The Role Houses of Faith in Advancing Civic Engagement

By

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fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the department of
International Development, Community, and Environment
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University of Massachusetts, Boston, MA
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Boston Theological Institute, Newton, MA
Certificate in Youth and young Adult Ministry Studies, 2006

Harvard Divinity School, **Cambridge, MA**
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Executive Summary

The Initiative for Engaged Citizenship (IEC) is a non-partisan, non-profit organization located at 74 Providence Street, Worcester, MA. They have identified "Five Actions" that serve as guiding standards to enable their organization to work alongside residents in making their neighborhoods stronger. The challenge that IEC faced was how to market and outreach their "Five Actions" to the community. The organization contracted Linda Parham, a Clark University graduate student with extensive knowledge and experience in the nonprofit industry, to conduct an exploratory study that would assist IEC in providing outreach and implementing their five actions.

IEC was initiated in 2011 and its mission is to focus on residents who are alienated from and have developed apathy towards the political process. Therefore, to remedy this problem, IEC will have to be intentional about the involvement of the diverse citizens in the urban neighborhoods of Worcester. In other words, IEC's emphasis must be grounded in fostering collaboration, and promoting civic and voter engagement.

Therefore, IEC will have to collaborate with community organizations, resident groups, houses of faith, and civic associations. Furthermore, IEC will need to raise awareness in historically under-represented areas as well as advocate for better practices and policies to increase voter accessibility.

Recommendations

The results revealed by this exploratory project suggest that IEC will need to collaborate with Houses of Faith to implement their strategic marketing and outreach plan for their five actions.   My recommendations to IEC are as follows:

1. **Alternative Outreach:** IEC will engage local businesses with high traffic such as houses of faith, barber shops, hair salons, cafes, and ethnic markets to advertise voter registration and help convey to congregants/customers the importance of voting.
2. **Curriculum Integration and Revision:** IEC organizers will partner with houses of faith to develop a curriculum for civic engagement.
3. **Leadership Development:** Having already identified residents and youth who participated in the program, time would be spent to help these residents take ownership for the operation of the program in their neighborhood.
4. **Coordination of Election Day Outreach:** IEC will bring together groups already conducting voter outreach and coordinate efforts so as not to replicate services and build recognition.

 On the following pages, I provide detailed support and evidence for these conclusions based on examination of the IEC current client base and the local environment. In addition, I evaluate the time and degree of difficulty associated with implementing my recommendations.   My suggestion is for the organization to develop a short term, medium term, and long term strategic marketing and outreach plan and collaborate with Houses of Faith.

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Introduction

Civic and voter engagement both are the basis for the democratic process. Civic engagement in the project is be defined as volunteerism and voting. When citizens do not become engaged in the democratic[1] process, which is a right, they give up the chance to have a say in their future. In other words they are less likely to make informed decisions. For example, if a citizen is not familiar with a candidate's position on certain issues they may not know what they are voting for as well as be able to advocate on issues that involve them directly (such as housing, food, and health). To increase understanding of civic and voter engagement in low income neighborhoods, the Initiative for Engaged Citizenship (IEC) requested that a project be conducted in some of the low voter turnout and low income neighborhoods in Worcester, Massachusetts. IEC seeks to collaborate with Houses of Faith to help mobilize their constituents to vote in municipal elections, and to enhance civic engagement in the urban neighborhoods of Worcester. This project will provide background information on IEC; it examines the voter turnout environment in Worcester and the role of Houses of Faith in civic engagement in urban neighborhoods.

In the context of this paper, the project discusses how Houses of Faith can be used to advance civic and voter engagement in low income and low voter turnout areas in Worcester, MA. To gather this information the following methods were used: focus group

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[1] We are a democracy. The democratic process is the ways we make democracy happen. The democratic process is not a methodology, but a way of living that keeps our country strong. http://www.goodcitizen.org/WWLA%20Book/Actions/ActionCategories/DemocraticProcess/DemocraticProcess.htm (accessed 2/22/13).

discussions and survey questions.

