

Whittier Alliance Community Participation Program 2011 Annual Report

Intended audience: Your Community Participation Program annual report is primarily intended to inform the NCR Department, the Neighborhood and Community Engagement Commission (NCEC) and the public about your Community Participation Program activities. You may also want to use your annual report to NCR as a way to inform others about your work, including funders, other neighborhood organizations, City departments and the City Council. If your organization produces a separate report for your annual meeting, you may also want to include it as supplemental material.

Contents: At a minimum, your annual report should address the following:

1. Accomplishments

What were your organization's major accomplishments in 2011? How were individuals in your community directly impacted by your work?

The major focus for the Whittier Alliance and neighborhood in 2011 was the development of the Strategic Plan. Initiated in 2010 at a Board retreat, the plan moved into the community input and discussion stage in early 2011. A survey monkey was developed and 159 responses were completed on line. Additionally, eleven focus groups of 8-15 people each included renters, home owners, businesses, intuitions, religious and service organizations and rental property owners. The survey was translated into Spanish and Somali and a focus group with Spanish and Somali oral translators provided input from our immigrant population. The community engagement data was summarized and a draft of the Plan was presented at the 2011 Annual Meeting. Additional input from the presentation helped shape the 2012-17 Whittier Strategic Plan, which was adopted by the Board in December of 2011. The plan focuses on six areas: Engaging Stakeholders; Promoting Historic Preservation; Strengthening the Nicollet Commercial Corridor; Becoming a Model of Neighborhood Environmental Sustainability; Improving Housing Quality and Choice, and Ensuring Organizational Sustainability.

From stacks of ice to walls of stone, the conversion of the former Cedar Lake Ice House to Vertical Endeavors urban climbing facility was a clever and appropriate adaptive reuse of a unique property. The facility has drawn a new population to the Whittier neighborhood to complement and support our active commercial corridor. Additionally, the plaza highlights the "destination" aspect of the development and Eat Street. The Whittier Alliance and neighborhood were active participants in achieving a neighborhood preferred outcome for the development. The businesses along Nicollet Ave will benefit from the 100,000 annual users and visitors to Vertical Endeavors. The adaptive reuse of the property also supports the Historic Preservation component of our Strategic Plan.

Whittier homes were proudly showcased in April during the Minneapolis-St Paul Home Tour. The three homes: 2008 Pillsbury (the Hewson House), 2222 Pillsbury and 2611 2nd Ave, were the most visited homes of the entire tour –nearly 1000 people from both inside and outside Whittier toured each home. Twenty Whittier neighborhood volunteers

rotated shifts at each house during the Home Show greeting visitors and distributing Whittier neighborhood information. This was a benchmark moment for Whittier housing. Gary Kirt of Bell Mortgage helped stabilize the Hewson House at 2008 Pillsbury. The Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission awarded the 2011 Neighborhood Advocacy Award to Gary, the Whittier Alliance, and Whittier neighborhood for their quick intervention in saving this historic asset. In addition, Whittier has long been regarded as a renter only neighborhood. Having 3 owner-occupied homes on the Home Tour helped showcase the stability of the neighborhood.

Each month the Whittier Alliance sponsors a community building event. These events serve to introduce residents to each other as well as an opportunity to engage and encourage participation in our monthly meetings. They vary in attendance and demographics one to the other. It could be Frisbee in the park or a theater performance; the Green Fair or an ice cream social; a litter pick up or candidate forum. The events draw a number of people who do not attend meetings but need to be informed of the services and amenities in the Whittier neighborhood.

2. 2011 CPP Submission

Reviewing your submission for CPP funds for 2011, what outreach and engagement activities did you carry out? What worked well, and what did not work so well? Why?

The Whittier Alliance engaged the community in multiple capacities, hosting a variety of events and meetings aimed at strengthening the neighborhood and community ties. The events held in 2011 are listed below and happened in conjunction with 12 Community Issues and 12 Business Association meetings.

Annual Meeting
Dog Days
Green Fair
Greenway Cleanup
Intergenerational Cribbage Class
May Day Soiree
Neighborhood Cleanup (2)
Special Election Candidate Forum
Strategic Planning Focus Groups and Survey
Theater in the Park (3)
Whittier Youth Field Day
World of Whittier Family Fair

Additionally, the Whittier Alliance participated in community events held by other organizations to reach a wider audience, such as the Salem Church potluck, Peace Games and Whittier School PTA and Carnivals, 35W Transit Access open houses, etc.

Whether outreach and engagement activities worked well really depended on the topic and the concurrently scheduled events in other parts of the city. Activities sponsored or facilitated by the Whittier Alliance that elicited greater conversation from Whittier neighborhood (Focus Groups and Survey) or offered a festive and active atmosphere (May

Day Soiree and Youth Field Day) drew in the largest attendance and the least overlap in participation.

3. Stakeholder Involvement

Reviewing your submission for CPP funds for 2011, how did you reach out to and involve under-represented communities? Did you find any strategies to be particularly successful?

The majority of our events (and all of our meetings) are free and open to anyone who wants to come. Advertising is carried out through many mediums, but the most effective at reaching new people is flyer distribution in targeted areas. This works well for events like Youth Field Day, where a major draw beyond the games is free school supplies for participating youth. Focus Groups were built around categories of stakeholders, and the Whittier Alliance sought to ensure the participation of a diverse population. The survey to gather data for the Strategic Plan was translated into Somali and Spanish as well. General Whittier neighborhood information has also been translated into Somali and Spanish. All meetings are held in ADA accessible buildings.

