

**City of Minneapolis**  
**Request for Committee Action**

**To:** Health, Environment & Community Engagement  
**Date:** 7/11/2016  
**From:** Neighborhood & Community Relations  
**Prepared by:** David Rubedor, Director Neighborhood and Community Relations  
**Presented by:** David Rubedor and Bill Smith, Biko and Associates  
**File type:** Receive & File  
**Subcategory:** Staff Direction

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**Subject:**

Neighborhood and Community Relations (NCR) Neighborhood Programming and Support Audit Report

**Description:**

1. Receiving the NCR Neighborhood Programming and Support Audit Report.
2. Directing the Neighborhood and Community Relations staff to work with the Neighborhood and Community Engagement Commission and Neighborhood Revitalization Policy Board to identify options for combining their functions and merging into one board or commission and to report back to the HECE committee by January 31, 2017.
3. Directing the Neighborhood and Community Relations staff to work with the City Coordinator's office and other departments as needed to identify potential funding options for funding neighborhood organizations after the expiration of the Consolidated TIF district, which is legislatively mandated to end in 2020, and report back to the HECE by January 31, 2017.

**Previous Actions:**

The report was presented to the Audit Committee on May 24, 2016. The Audit Committee referred the report to the Health, Environment and Community Engagement Committee.

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**Ward/Neighborhood/Address:**

Not Applicable

**Background/Analysis:**

**Summary of the Evaluation Process**

The evaluation was conducted from Jun 2015 through December 2015 and consisted of four phases. The Executive Summary of the report is provided below.

# Evaluation of Neighborhood Programming and Support

## Executive Summary

### **Phase 1 -- Initial Discovery**

During Phase 1, a Steering Committee was formed comprising two elected officials (City Council Members Cam Gordon and Linea Palmisano)<sup>1</sup>; the NCR director, David Rubedor, NCR Community Engagement Manager, Howard Blin; NCR Neighborhood Support Specialist, Robert Thompson; and Will Tetsell, the City Auditor. The evaluation team worked with the Steering Committee to refine the outreach and investigation methodology and receive insights into various aspects of NRP, CPP, NCEC and other experiences working with neighborhood organizations and other resident groups.

The following investigation activities were conducted under Phase 1 of the evaluation:

1. A review and analysis of previously prepared plans and reports to learn as much as possible about the entities to be evaluated, how they operate as single entities and in concert.
2. An interview with NCR Department director, David Rubedor to gather first-hand information on the department, its programs and services and challenges.
3. Interviews with each of the 13 City Council members.
4. A review and analysis of evaluation data from the 2014 and 2015 Community Connections
5. Conferences.
6. A review and analysis of annual reports submitted to NCR from the neighborhood organizations for 2012, 2013, and 2014.

### **Phase 2 -- Immediate Outreach and Investigation**

The immediate outreach and investigation phase included an NCR staff focus group meeting and an NCEC commissioner focus group meeting.

### **Phase 3 -- Preliminary Online Survey**

Following completion of Phase 2, the evaluation team designed a preliminary online survey that was administered to a stratified sample of neighborhood organization staff and board members. Thirty-three organizations (41 percent of the 80 neighborhood organizations) were included in the stratified sample.

### **Phase 4 -- Final Investigation**

Analysis of input received during Phases 1, 2, and 3 provided answers to the evaluation team's early questions and raised an additional set of questions that was addressed in Phase 4, which included:

1. Two follow-up focus group meetings with neighborhood organizations (staff, board members and volunteers) who were not included in the Phase 3 stratified sample;
2. A follow-up online survey that was administered to neighborhood organizations (again, both staff and board members) who were not included in the Phase 3 stratified sample;
3. A follow-up online survey that was administered to NCEC members to follow up on unanswered concerns from the Phase 2 NCEC focus group meeting; and
4. A final meeting with the Steering Committee was held to review and discuss the programmatic implications of findings and recommendations.

### **Major observations, recommendations and responses**

The following observations and recommendations are themed into five categories:

1. Meeting overall expectations.
2. Providing assistance to neighborhood groups.
3. Facilitating the NCEC.
4. Communicating with City Council.
5. NCR Department Staff and NCEC Organization.