1.1 Background about Initiative for Engaged Citizenship (IEC)

The Initiative for Engaged Citizenship (IEC) was started in 2010 with the mission to draw attention to the concerns of citizens who believe they were alienated from the political process. IEC's primary emphasis is on citizens who live in low income neighborhoods. IEC has identified the importance of civic and voter engagement and how it helps residents make decisions for their benefit. IEC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that is an affiliate of Oak Hill Community Development Corporation (CDC) located at 74 Providence Street Worcester, MA 01604. IEC's mission is simply to empower communities through dialogue, education, and the promotion of a more accessible and inclusive civic process. Its goal is to empower residents and facilitate partnerships that make Worcester neighborhoods stronger. IEC has identified five actions they will use for effective outreach to United States citizens residing in low voter and low income neighborhoods. These actions are

- Coordination of community outreach efforts to increase voter turnout
- Providing individuals and organizations with skills and information necessary to advocate in their community
- Assist in dialogue to encourage inclusivity, accessibility, and discredit bias
- Community-based participatory research that encourages greater resident involvement
- Action-based civics education to empower the youth

The challenge that IEC is facing in achieving their five actions is that they do not have an outreach plan for civic and voter engagement in low voter and low income neighborhoods. The project will examine the data on voting, socioeconomic status, and Houses of Faith in Worcester.

1.2 Voting in Worcester

One of IEC's key goals is to raise voter turnout in historically low voting precincts in Worcester. Table 1 shows the results from three of the precincts for 2011, 2009, and 2007 elections in Worcester.

The information in Table 1 shows three precincts with the lowest voter turnout are in largely working class and immigrant neighborhoods.   This project considers the civic and voter engagement in three of the low voter turnout precincts, namely, 3-4, 8-3, and 10-4 and identified as Main South (notably precincts 8-3 and 10-4) turnouts are below 10%.

Table 1: Voter Turnout at Low Turnout Precincts

Precinct	Location	District	2011 (%)	2009 (%)	2007 (%)	Average
3-4	Worcester Tech. High School	2	11	9	9	**9.6**
8-3	St. Peter's Church	4	9.4	9.9	8	**9.1**
10-4	Mayside Apartments	4	11.3	9.7	8	**9.6**

Source: http://www.worcesterma.gov/city-clerk/elections/election-results

Two of the precincts mentioned previously are in the disadvantaged areas of Worcester's Main South. The residents of this area are very diverse. Many are single

mothers' head of household, and living below poverty level.[2] Based on the 2007-2011

U.S. Census and American Community Survey (ACS) data, it is estimated that more than

28.5% of the population in the Main South neighborhood falls under the official federal

government's poverty threshold line of $22,350 for a family of four and $10,890 for an

individual. The respective figure for the city of Worcester is 18.3%.[3]

1.3 The Environment in Worcester

Like many other New England older cities, Worcester, Massachusetts, the second

largest city in New England, is evolving from a manufacturing sector to a service sector.

The city of Worcester shares the "Rust Belt" experiences of the second half of the

twentieth century: de-industrialization; population stagnation, and fiscal stress (Ross &

Riesman, 1994). According to an economic analysis report conducted in March 2012, the

median household income for the city of Worcester is estimated at $45,038 and the poverty

level is 18%. Worcester has a highly diversified population and a large portion of the

residents are non-natives and bring their own culture, language, faith, work, families, and

understanding of the political system to Worcester.

1.4 Houses of Faith Role

In this context, the project will examine the role that House of Faith can contribute

to enhancing civic and voter engagement in Worcester communities. The project uses the

term, Houses of Faith as a cultural, social structure meant for religious or spiritual

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[2] www.city-data.com/city/Worcester-Massachusetts.html *(Percent of families below poverty level: 14.1% (57.1% of which were female household families with related children under 5 years)*
[3] http://www.arcgis.com/home/webmap/viewer.html?webmap=7c845716469b4aa2a6f8cff7dc8ad7a5. The data comes from the U.S. Census American Community Survey (ACS), 2007-2011.

practices, such as prayer, rites of passage, or a form of reverencing a person, place, or thing

higher than oneself. Because religious practices are important in many individuals' lives,

Houses of Faith are among the most popular places for community gatherings. Houses of

Faith activities provide members with a sense of belonging and serve as a means for

expressing and expanding culture. Particularly, Houses of Faith have a long track record

of community outreach with new immigrant citizens and low income citizens that date

back to before the Civil Rights Movement. Historically, Calhoun-Brown (2001, 1993)

notes that when Houses of Faith were established for African Americans in 1774, they

were born out of struggle and oppression and became the center of social, economic,

spiritual, and political growth for mobilization. For example, African American Houses of

Faith helped individuals enhance their reading and writing skills (Lincoln & Mamiya,

1990).

