

Community Participation Program 2014 Annual Report

Neighborhood Organization: Whittier Alliance

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1. Stakeholder Involvement

Reviewing your CPP activities in 2014, Please provide information about:

- What outreach and engagement activities did you carry out in 2014?
The Whittier Alliance did of outreach and engagement at several levels and formats:
 - Regularly scheduled monthly business and community meetings engaged a broad segment of the Whittier neighborhood in a more traditional setting.
 - Monthly community building events and outreach were sponsored by the Alliance focusing on engaging populations in Whittier who generally don't attend meetings but also included those who do. To name a few, the community building opportunities included: safety seminars, Dog Days, Ice Cream Socials, Youth Field Day, Artists in Storefronts-movie nights, neighborhood clean ups, strategic planning task forces, etc.
 - The Mail Chimp electronic newsletter was distributed each month to inform residents and businesses of general issues, events and opportunities in the neighborhood. Facebook, Nextdoor Neighborhood, the Whittier Website, and US postal mailings were also an important outreach tools to different segments of our population
 - In addition, door knocking and fliering were done on a monthly basis to build awareness of the Whittier Alliance, Whittier neighborhood and create a sense of place.
 - The Whittier Alliance partnered with institutions, organizations, businesses and individuals to expand outreach and sponsor events. Tabling at events like the Somali Independence Day and the Minneapolis Institute of Arts "Get Local" night were totally different but equally rewarding outreach experiences. Most notably however, the multi-neighborhood Nicollet Votes initiative through the summer and fall mobilized neighborhood volunteers in a door knocking campaign to get Whittier residents out to vote. Over 500 Whittier doors were knocked resulting in both increased voter awareness and valuable feedback to a short survey about neighborhood.

 - How did you reach out to and involve under-represented communities in 2014?
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2014 was a very unusual year for Whittier and many people of color and minorities became involved in a back door manner. The Annual Meeting and a subsequent Special Meeting resulted in many Somali residents becoming aware of the Whittier Alliance and many have stayed in contact with the Alliance. Not as frequent meeting attendees but as an information and resource center and a friendly open door.

More renters were enlisted for door knocking as part of the Nicollet Votes campaign. Apartment building managers were utilized to help distribute information. And the Alliance partnered with some of the affordable housing buildings to reach more immigrants and families.

Events and outreach varied to engage different populations within the Whittier neighborhood. For example Dog Days appealed to and was attended by renters and homeowners, a blended representation of Whittier families attended World of Whittier Family Fair and the Summer Social in Clinton Field Park. And the very successful Youth Field Day had 150 predominantly minority youth participating with family members watching. The participants each received a free back pack filled with school supplies—and information about the Whittier Alliance.

Our part-time Somali community organizer was also instrumental in building a communication link between the Whittier Alliance, neighborhood and the Somali community. Family and safety issues were identified and assistance was given in the form of referrals and on-sight seminars

- Did you find any strategies to be particularly successful? Why?

Enlisting the assistance of apartment building managers and/or owners continued to be successful. Flyering was a critical component of our outreach. And personal phone calls or one on one communication was the most effective outreach and had the highest rate of retained and reciprocal interest in neighborhood activities and issues.

- What did not work so well? Why?

Trying to engage youth for flyering or community building projects like clean ups was not successful though we keep trying. Although the “open rate” for our electronic newsletter is 35% the amount of action triggered from that communication seems low.

- How many people did you reach through direct contact (door knocking, meetings, one-on-ones, etc.)?

The Whittier Alliance staff and volunteers had direct contact in the form of monthly meetings, task forces, door knocking, community building events, fundraisers, block clubs, community gardens, community partnerships, etc. was well over 2500 people. Many of these events don't have sign in sheets so it is difficult to give a count

- How many individuals volunteered in organization activities?
140 individuals volunteered for one or more of the Whittier Alliance activities
- How many individuals participated in your organization's activities?
1100 attended events during 2014
- How many people receive your print publications?
Monthly Fliers and Mailings: 800-900 per mo
Annual Meeting, Fundraising Invitation, Fundraising Solicitation: 2600
Annual Whittier Calendar with community meeting dates, neighborhood event dates and resources: 7900
- How many people receive your electronic communications?
Monthly: 1100

2. 2014 Highlights

Please describe one or two major highlights, and if possible, please include digital photos or illustrations:

- What was the issue or opportunity the neighborhood was facing?
- Who was impacted?
- What steps did you take to address the issue or opportunity?
- What was the outcome?

The Whittier Neighborhood has long been primarily rental housing. That is not likely to change. However, many Whittier renters want to stay in the neighborhood but find a lack of homeownership opportunity. This contributes to the annual high turnover and a loss of good residents each year. With only 772 single family homes out of 7450 housing dwelling units the owner occupied options are very limited but critical to offering the neighborhood housing choice.

One of Whittier's housing goals is to find and return to owner occupancy, homes that were rental or threatened by demolition. Starting in late 2013 and completing in 2014, the homes at 2726 & 2728 Stevens Ave S were returned to owner occupancy. The two modest single family homes were rehabbed, brought into code compliance and sold for over the asking price but within Whittier's average price range. With the generous help of neighborhood minded partners the Whittier Alliance was able to complete the project and made a few dollars in the end. The best result is that we now have 4 new residents in the Whittier neighborhood who have become active with the Whittier Alliance and neighborhood.

