

FINAL REPORT

Evaluation of Neighborhood Programming and Support

Submitted to:

**City of Minneapolis Office of the
Internal Auditor**

Submitted by:

Biko Associates, Inc.

with

GrayHall, LLP. and

Paula Pentel

May 20, 2016



MINNEAPOLIS

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EVALUATION OF NEIGHBORHOOD PROGRAMMING AND SUPPORT

Submitted to:

**City of Minneapolis Office of the Internal Auditor
350 South Fifth Street, Room 302
Minneapolis, MN 55415**

Submitted by:

**Biko Associates, Inc.
79 13th Avenue Northeast
Studio 107
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55413**

**GrayHall, LLP
1213 Summit Avenue
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55105**

**Paula Pentel
Urban Studies Program
University of Minnesota
348 Social Sciences Building
267 19th Ave South
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND AND SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

The City of Minneapolis' Office of the Internal Auditor issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) in May 2015 to solicit proposals to conduct an external evaluation of the Neighborhood and Community Relations (NCR) Department's support of the Neighborhood Community Engagement Commission (NCEC) and its administration of the Community Participation Program (CPP) and the Neighborhood Revitalization Program (NRP). The purposes of the evaluation were to:

1. Determine progress toward meeting expectations established in the City of Minneapolis' (City) *Framework for the Future*, which was adopted by City Council in 2009;
2. Highlight areas where NCR has experienced success in the aforementioned areas;
3. Identify areas where opportunity still exists in the aforementioned areas; and
4. Recommend modifications that might be implemented to improve the delivery of services.

The City's *Framework for the Future* was submitted to the City Council Committee of the Whole on July 24, 2008 by the NRP Work Group, a working committee that was established in 2007 to determine the future of the Neighborhood Revitalization Program (NRP), which was to come to an end in December 2011. Specifically, the Work Group was tasked with developing City positions on:

- An administrative structure to support community engagement activities;
- Expectations of services community or neighborhood organizations would provide through resident participation contracts; and
- Extending, or not, a formal program of using discretionary funds for community initiated projects.

The RFP issued by the Office of Internal Audit outlined specific concerns to be addressed during the external evaluation. These are presented below as questions that were outlined in the RFP.

- Have NCR and NCEC achieved the purposes and aims for which they were created as outlined in the approved *Framework for the Future*?
- How well have they integrated the former NRP and the new engagement program (Community Participation Program) from the perspective of neighborhood organizations?
- Has the change from the former NRP realized any new benefits or created new challenges? If so, what are these?
- Are the Department and Commission ensuring wise use of public dollars allocated to neighborhood organizations?
- How can NCR and NCEC more effectively support neighborhood organizations in the following areas:
 - In implementing CPP?
 - In effective and inclusive neighborhood work in general?
 - In using the annual reports from the Community Participation Program to improve its services and oversight?

OTHER NCR DEPARTMENT ACTIVITIES

It should be noted that the scope of this evaluation does not directly address all aspects of NCR . The NCR Department is a multi-faceted entity within city government, and its responsibilities are broad and extend beyond NRP, CPP, and the NCEC. Not addressed in this evaluation are additional responsibilities that include:

■ Engagement

- Cultural engagement –NCR’s Access and Outreach team builds connections with communities where cultural norms or practices, language or disabilities limit knowledge and access to government. NCR staff directly engages the African American, Southeast Asian, Latino, American Indian, East African, LGBT, Senior and Disability community.
- City Academy – The department supports an annual program that runs for five weeks and is intended to give residents interested in getting involved in city government a quick overview of how the City functions.
- City boards and commissions - NCR provides general outreach and awareness to Neighborhood and Cultural Communities for the spring and fall cycles of the boards and commissions streamlined process. NCR also works closely with the clerk’s office on general boards and commissions related information. NCR also provides staff support to four City boards and commissions.

■ Consulting

- Americans with Disabilities Act – NCR consults City of Minneapolis Departments on providing equal access for people with disabilities to participate in and/or receive benefits of City programs, services and activities.
- Auditing and financial readiness – NCR arranges for audit services and assists with required state and federal filings for neighborhood organizations.
- Conflict resolution- The department assists boards and committees with codes of conduct, pointers for participation, IAP2 Principles for Meetings, running effective meetings, Roberts Rules of Order, understanding cultural norms and working with diverse participants in the community. Note: NCR does not facilitate mediation but can recommend outside agencies and experts.
- City department consultation – NCR consults City of Minneapolis Departments on Community Engagement Plans on a particular issue, project, policy, etc. Each community is different, and NCR staff can help tailor strategies to have the most effective reach for important City messages.
- Legal consult –NCR provides legal services to neighborhood groups on employment law and non-profit law (via contract).
- Risk management – NCR arranges for Director and Officers Insurance for most neighborhood boards and tracks General Liability insurance policies for neighborhood organizations.
- Directory of services for neighborhood organizations - NCR publishes a directory that lists all the guidance and services it provides.

■ Language Services

- Language Access Plan – NCR consults City of Minneapolis Departments on interpretation, translation and engagement strategies to effectively relay information to non-to-limited English speaking residents. This may include the use of video, radio, TV, as well as print. NCR can help determine where an agency’s money is best spent. NCR also provides oversight of language contracts and assists with accuracy of translated materials and equipment for face to face interpretation of one language to another.

SUMMARY OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

An iterative, four phase process was designed for the conduct of the external evaluation. The iterations were represented by a repeated cycle of operations designed to be informative and convergent. Iterative processes ensure that the execution of one step in the process results in an understanding of what is known and an understanding of what is yet to be learned. Thus, each step in the evaluation process informs the focus and design of following evaluation steps. With each iterative step in the process, the evaluators are brought closer to a point where all the questions are addressed. In this case, the evaluation process proceeded as follows:

- Phase 1 -- Initial Discovery

During Phase 1, a Steering Committee was formed comprising two elected officials (City Council Members Cam Gordon and Linea Palmisano)¹; the NCR director, David Rubedor, NCR Community Engagement Manager, Howard Blin; NCR Neighborhood Support Specialist, Robert Thompson; and Will Tetsell, the City Auditor. The evaluation team worked with the Steering Committee to refine the outreach and investigation methodology and receive insights into various aspects of NRP, CPP, NCEC and other experiences working with neighborhood organizations and other resident groups.

The following investigation activities were conducted under Phase 1 of the evaluation:

1. A review and analysis of previously prepared plans and reports to learn as much as possible about the entities to be evaluated, how they operate as single entities and in concert.
2. An interview with NCR Department director, David Rubedor to gather first-hand information on the department, its programs and services and challenges.
3. Interviews with each of the 13 City Council members.
4. A review and analysis of evaluation data from the 2014 and 2015 Community Connections Conferences.
5. A review and analysis of annual reports submitted to NCR from the neighborhood organizations for 2012, 2013, and 2014.

- Phase 2 -- Immediate Outreach and Investigation

The immediate outreach and investigation phase included an NCR staff focus group meeting and an NCEC commissioner focus group meeting.

- Phase 3 -- Preliminary Online Survey

Following completion of Phase 2, the evaluation team designed a preliminary online survey that was administered to a stratified sample of neighborhood organization staff and board members. Thirty-three organizations (41 percent of the 80 neighborhood organizations) were included in the stratified sample.

- Phase 4 -- Final Investigation

Analysis of input received during Phases 1, 2, and 3 provided answers to the evaluation team's early questions and raised an additional set of questions that was addressed in Phase 4, which included:

¹ Council Member Gordon chairs the Health, Environment and Community Engagement Committee, and Council Member Palmisano chairs the Audit Committee.

1. Two follow-up focus group meetings with neighborhood organizations (staff, board members and volunteers) who were not included in the Phase 3 stratified sample;
2. A follow-up online survey that was administered to neighborhood organizations (again, both staff and board members) who were not included in the Phase 3 stratified sample;
3. A follow-up online survey that was administered to NCEC members to follow up on unanswered concerns from the Phase 2 NCEC focus group meeting; and
4. A final meeting with the Steering Committee was held to review and discuss the programmatic implications of findings and recommendations.

MAJOR OBSERVATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESPONSES

The following observations and recommendations are themed into five categories:

1. Meeting overall expectations.
2. Providing assistance to neighborhood groups.
3. Facilitating the NCEC.
4. Communicating with City Council.
5. NCR Department Staff and NCEC Organization.

1. MEETING OVERALL EXPECTATIONS

Observations:

The NCR Department has met all the expectations outlined in *Framework for the Future*. Generally, the expectations, listed below, have been successfully met; some more successfully than others; some less so. The department has successfully:

- Developed and administered a new department to:
 - oversee the continuation of NRP and the new engagement program;
 - administer new grant funds; and
 - advise the Mayor, City Council, and City departments on community issues and needs related to community participation and the City's community participation system.
- Administered the post-2009 NRP. NCR staff have worked with neighborhood organizations providing support for their continued NRP Phase 1 and Phase 2 efforts at planning, priority setting and implementation and execution.
- Administered the new "engagement program," CPP. NCR staff have, again, worked with neighborhood organizations to ensure that they are able to:
 - understand their responsibilities as recipients of administrative support, investment, and innovation funds;
 - run efficient organizations that meet fiscal and legal requirements for free-standing, non-profits;
 - conduct inclusionary outreach programs that are inviting to all socio-economic and demographic groups comprising their neighborhoods, often designing outreach methods to specifically reach residents who have historically not been involved in resident-oriented programs and organizations;
 - integrate neighborhood-level work with the work of the City; and
 - provide neighborhood organizations with access to Neighborhood Investment and Community Innovation Funds.

- Provided support to City departments in the area of resident involvement and outreach.
- Developed a resident-controlled advisory board that would be staffed by the department.

Recommendations:

The neighborhood organizations expressed belief that advocacy should be one of NCR's expectations. As an advocate for the neighborhoods, NCR should be "out front," ensuring that neighborhoods are prepared for the future, and thought needs to be given about the future of neighborhood support. In a mere four years the landscape for Minneapolis neighborhoods will change when funding comes to an end for the current CPP.

- NCR should be working directly with the NCEC and neighborhood organizations to develop and evaluate alternative survival strategies that can ensure the long-term existence of the neighborhood organizations and resident engagement activities in the City.
- It was learned that some of the neighborhood organizations are more financially secure than others. Many of the more secure organizations operate collaboratively with others. An element of future strategies is for neighborhood organizations to collaborate with one another.
- Some organizations are already collaborating without assistance from NCR or NCEC. Other organizations will need assistance, and the department should implement trainings and processes that better enable organizations to collaborate.
- Neighborhoods call for NCR to advocate for the need for neighborhood funding; provide promotion and visibility opportunities; and promote neighborhood events through City social media outlets.
- It may be time to reassess ranges of assistance and reprioritize the types of assistance, as some neighborhoods may need more funding and other forms of support than others.

NCR Response:

The Department agrees with the evaluator's findings and recommendations. The Department further recognizes that although the Framework for the Future has been successfully implemented, it is now a dated document. The Department is working to create a new vision for neighborhoods, including better defining their role and relationship with the City, expanding engagement work and exploring funding options for the next decade. The Department is establishing an internal work group to guide this discussion and is providing staff support to the NCEC's Neighborhoods 2020 committee.

In addition, NCR staff are reaching out to neighborhood associations to organize sector conversations with neighborhood leaders on the future role of neighborhood organizations. The dialogues will be co-facilitated by neighborhood leaders and NCR staff who will participate in a facilitation training and planning retreat to prepare for the community dialogues.

NCR staff are currently compiling financial and demographic data for neighborhood organizations to provide more opportunities for peer review and benchmarking, and to create additional and develop new best practices guides in addition to those already provided by the Department.

2. PROVIDING ASSISTANCE TO NEIGHBORHOOD GROUPS

Observations:

A primary focus of NCR has been assisting neighborhoods with administrative issues so that they can meet the legal requirements of non-profit organizations and run efficiently with transparency and inclusiveness. The assistance the department provides to the organizations is vital, and a majority of organizations expressed appreciation for the department's efforts. At the same time, the evaluation team found that some of neighborhood organizations felt NCR should be doing more to advocate on their behalf and that the timeliness

and quality of the assistance received from NCR could be improved. Evaluation results showed that many neighborhoods are uncertain about how NCR as a department (and by extension, its staff) functions and operates.

