

*“Dreams” and “Strategies” from Brightmoor and Osborn Residents:
Themes and Implications for Technical Assistance*

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Goals for each community respectively were:

Brightmoor: “All Brightmoor youth will have access to, and participate in a range of year-round programs during non-school hours that encourage academic growth and positive social development.”

Osborn: “Families have all the resources and support necessary to make their children successful in life.”

Purpose

The purpose of this analysis was to discern implications for technical assistance offerings from themes reflected in input provided by residents of Brightmoor and Osborn neighborhoods. Transcribed reports from 15 small-group discussions occurring in July and August 2006 by residents of each of the two neighborhoods respectively provided the data from which this project was carried out.

Results

Overarching theme: Minimal expectations of governmental systems

A pervasive theme was the reality that many of the services participants “dreamed of” to accomplish their community goal were services residents of other communities take for granted and expect. Examples were dreams of:

- Clean and fully-paved streets
- Paved sidewalks for residents to walk on and for children to ride their bikes on. (The dream of a bike path, a reality in many communities, was mentioned by only one resident.)
- Clear, well-equipped and well-cared for parks that children played safely in.
- Recreation centers in which children, adolescents, and adults played and took part in a range of activities.
- Neighborhoods that adults and child residents walked safely in
- Neighborhoods in which burned out houses were immediately demolished
- Regular and frequent removal of bulk trash
- Regularly mowed and cared for medians and public areas
- Schools that were accessible at non-school hours
- Schools that were child and family friendly.

Where strategies *were* discussed, residents suggested approaches that involved taking responsibility themselves for implementing the changes and for doing the work, in a few cases through soliciting help from foundation and other grant funds. While accountability and commitment are important, in neither community did residents seem to hold governmental systems accountable for providing the services to the community, nor did they seem to expect a commitment from these systems in that regard. In the context of this observation, specific themes were identified that were related to public service improvement needs.

A. Themes related to Improvements in Public Services

Of the five most frequently-appearing themes overall, three in Brightmoor and four in Osborn meetings focused on areas for improvements in public services. (See Appendix 1 for a complete list of frequencies of themes according to neighborhood.) Several potential directions were implied from neighborhood comments.

- Community Organizing for Political Action. Recognition of a need for political advocacy was reflected in a Brightmoor resident's call for "a community voice and outcry/outrage to get something done...." The importance of this strategy was evident in the statement by another resident that: "We [need to] responsibly advocate for [the] police and other basic city services to do their jobs."
- Partnership-building. In addition, themes emerging from some resident comments were suggestive of establishing community partnerships. Suggested areas and the frequencies of their appearance in the data for Brightmoor and Osborn residents respectively were:
 - Church-Community partnerships (n=14 and n=4)
 - Police-Community partnerships (n=11 and n=1)
 - Business-Community partnerships (n=10 and n=4)
 - Arts and Humanities and Community partnerships (n=2 and n=10)
 - School-Community partnerships (n= 11 and n=6)
 - Government-Community partnerships (n=3 and n=1)
 - Industry-Community partnerships (n=0, 1)
 - Union-Community partnerships (n=0, 1).
- Establishment of Local Chambers of Commerce. Business Development and Entrepreneurship was the fourth most frequently appearing theme overall among Brightmoor resident comments and was not infrequently mentioned among comments by Osborn residents. Residents were particularly interested in business start-ups by residents and others, attracting and sustaining new businesses in the communities, promoting businesses that offer a range of services needed by residents, and training residents in entrepreneurial skills. Residents also placed emphasis on businesses whose owners had a commitment to the neighborhood and who would provide needed employment to community members. Several mentioned a need for tax incentives that would motivate business development and practices, such as welcome committees that would encourage families to settle. These efforts are often realized through local chambers of commerce.

B. Themes related to Building and Sustaining a Sense of Community

A second pervasive theme reflected an emphasis on a strong sense of community among residents of Brightmoor and Osborn neighborhoods and a belief that strengthening this characteristic was necessary to accomplish their overall community goals. Three specific themes with implications for technical assistance were:

- Community-Building. This theme appeared most frequently among comments of Brightmoor residents (n = 60) and was a close second among Osborn residents'

comments and suggestions (n = 54). The definition of community emerging from residents' comments was of efforts perceived as unifying the community and its members (youth and adult) behind a shared mission and set of goals.

- Block Club Development. Also reflected in the category of *community* were themes of block club development and block activities, usually mentioned specifically in residents' comments.
- Neighborhood Beautification. This theme appeared frequently throughout discussions and seemed to encompass residents' emphasis on improving the physical attractiveness of their neighborhood, thus engendering community pride.

C. Themes Related to a Need for Preparedness

A third prevalent theme involved residents' recognition of the need for preparation in going forward with actions aimed at attaining the overall community goal. This theme seems to reflect a need for attention to leadership development, including volunteerism, strategic planning, and ongoing public relations and communication.

