



"This Is Our Community – WE'RE ALL IN:" Civic Participation in Pittsburgh's Larimer/East Liberty Choice Neighborhood

BACKGROUND

HUD's Choice Neighborhoods program invests in struggling neighborhoods with distressed public or HUD-assisted housing through a comprehensive approach to neighborhood revitalization. Its success relies on a locally driven approach to revitalization that draws on the vision and expertise of residents, local leaders and stakeholders, such as public housing authorities, city government, schools and school systems, private developers and many others, who come together to formulate a plan to transform the distressed housing and the surrounding neighborhood.

Recognizing that locally led revitalization must reflect resident and community priorities, the Choice Neighborhoods program requires that grantees make community engagement central to both the planning and implementation phases of their work. To that end, Choice Neighborhoods grantees are encouraged to work with a broad range of public and private organizations to mobilize the financial and human resources needed to support and sustain their Transformation Plan. Choice Neighborhoods grantees are also expected to involve residents, faith-based institutions, local business owners and other community organizations as partners in planning and implementation. This is best accomplished by developing an intentional approach to community engagement that creates multiple opportunities for resident participation and leadership and thus builds the foundation for long-lasting, locally driven change.

This guide focuses particularly on civic participation, which we define as *community members working together to influence and make important decisions that impact their neighborhood, their city and their lives*. Civic participation can take many forms, from active involvement and leadership in community forums, meetings and planning processes, to advocacy for policy positions, to roles in decision-making bodies. Meaningful and long-lasting civic participation in a neighborhood setting usually requires some form of *supportive infrastructure*, such as organizational supports that help empower citizens to exert influence and make decisions. Although civic participation in local affairs is voluntary in nature, sustaining such a process

for cumulative and lasting impact requires intentionality and investment of time, expertise and dollars.

This guide describes the development of an infrastructure for civic participation in the Larimer/East Liberty neighborhood in Pittsburgh. The Larimer Consensus Group (LCG), a grassroots group comprised of residents and other community stakeholders, emerged from a community-driven planning process in 2008. Since that time, the LCG has grown as a successful agent of change and an effective decision-making entity with influence in the Larimer community. Through multiple planning phases, the LCG and its partners in city government, particularly the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh, created a community plan that aligned with the Choice Neighborhoods program's vision for locally driven neighborhood revitalization. Building on this plan, the Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh (HACP) and the city government were able to partner with the LCG to secure a \$30 million Choice Neighborhoods Implementation Grant in 2014.

The Larimer Consensus Group's development as an influential stakeholder in neighborhood revitalization can serve as a valuable example for Choice Neighborhoods grantees and leaders in other communities seeking to build the kind of civic participation that drives and sustains neighborhood gains.

"The Larimer Consensus Group represents sustainable community involvement at its highest level. With deep roots in the community, and a proven ability to work with government, businesses, residents and other partners, it is the driving force that will enable us to realize our shared vision for this amazing neighborhood."

- Pittsburgh Mayor William Peduto

A FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION

Robust community engagement has several benefits for communities involved in comprehensive neighborhood revitalization. It ensures that plans for change are well-informed by the expertise, priorities and experiences of residents and thus are more likely to be effective. It increases ownership of agreed-upon changes within the neighborhood because community members have a say in the decisions. Robust community engagement can also promote strong ties and relationships among neighbors, generating social networks and leadership opportunities that have immediate benefits and build neighborhood capacity to sustain change well beyond the scope of a single grant or initiative.

There is no one strategy that ensures that residents and community members are fully informed and engaged. Rather, successful community engagement usually emerges from a variety of approaches that offer residents opportunities to play important roles. The honeycomb, first developed as a framework by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, is one way of visualizing how multiple approaches to community engagement can reinforce each other. Each cell of the honeycomb represents a different approach to community engagement. Although each strategy can be used on its own, when combined the community engagement structure – as with a honeycomb – is stronger and provides the widest range of opportunities and channels through which residents can shape the future of their neighborhood.



The strategies represented in the honeycomb are just a few of many that can be incorporated within a neighborhood's approach to community engagement.

