spanish classes at CLUES to talk about the pre-forum workshop and to distribute flyers.

Kattia, one of the women in Hirsch's class, volunteered to talk to people she knew about the forum and workshop. Ana, a Spanish early childhood family education teacher, posted notices in her building. The Jane Addams School members discussed the pre-forum workshop and district forum at their Wednesday evening Spanish circle groups and distributed the pre-forum workshop flyers. In addition, members of JAS talked personally with their Hmong and Somali participants, especially the elders, about the events. Johnson of Neighborhood House said, "I think the key to people attending was. . .personal invitations that connected the meetings to peoples' self-interests. . . . People did seem interested in issues around education."

Forty-five people (including children and trainers) participated in the pre-forum workshop, which began at 6:00 PM. Dinner and childcare were provided. The organizers did not provide transportation to the meeting, but did transport many families back home after the meeting. The training was conducted in three languages, Hmong, Spanish, and Somali. The main purpose of the workshop was for participants to learn and practice the basic public skill of framing a personal concern as a public issue. After dinner, they broke into smaller groups they called "sharing circles" where the agenda included the following items:

1. Parents introduced themselves and shared why they were there to talk about education.
2. The facilitator asked one or two people to share what they believed school choice means. Then, the facilitator shared a short history of school choice in St. Paul.
3. The facilitator asked parents to think about why they chose the current school for their child and what was their biggest concern about the school or their child's education. Depending on time, at least two or three parents in each circle shared their thoughts.

After all responses were recorded on flip charts, the sharing groups merged back into a large group. Using the responses to the question of concerns about schools

or education, the trainers asked whether anyone else shared each concern. For instance, a Latino parent had stated that she did not read English well enough to help her high school student with his social studies homework. She felt bad about this because she knew that helping with homework was a job parents should do. She wished the school had tutoring help available for him. When the trainer asked whether others shared this concern, many said they did. Another parent said she had heard that she should not read in Spanish to her young children because it would hurt their ability to learn English, and she wanted someone else to read to them. The trainers quickly dismissed this misconception. Another concern was that a parent could not navigate the school phone system in English well enough to leave a message on the right voicemail to have his child excused for being tardy or absent. Many others also had encountered this problem. Another parent complained that her lactose-intolerant child was often faced with eating dairy (for example, on pizza) at school or going hungry, both choices hurting his ability to learn in the afternoons. Because Hmong students are more likely to be lactose intolerant than other students, this was a common concern of Hmong parents.

After demonstrating that other people shared these personal concerns, the trainers talked about what to expect at the district forum and how to connect their concerns to the district agenda on school choice. Then they asked who would be willing to speak up at the district forum breakout sessions. Volunteers were assigned to ask a specific question or to make a specific comment on the issues discussed in the training. The trainer wrote the volunteer's name on the flip chart by the concern.

Johnson said the vast majority of people who came to the district forum had attended the workshop. The planners agreed at their evaluation meeting that conducting training in people's first language proved very helpful, but the 90 minutes allotted was not enough to realistically develop the skill level intended. In the Latino group, people could articulate quite well their concerns, but it seemed difficult for them to connect these concerns to the issue of school choice. At the district forum, the people who had participated in the training seemed to be comfortable expressing opinions, asking questions, and generally speaking with school administrators. It seemed important for parents to realize they were part of something larger and that there were other parents who also cared about the issues and were willing to work for change. The

district forum breakout groups were language-specific. Participants in the Spanish-speaking group who had attended the pre-forum workshops seemed to take their assigned roles seriously and spoke up.

Conclusions

One-on-one interviews helped identify people who shared WSCO's commitment to the immigrant community. Along with other neighborhood services, immigrants need help organizing to participate more fully in decisions that affect them, whether the issue is schools or other concerns. Collaborating with organizations that had a successful history of serving the Latino community was effective, even though their specific missions of social service or education or citizenship were different. Working together, the four collaborators helped clarify and define issues around education. Having language interpretation at the pre-forum workshop was critical to full participation. Learning to frame a personal concern as a public issue allowed parents to express themselves effectively at the district forum and build self-confidence for future public work.

