



Nexus has a new website to go with our new name and identity!

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- Learn more about our work
- Find community building and community development resources
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SPRING 2010 INTERSECTIONS

Building More *Engaged* and *Powerful* Communities

BUILDING MORE ENGAGED AND POWERFUL COMMUNITIES

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From the Director



REPA MEKHA

For Nexus Community Partners (formerly Payne Lake Community Partners), 2009 was an exciting year. This past year represented a culmination of our strategic re-thinking process begun in 2007, an expansion of our work to include North Minneapolis and most notably a new name and identity. As we begin 2010, we're excited to strengthen and grow our efforts to build more engaged and powerful communities in Minneapolis and St. Paul.

As a community building intermediary, Nexus specializes in strengthening the social and human capital of the region's most excluded communities—pre-developing community capacity to take advantage of the opportunities provided by established housing, economic and business development intermediaries and other organizations. We connect high impact community building strategies to effective mainstream community and economic development activities in

order to achieve more sustainable and equitable development in the communities we work in.

At Nexus we utilize a toolkit of revitalization strategies, including convening diverse community residents and leaders; acting as a cultural mediator between grassroots residents and mainstream funders and developers; community outreach and engagement; promoting civic participation; community organizing; as well as incubating model asset-building initiatives in the areas of workforce development, successful homeownership, digital technology access, and financial literacy.

In 2010 our activities will continue to focus on two key community building strategies: asset building and community engagement. Nexus believes that by bridging these two areas we can help create an actively engaged community that has greater power over and responsibility for the decisions that shape their community and is in a better position to take advantage of asset building opportunities to end long term poverty.

Thank you for the support of our work as we work together to build more engaged and powerful communities.

Doing Business Differently on the East Side

The definition of 'entry-level' jobs has changed. The blue collar jobs of yesterday are gone, and higher skill levels are now required even for first jobs. On the East Side of St. Paul there are a growing number of workers without the skills needed to benefit from even the most basic job training. Those with some work history and limited skills are finding it difficult to find a job for which they are qualified. Skill requirements for "entry level" jobs are often far beyond the skill level of area job seekers, leaving an increasing pool of East Side residents unable to obtain livable wage jobs. To address this challenge, Employer Solutions, Inc. (ESI) developed the "First Step - Next Step Initiative; a Job Training, Placement and Career Advancement Strategy" in partnership with Regions Hospital, and funded by the McKnight and St. Paul Foundations and Nexus Community Partners.

Late in 2008, ESI and Nexus began having conversations about ways ESI could build upon its previous success and increase their impact through greater community involvement.

With Nexus' support ESI developed a more comprehensive approach to its work through the

implementation of its Integrated Community Based Workforce Development Model.

"We were looking to enhance our impact by rooting our work more deeply in the diverse community fabric of St. Paul, and asking communities to define their own issues and develop solutions that will be effective in their neighborhoods."

-ESI's CEO, Janet Ludden.

Through the initiative, ESI was able to implement an engagement strategy to directly connect ESI resources with community based organizations and residents. A Cultural Advisory Committee was formed to assist in effectively reaching and connecting with low-income communities, immigrants, refugees, and persons of color. Community meetings were held to invite participation to shape and inform this unique initiative.

This integrated approach linked residents, community leaders, agencies, and employers in new ways to better provide St. Paul's East Side residents the opportunity to obtain, retain and advance their careers, gain economic stability, and move toward wealth creation.

"This approach represents a new way of doing business for ESI. Bringing business, economic and community perspectives together to inform workforce development and training, we believe significantly increases our effectiveness and produces better results for the community." said Janet Ludden.



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- ➔ In 2009, 93% of enrolled students graduated from the program and 40% are working.
- ➔ ESI partnered with Project for Pride in Living to deliver the training curriculum and with the Center for Working Families, the Cultural Wellness Center, Goodwill Easter Seals and other organizations to provide referrals and on going support services to participants.
- ➔ More than a dozen community leaders representing the public, private and nonprofit sectors, as well as elected officials, economic development partners, chambers of commerce, employers and cultural and community leaders were engaged.
- ➔ ESI worked with over 29 local organizations through the Prosperity Campaign (a collaboration of St. Paul organizations working together to build a more prosperous East Side) and other relationships.



IMPACT

Community members are able to define local employment and training challenges and create and implement solutions that they believe to be most appropriate.

Community agencies are able to develop stronger partnerships, leverage resources, and enhance participant outcomes.

Employers are able to benefit from a more diverse workforce of skilled employees with strong social supports and networks.

A Community Building Framework

Despite a strong and respected community development infrastructure in the Twin Cities, as well as an engaged and robust philanthropic community, low-income people of color and immigrants continue to show persistent disparities along all socio-economic indicators. At Nexus we believe this gap exists because, while there are those within these communities who are able to capitalize on existing community development opportunities, there are many more who do not benefit from conventional community development efforts. To reach those most isolated, economically vulnerable and disadvantaged in our communities (those least likely to benefit from mainstream community development efforts) Nexus helps put in place highly targeted community building strategies. These more targeted approaches reach deeper into communities,

helping address the unique factors - including culture, language, family and personal background - that can lead to a person's inability to take advantage of existing opportunities and resources.

Whether by helping build the capacity of ethnically based CDCs or investing in organizations that do deep community engagement work on the East Side of St. Paul, Nexus recognizes that more attention and resources need to be focused on rebuilding and reweaving the social and human infrastructure of the communities we work in. Building this community infrastructure (and fusing it to the physical and economic infrastructure) is the necessary pre-condition that leads to more equitable and sustainable neighborhood revitalization efforts.

As a community building intermediary Nexus provides funding, technical assistance, research, evaluation and strategic support to ensure that the Twin Cities lowest income communities of color participate in and benefit from neighborhood revitalization efforts.

What is Community Building?

- ➔ Includes community outreach, community education, community organizing, civic participation and community engagement as tools to help engage residents often most isolated and left out from neighborhood revitalization efforts.
- ➔ Connects residents to a range of other individuals, groups, and networks engaged in collective action to improve conditions in their neighborhoods as well as in the broader community.
- ➔ Enhances the capacities of individuals and organizations in communities and the connections between them.
- ➔ Builds trust and networks, mobilizes the community for action, gives legitimacy to plans and lays the groundwork for future change.

Nexus Community Partners has established a distinctive role in the emerging field of community building:

- ➔ Addressing racial disparities in revitalization by ensuring that low-income residents can develop the skills to build assets and access supportive services.
- ➔ Promoting and modeling inclusion and cultural competence as prerequisites for equitable, sustainable community revitalization.
- ➔ Innovating participatory tools such as engagement, culturally-based outreach and education tools to reach low-income people of color and immigrants.
- ➔ Becoming a "mini-think tank" for identifying unseen community issues, particularly the needs and resources of culturally and socially isolated constituencies.
- ➔ Incubating "engaged" community building models that are spun off and brought to scale by other partners to expand social impact.