- **Civic participation** strategies increase the level at which community members engage in decision-making in their community, including active participation in community forums and design processes, policy advocacy, working through civic organizations and/or exercising the right to vote.
- **Resident leadership** strategies train and develop community members to take on leadership roles in the neighborhood revitalization process underway in their community.
- **Social networks** strategies focus on building relationships between and among residents of a community, yielding a variety of personal and community benefits.
- **Community organizing** strategies mobilize community members to take action around achieving better outcomes for their neighborhood.

Sustaining Neighborhood Change: The Power of Resident Leadership, Social Networks, and Community Mobilization can be found online at <http://www.cssp.org/publications/neighborhood-investment/making-connections/making-connections-sustaining-neighborhood-change.pdf>.

THE LARIMER/EAST LIBERTY NEIGHBORHOOD



Source: Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh

Pittsburgh’s Choice Neighborhood – located three miles east of downtown – is comprised of the Larimer neighborhood and the eastern-most section of the adjacent East Liberty neighborhood. The area is home to approximately 2,400 residents, 87 percent of whom are African American and one-quarter of whom are older than age 65. The area has suffered from disinvestment and decline over the last five decades, with the population of the Larimer neighborhood decreasing by 75 percent between 1950 and 2010. This change has resulted in a neighborhood with more than 700 untended vacant lots (53 percent of the lots in the neighborhood are vacant) and a growing crime rate.

The neighborhood is home to two deteriorating public and HUD-assisted housing developments: Hamilton-Larimer Housing, with 28 units of public housing, and East Liberty Gardens, with 127 units of HUD-assisted housing. (Although East Liberty Gardens is just outside the Larimer neighborhood, it is in a part of the East Liberty neighborhood that is only a few blocks from Larimer’s borders.) Historically, the entire neighborhood was known as East Liberty, but it was divided in 1960 by East Liberty Boulevard and the northern part of the neighborhood was renamed Larimer. Even so, the two neighborhoods and the redevelopment occurring within them are still very much interconnected.

Recent shifts in regional job growth have supported reinvestment in areas adjacent to the Larimer/East Liberty Choice Neighborhood. The adjacent East Liberty Business District has experienced an upswing in development. Technology and research companies, such as Google, RAND and Disney Research, have moved into the area, supporting the revitalization of the business district itself and positioning

the Larimer/East Liberty residential neighborhood for change. The \$30 million Choice Neighborhoods Implementation Grant is enabling the Housing Authority and the City to revitalize both Hamilton-Larimer complex and East Liberty Gardens, replacing all 155 units with a 334-unit mixed-income community. Building on the nearby economic development, the Larimer/East Liberty partners are using the Choice Neighborhoods grant as a tool to expand those improvements into the neighborhood by addressing vacant lots and properties and “greening” the community through storm water infrastructure, developing green space and providing incentives for green businesses, thereby also creating pathways to employment for local residents.

BUILDING CIVIC PARTICIPATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE FOR NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION

The Larimer/East Liberty Partners

The roots of the neighborhood’s civic participation strategies were established decades ago and have been nurtured by a succession of community leaders. Present-day leaders are conscious of this history and respectfully place current accomplishments in this context, as illustrated in the graphic titled “Building on the Past & Preparing for the Future,” which portrays 20 years of milestones in neighborhood planning and civic participation.

Larimer/East Liberty’s civic participation efforts have involved a number of community groups and organizations. The roles of key entities, including the East Liberty Concerned Citizens, Larimer Consensus Group, Kingsley Association and K.E.E.L., are described briefly in the text box titled “Larimer/East Liberty’s Civic Groups and Organizations.” In addition, the City of Pittsburgh has been a champion of community engagement and civic participation, partnering with these grassroots groups over the last two decades to fund neighborhood planning and help secure implementation dollars. The Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA), the City’s economic development agency, in particular, has partnered with the ELCCC and LCG to fund a series of community plans in Larimer/East Liberty since 2007. K.E.E.L. is now the community and resident engagement partner in the Choice Neighborhoods Implementation Grant, and the City has built K.E.E.L. into the governance and accountability structure for the Choice Neighborhoods Implementation Grant activities. “The LCG and its community engagement work will help the City stay true to the larger vision the neighborhood holds,” states Kyle Chintalapalli, Housing Manager in the Office of the Mayor. “We are in constant communication with the LCG and Kingsley to make sure things are going the way the community wants.”

