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An Evaluation of Over-the-Rhine Community Housing

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Abstract

There is little dispute that volunteers affect the capacity of Community Development Corporations that they serve. What is not clear is the type of work performed that contributes to the effectiveness of the nonprofit where service is rendered. To better understand the degree that volunteers can impact a nonprofits’ capacity, this project takes an objective view of Over-the-Rhine Community Housing, a grassroots Community Development Corporation, situated in Over-the-Rhine an inner-city neighborhood in Cincinnati, Ohio.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1: Background

Over-the-Rhine Community Housing (OTRCH) is a community development corporation (CDC) in Over-the-Rhine, a neighborhood in Cincinnati, Ohio. Officially incorporated in April 2006, this CDC was created from the merger of two former affordable housing groups: the Over-the-Rhine Housing Network and the Race Street Tenant Organization Co-operative (ReSTOC). CDCs are community-based, community-controlled, nonprofit organizations that have existed in the U.S. since the 1960s. They work to improve the physical and social infrastructures in target neighborhoods with populations significantly below the area’s median income.

With a commitment to provide affordable housing for low and moderate-income households residing in Over-the-Rhine (OTR), the organization’s mission states that OTRCH is “a nonprofit organization that works to build and sustain a diverse neighborhood that values and benefits low-income residents.”¹ To meet this mission, OTRCH outlines six principal goals: property management, property development, community development, education/advocacy, fund development and organizational capacity. Each of these goals are advanced through specifically associated programs and projects (Over-the-Rhine Community Housing 2006).

Historically, OTRCH has had a strong linkage with volunteers. In the 1970s and 1980s, ReSTOC and Over-the-Rhine Housing Network were formed through the grassroots efforts of community activists Buddy Gray and citizen volunteers.² Today volunteers play a part in the continued productivity of the organization (Over-the-Rhine Community Housing 2009).

Being a relatively small CDC with only 15 full-time employees and limited resources, OTRCH relies heavily on its relationship with volunteers drawn from the Over-the-Rhine community, as well as from nearby colleges, universities, high schools, and church groups. Opportunities for volunteers include the “general” program (now Skilled Volunteers) and Saturday crew, as well as

¹ Accessed from the WWW on April 2, 2009 at http://www.otrch.org/whoweare.html
² According to Smith (2000) grassroots associations are locally based, volunteer-run, formal nonprofit groups. These groups have official memberships of volunteers who perform most of the work/activity done in and by the nonprofits. They can also be comprised of both paid and unpaid volunteers.
programs made in partnership with AmeriCorps Vista, and Miami University’s School of Architecture. According to OTRCH, over 1,450 volunteers participate annually through one or more of its available volunteer programs.\(^3\)

1.2: Purpose of Study

CDCs are typically small nonprofit organizations with less than 20 permanent staff members. Their missions are typically related to affordable housing provision for low income households. CDC budgets are often insufficient to meet the needs of their stated missions and rely on a mixture of private and public grants from civic philanthropists and from federal, state and municipal funds earmarked for aspects of community development. Volunteer labor goes far to stretch the budget and further the goals of CDCs like OTRCH.

The purpose of this study is to determine how volunteers influence the effectiveness of OTRCH. To this end, the study questions former and current volunteers rather than OTRCH’s staff members. The study describes the typical characteristics of the organization’s volunteers, i.e., their age, sex, education level, and the length of their volunteer work with the CDC. The study also details the factors that attract volunteers, the types of work they are assigned, the preparation and training they receive to perform tasks, the level of autonomy they have in meeting responsibilities, their sense of achievement, and their perception of OTRCH prior to and after their volunteer experience.

1.2.1: Research Questions

OTRCH is one of about 4,500 CDCs that exist in the United States (The Democracy Collaborative 2007).\(^4\) Most CDCs have unique relationships with the community where they are located (Kohler 1966; Peterson 2000). To better understand the relationship that a grassroots organization like OTRCH has with its volunteers and with the neighborhood it serves, this study

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\(^3\) According to Over-the-Rhine Community Housing Director of Operations, Andy Hutzel, this number is based on head count and not individual participation in OTRCH’s volunteer programs. Therefore, repeat volunteers may be counted one or more times in the total.

\(^4\) Accessed from WWW on October 1, 2007 at www.community-wealth.org/strategies/panel/cdcs/index.html. The Democracy Collaborative is an international consortium of leading academic centers, civil society organizations, distinguished scholars and seasoned practitioners. They seek to provide information on subject matters considered deficient.
explores the phenomena of CDCs, the growth of what can be termed a CDC “industry,” and its place in the urban and planning history of the United States.

CDCs are community-based organizations (CBOs). Two of the prominent characteristics of the industry are that CDCs target centered and community-controlled. CDCs seek to improve the quality of life in low-income neighborhoods. As they are concerned with all aspects of community living, especially housing, their mission is more comprehensive in nature. The CDC industry operates from the belief that residents are more knowledgeable about the needs of their community, and therefore should have strong presence in the functionality of CDCs through resident participation (Stoutland 1999, 193).

To maintain the focus of this thesis, the literature review will answer the following questions:
1) How many CDCs are there in the United States and how has this number changed over time?
2) What are CDCs expected to accomplish and what in fact do they do?
3) How successful have CDCs been in the neighborhoods and communities they serve?
4) What factors affect the capacity of CDCs?
5) To what extent have volunteers aided CDCs?

1.2.2: Limitations

While the primary focus of this study is to explore how volunteers help CDCs like OTRCH, there are boundaries that set the extent of research. The first part of this study overviews the history of CDCs and their relationship with volunteers. Then, comprehensive histories of Over-the-Rhine and OTRCH are reviewed, i.e. a history of the “People’s Movement” – the political activism of Buddy Gray and fellow organizers in Over-the-Rhine in the 70s and 80s that does not reflect directly upon the issue of volunteer labor and volunteership. Also, concerning the history of OTRCH, there were limited sources that thoroughly cover Over-the-Rhine Housing Network (OTRNH), a former affordable housing organization that evolved into OTRCH.

Another aspect that limits the scope of this research is the lack of in-depth literature on volunteer labor within CDCs, both within the industry and by academics. According to Smith (2000) and Sharpe (2006) research on how volunteers contribute to small, volunteer-led nonprofits have
been traditionally overlooked in favor of the “established nonprofits,” even though grassroots
groups outnumber the established nonprofits by a ratio of ten to one. The role that volunteer
organizations play in building community capacity and fostering civic engagement has recently
received attention in social science with the emergence of neo-Tocquevillen thinking (Toepler
2003). Despite this Ladd (1999) believes that the “localness” or decentralization of the industry
makes measuring the impact of volunteer labor in CDCs difficult.

Finally, 10 out of 36 former and current volunteers of OTRCH approached participated in the
survey section of this study. Twenty-one questions were asked of each participant. Ten of the
questions were used to establish the characteristics of the participants, i.e. age, race, gender,
marital status, number of children, educational level, affiliation, current employment status, and
their current area of work. Charts and graphs have been used to show these quantitative results.
The other 11 survey questions sought to garner participants’ experience as volunteers with
OTRCH. Charts and graphs comparing participants’ responses and a narrative explaining the
qualitative findings are used to show these results.

