CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR AUTHENTIC CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT: NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES IN THE LAS VEGAS VALLEY

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Abstract

Communities with high levels of civic engagement may be better places to live, characterized by more trust in government, higher levels of government performance, and more positive relations between citizens and the state. This paper presents a preliminary evaluation of one effort to build authentic citizen involvement in community affairs. The model described here was implemented in Clark County Nevada, one of America's fastest growing communities. We evaluate several pilot programs designed to enhance citizen participation in solving neighborhood & community-level problems, and present lessons learned from the Clark County experience.

What sets apart strong and vibrant communities where residents work together on problems, interact frequently with local government, and respond creatively to local, national and global challenges? In language that is reminiscent of Tocqueville, a growing chorus of observers has suggested that it is the health of civil society that explains not only the quality of community life, but also levels of political efficacy and governmental performance. As Alan Wolfe has observed, citizens live their lives neither "in the government" nor "in the marketplace," but in rich networks built around families and neighborhoods, churches and civic groups, professional societies and sports clubs (Dionne 1996). Together, these networks form a set of "intermediary associations" that strengthen the connective tissue between individuals, connecting them with their neighbors as well as with their governments. Strong intermediary associations strengthen civil society by generating opportunities for individuals to interact, to learn from and about each other, and to forge a collective social and political identity (Barber 1998; Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swindler, & Tipton 1996; Boyte & Kari, 1997; Fukuyama 1995; Putnam 1993).

The outgrowth of this process of community interaction is the development of a collective social and political identity that is at the basis of healthy neighborhoods, communities, and cities. In academic terms: through repeated patterns of active interaction neighbors establish powerful norms of community behavior. As Robert Putnam explains:

> Norms of generalized reciprocity and networks of civic engagement [increase] trust and cooperation because they reduce incentives to defect, reduce uncertainty, and provide models for future cooperation (1993, p. 177).

Conversely, where networks of civic engagement are weak and intermediary associations fail to develop, citizens remain disconnected from each other and from their governments. This situation is exacerbated as individuals are distanced from families and kinship networks and is further exacerbated by suburbanization, which splits workplaces from bedroom communities. As a result, individuals have less time or reason to interact with their neighbors and less reason to see the problems that affect the parts of town where they work (usually urban, distant, and disproportionately poor) as their problems. Suburban neighborhood interaction, meanwhile, is governed by neighborhood covenants rather than interpersonal relationships.

The research on social capital suggests a tantalizing possibility: those communities with higher levels of civic engagement become better places to live, characterized by more trust in government,

higher levels of government performance, and more positive relations between citizens and the state.[1] If this is the case, can local government encourage the development of civil society and, in so doing, make healthier communities in which to live and work? Moreover, should governments play a role in nurturing the development of civil society? Would elected officials welcome the active involvement of citizens in policy making?

This paper presents a preliminary evaluation of one effort to build authentic citizen involvement in community affairs. We contribute to the extant literature in this area by providing an overview of a government-sponsored effort to foster citizen participation and civility in one of America's most dynamic geographic regions.

BACKGROUND: CLARK COUNTY

Clark County, Nevada (population 1.2 million) has been the fastest growing metropolitan region in the country for the past three years (6% growth per year) and has welcomed more than five thousand new residents each month (Bass, 1999; Clark County Demographic Summary 1998; Couret, 1998; McKinnon, 1998a, 1998b; Ryan, 1999). The number of permits issued for new home construction 60 percent in just four years, from 19,000 in 1993 to 30,000 in 1996 (Urban and Land Institute, 1997). In 1997 alone, over 14,000 new building permits were issued, valued at some $1.8 billion dollars (Clark County Building Department, 1998). Inevitably, the magnitude of this growth has aggravated a number of urban problems, including traffic congestion, poor air quality, a shortage of parks and community space, inadequate and aging infrastructures, and overcrowded schools. Indeed, three new schools need to be built and staffed each month just to keep pace with the Valley's growth (Clark County School District , 1998).