These strong present-day partnerships were built over time, as recounted in the sections that follow.



Source: The Larimer Consensus Group

LARIMER/EAST LIBERTY'S CIVIC GROUPS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Strong community-based civic organizations help lead and guide Pittsburgh's Choice Neighborhoods initiative. The following organizations have been key actors in working toward revitalization of the Larimer/East Liberty community over the last two decades:

East Liberty Concerned Citizens Corporation (ELCCC): The ELCCC was formed in the 1970s under the leadership of activist Ora Lee Carroll and other residents of the area. The group was a driving force behind partnerships that set the first rounds of community planning in motion.

Larimer Consensus Group (LCG): Growing out of an intense period of community planning in 2007-2008, the LCG is a volunteer-led body comprised of Larimer/East Liberty residents and representatives from community organizations. The LCG undertakes projects to improve the neighborhood and increasingly represents neighborhood residents and their vision in many city processes. The LCG has also assumed responsibility for the foundational community work begun by the ELCCC.

Kingsley Association: The Kingsley Association began as a settlement house in the late 19th century and moved to the Larimer neighborhood in 1923. It provides programming and services to support individuals, families and youth in the area. A partner in several of the community planning initiatives over the last two decades, Kingsley also currently serves as a partner, incubator and fiscal agent for the LCG.

K.E.E.L.: K.E.E.L. is comprised of the Kingsley Association, East Liberty Housing Incorporated (the board that oversees East Liberty Garden Apartments), East Liberty Development Incorporated (a community-based organization in the neighborhood) and the Larimer Consensus Group, which now includes a resident of Hamilton-Larimer on its board. Together as "K.E.E.L.," these organizations serve as the community and resident engagement partners in the Choice Neighborhoods implementation work with the City of Pittsburgh and HACP.



Taking a Stand

Residents have been actively participating in revitalizing the neighborhood since the 1990s. An early milestone occurred in 1998, when Ms. Ora Lee Carroll, a noted community leader and head of the East Liberty Concerned Citizens Corporation, and Senator Jim Ferlo (then representing the Larimer neighborhood on the Pittsburgh City Council) came together to call attention to the escalating number of vacant lots, as well as the consequences of the poorly laid out street grid that had isolated parts of the neighborhood. Their work resulted in the neighborhood's first community-driven plan, and today's community leaders credit this early effort as the foundation for the current robust civic participation in Larimer/East Liberty.

"We didn't start from the ground floor when we applied for the Choice Neighborhoods money. We had been working on rebuilding our community through strong community engagement for years. We decided that even if we didn't get the [Choice Neighborhoods] money, we were still going to move forward."

- Carolyn Peeks, 30-year Larimer resident and chair of the LCG Board

Getting Organized for Action

The process of building civic participation was not always easy. Progress following the initial plan often seemed slow, due partially to disagreements among neighborhood groups and stakeholders and to the limited resources of existing civic organizations. However, residents advocated steadily for neighborhood change, and 10 years later this resulted in a Larimer Community Planning Process that took place from October 2007 through September 2008. This process was facilitated by a group that has become an important neighborhood ally, Jackson Clark Partners, consultants working with several of Pittsburgh's neighborhoods. The updated Larimer Community Plan that resulted from the process established a vision for the neighborhood as a green, sustainable community for the 21st century, with a distinctive focus on "quick wins" and more widespread community participation. The aim was action, so that residents could see concrete change and be part of a broader, longer-term process to attract large-scale investment in the neighborhood.

ACTION TEAMS

Residents determined the Action Teams' agendas, based on ideas gathered through neighborhood interviews, listening sessions, surveys and door-knocking campaigns:

- **The Green Team** focuses on green initiatives and making environmentally friendly practices a clear neighborhood priority.
- **Redd Up** addresses blighted properties and abandoned land through neighborhood beautification projects and strategies to reactivate vacant lots.
- **One Voice** is responsible for communication strategies and getting important information out to the community.
- **Work & Wellness** focuses on health, safety, employment and business development.
- **Celebrate** team members focus on community image and "pride of place" projects.