1.3: Implications for OTRCH, CDCs, and Other Grassroots Organizations

The results of this study may provide OTRCH with a different perspective on its
volunteer programs that may lead to changes or improvements. Results may also show that
additional research is warranted by the CDC industry as well as by researchers of nonprofit
volunteer labor. Finally, it is hoped that the results of this study help to address the gap in the
available literature on the effect of volunteers on the capability of CDCs and other grassroots
organizations.

1.4: Chapter Outline

There are eight chapters that make up this study. This chapter, Chapter 1, introduces the
study area, the project’s purposes, research questions, and limitations. It also highlights
implications for the study results as well as provides a chapter outline. In Chapter 2, the study
methodology details the parameters of selecting participants, the process and conduct of the
surveys, and the analysis of survey results. Chapter 3 provides insight into the CDC industry as it
relates to the role of volunteers. A comprehensive history of the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood is
highlighted in Chapter 4. Key events that led to the creation of OTRCH as it relates the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood are explained in Chapter 5. In Chapter 6, details of OTRCH’s programs, projects and volunteers are highlighted. Chapter 7 presents an analysis and findings of the survey results from former and current volunteers of Over-the-Rhine Community Housing. This chapter also includes a summary of the suggested changes made by surveyed participants for OTRCH’s volunteer programs. Chapter 8 summarizes this project and tells how this study has filled the literature gap that exists in the area of volunteer labor in CDCs.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

2.1: Study Design

To determine how volunteers at OTRCH affected the organization’s capability, interviews were conducted with 10 former and current volunteers of the organization. Survey participants were assured that their involvement would remain confidential and that their names would be concealed as related to survey responses. Twenty-one questions were asked of each participant. Eleven questions served to identify personal characteristics of the volunteers: age, race, gender, marital status, number of children, educational level, affiliation, current employment status, and work hours attributed to volunteered, and their current area of work.

Volunteers were additionally asked the following 10 questions concerning their experience at OTRCH:

1. Motivating factors towards volunteering
2. Costs and benefits of volunteering
3. Type of work assigned
4. Direction provided by personnel (both paid staff and more veteran volunteers)
5. Training provided for accomplishing tasks
6. Degree of worker autonomy in performing assigned tasks
7. Contributions made by the volunteer to the organization that would facilitate the organization meeting its mission and goals
8. Overall perception of organization before and after volunteering
9. Perception of the organization’s ability to completed its mission
10. Suggested changes to volunteer programs
To protect the identity of participants a random number was assigned to each participant and preserved in a Master Sheet created with a spreadsheet application (Microsoft Excel 2007). Surveys were conducted either in person or by telephone. In-person interviews were conducted in settings agreed upon by the author and participant. At no time were surveys conducted on the premises of OTRCH. Telephone surveys were made to volunteers living outside of the Greater Cincinnati area and when local weather prevented an in-person interview. All surveys were recorded and transcribed, with the exception of one participant who requested to respond in written form. Questions administered in person or by telephone were recorded using a digital audio recorder. The digital audio files were then transferred to a computer for transcription by the author. Transcription was performed using a combination of digital media player for playback and text editing software (Windows Media Player with Microsoft Word 2007). Verbatim transcripts of survey responses for questions 1 through 10 were then analyzed using qualitative analysis software (NVivo). Responses to question 11 were summarized according to like changes that participants suggested for OTRCH’s volunteer programs.

### 2.2: Participants

The process of finding participants for this study involved two steps: 1) finding OTRCH volunteers, and 2) soliciting their participation. The author emailed Andy Hutzel, the Director of Operations at OTRCH, explaining the subject of the study and requesting a contact list of former and current volunteers. Hutzel provided a list containing 220 volunteer names. This list grouped volunteers by institutional affiliation only. No distinction was made as to whether volunteers were formerly associated with ReSTOC or Over-the-Rhine Housing Network. My prior working relationship with OTRCH facilitated the sharing of this data; a few years ago I intern with the organization.

Only 7 of the volunteers provided in Hutzel’s list had a telephone number listed, and 158 had a contact email addresses. Over a span of two months, 36 volunteers were solicited by email and 7

---

5. This qualitative software allows data that has no numeric value to be grouped for management and analysis. Data groupings make finding data patterns for assessment easier.

6. Most volunteers listed were affiliated with the following educational institutions: Berea College, Miami University, University of Cincinnati, Xavier University, Clark Montessori, Moeller High School, Mount Notre Dame High School, Ross High School, St. Columban High School, St. Xavier High School, Summit High School, Sycamore High School, Ursuline Academy High School, and Walnut Hills High School.
by phone. With the exception of selecting volunteers from different institutional affiliation, solicited volunteers were chosen randomly. All volunteers contacted by telephone became willing participants. Only five out of the 36 volunteers solicited by email showed interest and only three participated in this study. The majority of emails sent out were not responded to. Eight were returned as “failure,” “delivery delay,” and “out of office.” In consideration of time, no additional efforts were made to contact these individuals.

In introducing the study by email, two summaries of the project were prepared to help solicit participants. The initial summary included the title of the project and its purpose, the name of the author, how contact information was acquired, and assurance that all communications would be kept confidential. A second more detailed summary was provided when prospective participants conveyed interest for more information or indicated a willingness to participate. This summary included the title of the project and its purpose, an explanation of the method used to protect the participant’s identity, the number of survey questions and the projected length of survey, as well as an option for participants to receive a copy of the survey responses.

Prospective participants solicited by telephone were provided the title and purpose of the study. They were informed that the study was confidential and about the methods used to conceal their identity. All participants were informed of the author’s intention to digitally record their survey question responses, and were provided an option to refuse an audio recording of their response in favor of another method.

2.3: Eligibility Requirements

In order to participate in the study, participants were required to meet the following requirements:

- **18 Years or Older.** All participants had to be 18 years or older and mentally competent.
- **Due Length of Volunteership.** Participants had to have volunteered a minimum of 80 hours or 2 months at OTRCH. The requirement was set to ensure that selected participants held more than a minimal knowledge of the organization.
- **Non-Board Member of OTRCH.** While nonprofit board members are volunteers, participants in this study did not function in this role. The main reason for not soliciting
board members participation was potential liability. Board members are privy to proprietary information. They also legally bound by a duty of loyalty, which is a standard of faithfulness that requires them to act in the best interest of the organization. To avoid possible conflict of interest and potential bias, they are not included in this study.\footnote{This information is in accordance with OTRCH’s Board Guide, and Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Policies.}

\checkmark **Non-Tenant of OTRCH.** To preserve the survey from undue self-censorship and bias, participants could not be current tenants or service recipients of OTRCH. This eligibility requirement also served to eliminate participants who may have fallen under the protected or “vulnerable” class category. Some of OTRCH’s tenants are formerly homeless persons who receive substance abuse treatment through Buddy’s Place, McMicken Transitional Housing, Recovery Hotel, and the Jimmy Heath House, four supportive housing programs. While tenants of Buddy’s Place and the Jimmy Heath House receive permanent housing that includes onsite treatment, Recovery Hotel and McMicken Transitional Housing are transitional. At the end of treatment through Recovery Hotel or the Jimmy Heath House, service recipients may choose to seek permanent housing with OTRCH. There are no independent means to identify these tenants without violating possible conflict of interest between the organization and its tenants. Similar to its board members, OTRCH’s staff is bounded by policies that regulate proprietary information and conflict of interest.

