

Exemplary Materials For
Designing a Community Building
Initiative in a Neighborhood

The materials that follow were developed cooperatively by The Woodlawn Organization, a Chicago neighborhood organization, and the Asset Based Community Institute of Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois.

The materials were designed for a particular neighborhood. They are one approach to community building and should be adapted or revised so they will be appropriate for any other neighborhood where they are used.

If you proceed to initiate a community building initiative that generally follows the methods described here, we would like to know about your project so we can learn together. Contact us at jlmabcd@aol.com

The first step is to decide on the information you want to gather. We have found that people “open up” when they know that this is a talent search. The questions we used are on the next two pages. As you can see, they all help us understand what talents people are willing to act on. So it is not a survey collecting “data.” It is an exploration by a neighbor of the talents their neighbors are willing to share or act on.

The Woodlawn Community

Talent Search

Questionnaire

Name of Resident:

How long did interview take?

Address f Block:

QUESTIONS

1. What are some of your gifts? i.e. (things you are born with, singing, athletic ability, listening, organizing people etc). (Please be detailed).

A.Would you be willing to share any of these gifts with people on this block?

2. What are some of your skills? Example; things that you have learned to do well. i.e. (carpentry, playing a instrument, programming a computer etc).

B.Would you be willing to share certain skills with people on this block?

3. What are some things that you are passionate about? Example; (Things that you love to do and wouldn't have to be paid for them. i.e. singing, playing baseball, writing poetry etc.).

c. Which of these passions would you be willing to share with people on this block?

4. What do you know well enough that you can teach someone else (children or adults)?

d. Which of these things would you be willing to teach children, youths and adults on this block?

5. What would you like to learn that you do not know?

6. What social group or religious organization do you belong to?

The next 2 pages summarize the answers to the questions we asked 7 people on 1 block.

We did not record the actions they were willing to take on this form, but you could do it by underlining the talents they say they will act upon.

[REDACTED] South Ingleside Block Club

| Resident Name, Address and Length of Interview | Date of Interview | What are your gifts | What are some skills | What are your passions | What do you do well enough to teach | Do you know anyone running small business out of their home..what type | Hobbies |
|---|-------------------|---|--|---|---|--|---|
| [REDACTED] Chicago, IL (Length: 25 mins.) | 12/7/2010 | good listener, cooking, mentor, good communicator, discernment | caretaker, cooking, medical assistant, housekeeping | spirituality, problem solver, service to others | cooking, how to make wise decisions (i.e., mentoring) & how to have faith | catering & housekeeping | stepping, dining, bowling & watching movies |
| [REDACTED] Chicago, IL (Length: 30 mins.) | 12/8/2010 | good with hands, good communicator, good listener & good with kids | carpentry, electrical work, plumbing, sheet metal worker by profession | passionate about occupational work | sheet metal work, plumbing & carpentry | | relaxing |
| [REDACTED] (Length: 30 mins.) | 12/9/2010 | organizing, planning, communicating, problem-solving | gardening, landscaping, decorating & community organizing | horticulture (gardening) | | making baskets and vases for special occasions | planting, crossword puzzles & reading |
| [REDACTED] Chicago, IL (Length: 25 mins.) | 12/10/2010 | connecting with others, objectivity and hardworking | handyman, home improvement, human development & mobilization | gardening, the outdoors, advocating on environmentally friendly community & bike riding | community empathy, communication, rational and emotional thinking | | gardening, biking, home repair & theater |

[REDACTED] South Ingleside Block Club

| Resident Name and Address | Date of Interview | What are your gifts | What are some skills | What are your passions | What do you do well enough to teach | Do you know anyone running small business out of their home..what type | Hobbies |
|---|-------------------|--|--|--|--|--|---|
| [REDACTED] Chicago, IL (Length: 20 mins.) | 12/13/2010 | solution driven, motivator, communicator, people person & organized | psychology, community organizing, mobilization, negotiation & entrepreneur | educational justice for youth | organizational skills | | sports, reading, endurance racing, theater & dancing |
| [REDACTED] Chicago, IL (Length: 20 mins.) | 12/14/2010 | ability to plan, strategize and implement change & creativity | legal knowledge (occupation: attorney), business | business strategy (for local and small businesses to move community forward) | how to start a business from the ground up | | home improvement, do it yourself projects |
| [REDACTED] Chicago, IL (Length: 40 mins.) | 12/15/2010 | communication, managerial, organizational, education, business, veteran services, senior services, leader, political analyst, getting things done, vision, ability to create and | painting, cooking, certified food sanitation, master gardener, grant writing, financial aid assistance (students), interior decorator, project manager & veteran's | educating people, politics, community development, facilitating youth activities, spirituality, global socio-economics, motivational | math, senior social services, black history, world history, geography, etiquette, gardening, cooking, painting, veteran services & parenting | event planning and a non-for profit agency for community development | gardening, boating, traveling, event planning & education |

The next four pages identify all the gifts, skills, passions and teachable information of 17 residents of a very low income Chicago neighborhood. These 4 abilities are the basic material used by community connectors for building a productive neighborhood.