In the evaluation of this project, collaborators looked for ways to continue the momentum they had generated. They considered, then rejected, applying for funds from the Organizer Apprenticeship Program (OAP) to pay organizers to carry the work forward. The cumulative effect of this and many other neighborhood efforts were beginning to show results. For instance, the school district announced plans to pilot a culturally specific school lunch program. For the first time, the WSCO Annual Meeting saw competition for board seats and five non-native English speakers were elected to the board. Jane Addams School began an "Organizing Circle" for immigrants, which met every week to allow members to learn and practice community organizing. The West Side history of collaborations, of which the school change project was a part, will continue. Although sustaining this kind of collaboration in a formal way is complicated, the relationships that developed between staff and volunteers will make it easier in the future and have contributed to the creation of a tight-knit community.



Conclusion

Neighborhood/ community organizing is the practice of developing and nurturing civic involvement. Organizers use techniques and skills to bring people together around issues that affect their personal lives and their community. Although these case studies represent quite different neighborhoods, all the organizers successfully faced the challenge of how to get new people involved. The details of each project reflect similar techniques that were key to their success and that can be replicated in other situations as well.

First, because relationships are critical in working with people, when an organizer lacked relationships with particular community members essential to an organization's work, the organizers used their existing networks and collaborated with other organizations, organizers, or community leaders that had relationships with those essential members. When the three north Minneapolis neighborhood associations collaborated with the Southeast Asian Community Center (SEACC) to form NMSEAI, the trust that accompanied that relationship was critical to getting people involved

Second, cultural differences were respected. For example, the neighborhood organizations respected what SEACC brought to the partnership and followed SEACC's lead to involve Hmong community residents. When people with limited English skills were represented in the essential constituents, interpreters were always provided. Organizers had interpreters present for meetings even when they were not certain they would be needed. This cultural sensitivity extended to providing culturally appropriate refreshments, childcare, or transportation when appropriate. Successful organizers did everything they could to make *everyone* feel welcome and comfortable when they participated.

Third, organizers are communicators who rely on a wide array of methods to communicate, including public service announcements, flyers, posters, newspapers, letters, e-mails, and phone calls. They collect names of stakeholders using sign-in sheets, partner networks, GIS mapping software, elected officials' mailing lists, door knocking, and contact lists obtained from related organizations. The LRT project was successful using a volunteer sign-up form to identify participants willing to distribute flyers four