\checkmark **Consent Form.** The University of Cincinnati’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) regulates all social and behavior science research that use human subjects as part of studies. In compliance with the IRB, all participants had to read and sign a consent form. For this study, the consent form highlighted measures used to protect the confidentiality of participants, the audio recording of survey responses and the subsequent deletion of collected recordings on the completion of the study, nonpayment for participation, participants’ right to request a copy of their responses as related to survey questions, participant’s right to not contribute to the study, and the contact (i.e. telephone numbers) information of the author and thesis chair.
2.4: Confidentiality

One of the most important points made when soliciting participants for this project was that participant identities would be concealed from everyone except for the author. This was done both to protect the privacy of participants and to garner responses that were not self-censored due to fear of exposure. Participants, however, were not restricted from discussing their role in the study with others. To ensure that participants’ identities were concealed, a Master Sheet was created using a spreadsheet application and each participant was randomly assigned an identification number. To prevent the possibility of identification profiling this number was not referenced when quoting comments made by participants in the findings as presented in Chapter 7. Additionally, all tracking information showing the true name of participants was destroyed upon completion of the study.

2.5: Analysis

Once the surveys were conducted and transcribed, the responses were grouped into like responses and analyzed to help determine volunteer impact on the effectiveness of OTRCH. Each participant suggested one or more changes to OTRCH’s volunteer programs in their survey responses.

NVivo, a qualitative analysis application, was used as the primary analytical tool for the survey. Using NVivo, the transcribed survey responses were placed in groups based on their similarity, by author and then analyzed manually for assessment. Data results derived from questions 1 through 10 are presented in Chapter 7.
CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1: Community Development Corporations in the U.S.

Since their inception in the 1960s, the number of CDCs increased dramatically (see Table 1). The growth of this nascent CDC industry has witnessed both “mission creep” (the tendency of organizations to pursue goals beyond their originally stated mission) as well as the related struggle of CDCs to fund their operations (Hallman 1984, 225; Peterman 2000, 50). To survive, CDCs sought funding from sources outside their communities, neighborhoods, and cities.

The requirements of these outside funders, however, brought additional challenges. Outside funders pressured the local and volunteer driven CDCs to become more professionalized in order to achieve their stated goals and to credibly measure and report their progress. As a result, some critics questioned whether professionally led CDCs, funded by outside dollars, actually live up to their reputation as community-based and community-controlled organizations (Medoff and Sklar 1994, 107; Stoecker 1996).

Meanwhile, the industry has struggled with how exactly to best measure CDC performance. The problem is rooted in the fact that CDCs have both organizational and contextual variables. Organizational variables are internal and are related to the capacity of the CDC to achieve its mission. Conversely, contextual variables are external and beyond the control of the organization. To get a clear understanding of the complexity involved in measuring CDCs

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Table 1: Growth of CDCs in the U.S.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th># of CDCs</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960s</td>
<td>less than 100</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970s</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>186%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990s</td>
<td>3,600</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>4,600</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Congress for Community Economic Development 1999; Peirce and Steinback 1990; Peterman 2000; Rohe and Bratt 2003; Swope 2000; Zdenek 1987

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8 The industry experienced two mission creeps. CDCs are community-based, community-controlled, nonprofit organizations that work to improve physical and social infrastructures in target neighborhood significantly below the area’s median income.
performance, both organizational and contextual variables must be reviewed (Gitttell and Wilder 1999).

### 3.1.1: Evolution of CDCs

CDCs ascended during the early-1960s when disillusioned community members organized to address poverty issues at the local level in their neighborhoods in response to failed federal programs, such as the First New Deal (1933) and Second New Deal (1935), and later on Model Cities Act of 1966 and the 1964 Poverty Program, which sought to reduce economic hardship and encourage social reform (Peterman 2000, 49; Stoutland 1999, 197; Twelvetrees 1996, 7). America’s inner cities had descended into a state of crisis by the earlier 1950s as many areas experienced population booms when blacks migrated from the southern United States and when WWII veterans returned home. Some of the most prominent social problems in cities were those related to housing and employment (Kohler 1966; Peterson 2000).

Expanding rapidly, the industry gained prominence in the 1970s. It is estimated that 700 CDCs were founded nationwide during that decade (Peirce and Steinbach 1990; Peterman 2000, 2; Rohe and Bratt 2003; Swope 2000; Zdenek 1987). By the 1980s the numbers of CDCs increased to 2,000, and grew to 3,600 through the 1990s. In 2005, over 4,600 CDCs existed in the United States. The rapid growth of the industry continued despite the challenges of insufficient funding (Hallman 1984, 225; National Congress for Community Economic Development 2006; Peterman 2000, 50).

While the initial focus of CDCs in the 1960s was in the area of job creation, some of the first public and private funding available to CDCs came through housing subsidy programs

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9 This group also includes community action organizations that evolved into development agencies. Some of the first such organizations were Woodlawn Organization–Chicago, IL 1960, Spanish Speaking Unity Council–Oakland, CA 1964 (known as The Unity Council), and Watts Labor and Community Action Committee–Los Angeles, CA 1965 (Twelvetrees 1996).

Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation is considered the first formally established CDC by some. It was founded in Brooklyn, NY in 1967 by then United States Senator Robert Kennedy and former Attorney General Jacob Javits. Kennedy also was instrumental in the creation of the 1966 Special Impact Amendment to the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, which subsequently was one of the primary funding sources of Bedford (Filner 2001; Kohler 1966; Twelvetrees 1996).9

10 Historical migrations of blacks from the southern United States are the Great Migration (1916-1930) and the Second Great Migration (1940-1970).
emphasizing community and housing development.\textsuperscript{11} To secure funding, in the 1970s CDCs broadened their focus to incorporate housing development and renovation as well as the renting and selling of housing to low and moderate income households (Filner 2001; Hallman 1984, 223; Kelly 1977; Kohler 1966; LISC 2008; Peterman 2000, 51). As a result, CDCs became known as agents of community-driven, comprehensive change in communities facing gross disparities and disinvestment (Bennett and Giloth 2007, 39; Perry 1987, 9).

While the industry made great strides with its comprehensive approach to dealing with neighborhood issues, CDCs were unable to fully sustain support of ventures that created jobs. They often lacked the fiscal resources for such undertakings. Therefore, affordable housing production with some limited commercial activity became central to many CDCs’ programming by the 1980s (Bennett and Giloth 2007, 39; Johnson 2004). This transition was further encouraged as federal housing subsidies and other private and public funding programs increasingly stipulated housing development as a rudimentary requirement for resource allocation (Johnson 2004). Consequently, CDCs transition from a comprehensive development approach to housing production was the first mission creep experienced by the industry.

Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, federal cutbacks to the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) housing subsidy programs significantly undermined housing development for many CDCs and other community-based organizations (CBOs) that tried to produce low-income housing.\textsuperscript{12} The Reagan and Bush Administrations determined that the housing problem was not one of supply but of affordability; thus, they shifted emphasis from supply-side to demand-side subsidies. Housing subsidies were provided for low to moderate income households seeking housing, rather than to the CDCs (Rohe and Bratt 2003; Swanstrom 1999).

\textsuperscript{11} Federal housing subsidy and voucher programs includes the 1966 Special Impact Amendment to the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, later refined to the Title IV of the Community Service Act in 1974; Section 8 authorized through the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974; and the Community Block Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program, which replaced the Model Cities Program, formed in 1974.

Nonprofit housing funders include the Ford Foundation, a charitable foundation with a humanitarian focus, chartered in 1936. The Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), one of the primary funders of CDCs, was created in 1979 through the Ford Foundation.

\textsuperscript{12} HUD is a cabinet-level agency that was created in 1965. It succeeds the Housing and Home Finance Agency (HHFA), and administered all non-farm housing programs.
These cutbacks spurred the development of other programs to attempt fill the funding gap. While these programs assisted CDCs and other nonprofits they were not sufficient supplements for the HUD housing subsidy cuts (Peterman 2000, 51; Rohe, et al 2003; Swanstrom 1999). The funding changes forced CDCs to take a proactive stance, which led to the second mission creep in the industry. CDCs began pursuing partnerships with local intermediaries, like Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), and CDCs gathered support from the public sector as well as corporations and foundations (Nye and Glickman 2000). While this has been beneficial, the relationship that CDCs have forged with external resources has caused some critics to question their commitment to the neighborhoods that they serve (Medoff and Sklar 1994, 107; Stoecker 1996).

3.1.2: Credibility of CDCs

Some CDCs are oriented towards a comprehensive approach to community problems, while others place strong emphasis on specific program activities, such as housing production and organizational structure (Rubin 1993; Stoutland 1999, 195; Twelvetrees 1996, 9). The organizational structure of CDCs focuses on resident involvement, theoretically, community members influence all decisions made by CDCs (Stoutland 1999, 193). The beneficial value of an organization being “community-controlled” is based on the belief that residents know best the special needs of their own neighborhood. According to this belief, the community should thus apply their knowledge and control any restorative activities through their participation (Katz 1989; Stoecker 1996; Stoutland 1999, 193). While CDCs have been publicly lauded as community-based, community-controlled organizations that work to enact social and physical change in poor communities weakened by years of disinvestment (Rubin 1993; Stoutland 1999, 193), some critics are pessimistic about CDCs’ effectiveness.

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13 The Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) was created in 1986 and made permanent in 1993; the HOME Program was enacted through the Affordable Housing Act of 1990; and Empowerment Zones/Enterprise Communities was designated in 1994 through the Clinton Administration.

14 Intermediaries are umbrella organizations formed to community-based organizations by providing them with technical, financial, and political support (Swanstrom 1999).
Critics find that today’s CDCs no longer represent of community residents. In their view, CDCs today are more “professionalized” than the CDCs of the past, initially established through community activism (Filner 2001; Goetz 1993; Stoecker 1996; Stoutland 1999, 199; Taub 1990; Vidal 1992). According to these critics CDCs went from being a leader of community empowerment to nonprofit organizations dedicated to production and maintenance of affordable housing stock (Pierce and Steinbach 1987).

The key distinction between the CDCs of today and yesteryear is capital. Until the 1970s when public and private funding became available, CDCs had been developed and supported through largely grassroots efforts. Outside funding became critical to the survival of the industry as poor communities were unable to generate adequate community-controlled capital to sustain them (Berndt 1977, 35; Husock 2002; Knotts 2005; Stoecker 1996; Stoutland 1999, 194).

While public and private funding allowed CDCs to remain viable, as a consequence, some compromise between the mission of the CDC and that of their funders was inevitable. Most funders have their own agenda in making their capital available (Nye and Glickman 2000). For example, the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), one of the primary funders of CDCs nationwide, places a higher value on housing production than community building. To secure funding from LISC, a CDC must incorporate housing development into their program (Giloth et al 1992; Stoecker 1996).

Another consideration of some funders when making capital available is the future viability of the CDC. Much of the funding that CDCs receive through public and private sources is temporary. When a funding resource dries up, a replacement must be found. As an industry, this often leaves CDCs in a constant state of flux. To make CDCs more self-sustaining and stable, many of the industry’s partners push for CDCs to improve their financial conditions by diversifying their revenue and developing standard sources of income. Partners want CDCs to augment their operating budget by increasing fees and revenues as well as by becoming more effective fundraisers (Nye and Glickman 2000).
While the intention of some partners is to reposition the CDC industry in order to become sustainable, the resulting pressure drives CDCs to become more businesslike and professional as they focus on efficiency and performance measures rather than community empowerment. There is little recourse for CDCs but to navigate these conflicting interests as their survival depends on available funds. The conflict will continue so long as the CDCs require funds that cannot be met within the communities they serve (Nye and Glickman 2000; Stoutland 1999, 195).

3.1.3: Success of CDCs

Measuring the success of CDCs can be difficult because of the variety of factors that influence the performance of CDCs. Most studies that measure CDC performance tend to underestimate variations in efficiency of CDCs. Developing a measure that takes into account all components presents significant challenges (Cowen, Rohe and Baku 1999).

Studies have attempted to measure the success of CDCs by looking at aspects of their performance. Some of these studies focused on the CDC’s operating budget and size, housing production, programming activities, and overall improvement of neighborhood conditions. Often times, the outcomes of these studies yield incomplete results as important variables are not considered. For instance, Cowan, et al. (1999) conducted a study of staff size and annual budget to determine the typical operations of CDCs. The study compared 130 CDCs, some with 95 staff members and annual budget over $10 million. While the typical CDC is small, with an average size of seven staff members and operating budgets under $700,000, the presence of the larger CDCs distorted the measures of performance that would have shown the operations of a typical CDC.

The variables that affect CDC outcome can be contextual or organizational. Within these contextual and organizational variables are quantitative and qualitative elements that also prove difficult to measure. To determine the performance of a CDC, consideration must be given to the organization capacity of the CDC and the characteristics of the neighborhood in which the CDC operates. Broadly, these attributes represent the organizational and contextual variables respectively.
While the CDC industry is founded on community-based development and empowerment, each CDC’s capacity is unique. In this context, “capacity” refers to the internal structure of an organization that enables it to carry out its vision and mission effectively (De Vita and Fleming 2001; Glickman and Servon 2000; Nye and Glickman 2000; Rohe, Bratt and Biswas 2003; Wagner 2007). Providing a more expansive definition, Nye and Glickman (2000) identify five types of capacity comprised of organizational variables: resource capacity, organizational capacity, networking capacity, programmatic capacity and political capacity.