Gifts of 17 Residents of 3 Blocks in Chicago's Woodlawn Neighborhood

Solution driven
Motivator
People person
Organized
Ability to plan, strategize and implement change
Creative
Managerial
Education
Business
Veteran services
Leader
Political analyst
Getting things done
Vision
Ability to create
Good listener
Cooking
Mentor
Good communicator
Discernment
Good with hands

Good with kids
Problem solving
Connecting with others
Objectivity
Hardworking
Articulate
Multi-tasker
Voiceovers (radio)
Commentating
Public Speaking
Bring diverse groups together
Interacting well with youth
Intense motivator
Ability to inspire people
Dealing with kids well
Encourager
Reading comprehension
Good with people
Computers
Mathematics
Reaching out

Skills of 17 Residents of 3 Blocks in Chicago's Woodlawn Neighborhood

| | | |
|---------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| Computer trouble shooting | Electrical work | Cooking Certified food sanitation |
| Gourmet cooking | Plumbing | Master gardener |
| Skillful palette | Sheet metal worker by profession | Grant writing |
| Writing | Gardening | Financial aid assistance (students) |
| Blogging | Landscaping | Interior decorator |
| Mentoring young women | Decorating | Project manager |
| Sewing | Community organizing | Knitting |
| Singing | Handyman | Light repairs |
| Teaching | Home improvement | Computers |
| Strategic planning skills | Human development and mobilization | Mathematics |
| Reading | Psychology | Researching |
| Business (financial) | Negotiation | Skating |
| Identifying internal weaknesses | Entrepreneur | Real estate law |
| Caretaker | Legal knowledge (occupation attorney) | People problem solving |
| Cooking | Business | Computer skills |
| Medical assistant | Painting | |
| Housekeeping | | |
| Carpentry | | |

Passions of 17 Residents of 3 Blocks in Chicago's Woodlawn Neighborhood

Educational justice for youth
Business strategy (for local
and small businesses to
move community forward)
Educating people
Politics
Community development
Facilitating youth activities
Spirituality
Global socio-economics
Motivational
Problem solver
Service to others
Occupational work
Horticulture (gardening)
The outdoors
Advocating for an
environmentally
friendly community
Bike riding

Organizing events
(celebratory)
Music
Youth involved in music
Directing cultural events
Mentoring young women
Sincere Milk Ministries
(i.e. military moms)
Business development
Community outreach
Youth initiatives
Senior initiatives
Job Training
Personal financing
Working out
Reading
Family (i.e. children)
Helping in general
Education
Youth
Community

Correcting problem buildings
Church
Listening to jazz
Literacy
Etiquette
Decorate
Handwork
Wall hangings
Second hand store shopping
Good eye for potential
Dressing
Antique shopping
Gardening
Photography
Working with kids
Being around people
Being able to help someone
Skating

Teachables of 17 Residents of 3 Blocks in Chicago's Woodlawn Neighborhood

| | | |
|-------------------------------|---|---------------------------|
| Entrepreneurship | Organizing events | Life skills for youth |
| Job Creation | English | Knitting |
| Job training | Public speaking | Computer technology |
| Marketing | Presentational etiquette | Mathematics |
| Strategic planning | Cooking | Skating |
| Physical fitness | Journalism for beginners | How to be a good neighbor |
| Basic accounting | Home Schooling | Real estate |
| Economics | Basic etiquette | Reading comprehension |
| How to review a credit report | Breastfeeding techniques for first time moms | Sewing |
| Credit quality | First Aid | Handcrafting |
| Banking | Hygiene | Cooking |
| Dietician | | |
| Grammar | Self-esteem | |

The next page is an email sent by a neighbor to 8 other neighbors on the block introducing the “talent searcher.” All the neighbors who were contacted agreed to be interviewed because of this request.

Hello and Happy New Year!

Warren and I met last night for a brief time to discuss this initiative and I must tell you, it was very interesting to hear some of the questions, (and I was a bit surprised at a few of my own responses)...

Warren is trying to interview a few more people on our block by the end of this week and I'm hoping you'll get in touch with him to schedule about 15-20mins to go through the questionnaire. You can reach Warren at the email address above or at 673-434-1113.