In addition, Houses of Faith have a history of playing an important role in

cultivating capital in urban communities. Mark Warren, in his 1995 dissertation, noted

that "the Texas Industrial Areas Foundation" (IAF)[4] used religious institutions as a vehicle

for community organizing and the development of capital resources in urban

communities.[5]

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[4]The Industrial Areas Foundation, or IAF, is a network of large-scale, successful citizen organizations made up of poor, minority, lower and middle class groups associated with a training center established by Saul Alinsky

[5] Mark Russell Warren, Social Capital and Community Empowerment: Religion and Political Organization in the Texas Industrial Areas Foundation Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University1995.

Even in contemporary times, low income citizens are still using Houses of Faith to obtain many of their basic needs (e.g., food, clothes, shelter, information, etc). Houses of Faith have been a valuable asset to low income areas, namely they have helped to shape the way citizens participate in civic and voter engagement through helping them to understand how the electoral process of civic and voter engagement in the city of Worcester operates. Many of these new citizens who come to the United States already have a faith belief system that may shape their view of the political system. In this project, qualitative methods are used to gain a thorough understanding of the potential contribution of Houses of Faith in engaging, mobilizing, and organizing low income communities.

1.5 Objective and Primary Research Questions

The primary research questions addressed in this project are

1. How can Houses of Faith increase civic and voter engagement among new and low income citizens in urban neighborhoods?

   - Which voting and election information will be most helpful to increase awareness and educate citizens?

   - What types of voter engagement services can Houses of Faith provide to the community while staying within their boundaries?

2. How can Houses of Faith help to empower the residents and the community?

   - What services are Houses of Faith providing for the citizens in the low income neighborhoods (e.g., food or ESL)?

   - What resources are Houses of Faith providing for citizens in the low income neighborhood (e.g., spiritual, political, social, etc)?

CHAPTER TWO

Methodology

This chapter describes the methodology and data analysis for the survey questions and the focus group discussions.

2.1 Site Selection

The respondents of the study are members of three local Houses of Faith in low voter turnout and low income areas in Worcester, Massachusetts. These Houses of Faith were selected because they are located in the Main South neighborhood. The first House of Faith, Belmont African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Zion Church, is in Precinct 8-3 (St. Peter Church). The second House of Faith, John Street Baptist Church, is in the 3-4 Precinct (Worcester Technical High School), and the third House of Faith, Emmanuel Baptist Church, is near Precinct 10-4 (Mayside Apartments).

Several visits were made with each House of Faith's leaders to discuss the survey and the schedules for the focus group discussion. Each Houses of Faith was requested to make weekly announcements for a month to their members about the study, date, location, and time.   They were also requested to notify others in surrounding neighborhoods. Throughout June 2012 a one-page descriptive leaflet was distributed to the selected precincts near each House of Faith.

2.2 Data Collection

The data collection took place over a period of two months from July through August 2012 on three different days and times. As stated by Kumar (2005), the two methods of data collection are primary and secondary data collection methods. According to Du Plooy, (2002) "the combination of two or more data-collection methods and referencing to multiple sources of information to obtain data, are generally referred to as triangulation." The primary data collections employed a triangulation of individual in-depth survey questions, observations, and focus group discussions, whereas the secondary data consist of articles, publications, and Internet sites.

2.3 Group Observation

The group observation involved attending and participating in several weekly gatherings and dinners with the three Houses of Faith. Qualitative methods and open-ended (unstructured) questions were used for a more natural and free-narration flowing of opinions (Du Plooy, 2002). This allowed the respondents to be observed in their natural environment (Kumar, 2005). Further, notes were recorded from the observations and analyzed as part of the data for the project. The members and non-members could be relaxed, free, and comfortable to respond openly with what was happening in their lives. This served as a bridge for each focus group discussion and the survey.

2.4 Survey Questions

The total number of respondents who completed the survey was 68. The purpose of the survey was to gather relevant accurate data essential to the project. The survey was

in the form of a written questionnaire. The questions were tailored to our target audiences,

members or persons who attended one of the Houses of Faith in the community.

The questionnaire consisted of 15 questions, which are shown in Appendix 2. The

survey began with a general question and moved to more specific questions. This

technique allowed the respondent to feel relaxed and not intimated. Each of the

respondents received the same questionnaire that was a mix of open-ended and closed-

ended questions. As a result, this gave the respondents an opportunity to think about their

responses and to express their thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs on the project topics.

2.5 Focus Group Discussion and Questions

The focus group respondents consisted of 26 individuals randomly selected from

our initial pool of survey respondents. During the focus groups, unlike during the

questionnaire, the respondents can converse during and after the discussion. A moderator

was used to direct the focus group discussion. The moderator also encouraged the

respondents to participate in the discussion.