1. **Resource Capacity.** This is the ability of a CDC to develop funding through partnerships, subsidies, grants, loans, fundraisers, and contracts. Financial capital is essential to the stability, sustainability, and growth of CDCs. With proper funding a CDC can increase the scale and scope of projects and reduce development time. Access to investment capital can also afford CDCs the opportunity to enlarge their program capacity which can work to attract other outside funding sources. A lack of adequate operating capital can result in downsizing, merging, or failure (Glickman and Servon 1998; Nye and Glickman 2000; Rohe and Bratt 2003).

2. **Organizational Capacity.** Human capital and the internal operations of CDCs are components of organizational capacity. This encompasses the administrative staff, executive director, volunteers, and board of directors (Cowan, Rohe, and Baku 1999; Rohe and Bratt 2003; Glickman and Servon 2000). A CDC must develop its human capital through ongoing training and other professional development programs, in order to be efficient. Also, appropriate incentives such as benefits and competitive salaries must be offered to attract and retain skilled professionals.

Further, a skilled, knowledgeable, and experienced executive director can also affect the organizational capacity of a CDC. Some studies of the performance of CDCs note a correlation between the age, longevity and success of CDCs with the leadership abilities and tenure of executive directors. Stable leadership allows a CDC to make strategic decisions that enable them to carry out their missions more effectively.
(Cowan, Rohe, and Baku 1999; Gittell and Wilder 1999; Glickman and Servon 1998; Nye and Glickman 2000).

3. **Networking Capacity.** This is the CDC’s ability to interact and partner with other institutions, both inside and outside the target neighborhood. By connecting with external sources, CDCs have opportunities to enhance their knowledge, experience, efficiency, and resource base. This may allow for increased performance and organizational efficiency (Glickman and Servon 1998; Glickman and Servon 2000).

4. **Programmatic Capacity.** CDCs try to meet the changing needs of their target neighborhood through the programs that they offer. Some of the programming that CDCs typically engage in includes building and managing housing, economic development, family services, crime fighting, and job creation. A CDC’s programmatic capacity will differ at different stages of its development. For instance, an emerging CDC is more than likely to focus singularly on housing development than an established or mature CDC. The more stable the financial capital, the more diverse the program activities a CDC can offer (Cowan, Rohe, and Baku 1999; Glickman and Servon 1998; Glickman and Servon 2000).

5. **Political Capacity.** CDCs try to influence local policies through political processes in advocacy of neighborhood needs. Some critics argue that CDCs today have traded their capacity for political organizing in order to receive more favorable access to funding from institutions, corporations, and public agencies. (Gittell and Wilder 1999; Glickman and Servon 1998; Stoecker 1996).

While organizational variables reveal the internal organizational aspects that affect a CDC’s performance, contextual variables reveal the external context in which the CDC operates, i.e. the neighborhood and community beyond its control. Rohe and Bratt (2003) identify six contextual variables that CDCs encounter: market forces, competition, city policies, the role of intermediaries and other funders, lack of support and trust.
1. *Market Forces.* Housing market forces are complex. They are driven by several elements, including income and housing prices, demographics and social change, as well as economic factors like employment and consumer confidence (Building 2004). A CDC’s financial health can be affected by both strong and weak markets. A strong housing market can escalate the costs of building while reducing the availability of land and buildings, thus making affordable housing development virtually impossible. Conversely, a weak housing market based on low demand can escalate the costs of operation. This situation makes for a difficult challenge to a CDC involved in providing affordable housing as it impedes their ability to fully lease units. As vacancies increase, rent revenue declines (Bratt and Rohe 2003; Rohe and Bratt 2003). Since CDCs strive to keep the cost of their housing units low in order to serve the poor, reductions in rent revenue cause them to rely heavily on subsidies to fill the gap. These subsidies are necessary because CDCs cannot raise rents so as to cover the increased operational costs caused by the vacancies (Peterman 2000, 51).

2. *Competition.* The funding changes in federal housing programs and the expansion of the industry between the 1980s and 1990s resulted in CDCs competing with each other for the same limited funding sources. To procure funding, CDCs must be deemed effective by the funder. Furthermore, a mismatch in CDCs and funders’ individual priorities may also prevent receipt of funding (Bratt and Rohe 2003). Without adequate funding for their operations, a CDC may be unable to attract skilled and talented staff. Because more staff time will need to be dedicated to fundraising activities, the CDC may experience a reduction in productivity (Bratt and Rohe 2003; Rohe et al. 2003).

3. *City Policies.* While a CDC’s success is not solely dependent on local government, the policies of local governments can affect an individual organization’s viability. Local governments control how funding from federal programs such as CDBG and HOME are distributed. If a local government elects to place a requirement on a CDC that is beyond its organizational capacity to meet, there is limited recourse for the CDC (Rohe and Bratt 2003).
4. **Role of Intermediaries and Other Funders.** As noted previously, a mismatch in objectives by CDCs and their funders can be problematic. Intermediaries, and other funders, are corporations into themselves and have their own interests to consider when allocating funds. Because of the shortage of funding, CDCs may be tempted to realign their focus in order to procure resources. Depending on conditions set by the intermediaries and other funders, this can prove to be just as detrimental to CDCs as receiving too little funding (Bratt and Rohe 2003; Rohe et al. 2003).

5. **Lack of Support.** CDCs must garner support from public, private and other nonprofit organizations as well as city officials. These networks are beneficial to CDCs as there is a potential to share knowledge, gain access to other resources, and influence public policy (Rohe and Bratt 2003).

6. **Trust.** There must be a level of transparency by CDCs and their constituents to succeed. A lack of trust can cause CDCs to lose invaluable players for the healthy growth and development of the industry itself (Rohe et al. 2003).

Within the contextual and organizational variables are qualitative and quantitative elements. Quantitative elements contain measureable units from which certain conclusions may be drawn. While inferences can be reached using qualitative elements, measurement is difficult. For example, studies that focus on housing production have quantitative elements that can be computed to derive a measureable outcome for comparison. Qualitative elements, such as a survey of improved neighborhood conditions, can be analyzed to help interpret results reached through quantitative analysis.

### 3.2: CDC Volunteers

The capacity of CDCs is extended though the use of volunteers (Cowan, Rohe, and Baku 1999). CDCs are grassroots, community-based organizations that were spurred on through volunteer resident initiatives (Gitttell and Wilder 1999). Generally, it is assumed that the greatest impacts of voluntary efforts have been in the arenas of civic engagement and organizational
capacity. CDC volunteers can greatly impact the relationship between their organization and the community they serve. They can also influence programmatic and networking capacities (Cowan, Rohe, and Baku 1999; Ladd 1999, 49; Sharpe 2006).

Most of the literature addressing contributions by volunteers in CDCs focuses primarily on voluntary board members. There is, however, limited literature that provides an in-depth perspective of the kinds of contributions that Gittell and Vidal (1998) identify as “quality volunteers” in the CDC industry. Quality volunteers are individuals who commit to investing a significant amount of time and energy to CDCs in target neighborhoods. They may or may not serve as board members (Gittell and Vidal 1998, 84).