Thank you and I look forward to seeing you all soon as we prepare for our Community Summit in March!!

Blessings,

We used the same questions with a group of teenagers in the neighborhood. The next three pages show a summary of their responses. The two pages that follow these responses summarize what they said they would like to learn and what they could teach.

ASSET BASED ORGANIZING

YOUTH SAMPLE

| Resident Name and Address | Date of Interview | What are your gifts | What are some skills | What are your passions | What do you do well enough to teach | What organizations do you belong to | What would you like to learn |
|---|-------------------|--------------------------|---|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| Chantel Brown (age 15) 600 S. Dearborn Chicago, Illinois | | dancing, hairstyling | hair styling, nail manicuring | shopping, hair styling | hair styling, nail manicuring | T.W.O. mentoring program | design clothes |
| Chantel Jackson (age 14) 600 S. Dearborn Chicago, Illinois | | singing, spiritual gifts | writing poetry | writing, singing | math | poetry club | speak spanish, geometry |
| Deshawn McIntosh (age 16) 6238 600 S. Dearborn Chicago, Illinois (Hyde Park) | | singing, athletics | tumbling/acrobatics, writing music/poetry | tumbling, singing, comedy | english (infants), drawing | Chicago Boy's Acrobatic Team, Boy's & Girl's Club of Chicago | how to play the piano, how to make instrumental music |

ASSET BASED ORGANIZING

| Resident Name and Address | Date of Interview | What are your gifts | What are some skills | What are your passions | What do you do well enough to teach | What organizations do you belong to | What would you like to learn |
|---|-------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|--|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <p>[REDACTED] (age 14)</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>Chicago, Illinois</p> | | reading, dancing | reading, writing | writing | dancing | church, pom-pom dance group | higher level math |
| <p>[REDACTED] (age 15)</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>Chicago, Illinois</p> | | doing hair | hair stylist, math | hair styling, talking on the phone and listening | hairstyling, basic skills for children (i.e., learning alphabet) | T.W.O. mentoring program | foreign language |
| <p>[REDACTED] (age 15)</p> <p>[REDACTED]</p> <p>Chicago, Illinois</p> | | dancing, reading, counting money | dancing, reading, hair styling | hair styling, clothing design, home decorating | hairstyling, nail care (manicuring), dressing | T.W.O. mentoring program, church | foreign language |

ASSET BASED ORGANIZING

| Resident Name and Address | Date of Interview | What are your gifts | What are some skills | What are your passions | What do you do well enough to teach | What organizations do you belong to | What would you like to learn |
|--|-------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Kenneth Johnson (age 17) 1001 W. 10th Street Chicago, Illinois (Hyattsville) | | rapping, debating | rapping | rapping, making a difference through rap | conflict resolution | CPS mentoring program | how to surf |
| Kenneth Johnson (age 15) 1001 W. 10th Street Chicago, Illinois (Hyattsville High School) | | ability to dress well | playing video games (basketball) | shopping for clothes | cooking | CPS mentoring program | how to repair electronic devices |

TOPICS THAT TEENAGERS WANT TO LEARN

Designing Clothes

Spanish

Geometry

Playing piano

Learning musical instruments

Higher level math

A foreign language

How to surf

How to repair electronic devices

(9topics, 8 teens, residents of Woodlawn neighborhood, Chicago)

TOPICS THAT TEEN-AGE NEIGHBORHOOD
RESIDENTS ARE PREPARED TO TEACH

Hair styling

Manicuring

Mathematics

English for infants

Drawing

Dancing

Basic Skills for children

Conflict resolution

Cooking

(9 topics, 8 teens, residents of Woodlawn neighborhood, Chicago)

When we asked the talent questions of 19 people on 3 blocks they told us 38 different topics they could teach other people on the block. The next two pages show what those 38 topics are.

WHICH OF THESE WOULD YOU LIKE TO LEARN?