- Adult Leadership Development. Summing up this theme was an Osborn resident's suggestion that "leaders be identified in every neighborhood" and the suggestion, also by an Osborn resident, that adult leadership and direction were important. Also apparent within this theme was volunteerism, generally defined by residents simply as encouraging and sustaining parent participation.
- Strategic Planning. Strategic planning will assist residents in finalizing priorities for moving forward, translating goals and priorities into action steps, identifying remaining technical, person-power, and resource needs and how those will be realized, and developing an action plan.
- Public Relations and Communication. Members of both neighborhoods stressed the importance of keeping all residents notified of the work Initiative, particularly calling attention to success and improvements. Frequently seen was a theme of publicizing the accomplishments of community members.
- Grant procurement, conducting needs assessments, fund-raising, and asset building were identified in an earlier cursory analysis of Southwest Community data and have been or are being responded to.

D. Themes Related to Youth Development

These themes are mentioned *in addition to* already-mentioned themes related to needed improvements in education and school-related services and school-community partnerships. The following were prominent in comments from residents of both communities (See Appendix 1 for a complete list of frequencies of themes according to neighborhood).

- Youth Leadership Development.
- Positive Youth Development.
- Mentoring
- Tutoring

Additionally, after school programs were mentioned as a strategy for community goal attainment.

E. Themes Related to Information on Availability and Accessibility of Resources

- Resource Information, Exchange, and Coordination. A theme appearing in both communities was a perceived need for a mechanism by which residents could be continuously made aware of the service resources that exist and that are already available in their communities. Themes related to the dissemination of information and coordination between services and resources were noted.
- A Centralized Social Service Delivery System. Closely related to a desire for information about available services was the theme of accessibility and provision of “one stop shopping” for multiple family services. The definition of this theme was best summarized by an Osborn resident at Table 15 as “community centers that provide services [such as] parenting classes, counseling for children, transportation for after-school programs, meals, counseling, and mentoring.”

Discussion

Analysis of Brightmoor and Osborn data suggests a number of similarities. For example, residents of both neighborhoods seem to place a great deal of emphasis on building a sense of community, unity, and pride. Among themes related to needed improvements in public services, the five most frequently appearing themes were the same among residents of both neighborhoods. And other than in three instances involving very small frequencies, no themes appeared in the text of one neighborhood and not at all in that of the other. However, there were some differences in emphases, the most noteworthy of which were the different public service improvement needs mentioned most frequently – police and public safety needs among Brightmoor residents and education and school-related needs among Osborn residents. It is not known whether these and others represent differences in the direction of efforts needed by residents of each neighborhood. However, they are worthy of further exploration. (See Appendix 1 for a complete list of frequencies of themes according to neighborhood).

Conclusions and Recommendations

In summary, input from residents of Brightmoor and Osborn neighborhoods in Detroit was consistent with themes of needed improvements in public services, building partnerships with social systems in the community, building and sustaining unified communities, developing technical preparedness skills, facilitating youth development, and ensuring that resources that do exist are available and accessible. Attention is particularly called to the importance of assisting communities to organize and advocate for governmental systems fulfilling their responsibilities with regard to public services, in addition to direct actions taken by residents in their own behalf (for example, in neighborhood beautification efforts). Themes and the frequencies of their appearance should be considered for their implications for neighborhood specific and cross-neighborhood technical assistance offerings.

Appendix 1. Technical Assistance Themes by Category and Frequency of Appearance

Technical Assistance Themes	Brightmoor	Osborn
Needed Improvements in Public Services		
Parks and Recreation Services	32	24
Police and Public Safety Services	41	24
Employment and Career Training and Development Services	23	15
Housing Development and Rehabilitation Services	13	16
Education and School-Related Services	25	57
Information Technology/Library Services	9	12
Human Services	7	10
Social Services	29	31
Transportation Services	11	6
Health and Wellness Services	13	11
Street/Sidewalk Repair and Maintenance Services	2	4
Business Development and Entrepreneurship Services	30	18
Snow Removal and Trash Removal Services	6	1
Zoning Adherence Services	1	2
Neighborhood Revitalization Services	5	1
Responses to Needed Improvements		
Political advocacy	7	2
Community organizing	10	10
Suggested Partnerships		
School-Community	11	6
Business-Community	10	4
Police-Community	11	1
Church-Community	14	4
Government-Community	3	1
Arts and Humanities-Community	2	10
Industry-Community	0	1
Labor Union-Community	0	1
Unified Community		
Community Building	60	54
Block Club Development	17	11
Neighborhood Beautification	34	22
Preparedness Needs		
Strategic Planning	4	3
Leadership Development (Adults)	5	6
Public Relations and Communication	8	6
Grant Procurement	5	1
Fund-raising	5	4
Asset Building	0	5
Needs Assessment/Surveys	3	1

Appendix 1 Continued.

Technical Assistance Themes	Brightmoor	Osborn
Youth Development		
Youth Leadership Development	14	9
Positive Youth Development	23	4
Mentoring	13	20
Tutoring	5	4
Resource Availability and Accessibility		
Information Exchange and Coordination	15	8
“One-Stop Shopping” (Centralized) for Services	6	9