According to Smith (2000), voluntary sector research typically ignores the contributions of volunteers on the grassroots level as well. Two reasons for the lack of comprehensive literature on quality volunteers in CDCs and other grassroots nonprofits are the decentralization of the field and the preference given to more recognizable nonprofits. Moreover, Ladd (1999) notes that grassroots organizations have a degree of “devolution” and “localness” that creates difficulty for those trying to measure the level of participation, as opposed to organizations that are more centralized and national. Quality volunteers in grassroots organizations, such as CDCs, are also overlooked in favor of the more “established nonprofit” sectors. This is despite the fact that grassroots nonprofit organizations outnumber the established nonprofits sector (Smith 2000, 229).

3.2.1: Voluntary Board Members

The success of CDCs and other nonprofit organizations in general has been linked to their boards (Rohn, Bratt, and Biswas 2003). Boards of directors for CDCs are voluntary. They are ultimately responsible for the governance and leadership of the organization, which is how they influence organizational capacity. Board members uphold the CDC’s purpose, mission, and values by setting policies, direction and priorities. They select the executive director to run the organization. Board members participate in steering committees, e.g. finance, grant review, fundraising, and personnel, that are critical to the sustainability of CDCs. Sound directional decisions made by boards can induce growth in programmatic capacity as the CDC matures.
Through their external associations board members can also enhance the networking capacity of a CDC (Rohn, Bratt, and Biswas 2003; Gittell and Vidal 1998; Mueller 1998). Besides stabilizing CDCs, board members can also cause organizations to function ineffectively or fail completely.

Since board members are at the helm of CDCs, it is important that they understand the community that they serve. It is assumed by some that CDC boards are representative of the organization’s target neighborhood. Thereby, they are acquainted with the unique needs and characteristics of the community, thus making them better decision makers (Knottes 2005). This may not be true.

Those critics who argue that today’s typical CDC is not community-controlled (or any representative of the community) also believe that the professionalization of the CDC industry resulted from changes in board composition. Community board members, in some instances, have been displaced by business professionals who are more interested in the bottom line instead of community values (Nye and Glickman 2000; Stoecker 1996; Zdenek 1999). The ideal relationship has become one of steward rather than advocate. As a result some CDCs have lost the connection, trust, and support of community members (Stoecker 1996; Williams 1985, 149).

Another aspect of the board that can cause failure or dysfunction in a CDC is the quality of the relationship it has with its executive director (Bratt and Rohe 2004; Knottes 2005; Nye and Glickman 2000). Executive directors have an enormous influence on the operating style and ability of a CDC to perform its work (Gittell and Vidal 1998). Boards must be careful to select a qualified and competent executive director to operate their CDC. The relationship must consist of trust, open communication and transparency, so that the board is receiving accurate and timely information about the operations of the organization. Boards must maintain their roles in the governance and leadership of the organization. Micromanagement or passivity on the part of board members can also cause the organization to decline (Rohe, et al. 2003).
3.2.2: Quality Volunteers

Despite the limited literature on quality volunteers in CDCs, some understanding can be had by taking a broader perspective and looking at the entire sector of volunteers for community based organizations (CBOs). A CBO is a private or public nonprofit that functions to meet the community’s human, educational, environmental or public safety needs (Walker 2002). In the context of the industry’s own definition CDCs are also CBOs (Gittel and Wilder 1999; Lowe 2006, 4; Silverman 2005). Parts of the voluntary sector research, the National Congress for Community Economic Development (NCCED), and the United States Department of Labor present facts and statistics concerning CDC volunteers together with other CBOs.

The standard organizational profile for CDCs incorporated in the 1980s reveals that CDCs have approximately 10 paid employees, 11 board members, and 5 volunteers, according to the 2005 Census performed by the NCCED, (see Table 2).^{15}

Quality volunteers are invaluable to CDCs as they donate a considerable amount of time through in-kind services to organizations (Gittell and Vidal 1998.84). Some view the role of these volunteers as just being supplementary or supportive (Lauffer and Gorodezky 1977). Others, however, believe that quality volunteers have taken on more staff-like roles (Grossman and Furano 2002).

Voluntary sector research show that some quality volunteers are progressively required to take on administrative roles that extend beyond the scope of the typical supplemental or supportive role that worked to enhance productive for-paid staff. Today’s volunteers are expected to be dependable, give more time, and contribute to the daily operations of organizations (Grossman and Furano 2002).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CDC Staff</th>
<th>Median Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full time staff</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part time staff</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board of Directors</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NCCED 2005

^{15} While no information is available concerning the population size of their neighborhood or the demographic composition of their community, the typical CDCs target urban areas (NCCED 2005).
One of the reasons for this shift in responsibilities of volunteers, especially in CDCs, is the aforementioned loss of federal funding during the Reagan and Bush administrations’ in the 1980s and early 90s. The loss of HOME and CDBG subsidies and other investment capital further hinders CDCs from attracting or retaining qualified staff, pressing them to fill the gap with voluntary labor (Bessant and Annis 2004, 15; Grimason 2007). According to Farrell (2005) unpaid staff can actually save organizations money. It is estimated that volunteers saved communities $4.45 billion with the services that they rendered in 2005. In many instances, the widespread utilization of volunteers has changed the scope of voluntary training and management.

While organizations previously emphasized volunteer training and management, increased reliance on voluntary labor has made volunteer training and management the rule rather than the exception. Training volunteers can bring their skills and knowledge up to speed so they can perform tasks beneficial to CDCs. The presence of well-trained quality volunteers enhances organizational capacity by enabling CDCs to extend programmatic activities. Volunteers can also enrich networking capacity through the relationships that they have beyond the organization (Ferguson and Dickens 1999, 15; Sharpe 2006).

Some volunteer sector researchers, however, believe that nonprofits should screen prospective volunteers prior to engaging them in any type of training in order to determine their level of skill and commitment. The reasoning behind screening applicants is time and the cost of training. An organization wastes resources when training less committed volunteers who may leave the organization shortly after receiving training (Bessant and Annis 2004, 10; Grossman and Furano 2002).

The work that volunteers perform puts them in a position where they can affect the reputation of CDCs. Therefore, regular supervision of volunteers is crucial to insure that they are effective. Some volunteer sector research shows a positive correlation in performance and attendance with volunteers that are supervised by professional staff (Grossman and Furano 2002).
One of the challenges that overseeing volunteers creates for nonprofits is its potential to hamper the efficiency of the managing staff (Grossman and Furano 2002). To minimize the loss of productivity in the professional staff some organizations utilize more experienced volunteers as volunteer coordinators (Urban Institute 2004).

3.3: Summary

CDCs were created when federal poverty programs failed to properly address some of the social problems of past decades. Although the industry flourished rapidly, it faced significant challenges. One of the primary challenges for CDCs has been retaining their credibility as a community-based and community-controlled organization in the face of pressure from outside funders for the CDC to become more professional. Additionally, the conflicting mission of funders and CDCs is a source of stress on organizational capacity. Meanwhile the CDC industry has struggled with determining performance measures to report achievement. Past studies have tried to isolate various indictors, such as operating budget and size or housing production. These studies have failed to identify such measures. The reason for this is that CDCs are multidimensional, with both contextual and organizational variables. Some variables are measurable while others are not, and qualitative research helps to explain quantified results.