The questions used in the focus groups are shown in Appendix 2. The questions

developed for the focus group were opened-ended and probing to generate a more natural

response and also to get the respondents thinking. The questions were short so that there

was more time for the response. The questions were asked of the group not to specific

individuals, thus creating a relaxed environment. The group discussions were observed

using active listening techniques that helped to give reliability, and validity to the project

findings (DeVos, 1998 and Johnson, 1997). The active listening techniques allow the focus group to stay focus and present in the conversation with no distractions.

2.6 Data Analysis

The data collected from the questionnaires were coded and analyzed. The questionnaires were grouped based on the responses to the questions about basic understanding and knowledge of civic and voter engagement (questionnaire, Appendix 2). The open-ended questions and group observation data were categorized by themes. The results were presented in the form of charts, tables, and graphics.

2.7 Ethical

The respondents were informed that the data collected was confidential with each participating Houses of Faith identified by a code. No identifiable information about the respondents was used such as their name, address, telephone number, etc. Before the focus group discussions and survey administration, the respondents were asked to sign a consent form as well as to state their name, date, time, and the assertion of their desire to participate in the project. The focus group discussions, observations, and surveys always started and ended with a statement that the respondents could terminate their participation in the project at any time. The respondents were informed that this project would not seek to alter their opinions, beliefs, attitudes, emotions, or manipulate any respondent. Each respondent was informed that this project's main purpose was to understand their views and understanding of civic and voter engagement.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 FINDINGS

The results of the survey (including respondents' profiles), focus groups, and observations are summarized below.[6] The open-ended questions led to some key themes not precisely related to voting and volunteerism. Data related to these themes are included in Appendix 3 and may be of interest to the reader. Data related to voting and volunteerisms are presented in the following tables and charts.

Table 2: Number of respondents and age

| Group/Subgroup	Number	Age Range
Total Respondents	68	16- 83
Focus Group	26	27-64
Clergy Leaders	6	45- 75

3.1 General Information about Survey Respondents

The project consisted of 68 respondents from three different Houses of Faith. Each filled out a questionnaire, and returned it at the end of the project. Of the 68 respondents, 44.1% were men and 55.9% women. The respondent's ages ranged from 16 to 83 years; three of the respondents were 16 to 17 years, five 18-30 years, five 31-45 years, 28 were 46-60 years, and 27 were over the age of 61.

The data collection in chart 1 indicates that of the 68 community residents, 23% had received 13 years or more of education and 11% had received 9-12 years of education and 65% had received fewer than 9 years of education.

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[6] Please see appendix 3

**Chart 1: Education Level of
Respondents**
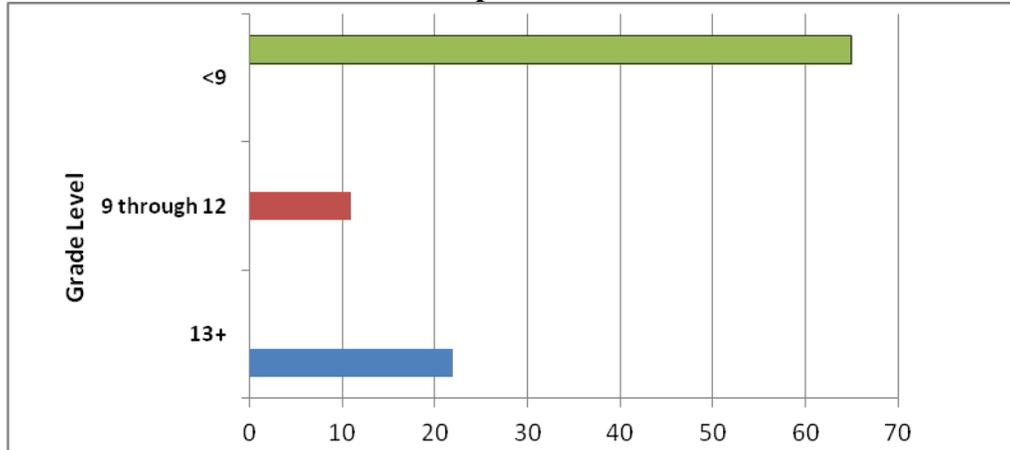
Focus group respondents noted that members often work several jobs to make
enough money to support the family. They add that new and low income citizens have
below-average incomes, thus decreasing their opportunities for higher education and
higher pay jobs. The respondents said that the perceptions about civic and voter
engagement will have to change by educating the citizens. Once citizens are educated
about how to understand and address issues many will be more equipped to express their
views. This will increase the voter turnout and motivate citizens to become involved in
civic and voter engagement.

