

JACOBS CENTER FOR
NEIGHBORHOOD INNOVATION



LEARNING SERIES

*RESIDENT
COMPENSATION
for Participation in
The Village at Market Creek*



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When the Jacobs Center for Neighborhood Innovation (JCNI) entered the neighborhoods of southeastern San Diego in 1997, our staff began by knocking on doors to build relationships and connections with residents to deepen our understanding of how to learn and work with the community. Together, we began exploring how to build upon the community's many existing assets and address needs around jobs creation, safety, and chronic underinvestment.

Since we began our initial outreach and organizing efforts in the community, this work has included carefully considered instances where we have compensated residents for their participation.

These cases have taken **three** primary forms at specific junctures in our work:

- 1. Neighborhood Coordinators Training Program**
Building individual resident capacity to take leadership roles in their communities
- 2. Construction Working Team**
Collaborating with residents and experts to develop the Joe & Vi Jacobs Center
- 3. Voices of Community at All Levels (VOCAL)**
Creating a network of grassroots organizations and community groups to foster inclusive consensus decision making for a comprehensive Village plan



OVERVIEW

- ◆ A total of three, three-month training sessions were offered from 1999 to 2002.
- ◆ Each session consisted of up to twenty hours per week of in-class training and practical application of community organizing skills in each participant's neighborhood.
- ◆ Nine to eleven residents were selected for each session; thirty-one residents in all participated.
- ◆ Estimated direct participant compensation costs averaged nearly \$26,000 per session (\$2,500 per participant), for an estimated total of over \$77,000 over all three sessions. Financial support was provided by JCNI program funds.

The Neighborhood Coordinators Training Program is a resident engagement program that was launched in 1999 and implemented in select neighborhoods in southeastern San Diego. Its aim was to help residents become more active participants in their neighborhoods by providing them with the skills, resources, and confidence needed to organize their neighbors to improve their communities.

The program consisted of a three-month training period that incorporated classroom sessions designed to familiarize participants with government and community resources and services that were available to them; living room meetings and house visits for working with their neighbors to identify and define the most pressing issues in their communities; and projects they developed in concert with their neighbors to address one of the key issues identified in the meetings and house visits.

Three training sessions were offered between 1999 and 2002. Outreach for participants focused on four neighborhoods near the development now known as The Village at Market Creek: Valencia Park, Lincoln Park, Mountain View, and Chollas View. Among the many residents JCNI staff met through the informal living room meetings they organized in these neighborhoods, nine to eleven participants were selected to participate in each session.

Participants were paid an hourly rate, set slightly higher than minimum wage, for in-classroom training and practical application of their community organizing skills for up to a maximum of 20 hours per week. At the conclusion of each session, JCNI hired two to four residents as Community Coordinators. The coordinators connected with residents in their neighborhoods and cultural communities who were interested in helping us identify and pilot ownership opportunities in The Village.

RESULTS

- ◆ *Residents expanded and deepened their personal and community networks by developing relationships with their neighbors and representatives from community organizations and civic agencies.*
- ◆ *Resident capacity was increased to identify and address neighborhood concerns.*
- ◆ *JCNI's reach into the neighborhoods surrounding what became The Village at Market Creek development increased as we developed and strengthened our connections with the residents and their neighbors who participated in each session.*



OVERVIEW

- ◆ The team was convened from 2005 to 2008.
- ◆ Participants met weekly for several months before settling into a monthly meeting schedule, where they shaped and implemented a best-value bid process to select contractors for the project.
- ◆ Six residents and three experts participated on the team.
- ◆ The estimated cost of direct compensation to the team over the course of the project was just over \$12,000. Funding was provided by JCNI program funds and Jacobs Family Foundation grants.

In the late 1990s, JCNI began developing the first of several construction projects in The Village at Market Creek. The initial phase produced Market Creek Plaza, a shopping, dining, and entertainment center that opened the community's first major retail grocery store in thirty years. JCNI relied on a small implementation team of experts in the architecture, construction, and employment fields to help guide the work of designing and building the plaza.

As planning began for the second phase – the Joe & Vi Jacobs Center, a community events and office space – JCNI sought to blend resident and expert voices in that guidance role. The Construction Working Team was formed in 2005 with community residents, local contractors, and employment experts who were tasked with involving the highest possible number of community builders in the construction of the building. The team was responsible for implementing a best-value bid process where they negotiated community

benefits with contractors and assisted minority- and women-owned businesses in securing contracts. Through the process, over 74% of the project's contracts were awarded to local minority- and women-owned businesses.