CIRCLE EACH TOPIC THAT INTERESTS YOU

How to start a business

Mathematics

Black history

World history

Geography

Etiquette

Gardening

Cooking

Painting

Parenting

How to have faith

Sheet metal work

Plumbing

Carpentry

Skating

Real estate/business

Reading comprehension

Sewing

Typing

Reading

Knitting
Computer technology
Real estate
Good neighboring
First Aid
Self-esteem
Life styles for youth
Marketing
Strategic planning
Physical fitness
Basic accounting
Reading a credit report
Banking
Diction
Grammar
English
Public speaking
Journalism for beginners

We then asked a group of neighborhood teenagers which of the things adults could teach them that they would like to learn. The next page shows what this group of teenagers said they would like to learn.

| TOPIC OF INTEREST | NUMBER OF STUDENTS | MALES | FEMALES |
|--------------------------|--------------------|-------|---------|
| COOKING | 23 | 12 | 11 |
| BANKING | 14 | 6 | 8 |
| COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY | 13 | 8 | 5 |
| HOW TO START A BUSINESS | 12 | 7 | 5 |
| PAINTING | 11 | 6 | 5 |
| REAL ESTATE/BUSINESS | 11 | 7 | 4 |
| SKATING | 11 | 5 | 6 |
| TYPING | 11 | 7 | 4 |
| BLACK HISTORY | 9 | 5 | 4 |
| PHYSICAL FITNESS | 9 | 3 | 6 |
| ENGLISH | 8 | 5 | 3 |
| MATHEMATICS | 8 | 5 | 3 |
| PARENTING | 8 | 3 | 5 |
| READING | 6 | 4 | 2 |
| CARPENTRY | 5 | 3 | 2 |
| FIRST AID | 5 | 0 | 5 |
| GRAMMAR | 5 | 3 | 2 |
| LIFE STYLES FOR YOUTH | 5 | 3 | 2 |
| MARKETING | 5 | 2 | 3 |
| BASIC ACCOUNTING | 4 | 1 | 3 |
| HOW TO HAVE FAITH | 4 | 1 | 3 |
| JOURNALISM FOR BEGINNERS | 4 | 2 | 2 |
| READING A CREDIT REPORT | 4 | 2 | 2 |
| READING COMPREHENSION | 4 | 3 | 1 |
| SEWING | 4 | 1 | 3 |
| ETIQUETTE | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| GARDENING | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| PUBLIC SPEAKING | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| SELF-ESTEEM | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| WORLD HISTORY | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| GOOD NEIGHBORING | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| DICTION | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| GEOGRAPHY | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| KNITTING | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| PLUMBING | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| SHEET METAL | 1 | 1 | 0 |

The Talent Search form shown at the beginning of these materials is open-ended. It asks people to self-identify their gifts, skills, passions and teachables. Then the connector needs to act to create new relationships and activities based on the talents discovered.

An additional set of questions can be asked that focus on participating in specific new initiatives on the block. These questions seek commitments to particular activities rather than commitments to share gift, etc. They can be added to the Talent Search questions or used on their own.

POTENTIAL BLOCK INITIATIVES

- Participating in a block tutoring project for young children
- Joining a group that reads books to children on the block
- Organizing a block clean up and greening day
- Teaching one of your skills to teenagers on the block
- A project involving planting and gardening
- In helping elderly or homebound residents shop, remove snow or trash
- Creating a child care group
- Joining a block band
- Joining a block book club
- Joining a group helping the local elementary or high school
- Coaching athletic events for youth
- Joining the block watch.
- Joining a block cooking club
- Joining a block walking club
- Joining a group that will walk the block children to and from the school
- Joining others who are interested in doing arts and crafts
- Joining a block chorus
- Participating in a block group to discuss political issues and events

In the neighborhood the Woodlawn Organization was going to build a greenhouse in each school yard. They took the occasion to add a set of “Green” questions in order to find people to help build and manage the greenhouses. They also found people who wanted to learn gardening. Then they could connect them to the gardeners they had found.

The next page shows the “Green” questions.

GREEN QUESTIONS

Do you have a garden?

Are you growing things in a community garden in Woodlawn? Which one?

If you don't garden now, have you gardened in the past?

What do you grow?

Have you done composting?

Have you ever done gardening in a greenhouse?

Would you be willing to help erect a greenhouse at a local school on May 7, Earth Day?

Would you be willing to help teach children in the local schools how to grow things in their new greenhouse?

If you have never gardened, would you like to learn how?

The neighborhood organization has a “Homecomers” program for neighborhood people returning from prison. They asked some of these people to fill in the basic talent search information.

The next 2 pages show the talents of 2 people just out of prison. The neighborhood organization can use this information to build connections that will help those “Homecomers” build a new future.