Discussions on developing strategies to address the myriad of challenges associated with the impact of this growth have occurred in the business community, among university faculty, as well as in the media, legislature and local and state government (Bass, 1999; McKinnon 1998;). Much attention has been focused on the need to build

sufficient "financial capital" (i.e., an adequate tax base) and "physical capital" (i.e., roads, public transportation, adequate water supply, and city services). Simultaneously, a dialogue has begun to develop around the need to build social capital. The rate of growth in southern Nevada has meant that neighborhoods materialize almost overnight, allowing few opportunities for the bonds that undergird civil society to form. The existing set of Town Advisory Boards (TABs) was designed to facilitate community interaction and representation at a time when Clark County was sparsely populated. Clark County is unique with its tri-part responsibility: simultaneously, it is a regional, urban and town government. TABs were formed by state statute to assist the Board of County Commissioners in an advisory capacity with the decision-making process in supplying public services to the unincorporated areas of Clark County. These areas had long ago become overwhelmed with zoning issues and, almost as a perfect function of the degree of urbanization of their areas, had lost their ability to serve as venues for public interaction and participation. The communities absorbing the bulk of the recent immigration to Clark County found their TABs overwhelmed with zoning issues, effectively closing this single venue for political participation to other citizen concerns.

Responding to this situation in early 1996, members of the Clark County Commissioners began to explore the possibility of developing a neighborhood services program within the Las Vegas Valley. This program would work to develop social capital at the neighborhood level in an attempt to make neighborhoods more self-reliant and to improve their interactions with local government. Nationwide, local jurisdictions have utilized the concept of neighborhood services to encourage citizens to become more active in determining the direction and development of the community in which they live (Page-Adams & Sherraden, 1998; Wallis & Koziol, 1996; Walsh, 1997). Berry, Portney and Thomson (1993), in their book, The Rebirth of Urban Democracy, found that structured citizen-government relationships dramatically changed the pattern of political involvement for citizens by providing real opportunities for citizens to shape issues affecting their lives. Their analysis found that municipalities with structured community

participation were better able to respond to a broad range of citizen issues and better able to balance the demands of diverse groups.

There were several community and organizational challenges to developing a fully functional and effective neighborhood services strategy in Southern Nevada. First, Clark County does not have many traditional neighborhoods. Residents report low levels of trust in their neighbors and little opportunity to interact with each other or with government in a positive manner. A recent survey found that in the previous year, 90% of residents had not participated in any type of civic group, 71% had not participated in any type of neighborhood meeting, and one-half indicated that conversations with neighbors were never about community issues (InfoSearch, 1998). For this reason, citizens usually turn first to neutral or negative forms of public interaction such as police intervention, lawsuits, and utilizing code enforcement to deal with common neighborhood issues such as zoning struggles, barking dogs, graffiti, dirty yards and noisy neighbors. This form of interaction makes it difficult to invigorate and facilitate communication and cooperation (Chasin, Herzig, Roth, Chasin, Becker, & Stains, 1996). Government solutions to such issues are also much less cost effective than community residents handling their own concerns.

INITIAL OBJECTIONS TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES INITIATIVE

There were a number of concerns raised at the outset of this initiative. First, the impetus for developing a neighborhood services program came from county commissioners rather than from citizens. Can government generate and foster vibrant community associations? Research on successful neighborhood services programs suggests that a bottom-up, grass roots approach with citizens is key in making these programs work (Kretzman & McKnight, 1993; Lappe & Du Bois, 1997; Walsh, 1997).

Second, there was some opposition from the county manager's office. Some feared it would primarily serve as a tool for commissioners to secure their own staff, furthering individual political agendas

and weakening the county's strong council-manager form of government. Finally, as with many elected boards, the Clark County Board of County Commissioners (BCC) was split over how aggressively to pursue a neighborhood services program (Eadie, 1994). As a result, the design chosen was a compromise, including: (1) A pilot neighborhood services program, and (2) recommendations for an appropriate organizational structure and fiscal requirements for the continuation of neighborhood services.