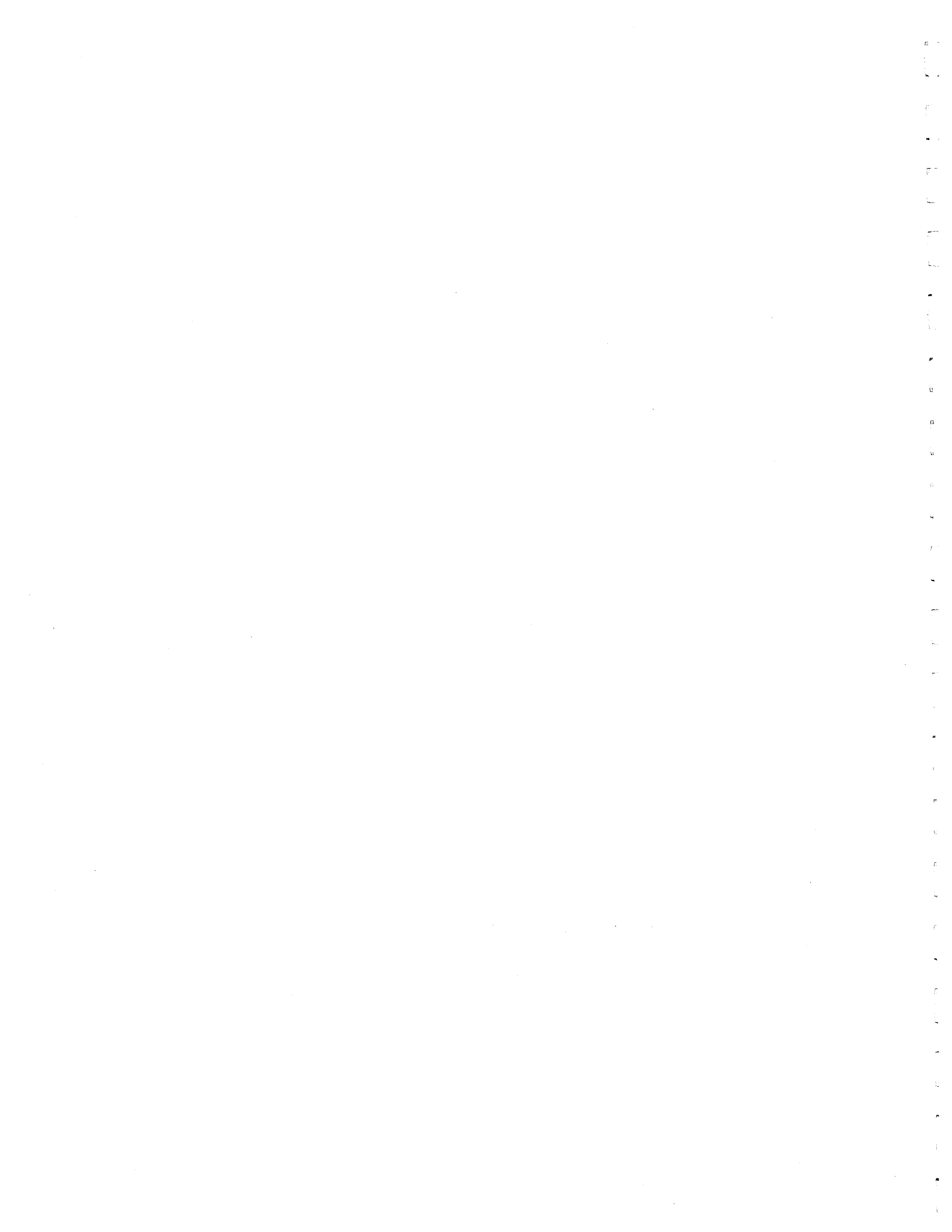
times a year. The organizer in the Job Corps project had twelve “point persons” to assist with communication. This range of communication methods is the very essence of the creative resourcefulness that typifies successful organizers. No single method was ever relied on to bring out people for a public meeting.

Finally, each of these projects was successful at connecting people. Neighbors were brought together and then worked through their differing concerns to arrive at some consensus on issues. Participants were taught how to take many different concerns and find at least one common, specific issue on which they could act together. Then, organizers helped again to connect participants to the appropriate “experts,” such as government staff or elected politicians, for the purpose of influencing decision making. Hmong residents on the North Side were connected to the mayor and to the chief of police; Longfellow residents were connected to city council members and transit authorities on the LRT issue; Como Park neighbors were connected to the mayor of St. Paul, Congressional leaders, and the Secretary of the Interior; and West Side St. Paul residents were connected to St. Paul School District officials.