#### **1. Meeting overall expectations**

**Observations:**

The NCR Department has met all the expectations outlined in Framework for the Future. Generally, the expectations, listed below, have been successfully met; some more successfully than others; some less so. The department has successfully:

- Developed and administered a new department to:
  - oversee the continuation of NRP and the new engagement program;
  - administer new grant funds; and
  - advise the Mayor, City Council, and City departments on community issues and needs related to community participation and the City's community participation system.
- Administered the post-2009 NRP. NCR staff have worked with neighborhood organizations providing support for their continued NRP Phase 1 and Phase 2 efforts at planning, priority setting and implementation and execution.
- Administered the new "engagement program," CPP. NCR staff have, again, worked with neighborhood organizations to ensure that they are able to:
  - understand their responsibilities as recipients of administrative support, investment, and innovation funds;
  - run efficient organizations that meet fiscal and legal requirements for free-standing, non-profits;
  - conduct inclusionary outreach programs that are inviting to all socio-economic and demographic groups comprising their neighborhoods, often designing outreach methods to specifically reach residents who have historically not been involved in resident-oriented programs and organizations;
  - integrate neighborhood-level work with the work of the City; and
  - provide neighborhood organizations with access to Neighborhood Investment and Community
- Provided support to City departments in the area of resident involvement and outreach.
- Developed a resident-controlled advisory board that would be staffed by the department.

**Recommendations:**

The neighborhood organizations expressed belief that advocacy should be one of NCR's expectations. As an advocate for the neighborhoods, NCR should be "out front," ensuring that neighborhoods are prepared for the future, and thought needs to be given about the future of neighborhood support. In a mere four years the landscape for Minneapolis neighborhoods will change when funding comes to an end for the current CPP.

- NCR should be working directly with the NCEC and neighborhood organizations to develop and evaluate alternative survival strategies that can ensure the long-term existence of the neighborhood organizations and resident engagement activities in the City.
- It was learned that some of the neighborhood organizations are more financially secure than others.
- Many of the more secure organizations operate collaboratively with others. An element of future strategies is for neighborhood organizations to collaborate with one another.
- Some organizations are already collaborating without assistance from NCR or NCEC. Other
- Organizations will need assistance, and the department should implement trainings and processes that better enable organizations to collaborate.
- Neighborhoods call for NCR to advocate for the need for neighborhood funding; provide promotion and visibility opportunities; and promote neighborhood events through City social media outlets.
- It may be time to reassess ranges of assistance and reprioritize the types of assistance, as some neighborhoods may need more funding and other forms of support than others.

**NCR Response:**

The Department agrees with the evaluator's findings and recommendations. The Department further recognizes that although the Framework for the Future has been successfully implemented, it is now a dated document. The Department is working to create a new vision for neighborhoods, including better defining their role and relationship with the City, expanding engagement work and exploring funding options for the next decade. The Department is establishing an internal work group to guide this discussion and is providing staff support to the NCEC's Neighborhoods 2020 committee.

In addition, NCR staff are reaching out to neighborhood associations to organize sector conversations with neighborhood leaders on the future role of neighborhood organizations. The dialogues will be co-facilitated by neighborhood leaders and NCR staff who will participate in a facilitation training and planning retreat to prepare for the community dialogues.

NCR staff are currently compiling financial and demographic data for neighborhood organizations to provide more opportunities for peer review and benchmarking, and to create additional and develop new best practices guides in addition to those already provided by the Department.

**2. Providing assistance to neighborhood groups:**

**Observations:**

A primary focus of NCR has been assisting neighborhoods with administrative issues so that they can meet the legal requirements of non-profit organizations and run efficiently with transparency and inclusiveness. The assistance the department provides to the organizations is vital, and a majority of organizations expressed appreciation for the department's efforts. At the same time, the evaluation team found that some of neighborhood organizations felt NCR should be doing more to advocate on their behalf and that the timeliness and quality of the assistance received from NCR could be improved. Evaluation results showed that many neighborhoods are uncertain about how NCR as a department (and by extension, its staff) functions and operates.

