

## **NRP's Impact on Resident Participation and Inclusiveness**

The Neighborhood Revitalization Program has been the subject of a number of evaluations since it began in 1990 (see the NRP Chronology for a listing of these evaluations). A number of these evaluations measured the NRP's impact on resident participation and inclusiveness.

### Center for Urban and Regional Affairs

In 1994, the University of Minnesota's Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) published a report on the impact of the NRP on neighborhood organizations. The report concluded that:

- NRP has boosted participation in neighborhood groups and led to an increase in more competitive board elections.
- The time demands of NRP exacerbate the bias in citizen participation toward the middle class.

### Center for Urban Policy Research

In 1995, the Rutgers University Center for Urban Policy Research issued its final evaluation of the program. Among its findings:

- The one clear-cut result of the NRP is the greater involvement of citizens in planning for their neighborhoods and a consequent heightening of community capacity and neighborhood identity.
- In some neighborhoods, middle-income, mainly white, homeowners dominated the process.
- Some neighborhoods found their neighborhood organizations to be vulnerable to actions that undermined their goal of broadly representing the neighborhood. This included the actions of individuals with irritating personalities or small, determined groups intent on taking control of the organization.

### TEAMWORKS

In 2000, TEAMWORKS presented its evaluation of the first ten years (1990–1999) of the Neighborhood Revitalization Program. This evaluation included a survey of 1,100 Minneapolis households. Among the evaluation's findings:

- According to the survey, sixty-six percent of adults in Minneapolis report they have heard of NRP. Among those who had heard of NRP, 43 percent said it was good for

their neighborhood, while only 3 percent said it had a bad effect, and 22 percent said the program had no effect. Another one-third of this group had no opinion.

- Those rating NRP positively tend to be much more satisfied with their own neighborhoods; they see more evidence of progress; and they have more faith in the ability of government and residents to improve neighborhood conditions. Additionally, those who say NRP has helped their neighborhoods tend to be somewhat more interested and active in community and neighborhood affairs.
- NRP has a significant positive impact on residents' ratings of how many conditions (e.g., providing parks and recreation) are getting better in their neighborhoods.
- Spending NRP money on planning and on communication activities in particular seems to be useful in encouraging citizen participation.

### Kennedy School of Government

In 2005, two researchers from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University published their review of NRP for the International Workshop on Resources, Citizen Engagement and Democratic Local Governance (ReCitE). In that review, they found:

- Participation from particular groups such as minorities, renters, absentee property owners, seniors and young people is commonly low. This biased participation results not from the deliberate efforts of some, but rather from other factors such as the lack of resources, low interest and cultural barriers.
- The design of the NRP ensures the long-term success of public involvement by institutionalizing the decision-making role of neighborhoods for that involvement.
- Participation in neighborhood meetings increased by 280% between 1994 and 1999.
- Participation patterns in the NRP can be explained by four mutually reinforcing considerations:
  - (1) the needs addressed by the NRP (the NRP addresses needs and interests that are more deeply felt by homeowners and other long-term residents than others);
  - (2) the demands of participation (participation in NRP imposes great demands upon individuals);
  - (3) the “insider” culture that can develop among long-term activists; and
  - (4) background distribution of resources that facilitate resident participation (resources such as wealth, education, status and time make it more difficult for those who are less well off to participate in all kinds of political activity compared to those who are better off).

- Despite biases in participation, NRP has contributed to the development of substantial capacities for planning, development, project implementation and collective action at the neighborhood level.
- Spending on planning and communication is particularly important to attract citizen participation. Neighborhood organizations with less staff tend to neglect outreach.

### Resident Surveys

In addition to the NRP reports and evaluations prepared over the years, the City has conducted a number of resident surveys. Of the three citywide surveys done in recent years (2001, 2003 and 2005), only the 2001 survey included questions explicitly about the NRP. That survey found:

- 59% of respondents were familiar with the NRP.
- White citizens were more likely to be familiar with the NRP (63%) than were people of color (39%).
- Both age and income are positively correlated to NRP familiarity (older more affluent subgroups were more likely to be familiar).
- Females (59%) are more likely than males (51%) to be familiar with the program.
- Citizens who rated the City favorably are more likely to be familiar with the NRP than those who rate the City unfavorably. The same held true for the rating of one's neighborhood.
- Citizens that anticipate staying in the City were more likely to be familiar with the NRP than those who anticipated leaving the City in the next five years.
- Citywide, 59% of those familiar with the NRP reported that the program had a positive or very positive impact on their neighborhood; 22% reported that the program had no impact; and 6% reported that the program had a negative or very negative impact. The perceived impact of the NRP varied widely across the City's communities.
- 65% of those familiar with the NRP agreed or strongly agreed that because of the NRP, City residents have more influence on how important issues are addressed, public services delivered and public funds used; 22% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

The 2005 survey did include a series of questions on community engagement. The responses to these questions showed that:

- Approximately 70% of respondents would be “somewhat” or “very likely” to attend a community meeting, contact their elected official, contact City staff or contact their neighborhood group. While fewer respondents reported that they would be at least “somewhat likely” to work with a group not affiliated with the City (54%) or join a City advisory group (38%), more than one-third of respondents reported a likelihood of participating in these activities to influence decisions on an issue of their concern.
- Of the respondents who answered “somewhat” or “very” unlikely to three or more of the scenarios in the previous question, 7% were unable to highlight their reasons. Of the remaining respondents, 43% reported having “no time” to participate, 13% mentioned “no interest,” 12% said that their participation “would not change the results,” and 11% that they were “not aware of options” or “did not know how” to participate.