In similar projects, organization staff, consultants, and city employees are often paid for their expertise at project meetings while the residents at the table would not be compensated. On the Construction Working Team, both experts and residents were paid a fixed, hourly rate for their participation in team meetings that took place weekly as the bid process was developed and contractors were selected, and then monthly thereafter. While the rate paid to the residents on the team was slightly lower than that of the experts, staff considered it important to keep the gap between the two figures as small as possible. The team continued to meet through the building's completion in 2008.

RESULTS

- ◆ *A more equitable balance of resident and expert voices was created to support the development process.*
- ◆ *Resident capacity was increased on community development topics that included community benefits agreements, historically underutilized businesses, and Village development planning.*



OVERVIEW

- ◆ The network was convened for four "phases" over a two-year period that began in March 2010.
- ◆ Each phase lasted four to six months and focused on a learning agenda for specific aspects of a comprehensive development plan for The Village. Participants met weekly in the first two phases, then twice a month in the last two.
- ◆ Eighteen community groups and organizations participated in each phase. Altogether, twenty organizations and groups took part in VOCAL's work.
- ◆ Direct participant compensation costs were \$45,000 per phase (\$2,500 per organization/community group), for a total of \$180,000 over four phases. Financial support was provided by JCNi program funds and grants received from the Jacobs Family Foundation (initial phases) and the Environmental Protection Agency (final phases).

When it came time to update The Village's comprehensive development plan in 2010, JCNi outlined the next model for our community engagement work: the development of networked groups and organizations working together to address the complex planning needs of The Village. The VOCAL (Voices of Community at All Levels) network was initially formed with forty resident participants who represented eighteen of southeastern San Diego's cultural communities, neighborhood councils, schools, Market Creek Plaza ownership organizations (Neighborhood Unity Foundation and Diamond Community Investors, Inc.), youth groups, and other community collaborations.

The work of VOCAL was divided into four- to six-month phases that addressed specific objectives for informing the planning document, which looks beyond land use in The Village to the community's best recommendations on urban design, smart growth, sustainability, connectivity, safety, health, education, and arts and culture. **Phase 1** focused on how we identify ourselves as a distinct physical and cultural area in the San Diego region, as well as the land use and development of a Village property called Northwest Commercial. **Phase 2** looked at LEED-ND planning concepts and, in particular, how to create greater physical connectivity to enhance our sense of place. Participants in **Phases 3 and 4** concentrated on area-wide brownfields: what they

are, where they are located in the community, and the remediation options available to us. Urban planners, government officials, and other experts were brought in to build resident capacity around these complex topics, and each session built upon each other to maximize understanding and participation.

Given the exceptional level of commitment and time needed by VOCAL's participants to complete the plan, the organization took the step of developing written contracts and providing stipends for each group or organization that was invited to participate. These agreements outlined expectations and understandings for participants and JCNi. In addition

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to regular attendance by group representatives, active participation in the meetings, and keeping their respective communities up-to-date on the work taking place, VOCAL's participants were required to connect with and secure broad representation from their communities at a number of large-scale planning sessions that accompanied each phase of the work; this was a critical step for maximizing resident participation in the plan's development and ensuring that the greater community stayed connected with the work. JCNI, in turn, provided clear and responsive learning agendas and secured the necessary expertise to build resident capacity and knowledge for the team to make informed decisions.

VOCAL was initially convened in 2010 and completed its fourth and final phase in 2012. Funds were provided on a pre-determined schedule to participating groups and organizations to support their work in the community. The funding strategy for this work sought to address two objectives: 1) meet an important need for funding support to local organizations that took place outside of the usual grantmaking process, and 2) incentivize participation for

what the organization expected to be a lengthy, multifaceted project where continuity of participation was critical. The amount of the stipends themselves was based on the time commitment the organizations were expected to serve, as well as an assessment of our organization's grants experience: we found that a certain minimal level of funding made a difference in the ability of local groups to successfully implement projects that would benefit the community.



RESULTS

- ◆ Resident capacity was built around community planning components such as LEED-ND certification, density, and brownfields.
- ◆ A network of community-minded groups was developed that spanned cultures, neighborhoods, interests, and generations.
- ◆ Participant compensation benefited the community through the work of the groups who were committed to stay at the table.
- ◆ JCNI gained a deeper reach into the participants' respective communities through their outreach efforts for the community charrette process that was organized for each session.
- ◆ Greater continuity of participation led to more in-depth conversations on critical development and planning topics and increased our ability to move the work forward at a reasonable pace.



There are certain benefits and drawbacks to consider when compensating residents for their participation in the work. Some key benefits JCNi discovered are:

BENEFITS

Demonstrates that we value their knowledge and participation.