The occupational breakdown of the 68 community citizens was: 12% worked in
administrative support, service, industrial, or sales positions, and 4% percent worked in
professional, managerial or technical positions (See chart 2). Nearly half (48%) did not
have a steady income; they worked as homemakers or were unemployed.

Chart 2: Occupation of respondents
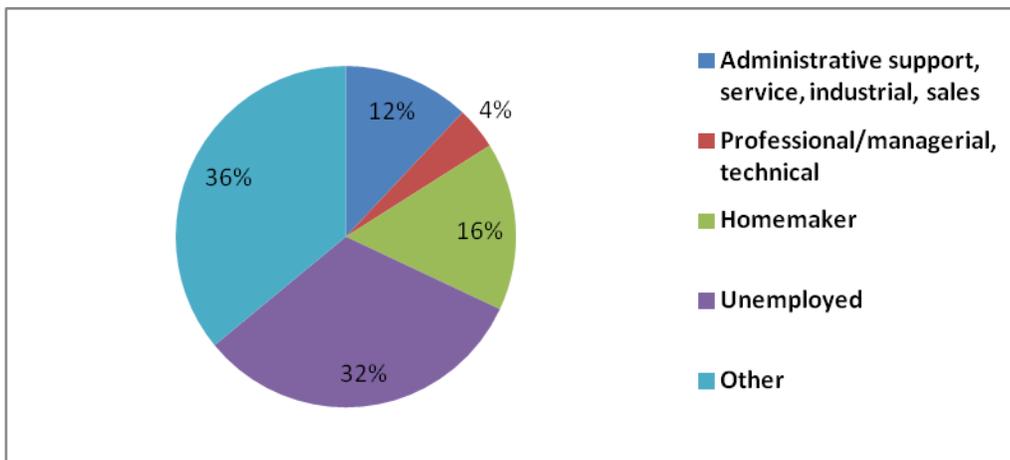
Clergy leaders said "civic and voter engagement of the community are threatened by high unemployment rates, low job security, poverty, and lack of affordable housing." Clergy leaders and the focus group both noted that people will become motivated if they understood the connection between civic and voter engagement in relation to job security and addressing major poverty for the neighborhood.

3.2 Knowledge of Voter and Civic Engagement

The questions in Table 3 assess respondents' basic knowledge and comprehension of civic engagement measured by voting and volunteerism.

Table 3: Content of Questions

Question Number**[7]	Topic of Question(s)
1	Volunteerism
2	Information seeking about community

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[7]** See Appendix 2 for copy of the survey

8, 9, 10, 12, 14, and 15	Civic and voting knowledge and beliefs

Based on the response to these questions, it was determined that the majority of the respondents understood civic and voting engagement. Out of the 68 respondents 64 understood civic and voter engagement to be helpful in voting process. Similarly, 60 respondents recognized that civic and voter engagement to be a necessary tool to empower neighborhoods with low voter turnout. Interestingly, when the respondents were asked if they believed their vote made a difference, 61 respondents said, "Even though they voted, they did not believe that their vote counted." However, they believed that when they received information, it had an influence on their decisions. Moreover, 48 respondents believed that where they received their information influenced their decision to vote.

As noted Table 4 below 65 of the respondents obtained their voting information from Houses of Faith. In addition, 56 of the respondents indicated their primary source of information about civic and voter engagement was from work, family, friends, and neighbors. Social networking is the key source of communication for urban neighborhoods.

Table 4: Source of the Respondents Information

	Periodicals	Media	Houses of Faith	Social Media	Others
Total Respondents	49	23	65	20	56

Clergy leaders said that, "although many people get civic and voting information through family and friends, Houses of Faith can play an important role in advancing civic and voter engagement education to reach a larger portion of the population in low voter and low income citizens at one time." Community outreach materials and resources (e.g., flyers, radio, food pantry, soup kitchen, and networking) are the means that Houses of Faith most use for distribution of information.

As shown in Table 5, the respondents indicated that the basis for their decision to vote relied heavily on their own community setting. The reasons for voting included civic duty, and community service, followed by external environmental factors such as candidate for election, and economics (e.g., jobs, housing, taxes, and business).

Table 5: Why Respondents Voted

	Civic or Public Service	Candidate	Economic
Total Respondents	60	45	53

Education about civic and voter engagement helps in understanding an issue and how to mobilize citizens to go out and vote in local elections as well as national elections. The focus group said, "Members are going to vote in the presidential election but were not sure about local or state elections."