Another successful project that was completed in 2014 was amending the Whittier By-Laws. This is a project that is neither fun nor universally appreciated. By-Laws are needed as a governance tool but are rarely noticed until a conflict arises or they are being amended. Several clauses in the Whittier By-Laws had been abused over the years and there was a need to address the breach between intent and application.

A volunteer task force took on the process and through the late summer and until December met several times to adjust language that was inclusive but offered more structure and guidance to the organization. Other non-profit governance documents were researched, an attorney was consulted and NCR reviewed the document with NRP policy. The outcome is a document with more clarity and direction in governance.

3. 2014 Accomplishments

Please provide information about your other accomplishments in 2014:

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

The rehab and sale of 2726 & 2728 Stevens Ave homes. This was a neighborhood project with lots of neighborhood interest and support. A neighborhood open house drew people from diverse backgrounds. The project was well managed and in the end, the Whittier Alliance was able to pocket a very small but satisfying profit.

The Youth Field Day has been a Whittier Alliance annual event for the past 5 years. In 2014, 150 Somali, East African, Latino, African American and Caucasian youth ages 4 to 15 compete in a circuit of athletic challenges. Their families cheered them on and joined in the tug of war finale. Popsicles and back packs with school supplies were distributed to the participants at the end of the event.

It is a community building event that brings the entire neighborhood together. It requires lots of coordination and Whittier residents and staff from Whittier's youth serving organizations volunteer for the event. It's always a good event.

Since 2007 one of the most informative, interesting and useful things the Whittier Alliance has done is publish an annual calendar. The calendar showcases Whittier in a different light and theme each year. Calls start coming in October as to when the calendar will be delivered and call of thanks continue through March. Besides featuring different aspects of the neighborhood, the calendar gives the neighborhood committee meeting dates, neighborhood resources and general information such as snow emergency and nearest library locations. The calendar has been responsible for garnering donations, volunteers, and awards for the Whittier Alliance.

Getting a significant body of work done in 2014 despite distractions, demands and challenges was hard. It was one of the most difficult years in memory. Credit needs to be given to a strong, thoughtful, smart and supportive board and the many volunteers and residents who live in Whittier and support the work of the Alliance.

4. *Housing*

What percentage of time did your organization spend on housing-related activities?

2014 was an exceptional year due to the rehab of the houses and the project management needed. An estimate would be 40%

5. *Financial Reports*

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

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

1. *Impact*

What interactions with City departments occupied a major part of your time? What worked well? What could be improved?

Due to a challenge/grievance from a neighborhood source, the Whittier Alliance appreciated the assistance the NCR department provided. The advice and guidance of NCR was good. The NCR staff was responsive.

However, through the process it seemed an added layer of expectations and higher standards were placed on the Whittier neighborhood compared to other neighborhoods. We spent way too much time defending ourselves to the grievants and NCR. The outcome was good but the process seemed as though Whittier was left to fend for itself. A meeting with the City Attny's office to explore ways to protect the neighborhood from frivolous claims was not as productive as hoped.

Earlier in the year, it did not feel that NCR defended Whittier against other unreasonable and unprecedented demands and comments from other city departments.

Working with the Mpls Finance department and CPED's Business District/Great Streets departments have been very positive

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being poor and 5 being excellent, how would you rate your overall experience with your interactions with the City? 3

2. *City Communications - effectiveness*

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

NCR returns calls in a timely manner and generally gives good feedback and instruction. If an answer isn't known, one is sought and a reply is given.

Michelle Chavez' summary to a question regarding Whittier's By-Law changes was very concise and helpful. Robert Thompson's knowledge of governance and process was very helpful and reassuring. With his experience working in neighborhoods and knowing the unseen outreach and body of work neighborhood do, he was also able to give much needed moral support.

There are a lot of emails from NCR and I can't keep up to them.

CPED is getting more obtuse. Calls are not returned promptly. Communication is sparse. It seems they are being told not to give neighborhoods any information or reply only to the direct question - information given on an as needed basis.

Working with Mpls Finance and the Great Streets/Bus Dist is very positive and collaborative.

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being poor and 5 being excellent, how would you rate overall communications from the City? ____3__

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.

Basically things have not changed from last year and my comments from last year still stand.

There is adequate notice from NCR of events and meetings but there are so many notices that they get lost. I need to prioritize replies to people in the neighborhood so reading or responding to City communications gets neglected.

A notice on public hearings is not adequate.

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being poor and 5 being excellent, how would you rate the timeliness of communications from the City? __2__

4. City Departments

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

Be willing to come out and speak at neighborhood meetings.

Make direct phone number available

311 is not responsive, no follow up, and the multiple choice on the message is getting longer and longer

Respect neighborhood strategic and/or land use plans

Insist that development plans be presented in the neighborhood prior to submitting city applications

Give neighborhoods notice of critical applications

5. City Assistance

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

Defend neighborhoods. Reinforce to City Hall that engagement is not only measured by attendance at meetings. Publicly recognize and reinforce to other city departments the collaborations and partnerships that the recognized

neighborhood organization fosters. Whittier partners with the schools, institutions, faith based groups, etc to align our missions and activities for the best outcomes for the neighborhood. If a neighborhood stakeholder calls to complain, ask for information, etc. 1st ask them if they have contacted the neighborhood office to discuss the issue. Also ask if they have been to meetings or participated in the issue that they are calling about.

On a scale of 1 to5, with 1 being poor and 5 being excellent, how would you rate the assistance provided to your neighborhood by NCR? __3__

6. *Other comments?*