- According to the annual reports that were reviewed for 2012 through 2014, some of the neighborhood organizations need an advocate who will champion their cases and support them in their needs. According to the neighborhood organizations, not enough is being done by NCR to advocate for additional funding.
- Analysis of the annual reports showed that 14 percent of the neighborhood organizations in 2013 and 9 percent of the organizations in 2014 ranked NCR's assistance as poor. The organizations that ranked NCR's assistance as poor cited the following issues and concerns. Some commented that NCR had not resolved these issues and concerns, despite repeated requests in the annual reports for:
 - reduced turn-around time contract approvals and reimbursements and a streamlined funding approval process;
 - clearer guidance and instructions on the use of funds and consistent guidelines for reporting expenditure and use of funding;
 - research on alternative insurance policies for medical, dental, and retirement;
 - more support in the area of collaboration with other organizations;
 - more City-wide workshops and training opportunities;
 - more translation and interpreter services;
 - more assistance in the area of communications, branding, marketing and use of social media; and
 - more training specifically in the area of engaging under-represented populations.

Recommendations:

Neighborhoods need assistance in areas other than administration, finances, governance, and legal matters. They also need technical assistance addressing issues in the areas of: a) alternatives development, evaluation and analysis; b) accessing public agencies (including City departments) and private entities to identify allies and partners who can help resolve their issues; and c) strategy development that incorporates their strongest asset (organized people). The following table, which is explained in detail on pages 10 through 15 of this report, identifies 11 areas where the neighborhood organizations feel NCR could improve the assistance and services it provides. The table reports the frequency (as percentages) of the neighborhoods' suggested improvements for 2012, 2013, and 2014.

IMPROVEMENTS SUGGESTED IN ANNUAL REPORTS BETWEEN 2012 AND 2014

Improvements Suggested in Annual Reports	Frequency of Suggestions		
	2012	2013	2014
Improve timing for contracting and reimbursements. Improve processes for reporting by streamlining reports. Improve practice by providing better insurance coverage for neighborhood organization employees.	28%	18%	18%
Facilitate robust sharing ideas/working together across neighborhoods. Facilitate inter-neighborhood collaboration and interaction.	16%	3%	0
Enhance translator/interpreter services; e.g., simultaneous translation; to engage with East African, Hmong, and others communities.	14%	11%	7%
Improve communications and advocacy services and assistance; advocate/promote neighborhoods and neighborhood funding; provide promotion, visibility, and marketing opportunities; promote events through social media outlets; advocate for neighborhood groups at City Hall; defend and promote the neighborhoods.	8%	11%	7%
Improve neighborhoods' access to assigned specialists.	12%	0	0
Increase neighborhood funding.	12%	7%	5%
Hold informational meetings for residents, neighborhood organizations regarding the CPP program; services NCR offers and how to access; provide better guidance on what is expected for drafting the Neighborhood Priority Plan; regarding clarifying ADA Policy in certain sections; more meetings that provide an opportunity to discuss issues with NCR representatives; offer training modules on how to make an organizational budget, run a board meeting, and deal with conflict) and offer board training	8%	3%	2%
Publish a list of services that the NCR Department offers the neighborhood organizations.	0	7%	9%
Provide more help with outreach to specific interest groups; e.g., under-engaged populations, renters, and non-English speakers.	8%	7%	9%
Adjust expectations for organizations with unpaid staff (e.g., keep requirements simple for neighborhoods that receive the lowest allocations; some may not have full- or part-time staff)	2%	3%	2%
Build stronger financial capabilities within NCR, as improvements are needed in the areas of contracting, group grant writing, accounting, and understanding costs associated with healthcare services)	0	3%	0

NCR Response:

Overall, the frequency of neighborhood suggestions for improvements included in the report is very low and has been decreasing over time. The report does provide useful information for areas in which the Department could strengthen its support for neighborhood organizations. The Department will move forward with reviewing these suggestions.

The Department considers a standard of about 10 percent of neighborhoods rating our work as "poor" to be acceptable. The Department's own evaluation of the same annual reports indicate that neighborhoods, on average, rate the Department at 4 (above average) on a scale of 1 - 5 (low - high). Both of these ratings are within acceptable Department operating standards. The Department plays both an advocacy as well as an enforcement role with neighborhood organizations. The Department is continually engaged in contract or guideline compliance issues, conflict issues, financial issues, etc. These situations are often challenging and can lead to a negative response. This is a critical aspect of the Department's work and inherent in ensuring that neighborhoods function well, are accountable and transparent, and provide assurances that all residents are welcome and can participate.

Regarding some of the specific concerns:

- Timeliness of contracting and reimbursements is a frequent issue with neighborhoods. The City's contracting and reimbursement system includes important checks and balances that ensure legal and appropriate use of public funds. The Department has worked closely with the Finance Department to expedite the reimbursement process and lessen potential cash flow issues with neighborhood associations. The time required to process neighborhood reimbursement requests has decreased and is now often less than 10 days. Contracting is a longer process and generally takes 4 – 6 weeks. While much of the contracting process is out of the Department's control, the Department could improve its communication of these timing issues to neighborhood organizations.
- The Department is examining the return on investment of the City's funding of neighborhood organizations. This will review the value of the programs offered by neighborhood organizations, including the placemaking and community building activities, crime and safety initiatives, engagement work, housing and other activities neighborhoods provide. Included in this examination will be the total resources needed for neighborhoods to accomplish City goals. The Department is expanding performance measures which will result in a tool which can be used to evaluate the impact and success of neighborhoods.
- The Department will provide better clarity on the role of the Department, the NCEC and neighborhoods to advocate for neighborhood funding.
- The Department uses feedback from the annual reports to determine the content of the Learning Labs provided at the annual Community Connections Conference. The ability to further provide neighborhood organizations support beyond administrative, governance and financial guidance is a capacity question and one that will likely be addressed in the aforementioned 2020 work.

3. FACILITATING THE NCEC

Observations:

The resident-controlled advisory committee that was developed to meet expectations in the *Framework for the Future* has evolved to become the NCEC. This external evaluation found that the NCEC is not functioning as effectively as it should, as evidenced by the following:

- NCEC Commissioners themselves are not always certain of the Commission's role. For example, when asked about opportunities for NCEC Commissioners to become more directly involved with the neighborhood organizations they represent, there was confusion. Some Commissioners indicated that direct involvement is an expectation, and others felt as though direct involvement with neighborhood organizations was never understood to be one of the Commission's roles.
- Overall, most NCEC Commissioners have had little to no contact with neighborhood organizations within their districts and are, therefore, not in a position where they can genuinely advocate for them, review their proposals or make judgments about their funding requests.
- The Commissioners are not satisfied with their role. When asked, 78 percent of the Commissioners stated they were not satisfied.
- According to the NCEC Online survey, 16 percent of the Commissioners feel that NCR has diminished their capacity as advisors, does not fully engage them in discussions and the formulation of policies, and, instead, regards them as "rubber stamps."
- At least two NCEC Commissioners attending the NCEC focus group meeting expressed concern that City Council has interfered and prevented them from becoming fully involved.

- When representatives of the neighborhood organizations attending a focus group meeting were asked if they were fully aware of the NCEC Commission's role, all but one (92 percent) responded that they weren't. One person in attendance at the focus group meeting went so far as to suggest that the Commission is expendable.
- Five of the 13 City Council members were highly critical of NCEC and commented that the NCEC had not made significant positive contributions to improve resident engagement, nor have they been a positive addition to serving or advocating for the neighborhoods.

Recommendations:

The resident-controlled advisory board that was identified in the *Framework for the Future* evolved into the NCEC, and while the NCEC is a resident-controlled body, staff support is provided by the NCR Department. According to comments received during the NCEC focus group meeting and responses to survey questions, some Commissioners feel the NCR Department actually controls the NCEC's agenda, topics that are discussed at NCEC meetings, and the NCEC's activities. When asked about their vision for the NCEC and its role in the City's resident engagement support programs and services, the Commissioners provided examples of what they would like the NCEC to become. Their responses to the evaluators' questions indicated that they would like to see the Commission become more involved with the neighborhood organizations in order to better advocate on the neighborhoods' behalf..

- NCR should work directly with the Commissioners in workshop sessions to revisit, reaffirm, or revise the NCEC mission and vision. While, as a resident-controlled body, the Commissioners could do this on their own, NCR's provision of staff assistance is a positive. Without staff assistance, the Commission would be at a loss, as the Commissioners are not paid for their work on the Commission.
- Commissioners should feel an obligation to develop relationships with organizations in their districts so that they can become versed about their issues and become effective advocates.
- The status and importance of sitting on the NCEC should be elevated. NCR could facilitate this transformation by ensuring that the Commissioners are more in charge of the Commission's agenda and activities.
- Commissioners should proactively discuss the future of resident engagement and the City's future support services and programs in view of the end of current CPP funding mechanisms. Commissioners should develop a strategy for informing and involving neighborhood organizations in these discussions. In its role as staff support for the Commission, NCR should assist NCEC in its deliberations about the future of the neighborhood organizations and provide assistance to the Commissioners as they engage the organizations they represent.

NCR Response:

The Department is in agreement with the recommendations in the Evaluation which call for strengthening of the role of the NCEC.

Presently, the work associated with neighborhood organizations is managed by two boards/commissions, the NRP Policy Board and the NCEC. The NRP Policy Board oversees the administration of NRP Phase I and II and all NRP State statutory requirements. The NCEC oversees the Community Participation Program, or NRP Phase III as defined by City Ordinance. Having two boards/commissions splitting these responsibilities for neighborhood organizations is confusing to both neighborhoods and board/commission members. The Department is examining options to restructure the NCEC to support all aspects of the NRP ordinance, including State statutory requirements.

Some of the recommended measures have already been initiated in the past year.

- In 2015, the NCEC has developed its first strategic plan which establishes the vision, mission and priorities for the work of the Commission. Given that the Evaluation included interviewing some former NCEC commissioners, their responses were not reflective of current action.
- The NCEC has established a Neighborhoods 2020 Committee to study and make recommendations on future changes to neighborhood programs.
- The NCEC is completing work on an enhanced orientation program for newly appointed commissioners with the objective of providing a clearer understanding of the work of the Commission.
- The NCEC has embarked on a regular series of community forums, to be held on a quarterly basis to all residents to directly address the Commission on current topics.

4. COMMUNICATING WITH CITY COUNCIL

Observations:

Interviews with City Council members indicate that NCR has not been as effective as it should be at keeping the City Council informed about a number of ongoing issues. Open communication is particularly critical with the current City Council as so many City Council members are new to city government.

Recommendations:

Following is a list of concerns about which City Council should be regularly informed about:

- NCR's role as the designated institution within city government that ensures the efficiency and effectiveness of grassroots organizations.
- Measurements of NCR's work (number of meetings, number of issues resolved, etc.).
- The neighborhoods' contributions to the City and the challenges they face.
- Findings from annual reports, which should be organized and presented to City Council on an annual basis.

Where appropriate, NCR should work with NCEC Commissioners to provide them with opportunities to formally address and present information to the City Council.

NCR Response:

The Department is in agreement with the recommendations in the evaluation. The Department will improve communications with the City Council in the following ways:

- Expand and publicize performance metrics to better measure and articulate the value of neighborhood work (see response #2).
- Restructure our annual neighborhood report, based on information gathered through the annual reports submitted by neighborhoods and make that available to the City Council and the public.
- Provide an annual report to the City Council and the public and the Blueprint for Equitable Engagement.

A future goal of NCR staff would be to facilitate more meetings between Council Members and neighborhood organizations in their wards, such as the Ward 11 and Ward 13 neighborhood organization summits. However, with current demands on the Department's neighborhood staff, there is not sufficient capacity.

5. NCR DEPARTMENT STAFF AND NCEC ORGANIZATION

Observations:

Outreach to NCR staff, NCEC Commissioners, and the neighborhood organizations revealed organizational issues that deserve consideration.

- With only five outreach staff, where each staff person is responsible for 16 to 17 neighborhood organizations, just keeping up with the neighborhoods' requests for administrative assistance is a daunting task. The ability of staff to address the neighborhood organizations' requests for expanded services (e.g., issue resolution, collaboration with other organizations, outreach to under-represented populations, etc.) is low.
- The current staffing level limits the efforts of managers and line staff to address concerns identified by residents.
- NCR Staff have encountered difficulties working with other departments in the City that need expertise in conducting outreach to resident groups.
- Staff feels that communication ties with City Council members are not always effective.
- NCEC Commissioners identified organizational issues such as:
 - unstaggered, two-year terms for Commissioners, which does not support opportunities for institutional learning on the commission,
 - the commissions lack of access to decision-makers,
 - the commission's lack of control of its agenda,
 - the lack of an NCEC mission,
 - the lack of an NCEC vision, and

Recommendations:

Recommendations addressing the fifth category of issues have largely been addressed in the discussion on categories 2 and 3. Three additional recommendations are offered, however.

