



Urban Initiatives: A University/Community Partnership in North Philadelphia, Pennsylvania¹

Presenter:

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Background

The Center for Public Policy Urban Initiatives at Temple University is building a partnership between a North Philadelphia community, the City of Philadelphia, and the university. The project is funded by a \$582,563 grant from the U.S. Department of Education and an additional \$193,198 in matching funds contributed from a variety of participants, most notably the Beech Corporation, and Habitat for Humanity. The Recreation component received approximately \$134,000 for three years, much of it used to award community grants. The project was designed to complement and expand ongoing technical, training, and evaluation assistance to the Cecil B. Moore community as part of Temple University's urban mission.

The central theme of Urban Initiatives is *community empowerment*. Rehabilitation of the physical and social landscape is achieved by linking the analytic, problem-solving, and educational resources of Temple University with a broad-based coalition of agencies seeking to improve the quality of life in the Cecil B. Moore area of North Philadelphia. The three-year effort is aimed at:

(1) working with the local residents and civic and municipal leadership toward the social and physical betterment of the community;

(2) providing technology transfer to community-based organization and business interests so continuation of these developmental efforts can be institutionalized within the community, thus enabling the community to be less reliant on external assistance;

(3) creating viable demonstration projects which involve all partners, and which leave tangible impacts on the community; and

(4) elaborating on the role which the urban university should be playing in urban neighborhoods by designing curricula and involving students in urban policy analysis and community design projects.

The Cecil B. Moore community is located in North Central Philadelphia and three contiguous census tracts. The area displays the signs of urban decay found in many urban centers: crumbling houses, abandoned autos, overgrown and littered lots, cracked sidewalks, and potholes, as well as an array of social disorganization and public health safety problems.

The total population of the area is 12,094, with a slightly higher number of females (6,309) than males (5,785). Over 90% of residents are African American. Close to one-third (32%) of residents are under 18 years of age. There is also a fairly significant elderly population, with 15% of residents

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over 65 years of age. Many children under 16 are being raised by grandmothers.

The target area includes 6,287 housing units. Over one-third of the housing units are unoccupied, abandoned, and blighted. Many of the houses are actually owned or supervised by the city of Philadelphia. One-third of the units are single unit attached or rowhouses. Most of the housing units are valued at less than \$15,000. Half of the rental units lease for less than \$250 a month.

Recreation opportunities are limited in the target community. Many of the recreation facilities are open only a few hours a week and, when open, are staffed with temporary or patronage employees. Most of the recreation centers are old, poorly maintained and in need of capital improvements. Teen violence, vandalism, and theft impact negatively on recreational programs and community participation. City and department budget constraints, job freezes, public safety, and public health priorities limit opportunities to provide or create programs to meet the special needs of at-risk youth living in the target area.

Program Objectives

Urban Initiatives has five major objectives:

- (1) to assist in the social and economic development of the community by designing and implementing programs to increase community organization, share community information, develop mentoring programs, and train a number of community residents in community organization and leadership skills;
- (2) to increase public safety, particularly in public places, by planning for and implementing a police "mini-station" in the target community;
- (3) to improve the physical landscape and land use in the target community through collaboration of academic and technical assistance, and "projects" conducted in collaboration with the Beech Corporation and Habitat for Humanity;
- (4) to design, provide, and support recreational opportunities planned by and for the community; and
- (5) to increase education and training opportunities for community leaders, local business persons, and community residents.

Each of the objectives is intended to contribute directly to stabilization of the community, while at the same time providing a vehicle for community organization and self-determination.

Key Players

A *Community Advisory Board* was established to better coordinate the project and provide a linkage with community and governmental representatives. The Recreation Networking Advisory Committee (RNAC), consisting of 12 community residents who live in the Cecil B. Moore neighborhood, was established to determine guidelines and approve funding for recreation proposals and monitor the services rendered. Many of the members are long-time community activists. The committee meets monthly to establish criteria and guidelines for administering grants and to monitor them. The RNAC also advises the Sport Management and Leisure Studies faculty at Temple University on potential opportunities for fieldwork and intern placement.

The RNAC is staffed by one coordinator and a doctoral student majoring in sport and recreation administration. The coordinator is supervised by a faculty member, familiar with the Cecil B. Moore target area, its problems and needs. The coordinator is responsible for planning RNAC meetings and activities, developing a calendar of events for the service/learning projects, compiling data for the resource directory, providing technical assistance; monitoring and evaluating activities, program development, and supporting and cooperating with other Urban Initiatives project coordinators.