Through the display of table 6, it is shown how Houses of Faith serve as a resource center for many of the basic needs of new and low income citizens in the neighborhoods of the three low voter precincts. Civic and voter engagement outreach can occur when citizens come to the Houses of Faith for other resources.

Table 6: Resources Accessed From Houses of Faith

Description		Percentage
Networking		10
Food Pantry		12
Soup Kitchen		12
Money		6
Education		8
Youth Program		10
Counseling		10
Legal		8
Daycare		8
Thrift Store		8
Family & Friends		8

All the respondents (survey questionnaire and focus group) said that being educated about civic and voter engagement is important and helpful for the community.   The respondents who completed the questionnaire said, "The Houses of Faith symbolize love, safe, trust, and caring for others." The focus group respondents said, "The Houses of Faith also symbolize kindness and willingness to help and share with others." Clergy leaders noted that in addition to getting involved in neighborhoods activities, religion plays a significant role in civic and voter engagement for low income citizens.

Clergy leaders and focus group respondents said they believed people have a difficult time getting involved, even after they understanding the importance of civic and voter engagement because few skill and information building and support programs exist to assist in inclusivity and accessibility needed for greater citizen involvement. The clergy leaders and focus group respondents said that Houses of Faith and community centers are the sites most frequently attended for local election information. Houses of Faith and community centers would be effective locations for IEC's outreach efforts.

CHAPTER 4

Discussion

The findings from the exploratory project, as it relates to Houses of Faith, will aid the development of outreach programs and be used to advance civic and voter engagement in low income and low voter turnout areas in Worcester, MA.   Respondents from the focus groups, clergy leaders, and survey questions conveyed numerous specific ideas about how Houses of Faith can contribute to civic engagement and voter outreach efforts.

Gaining the trust of citizens is a key step in fostering civic and voter engagement. Clergy leaders indicated that new immigrant citizens cannot communicate effectively in English and recommended that culturally competent and bilingual organizers increase personal contact with these citizens through voter registration campaigns. These organizers can create relationships that allow them to effectively distribute election materials and answer questions about the civic and voter engagement system. The clergy leaders suggested that group activities will help community citizens build support groups,

self-esteem, and ultimately improve citizens' desire to become civically engaged. The social networks that happen naturally in Houses of Faith can be used to organize groups of individuals to assist in the design and implementation of a strategic marketing outreach plan for enhancing civic and voter engagement in low-voter turnout and low-income areas.

Such programs could inspire individuals and help them to take leadership in recruiting and encouraging individuals to become civically engaged. For example cultural and religious institutions (e.g., Houses of Faith, school, museums, and parks) offer numerous opportunities to engage in leadership roles. Moreover, clergy leaders and focus group members noted that the cultural ritual/traditions (e.g., gospel music, prayer, testimony, spirited sermons, and social activism) prevalent in Houses of Faith in urban communities may inspire community action.

The respondents in this study concluded that the lack of both education about the benefits of voting and encouragement to vote were central to low voter turnout and civic engagement. Indeed, educating citizens would make them aware of the role their vote plays in the democratic system. But most importantly voting information must be readily available to citizens and Houses of Faith can serve as a major resource center for such information.

On a different note, the group dynamic created by Houses of Faith encourages people to engage in "self-determined action as the group works towards common goals, such as lobbyists brought together by their mutual interest in a political issue" (Drake, 2005). The ideal solution would be collaboration between Houses of Faith and the IEC to

develop a strategic marketing outreach and implementation plan for civic and voter

engagement. As history has shown, Houses of Faith have a long and successful track

record reaching out to low-voter turnout and low income communities.

In addition, Houses of Faith can be used to enhance civic and voter engagement

among different ages. For example youth engage in after school sports events and the

elderly help with the gardening at Houses of Faith; such activities offer an opportunity to

present programming on civic engagement. Further, Houses of Faith can host

neighborhood block parties that allow citizens to meet and greet candidates. Civic and

voter engagement programs can also be offered when citizens come to the Houses of Faith

for other resources.

Limitations of the Study

Overall, the study was limited because more information was needed pertaining to

neighborhoods where Houses of Faith were located; the geographical areas studied and

sample size were small. Also, some survey questions were repetitive and required further

modification.