THE CLARK COUNTY APPROACH

The pilot program included five initiatives:

1) **The Neighborhood College** - Through a ten week, 30 hour course, the Neighborhood College focused on teaching citizens the skills to successfully interact with government and their neighbors. Individuals applying for the College had to identify an issue in their neighborhood that they were willing to develop an action plan to address. Neighborhood College participants took part in mock planning meetings to gain a greater understanding of the formalized governmental process. Course curriculum covered a variety of topics including leadership development, volunteer recruitment, developing a neighborhood vision, conflict resolution, accessing governmental and non-profit resources; community bench-marking; and planning, evaluating and financing a project. Graduation ceremonies were held for each graduating class. Upon completion of the course, and with the support of assigned neighborhood liaisons, graduates were encouraged to implement their neighborhood action plans.

2) **Small Grant Projects** - This project provided matched grant assistance to nonprofit and neighborhood-based organizations for neighborhood improvement projects. Clark County's cash grant is matched by the community's contribution of volunteer labor, materials, professional services, or privately raised funds. An application review team was made up of governmental, non-profit and community groups as well as Neighborhood College graduates. The United Way of Southern Nevada served as fiscal agent and provided monitoring services. Projects funded ranged from assistance

to a local water cooperative to build a water pipe for a rural community; design and construction of a community garden; block parties in at-risk neighborhoods; a graffiti clean-up program; an after-school recreational program; and a community gay and lesbian youth group.

3) **Town Advisory Board Strategic Planning** - A coordinated effort was initiated to employ a community-based strategic planning effort with the urban town boards. An extensive effort was made to inform citizens of their TAB's purpose, meeting time and location. Community brainstorming sessions occurred and neighborhood action committees were formed to address particular issues identified by the community.

4) **Special Events to Connect with Citizens** - In an effort to increase communication between citizens and government, to support neighborhood improvement, and respond to needs identified in a preliminary study of commission districts, a variety of neighborhood and community-based programs were implemented. These program and activities included a series of innovative get-togethers such as coffee chats and community pancake breakfasts, which provided residents the opportunity to informally meet with their county commissioners and other county staff at such places as bookstores, coffee houses, cafes and fire stations.

5) **Countywide Coordination and Training** - Various programs aimed at coordinating services and activities valley-wide were initiated. For example, a coordinated response team was formed that involves the mobilization of multiple agencies to respond to specific neighborhood issues. Depending upon the community issue, representatives from public works, business license, public response, and comprehensive planning may be called upon to jointly send representatives to develop a plan of action to mitigate the problem at hand.

A PRELIMINARY EVALUATION OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES PROGRAM

Our evaluation covered the first two Neighborhood College Programs (NCP), including 80 participants and 59 graduates. The NCP was evaluated in three ways. First, participants completed process evaluation surveys at the end of each session and a summative process survey at the end of the final session. Second, a parallel pretest and posttest assessed the extent of goal attainment by each NCP participant. Finally, follow-up telephone interviews of a randomly selected subset of NCP participants assessed their perceptions of the value of their experience in the program.

The process evaluation survey asked NCP participants to rate each aspect of the session on a Likert scale ranging from 1-5 (1=Not Useful, 3=Somewhat Useful, 5=Very Useful). In general, participants rated all components of the NCP positively. The average rating of each component of the NCP was 4.38 (SD=.32, Range=3.74C4.86). Thus participants generally evaluated each component of the NCP as useful or very useful. The positive evaluations drawn from these session-by-session process evaluations are supported by the summative process evaluations completed by participants at the conclusion of the NCP. For example, when participants were asked what they found least useful about the NCP, 87% did not comment or replied that all aspects of the program were useful. Further, 100% of the participants indicated that they would recommend the NCP to a friend.