As a result of the updated plan, **Action Teams were established and charged with bringing about neighborhood change. The teams were designed to involve and connect many community members and organizational stakeholders and to pursue low-cost, high-impact actions.** This focus on action was essential; after a decade following the first community plan and another 11-month planning process in 2008, community leaders and partners heard from residents that they were frustrated with long planning processes and needed to see and feel positive change in the neighborhood.

The fact that the Action Teams produced visible results was what kept residents involved and motivated. For example, the Green Team was the force behind building a popular community garden in the neighborhood. This team also started hosting a now-annual fundraising event called "Taste the Future of Larimer," which features food from local vendors and live music.

The Redd Up team has been responsible for the *52Lots* project, a year-long effort that successfully brought residents of the area together to clean up one vacant lot every Saturday. The 2008 Larimer Community Plan also served as a springboard to some of the first private investment in the neighborhood in more than 40 years, garnering \$12 million of investment from the Urban Redevelopment Authority to jumpstart economic development and job opportunities in the area.

The 2007-2008 planning process also resulted in the establishment of the Larimer Consensus Group, which was formed to represent the interests of neighborhood stakeholders and serve as the implementation group for Larimer's action-oriented plan. Initially, the LCG was made up of 10 volunteer members, representing one of the following three member categories: (1) neighborhood residents, (2) organizational members (including community organizations, agencies and businesses) and (3) at-large members committed to revitalization but who did not live in the neighborhood. The plan acknowledged that the community needed to increase its capacity and resources to push transformation forward and that a broader-reaching group bringing together the interests of neighborhood stakeholders was needed. The LCG's launch and initial work were supported by funding from the Neighborhood Allies (then called the Pittsburgh Partnership for Neighborhood Development) and the Heinz Endowment.

Setting a Shared Vision

The activity spurred by the 2008 plan led the newly formed LCG to produce the Larimer Vision Plan in 2010, a comprehensive land use plan that envisioned Larimer as a mixed-income, state-of-the-art green community. This plan was jointly funded by the URA, Community Design Center (a local nonprofit organization), the Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh (HACP) and Neighborhood Allies. It proposed solutions to the continuing problem of vacant, distressed and underutilized land and recommended actions to address the urban design issues that physically isolated Larimer from other parts of the city. Furthermore, it highlighted the need to partner with HACP, the largest landholder in the area, to achieve the vision. The plan incorporated broad community input from many community meetings and a "community census survey." With the completion of this land use plan, the LCG was ready to shift focus from planning to implementation and began working with the URA and other city agencies to identify and secure funding to operationalize the recommendations.

Throughout this process, the LCG recognized that revitalizing Larimer/East Liberty could happen only if community members were a vital part of the process. As a result, LCG committed itself to broad outreach and communication strategies. "We really wanted to hear the voice of community. We wanted to hear what they thought, what they wanted, what they needed. We made ourselves visible in the community. We walked house to house, held events at the community garden and in other places people regularly gathered," explained Carolyn Peeks.

"We made sure we let people know what was going on and worked to help the community see things were happening. We wanted folks to know more change is coming and we need our

neighbors, all of our neighbors, sitting at the table so we can continue to have a voice. We need all hands on deck."

The LCG offered residents concrete ways to get involved: join an Action Team, complete the community census survey, attend and contribute to monthly community meetings and visit the LCG website for updated information and then share it with their network. The LCG also worked with Jackson Clark Partners to create a visible community brand that promotes community engagement and ownership of community outcomes. "In Larimer, residents are committed to building equity and transformation from the inside out," said Pat Clark of Jackson Clark Partners.

BRANDING CAMPAIGN

The campaign "This is our community: WE'RE ALL IN," formulated in early 2012, was designed to be a recognizable and trusted brand that residents and partners could rally around and also serve as an invitation for other interested stakeholders to get involved. The campaign included four strategies to broaden engagement and support among all neighborhood residents.

