

LISC-BSC Partner Meeting Themes Summary Native American Community Development Institute (NACDI)

Background

Wilder Research was hired by LISC to evaluate the overall Building Sustainable Communities program. In order to develop an evaluation plan that accurately reflects the context, needs, and goals of the different partner organizations being funded through this program, Wilder Research met individually with each lead agency to learn more about their organization's work, evaluation goals, and community context.

This is a summary of the main themes from three meetings held by Wilder Research staff with the Native American Community Development Institute (NACDI) and its partners. The first meeting was on January 24, 2014, attended by two key organizational leaders from NACDI. Two final focus groups were held on September 15, 2014 with 6 organizational partners and on October 1, 2014 with 17 community members.

This summary is meant to be an overview of the discussions and a supplement to the full meeting notes (attached). It is also intended to serve as a feedback loop between Wilder Research and the partner organizations, ensuring that we accurately captured and interpreted the things said during our meeting. Once agreed to, it will also help to inform LISC staff.

Initial meeting

Community conditions

NACDI staff described the history of the organization beginning with Hennepin County funding a study on the state of Native families, which focused on visioning, community engagement and listening, and an analysis of the Native nonprofit sector. It was out of this study's recommendations that NACDI was formed, along with its visions as an organization in the Native American Blueprint.

One of the findings that came out of this study that NACDI immediately took on was a large but often ineffective Native nonprofit sector. They described there being many Native serving nonprofits in the area that were receiving quite a bit of funding, but they were not necessarily bringing in any results. To change this, NACDI began building relationships with organizations in the area serving the Native community to help coordinate the work being done in order to more effectively meet the needs of the community. This was particularly important because they described the Native nonprofits being siloed and protective of their work, so relationship building and trust building was an important first step.

They also described there being a complete lack of Native American cultural presence in the community, prior to NACDI being formed. As a result, one of the first initiatives it took on was the Franklin Ave. cultural corridor project, which brought more Native cultural presence to the area.

NACDI also described there being very little community engagement occurring in the area prior to its formation. In fact, they said that up until very recently, NACDI was the only Native nonprofit in the area with a community organizer on staff. In order to build trust and buy-in with the community, they focused much of their efforts on community engagement, hosting listening sessions and other community events.

Activities and strategies

NACDI staff emphasized how closely community engagement is tied into all their work. They described community engagement as the context for which they build partnerships with other organizations in the area, being able to act as a bridge between the community and other organizations serving the community. It is from

organizations to the table. Recently, they began convening conversations about wealth and asset building, hearing the community's goals as well as what other organizations in the area are doing about it. Other conversations have been around topics such as food and entrepreneurialism. Overall, their strategy appears to be that community development is done through community engagement.

NACDI has also worked with LISC prior to the Building Sustainable Communities grant, particularly in their efforts with the Franklin Ave. Cultural Corridor. In this effort, both NACDI and LISC recognized that community development cannot solely look at built community for improving the quality of life, and focused on instilling a sense of community identity and cultural pride in the neighborhood.

Moving forward, NACDI recently completed its initial five year strategic plan, and is about to go into a new cycle of strategic planning with its board. With its focus on opportunity-based community development approaches, it is now focusing on taking its vision statements and previous evaluation information into further action steps.

Learnings to date

NACDI staff frequently described how important it is for their work to engage community members and listen to their voices and goals. They also described the importance of building relationships and trust with other Native nonprofits in order to most effectively meet the needs of the community members and catalyze progress in their community.

Along those lines, NACDI staff described an important learning in their previous partnership with LISC. During their work, NACDI was more focused on the people/community side of the work and saw that as a means to influence a sense of place, whereas LISC was more place-based in focus rather than on the engagement side. Each organization has learned the importance of integrating both for achieving successful community development and with community buy-in and support.

Evaluation hopes and fears

NACDI staff were eager to more deeply incorporate evaluation into their organization. In fact, they even described wanting to become a warehouse for tracking relevant community indicators for other Native serving nonprofits in the area. They said it is important as an independent organization to own their own data and have self-determination in that regard.

Related to Wilder's evaluation for this project, NACDI hopes that the evaluation can be a bridge for NACDI to take on more evaluation of their own moving forward. Further, they hope that it can somehow document the BSC model in a way that shines light onto NACDI's model for this work, as well as document the community's work and impact. They hope this evaluation will lead to sharing effective practices with others in the field.

In particular, they hope to see indicators from the quantitative side regarding homeownership, school achievement, health indicators, Native ownership of local businesses, etc. They are interested in data collection, identifying key data points and indicators, in order to identify learnings that will shape their work and others' work in the community. They appreciate the value of qualitative research, and hope that the partnership LISC BSC has with both CURA and Wilder will connect the qualitative with the quantitative to show how this model "moves the needle forward."