- The number of NCR outreach staff workers is too small to for each staff to meet the operational needs of the complement of organizations under their umbrella. The number of outreach staff should be increased to at least 10.
- Ensure that the NCEC Commissioners continue to be elected/selected from neighborhoods within specific NCEC districts.
- Ensure that NCEC Commissioners are engaged with the neighborhood organizations and that they understand that they have two responsibilities:
 - advocacy for the neighborhoods within their districts
 - advocacy for all neighborhoods in the City.
- Develop an organization flow chart that can be used to describe organizational relationships among the many entities that are concerned with resident outreach. The organization chart should be a graphical representation of relationships between an organization's departments, functions and people. It can also indicate the flow of data, responsibility and reporting from bottom-up or top-down. The chart should:
 - Accompany and support textual descriptions of how NCR functions and operates.
 - Describe NCR as a department and how it is responsible to and communicates with the City Council; the Council's Health, Environment and Community Engagement Committee; and the Mayor's office.
 - Identify its leadership, decision-making processes and structure, staff (managers, specialists, and clerical, etc.), and work processes and systems. It should demonstrate processes by which neighborhood organizations can influence outcomes within the department.

- Describe NCR's relationship to the NCEC and outline how the two entities communicate.
- Describe NCEC and its relationship to the City Council; the Council's Health, Environment and Community Engagement Committee; and the Mayor's office
- The organizational flow charts described above should be an element of brochures and pamphlets that are produced and distributed by NCR.

NCR Response:

Some of the recommendations included the Evaluation concerning the NCEC are addressed in previous sections. Improvements to the NCEC operations are underway.

The Department itself is currently re-aligning staff, bringing the cultural/under-engaged staff support in alignment with the neighborhood support staff. The purpose of this change is to strengthen the engagement support with cultural communities, neighborhoods and City Departments. As this re-alignment is completed, a flow chart, as recommended, can then be developed to show the structure and relationships of the Department, staff, NCEC, and HECE. Once this re-alignment is complete, a flow chart, as suggested by the evaluators, can be developed and made available to the neighborhoods.

INITIAL DISCOVERIES

DISCUSSION WITH NCR DEPARTMENT LEADERSHIP

As explained by the NCR Department director:

- The department has three main functions:
 1. Provide support to neighborhood organizing through CPP, the new community engagement program.
 2. Continue to support NRP.
 3. Provide neighborhoods with support in the areas of access and outreach.
- Challenges:
 1. When NCR and CPP were established, the City Council determined that approximately \$10 million from the pool of NRP funds that had been committed to the neighborhoods for their Phase 2 NRP work should be used, instead, to fund the new CPP. This City Council action left the average neighborhood with approximately 70 percent of previously committed Phase 2 NRP funds and raised suspicion and distrust among the neighborhood organizations. As a result, some of the neighborhood organizations harbor hostile feelings toward NCR.
 2. The level of funding allocated for administrative support is only \$3.9 million per year for all 80 organizations. The formula for allocating this funding to the organizations considers eight factors. The most controversial are: the diversity index and the population of individuals where English is a second language. NCR has been criticized for focusing too heavily on racial and ethnic distinctions.
 3. NRP was regarded by many organizations as an entitlement. As the City has shifted from NRP to CPP, the importance of annual evaluations to determine whether the neighborhood organizations meet eligibility criteria have become an important factor. NCR requires that the organizations must be transparent and inclusionary, and organizations are to report on their efforts to conduct rigorous outreach and engagement programs in their annual reports. This level of scrutiny has met resistance.

The department director explained that from his perspective, the evaluation could be most helpful if it were to focus on:

- The department's work supporting the neighborhoods with engagement and outreach.
- Ways in which to measure the department's efforts.
- What the City can expect from the neighborhoods and how these expectations can be quantified.

INTERVIEWS WITH MINNEAPOLIS CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS

Thirteen Minneapolis City Council members participated in a six-question telephone interview to discuss the transition from the NRP to CPP and other aspects of the evaluation. The purpose of the interviews was to get opinions on the effectiveness and efficiency of NCR in its administration of the transition from NRP to the CPP and help develop questions that should be included in future steps of the evaluation, the focus group meetings and the online survey.

Interview Findings

Overall familiarity with NCR's efforts:

- All 13 City Council members reported high levels of knowledge and understanding about the work of the neighborhood associations in their wards. City Council members who are the most recently elected members reported knowing about the history of NRP prior to their election to the City Council.
- All City Council members felt that the success and effectiveness of any particular neighborhood was dependent on the neighborhood. (i.e., all neighborhoods groups are different; some are successful, and others are not; it “depends on the neighborhood.”)
- Many City Council members were able to provide numerous examples of positive resident engagement by a number of neighborhood associations. Likewise, they were able to identify the neighborhood organizations that have struggled to be effective over time.
- While City Council members seem well versed with the work of the neighborhood associations, about half of them expressed a lack of knowledge and confusion about the amount of time spent and type of services provided by NCR staff.
- Moreover, some City Council members claimed not to know or understand NCR's goals.
- Still others felt the neighborhood organizations, themselves, were unclear about the role of NCR, and consequently their expectations are unclear.
- One City Council member claimed to have attended literally 100s of neighborhood meetings and, during that time, never ran into or heard from an NCR staff person at any of the meetings.
- It was expressed that NCR staff should have better metrics to define how they spend their time and help determine if their goals are being met.
- One City Council member stated, “I know what the Public Works Department does, I know what the Police Department does, I have no clear idea what NCR does; the City Council has been asking NCR to define itself, and we could have provided more guidance than we have so far.”

How effective are the NCR's and NCEC's efforts to engage more residents and enhance the level of resident participation?

- Seven City Council members rated NCR as “Pretty effective” to “Effective” with room for improvement. Three reported mixed results, citing “Average effectiveness;” two said they are “Still figuring out what they [NCR] do and “don't know their goals;” while one said “There are too many issues going on with neighborhood associations, and oversight is needed for them to be considered effective.”
- Six City Council members described the NCEC's efforts as “Pretty effective” to “Effective.” It was commented that, “Now they [NCEC] have provided positive, clear recommendations that were pretty helpful; it's not the NCEC's job to enhance resident participation; they're supposed to

advise us on policies, procedures, and programs and they've started to do that; they've made a dramatic improvement."

- Five reported the NCEC is as not at all effective. "I am not aware of anything they've successfully done. Their charge and mission is not clearly understood; and I'm not impressed with anything associated with them."
- One reported "Mixed results," and another said "I don't know anything about them."

Successes and challenges associated with the transition from NRP to CPP

- All 13 City Council members described the transition as very challenging, but most (10) suggested the transition has been successful. Some of the City Council members commented that, "It could have been so much worse than it was; even given the bumps in the road the transition went relatively smoothly when it could have been terrible; there's some new leadership involved now; new perspectives are beginning; there's more accountability built into the new programs."
- Three City Council members commented that challenges associated with funds that weren't spent in Phase 1 or Phase 2 of NRP need to be addressed.

Successes and challenges associated with unspent Phase 1 and Phase 2 NRP funds

- Seven City Council members felt that neighborhoods should not be penalized because neighborhood dynamics affected the capacity of some neighborhoods to start later than others or for long range planning.
- Five reported a desire to establish a hard deadline for using the funds where the neighborhoods lose it if they don't use it.

Opinion about CPP and its formula

- Eleven City Council members think it's a good time to review and revisit the CPP formula. They felt that the program is good, but the formula probably needs to be "tweaked." They commented that there is a need to reassess ranges of assistance and reprioritize the types of assistance, because some neighborhoods need more funding than others.
- One reported "An unimpressive first round of grants."

City's best promising and innovative practices

- Outreach to residents who speak English as a second language was applauded, but more is needed.
- The capacity of one neighborhood to institute best or innovative practices depends entirely on the neighborhood.
- Each City Council member provided at least one example of some aspect of successful work by a neighborhood association in her/his Ward.

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NCR DEPARTMENT STAFF FOCUS GROUP MEETING

FOCUS GROUP MEETING PROTOCOL

A protocol was prepared that outlined topics that were addressed during the NCR staff focus group meeting. (See the appendix.) The NCR staff protocol sought to learn about the staff's experiences working directly with neighborhood organizations and focused on their experiences as they assisted neighborhood organizations in the transition from NRP to CPP. Specifically, the protocol included questions that addressed:

- Differences between NRP and CPP and how those differences might have affected their work with neighborhood organizations.
- Challenges working with neighborhood organizations under NRP compared to CPP.
- The purposes of CPP and whether neighborhood organizations were achieving them.
- Challenges experienced by the neighborhood organizations under NRP compared to CPP.
- Characteristics of neighborhoods that have successfully navigated the transition from NRP to CPP.
- The types of assistance requested by neighborhood organizations and staff's ability to resolve their issues.

NCR STAFF FOCUS GROUP MEETING

There is a total of 16 staff in the NCR Department. Twelve invitations to participate in the focus group meeting were extended to the non-managerial and non-administrative staff. These 12 individuals hold positions that are titled "Specialist," and they work in the areas of Community Relations, Access & Outreach and Neighborhood Support. Eight staff attended the focus group meeting.

The evaluation team began the focus group meeting with a set of questions and a protocol for conducting the meeting. In a respectful and constructive way, staff members participating in the meeting disregarded the prepared questions and protocol and focused the discussion on issues that were most important to them.

NCR Staff Focus Group Findings

- Staff feels overcommitted. There was not enough staff to effectively work with 71 neighborhood associations at the level staff believe neighborhood organizations deserve. There are 4.5 full time staff equivalents to work with all the neighborhoods. Each person works with 16 to 17 organizations.
- Staff feels the City's expectations/goals of neighborhood organizations are unclear. The City has not clearly or adequately defined what it wants from the 71 neighborhood organizations.
- Some organizations need more assistance than others. Staff is not certain that some of the organizations have the capacity to adequately carry out expectations/goals.
- Neighborhood organizations have persevered. Staff feels neighborhood organizations have gotten through the transition from the NRP to the CPP better than NCR.

- Staff feels the City has a “misdirection of responsibilities.” The City has directed its role and responsibility for community engagement/resident participation to neighborhood organizations, and some of those organizations are not adequately prepared to be effective in that role.
- No one has articulated or explained what to expect; what is the return on investment. NCR’s work needs to be measured. If there’s a value proposition for the department it should be widely shared with City Council.
- There is a lack of clarity about the roles of NCR staff across City departments. NCR is supposed to be available to other departments, but there is a lack of clarity among City departments as how to best work with NCR. Protocols need to be established to ensure maximum efficiency and effectiveness.
- Better cooperation from City Council is needed. NCR would benefit from better cooperation, understanding and adequate support from the City Council to improve its work.

REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATION ANNUAL REPORTS

BACKGROUND

CPP Neighborhood Annual Reports for the period 2012 through 2014 were reviewed as part of the NCR Department evaluation. A total of 178 annual reports were reviewed for the three-year period, an average of 59 for each year. Table 1 presents a year-by-year tally of annual reports for the investigation period.

TABLE 1
NUMBER OF CPP ANNUAL REPORTS REVIEWED

Year	Number of Annual Reports
2012	50
2013	71
2014	57
Total	178

Source: GrayHall, March 3, 2016

The CPP Annual Report Form asks respondents to list their activities for each calendar year including the number of volunteers (e.g., board members, committee members, office volunteers, and others who serve at events or other activities); participants (e.g., people who participate in other ways such as attending meetings or organization events); highlights of work and photos, information of direct contacts (e.g., individuals the organization interacted with directly, through door-knocking, meetings, or perhaps over the phone); and how many people regularly receive print or electronic communications from neighborhood organizations. Organizations also report major accomplishments each year and ways in which individuals in their community directly impact the organizations' work.

Other information shared in the annual reports includes the percentages of time organizations spent on housing-related activities and preparing annual financial reports (e.g., income and expenses). In addition, organizations are asked to describe their interactions with City departments and other jurisdictions. They are also asked to rank, on a scale of 1 to 5 (e.g., 1 being poor and 5 being excellent), the impact of their interactions with City departments that occupied a major part of their time. They are asked to rank the effectiveness and timeliness of City communications and describe how City departments can improve the ways in which they function with and in neighborhoods. A final rating is requested on how NCR can improve the assistance it offers to organizations.

RATING THE ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY NCR

The review and analysis conducted for the evaluation focused on two annual report questions related to *City Assistance*:

1. “On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being poor and 5 being excellent, how would you rate the assistance provided to your neighborhood by NCR?” and
2. “How can the Neighborhood and Community Relations Department improve the assistance it provides to your organization as a community participation group?”

Review of the annual reports showed that the average rating of NCR assistance provided to the neighborhood organizations over the three- year period from 2012 to 2014 is 3.8. The overall rating when all reporting organizations' scores are averaged for 2012 is 3.5, for 2013 it is 3.8, and for 2014 the overall rating is 4.0.