- 1. Increase participation of those who normally don't participate:** LCG members went door-to-door to talk with neighbors about the work underway in Larimer/East Liberty, not waiting for people to come to them or to show up at a community meeting. They pushed to move civic participation beyond the traditionally "active" community members who were already part of the formal networks for change. LCG members connected to neighbors who previously had been part of informal networks of influence.
- 2. Listen first:** LCG members and the residents working with them started with one-on-one conversations with their neighbors. When gathering information for the community census, they listened to their neighbors' concerns and invited neighbors to be part of the solutions. They took care to report back to the community in clear and transparent ways their progress and the status of important efforts such as the Choice Neighborhoods application and, later, the activities under the Choice Neighborhoods grant.
- 3. Establish a bias for action:** After formulating several community plans over the years, residents were tired of planning. LCG members found that the more they developed well-structured avenues for action and participation, the more neighbors "stepped up" to be part of the Larimer movement for change. Residents joined in

Action Team activities, and the constant focus on an action agenda helped engage new people and build their capacity as the next generation of leaders.

4. Create a wide network that can rebuild the civic infrastructure of the community: The LCG began building a neighbor network to increase neighbor-to-neighbor connections and decrease isolation. The six residents who formed the survey team have been the key actors in connecting residents to one another, creating and promoting opportunities for people from varied parts of the neighborhood to work together, through such basic steps as bringing them on to Action Teams and inviting them to events at the community garden. This growing network now serves as one more vehicle for building social connections.

Moving from Vision to Action

The LCG and its community partners continued to work together and with the City toward the neighborhood vision. They created an updated Larimer Vision-to-Action Plan in 2012. (A draft version of the of The Larimer Vision-to-Action Plan is available online at: https://larimerplan.files.wordpress.com/2012/06/larimer-vision-to-action-plan-report_phase-i.pdf.) Funded by HACP, it was the core planning document that informed Pittsburgh's Choice Neighborhoods Transformation Plan that was ultimately successful in securing a \$30 million Choice Neighborhoods Implementation Grant in 2014.

The development of the Vision-to-Action-Plan in 2012 expanded the LCG's focus in several pivotal ways. It more intentionally aligned the neighborhood's revitalization efforts with the transformation of the distressed public and HUD-assisted housing and fostered a connection of HUD-assisted residents to the broader community. Up until this point, the community planning and engagement efforts had focused on housing values, repairs and the needs of long-standing homeowners as they endeavored to maintain their homes. Reflecting that focus, LCG resident members were mainly homeowners and seniors. However, with 63 percent of housing in the area comprised of rental units, the LCG recognized the need to expand its outreach. For example, the community civic census survey, a tool that the LCG had used to gather data on community concerns and interests in their previous planning processes, did not fully reflect the interests of public and HUD-assisted housing residents. Though the invitation to complete the survey and become involved was open to all Larimer residents, prior to the development of the Vision-to-Action plan, there was very little engagement with the public and HUD-assisted housing residents.

During the formation of the Vision-to-Action Plan, the City and LCG partnered with Urban Strategies, a national nonprofit organization that implements place-based human capital development strategies in public housing communities that are undergoing comprehensive revitalization. This partnership helped the LCG to expand its connections to public and HUD-assisted housing residents. "The LCG was already very active prior to the Choice Neighborhoods initiative. They were organized and well-intentioned. When Urban Strategies got involved, our role was not to recreate an engagement strategy but to help the LCG reach more deeply into the public housing and HUD-assisted housing communities and thus connect the work underway more closely to the Choice Neighborhoods initiative," said Uma Murugan, vice president of projects and fund development for Urban Strategies.

Building on Urban Strategies' community-tested method of surveying residents, the LCG, Urban Strategies and Jackson Clark Partners worked to enhance the existing community survey to include the voices of the Hamilton-Larimer and East Liberty Gardens residents. The survey's first module of seven questions was administered to all participants, regardless of housing type. The survey's new second module specifically focused on public and HUD-assisted housing residents.

The new survey process became a way to engage residents and build new bridges between Hamilton-Larimer and East Liberty Gardens residents and other neighborhood residents – bridges that are leading to increased civic participation. For example, a Hamilton-Larimer resident now serves on the LCG's board. The expanded community survey process mobilized resident survey teams to more fully engage public and HUD-assisted housing residents. The teams were comprised of six residents, including three residents of Hamilton-Larimer and East Liberty Gardens, who were hired part-time to go door-to-door and survey their neighbors.