The pretest/posttest instrument was designed to measure the development of the thinking of neighborhood college participants along four dimensions: 1) project design and development, 2) resource and alliance building, 3) community collective identification and mobilization, 4) leadership growth and development.[2]

A review of the responses generated by participants' yields a number of interesting findings.[3] One of the most dramatic concerns participants' perceptions of the importance of community and governmental support in program development. Over the course of the NCP, participants developed a growing awareness of community-based resources. This shift occurred on four indicators on the questionnaire: the number of mentions of

government agencies, the emphasis given to resources derived from governmental as opposed to community sources, emphasis on the importance of neighborhood involvement, and mention of potential community allies.

The increased emphasis on community resources and power is striking.[4] On the pretest, respondents were twice as likely to identify governmental resources and support as critical to the success of their project as they were to identify community resources. By the posttest, these proportions had more than reversed, with more than four times as many responses identifying citizen and neighborhood derived resources, as responses identifying resources derived from government sources. Qualitative evidence of this shift in thinking is seen in terms of a greater emphasis on the collective power of citizens working together and an emphasis on the need for effective organization-building both within and across neighborhood and civic groups. This finding strongly suggests that one influence of the NC is to increase recognition among participants of the importance of community organization and involvement in successful neighborhood projects.

We can characterize this shift as indicative of a growing emphasis on horizontal vs. vertical linkages in the action plans of these community leaders. After their participation in the NCP, individuals were increasingly interested in looking to citizens groups for resources and to develop strong and vibrant neighborhoods, rather than looking to governmental agencies for resources and effort.

A second area of evaluation in which we found a development in the thinking of NCP participants concerned their skill base for community program development. We found evidence of increasing programmatic sophistication in the community projects proposed by NCP participants. Potential indications of developmental competency included: 1) increased specificity in the description of projects proposed; and 2) mention of specific aspects of project development including a mechanism for needs assessment, identification of critical resources and potential allies, development of an action plan, identification of obstacles to be faced,

and development of an evaluation process, ideally including both outcome and process measures.

Respondents were much more likely to present their community projects in terms of these aspects of program development on the posttest than on the pretest. While less than 20% of responses on the pretest discussed the development of community projects in terms of these component parts, more than 80% of the responses on the posttest included some mention of one or more of these components. Further evidence of the influence of the NCP on the development of participants' community projects is seen in terms of the specificity of the projects proposed. More than two thirds of all posttest responses offered project descriptions with concrete action items and specific goals.

The third dimension assessed on the NCP questionnaire concerned the self-perception of NCP participants in terms of leadership skills. Respondents reported a shift in self-perceptions of leaders over the course of their participation in the NC. Over 90% of the responses on the pretest concerning leadership attributes stressed the charisma and leadership experience of NCP participants themselves. In contrast, respondents were much more likely to discuss the importance of effective delegation, team-based approaches and group dynamics in their assessments of effective leadership on the posttest. This evolution may indicate an increasing awareness among NCP participants of the importance of community involvement and management for the success of any neighborhood effort.

In short, the Neighborhood College evaluation suggests that participants developed increasing awareness of the resources and potential power available to communities working together. This realization led to decreasing emphasis on governmental leadership in neighborhood problem solving. Second, between the pre and posttest participants demonstrated an increasing level of sophistication in the development of community project action plans, including greater familiarity with the facets of successful project development and implementation. Third, the NCP Questionnaire underscores the development of consciousness

among participants concerning the efficacy of maximizing the effective participation of neighborhood groups in the development of successful community projects.

We can also present the results from a preliminary evaluation of the special programs component of the Neighborhood Services Program. Specifically, four "Coffee Chats" were scheduled. These events provided citizens a forum for informal discussions of timely issues with the county commissioners. At the conclusion of each of four coffee chats, all participants were asked to complete a brief anonymous evaluation form. The evaluation asked about reasons for attending the program, how the program compared with expectations (1 = Below, 3 = Met, 5 = Above), whether the program was worthwhile (1 = Not, 3 = Somewhat, 5 = Very), what the participants liked best, and if they had suggestions for improvements.