TABLE 2
AVERAGE RATINGS OF NCR'S ASSISTANCE PROVIDED TO NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATIONS
2012-2014

Year	Annual Reports' Average Ratings
2012	3.5
2013	3.8
2014	4.0
N=178	

Source: GrayHall, March 3, 2016

The ratings demonstrate slight increases in movement over the years, suggesting that NCR has addressed some of the assistance concerns raised over the three-year period.

Ratings for Overall NCR Assistance in 2012:

In 2012, the neighborhood organizations ranked NCR assistance from zero to 5, with 10 percent of them rating NCR assistance as low as 1 or 2. During that same year, the highest percentage of neighborhood organizations (46 percent) ranked NCR assistance at 4. Most of the neighborhood organizations in 2012 that ranked NCR assistance at 4, praised the work of individual NCR staff members, noting that staff responded in timely manners when contacted.

Organizations giving NCR low ratings of 1 or 2 commented that “poor timing of activities was of great concern as was the limited contact with the NCEC commissioner.”

"We submitted a request for an NRP [Neighborhood Revitalization Program] plan modification months ago and have yet to hear anything about it. The NCEC commissioner who is supposed to represent us has never contacted us – and only now we hear that he has not been attending meetings."

Ratings for Overall NCR Assistance in 2013:

NCR assistance ratings in 2013 varied from 1 to 5, with a majority of neighborhood organizations selecting the “very good” rating of 4. During that same year, however, 14 percent of the neighborhood organizations ranked NCR assistance as low as 1 or 2. Three of the neighborhood organizations, providing ratings of 1 or 2 wrote:

"Some of the information received is useful, sometimes it just feels like too much. We believe that phone calls at times would be more useful; emails get bogged down and lost in the shuffle as well as letters."

"We would like to know what NCR has to offer. We would love assistance with groups we struggle to engage, such as renters and those who speak no or little English. [We] would also like to know how NCR envisions our role in community participation."

"We wish the City departments would view [us] and other neighborhood organizations as partners. Ideally, we would like to see and hear from representatives from the City departments on a regular basis. Instead, the norm is to not hear from city departments unless there is a problem or we request information. We rely on our City Council member to help us gain access to City staff and departments."

In 2013, most neighborhood organizations that ranked NCR assistance as “very good” or 4, offered comments similar to these:

"NCR staff has proven to be an asset and willingly accommodates their time to attend meetings. Their expertise, experience, and knowledge of resources has proven to be priceless, which has allowed [our organization] to creatively think more strategically about partnerships beyond its boundaries, allocation of CPP funding, and best practices for community engagement."

"In 2013 [we] had cause to utilize the services and expertise of the NCR department. The guidance was good and helped facilitate the Annual Meeting as well as some other difficult situations. The NCR staff was responsive and knowledgeable, working on a one-on-one basis and on a specific topic. We were fortunate to have NCR as a resource."

Ratings for Overall NCR Assistance in 2014:

A majority, 74 percent of 2014 neighborhood organizations, provided ratings of 4 (33 percent) or 5 (40 percent) when asked about NCR assistance. Nine (9) percent of the organizations offered a rating of 3, and 9 percent indicated ratings of 1 or 2. In 2013, written comments associated with low ratings tended to resemble the three below.

"Provide a detailed written document (guide) including specs for Neighborhood Priority Plans (NPP) like the one created for use of CPP funds."

"Fast track the reimbursement process. It takes NCR too long to get contracts ready."

"Explore ways to use the General Fund and other non-TIF funds so that neighborhoods can

use a designated small amount for festivals or food in conjunction with neighborhood events."

The majority of 2013-2014 neighborhood organizations (82 percent) praised the work of NCR, offering "very good" to "excellent" ratings shared comments such as these:

"We've found NCR staff very responsive to our questions and a great resource for problem solving."

"My interactions with NCR have always been great and positive."

"Doing a great job with our organizational and financial needs."

Overall, the ratings suggest two things. The first is that most neighborhood organizations are satisfied with NCR assistance. The second is that there is just a small number of organizations that have a strong interest in change. However, as illustrated under the following heading, some organizations that provided high ratings such as 4 still offered suggestions for improvement. In the spirit of fairness and continuous improvement to NCR, the following section gives attention to issues raised by organizations in the areas below.

NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATIONS' SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

From 2012 through 2014, neighborhood organizations raised a number of issues they would like NCR to address. According to the 2012, 2013, and 2014 annual reports, assistance to neighborhood organizations would have been improved if the department had implemented the following 11 suggestions:

- Addressed:
 - Timing issues which concern the turn-around for contract approval, requests for assistance, and reimbursements);
 - Process issues to reduce redundancy and complexity in the reporting process; and
 - Practice issues to provide better insurance coverage for neighborhood organizations employees..
- Facilitated a sharing of ideas and encouraged cooperation across neighborhoods.
- Offered translation and interpreter services.
- Improved communications assistance and advocacy.
- Ensured that neighborhoods had made contact with and had access to an assigned specialist easier.
- Used its influence to see that the neighborhoods received increased funding.
- Held informational meetings for residents and neighborhood organizations, and offered board training.
- Published a list of services that the NCR Department could offer neighborhood organizations.
- Provided more assistance in the area of reaching out to under-engaged and other hard to reach populations.
- Adjusted expectations for organizations with unpaid staff.

- Built stronger financial capabilities within NCR for neighborhood organizations so that NCR specialists are able to better respond to inquiries about the organizations' budgets and other financial matters.

Table 3, on the following page, outlines each of these suggested improvements, several of which were continuously noted over the 2012 through 2014 timeframe in the annual reports. Some of the neighborhood organizations reported that the same concerns were being raised year-after-year, and no action appeared to be taken. More than half (64 percent) were mentioned each year in annual reports each year from 2012 through 2014.

TABLE 3

IMPROVEMENTS SUGGESTED IN ANNUAL REPORTS BETWEEN 2012 AND 2014

Improvements Suggested in Annual Reports	Frequency of Suggestions		
	2012	2013	2014
Timing, processes, and practice (e.g., Internet links do not always work; responses to some requests are not timely; turn-around time for contracting continues to be slow; turn-around time on short/simple translations could be faster. NCR should quickly finish the Emergency Funding protocols; streamline funding approval processes. Non-technical explanations are needed. A checklist of annual deadlines is needed. Clear guidelines regarding use of funds are requested. Consistent expectations in reporting requirements for CPP funding are expected. insurance policies carried by NCR are not adequate; the department should research offering medical, dental and retirement insurance pools.) Unique difficult demands appear to be directed at certain organizations and not others; a standardized template for policy and procedures such as personnel, finance, conflict of interest, board member info is needed. Better policy guidelines in respect to housing project definitions and requirements are needed. Early release of information on NCR's plans for 2014-2017 CPP Funding Cycle is needed. NCR Department Facebook page with useful content that neighborhood organizations can repost and/or use as newsletter and website content.	28%	18%	18%
Facilitate robust sharing ideas/working together across neighborhoods (e.g., more City-wide meetings where new policies/procedures are explained vs. only sending a letter/one-way "engagement"; show case progress)	16%	3%	0
Translation/Interpreter services (e.g., simultaneous translation; to engage with East African, Hmong, and others communities)	14%	11%	7%
Communications Assistance and Advocacy (e.g., advocate/promote neighborhoods and neighborhood funding; provide promotion, visibility, and marketing opportunities; promote events through social media outlets; advocate for neighborhood groups at City Hall; defend and promote the neighborhoods; explaining the good work neighborhoods accomplish – both to general public and elected officials)	8%	11%	7%
Making contact with assigned specialist is difficult (e.g., to what extent is NCR willing to listen to all other neighborhood organizations)	12%	0	0
Increase neighborhood funding (e.g., across the board; to support food at meetings/events)	12%	7%	5%
Hold informational meetings for residents, neighborhood organizations (e.g., regarding the entire CPP program; regarding services NCR offers and how to access; regarding guidance on what is expected for drafting the Neighborhood Priority Plan; regarding clarifying ADA Policy in certain sections; more meetings that provide an opportunity to discuss issues with NCR representatives; offer training modules on how to make an organizational budget, run a board meeting, and deal with conflict) and offer board training	8%	3%	2%
List of services that the NCR Department could offer neighborhood organizations (e.g., clearly communicate the parameters of the use of CPP funds)	0	7%	9%
Provide more help for reaching out to under-engaged populations (e.g., renters, non-English speakers)	8%	7%	9%
Adjust expectations for organizations with unpaid staff (e.g., keep requirements simple for neighborhoods that receive the lowest allocations; some may not have full- or part-time staff)	2%	3%	2%
Build stronger financial capabilities within NCR (e.g., improvements are needed in the areas of contracting, group grant writing, accounting, and understanding costs associated with healthcare services)	0	3%	0
N=37. More than one option could be mentioned per respondent			

Source: GrayHall, LLP; March 3, 2016

As shown in Table 3, the top three suggestions were for NCR to:

1. Improve Timing, Processes, and Practice:

Reduce the amount of time between a request for information or assistance and the actual delivery of the requested services. Reporting and contracting processes should be streamlined so that the organizations are not providing NCR the same information more than once and contracts are executed in a more timely manner. Make an effort to find insurance policies that provide better coverage in the areas of medical, dental, and retirement.

2. Facilitate More Robust Sharing of Resources Across Neighborhoods:

Act on the need to facilitate sharing ideas and working together across neighborhoods. (For example, NCR should facilitate more City wide meetings. The agendas for these meetings should include sessions where new policies/procedures are explained and opportunities for the neighborhood organizations to interact to learn about resources that could be shared.)

3. Provide Translator/Interpreter Services:

Act on the need for translation/interpreter services, especially for simultaneous translation and to engage East African, Hmong, and other communities.

Analysis of the Top Three Suggested Improvements

1. Improve Timing, Processes, and Practice:

In 2012, 14 neighborhood organizations identified ways NCR could improve assistance it provides to neighborhood organizations related to policies, practices and timing. Among items raised was the importance of having each organization's NCR staff representative stop by to deliver hands-on assistance at least two to three times per year. This, according to one annual report, would assure that materials and information are presented in the manner needed. Another annual report indicated that it would be very important to have contact with NCR representatives as funding deadlines arise. Also noted, as an area for improvement in 2012, 2013 and 2014 was the need for timely responses to neighborhood organizations' questions and requests for information.

One annual report, submitted in 2012, called for consistent expectations in reporting requirements for CPP funding. Another indicated that staff time is very precious, especially for organizations that do not have paid staff and, "These reports [that are required by NCR] are onerous and take a lot of staff time to answer."

Another concern identified was that the turnaround time for completing contracts was said to be slow, and the "turn-around time on short/simple translations could also be faster," another annual report emphasized.

There was also a request for general communications from NCR to be made clear. Such items as policy announcements, notices related to the ADA (American with Disabilities Act) grievance policy, and communication about the NRP/CPP Plan Modification and Program Income handling could be made clearer.

Two other 2012 annual reports pointed out that the role of the NCEC is unclear, and policies and procedures related to CPP Neighborhood Priority Plans "appear to have changed or are changing, so clarification on this process would be appreciated," the report noted. Describing issues of improvement

related to specific policies, practices, timing and tools needed in 2013, four organizations included the following comments in their annual reports which support 2012 suggestions:

"Faster responses via email from our representative [is needed] or agree to a different form of communication that will elicit a faster response."

"We give a rating of 4. The three reasons that the rating is not a 5 are timeliness, confusing reports and poor accounting support. We emphasize, however, that our experience with the NCR department has generally been positive and we appreciate your assistance over the past year."

"The information from the City is useful but not always understandable or consistent. There have been times when information coming from the NCR department was incorrect — one example is the Blueprint for Equity. At a board meeting we were told NCR would offer translation services only for them to later [tell us] what this program actually entails. The Neighborhood Priority Plan rollout was unclear and inefficient. Several neighborhoods had their plans turned in and approved before our neighborhood got complete information on what the program was. The role of the NCEC is still unclear. The City website goes in circles when looking for the role that the NCEC plays in relation to other City departments. It would be good to have an organizational chart that shows how the City departments and boards (such as NCEC) relate to each other and what areas they have influence over."

"Notifications on public hearings or meetings on topics that interest residents are often times sent out just before the event. This doesn't give us adequate time to get the information out to our residents and businesses. Additionally, it does no good to get a listing of legalese, statute numbers, and titles without information about specific changes. If these changes were written in plain language that clearly spelled out how residents and businesses would be affected, it would help. An option to only receive information in electronic format and not in paper format would be helpful. A lot of material is printed and sent through USPS and could be emailed — job postings from the MPHA, the Minneapolis Connects newsletter, direct deposit receipts from the Finance Department, etc. By emailing notices about zoning law changes, you can easily link to what is being changed. At this time, we are receiving both print and email for some of the notices. This is a waste of time on the City's part to send it out and the neighborhood's part to have to deal with the waste. Additionally, it isn't environmentally friendly."