To summarize, findings from clergy leaders, focus group and survey questions

indicated that citizens had moderate knowledge of civic and voter engagement, and were

not regularly engaged in volunteerism. Further findings determined that Houses of Faith

can advance civic engagement and outreach for low voter turnout in low income

neighborhoods. Moreover, it was shown that the majority of the respondents used

programs offered by Houses of Faith including food pantries, soup kitchens, after-school

programs, health, and medical services. This study's findings revealed that Houses of

Faith can be used to increase voter turnout through educating, engaging, enabling, and

empowering civic and voter engagement in urban communities

Recommendations

The recommendation is for IEC to develop partnerships with Houses of Faith to

reach new and low income citizens in low voter turnout and low-income neighborhoods in

Worcester. The findings from the study with Houses of Faith are compatible with IEC five

actions to engage and educate low voter and low-income citizens in neighborhoods in

Worcester. IEC and Houses of Faith could collaborate on strategic outreach and

implementation of the sample programs recommended below.

Outreach Programs

General Outreach: IEC would engage local organizations and businesses with high
traffic such as Houses of Faith, barbershops, hair salons, cafes, and ethnic markets to
advertise voter registration and help convey to congregants/customers the importance of
voting. This will help to put the act of civic participation in a "safe space." Using different
types of advertising and publicity will be used to reach younger populations as well as
adults.

Curriculum Integration and Revision: IEC organizers can partner with Houses of Faith
to develop a curriculum for civic engagement. IEC would work with committed partners
and integrate the curriculum into existing services and programs and revise the programs to
fit citizens' needs. Feedback from participants for each workshop operated by IEC will
drive curriculum revision and additional initiatives. The study findings suggest that of
Houses of Faith to have monthly workshops around absentee ballots, same-day voter
registration ballot casting, and remodeling the design functionality of the current voting
ballot to create a clear, concise, and comprehensible process.

Leadership Development: IEC might offer a leadership development program that allows
citizens and youth in historically low income areas to take ownership for the operation of
civic and voter engagement initiatives in their neighborhoods. This not only creates a sense

of leadership but also allows them to practice community-organizing skills necessary for engagement with the political system.

Coordination of Election Day Outreach: IEC could bring in groups already conducting voter outreach and try to coordinate efforts so as not to replicate services and to build recognition. Also planning will enable Election Day mobilization, absentee ballot distribution, and transportation services to have a greater impact on the turnout. This will further increase IEC's visibility and legitimacy in the community at large. IEC members will also meet with local administrators to discuss issues of access to the polls residents face, and the possibility of   including cultural competence in poll worker training.

In closing, throughout this paper, I have pointed to many facets that are

instrumental in promoting civic engagement and increasing voter turnout. For

example, community organizing, education, outreach, and voter mobilization can empower

and enable voters to build social and civic capital so that they may be more likely to

engage with the voting process. In addition, Houses of Faith are essential in bringing

citizens together and encouraging them to go out and vote. But more importantly, IEC has

their established actions, which can be used to collaborate with Houses of Faith Worcester

that can significantly improve future voter turnout in elections. As Burns, Kinder, and

Rahn explain in their essay, "Social Trust and Democratic Politics," participation in

politics is not a single thing but many discrete things" (Burns, 2003). There are certainly

many things that can be done to enhance civic and voter engagement. The results of the

survey show that individuals obtain most of their information about politics from others.

This result demonstrates the importance of personal connections and relationships in

enhancing civic and voter engagement. Interpersonal relationships should be used to

disseminate information and encourage further civic and voter engagement. The results of

this project show that collaboration with Houses of Faith has the capacity to yield positive

benefits, especially in low turnout areas, and therefore should be examined alongside the

possibility of increasing education and outreach within certain precincts.

APPENDIX 1

LIVELIHOODS ASSETS FRAMEWORK
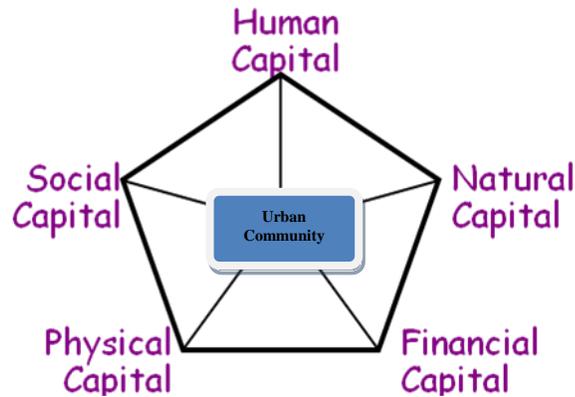
HUMAN CAPITAL: (health, nutrition, education, knowledge, skills, capacity to work, and capacity to adapt)

