

Neighborhoods as Regional Partners

Neighborhoods have historically been at the forefront of positive change: catalysts for the work of commercial corridor revitalization, pioneers in community crime prevention and restorative justice, innovators of ways to support youth and families, and stewards of the places that matter. These are all great achievements, each a reflection of the values and passions that move people to action. The Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul have benefited immensely from the ingenuity and inspiration from grassroots efforts at the neighborhood level. Neighborhood-based community improvements have clearly helped to reinvigorate the market and renewed confidence in city living.

Today, the politics of place have become increasingly complex as our communities become more diverse. Critical challenges to transportation, education, housing, and economic development are ultimately not neighborhood-based, although neighborhoods can play an important role in addressing them. Key issues emerging in transportation are triggered by the regional growth of population. Education is undergoing immense stress in response to the expanding diversity of our community. After a long period of decline, the urban core is beginning to benefit from the renewed interest of market forces. And shifting demographic forces are commanding greater attention from governmental and philanthropic interests.

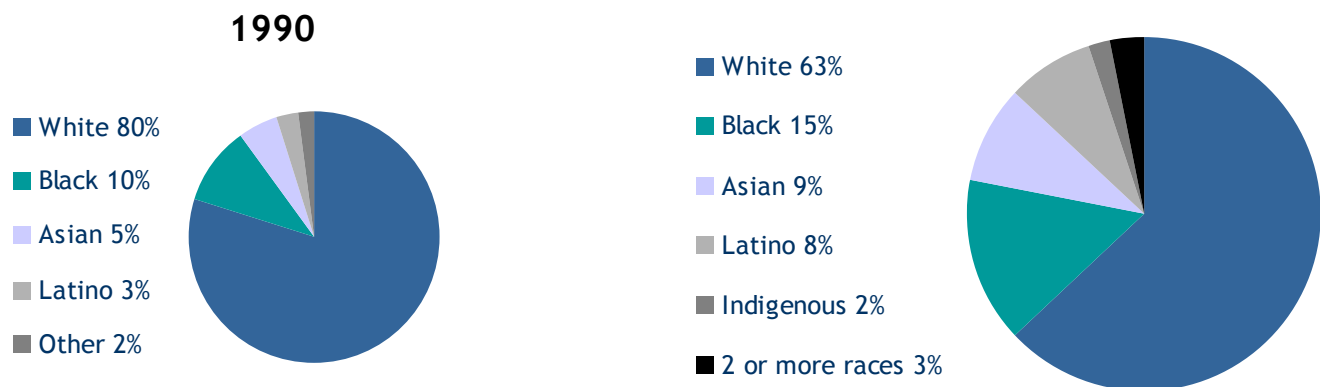
How will neighborhoods respond? Will they be up for the challenge to engage in efforts to address these larger trends? What opportunities are available for neighborhoods to participate in defining priorities and solutions? Will we continue to rely on the old systems of community engagement, or will we create new systems that reflect our changing demographic? How will neighborhoods remain relevant as issues are increasingly defined through a regional lens?

Neighborhoods are at a critical juncture. It will be important to look outward as well as inward—not to lose identity and connection to place, but to expand the ways in which people make neighborhoods.

Changing Faces

The “face” of the Twin Cities population has changed significantly since 1990.

Racial/ethnic minorities in the Twin Cities significantly increased in population share between 1990 and 2000.



In addition:

- 14.4% of Twin Cities residents are foreign-born; the region saw a 127% rise in its immigrant population from 1990 to 2000. Today, more than 60% of foreign-born residents arrived here in the past ten years.
- Nearly one-third of all Twin Cities’ residents moved here within the past five years.
- Residents in their 20s make up the largest age group.

Source: The Brookings Institution

Center for Neighborhoods
2004 State of the Neighborhoods Address
How People Make Neighborhoods

Changing Needs

Our ability to make effective decisions, for our neighborhoods and for the region, will increasingly be a product of how well we understand our community. Consider, for example, the following:

Transportation Only half of Minneapolis and St. Paul residents work in their respective cities. 65% of workers commute alone by car; only 12% use public transportation. Over 1/3 of black households lack access to a car.

Housing Twin Cities homeownership rose moderately in the 1990s and is now average for the nation's 100 largest cities; however, the homeownership rate among minority households continues to lag behind that of white households.

Income/Employment Income distribution in the Twin Cities has grown more balanced since 1990; however, one in five Latinos and nearly one in three African Americans live in poverty. About one in six children live in a household with no adult in the workforce.

Education 40% of St. Paul kindergartners in 2000-2001 were English language learners (ELL). ELL students in Minneapolis speak more than 80 languages.

Source: The Brookings Institution

Changing the Rules of Engagement

Both Minneapolis and St. Paul have recently undertaken efforts to review citizen engagement systems.

St. Paul

In April of 2004, the St. Paul City Council established an Ad Hoc Committee on Citizen Participation to develop specific recommendations for:

- a revised funding formula that created a more equitable distribution of citizen participation funds throughout the district council system,
- ways to strengthen accountability and inclusiveness within the district council system, and
- what City staff support is needed to assist the district council system.

In an unprecedented effort, representatives from all 19 district and community councils participated in a series of meetings to discuss options and build consensus around a set of recommendations; these recommendations were presented to the City Council and Mayor in early August. By unifying their efforts, the district and community councils were able to make a solid case to the elected officials for increasing the funding for citizen participation by \$111,587, an 18% increase over 2004. The Mayor has included the increased funding in the 2005 budget, to be decided in December.

Minneapolis

In 2003, the Minneapolis City Coordinator's office established a work team to address citizen engagement, an officially-adopted City goal, and to assemble a current "catalog" of existing citizen engagement efforts within City departments. This analysis determined that the City was spending approximately \$6 – 8 million on community engagement activities each year—this amount does not include the money spent to implement neighborhood action plans through the Neighborhood Revitalization Program (NRP). In 2004, the Ways and Means/Budget Committee requested that the City Coordinator's Office undertake the Minneapolis Engagement and Community Building Project and assigned the City's Communications Director to oversee the effort. Central to the project is an internal analysis of the City's citizen engagement methods, to find ways to achieve greater efficiencies of scale, consistency of message, and improved focus where needed. The goal is to arrive at a system of cohesive and predictable processes that allow citizens to better understand, anticipate, and influence City policies. Complementing this effort, the Project (at the request of Council Members Niziolek, Samuels, and Benson) will convene a series of conversations to:

- articulate a "problem statement" that identifies the key issues surrounding community engagement that need to be addressed;
- establish a common definition of community engagement so that policy discussions on framework, principles, accountability, and performance measures can be truly productive,
- create a framework that outlines the components of an effective community engagement system; and
- recommend a process rooted in the community to advance the conversation about community engagement policy decisions.

The focus of this effort is on the policies that will ultimately direct the citizen engagement system.