- According to the annual reports that were reviewed for 2012 through 2014, some of the neighborhood organizations need an advocate who will champion their cases and support them in their needs. According to the neighborhood organizations, not enough is being done by NCR to advocate for additional funding.
- Analysis of the annual reports showed that 14 percent of the neighborhood organizations in 2013 and 9 percent of the organizations in 2014 ranked NCR's assistance as poor. The organizations that ranked NCR's assistance as poor cited the following issues and concerns. Some commented that NCR had not resolved these issues and concerns, despite repeated requests in the annual reports for:
  - reduced turn-around time contract approvals and reimbursements and a streamlined funding approval process;
  - clearer guidance and instructions on the use of funds and consistent guidelines for reporting expenditure and use of funding;
  - research on alternative insurance policies for medical, dental, and retirement;
  - more support in the area of collaboration with other organizations;
  - more City-wide workshops and training opportunities;
  - more translation and interpreter services;
  - more assistance in the area of communications, branding, marketing and use of social media; and
  - more training specifically in the area of engaging under-represented populations.

**Recommendations:**

Neighborhoods need assistance in areas other than administration, finances, governance, and legal matters. They also need technical assistance addressing issues in the areas of: a) alternatives development, evaluation and analysis; b) accessing public agencies (including City departments) and private entities to identify allies and partners who can help resolve their issues; and c) strategy development that incorporates their strongest asset (organized people). The following table, which is explained in detail on pages 10 through 15 of this report, identifies 11 areas where the neighborhood organizations feel NCR could improve the assistance and services it provides. The table reports the frequency (as percentages) of the neighborhoods' suggested improvements for 2012, 2013, and 2014.

**Improvements suggested in annual reports between 2012 and 2014**

Improvements Suggested in Annual Reports	Frequency of Suggestions		
	2012	2013	2014
Improve timing for contracting and reimbursements. Improve processes for reporting by streamlining reports. Improve practice by providing better insurance coverage for neighborhood organization employees.	28%	18%	18%
Facilitate robust sharing ideas/working together across neighborhoods. Facilitate inter-neighborhood collaboration and interaction.	16%	3%	0
Enhance translator/interpreter services; e.g., simultaneous translation; to engage with East African, Hmong, and others communities.	14%	11%	7%
Improve communications and advocacy services and assistance; advocate/promote neighborhoods and neighborhood funding; provide promotion, visibility, and marketing opportunities; promote events through social media outlets; advocate for neighborhood groups at City Hall; defend and promote the neighborhoods.	8%	11%	7%

Improve neighborhoods' access to assigned specialists.	12%	0	0
Increase neighborhood funding.	12%	7%	5%
Hold informational meetings for residents, neighborhood organizations regarding the CPP program; services NCR offers and how to access; provide better guidance on what is expected for drafting the Neighborhood Priority Plan; regarding clarifying ADA Policy in certain sections; more meetings that provide an opportunity to discuss issues with NCR representatives; offer training modules on how to make an organizational budget, run a board meeting, and deal with conflict) and offer board training	8%	3%	2%
Publish a list of services that the NCR Department offers the neighborhood organizations.	0	7%	9%
Provide more help with outreach to specific interest groups; e.g., under-engaged populations, renters and non-English speakers.	8%	7%	9%
Adjust expectations for organizations with unpaid staff (e.g., keep requirements simple for neighborhoods that receive the lowest allocations; some may not have full- or part-time staff)	2%	3%	2%
Build stronger financial capabilities within NCR, as improvements are needed in the areas of contracting, group grant writing, accounting, and understanding costs associated with healthcare services)	0	3%	0

**NCR Response:**

Overall, the frequency of neighborhood suggestions for improvements included in the report is very low and has been decreasing over time. The report does provide useful information for areas in which the Department could strengthen its support for neighborhood organizations. The Department will move forward with reviewing these suggestions.

The Department considers a standard of about 10 percent of neighborhoods rating our work as “poor” to be acceptable. The Department’s own evaluation of the same annual reports indicate that neighborhoods, on average, rate the Department at 4 (above average) on a scale of 1 - 5 (low - high). Both of these ratings are within acceptable Department operating standards. The Department plays both an advocacy as well as an enforcement role with neighborhood organizations. The Department is continually engaged in contract or guideline compliance issues, conflict issues, financial issues, etc. These situations are often challenging and can lead to a negative response. This is a critical aspect of the Department’s work and inherent in ensuring that neighborhoods function well, are accountable and transparent, and provide assurances that all residents are welcome and can participate.