FINANCIAL CAPITAL: (savings, credit, debt –formal, informal, remittances, retirement fund, and wages)

PHYSICAL CAPITAL: (Infrastructure: (Transport – roads, vehicles, secure shelter, buildings, water supply, sanitation, energy, and communication) Tools and technology: (tools and equipment, seed, fertilizer, traditional technology)

NATURAL CAPITAL: (Land and produce, water, trees and forest products, wildlife, biodiversity, and environmental services)

SOCIAL CAPITAL: (Networks and connections, support, neighborhoods, relationship, trust and mutual support, formal, informal groups, common rules, sanctions, collective representation, participation in decision, and leadership)

APPENDIX 2
PROJECT SEMINAR SURVEY QUESTIONS
Houses of Faith, Civic and Voter Engagement and Education Questionnaire

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[8]The Livelihood Framework is a tool to improve help in understanding of people livelihoods. Livelihood seeks to gain accurate and realistic understanding people strengths through social, human, natural, financial, and physical capital and how to convert into positive outcomes (Livelihoods @dfid.gov.uk April 1999).

1. Do you volunteer? ___Yes, ___No
   a. If Yes why_____
   b. If No why not_____
   c. What can be done to encourage volunteering? _____
2. How do you find information about issues in your communities
3. What languages do you speak (Please check those that apply)
   ___English
   ___Spanish
   ___Vietnamese
   ___Portuguese
   ___French
   ___Other_____
4. What is your age?
   a.   16__17
   b.   18__30
   c.   31__45
   d.   46__60
   e.   61__older
5. What is your highest level of education
   a.   __High school
   b.   __Associate degree
   c.   __Bachelor
   d.   __Certificate trade
   e.   __Graduate & above
   f.   __Professional
6. Which one best describe you
   a.   __Member and resident in the neighborhood
   b.   __Resident but not a member of a Houses of Faith
   c.   __Member of this House of Faith but not a resident of the neighborhood
7. What is your religious denomination (Please be specific, e.g., Baptist, Presbyterian)?
8. Are you eligible to vote? ___Yes, ___No, ___N/A
9. Do you vote? ___Yes, ___No
10. Why do you vote? _____
11. What would be helpful for you in finding information about voting and elections
12. Do you believe your vote counts? ___Yes, ___No
13. Gender: _____Female _____Male
14. Is your voting location convenient? ___Yes, ____No

15. Who is your district Council
    a.   ___ Anthony J. Economou

b. ___ Philip P. Palmieri
c. ___ George Russell
d. ___ Sarai Rivera
e. ___ William J. Eddy
f. ___ I am not sure

APPENDIX 3
PROJECT SEMINAR FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS
Houses of Faith Questionnaire

1. What are things that this House of Faith can do to help empower the residents and community?
2. What resources would you like this House of Faith to provide or offer the residents in the neighborhood?
3. What type of activities can help increase voter turnout? (e.g., helping individuals with transportation, voter registration, voter education, get-out-the-vote work, etc.)
4. What would you want to have this House of Faith do once a month for the community?
5. What can House of Faith do to dispel the myth about voting and civic engagement?
6. Are you aware of any programs, resources or activities that this House of Faith offers for the age group between 12-17 years? (Do not include Bible Study or Sunday school? ___Yes, ___No
   If yes, please list:
   If no what would you like to see provided:

GLOSSARY

Beloved Community: the term originated with Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He first used the term in a 1956 speech at the end of the Montgomery Bus Boycott in the onset of the Civil Rights movement. He argued that the purpose of the movement was not boycott but radical social change and a socially just society.

Civic Engagement- civic engagement is an umbrella term used to describe the activities that promote the bridging of communities with socially conscious thought and action. "Civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference."

Houses of Faith- is defined as a cultural, social structure meant for religious or spiritual practices, such as prayer, rites of passage, or a form of reverencing a person, place or thing higher than oneself.

Livelihood "livelihood" will be defined as the capabilities, assets, activities, and strategies required and pursued by individuals households and organizations for means of living. (Source: Ashley and Carney (1999) p. 4.)

Livelihood Framework The Livelihood Framework is a tool to improve help in understanding of people livelihoods. Livelihood seeks to gain accurate and realistic understanding people strengths through social, human, natural, financial, and physical capital and how to convert into positive outcomes. (Livelihoods @dfid.gov.uk April 1999).

Social Capital- Social capital refers to those stocks of social trust, norms and networks that people can draw upon to solve common problems. Networks of civic engagement, such as neighborhood associations, sports clubs, and cooperatives, are an essential form of social capital,

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