Also supporting the improvement of specific policies, practices, timing and tools are annual report comments from 2014. These include organizations that identified the need for NCR to clarify the use of CPP Neighborhood Priority Plan resources for capital projects. One respondent wrote, "We've received different responses to this issue. What defines CPP?"

Sometimes, even when neighborhood organizations offered compliments about their work with NCR, they still had great expectations for how NCR could improve its performance. In 2013, one such organization cautioned NCR about becoming too much like the City in its behavior:

"In the bigger picture, it seems that NCR is adopting the City's model in its expectations, oversight and offerings. From a neighborhood view, that might be more bureaucratic than productive. NRP was not a perfect model but it had a 'can do/let's find a way' attitude. From a neighborhood perspective, the Community Planning and Economic Development (CPED) planning staff certainly defends and paves the way for the developers. NCR should do the same for neighborhoods – lobby CPED to insist that neighborhood plans be recognized, that development or transit plans be presented to the neighborhood for neighborhood review, etc. Each neighborhood is different, which contributes to the texture of the City; yet there seems to be a trending toward practices and policies that groom neighborhoods to conformity. "

Although another 2013 annual report ranked NCR assistance as 4, the respondent indicated concern about "Timely responses; explanations in non-technical terms; streamlining of permitting processes such as for special events; need for CLIC information/notifications in an easier-to-decipher format. Also: add Planning Commission to government delivery system so that notices are e-mailed to subscribers as for other City Council-related bodies," the respondent continued.

Concerns that NCR staff does not always follow NCR policies was raised by one 2013 annual report. The respondent indicated that not following policies "causes confusion at the neighborhood level." Specifically noted was: Insurance policies carried by NCR that are not adequate, and are not explained, and Internet links that do not always work. "NCR needs to develop and follow policies that address issues that arise when neighborhoods are faced with frivolous claims and accusations," according to the report, and "The director of NCR should not request meetings with neighborhood Boards and then not show up for the meetings."

The number of neighborhood organizations still raising policies, practices, timing and tools as areas for improvement in 2013 (13 or 22 percent) and 2014 (10 or 17 percent) suggests that this is an area that requires ongoing attention. There was little change in the number of organizations suggesting improvements from 2012 (14 or 24 percent). It is likely that issues associated with policies, practices, timing and tools are ever evolving, suggesting the need for intentional oversight to ensure these elements work well for neighborhood organizations.

2. Facilitate More Robust Sharing Ideas and Working Together Across Neighborhoods:

During each year (2012, 2013 and 2014), an average of five organizations noted the need to bring the neighborhood organizations together to share best practices and learn from each other. From the annual reports there appears to be great excitement regarding the potential outcomes of such gatherings. The following comment from a 2014 annual report is representative of sentiments shared: "Encourage neighborhoods to collaborate and share best practices. Staff has been helpful in providing info through emails and organized meetings," one annual report noted. "They provide good service in organizing City-wide conferences like the 2015 Community Connections Conference (CCC). The 2014 CCC was also very informative," the respondent said. Additional meetings, according to respondents, could be set up to explain new policies/procedures and illustrate neighborhood progress.

3. Translation/Interpreter Services:

Minnesota's changing neighborhood demographics make clear the need for translation and interpreter services. Across the years (2012-2014) of annual reports reviewed, there was a very strong interest in

obtaining easily accessible and free translation and interpreter services. In 2012 (7 or 12 percent) and 2013 (8 or 13 percent), about the same number of neighborhood organizations suggested translation and interpreter services as one way to improve assistance to organizations. Fewer (4 or 7 percent) organizations suggested this service in 2014. Below are examples of comments from four annual reports:

"Translation services would be extremely valuable. Requiring individual neighborhoods to figure this issue out on their own is inefficient and often unsustainable for small budgets and volunteer run groups. This creates significant inequity in engagement of non-English speaking residents. NCR should have a central service for translation."

"We would like assistance in interpreting some outreach materials into Spanish and Korean. I spoke with [NCR staff], and they have been very helpful in providing us assistance. We would like to see this continue so whenever we need a flyer or a postcard translated into these languages, we can send it to NCR in advance, and they can help us provide translations."

"Some of the difficulties we faced were needing way more translation services than we anticipated and finding ways to make connections among different East African communities."

"City departments should provide certified interpreters for any meetings they come to present at. The interpreters should not only be certified but have ample background knowledge on the topic being discussed (i.e. should meet with the presenter prior to the meeting to be sure they understand the information). Having someone interpret because 'they speak Spanish' isn't good enough and shows a lack of respect for the people relying on that particular interpreter. Offer translation and interpretation services from CERTIFIED interpreters and translators. Solely speaking a language does not make someone qualified to interpret. It would be best if the City adopted a policy that stated interpreters need to be certified in order to work at any City function."

FIVE ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

In addition to the top three suggestions for improvement, the neighborhood organizations offered five others on a consistent (2012, 2013 and 2014) basis.

1. Provide Communications Assistance and Advocacy:

During 2012, 2013 and 2014, neighborhood organizations' annual reports indicated that NCR could improve assistance to organizations by providing more communications and advocacy support. Specifically, the reports called for NCR to advocate and promote neighborhoods and the need for higher levels of neighborhood funding; provide promotion and visibility opportunities; and promote

neighborhood events through social media outlets. One organization called on NCR to advocate for neighborhood groups at City Hall and to:

“Defend and promote the neighborhoods, including explanations of the good work neighborhoods accomplish,” according to another annual report.

In 2014, two other respondents said: “NCR needs to better advocate for neighborhood groups at City Hall to help us obtain an equitable and steady funding source. Become an advocate for neighborhoods and increase neighborhood funding.”

2. Improve Neighborhoods' Ability to Contact Assigned Specialists and Increase Neighborhood Funding:

Several annual reports in 2012 and 2013 indicated that organizations experienced difficulty contacting the NCR staff person assigned to their organization. In most instances, the organizations were able to get their needs met by contacting another person at NCR. All expressed interest in having this process made easier. In some cases, staff were reassigned. In those instances, annual report comments praised the effort and the new staff person.

Six organizations in 2012, five in 2013 and three in 2014 recommended that NCR improve assistance by advocating for increased funding for neighborhood organizations. There was concern that some organizations do not have enough financial resources to support neighborhood efforts. A review of the CPP organizational budgets presented in the most recent annual reports illustrates the wide range in budgets with which the neighborhoods work.

Regarding additional funding, a neighborhood organization that did not provide an NCR rating made the following statement that is representative of many comments received about increased funding:

“Provide us with adequate financial resources to run our organizations, communicate with the City, work with citizens and the City to develop solutions, and the funds to use to help implement the solutions as well. Don’t duplicate our jobs; just provide us the resources for us to do them well, as the ground-level organization in each community.”

Another organization, rating NCR assistance as 1, would like NCR to “Provide some funding for food. We know that offering food gets people to meetings and events, and engaging in a communal meal builds a sense of community,” the respondent explained.

A total of 61 neighborhood organizational budgets were reviewed for 2014, the most current year annual reports were available. The lowest annual budget reported was \$18,000, and the highest was over \$500,000. The majority of budgets were in the \$50,000 to \$100,000 range (18 organizations), followed by budgets of \$18,000 to \$35,000 (14). Next were organizational budgets of \$100,001 to \$200,000 (13). See all the 2014 budget ranges in Table 4 below.

TABLE 4
ORGANIZATIONS' ANNUAL BUDGETS
AS REPORTED IN CPP 2014 ANNUAL REPORTS

Budget Ranges	Number of Responses	Percentage of Responses
\$18,000 - 35,000	14	23%
\$35,001 - 50,000	7	11%
\$50,001 - 100,000	18	30%
\$100,001 - 200,000	13	21%
\$200,001 - 300,000	4	7%
\$300,001 - 400,000	3	5%
\$400,001 - 500,000	1	1.5%
\$500,000+	1	1.5%
N=61		100%

Source: GrayHall, LLP; March 3, 2016

In calling for increases in funding, neighborhood organizations linked several of the improvements suggested in Table 3. For example, writing in 2013, one neighborhood organization stated,

"The most important thing for NCR to do is become an advocate for neighborhoods and increase neighborhood funding. The work neighborhood organizations try to do cannot be done well with the current level of financial or organizational support from the City," the respondent noted.

This sentiment was supported by comments from another organization respondent who pointed out the need for translation support and funding for a bi-lingual community organizer:

"In order to serve 1/3 of our community, [we] have raised additional funds to hire a bilingual community organizer. This would not be possible with just the CPP funding. This has helped tremendously. NCR should consider funding more staff. This is a question of equity."

3. Provide Informational Meetings and Board Training:

The number of recommendations for NCR to sponsor and provide informational meetings and training sessions for neighborhood residents and neighborhood organizations (including board training) decreased from 2012 to 2014. In 2012, five organizations suggested one or more of these meetings, and by 2014 just one called for training. Several organizations over the years have complimented NCR for knowledgeable staff and board support, which may suggest that informational meetings for residents and neighborhood organizations and board training sessions are not as important today as in 2012. Many comments, such as this one, can be found throughout the 2013 and 2014 annual reports:

"We rely very heavily on NCR staff expertise and experience. They have been an asset to our organization, their support is invaluable."

4. Provide Information on Best Practices for Involving Under-Engaged Populations:

Much was said by five organizations in 2013 and 2014, regarding the need to improve knowledge about services available to neighborhood organizations from NCR. The need to explore best practices for including those that are under-engaged was also noted in 2012, 2013 and 2014. Regarding NCR services, the following comments were recorded in 2013 and 2014 annual reports as a way to improve NCR assistance:

"It is not clear to us what sorts of services the NCR department offers or how to access them."

"Better communicate what services the NCR department offers and how to access them. With the services we have accessed (e.g., translation) we've had every mixed experiences."

"We do suggest that NCR clarifies its scope of work and what services it offers. An explanation of NCEC would also be appreciated."

"It would be helpful to have a list of services and resources available at the NCR department. It would be a great help."

"Wish we had a list of how NCR can help us. It's difficult to know what we should focus on to better our organization."

Based on statements in the annual reports, there appears to be a strong interest in learning how to include under-engaged populations. Specific populations mentioned were renters and non-English speakers. Comments from 2014 are widely representative of those made in 2012 and 2013:

"We want to engage underrepresented groups but need additional suggestions and tools to meet those goals with our small CPP allocation."

"Provide more community engagement tools and assistance."

"NCR should consider funding more staff positions which can help engagement with non-English speaking residents. It's a question of equity."

5. Adjust Expectations:

In annual reports every year from 2012 through 2014, neighborhood organizations with small budgets and limited staff indicated that too much was expected of them. One suggested the value of keeping requirements simple for neighborhoods that receive the lowest allocations and reminded readers that some neighborhood organizations do not have full- or part-time staff. One organization would like for NCR to remember that some neighborhood organizations rely on unpaid staff and are unable to perform at the level of those with greater staff capacity:

"The NCR department needs to continually remember and recognize that the neighborhood organizations are volunteers rather FT or PT paid employees. They are not City departments but nonprofit organizations that meet once a month generally. They can accomplish much but need more time to accomplish goals."

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OUTREACH TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATIONS

BACKGROUND

Input in the evaluation from the neighborhood organizations was sought through:

1. A preliminary online survey that was administered to 33 organizations that were part of a stratified sample of neighborhood organizations.
2. Two follow-up focus group meetings where invited participants were representatives (staff, board members, and volunteers) of the neighborhood organizations that were not included in the stratified sample.
3. A follow-up online survey that was administered to the neighborhood organizations that were not included in the stratified sample.

PRELIMINARY ONLINE SURVEY

Because of the original timeframe for project initiation and completion, the work program submitted in the evaluation team's proposal sought to provide the Department of Internal Audit and NCR (client group) with immediate, preliminary results. The evaluation team proposed that a preliminary online survey should be administered to a sample of neighborhood organizations in order to obtain an early snapshot of the neighborhood organizations' views and opinions about NCR programs and services. It was the intent of the evaluation team to follow the preliminary survey with more rigorous data collection activities after the survey had been administered, results had been analyzed, and additional queries, informed by survey results, could be formulated.

The preliminary survey was sent to a sample of 33 neighborhood organizations. Both staff and board members were asked to respond to the survey. Thus, a total of 66 surveys were emailed.² Staff members were asked to complete the survey alone and independent from board members. Board members were given the option of answering the survey questions either alone or collaboratively. The survey questions were the same for staff and board. The sample was selected to ensure that neighborhood organizations receiving the survey would:

- Include the three original NRP neighborhood categories, Redirection, Revitalization, and Protection.
- Include the eight Neighborhood Community Engagement Commission (NCEC) districts.
- Include the 13 City of Minneapolis wards.