**Regarding some of the specific concerns:**

- Timeliness of contracting and reimbursements is a frequent issue with neighborhoods. The City’s contracting and reimbursement system includes important checks and balances that ensure legal and appropriate use of public funds. The Department has worked closely with the Finance Department to expedite the reimbursement process and lessen potential cash flow issues with neighborhood associations. The time required to process neighborhood reimbursement requests has decreased and is now often less than 10 days. Contracting is a longer process and generally takes 4 – 6 weeks. While much of the contracting process is out of the Department’s control, the Department could improve its communication of these timing issues to neighborhood organizations.
- The Department is examining the return on investment of the City’s funding of neighborhood organizations. This will review the value of the programs offered by neighborhood organizations, including the placemaking and community building activities, crime and safety initiatives, engagement work, housing and other activities neighborhoods provide. Included in this examination will be the total resources needed for neighborhoods to accomplish City goals. The Department is expanding performance measures which will result in a tool which can be used to evaluate the impact and success of neighborhoods.
- The Department will provide better clarity on the role of the Department, the NCEC and Neighborhoods to advocate for neighborhood funding.
- The Department uses feedback from the annual reports to determine the content of the Learning Labs provided at the annual Community Connections Conference. The ability to further provide neighborhood organizations support beyond administrative, governance and financial guidance is a capacity question and one that will likely be addressed in the aforementioned 2020 work.

**3. Facilitating the NCEC**

**Observations:**

The resident-controlled advisory committee that was developed to meet expectations in the Framework for the Future has evolved to become the NCEC. This external evaluation found that the NCEC is not functioning as effectively as it should, as evidenced by the following:

- NCEC Commissioners themselves are not always certain of the Commission's role. For example, when asked about opportunities for NCEC Commissioners to become more directly involved with the neighborhood organizations they represent, there was confusion. Some Commissioners indicated that direct involvement is an expectation, and others felt as though direct involvement with neighborhood organizations was never understood to be one of the Commission's roles.
- Overall, most NCEC Commissioners have had little to no contact with neighborhood organizations within their districts and are, therefore, not in a position where they can genuinely advocate for them, review their proposals or make judgments about their funding requests.
- The Commissioners are not satisfied with their role. When asked, 78 percent of the Commissioners stated they were not satisfied.
- According to the NCEC Online survey, 16 percent of the Commissioners feel that NCR has diminished their capacity as advisors, does not fully engage them in discussions and the formulation of policies, and, instead, regards them as "rubber stamps."
- At least two NCEC Commissioners attending the NCEC focus group meeting expressed concern that
- City Council has interfered and prevented them from becoming fully involved.
- When representatives of the neighborhood organizations attending a focus group meeting were asked if they were fully aware of the NCEC Commission's role, all but one (92 percent) responded that they weren't. One person in attendance at the focus group meeting went so far as to suggest that the Commission is expendable.
- Five of the 13 City Council members were highly critical of NCEC and commented that the NCEC had not made significant positive contributions to improve resident engagement, nor have they been a positive addition to serving or advocating for the neighborhoods.

#### **Recommendations:**

The resident-controlled advisory board that was identified in the Framework for the Future evolved into the NCEC, and while the NCEC is a resident-controlled body, staff support is provided by the NCR Department. According to comments received during the NCEC focus group meeting and responses to survey questions, some Commissioners feel the NCR Department actually controls the NCEC's agenda, topics that are discussed at NCEC meetings, and the NCEC's activities. When asked about their vision for the NCEC and its role in the City's resident engagement support programs and services, the Commissioners provided examples of what they would like the NCEC to become. Their responses to the evaluators' questions indicated that they would like to see the Commission become more involved with the neighborhood organizations in order to better advocate on the neighborhoods' behalf.