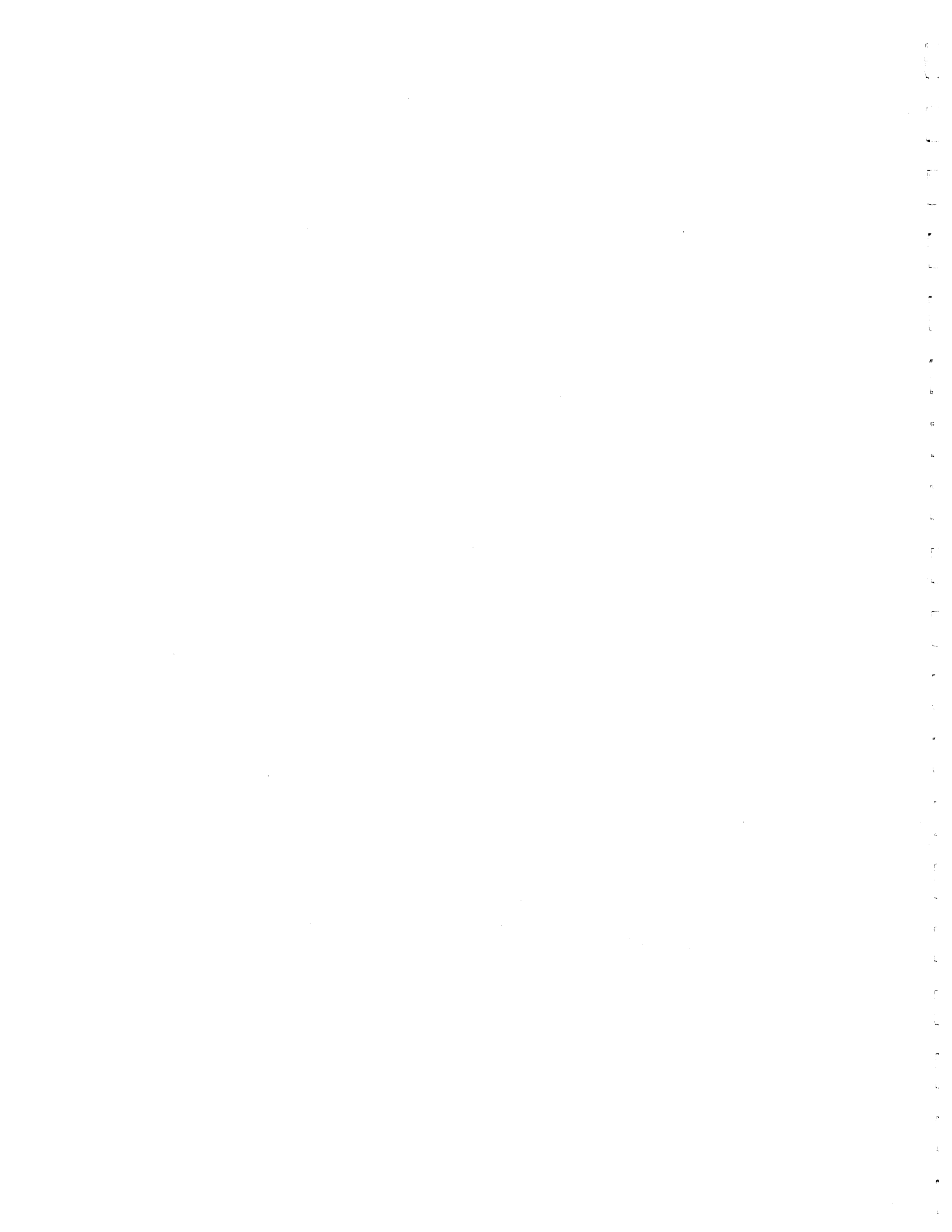
In summary, organizers deliberately teach people the skills that are required for civic engagement. None of these case studies demonstrated this as explicitly as the case of the school choice organizers. Their pre-forum workshop curriculum was designed to teach the concept of how public issues arise from private ones. Other organizers relied entirely on teaching these skills experientially through talking and interacting with public officials—for example, by hosting a city council candidate forum as NMSEAI did. Confidence that their newly acquired skills could make a difference was increased because all of these projects ended with some measure of success for the people involved. The organizer’s craft of empowering others is used to help neighbors learn that their concerns are valid and that together with other neighbors they can create a better neighborhood. These projects are proof that people do want to be involved in their communities. With Jay Clark’s coaching and training, these four organizers worked diligently and gracefully to support community involvement on issues that concerned individuals, the neighborhood, and the broader community. Felton Earls, of the Harvard School of Public Health, described neighborhood work this way:

If you got a crew to clean up the mess, it would last two weeks and go back to where it was. The point of intervention is not to clean up the neighborhood, but to work on its collective efficacy. If you organized a community meeting in a local church or school, it's a chance for people to meet and solve problems. If one of the ideas that comes out of the meeting is for them to clean up the graffiti in the neighborhood, the benefit will be much longer lasting, and will probably impact the development of kids in that area. But it would be based on this community action—not on a work crew coming in from the outside.⁸