Final focus groups

Strategies for engagement

When community members were asked how they initially got involved with NACDI, many described attending one of NACDI's gallery art shows, its monthly community meeting space called "Breakfast Bites," participating in talking circles or the American Indian Day celebration, or just simply seeing the Native public artwork on Franklin Ave. Some participants also mentioned having deeper historical connections to other organizations in the community that partner with NACDI.

those partnerships that NACDI then works to build connections across organizations doing similar work and helping to coordinate those efforts in order to meet community needs. In that role, they also work to highlight and promote the efforts and models of organizations that are doing effective work, hoping to inspire others in the area to do the same.

In order to effectively engage the community and other organizations in the area, NACDI described often convening conversations around certain topics to get community input and to get other
As these first-time experiences highlight, residents view NACDI as facilitating an important cultural and community space for the American Indian community in Phillips to meet, discuss their priorities or vision for the community, develop artists and display their art, connect with youth across generations, and get people involved with activism or community-building efforts.

Residents also see NACDI as playing a critical role in the economic and business development of Franklin Avenue in the Phillips neighborhood, connecting Native cultural identity and art with strategic visioning and intentional economic investment for the community. This theme was supported by its partner organization representatives who emphasized the critical role that NACDI has played with promoting Native culture and using the arts as an important tool for holistic community development in Phillips and its American Indian community.

Partner organization representatives also focused on how NACDI has been very intentional about engaging residents and building relationships with the community, and how that has helped NACDI be successful in building trust with a community that has had some historical and contemporary mistrust of organizations focusing on the American Indian community in Phillips. In addition, partner organizations mentioned how NACDI has been an important partner in their work, often acting as a mentor from which they can learn and with which they can discuss ideas for other organizations in the community.

By developing the Blueprint, NACDI has helped to construct and share a strategic vision for the development of the Native community in Phillips, and this has helped facilitate a level of accountability to the community that has helped build trust (although according to one resident it is still possible to be even more intentional about engaging residents). According to residents, one of the ways that NACDI has helped build the trust of the community is by proactively seeking out the input and ideas of residents, and translating it into actions and results. Many cited the example of lobbying elected officials to change the holiday from “Columbus Day” to “American Indian Day,” or their success in getting Native art displayed throughout Franklin Avenue. This physical and aesthetic presence of Native art throughout the Franklin Avenue corridor was described as being an important point of pride and cultural identity for residents.

Relationship building

Most of the organizational partners who participated in the focus group described working with NACDI primarily at a one-to-one or peer-to-peer level, taking on certain targeted initiatives together or going to one another for advice or resources. Some described having more of an ongoing partnership or collaboration, whereas others described focusing on a specific initiative together, such as the Open Streets event, the Southwest light rail transit planning efforts, and the mayoral forums that NACDI hosted with Mayor Betsy Hodges. Partners frequently described NACDI as being a consistent representative of the Phillips American Indian community to planners, elected officials, and other organizations, and that NACDI brings new perspectives and ideas to the other organizations in the area.

NACDI is also described as an important source of information and updates on the community for its partner organizations, bringing the perspectives of the community members that it engages with to other organizations that are working with this community in order to make their efforts more coordinated and effective. Organizational representatives also described NACDI as an important resource to learn from and partner with in

their work, and sees NACDI as being innovative and yet focused on the long-term sustainability of the community as a whole. Most importantly, they emphasized how NACDI has been a leader helping other organizations in the community shift from a deficit- or needs-based approach to an asset-based approach, seeing the community's potential and the resources it already possesses and working to develop those further:

NACDI past and present has really been integral in the change in the community, the renewal of Franklin Avenue. What it used to be? -- It was devastating. So we stopped the conversations about the deficits in our community, and started seeing the assets, what we have to offer. Not just here, but now a change in the public, the police department, the health department, [a change toward seeing] the success in the community. What's in the Blueprint and what the citizens value—it makes it apparent, and mapped out.

Impacts

Both partner organizations and residents frequently mentioned the work that NACDI has done to make the Franklin Avenue corridor more aesthetically pleasing with Native art. It was cited not only as important for the image and economic development of the community, but also for the sense of cultural pride and identity for its residents, highlighting the history and culture of American Indians in the Twin Cities. NACDI's combining of cultural identity and

economic development with intentional and proactive resident engagement and partnership building with other organizations in the area has been critical in making NACDI a dynamic, effective and collaborative backbone organization in the Phillips neighborhood and its American Indian community. As one partner organization noted,

For our organization, they [NACDI] remind us that how important it is when you are making decisions that affect the community, to involve the community! It made us recognize the importance of putting effort over the long term for engaging the people being served.

While working to develop the businesses of Franklin Avenue, prevent gentrification, and build relationships with residents and other organizations in the community, NACDI has helped reclaim a space in the community for investing in Native arts, history, culture, and community voices, which has been critically important for the work of other organizations in the community. They have also translated the effects into effective policy advocacy work with elected public officials. As a whole, NACDI was described by residents and partner organizations as playing an integral role to the development of a more connected and engaged community, and as helping to build a more coordinated and collaborative network of organizational partners for improving the effectiveness of the work happening in its community.

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January 2015