² All the neighborhood organizations receiving the preliminary online survey had submitted annual reports to NCR, and typically it is the neighborhood organization's staff person who completes the annual report. Therefore, there is high likelihood that findings from the analysis of annual reports will be similar to responses to the online survey that were submitted by staff.

- Cluster within one standard deviation around NRP, neighborhood category-specific averages for the following socio demographic and economic characteristics:
 - population
 - percentage non-white population
 - number of households
 - percentage of renter-occupied households
 - household income
 - percentage of households with incomes at or below poverty

A list of neighborhood organizations receiving the preliminary online survey is shown in Table 5 below.

TABLE 5
NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATIONS SELECTED FOR PRELIMINARY ONLINE SURVEY

Redirection Organizations	Ward	Revitalization Organizations	Ward	Protection Organizations	Ward
Central	8 and 9	Bancroft	8	Armatage	13
Elliot Park	6 and 7	Bottineau	3	Audubon Park	1
Harrison	5	Holland	1	Diamond Lake	11
Hawthorne	5	Lind-Bohanon	4	East Calhoun	10
Lyndale	8	Logan Park	1	East Harriet	13
Near North	5	Longfellow	2 and 9	East Isles	7
Mid-Town Phillips	9	Seward	2 and 6	Kenny	13
Steven's Square-Loring Heights	6 and 7	Standish	12	Prospect Park	2
Phillips West	6	Webber-Camden	4	St. Anthony West	3
		Windom Park	1	Tangletown	11
		CARAG	10	Victory	4
				West Calhoun	13
				Nokomis East	12
9 of 13 Redirection Organizations (69percent)		11 of 37 Revitalization Organizations (30percent)		13 of 30 Protection Organizations (43percent)	

Source: Biko Associates, Inc.

A Snapshot of Who Completed the Preliminary Online Surveys:

Of the 66 surveys emailed to neighborhood organization staff and boards, 40 (61 percent) were completed and returned.

- 20 surveys completed by executive directors.
- 17 surveys by individual board members.
- 3 surveys by groups of board members working collaboratively.

Table 6 further describes the organizations that received the online survey. Table 6 compares the characteristics of surveyed organizations to those of neighborhood organizations across the City.

TABLE 6
CHARACTERISTICS OF SURVEYED ORGANIZATIONS COMPARED TO CHARACTERISTICS OBSERVED CITY-WIDE

Characteristic	Characteristics of Organizations where Survey was Completed by Staff	Characteristics of Organizations where Survey was Completed by Board Members	Characteristics of Organizations City-Wide
Original NRP Neighborhood Category:			
Redirection Neighborhood	25percent	15percent	16percent
Revitalization Neighborhood	30percent	25percent	46percent
Protection Neighborhood	45percent	60percent	38percent
Election Ward:	All wards responded to survey	All wards responded to survey, except Wards 8 and 12	
NRP Phase:			
1	60percent	80percent	66percent
2	15percent	10percent	11percent
3	20percent	10percent	6percent
CPP Priority Plan:			
Submitted	70percent	75percent	45percent
Not Submitted	30percent	25percent	55percent

NRP Phase: 1 = In Phase 1 or completed Phase 1

2 = Completed Phase 2

3 = Completed Phases 1 and 2

Source: Biko Associates, Inc.

As shown in Table 6, the neighborhood organizations completing and submitting surveys display similar characteristics in some categories to the neighborhood organizations spread throughout the City. Despite the similarities, completed surveys:

- Under represent Revitalization neighborhoods and over represent Protection neighborhoods
- Under represent Wards 8 and 12.
- Over represent organizations that are in both Phases 1 and 2 of the NRP.
- Under represent organizations that have not yet submitted CPP Priority Plans and over represent organizations that have.

Focus of the Preliminary Online Survey:

Five Themes:

The survey consisted of 30 questions; some with multiple choice responses, and others that sought open-ended responses. The survey questions are provided in their entirety in the appendix to this report. The survey questions were developed in response to:

- Goals and objectives of the external evaluation, as described in the RFP, whereby consultant assistance was first solicited.
- Input provided by this project's Steering Committee.
- Input provided by the NCR Department director.
- Input provided by NCR staff during a focus group meeting.
- Input provided by NCEC Commissioners during a focus group meeting.

These sources indicated that the following five overarching themes should be the focus of the evaluation. Thus, these themes were reflected in the questions put to the neighborhood organizations in the preliminary survey.

1. Neighborhood organization activities and operations under NRP compared to CPP and experiences fulfilling the three purposes of CPP, which are to:
 - identify and act on neighborhood issues and priorities
 - influence City decisions and priorities
 - increase involvement.
2. Experiences requesting and receiving technical assistance from NCR.
3. Experiences working with the NCEC and the NCEC commissioner.
4. Neighborhood organizations' most important priorities and issues. Whether they were initiated by community members or the City and if neighborhoods receive assistance from NCR and/or NCEC on non-City initiated issues. The level of NCR technical assistance and support provided for priorities and issues that were initiated by residents and other community members.
5. The extent to which neighborhood organizations collaborate and the effectiveness of collaboration efforts. The extent to which NCR and/or NCEC facilitate and support inter-neighborhood collaboration.

PRELIMINARY ONLINE SURVEY FINDINGS

Presented below are summaries of responses received from the neighborhood organizations. The responses are organized by the five overarching themes that were the focus of the preliminary survey.

Theme 1: Neighborhood organization activities and operations under NRP compared to CPP and experiences fulfilling the three purposes of CPP:

- Initially the transition from NRP to CPP was difficult. Some organizations struggled more than others.
- Some organizations continue to be disappointed that CPP does not provide funding for "investing" in the neighborhoods and only enough funding for outreach and engagement.

- Some organizations have found that it is difficult and frustrating to try to raise the interest levels of community members when there aren't projects or developments for them to be excited about.
- As many as half of staff and half of the board members felt that NCR has not adequately explained the purposes of CPP.
- None of the responses indicated that the transition from NRP to CPP had had a disproportionately negative effect on participation from historically disadvantaged or underrepresented groups (specifically non-homeowners, immigrants, minorities, disabled people, and people living in poverty).
- It was observed by 56 percent of staff and 47 percent of board members that non-homeowners had become more involved in neighborhood activities with the transition to CPP.
- While the majority of responses indicated that the neighborhood organizations have experienced varying levels of success fulfilling the three purposes of CPP, the value of CPP's focus and purposes was still called into question. Three key areas of concern were:
 - Why bother to identify and act on neighborhood issues and priorities when there is no money to address any problems?
 - Why bother to act on City policies when the City never changes its policies?
 - Why bother to increase the level of resident involvement? Just to quantify the number of people who attend a meeting or event?

Although the majority of neighborhood organizations have succeeded in making the transition from NRP to CPP, the mechanics and terms of the transition and reduced funding have negatively affected about one-half of the organizations. Their levels of dissatisfaction and skepticism are high and are compounded by what they perceive as unclear direction from NRC.

Theme 2: Experiences requesting and receiving technical assistance from NCR:

A little more than half of the organizations reported that they had requested and received technical assistance from NCR. For both staff and board members, assistance was most frequently requested in the areas of:

- Administration.
- Accounting, financial and fiscal-related.
- Cultural and language interpretation.
- Governance.
- Legal.

The surveys completed by staff indicated that only a few of the organizations had requested technical assistance to enhance their capacity to address identified neighborhood-identified issues and priorities. The surveys completed by board members showed that there was a somewhat greater demand for assistance with issues and priorities.

The majority of staff (60 percent) felt the assistance they received was "Very Good." Board members reported that the assistance they had received was evenly split (33 percent each) across "Excellent," "Very Good" and "Fair." The majority of staff and board members reported that they are "Very well acquainted" with the NCR staff person assigned to work with their organization.

The fact that the most frequently requested technical assistance, with the exception of cultural and language interpretation, is in the “how to run an efficient office” arena supports the administrative focus of CPP. Were the organizations more actively engaged in fulfilling CPP’s first two purposes, it is suspected that more technical assistance would be requested to help neighborhoods:

- Focus on solutions to identified issues and priorities.
- Better navigate their way through the City’s bureaucracy.
- Affect City policies.

It is also suspected that if the neighborhoods were to more effectively address the first two CPP purposes, the third purpose would be less difficult to fulfill. There are three concerns about the neighborhoods’ resource capabilities in this regard.

1. Are the administrative (“how to run an efficient office”) requirements of CPP so demanding that not enough time and money are left for staff and board members to engage their neighborhoods in other areas?
2. Are NCR staff trained and qualified to help the neighborhoods focus on solutions to neighborhood issues and priorities and affect City policies?
3. Is there support within the City for NCR to support the neighborhoods as they attempt to resolve issues and priorities and affect City policies?

Theme 3: Experiences working with the NCEC and the NCEC Commissioner:

Only 23 percent of staff and 6 percent of board members are “Very well acquainted” with their NCEC commissioner. Thirty-five (35) percent of staff and 50 percent of board members responded that they “Know his/her name.” Twenty-nine (29) percent of staff and 44 percent of board members responded that “We don’t know who our NCEC Commission is.”

When asked how the NCEC commissioner has been involved with their organizations, 56 percent of staff and 58 percent of board members responded that “He/she has not established a relationship with our organization.”

The NCEC, as described in previous reports and plans published by the City, is called out as an important element in the organizational structure of the City’s community engagement program. According to published materials, the NCEC are to: a) advise the Mayor and City Council on a wide range of community engagement issues, b) develop guidelines for CPP, c) broaden participation on the City’s advisory boards and commissions, d) develop recommendations for improving the public participation process and e) review the NCR business plan. These are activities that should not be conducted in a vacuum, and, at least touching base with the neighborhood organizations on a consistent and formal basis should be a requirement for the Commissioners.

Theme 4: Neighborhood organizations’ most important priorities and issues and whether they were initiated by community members or the City. Whether neighborhoods receive assistance from NCR and/or NCEC on non-City initiated issues:

The list of issues and priorities identified by the organizations is extensive. Broad issue/priority categories and rankings are shown in Table 7 on the following page.

TABLE 7
NEIGHBORHOOD-IDENTIFIED ISSUES AND PRIORITIES

Identified Neighborhood Issue	Ranking and Frequency				Totals	Percentage
	1°	2°	3°	4°		
Resident involvement	2	2	5	3	12	16%
Land use and zoning	3	2	1	2	8	11%
Neighborhood business and commercial development	3	2	2	1	8	11%
Natural environment and ecology	1	2	3	1	7	10%
Organization funding sustainability	3	2	0	2	7	10%
Housing accessibility and equity	2	0	2	1	5	7%
Commercial corridor urban design and beautification	0	2	0	2	4	6%
Crime, safety, security	1	1	1	1	4	6%
Home improvement	0	0	2	1	3	4%
Multi-modal transportation accessibility	2	1	0	0	3	4%
Public education/community schools	0	1	1	0	3	4%
Condition of and accessibility to parks and park buildings	1	0	0	1	2	3%
Small area planning	2	0	0	0	2	3%
Airport noise	0	1	0	0	1	1%
Radon abatement	0	1	0	0	1	1%
Senior citizen well being	0	0	0	1	1	1%
Summer youth employment	0	1	0	0	1	1%
Transportation, traffic, and parking	0	0	1	0	1	1%

Source: Biko Associates, Inc., March 3, 2016.

Respondents to the survey, staff and board members alike, indicated that most of the issues their organizations address (as high as 80 percent for staff and 92 percent for board members) were identified by residents and other community members; not the City. The respondents commented that they do not generally seek support from NCR on issues that are not City-initiated issues. They defined City-initiated issues as the ones they have to address in order to “navigate funding and contract-related concerns.” Some of them commented that they did not know NCR staff was prepared to offer any other kind of assistance.

When asked about NCEC’s involvement with the neighborhoods around issues and priorities, the responses indicated that most staff were uncertain about NCEC’s role. Some of staff’s comments were disparaging and included the following:

- “They spend a lot of time working against the interests of the neighborhoods.”
- “I’ve reached out to my commissioner several times and never got a reply. Obviously, the commissioner does not want direct contact with the neighborhoods.”
- “Some of the Commissioners have no knowledge of how city government works and even less about the structure of the neighborhood organizations. What good can they possibly provide?”
- “I do not know what NCEC does. I asked NCR to send someone to our neighborhood to explain it. I couldn’t get anyone to attend. Because of this we largely ignore NCEC.”