The second group of key players is the *Principal Investigators Working Group*. This group meets to discuss project efforts, activities, and outcomes. The group has fostered a closer relationship among internal Temple University faculty and staff, and helped to forge an academic coalition, which has resulted in joint programming among several project elements and the creation of project Community Forums.

The Recreation Program Content

Specific objectives of the recreation component are as follows:

- (1) award community grants for recreation programs;
- (2) implement a service/learning program led by Temple University students in the Cecil B. Moore community;
- (3) coordinate development of a community resource directory;
- (4) support the Recreation Networking Advisory Committee;

- (5) provide resource consultation to the community;
- (6) provide additional training for the adult population;
- (7) promote socialization networks; and
- (8) monitor community grants.

Community Grants

The Recreation Networking Advisory Committee evaluates applications for grants from community groups seeking to offer programs in the target area. Some of the community grants, which range from \$500 to \$2,000, targeted for at-risk youth are as follows:

- (1) *Aloha Tutorial Camp* - Founded and conducted by a resident from the Cecil B. Moore community, the camp is based at Smith Memorial Playground in East Fairmount Park. This day camp emphasizes education, providing remediation and reinforcement in math and reading through recreation activities. Campers experience a variety of activities including rhythmic activities and field trips, and lunch and snacks are provided. Over 90 neighborhood children, ages 3-10 years participate.
- (2) *Martin Luther King Flag Football Team*-Fifty adolescents, 14 and under, participate in a sport program that focuses on teaching teamwork, self-discipline, responsibility, and respect for others, while developing sport skills. All coaches are volunteers from the neighborhood. Funds provide uniforms, equipment, and awards.
- (3) *Girl Scouts of Greater Philadelphia Extended Family Program*-This program targets troop activities for girls living in homeless shelters. Troop leaders and volunteers are recruited from the neighborhood. During the summer, the girls attend a day camp in suburban Philadelphia.
- (4) *Police Explorer Scouts*-The local police district community relations officer directs and supervises youth from the neighborhood to perform community service at recreational events. Funds were used to purchase two-way radios.
- (5) *The North Philadelphia Senior Center at North City Congress*-The Intergenerational Choir was organized to bring together neighborhood youths and senior citizens living in the Cecil B. Moore neighborhood. Funds are used to purchase sheet music and provide light refreshments after choir rehearsals. The choir

entertains at nursing homes and special events during the year.

(6) *Heritage Community Study Buddy Program*-A need to focus on academic preparation through recreation is the hallmark of this program. Study Buddy provides community volunteers and tutors for neighborhood children. Funds are used to purchase school supplies and equipment.

(7) *Boy Scouts of Philadelphia, Liberty Council*-Funds are used to support a Boy Scout Troop and a Cub Pack at a neighborhood church. By purchasing camping and other scout equipment for the troop, Boy Scout membership fees, and subscriptions to *Boys Life Magazine*, scouts are given an opportunity to attend summer camp. Equipment is shared with other Cecil B. Moore Boy Scout troops to maximize participation by other boys from the neighborhood.

(8) *North Philadelphia Partnership's Youth Ambassador Corps*-Approximately 75 boys and girls are trained to improve ambassadorial skills such as public speaking, knowledge of their community and its relationship with other neighborhoods, and the history of North Philadelphia, including its community activists who made a difference. Once trained, they serve as tour guides and become a part of a conservation effort cleaning and landscaping vacant lots.

(9) *Mt. Lebanon Community Baptist Church*-This organization founded by church elders uses grant funds to support recreation and education programs for youth in the target community.

(10) *Sabree Youth Corps*-A community service organization, using veterans and neighborhood volunteers, Sabree trains youth at-risk in marching and singing drill teams. The corps performs at community special events, neighborhood playstreets, and drill team competition.

Service/Learning Projects

Twenty students, all sports/recreation management and therapeutic recreation majors, provide social and recreation programs at a neighborhood nursing home, John Wanamaker Junior High School, and the North Philadelphia YMCA. In addition, the students conduct a spring and a fall clean-up-fix-up day at the neighborhood recreation center. They also organize a warm clothing drive for adults, infants, and children. The students organize a canned goods drive and volunteer with the Recreation Networking Advisory Committee.