Across the four events, respondents reported that they had initially approached the program with some skepticism, but that the experience exceeded their expectations (Mean = 4.0, SD = .82) and was worthwhile (Mean = 5.0, SD = 0). Participants valued the opportunity to interact with the commissioners and the informal atmosphere. Suggestions for improvements focused on advertising the meetings more widely and holding the coffee chats more often to encourage greater citizen participation, allowing more time, and providing microphones for questions from the audience.

In short, each of the four coffee chat events has been evaluated positively. The meetings have consistently exceeded expectations of participants and have been uniformly judged to be worthwhile. Comments from participants suggest that they value the opportunity to interact in a personal and informal setting with the county commissioners. Participants have been pleased with the quality of the discussions and the concern and ideas expressed by the commissioners.

Evaluation of the Small Grants Project

To date, 10 citizen projects have been selected for small grant awards. The United Way of Southern Nevada provided fiscal and programmatic monitoring of the projects. All 10 projects developed by various neighborhoods were completed. Table 1 presents summary data for problems addressed, strategies employed, and outcomes achieved.

Evaluation of Town Advisory Board Strategic Planning

A process evaluation was completed on the pilot strategic planning initiative for the Winchester Town Advisory Board. The urban town of Winchester was chosen because Town Advicory Board members enthusiastically endorsed the effort, the TAB had involvement of some community groups such as the police and home owner associations and the Board had begun experimenting with addressing larger community issues and departing from their traditional and narrow focus on zoning requests.

TAB members and county staff began identifying stakeholder community groups. This original list was expanded with input from citizens. A community meeting was held with special invitations (letter and follow-up phone calls) to stakeholder groups such as religious institutions, schools, businesses and gaming establishments, a local hospital, home owner associations and the police. Citizens were informed by newspaper notices and flyers delivered to the local schools and to their homes.

The community-wide meeting was facilitated by the TAB liaison to the county, and written and verbal responses were gathered on community assets and community concerns. There was a great deal of consensus in these areas. Citizens viewed the strengths of Winchester being the abundance of mature neighborhoods, friendly neighbors, walking distances to schools, and convenience stores and large lots. Concerns (listed in order of severity) focused on traffic (identified by 78% of participants as a problem or significant problem); graffiti (71%); crime (69%); dust/air quality (66%); homelessness (61%); trash/liter (61%) and poverty (53%).

A community planning team was established from participants attending the meeting as well as others who were recruited by their neighbors and friends. Four 3-hour trainings/meetings were held

Table 1. Summary of Small Grants Projects

Neighborhood Project	Problem/Issue	Strategy Employed	Outcome
Blue Diamond Water Cooperative	Broken pipe for springhouse/ poor water quality	Purchase pipes, chlorinator system, use volunteer labor	Upgraded new pipe; better water quality
Helping hands of North Las Vegas	At-risk elderly and disabled residents in need of services	Match volunteers/labor with elderly; purchase equipment and supplies	10 volunteers trained; 9 disabled elderly assisted
Safe Space Project	No safe meeting place or gathering place for gay and lesbian teens	Purchase construction materials; Use volunteer labor	Created safe meeting place by building patio/deck to adjoining facility
Gay and Lesbian Youth Conference	Poor self-esteem for gay and lesbian youth; need skill building	Youth design program; community professionals volunteer time	25 youth attended first gay & lesbian youth skill-building conference
Safe Neighborhoods through Families	Increasing crime in neighborhood; graffiti	Purchase graffiti sprayer; organize community volunteers; received donated paint	Developed graffiti response program; community policing program
Clubs for Kids	Need for educational activities for learning disabled children	Allow high-risk youth to participate in a club of their choice	65 Learning disabled children participated in a club activity
Community Nutrition-Based Cultivation Project	Lack of food and nutrition education; need for increased family quality time	Involve children and parents in a housing project in the design of a community garden; purchase supplies	100 individuals participated in developing first community garden
Sidewalk Club Spring Break Camp	Idle teens during spring break and summer vacation; racial and ethnic problems	Involve neighborhood teens in spring camp	65 neighborhood teens participated in a 3-day camp on decision making and dealing with diversity
Collaborative Employment Opportunity	Unemployed individuals	Assess employment needs; enroll in job training; use professional volunteer labor	9 unemployed persons assessed and enrolled in job training; 6 placed in jobs
YMCA Extension Tutorial/Recreation Program	Lack of recreational services in under-served downtown area	Volunteer adult time; purchase transportation and fees	26 children participated; 7 adults recruited to provide tutorial and recreational services