Volunteers extend the capacity of CDCs. The work that they perform can increase the productivity and quality of services offered by organizations. While training and managing some volunteers may be costly, their value can far exceed the price because they fill gaps caused by federal and local funding cuts.

CHAPTER 4: THE OVER-THE-RHINE NEIGHBORHOOD

4.1: History of Over-the-Rhine

CDCs target poor neighborhoods that are significantly below the area’s median income. These neighborhoods are often places of physical and social disinvestment (Rubin 1993; Stoutland 1999, 193). Communities deteriorate due to disinvestment, which in turn results from a withdrawal of capital. In more simplistic terms it is the loss of wealth. Physical and social disinvestment occurs in neighborhoods when a substantial amount of the population and jobs are
loss and not replaced. This is also accompanied by an increase in the concentration of poverty and crime (Immergluck and Bush 1995).

Over-the-Rhine, one of Cincinnati’s oldest neighborhoods, is the site for considerable CDC activity. Over-the-Rhine Community Housing is one of several CDCs that operates in the neighborhood. To better understand CDC activity in Over-the-Rhine, this chapter traces key events in the history of neighborhood that caused it to be a place where such an organization could develop.

4.1.1: Evolution of the Neighborhood

Originally incorporated as a part of Cincinnati in 1802, the OTR neighborhood began to expand in the late 1820s with the construction of the Miami and Erie Canal (Ohio Historical Society 2007). Its growth was primarily due to low land costs and the continuous influx of German immigrants beginning in the 1830s. Later shifts reflected displaced blacks from the West End -an adjacent neighborhood- to make way for the construction I-71 in 1950s, and the migration of Appalachians after WWII (Ohio Historical Society 2007; Schill and Nathan 1983, 80). Between 1860 and 1900, OTR was considered the hub of German culture in Cincinnati, with its own businesses, stores, bars and restaurants (Profitability.net 2007). The urban fabric of the neighborhood comprised a large area of distinctive architecture from the period (Historic Conservation Office 2005). While never a high-income area, OTR was considered an attractive middle-class neighborhood (Schill and Nathan 1983, 80).

In the early-1900s through the 1960s, OTR population began a slow decline. The neighborhood’s population dropped from 44,475 in 1900 to 27,577 by 1960. The Great Depression caused many longtime businesses in OTR to close their doors. OTR was considered a neighborhood in decline by the 1940s. This population change was exacerbated by the advent of the interstate highway system (Profitability.net 2007).  

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16 \hspace{1cm} \text{Accessed from the WWW on October 7, 2007 at www.irhine.com/index.jsp?page=history_intro.html.} \\
17 \hspace{1cm} \text{Accessed from the WWW on May 26, 2009 at www.irhine.com/index.jsp?page=history_new_identity.}
\end{tabular}}\]
The Over-the-Rhine community continued its decline after WWII, as segments of the populace gained prominence. Across the county, many inner-city residents began to migrate to suburban communities assisted by changes in federal urban policies and the advent of the highway system in the 1950s and ‘60s. Neighborhood businesses followed this trend. As German-Americans migrated out, poor Appalachians and displaced blacks from the West End neighborhood became the predominant ethnic groups in the neighborhood (Ohio Historical Society 2007). OTR was cited by Cincinnati’s social work administrators as a problem area in the 1950s due to its concentration of poverty. As the home of economically distressed residents, OTRs architectural fabric began to deteriorate due to lack of upkeep and investment (Miller & Tucker 1998).

4.1.2: Rise of Social Activism

The Cincinnati Metropolitan Master Plan of 1948 set forth plans for slum clearance and land use changes in neighborhoods, including OTR, throughout the city (Miller and Tucker 1998, 29). Structures were to be razed and the land reused for industrial and low-density residential redevelopment. This would result in the displacement of existing residents, institutions and businesses. To assure the availability of relocation housing for persons displaced, the Ohio and the federal redevelopment laws of 1949 made provisions for such families (Miller and Tucker 1998, 37).  

The city’s first effort at slum clearance occurred in the West End, a predominately black neighborhood. Subsequently, slum clearance also made way for the construction of the expressway which cut across the West End neighborhood resulting in a loss of residential housing and displacement. OTR was to be the next slum clearance project on the city’s agenda. Because the city chose to start their clearance efforts in the black census tracts of the West End neighborhood, accusations of discriminatory practices arose. This was also accompanied by complaints of people who did not want their neighborhood sited for relocation housing for the displaced. There were concerns that property values would decrease, that crime and juvenile delinquency would increase, and that the presence of the poor would cause middle-class

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18 Alfred Bettman, attorney and former chair of the Cincinnati Planning Commission from 1930 to 1945, helped draft these laws that obligated the city government to assure relocation housing to the displaced. The Planning Commission considered this manageable until complicated by race which became a factor in the slum clearance of the West End neighborhood.
neighborhoods to decline (Miller and Tucker 1998, 38; Taylor 1993, 14). These problems forestalled the city’s plans for slum clearance in OTR.

Plans for slum clearance in OTR were never realized due to the problems associated with the West End’s slum clearance. The city abandoned its efforts for OTR’s slum clearance in 1957 and instead focused its clearance and redevelopment activities on commercial properties within the central business district (Miller and Tucker 1998, 40). This redirection in the 1948 Master Plan allowed neighborhood activists who opposed slum clearance to rally in the 1950s to form what are now called community action organizations (Miller and Tucker 1998, 59). One of OTR’s first recognized community action organizations was the Uptown Basin Council, formed in 1965. The aim of this organization was to improve the quality of life of the poor in OTR through social programs.

This grassroots activism and the shift in the city’s focus resulted in a reformulation of the city’s vision for OTR. By the 1960s, the city’s focus switched from demolition of the neighborhood to an anti-poverty campaign (Miller and Tucker 1998, 73). One of the programs that emerged out of this commotion was the 1971 Cincinnati Model Cities program. Model Cities sought to engage OTR residents in drafting their own neighborhood master plan by encouraging them to define their own needs and solve their own problems in partnership with a task force headed by Harris Forusz, a planner and University of Cincinnati professor who was hired by the city to stimulate community participation (Miller and Tucker 1998, 89).

Three years later, when the Model Cities program proved to be ineffective, a new cadre of community organizers arose: religious leaders (priests, ministers, etc.). This group disputed any proposal that sought to changes the physical design or culture of the neighborhood. During this time, the Nixon administration mandated a dispersal of federal housing subsidies for low and moderate-income residents with the objective of decentralizing the concentration of poverty common to inner-city neighborhoods (Miller and Tucker 1998, 82, 96). The overall effect would be to disperse the poor to lower poverty neighborhoods in the outer city. Neighborhood activists

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19 By 1964 the city completed abandoned its ideas of slum clearance in favor of conservation and perseveration approaches to revive Cincinnati as well as the OTR neighborhood (Miller and Tucker 1998, 57).
and some residents worried that the city government wanted to take control of OTR in order to convert it into a “chic” neighborhood with a racially and socio-economically mixed population (Miller and Tucker 1998, 85).