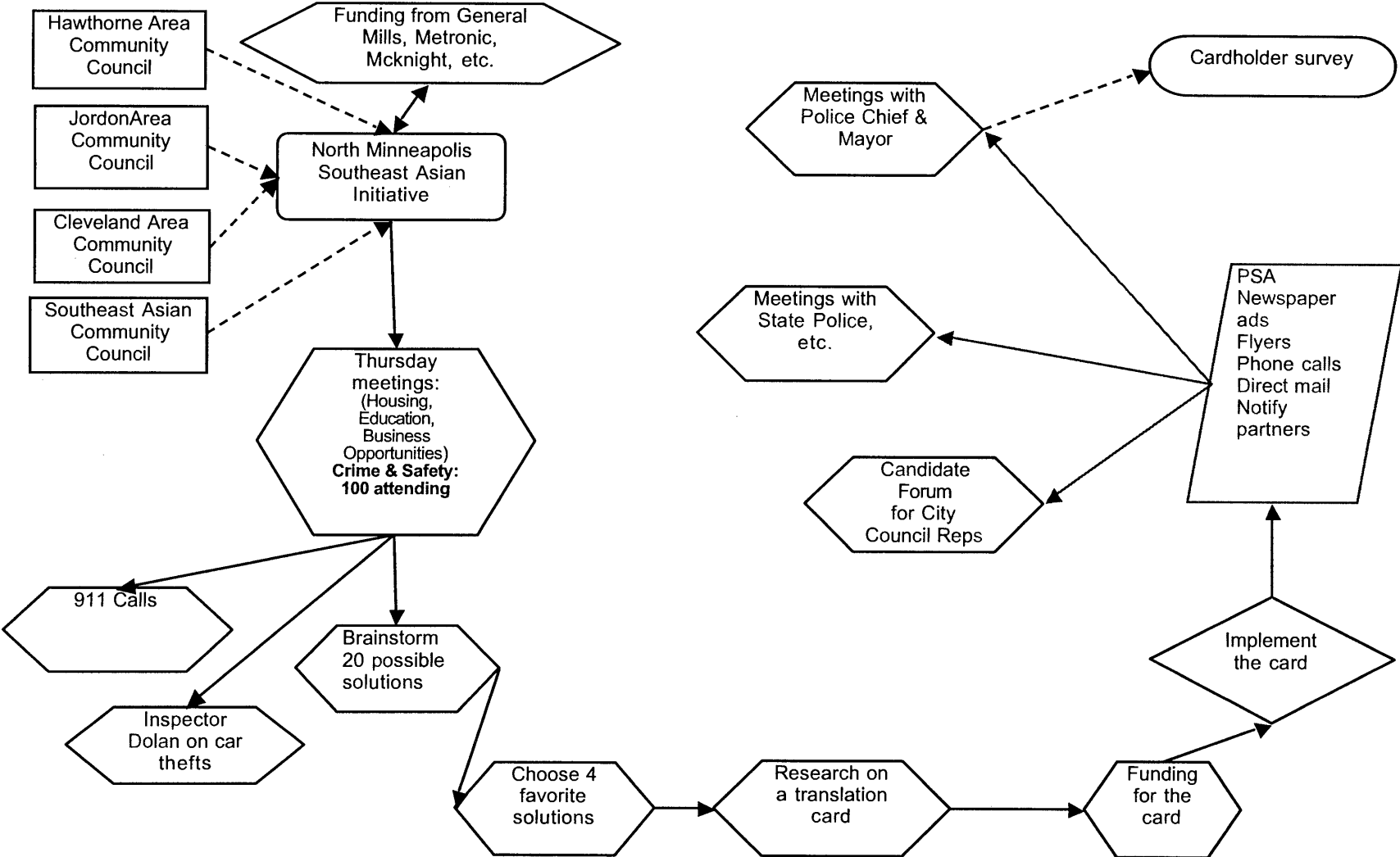
⁸ Quoted in Dan Hurley, "Researchers Site Personal Action as Urban-Crime Antidote," *New York Times*, January 11, 2004, n.p.