Talent Search

Questionnaire

“Home comers”

Name: [REDACTED] (Circle Of H.O.P.E. Re- Entry Program)

Address: [REDACTED]

Age: 33 yrs. Old

1. What are some of your gifts? Working with my hands, People person.
2. What are some of your skills? Athletic, carpentry, roofing, plumbing.
3. What are some of your passions? Swimming, bowling, sports.
4. What do you know well enough that you can someone else? (Adult or youth). Life principles.
5. What social organization or religious institution do you belong to? Community church, Circle of H.O.P.E. Re- entry program.
6. What would you like to learn that you do not know? Car mechanics, and general cooking

Talent Search
Questionnaire

"Home Comers"

Name: [REDACTED] (Circle of H.O.P.E. re-entry program)

Address: [REDACTED]

Age: 36 yrs Old

1. What are some of your gifts? Good with hands, quick learner.
2. What are some of your skills? Car mechanics, carpentry, masonry.
3. What are some of your passions? Working, and doing car mechanics.
4. What do you know well enough that you can teach someone? (adults or youths). Car mechanics, life principles.
5. What would you like to learn that you do not know? Car mechanics, and Life principles
6. What social organization or religious institution do you belong to? Community church, Narcotic Anonymous counseling sessions, Circle of H.O.P.E. re-entry program.

Finally, we have developed a basic process to use these materials. The next few pages are a brief summary of the approach we are using.

Activating Neighborhood Talents

We have found it is preferable to start with one person who will be the talent searcher. The person can be from the neighborhood or an outsider. They are usually paid if they are to spend full time leading the initiative. Most good talent searchers are oriented toward what people have to contribute rather than what issues or needs they have.

If possible, the searcher should begin interviewing with a person they know on a block or who someone will introduce them to. After completing the interview, they can ask who else on the block the interviewee thinks they should talk with. The interviewee may be willing to introduce the searcher to these people. Or, the searcher can contact the referral saying, "Mrs. Smith suggested I talk with you."

Interviews usually take about one half hour using the questions we have outlined. It is important to have a form to write the answers to the questions.

After the searcher has interviewed 6-8 people, choose the 2 who seemed most interested in the interview. Return to

these people and show them the results of all 8 interviews. Usually they will be quite interested and surprised. Ask if they will join you in doing two interviews.

On the first joint interview, the searcher asks the questions and the 2 interested residents listen. Then, on the second interview, the residents ask the questions. The searcher listens and may make suggestions.

It is preferable to have 2 people involved in the interviews so they feel more secure. However, if only one person seems interested, you can proceed with them until they recruit more people through their interviews.

The searcher then asks the 2 residents to complete as many interviews as possible on the block. As they do these interviews, they should see which other residents seem especially interested in the questions. These people can then be recruited to become block interviewers.

The goal is to get as many interviews as possible and to identify and involve as many residents as possible in the process.

When the interviews are completed (it is not necessary to get every last household) the interested residents can come together to look over the information they have gathered. They can see what kinds of connections can be made on the block using the information about gifts, skills, passions, teachables, and what they want to learn. We call these residents “connectors” and together they can create a “connectors table.” The “table” can meet on a regular basis to define new possibilities for connection and then introduce people in order to make the connections.

There are many kinds of connections. You can connect people one to one when a talent of one person is helpful to another, e.g., she’s homebound and he’s willing to cut grass.

People with the same talents can be connected, e.g., the three gardeners on the block can be introduced to each other. They can create a garden club and teach gardening to people on the block who have indicated they would like to learn how. And they can create a gardeners’ market to sell their produce on the block.

People with a particular talent can be connected to an appropriate club or group that another resident belongs to, e.g., a person with the gift of singing could be connected to a local church choir where a block resident belongs.

People who want to learn a topic can be connected to people who can teach it. This is especially important as a way to relate young people on the block to the adult residents.

Any block project can be assembled with the multiple talents of residents, from a neighborhood band to a safety watch.

The connecting possibilities are limitless. Often, a part of the connecting can be aided by creating a block website. Residents can offer clothing their children have outgrown, ask for assistance in learning the computer, identifying people needing special care, announcing celebrations such as birthdays and graduations, and offering services such as snow shoveling or carpentry.

As connections grow, many local residents will come to know each other. Then, activities for the entire block can be

created, e.g., an artist day, a children's play, a street barbeque, an invitation to local political candidates to present their case, a gardeners' market, etc.

Finally, some residents (perhaps teenagers) can interview each family and write up their story. These stories can be printed in a "block book" that can be released at a block gathering. It can also be published on the block website.

A welcoming committee can be set up and newcomers given the "block book" so they can get to know the neighbors. Then their story can be published on the website so residents can get to know the newcomers.

In all of these connections it is very important to try to create relationships between teenagers and adults on the block. It is these relationships that create a village that raises its children.

If you or a local group are interested in developing a neighborhood initiative similar to the one described in this workbook, please let us know. We are creating a national learning community of local "talent search" initiatives and we would like you to participate. You can contact us at jlmabcd@aol.com.