Encouraging participation by under-represented communities is an on-going effort with mixed results. However, Youth Field Day sponsored by the Whittier Alliance and Whittier Park draws 60-100 youth between 4 and 12 years old from all ethnicities and economic levels. Parents attend as well and are drawn into the games. Snacks and school supplies are distributed at the end of the event. It is designed as an “everyone wins” competition with ribbons being awarded to participants.

Another rallying point that draws a very diverse representation of Whittier demographics is the neighborhood cleanup. Respect for the neighborhood and a clean neighborhood appears to be a value held by all cultures and ages. For example, an invitation extended to St. Stevens Men’s Shelter resulted in a clean up team being formed. Everyone stays for the pizza and prizes at the end of the cleanup.

The common denominators for successful participation are: food and give-aways.

Please also provide the following:

A. How many people currently serve on your board? Are there vacancies?

The Whittier Alliance currently has fifteen (15) people elected at-large by the community serving on the board. There are no at large vacancies. The Chair of the Community Issues Committee also serves on the board by virtue of chairmanship.

B. Approximately how many individuals have participated in committee meetings in the last year?

Approximately 500 individuals have participated in various committee meetings in the last year. Attendance is issue and location driven. Some residents will show up to discuss a park issue but are uninterested in a proposal for a smoke shop. This number does not include the Strategic Planning Focus Group participants, although there is some overlap.

C. How many people attended your annual meeting?

A total of seventy-eight (78) residents and business owners attended the annual meeting. Other invited guests in attendance included city, county, and park representatives, as well as representatives from service organizations from within the neighborhood (Midtown Greenway, Nice Ride, Jabbock Family Services, etc.).

D. How many households regularly receive your publications (such as newsletters or newspapers)?

Every other week an electronic newsletter is sent to approximately 800 individuals who have subscribed to our email lists. Postcard announcements are mailed to approximately 400 businesses and households on a monthly basis. A network of volunteers also distribute up to 500 fliers each month with abbreviated meeting agendas on one side and a list of "Whittier Happenings" on the other. We have found that meeting and event attendance depends on all three methods of communication.

On an annual basis, the Whittier Calendar is delivered via bulk mail to all 7800 resident and business addresses in Whittier and is often cited as the first way someone heard about the Whittier Alliance. The calendar's images follow a chosen theme that features Whittier. All the community meeting dates, advance scheduled community events, and cultural and governmental holidays are noted on the calendar pages. Community resources are highlighted throughout the pages and neighborhood amenities are listed on the back page of the calendar. The Whittier Alliance has received hundreds of accolades for the calendar as well as an award from the Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission for the 2012 Whittier Preservation Calendar. The 2012 calendar also inspired an application for a sizable loan for rehab of a rental property.

E. Approximately how many people participate in other activities of the organization?

Considering the monthly community building event, task force meetings focusing on a targeted project, the Neighborhood Network information distribution group, National Night Out and volunteers who door knock and flier it is difficult to give a number but a guess would be 1000-1500 people.

Financial Reports

Please provide an income and expense report for your organization for the year. (Please include all funding sources).

See attached.

In addition to your annual report, please take time to describe your interactions with City departments and other jurisdictions.

1. *Impact*

What interactions occupied a major part of your time? What worked well, what could be improved?

Much of my time is spent responding to residents or business owners with either issues or plans. A significant amount of time is also dedicated to planning and working on policy, guidelines or projects that would improve the livability, property values & business vitality of the Whittier neighborhood. The Whittier strategic plan is never out of my scope of awareness. I contact people, businesses, organizations and the city trying to partner with people and bring assets that can benefit Whittier. I advocate. I roll the rock up the hill.

2. *City Communications – effectiveness*

Is the information that you receive from the City understandable and useful?

Foreclosure reports are very good.

Planning Dept & HPC application notifications are very good.

The City website is more difficult to navigate since it changed at the beginning of the year.

3. *City Communications – timeliness*

Do you receive adequate notice of City activities in your neighborhood? If not, did your organization inform somebody at the City of this? Did the City respond in a positive manner? Please explain.

I get so many emails from the City I have stopped reading them. Newsletters from council people & the mayor, NCR, planning dept, liscening dept, etc. I know I have missed some important information but it is email overload.

With NRP we would get a written letter when something important was happening and maybe an email.

I use the phone frequently and get very nice service.

4. *City Departments*

How can City departments improve the way in which they function in your neighborhood?

Provide direct phone numbers to city dept and staff rather than having to go through 311 when needing a question answered.

311 is fine for reporting problems, pot holes, environmental issues, etc. But if you need to know a specific answer to a specific question, it is better to be able to talk with a person.

The 311 return call giving the outcome or action or resolution to an issue is lame.

The City website is more difficult to navigate. And it bounces into random webpages frequently when a link is accessed.

5. *City Assistance*

How can the Neighborhood and Community Relations Department improve the assistance it provides to your organization as a citizen participation group?

Most of the communication from the NCR makes me feel like whatever I am doing isn't enough, isn't reaching the right people or is inconsistent with what should be done. We have great participation in Whittier but the sense I get from NCR is that it isn't adequate, doesn't reach the right people, etc. No consideration is given to the reasons why people don't participate.

If I was to apply or respond to all the applications and calls for RFPs that NCR promotes, I wouldn't have time to work in the neighborhood. My job is neighborhood based. We are not a department of the City.

6. *Other comments?*