Appendix: Project Flow Charts

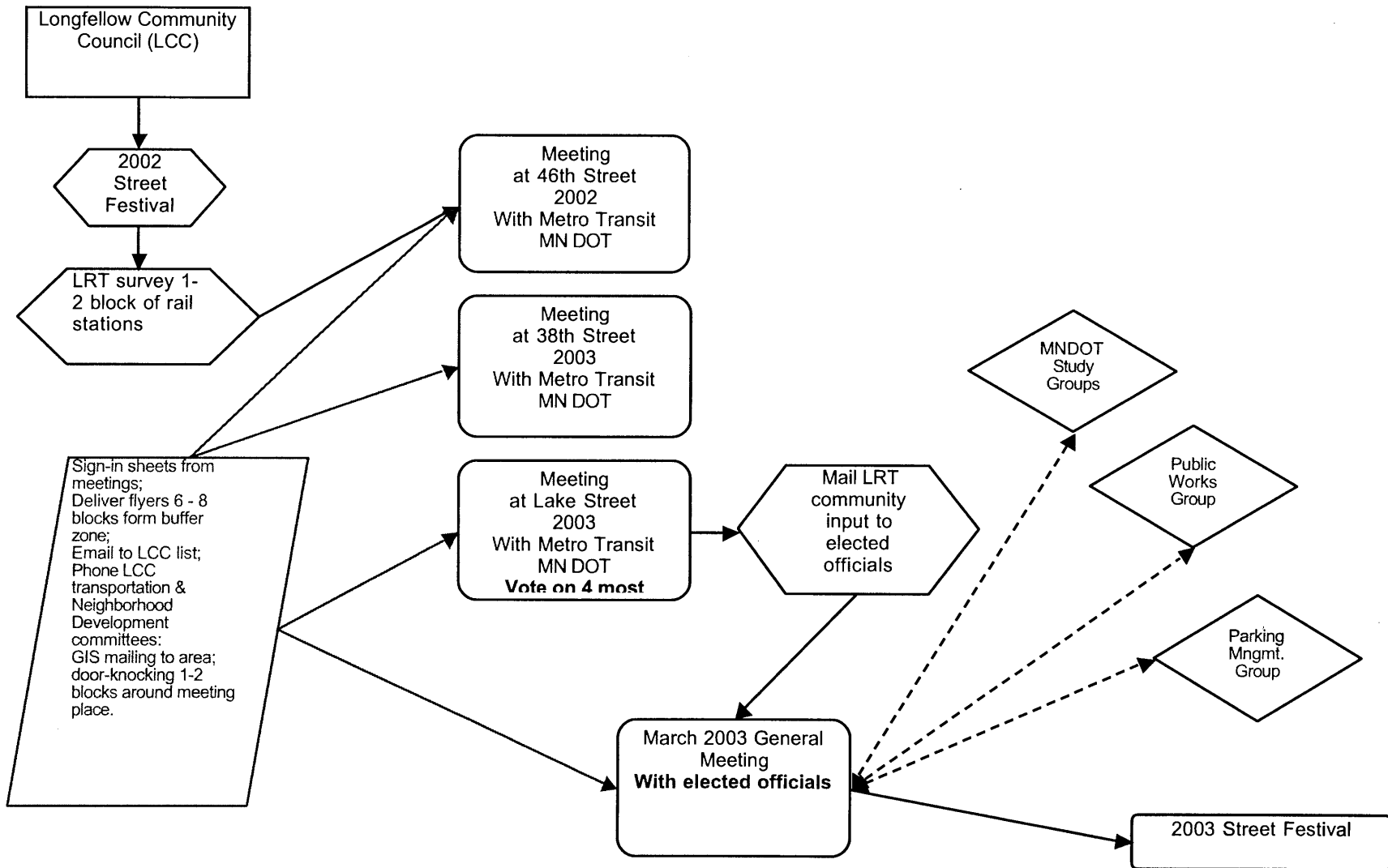