Residents provide invaluable community expertise to the planning for The Village at Market Creek. The commitment they make to support and move the work of The Village teams is often long – sometimes spanning many months or years – or particularly time-consuming, as was the case with VOCAL where the team sometimes met weekly for four- to six-month periods due to the complexity of the project.

Helps bring a broader range of voices into the work, leading to extended networks and stronger communities.

Many volunteers are residents who have extra time available to get involved in community groups and organizations which, while valuable, often results in more open and less targeted participation. The ability to provide a stipend to participants allowed us to seek people with a wider range of voices, skill sets, etc. that could benefit specific projects to be completed.

Encourages greater consistency, responsibility, and accountability in participation.

When coupled with clear commitments and expectations, compensation can sometimes provide an additional reason or motivating factor for stable and dependable participation, which can be particularly critical to the successful completion of certain projects or efforts.



We have also experienced and noted several key disadvantages to this strategy:

CHALLENGES

Limits participation.

Project budgets must be taken into account when determining how many participants can be compensated for a given rate over the length of the project.

May impact relationships with residents who are not invited to join a paid team.

Given that funding availability limits the number of spaces available for residents on paid teams, it can lead to hurt feelings or misunderstandings for long-standing volunteers and new participants alike who were not asked to join.

Can disincentivize volunteerism on a broader scale when used inappropriately.

When one resident is paid to do a job, other residents hear about it and are less likely to participate as volunteers.

Does not always result in more consistent participation.

The Construction Working Team faced this particular challenge. Despite the compensation that was provided to its members, several residents on the team attended only sporadically and dropped out before the project's conclusion.



Based on our experiences with resident compensation in these three cases, here are our best recommendations for other organizations and groups that are considering such an approach in their own communities:

Compensating residents for their participation can be effective when used in the right circumstances.

Specifically, it has been most effective for JCNi when the work consisted of **focused implementation efforts** that required sustained participation for a specific time period within a small- to medium-sized group.

Developing clear guidelines for when to pay provides clarity for staff and residents.

Compensating residents for their participation in capacity-building programs, such as the Neighborhood Coordinators Training Program, was an easy decision for JCNi as this strategy provided direct training opportunities that led to both individual and community development. Less clear, initially, was when to pay residents for their participation in other areas of our work without impacting overall volunteerism. Ultimately, it was decided that **implementation work for The Village – with its deeper and more time-intensive commitments – would happen in smaller teams that may, in rare cases, be paid.**

Delineating the point in our planning work where residents would be paid was critical for providing clarity when communicating with residents and staff.

Being upfront from the start about the commitment to be made on both sides bolsters accountability.

Developing agreements that plainly define the purpose and scope of work to be done, the timeline involved, and the responsibilities to meet was crucial for providing clarity and understanding **before the work began.** VOCAL's participants met with JCNi staff to review and agree to standards and expectations so that each was clear on what they were accountable for in the relationship before the session began.

Building relationships and community within paid teams takes additional forethought and planning.

The work of building relationships with residents who participated in paid teams began well before the first meeting was scheduled. It required **being out in the neighborhood and meeting people in their homes, businesses, and community centers;** only then could we learn about their interests and passions for their communities and find the natural intersections with the work to develop The Village.

Providing the needed facilitation to ensure open and honest dialogue is critical to the work's success.

Residents who participated in the work needed to feel okay to disagree. This was of particular importance on paid teams, where participants should not have to feel concerned that they would not be paid if they did not agree with our ideas and facilitation. **Developing a strong facilitation plan** that builds and emphasizes mutual respect, open dialogue, and a spirit of learning and understanding when disagreements arose led to trust and stronger, more cohesive teams.

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Having a plan in place for letting people go helps staff prepare for transitioning out participants.

Most of the residents who left a paid team they were involved with did so after a period of declining participation in the work. **Paying close attention to the engagement levels of our team members and being prepared to have a conversation with individuals** about where they were at and if continuing with the team made sense was important. Maintaining trust and respect at a time when a particular project was no longer a good fit helped keep the door open for their participation in another down the road that might be better suited to their interests.



Thinking about how to transition the skills and knowledge residents are learning into other areas can extend the learning deeper into the community.

Many of the skills that participants learned in well-planned and well-facilitated teams could translate into other areas of their lives and communities. Where appropriate, we sought **to create opportunities in the process to identify and highlight where and how these skills could be put to use.**

Understanding and anticipating that this strategy can lead to questions about the authenticity of the feedback you receive will help strengthen your efforts to create a solid plan.

We have faced such questions ourselves. Yet our experience has shown us that spaces can be created for open and honest dialogue when the work is done to ensure that the right components – open communication, clear objectives, a strong facilitation plan, committed residents, and mutual trust – are in place.



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