The expanded survey process shined a light on previously undocumented trends and needs. For instance, prior to this process, the LCG focused primarily on the needs of elderly residents. Through the revised survey, neighbors identified the need for more services for young children, particularly for children living in HUD-assisted and public housing: while 40 percent of young children in the entire zip code were enrolled in early childhood education programs, only 17 percent of children in HUD-assisted and public housing were enrolled. The survey results also helped the LCG pinpoint where youth lived in the neighborhood and thus where more robust youth development strategies were most needed. In sum, the new survey data helped residents, stakeholders and neighborhood organizations think differently about how to approach neighborhood challenges, laying the groundwork for the multi-sector partnerships needed to address service gaps.



LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

The successful community-driven planning process, long-term development of a civic infrastructure and central role of community engagement in Pittsburgh's Choice Neighborhoods Implementation Grant suggest potential lessons for other communities.

Use a community plan as an opportunity to establish the infrastructure for ongoing civic participation.

Neighborhood planning efforts often highlight the need for a civic infrastructure that holds partners accountable. The development of this infrastructure can be accelerated by being a central element of a visible community plan. Larimer/East Liberty's 2008 Community Plan called for the establishment of a representative and inclusive organization comprised of residents and community stakeholders that would lead and oversee the action agenda for the neighborhood. The prominence and visibility of this goal within the plan reinforced the need for an organization like the LCG, provided it with concrete goals and created impetus for seeking funds for its launch and early activities.

Focus on high-impact, low-cost action or "quick wins" that represent change people can see.

Large-scale neighborhood revitalization, such as the process underway in the Larimer/East Liberty neighborhood and in Choice Neighborhoods across the country, takes time. Too often, though, residents of communities with long histories of disinvestment have heard promises about community transformation, only to be disappointed when little happens. Working with community partners to achieve smaller scale, visible projects can seed confidence, cooperation and momentum. Even small gains show that change is possible. As the LCG learned in Larimer/East Liberty, engaging residents in Action Teams that completed projects in a timely way helped rally community support and continued engagement. Delivering on these action commitments is the surest way to combat resident skepticism and fatigue.

Invest in the capacity of civic organizations consistently and over time.

Emerging entities such as the LCG require significant investment in building and supporting operations, establishing sound financial management and managing comprehensive activities. Having a strong community partner, such as the Kingsley Association, to "lend" capacity in the early years may be critical until a new entity like the LCG can develop its own infrastructure. The experience in Larimer/East Liberty also illustrates the benefit of consistency in organizational capacity-building and leadership development. Because the LCG was able to access the ongoing support of the Kingsley Association and Jackson Clark Partners over a considerable period of time, both partners established trusted relationships and were able

to work with the LCG on both short-term and longer-range goals. In turn, the LCG's steady growth and accomplishments drew positive attention to the Larimer/East Liberty community and attracted additional capacity-building investments from both the public and private sectors.

The strong civic engagement now seen in Larimer/East Liberty is sustained by cooperation among a group of civic organizations and public sector partners. The LCG has evolved into a high-capacity group that is able to anchor the community engagement approach that is central to the Choice Neighborhoods Implementation Grant. However, the LCG is still a young entity, powered by volunteers and with no full-time staff. Presently, it relies on the unwavering commitment of residents and community partners to maintain a strong community presence and effective programming.

The Kingsley Association, as mentioned earlier, has served as an incubator and fiscal agent for LCG. The Kingsley Association has helped secure funding from local foundations to invest in capacity-building activities for the LCG, including support for leadership development, and continues to advise the LCG on important issues such as building board capacity, conducting good financial management and convening community meetings that are purposeful and focus on results. The Kingsley Association also funds the continued consulting services of Jackson Clark Partners, whose role is to assist the LCG with connecting to the community by supporting the LCG with vision-setting, organizational planning, branding and other operational pieces. Most recently, the LCG has completed a multi-year strategic plan that sets a course for the organization to decide whether to incorporate as a nonprofit organization or to remain as an unincorporated group. In 2014, the LCG received \$65,000 in funding from Neighborhood Allies, which will allow for the hiring of a dedicated, full-time staff member for the first time.