Emergency Interpretation Card

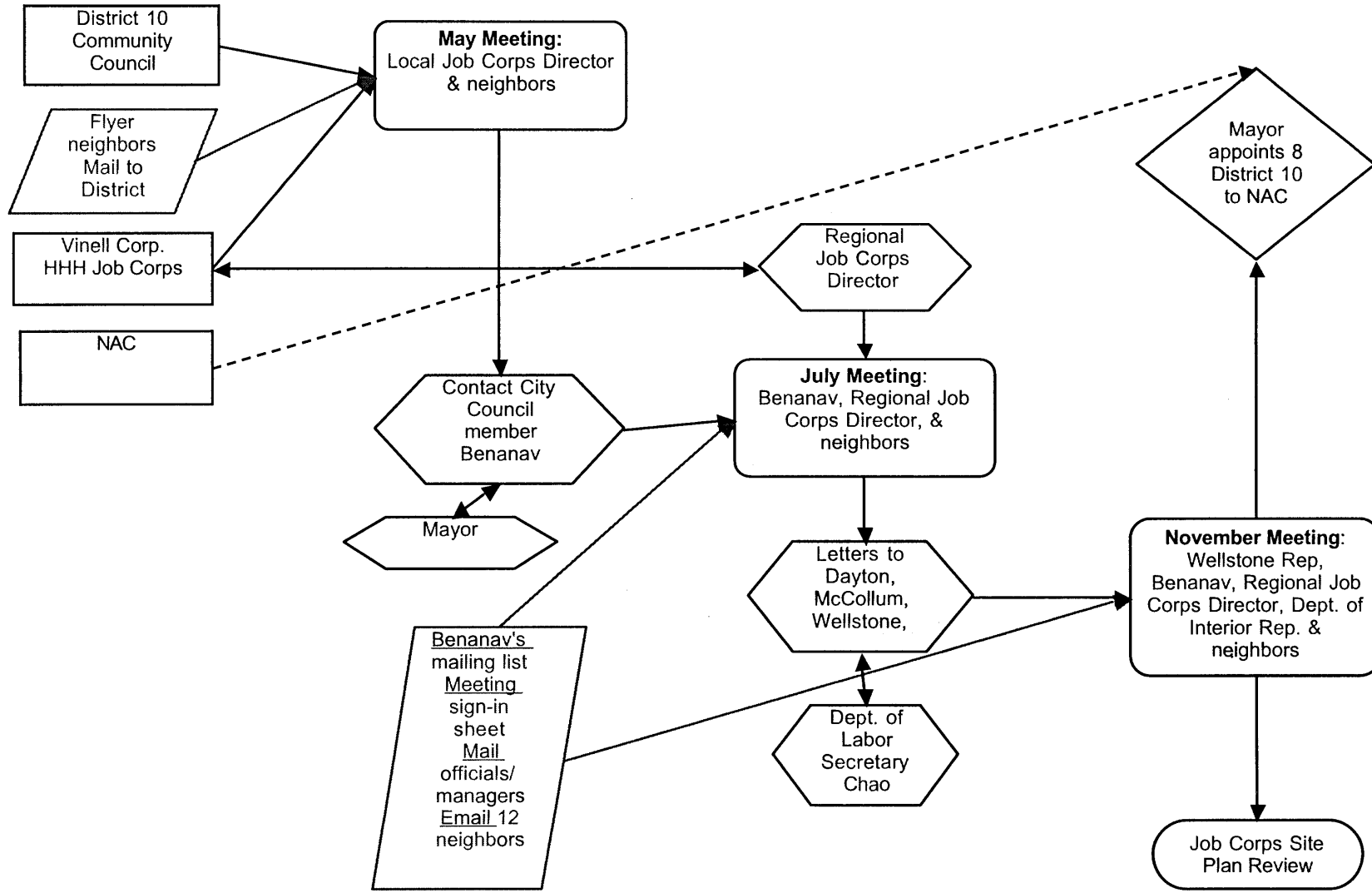


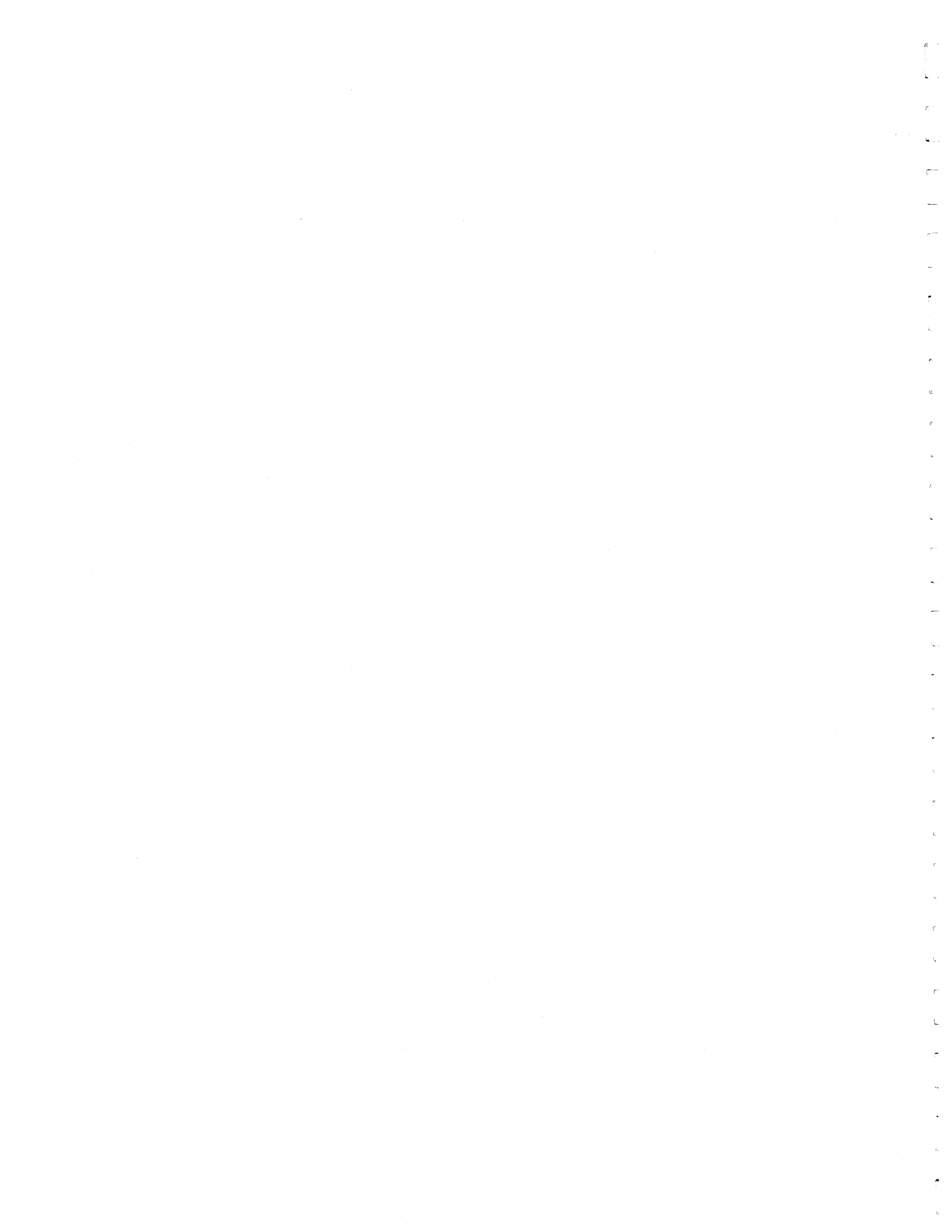


Light-Rail Transit



Job Corps Property Use





School Change