- “NCEC is totally dysfunctional and ineffective. The NCR staff, however, is stretched way too thin.”
- “NCR’s focus is too heavily placed on cultural communities. They divide Minneapolis by race. So much for “One Minneapolis.”

These points reinforce earlier observations. The first is that the CPP and NCR’s outreach and support programs are not viewed as being issue- and priority-focused but, instead, as administration-focused. Most respondents gave NCR’s outreach staff high praise for providing this type of administrative-focused technical assistance but do not view them as resources for resolving issues.

The second observation is that NCEC’s role is not clear. NCEC’s most current strategic plan, *“Neighborhood and Community Engagement Commission Strategic Plan and Implementation Tools; for the period: May 2015 – April 2016,”* indicates an advocacy role for the NCEC Commissioners where they will support the neighborhood organizations before the Mayor, City Council and City departments. It appears that this advocacy role is not being fulfilled.

Theme 5: The extent to which neighborhood organizations collaborate and the effectiveness of collaboration efforts and the extent to which NCR and/or NCEC facilitate and support inter-neighborhood collaboration:

Both staff’s and board members’ responses pointed to high levels of collaboration that occur across the neighborhood organizations. Eighty-two percent of staff indicated that their organizations collaborate with others, and 88 percent of board members indicated the same. Moreover, staff (64 percent) and board members (71 percent) reported that their organizations’ collaboration experiences were “Generally smooth and without difficulty.” Neither staff nor board members felt that their collaboration experiences were “Very difficult” or “Extremely difficult.”

When asked to identify ways in which collaborative efforts/activities have taken place, “Addressing priorities and issues together” was identified as is the most frequent activity. Other responses, in rank order, included avenues identified in Table 8, below.

TABLE 8
NEIGHBORHOOD-IDENTIFIED AVENUES FOR COLLABORATION

Collaboration Effort/Activity	Percent Identifying a Collaborative Effort/Activity	
	Staff	Board
Addressed issues and priorities together	100 percent	100 percent
Cooperated/collaborated on fundraising	36 percent	53 percent
Shared funding	29 percent	27 percent
Shared staff and personnel	14 percent	20 percent
Shared office space	7 percent	13 percent

Source: Biko Associates, Inc., March 3, 2016.

When asked about support provided by NCR and NCEC on their collaboration efforts, the majority of respondents indicated that neither NCR nor NCEC have been involved with their collaboration efforts. They also indicated that they did not expect either to assist with these efforts and that they initiate and implement them without assistance. This does not indicate that their assistance would not be accepted and appreciated.

FOLLOW-UP NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATION FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS

In an effort to ensure that all the City's neighborhood organizations would have an opportunity to participate in the evaluation, four focus group meetings were planned for staff, board members, and volunteers with 47 neighborhood organizations.

Thirteen organizations participated in the two focus group meetings, sending a total of 15 individuals. Characteristics of the organizations 15 individuals attending the two meetings are outlined in Table 9.

TABLE 9
CHARACTERISTICS OF NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATIONS PARTICIPATING IN FOLLOW-UP FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS

Characteristics of Individuals in Attendance				NCEC Districts Represented by Organizations in Attendance										Organization Administration	
Board Member	Volunteer	Staff	Total in Attendance	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total in Attendance	Staff	Volunteer	
5	1	9	15	2	2	0	6	0	1	2	0	13	12	1	

Source: Biko Associates, Inc., March 3, 2016.

As shown above, 15 individuals attended the two meetings. Five of the 15 were board members, 1 was a volunteer not serving on the board and nine were paid staff. Thirteen organizations (approximately 28 percent of the 47 organizations that were invited to attend) were represented at the two focus group meetings. There was no representation from organizations in NCEC Districts 3, 5 and 8. Of the 13 organizations attending the two meetings, 12 have paid staff and one is administered by volunteer members.

Neighborhood Organization Focus Group Findings

Participants unanimously indicated that the most important aspect of the NCR Department is the provision of funding. It was stated that without the funds provided by the department, the neighborhood organizations would not exist, have the capacity to identify priorities and (successfully or not) act identified concerns of residents. It was agreed by all in attendance that the fact that the program exists gives residents a sense of hope and “an actual place to start.” “A place to start” explains the role the neighborhood organizations play. They are the first number residents call when they want to address an issue or advance a neighborhood project.

It was agreed that NCR can (and should) support neighborhood organizations when they deal with developers, who are not always friendly and often circumvent neighborhoods by going directly to the City Council. Some of the people in attendance felt that they have good relationships with developers and that developers come to them for their opinions because they realize “our opinions do matter and we can turn out 100+ people to show up for a hot button issue.” Others felt the NCR Department could do more to assist neighborhood organizations when they are facing developers.

It was announced at one of the two focus group meetings that NCR is recommending a \$20,000 base allocation for each organization that can be used for staffing. Only two of the participants knew about this NCR action. It was overwhelmingly received as positive news. Several of the organizations in attendance claimed that while the funding from NCR is appreciated, it is not adequate to allow them to do as much as they would like to do. Staff members for organizations with comparatively lower budgets complained that there isn’t enough money in the organization’s budgets to enable staff to much more than administrative maintenance.

It was generally agreed that NCR is very difficult to access. The department has listed trainings and other events on its website but, still, that is not enough. Some of the participants commented that the website is not user friendly and that it is difficult to find information.

When asked about the role and importance of the NCEC and the Commissioners, comments were mixed. About half of the participants claimed to know their commissioner. The level of involvement with the Commissioners was identified as low. The prevailing sentiment was that there was essentially a “total disconnect” between the Commissioners and the neighborhood organizations. There was only one participant who could describe positive impacts to neighborhood organizations that were derived from involvement of the NCEC.

The rationale of maintaining NCEC Districts was called into question by some of the participants who felt that the geographic boundaries that define the districts are artificial and meaningless. One participant, who was very vocal, complained that he had never seen his NCR staff person. He commented that there should be a requirement for NCR staff person to attend at least one neighborhood meeting.

FOLLOW-UP NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATION ONLINE SURVEY

The neighborhood organization online survey was administered to 47 neighborhood organizations. Introductory letters accompanying the survey were sent to organization staff and, in cases where there is no staff person, directly to organization members. The introductory letter included instructions to forward the survey on to board members and volunteers. In total 10 surveys (approximately 21 percent) were completed and submitted to the evaluation team for review and analysis.

The survey consisted of 26 questions were developed by the evaluation team to permit further investigation into questions that were asked earlier in the Phase 3, preliminary survey and in the two neighborhood organization focus group meetings. The questions posed in the online survey addressed the following overarching themes:

1. The differences between NRP and CPP; investment versus engagement and the ability of neighborhood organizations to act on the three purposes of CPP.
2. The nature of technical assistance requested from NCR and the quality of the assistance received.
3. Neighborhood organization's relationships with NCEC.
4. Experiences collaborating with other neighborhood organizations.

Findings from the Neighborhood Organization Online Survey

Theme 1: NRP the investment program versus CPP the engagement program and experiences fulfilling the three purposes of CPP:

- Forty-four (44) percent) claimed that the distinction between NRP the investment program and CPP the engagement program has not affected the way the organization operates. Thirty-three (33) percent felt that the distinction had made a difference in operations, and 22 percent did not know.
- One respondent, presumably a staff person, commented that the most important job in a neighborhood organization is community engagement, and the efforts to engage residents are the same under CPP as they were under NRP.
- A respondent who felt that the distinction has made a difference in organizational operations commented that there are problems inherent in CPP that are exacerbated by the:
 - lack of funds that are still needed to address physical infrastructure and housing issues.
 - lack of staff who are skilled in meeting the demands of CPP, which are different compared to the demands of NRP.
 - lack of City experience administering a program that truly involves residents.
- The majority of respondents felt that their neighborhood organization has been "very successful" meeting the three purposes of CPP:
 - 50 percent of respondents felt their organization had been "very successful" enabling neighborhoods to identify and act on priorities.
 - 33 percent of respondents felt they had been "very successful" acting on City policies
 - 50 percent felt their neighborhood organization had been successful increasing the levels of involvement.
 - Of those who responded to questions about their organization's experiences working with groups that have historically been under-represented in their neighborhood organization, the majority reported that with the transition from NRP to CPP, there had been success in the following areas: increasing participation from non-white populations, renters and people living in poverty. The same respondents indicated that participation levels for other groups (disabled people and immigrants) had not appreciably changed with the shift from NRP to CPP.

Theme 2: The nature of technical assistance requested from NCR and the quality of the assistance received:

- Fifty (50) percent) claimed to have never requested technical assistance from NCR. Thirty-three (33) percent of the respondents claimed to have requested assistance.
- Of those who claimed to have requested assistance, the areas of assistance included:
 - Financial/fiscal (100 percent).
 - Administrative (50 percent).

- Governance (50 percent).
- Issue-related (50 percent).
- All the respondents rated the assistance they received as “very good.”
- On acquaintance with the NCR staff person:
 - 40 percent of the respondents claimed to be “very well acquainted with their NCR staff person.
 - 20 percent claimed to be somewhat acquainted.
 - 40 percent claimed to only know his/her name.

Theme 3: The nature of the neighborhood organizations’ experience with NCEC:

- On acquaintance with the NCEC commissioner:
 - 40 percent of the respondents claimed to be “very well acquainted with their NCR staff person.”
 - 20 percent claimed to be somewhat acquainted.
 - 40 percent claimed to only know his/her name.
- When asked about the level of involvement the NCEC commissioner has had with their organization, the respondents indicated that:
 - He/she advocates for us at NCEC meetings (60 percent).
 - He/she reports back to us with information from NCEC meetings (20 percent).
 - He/she coordinates and checks in with our organization to help us with NRP, CPP purposes, issues and priorities (20 percent).
- He/she reviews our submissions to NCR (e.g., proposals for funding assistance and reports that are submitted annually) (20 percent).
- He/she has not established a relationship with our organization (40 percent).
- NCEC’s two-year terms are too short. This does not allow enough time for the development of institutional knowledge.
- NCEC can easily operate in a bubble. The Commissioners should be more directly involved with their neighborhood organizations.
- It is critical that the Commissioners should be placed on the NCEC by the neighborhoods so that can be an assurance that someone is looking out for non-profits’ issues in the City.

Theme 4: Experiences collaborating with other neighborhood organizations:

- 100 percent of the respondents claimed that their organization collaborates with other neighborhood organizations.
- All of the respondents reported that their collaboration experiences had been “smooth.”
- Areas of collaboration were reported to be:
 - Addressed policies and issues together (100 percent)
 - Shared funding (50 percent)
 - Cooperated/collaborated on fundraising (50 percent)
- When asked if NCR and/or NCEC had assisted with any collaborative efforts, 33 percent of the respondents indicated that they had, and 67 percent indicated that they had not.

OUTREACH TO THE NCEC COMMISSIONERS

BACKGROUND

The NCEC evolved from what was recommended in the *Framework for the Future* as a resident-controlled advisory board to assist in the transition from NRP to CPP. Since its inception, the advisory board (and now the NCEC) has comprised:

- Eight elected/selected representatives from the city's neighborhood organizations, which are located within eight NCEC districts;.
- Two mayoral appointees;
- Four City Council appointees; and
- One Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) appointee.

The NCEC Commissioners were included in the evaluation through two mechanisms. First, the Commissioners were invited to participate in a focus group meeting. Second, an online survey was administered to the Commissioners.

NCEC FOCUS GROUP MEETING

As was done for the NCR staff focus group meeting, a protocol was prepared for the NCEC focus group meeting to guide the discussion with the Commissioners. The NCEC protocol sought to learn about the Commissioners' responsibilities and roles under the new CPP and challenges the Commissioners faced performing their responsibilities. The protocol, which is provided in the appendix, addressed the following points:

- Whether and how the work of the NCEC has affected neighborhood organizations' ability to make the transition from NRP to CPP.
- Particular challenges faced by the neighborhood organizations and how NCEC has addressed their challenges through the development of policies.
- The role of district-based Commissioners versus the role of at-large or appointed Commissioners.
- Processes for making changes in the definition of NCR's programs and/or the delivery of its services and whether the processes are effective.

Forty-five current and former NCEC Commissioners were invited to attend the focus group meeting. The focus group meeting was attended by seven people; two were former Commissioners whose terms had just ended. Five were current Commissioners, and two of them were newly appointed to the NCEC. Eleven current Commissioners did not attend the meeting.

NCEC Focus Group Findings

There was a discussion about the transition from NRP to CPP. Neither of the two newly-appointed Commissioners were aware of any of the history surrounding NRP and the transition to CPP. As a result,

the two emeritus Commissioners and the three veteran Commissioners led the discussion and contributed most of the responses to the evaluators' questions. There was agreement among these Commissioners that the transition was difficult but it could have (and would have) been worse if not for the NCEC.