- NCR should work directly with the Commissioners in workshop sessions to revisit, reaffirm, or revise
- The NCEC mission and vision. While, as a resident-controlled body, the Commissioners could do this on their own, NCR's provision of staff assistance is a positive. Without staff assistance, the Commission would be at a loss, as the Commissioners are not paid for their work on the Commission.
- Commissioners should feel an obligation to develop relationships with organizations in their districts so that they can become versed about their issues and become effective advocates.
- The status and importance of sitting on the NCEC should be elevated. NCR could facilitate this
- Transformation by ensuring that the Commissioners are more in charge of the Commission's agenda and activities.
- Commissioners should proactively discuss the future of resident engagement and the City's future support services and programs in view of the end of current CPP funding mechanisms. Commissioners should develop a strategy for informing and involving neighborhood organizations in these discussions. In its role as staff support for the Commission, NCR should assist NCEC in its deliberations about the future of the neighborhood organizations and provide assistance to the Commissioners as they engage the organizations they represent.

#### **NCR Response:**

The Department is in agreement with the recommendations in the Evaluation which call for strengthening of the role of the NCEC.

Presently, the work associated with neighborhood organizations is managed by two boards/commissions, the NRP Policy Board and the NCEC. The NRP Policy Board oversees the administration of NRP Phase I and II and all NRP State statutory requirements. The NCEC oversees the Community Participation Program, or NRP Phase III as defined by City Ordinance. Having two boards/commissions splitting these responsibilities for neighborhood organizations is confusing to both neighborhoods and board/commission members. The Department is examining options to restructure the NCEC to support all aspects of the NRP ordinance, including State statutory requirements.

Some of the recommended measures have already been initiated in the past year.

- In 2015, the NCEC has developed its first strategic plan which establishes the vision, mission and priorities for the work of the Commission. Given that the Evaluation included interviewing some former NCEC commissioners, their responses were not reflective of current action.
- The NCEC has established a Neighborhoods 2020 Committee to study and make recommendations on future changes to neighborhood programs.
- The NCEC is completing work on an enhanced orientation program for newly appointed commissioners
- With the objective of providing a clearer understanding of the work of the Commission.
- The NCEC has embarked on a regular series of community forums, to be held on a quarterly basis to all residents to directly address the Commission on current topics.

#### **4. Communicating with City Council**

##### **Observations:**

Interviews with City Council members indicate that NCR has not been as effective as it should be at keeping the City Council informed about a number of ongoing issues. Open communication is particularly critical with the current City Council as so many City Council members are new to city government.

##### **Recommendations:**

Following is a list of concerns about which City Council should be regularly informed about:

- NCR's role as the designated institution within city government that ensures the efficiency and effectiveness of grassroots organizations.
- Measurements of NCR's work (number of meetings, number of issues resolved, etc.).
- The neighborhoods' contributions to the City and the challenges they face.
- Findings from annual reports, which should be organized and presented to City Council on an annual basis.

Where appropriate, NCR should work with NCEC Commissioners to provide them with opportunities to formally address and present information to the City Council.

##### **NCR Response:**

The Department is in agreement with the recommendations in the evaluation. The Department will improve communications with the City Council in the following ways:

- Expand and publicize performance metrics to better measure and articulate the value of neighborhood work (see response #2).
- Restructure our annual neighborhood report, based on information gathered through the annual
- Reports submitted by neighborhoods and make that available to the City Council and the public.
- Provide an annual report to the City Council and the public and the Blueprint for Equitable
- Engagement.

A future goal of NCR staff would be to facilitate more meetings between Council Members and neighborhood organizations in their wards, such as the Ward 11 and Ward 13 neighborhood organization summits. However, with current demands on the Department's neighborhood staff, there is not sufficient capacity.

## 5. NCR department staff and NCEC organization

### Observations:

Outreach to NCR staff, NCEC Commissioners, and the neighborhood organizations revealed organizational issues that deserve consideration.

