

## **Wilder Center for Communities**

### **Self-assessments of the 6-month Neighborhood Leadership Program August 2010**

#### ***Introduction***

The Amherst H. Wilder Foundation's Neighborhood Leadership Programs (NLP) has supported and worked to grow the leadership capacity of those who live, work and/or volunteer in St. Paul's neighborhoods since 1995. NLP reflects a shared, collaborative leadership model and the philosophy that all people can be leaders. NLP's purpose is to develop and sustain a healthy and thriving community.

The 6-month Neighborhood Leadership Program (NLP) is a training course where participants come together twice per month (November through April) to build knowledge, skills and connections for effective neighborhood leadership. Typically, there are 30 people involved in the course. Participants engage with each other throughout the six months and are also paired with coaches. The 6-month NLP is designed for community members who want to: 1) gain greater insight and awareness of themselves; 2) develop additional skills and build working relationships with others; and 3) enhance commitment and engagement in meaningful action in the community.

This evaluation looked at short-term impact on participants' knowledge and attitudes that occurred over the course of the 6-month program. Though the evaluation does not measure longer-term behavior change, change in individuals' knowledge and attitudes are necessary before participants can change their behavior.

Wilder Research prepared this evaluation using self-assessments completed by participants in the 6-month NLP in fiscal years 2009 and 2010. Pre and post surveys were developed by NLP staff and revised with input from Wilder Research consultants. Staff administered pre surveys at the beginning of programming and post surveys during the final training session. Of the 61 participants, 52 (85%) completed both a pre survey and a post survey: 29 from 2009, and 32 from 2010.

Survey data were tallied by NLP staff and the results given to Wilder Research staff for analysis and reporting. Pre and post test data from 2009 and 2010 are reported in aggregate; and, for 2010 data, individual ratings are compared from pre to post test. Statistically significant change in individual ratings is noted with an asterisk. Findings are reported in three sections, which correlate with the three areas of impact that were measured through this evaluation: knowledge and skills; connection to others; and attitudes and intentions.

## ***Knowledge and skills***

In the area of knowledge and skills, the most change was seen in the area of familiarity with resources that are available in the community; 98 percent agreed on the post survey, and 52 percent of the 2010 cohort indicated strong agreement on the post test. Similarly, half of the 2010 cohort indicated stronger agreement in having knowledge of community needs and challenges. In addition, 96 percent of participants reporting better understanding the value of a diverse variety of opinions, viewpoints, and approaches, and more awareness of other people’s perspectives on community issues.

Less change was seen in the area of communication and conflict resolution skills, though 90 percent indicated they had these skills at the beginning of the program.

1.

<b>Knowledge and skills</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Somewhat agree</b>	<b>Somewhat disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
I am familiar with resources that are available in my community.				
Pre survey	12%	65%	15%	8%
Post survey	56%	42%	2%	0%
Percent who indicated stronger agreement on the post survey (2010 only)				52%*
I have knowledge of my community’s needs and challenges. (2010 only)				
Pre survey	8%	69%	23%	0%
Post survey	44%	48%	7%	0%
Percent who indicated stronger agreement on the post survey (2010 only)				50%*
I am aware of my own personal values and leadership style.				
Pre survey	25%	62%	13%	0%
Post survey	67%	29%	4%	0%
Percent who indicated stronger agreement on the post survey (2010 only)				44%*
I have strong interpersonal communication and conflict resolution skills.				
Pre survey	35%	56%	10%	0%
Post survey	50%	48%	2%	0%
Percent who indicated stronger agreement on the post survey (2010 only)				26%
Since starting the program, I better understand the value of a diverse variety of opinions, viewpoints, and approaches.				
Post survey only	85%	12%	4%	0%
Since starting the program, I am more aware of other people’s perspectives on community issues.				
Post survey only	69%	27%	4%	0%

## *Attitudes*

The largest change in participant attitudes was in participants' awareness of their own potential usefulness as a community leader; 98 percent agreed on the post survey and 63 percent of the 2010 cohort indicated stronger agreement. At the end of the program all participants reported being committed to participating in community projects, and 96 percent were interested in seeking out leadership position.