covering such topics as leadership development, consensus building and "getting past no," strategic planning, and developing action plans. The community planning team developed a vision statement and goal statements and presented their work at a TAB meeting for discussion and approval. Neighborhood action committees have been formed to develop action plans geared towards achieving the community goals.

DISCUSSION: LESSONS LEARNED

Several lessons, experiences and outcomes of the Clark County initiatives may prove helpful for other municipalities planning similar neighborhood services efforts.

A considerable amount of planning and design is needed. Neighborhood service programs are not a quick fix for decaying urban infrastructure or citizens' complaints about lack of involvement. Neighborhood services programs need to be implemented in a well-planned, dynamic, and deliberate way (Wallis & Koziol 1996). Communities are not identical; different tactics are needed to respond to the unique characteristics of different communities. The targeted roles and responsibilities of local government officials in connecting citizens with their government will vary from city to city; different resources will need to be employed. The political climate, organizational culture, and the values of a community will dictate the objectives and structures of each program (Thomas, 1995). Thoughtful planning is essential to a well-run program of services.

Real Opportunities must be available for citizens to access skill building and information. A clear message from both the literature (Chrislip, 1995; Fredrickson, 1996; Thomas, 1995) and from the Clark County experience is the need to provide avenues for citizens to interact meaningfully with government. A unique characteristic of the Clark County program was the Neighborhood College Program, which not only provided tangible skills to community leaders but also included a hands-on component where citizens partnered with agency staff in actually implementing a solution-based plan of action to address a community problem.

Advancing the interaction of citizens at the policy level requires the cooperation and buy-in of both administrative departments and elected officials. Citizens recognize disingenuous efforts at involving them, and have resisted media and public relations campaigns to win them over (Mathews, 1994).

Focus on "bottom-up" citizen-initiated events and activities. Many of the special events that were initiated in the Clark County program were top-down rather than citizen-driven. In some cases, citizens and the media suggested that these activities were a form of campaigning by elected officials. The community infrastructure is strengthened when opportunities for engagement are initiated and effectively managed by citizens. At the same time, neighborhood services staff should be specially trained in community-building skills such as conflict resolution, consensus-building, and community-wide planning in order to facilitate these opportunities (Henton, Melville & Walesh, 1997).

Elected officials (as well as staff) need to be careful about what they wish for. When real opportunities are presented for citizens to become involved in decisions that effect their lives, a much more vigorous and dynamic deliberative process will occur (McAfee, 1994). This may not sit well with some elected leaders and agency staff, who may find themselves increasingly faced with citizen anger and left with little control over the conduct and the civility of local debates. Citizens will become more skilled on how to access and work through government, however, when they are involved in the problem-solving process and share in the ownership of the solutions to their community's problems (Berry, Portney & Thompson, 1993; Walsh, 1997). The challenge for local elected officials is to begin to redefine their role in the community and within government and recognize that success in the local political arena often requires new approaches to community problem-solving (Potapchuk, 1996).

