



Best Practice: Resident Participation in Neighborhood Management

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CITY: JERUSALEM

POLICY AREA: SOCIAL SERVICES

BEST PRACTICE

Over the last 35 years the City of Jerusalem has opened 30 neighborhood-based community centers providing cultural, social and sporting activities to all age groups. Utilizing Jerusalem's strong community center infrastructure, the city launched the **Resident Participation Neighborhood Management (RPNM)** program to further involve local residents in the planning and implementation of a wide range of city-delivered neighborhood services. As a result of engaging city residents, city officials are able to bring local perspective to the forefront of their discussions with the national government on programs and issues of concern.

ISSUE

The initiative began in 1993 in response to complaints from professional staff and local residents that service delivery was planned and implemented without proper consideration of the real needs of residents. At the time, some complained that services were offered at great cost to the taxpayer but did not solve neighborhood problems.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The overall goal of the RPNM program is to provide an easily accessible platform for residents to make their voice heard at City Hall and make a valuable contribution to quality of neighborhood life. Other goals are to promote the use of community centers and strengthen local democracy by increasing civic participation.

IMPLEMENTATION

The process of establishing RPNM consisted of three stages.

The first stage involved initial outreach within each neighborhood, establishing committees of interested persons on relevant issues such as education, facilities for young adults, health services, public transportation, garbage collection and local parks.

The second stage involved providing these committees with the tools and training necessary to work with City Hall professional staff in defining problems and evaluating the feasibility of various solutions.

Finally, three years after initial implementation of the RPNM program, local elections were held for a representative community council, elected to four-year terms and recognized by City Hall as official community spokespersons.

COST

There were no special costs involved in implementing the first two stages of the RPNM program. Existing community organization personnel implemented the program, identified potential activists, and provided training for residents. A single allocation of funds was used for local elections to cover technical costs and to advertise a community festival to increase awareness of the importance of voting for the local community council.

RESULTS AND EVALUATION

By 1996, community councils were fully operational. Neighborhood activists learned how to cooperate with each other and with service professionals on a variety of community issues through sub-committees. Some examples of the ways these stakeholders were able to work together to improve city services include:

- revising bus routes between neighborhoods and the city center and improving timetables;
- altering proposed plans for new buildings to guarantee public playground space for children and shaded park benches for the elderly;
- revising plans to turn a major road artery into a one-way street;
- allocating funding for public school buildings and kindergartens according to the recommendations of neighborhood activists;



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- preventing the opening of stores and restaurants on quiet residential streets, redirecting their relocation into designated commercial areas;
- rescheduling public works program timetables to reduce the inconvenience to residents.

Community council elections have been held since the program inception. In one-third of the neighborhoods, elections were held for each seat on the council. Whereas in other neighborhoods, community councils were established by appointments based on consent from individuals serving in various sub-committees. Both models are viewed by residents as successful.

Five or six years after the initial implementation of the program it was found that many of the original residents were losing interest and the community organizers had to find new ways to recruit and retrain new residents. Therefore, program managers focused their efforts on continuous recruiting and training. This has been successful as an influx of new blood into sub-committees and the neighborhood representative councils has guaranteed that the program remains relevant.

The city implemented, in late 2010, a 4-year cycle of community council elections with 6-7 neighborhoods holding elections each year. Voter turnout in the first 2 years was about 20% with a higher number of women and young adults elected than previously. This was the outcome of a four-month focused outreach effort in each neighborhood. Each newly-elected neighborhood council then began a short three-session training program before commencing duties.

TIMELINE

1993	Jerusalem City Council authorizes establishment of community councils within framework of neighborhood community centers
1994	Implementation of first stage commences (recruitment of neighborhood activists)
1995-1997	Implementation of second stage (training and establishment of issue-based committees)
1997	Limited implementation of third stage (elected representative councils are elected in 10 out of 30 neighborhoods)
1998-2001	Representative councils established in other neighborhoods based on appointments by consent of local residents serving on sub-committees
2002-2010	Implementation of on-going recruitment and training programs to maintain high levels of resident Participation
2010-2013	New four-year cycle of representative neighborhood management council elections

LEGISLATION

No legislation is required for this program.

LESSONS LEARNED

A successful RPNM requires ongoing outreach to identify potential new activists and training of personnel. Neighborhood elections do not guarantee high voter turnout and other methods of establishment of such councils must be considered. According to the city, the most promising alternative is a voluntary participatory model.



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TRANSFERABILITY

Resident participation in neighborhood management can be replicated in most cities and countries. Essential requirements are a team of professional community organizers (or other professionals with similar skills) and a willingness of City Hall to give legitimacy to neighborhood councils.

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Facts and figures in this report were provided by the highlighted city agency to New York City Global Partners.