Though more participants (98% compared to 78%), taken as a whole, indicated feeling confident to take on leadership positions on the post test, only 26 percent of the 2010 cohort indicated stronger agreement.

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### 2.

<b>Attitudes and intentions</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Somewhat agree</b>	<b>Somewhat disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
I am aware of my own potential usefulness as a community leader.				
Pre survey	27%	50%	21%	2%
Post survey	58%	40%	2%	0%
Percent who indicated stronger agreement on the post survey (2010 only)				63%*
I feel confident to take on leadership roles in my community.				
Pre survey	40%	38%	17%	4%
Post survey	60%	38%	2%	0%
Percent who indicated stronger agreement on the post survey (2010 only)				26%
Since starting the program, I am more committed to working with others to address common issues.				
Post survey only	75%	21%	4%	0%
I am committed to participating in neighborhood or community projects .				
Post survey only (2010 only)	85%	15%	0%	0%
I am interested in seeking out leadership positions.				
Post survey only (2010 only)	63%	33%	4%	0%

## *Connections with others*

In their connections with others, participants joined the program with some connections, but left the program with stronger connections. Over half of the 2010 cohort indicated stronger agreement on the post survey to having people to talk with about community issues, and asking and receiving support from other leaders. Almost all (92%) reported having stronger relationships with people in their community at the end of the program.

### 3.

<b>Connections with others</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Somewhat agree</b>	<b>Somewhat disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
I have people I can talk with about community and leadership issues.				
Pre survey	38%	52%	6%	4%
Post survey	85%	13%	2%	0%
Percent who indicated stronger agreement on the post survey (2010 only)				52%*
I am able to ask for and receive support from other leaders. (2010 only)				
Pre survey	41%	44%	11%	4%
Post survey	82%	19%	0%	0%
Percent who indicated stronger agreement on the post survey (2010 only)				52%*
Since starting the program, I have stronger relationships with people in my neighborhood or community.				
Post survey only	57%	35%	6%	2%

## *Satisfaction with program*

Six-month NLP participants were asked to rate their satisfaction with the program. In most areas, participants were very satisfied. Participants noted that the “length of the program was conducive to the learning that took place,” and “every session was very well organized and dynamic.”

Notably, 94 percent of participants strongly agreed that the NLP staff was sensitive to cultural differences or participants’ different backgrounds; 88 percent of participants also strongly agreed that NLP provided them a safe space. For example, one person noted that “The program did a great job of pulling together a diverse group and for creating a deliberate, supportive environment.” Several people felt the small groups were particularly conducive to conversation about sensitive issues.

#### 4. Participant satisfaction with 6-month Neighborhood Leadership Program

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
<b>2009 and 2010 results (N=51)</b>				
NLP staff were sensitive to cultural differences/different backgrounds of people in the group	94%	4%	0%	2%
NLP provided a safe space to participate and share my opinions.	88%	12%	0%	0%
I am satisfied with the quality of the NLP.	78%	20%	2%	0%
<b>2009 only (N=25)</b>				
NLP staff treated me respectfully throughout the program.	96%	4%	0%	0%
NLP addressed my personal leadership goals.	60%	40%	0%	0%
<b>2010 only (N=26)</b>				
What I learned in NLP will help me be more effective in my community work	88%	12%	0%	0%
The written materials are useful	85%	15%	0%	0%

Across both years, participatory meeting facilitation, reflection on leadership, and intercultural communications and conflict were rated very highly with almost everyone rating them “very helpful” or “helpful” in 2010 and over two thirds rating them as “most helpful” in 2009. All 6-month NLP participants in 2010 also found the opening retreat “very helpful” or “helpful.” The organizing for action, action planning for community work, and navigating local government sessions received more mixed reviews across years. Almost everyone rated organizing for action, and action planning for community work as “very helpful” or “helpful” in 2010, but less than half rated them as “most helpful” in 2009. The opposite occurred with the navigating local government session, in which 65 percent rated it “most helpful” in 2009, but 25 percent said it was only “a little helpful” in 2010.