- With only five outreach staff, where each staff person is responsible for 16 to 17 neighborhood organizations, just keeping up with the neighborhoods' requests for administrative assistance is a daunting task. The ability of staff to address the neighborhood organizations' requests for expanded services (e.g., issue resolution, collaboration with other organizations, outreach to under-represented populations, etc.) is low.
- The current staffing level limits the efforts of managers and line staff to address concerns identified by residents.
- NCR Staff have encountered difficulties working with other departments in the City that need expertise in conducting outreach to resident groups.
- Staff feels that communication ties with City Council members are not always effective.
- NCEC Commissioners identified organizational issues such as:
  - unstaggered, two-year terms for Commissioners, which does not support opportunities for institutional learning on the commission,
  - the commissions lack of access to decision-makers,
  - the commission's lack of control of its agenda,
  - the lack of an NCEC mission,
  - the lack of an NCEC vision, and

### Recommendations:

Recommendations addressing the fifth category of issues have largely been addressed in the discussion on categories 2 and 3. Three additional recommendations are offered, however.

- The number of NCR outreach staff workers is too small to for each staff to meet the operational needs of the complement of organizations under their umbrella. The number of outreach staff should be increased to at least 10.
- Ensure that the NCEC Commissioners continue to be elected/selected from neighborhoods within
- Specific NCEC districts.
- Ensure that NCEC Commissioners are engaged with the neighborhood organizations and that they understand that they have two responsibilities:
  - advocacy for the neighborhoods within their districts
  - advocacy for all neighborhoods in the City.
- Develop an organization flow chart that can be used to describe organizational relationships among the many entities that are concerned with resident outreach. The organization chart should be a graphical representation of relationships between an organization's departments, functions and people. It can also indicate the flow of data, responsibility and reporting from bottom-up or top- down. The chart should
  - Accompany and support textual descriptions of how NCR functions and operates.
  - Describe NCR as a department and how it is responsible to and communicates with the City Council; the Council's Health, Environment and Community Engagement Committee; and the Mayor's office.
  - Identify its leadership, decision-making processes and structure, staff (managers, specialists, and clerical, etc.), and work processes and systems. It should demonstrate processes by which neighborhood organizations can influence outcomes within the department.

- Describe NCR's relationship to the NCEC and outline how the two entities communicate.
- Describe NCEC and its relationship to the City Council; the Council's Health, Environment and Community Engagement Committee; and the Mayor's office
- The organizational flow charts described above should be an element of brochures and pamphlets that are produced and distributed by NCR.

### **NCR Response**

The Department itself is currently re-aligning staff, bringing the cultural/under-engaged staff support in alignment with the neighborhood support staff. Previously organized as two teams with different managers, the two teams are being merged into one with only one manager. The purpose of this change is to strengthen the engagement support with cultural communities, neighborhoods and City Departments. As this re-alignment is completed, a flow chart, as recommended, can then be developed to show the structure and relationships of the Department, staff, NCEC, and HECE. Once this re-alignment is complete, a flow chart, as suggested by the evaluators, can be developed and made available to the neighborhoods.

Some of the recommendations included the Evaluation concerning the NCEC are addressed in previous sections. Improvements to the NCEC operations are underway.

### **Additional Actions taken since evaluation was completed**

1. Also in response to the Evaluation, the Department is re-assigning neighborhood staff to help support some of the recommendations. The new assignments will have our Neighborhood Support Specialists working in regions of the City. Instead of having assignments across the City, each Neighborhood Support Specialist will have groups of contiguous neighborhoods to support. The new assignments will support these outcomes:
  - ***Supporting collaborations between neighborhoods.*** A common theme in the Evaluation was that neighborhoods wanted neighborhood specialists to work with groups of adjoining neighborhoods. By assigning staff regionally, adjoining neighborhoods will share the same NCR staff person, thus helping the Department provide better communication and connections between neighborhoods.
  - ***Supporting alignment between neighborhood support staff regional boundaries used by other City departments.*** The Evaluation indicated that many neighborhood organizations want the Department to better support connections with City departments. Many City departments, such as Police precincts and CPED, organize their work by sectors. By assigning Neighborhood Support Specialist regionally will help the Department align neighborhood work with City departments.
  - ***Increasing collaboration between our neighborhood support staff and our Access and Outreach staff.*** The new alignment of neighborhood support staff will help support relationships between neighborhood organization and the Department's cultural outreach staff who are skilled in reaching cultural communities.
2. The Department will be requesting one additional FTE to support the enhanced level of service identified in the Evaluation.

### **Financial Review:**

**No financial impact.**

### **Attachments:**

1. NCR Neighborhood Programming and Support Audit Report