The emeritus Commissioners and veteran Commissioners agreed that CPP has resulted in a shift of power from the neighborhood to the City, and that neighborhoods no longer have the ability (or the financial resources) to control their destiny. They also agreed that CPP uses the neighborhoods to do the City's work, and that neighborhood organizations are called upon to conduct outreach to and engage residents for City-initiated projects. It was mentioned that after fulfilling this role, there isn't time or money remaining for the neighborhoods to work on issues of their choosing. When asked about their direct interactions with the neighborhood organizations, the Commissioners felt that there should be better connections with the organizations so that they could better understand the issues and concerns of the neighborhoods. The Commissioners expressed that they had been encouraged to not work "in the weeds" with neighborhood organizing. This lack of engagement with the various neighborhoods is a hands-off approach that leaves the members of NCEC working at 30,000 feet without clear guidance as to their roles.

When asked how they are able to fulfill their mission without directly engaging/interacting with the neighborhood organizations, one commissioner commented that if the NCEC were doing its job as outlined in *Framework for the Future*, City Council members should know who he is, because he would be before them making recommendations. Instead, he commented, "They don't know me from Adam."

There was discussion about the post-2009 role of the NCEC. Neither of the two newly-appointed Commissioners knew what the NCEC's mission is. As a result, the former Commissioners and the veteran Commissioners offered opinions, and there was a fair amount of disagreement about the commission's role and responsibilities. There was agreement, however, that NCEC was originally intended to be an advisory board that would hear concerns from the neighborhoods and make recommendations to the Mayor and City Council on behalf of the neighborhoods. There was agreement that this role has been diminished and is no longer a part of the agenda at NCEC meetings and that NCR seems to have usurped that authority, rendering the NCEC virtually without a critical responsibility it once performed.

NCEC's committee and task forces were discussed. (The chart that follows shows the committees and task forces.) The Commissioners felt that their most important work takes place at the committee and task force levels where, for example, they had recently:

- Crafted a policy on diversity and inclusion, which is included in the *"Blueprint for Equitable Engagement."*
- Established a Neighborhoods 2020 Committee to determine the future of neighborhood organizations after current funding streams that support the neighborhood organizations comes to an end.
- Worked on the One Minneapolis Fund and Community Innovation Fund Committees to establish guidelines for making grants to the neighborhood organizations.

Committees and Task Forces of the Neighborhood and Community Engagement Commission

Committee or Task Force	Purpose	Members	Meeting Date
Neighborhoods 2020	Partner with Neighborhood and Community Relations Department staff, neighborhood organizations, City Council offices as appropriate, and other key stakeholders to conduct engagement, to develop and compile recommendations to the NCEC on actions to envision the next phase of Minneapolis' neighborhood	Boyd, Houle, Israel and Gustafson (Chair). (4 seats open)	4th Thursday of every month
City Department Engagement Committee	To evaluate current public engagement practices of City departments and make recommendations on possible improvements to department engagement practices.	Behrens, Clark (Chair), Gustafson, Israel, Kimmons, Martinneau, Mussa and Segovia. (0 open seats)	3rd Wednesday of every month
One Minneapolis Fund	The Task Force will make recommendations to the NCEC on guidelines for the One Minneapolis Fund, develop a request for proposals for funding applications and review applications and make recommendations to the NCEC on projects to receive funding from the program.	Esmaili, Houle, Israel, Mussa, Wetjen (Chair) and Zaffran. (2 open seats)	2nd Wednesday of every month
Community Innovation Fund	The Committee will make recommendations to the NCEC on guidelines for the Community Innovation Fund, develop a request for proposals for funding applications and review applications and make recommendations to the NCEC on projects to receive funding from the program.	NCEC Members: Houle, Israel, Kimmons and Zaffran (Co-Chair). Neighborhood Members: Shauen Pearce (Co-Chair), Jennifer Arnold, Mohamed Mohamed, and Jeffrey Strand (0 open seats)	3rd Wednesday of every month
Community Connections Conference	The Community Connections Conference is an annual gathering of neighborhood and community leaders to discuss common issues and priorities. The NCEC serves a role by having membership on the Conference Planning Team.	Carrasco, Cichowicz and Mussa. (0 seats open)	2nd Monday of every month

FOLLOW-UP NCEC ONLINE SURVEY

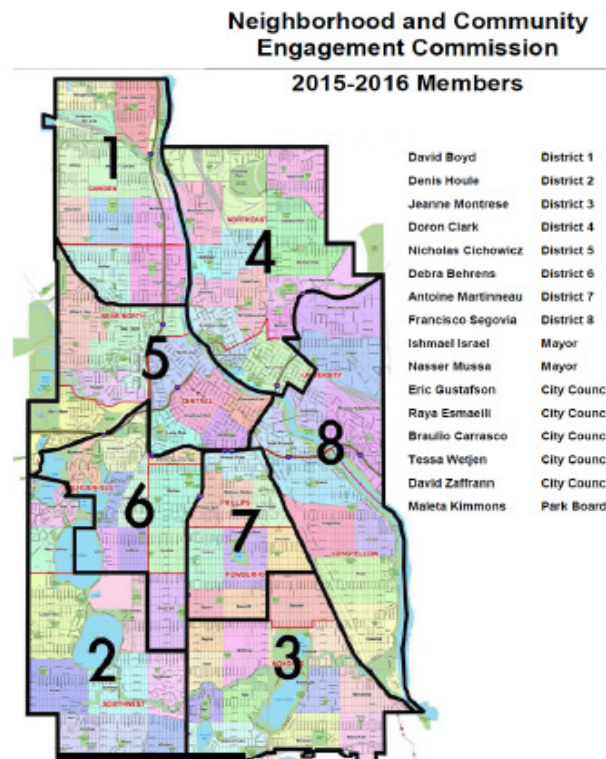
As mentioned, a focus group meeting was conducted with NCEC Commissioners early in the evaluation process, under Phase 2. Nevertheless, it was determined by the Steering Committee and the evaluation team that an additional effort to engage the Commissioners should be included as a part of the evaluation methodology. Factors supporting this determination were:

- The NCEC focus group meeting was attended by seven Commissioners; approximately 15 percent of the 45 former and current Commissioners invited to attend the meeting.
- Interviews with City Council members indicated that there was a considerable level of uncertainty about the role of the commission and the Commissioners in the City's resident engagement programs and activities.
- Analysis of responses from the Phase 3, preliminary survey showed that a noticeable number of respondents (representatives of neighborhood organizations) also were not sure about the role of the commission and Commissioners and expressed interest in seeing the commission play a more visible role in neighborhood organization affairs and activities.

The NCEC online survey included 22 questions that focused on the defined roles of the NCEC as a policy-making body and advisory board on resident engagement and the not quite as well-defined roles that individual Commissioners have to be involved with the neighborhood organizations within their districts.³

See a map of the eight NCEC Districts below. As shown, there are 16 current NCEC Commissioners. Eight are elected/ selected by the neighborhood organizations in eight NCEC Districts that are spread across the City. Of the remaining eight, two are appointed by the mayor, five are appointed by City Council, and one is appointed by the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board.

There were 13 respondents to the online survey; approximately 29 percent of the 45 Commissioners who received the survey. Six of the 13 (46 percent) were currently serving a term, and seven (34 percent) were former Commissioners whose terms have come to an end. Of the six who were currently serving a term, five were in their first term, and one was serving a second term.



³ While the evaluation team could not find a written list of duties and responsibilities for NCEC Commissioners, there is ample language that describes activities that can only be accomplished by the NCEC (and by extension, the Commissioners themselves) if there is some level of contact and communication between the Commissioners and the neighborhood organizations.

Findings from the NCEC Online Survey

- The Commissioners were asked if they believed the three purposes of the CPP accurately describe the directions neighborhood organizations should pursue.
 - 66 percent responded “yes.”
 - 17 percent responded “no.”
 - 17 percent responded “not sure.”
- The Commissioners were asked if they should have a role in helping neighborhood organizations achieve these purposes.
 - 27 percent responded “yes.”
 - 45 percent responded “no.”
 - 27 percent responded “not sure.”
- Commissioners who responded “yes” were asked to provide examples of how they have assisted the organizations in their district:
 - 100 percent of them cited developing policies and regulations that affect the way neighborhood organizations do their work.
 - 100 percent of them cited listening to the neighborhood organizations and participating in NCEC meetings to help Commissioners reach a better understanding of what neighborhood organizations do and the challenges they face.
 - 67 percent cited advocating for the neighborhood organizations before decision-makers in city government.
 - 33 percent claimed to have reviewed and discussed annual reports and funding applications with the neighborhood organizations before they are submitted to NCR.
- Commissioners who felt they do not have a role were asked to rationalize their response.
 - 67 percent stated that it was never their understanding that they were supposed to work directly with the neighborhood organizations.
 - 67 percent stated that the NCEC is a policy-development body, and day-to-day operations at the neighborhood organization level are not the NCEC’s responsibility.
 - 17 percent felt that providing direct assistance to the neighborhood organizations is the responsibility of NCR staff.
- The Commissioners were asked how well acquainted they are with the neighborhood organizations in their district. Fifty (50) percent responded that they are acquainted with a few. 38 percent of the Commissioners responded that they know all of the organizations in their district.
- The Commissioners were asked to describe the challenges they face/faced. Table 9, on the following page, details challenges the Commissioners identified.

TABLE 9 SELF-IDENTIFIED CHALLENGES FACED BY THE NCEC COMMISSIONERS

First Level Challenge	Frequency of Response	Second Level Challenge	Frequency of Response
The advisory nature of the commission. The commission has no teeth	1 (8%)	Two-year, unstaggered terms results in frequent turnover and does not provide enough time to build institutional knowledge	1 (8%)
Not being sure if City Council really cares what the Commissioners' opinion is	1 (8%)	A disconnect between NCEC and NCR staff. Some Commissioners do not respect NCR staff.	1 (8%)
Lack of clarity of the CPP mission compared to NRP	1 (8%)	Division among NCEC Commissioners	1 (8%)
Too many conflicting interests the Commissioners have to sift through	1 (8%)	Inability to see any actual difference that is being made in terms of participation	0
NCR staff having an agenda, manipulating people and scenarios to get what they want and sacrificing community engagement in the process	2 (16%)	Lack of clarity about missions of CPP, NCR Department, and NCEC	2 (16%)
Meddling by City staff, changing and inserting unrelated items into meeting agendas, minutes, and reports	2 (16%)	Uneducated, ill-informed, contentious neighborhood organizations that do not understand NCEC's mission and work	2 (16%)

Source: Biko Associates, Inc., March 2, 2016.

- The Commissioners were asked if the neighborhood organizations within their districts collaborate. Twenty-nine (29) percent said “yes,” 57 percent said “no,” and 14 percent were not sure.
- The Commissioners who responded “yes” were asked if the collaborations were successful. All of them indicated that they had been. Examples of successful collaborations included:
 - Shared staff and personnel (100 percent)
 - Addressed priorities and issues together (100 percent)
 - Collaborated on fundraising (100 percent)
 - Shared office space (50 percent)
 - Shared funding (50 percent)
- When asked if NCR or NCEC assisted in any of these collaborative efforts, 71 percent responded that they had not, and 29 percent responded that they had.

- The Commissioners were asked if they were satisfied with the role played by NCEC. Twenty-two percent reported that they were, and 78 percent reported that they were not. Aspects of the NCEC that the Commissioners would change included:
 - Unstaggered, two-year terms.
 - Lack of direct connection to the neighborhood organizations.
 - Lines of accountability between NCR and NCEC need to be strengthened.
 - Better communication between the NCEC and City Council.
 - Too much influence in NCEC decision-making from neighborhood organizations that have a financial interest in outcomes.
- When asked to describe what NCEC should become in the future, the Commissioners cited the following, as shown in Table 10.

TABLE 10
COMMISSIONER-IDENTIFIED VISION FOR THE NCEC

Future Aspects of NCEC	Frequency of Response
Ensure that NCEC has direct access to decision-makers.	7 (88%)
Ensure a more clearly defined role for NCEC.	5 (63%)
Provide more assistance to neighborhoods in their continuing involvement with NRP.	4 (50%)
Ensure that the NCEC can be a stronger advocate for neighborhood organizations.	3 (38%)
Provide technical expertise to help neighborhoods resolve issues and priorities.	3 (38%)
Change the organizational structure of NCEC.	3 (38%)
Provide assistance to neighborhood organizations as they attempt to navigate through City Hall and other agencies.	2 (25%)
Include NRP policy-related issues in NCEC's agenda.	2 (25%)

Source: Biko Associates, Inc., March 3, 2016.

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