Ensure that civic participation processes are inclusive, involve a diverse range of community members and specifically include residents of public and HUD-assisted housing.

The initial membership of the LCG (and of the ELCCC before it) was comprised primarily of homeowners and seniors in the neighborhood. However, active relationship-building with public and HUD-assisted housing residents has started to build a membership that more accurately represents the full Larimer/East Liberty neighborhood. Community leaders committed to full community engagement should reach out to and build relationships with public and HUD-assisted housing residents, offering meaningful and concrete options for contributing to revitalization efforts, such as the opportunities to survey community needs and serve on Action Teams that were available to Larimer/East Liberty's residents. Public housing authorities, public housing resident councils, property owners

of HUD-assisted housing developments and other organizations with experience engaging HUD-assisted residents can be helpful partners in building these bridges.

Use data collection and analysis as a community organizing tool. In Larimer/East Liberty, the LCG used the data gathering and surveying process as a way to listen to the needs of a more diverse set of community members. The community survey was an especially useful way to draw in public and HUD-assisted housing residents who had previously not been a part of neighborhood groups or activities. The LCG was also able to use the process to engage additional members of the community in the work of the Action Teams and generate knowledge about and interest in the community planning process underway in Larimer/East Liberty. Data gathering and reporting do not have to be one-sided, with "experts" reporting on the status of the community, nor does it have to be an academic exercise done to meet grant requirements. It can be a tool to get to know the community better by involving neighbors in gathering the data, analyzing it and providing "the story behind the numbers." The data collection process can also expose a wider range of residents to the activities underway in their community and to opportunities to become involved.

CONCLUSION

The Larimer Consensus Group has become an integral part of the governance and accountability structure of Pittsburgh's Choice Neighborhoods Implementation Grant, along with the Housing Authority, the Urban Redevelopment Agency and the City of Pittsburgh. As part of K.E.E.L., which collectively is represented on the Choice Neighborhoods Steering Committee, Management Team and Implementation Working Team as the resident and community engagement partner for revitalization, the LGC has a "seat at the table." The work in Pittsburgh's Larimer/East Liberty neighborhood offers a framework for responsible and sustainable community development. The planning process prioritized the development of an infrastructure for civic participation, including a representative and inclusive entity comprised of residents and community stakeholders that would lead and oversee the action agenda for the neighborhood. The prominence and visibility of this goal throughout the planning process reinforced the need for investment in this civic infrastructure. The Larimer Consensus Group's development as an influential stakeholder in neighborhood revitalization can serve as a valuable example for Choice Neighborhoods grantees and leaders in other communities across the country that are seeking to build the kind of civic participation that drives and sustains neighborhood gains.

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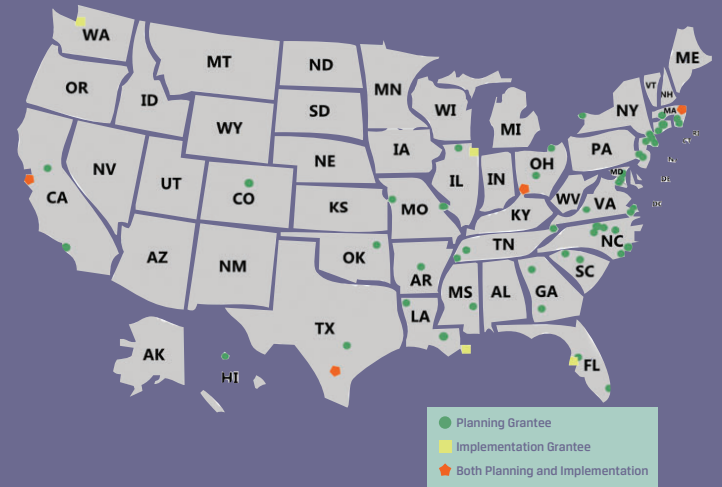
CHOICE NEIGHBORHOODS PROMISING PRACTICE GUIDES