## 5. Helpfulness of 6-month Neighborhood Leadership Program sessions

	2010 ratings (N=20-26)				Rated session "most helpful" in 2009 (N=22-25)
	Very helpful	Helpful	A little helpful	Not helpful	
Participatory meeting facilitation	50%	50%	0%	0%	73%
Reflection on leadership and next steps in community leadership	68%	28%	4%	0%	67%
Intercultural communications and conflict	61%	30%	9%	0%	67%
Exploring St Paul Neighborhoods; leadership styles; and self reflection with masks (Opening retreat)	73%	27%	0%	0%	72%
Action planning for community work	71%	29%	0%	0%	44%
Organizing for action in your community	70%	26%	0%	4%	33%
Navigating local government (district councils, county and/or city)	20%	55%	25%	0%	65%
Communications and coaching	56%	40%	4%	0%	N/A
Working inclusively in neighborhoods	52%	43%	4%	0%	57%
Personal values and community work and coaching	57%	35%	9%	0%	46%
Understanding conflict and conflict resolution and coaching	43%	38%	19%	0%	55%

In their comments, participants said the most helpful sessions had quality handouts, guest speakers, and a clear outcome or next steps. The less helpful sessions occurred when the participants were not fully engaged, the sessions' objectives were not clear, or when the session was more lecture style. Participants preferred hands-on activities, though some did not care for the art activities. The coaching received a mixed review; some people felt as though they were well connected with their coach, while others felt the coaching should have been more structured. Several participants felt the program overall could use more practical elements; they suggested providing an opportunity for participants to serve the community together. Others felt that though culture was discussed, the group itself was too homogeneous.

## *Summary and implications*

Results from fiscal years 2009 and 2010 indicate that participation in the 6-month NLP has the largest impact on participants' attitudes and connections to the community. In particular, the most change was seen in the following areas:

- Participants better understand the value of a diverse variety of opinions, viewpoints, and approaches, and are more aware of other people's perspectives.
- Participants have people they can talk with about community and leadership issues, and are more committed to working with others to address common issues.
- Participants are more aware of their own potential usefulness as a community leader.
- Participants are more familiar with resources that are available in their communities, and are able to ask for and receive support from other leaders.

Participants are generally satisfied with the 6-month NLP; they feel as though NLP staff are sensitive to the cultural differences of participants and NLP provides a "safe space" to share opinions.

Though the 6-month NLP had less impact on participants' values and skills, this was largely because many participants entered the program with a strong sense of their

own personal values and leadership style; with interpersonal communication and conflict resolution skills; and with confidence to take on leadership roles.

### **Implications**

The 6-month NLP will receive support from the Arts and Cultural Heritage Partnership Fund (ACHPF) administered by the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS) beginning fiscal year 2011. The new partnership benefits Wilder Foundation's priority of linking knowledge to practical application, as community members apply research or historical knowledge practically in the community to create change, while also enabling MHS to strengthen its ties to surrounding communities. As such, the 6-month NLP sessions will integrate historical resources and lessons into the current session model.

As NLP revises their model to integrate historical resources from MHS, NLP may also consider strengthening the skills sessions, which were areas participants showed less growth. NLP may also consider reaching out to community members that may be less skilled or confident as leaders, as participants appear to have been high in these areas initially. While all sessions were rated fairly high, understanding conflict and conflict

resolution and coaching; and personal values and community work and coaching were rated least helpful and may warrant revising. In addition, participants stressed the value and their appreciation of hands on activities, practical applications of lessons, and clear objectives in their comments.

A follow-up evaluation of 6-month NLP alumni would help determine the extent participants provide leadership to their communities in the months and years following their participation, and additional support NLP may provide to alumni. Some small changes to the pre and post survey are also recommended to ensure the tools are measuring the same items so individual change can be calculated more robustly.

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### For more information

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