Changes in how government connects with its citizens need to become part of the organizational culture of local municipalities through strategic planning efforts. Strategic planning is intended to enhance an organization's ability to think and act strategically and assist the organization in becoming

more effective in improving communication inside and outside the organization (Bryson & Alston, 1996). Current participation models are not satisfactory for most communities (Ostrom, 1993). Effective change in authentic citizen involvement requires an effort by local governments to reexamine and rework their organizational mandates in a strategic and planned manner. Strategic planning that is linked to both tactical and operational planning is one avenue some municipalities are employing to ensure real changes are made to how organizations operate and behave. If performed correctly, elected and appointed officials are in a better position to understand and support citizen-driven initiatives, allowing citizens to take the lead in solving problems. Strategies for increasing citizen participation have already been initiated in Clark County departments. These include out-stationing County staff in neighborhoods, requiring that all local zoning issues are routed through the Town Advisory Boards for their recommendation (including the applicant's appearance before the TAB), and allowing straw polling for TAB members instead of having them appointed directly by Commissioners.

Planners need to understand the political nature of neighborhood services programs. There is tension between the needs of professional managers and elected officials (DeSantis & Leal, 1998; Montjoy & Watson, 1995). Increased political pressure arising from the need for elected officials to become ever more responsive to citizens can put new demands on how city and county managers run their departments, interact with elected officials, and deliver services. Neighborhood service programs can easily get caught in the crossfire. Although Clark County has adopted a strong council-manager form of government (Kemp, 1987), tension has arisen as elected officials have demanded a more active role in deciding how neighborhood service programs are implemented, what activities neighborhood staff perform, and how and when resources are used. Requests have been made to assign each commissioner a specific neighborhood staff to serve as a liaison to his or her district and have that person report directly to the elected official. Top-down "citizen events" can easily get confused with campaigning, especially during election time. Setting clear written program guidelines that outline the expected outcomes of neighborhood services programs may minimize these problems; however, it is important to understand the political nature of programs that interface so closely with the shared power of governance.

FUTURE RESEARCH/CONCLUSION

This article has discussed an effort to encourage participation by citizens in addressing problems at the neighborhood and community level. Although the study involved only one county, our findings concerning efforts undertaken in the Las Vegas Valley support the findings of Barber (1998), Berry, Portney and Thomson (1993), and Wallis and Koziol (1996), among others. These researchers found that creating structured and authentic opportunities for involvement of citizens in city and county government is a critical step in preparing communities to effectively address the myriad of complex issues confronting urban America. Additionally, they found community participation produced citizens with a greater capacity to govern. Similar to the findings of Berry, Portney and Thomson (1993, p. 263-266), Clark County citizens involved in these innovative opportunities not only felt better about their own political effectiveness but also about the ability of their local government to respond.

Additional research is needed to determine whether these perceptions of Las Vegas Valley citizens translate into gains in their level of authority over decision-making, and whether they truly become involved in shaping policy at the local level. If so, these neighborhood services strategies may have the additional salutary effect of reducing levels of public cynicism and mistrust of government.

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Endnotes

[1] While Putnam makes much of the alutary role played by bowling leagues and choral societies (1993), it is not clear that all intermediary associations are equally desirable. Organizations with explicitly civic purposes, such as parent teacher associations or the League of Women Voters, may increase levels of social capital, but it is not at all clear that groups with anti-democratic beliefs, such as the Aryan Nation, provide positive civic outcomes.

[2] The survey instrument operationalized these dimensions, respectively, in terms of: 1) the steps participants would take in developing community projects, 2) participants' ability to identify necessary resources and potential allies, 3) participants' ability to identify possible obstacles to their efforts, 4) their plans for involving neighbors in planning and implementation efforts, 5) their development and self-perception as leaders.

[3] However, we must preface the reported results with the caveat that only one cohort of participants completed both the pre and posttests. As a result, we are working with qualitative data gathered from 30 participants in one completed sequence of the NCP. Still, we can point to a number of interesting aspects of development in the responses of these participants.

[4] As of January 1999, 71% of the Neighborhood College graduates (three classes) had completed or were in the process of implementing their neighborhood projects, 39% and 32% respectively. When surveyed via telephone, 70% of the graduates indicated they would look for non-governmental resources first when implementing their projects; this is the exact opposite of their responses when they first entered the program (i.e., 70% indicated they would look to the government for resources first).