What is Choice Neighborhoods? Choice Neighborhoods is HUD's signature place-based initiative and is a central element of the White House's Promise Zones Initiative, which builds on a federal partnership to transform high-poverty neighborhoods into places of opportunity and economic growth. Choice Neighborhoods enables communities to revitalize struggling neighborhoods with distressed public housing or HUD-assisted housing. Local leaders, residents and stakeholders, such as public housing authorities, cities, schools, police, business owners, nonprofits and private developers, create a plan that revitalizes distressed HUD housing and addresses the challenges in the surrounding neighborhood. Through these grants, communities are replacing obsolete, distressed housing with vibrant mixed-income communities, and are leveraging investments to develop new retail and businesses, turn around failing schools, strengthen early education, prevent crime, improve transportation, ensure basic neighborhood assets and increase access to jobs.

Why Choice Neighborhoods? More than 11 million Americans live in neighborhoods with a poverty rate of 40 percent or more. Many of these neighborhoods struggle with rampant crime, failing schools and the impact of decades of disinvestment. High-poverty neighborhoods also collectively have 105,000 units of distressed public and private HUD-assisted housing. Choice Neighborhoods recognizes the need to support local leaders in turning around these neighborhoods so that they can become centers of opportunity and economic growth.

What does Choice Neighborhoods do?

- **Builds upon two decades of HOPE VI innovations.** Choice Neighborhoods builds upon the bipartisan HOPE VI public housing revitalization program launched in 1993. HOPE VI has developed nearly 100,000 units of mixed-income housing in 260 communities. Many HOPE VI sites have not only rebuilt some of the most severely distressed public housing, but have also experienced sharp drops in poverty, crime and unemployment; large rises in income and property values; and new investment, business growth and jobs. Urban Institute has estimated that, with these gains, one typical, large HOPE VI redevelopment could save taxpayers \$22 million more than if HUD did nothing.
- **Transforms distressed housing and creates mixed-income communities.** The eight Choice Neighborhoods Implementation Grantees will replace and rehabilitate 2,770 obsolete, isolated public and private HUD-assisted housing units with new, mostly privately managed units. These replacement units will be mixed with 6,600 new affordable and market-rate units to ensure communities attract a sustainable mix of incomes. For some early grantees, Phase I construction is already starting. Boston is beginning to redevelop a distressed Section 8, HUD-assisted housing site that will be replaced with 129 new and reconfigured units. Meanwhile, Seattle is starting to replace a distressed public housing project through the new construction and rehabilitation of 118 units.



- **Catalyzes neighborhood transformation.** Choice Neighborhoods Grantees develop a comprehensive neighborhood plan that addresses the broader needs of the community, including nearby vacant private housing, public safety, local schools, employment, economic development and other critical community improvements. Grantees can use up to 30 percent of their award to leverage these investments. For example, with \$500,000 in Choice Neighborhoods funds and \$13.5 million in leverage, the City of Boston and its partners are converting an abandoned factory across the street from their future housing site into a multi-tenant food production facility. This facility will support more than 50 businesses and create more than 100 new jobs within the first three years of operation. Along the same street, Boston will make strategic façade improvements to 10-15 businesses. These and other physical investments will be complemented with improvements in residents' education, safety, health and employment.
- **Leverages other funding.** Choice Neighborhoods Grantees have leveraged more than \$2 billion, more than 8 times their total grant award. This total includes new and refocused funds from private investors, banks, cities, universities, foundations and a range of local partners.
- **Engages key stakeholders.** Mayors, local governments, nonprofits, tribal entities, developers and public housing authorities can apply for Choice Neighborhoods Grants. In addition to applicants, Choice Neighborhoods Grantees have also formed partnerships with a range of local players, such as private investors, Chambers of Commerce, school districts, police departments, community health clinics, faith-based organizations and Workforce Investment Boards.
- **Builds capacity through Planning Grants.** It takes years to plan a neighborhood transformation effort and build a strong coalition of stakeholders. For this reason, Choice Neighborhoods provides smaller, two-year Planning Grants. Planning Grants include competitive preferences for rural communities.