The Sustainable Neighborhoods Network: A City-citizen Partnership to Promote Sustainability

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Congratulations!!

Together, you have directly involved 1000s of residents in improving the environmental and community health of your cities, and indirectly influenced 1000s more.

- Transportation options workshops
- Sidewalk assessments
- Carbon footprint challenges
- Fireplace replacement
- Home energy & water audits
- Solar Fair
- Xeriscape workshops
- Vehicle maintenance
- Healthy home improvements
- Community garden potlucks

- Stream bank projects
- Fertilizer reduction campaign
- Noxious weed removal
- Compost & recycling sign up
- Bee-safe campaigns
- Community /school gardens
- Helping hands networks
- Neighborhood historic tour
- Local weekly lunch club
- Documentary screenings, Bag-It
- Community Support Agriculture

- Energy saving tips
- Recycling facility tours
- Reuse swaps
- Social dancing
- Adult wellness
- Emergency preparedness
- Sustainability hikes
- Health & Wellness promotion
- Bicycle repair
- Literacy programs

- And the lists continue!!!
Why we studied SNN

Your neighborhood. Your ideas. Your home
### Challenges to promoting sustainability and community

#### Appropriate scale & strategy
- If states and nations won’t sustain citizens, cities will
- Climate pledges and guilt
- Eco-localisation
- “Individuation” of climate change
- City Monitoring & Evaluation Systems, e.g. STAR Communities
- “Responsibilization” of the consumer
- Capabilities and resources by class, race, and gender?

#### Community Participation
- Democracy is in trouble... local government is the answer
- Isolation, self-sorting, and segregation
- But people don’t even know their neighbors
- Power dynamics influence voice and distribution of resources
- Time and energy to participate
- Some programs are gendered (extension of women’s domestic work)
Was the SNN the solution to these challenges?
How we studied it

What are the direct and ancillary benefits of the SNN?

Is this a sustainable model?
Is it scalable & replicable?
Who participates?
Is it effective?
Why?

• 4-Year study of 5 Lakewood and 5 Denver neighborhoods (at least 2 years in program by 2016)

• Quantitative:
  • Project database analysis
  • Online survey open to all city residents

• Qualitative:
  • Participant observation through “RA/Interns”
    • Caeli Hill, Greg Colucci, Maddie Keating, and Lorin Crandall
  • 26 Interviews with staff and residents
    • 2 additional RAs: Camron Bridgford, Sarah Turnbach

• Funding: $6,000 in 5 small grants from CU Denver
FINDINGS

Direct and Ancillary
Some of the numbers: In 2 years, 596 projects, 2056 credits, 99 Participants

<table>
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<th>Goal Areas</th>
<th>Projects</th>
<th>Credits</th>
<th>% by Goal Area</th>
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Particants: 52

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<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>786</td>
<td>100%</td>
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Particants: 47

People goal area targeted in most projects

Personal interaction may be what keeps it going.
Additional Numbers

• We also looked at:
  • Participation by age and gender
  • Involvement of “leaders” and who submitted the reports
  • More specific types of projects

• Findings
  • Reliance upon some individuals more than others
  • More females (similar to the research)
  • See full study for project details and summaries
Qualitative Findings: Ripple Effects

- People report significant changes to behaviors:
  - Education, awareness, tools, camaraderie
  - Emotional investment
- Appreciate connections with “like-minded” individuals
  - Neighborhood pride and greater attachment
  - Ownership and empowerment
- Role of government: slightly mixed views
  - “We don’t want the government to solve all of our problems”
  - We need more resources from the City
  - Creates its own momentum
  - Mutual respect and admiration between planners and citizens
- Leads to citizen involvement in other city goals
Discussion: Successes & Challenges

Affordable, equitable, practical, effective, enduring, wide-reaching, reliable, and scalable to other places?
SNN’s virtuous cycle

City & Residents Set Goals

City supports residents and adapts over time

Residents have time and can innovate

City lacks time & money to lead sustainability goals
Strengths

Positive Individuation of Climate Change

City is a hub for resources, continuity, and Sustaining momentum

Neighbors sharing ideas with other neighborhoods

Spurs other civic engagement beyond SNN

Neighborhoods receive equal treatment and SN has avoided “death by politics”

Politicians learning about and embracing sustainability

Promotes inter-agency problem solving
Weaknesses

Reliance upon unique inside-advocate planners who are passionate, patient, rational, cautious and strategic: what if they leave?

No funding for nonprofits informally involved in lower-resource neighborhoods

If it can’t be quantified, is it worthwhile?

Communication Resources & strategies to get word out

Limited Scale

Institutional Hesitance: Politicians love it but hesitant to fully support it

Reinforcing neighborhood differentiation: most leaders are homeowners
Opportunities

Neighborhood Demand exists: many want to do more and bigger projects, beyond neighborhoods

Involve SN in Denver’s 3 Big Goals: Community Resilience, Resource Conservation, Mobility

Other agencies eager to tap into SN for citizen outreach and support, e.g. implement HIA actions

Developing, tapping, and strengthening informal and relational networks across sectors

Utility and “Green” businesses want access SNs

Create events for residents outside participating neighborhoods
Threats

- Year-to-year and insufficient staff funding
- Some resident frustration from lack of resources, direction, and organization from City

- Neighborhoods without resources don’t join or don’t get adequate support

- Inclusiveness and equity: some neighborhoods have more time and resources
- Certain project opportunities and other City resources and programs institutionally favor SF homeowners

- Politics could threaten longevity of program
Summary thoughts

• SNN found a sweet spot between purely government led on the one hand and social movement or privatization on the other.
  • The government hasn’t “left the building” (e.g. privatization) nor have the groups tried to influence the government for personal gain or disengaged from the public sector
• Two-way learning: citizens $\leftrightarrow$ City
• Ripple effect is immeasurable but powerful
• Keep market in-check: may shift things toward capital gains, which could lead to exclusion, bias toward certain projects, or turn-off for some
• Support ongoing, even increased, government support
• Continue accountability systems: re-launches, reporting points, website, achievement levels, etc.