4.1.3: Population Shift

While the city government and neighborhood activists wrestled over the neighborhood’s future, OTR’s population continued to decline. The overall population decreased approximately 50 percent from 27,577 to 15,025 between 1960 and 1970. Meanwhile, the blacks in the neighborhood more than doubled from 2,720 to 5,830 (see Table 3) (Historic Conservation Office 2005). Despite this population shift, the racial composition remained relatively stable between 1960 and 1970. Whites comprised 60 percent and blacks 40 percent (Community Reinvestment Forum 2001).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3: Shift in OTR’s Black Population</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1960</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OTR: Total Population</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>OTR: Blacks</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>% of OTR Blacks</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Historic Conservation Office 2005

4.1.4: Move for Historic Preservation

Around 1974, the city government began pushing for historic preservation efforts in OTR in response to pressure from the Miami Purchase Association (MPA), the city’s major historic preservation advocacy organization. The MPA was emboldened by the U.S. Historic Preservation Act of 1966 that encouraged “adaptive reuse” of rehabilitated old buildings. The historic preservationists wanted to make the commonplace of the past into “a loving part of [the] community life and development in order to give a sense of orientation to the American people” (Miller and Tucker 1998, 97). MPA might have been successful in its efforts, but the Cincinnati Department of Urban Development (DUD) had its own ideas for preserving the OTR neighborhood. The DUD focused on the Washington Park area of OTR, as a part of its central business district development efforts.

To create a neighborhood with historic ambiance, the DUD plan called for the refurbishment of the park, for construction of compatible new residential housing on vacant lots, and for renovation of old residential buildings. The Washington Park proposal raised opposition in the
community because it failed to specify the income and racial composition of the population that it proposed to accommodate. Some neighborhood activists and residents felt that the renovation was an underhanded scheme to displace the existing, poor OTR population (Miller and Tucker 1998, 101).

In 1980, the Cincinnati Planning Commission in alliance with the MPA and other interested groups, proposed a new Washington Park historic preservation plan. To allay the concerns about displacement, the City Council approved an anti-displacement ordinance. This met with the approval of some community organizers in OTR. Buddy Gray and other activists who had spurred the Over-the-Rhine People’s Movement in the 1970s, however, did not feel the ordinance was sufficient to quell the threat of “gentrification”.20 Therefore, they opposed the consideration of OTR as a historic district and although they rallied over 270 protesters against its nomination at a public hearing, in their effort they failed. In 1983, OTR was placed on the National Register of Historic Places as a historic district (City of Cincinnati 2007; Miller and Tucker 1998, 107).

4.1.5: OTR’s Decline Continues

While neighborhood activists and the city debated historic district designation and other disagreements, OTR fell into further despair. Between 1980 and 1990, the overall population of OTR continued falling, from 11,914 to 9,572 respectively. Those households that remained were predominantly poor and black; more than half of household incomes were below $10,000 (City of Cincinnati Department of Community Development and Planning 2005; Lazare 2001; United States Census Bureau 1990). Criminal activity dramatically increased, as did the presence of the presence of Cincinnati police as a result. OTR became notorious for its criminal activity (Lazare 2001).

4.1.6: Impetus for Change

Neighborhood problems included poor relations between the Cincinnati Police Department and community members, a rising concentration of poverty and the continued

20 Gentrification would have transformed Over-the-Rhine into a neighborhood that would attract wealthy professionals at the expense of the poor (Diskin and Dutton 2002).
decline in the population (Diskin and Dutton 2002). OTR’s population dropped to 7,638 by 2000. The racial makeup of the neighborhood was 78 percent black, 20 percent white, and 2 percent Other. Economically, approximately 4,354 persons, or 57 percent of the populace, lived below the national poverty line. The median household income was $11,787 (City of Cincinnati Department of Community Development and Planning 2005; Hamilton County Regional Planning Commission 2001; United States Census Bureau 2000).

Tensions between Cincinnati police and OTR’s young black populace peaked in 2001 when the shooting of Timothy Thomas, an unarmed 19 year-old black male, spurred a three-day riot (Diskin and Dutton 2002). Already suffering from decades of decline, conditions of OTR further deteriorated in the riot’s aftermath. Neighborhood businesses closed and outsiders began avoiding the area at all costs (Diskin and Dutton 2002; Maag 2006).

With the riot, OTR gained national attention and the image of Cincinnati suffered (Diskin and Dutton 2002, Hulsey 2001). In an effort to resolve the problems in OTR, several steps were taken. Firstly, the city and interested parties including the Fraternal Order of Police, the American Civil Liberties Union, and the Cincinnati Black United Front (a local activist group) signed an agreement with the U.S. Justice Department designed to improve police-community relations (Diskin and Dutton 2002).

Secondly, the Cincinnati City Council moved to establish the Housing Impact Ordinance. The Ordinance sought to stymie any future low-income development by forbidding the City of Cincinnati from spending, approving or in any way condoning additional subsidized housing in areas deemed “impacted”. It was felt that the concentration of poverty was due to the clustering of low-income housing in particular areas. An impacted area was considered to be a community oversaturated with low-income residents (Diskin and Dutton 2002).

Cincinnati’s city government felt that it was best to promote market-rate homeownership development in OTR to counterbalance the overwhelming presence of low income housing (Diskin and Dutton 2002). To insure its efforts, the Cincinnati Center City Development Corporation (3CDC) was founded in 2003 (Alltucker 2004).
4.1.7: 3CDC’s Influence on OTR

Although previous systems, groups and organizations pushed for change in OTR, 3CDC is the entity that most successfully ushered in widespread investment in OTR’s physical and social fabric. 3CDC is a private-public development corporation that was created on the recommendation of the Cincinnati Economic Development Task Force. The organization is part of the system the city uses to promote economic growth activities (3CDC 2005). Prior to 3CDC’s incorporation, this quasi-public nonprofit was an advisory board to the Research and Development Department for Cincinnati. It advised the department on the most efficient application of federal funds including Empowerment Zone Funds (Zlatkin 2007). Shortly after its 2003 reclassification, 3CDC pursued three goals: 1) establish the organization, 2) develop funding resources, and 3) focus development plans for Fountain Square, The Banks, and Over-the-Rhine (3CDC 2003).

3CDC took a strategically aggressive stance in its approach to the physical disinvestment of OTR. In December 2004, the nonprofit formed a holding company, OTR Holding Inc., to secure property as well as to cycle future rent revenues back into the organization. 3CDC then secured millions for its revitalization efforts (Alltucker 2004). Funds were garnered through the city of Cincinnati, New Markets Tax Credits, Tax Increment Financing (TIFs) in OTR and Downtown Cincinnati, OTR Empowerment Zone Funds, Community Development Block Grants, and other local financial agencies (Zlatkin 2007). In the summer of 2006, the nonprofit started construction on property within its holdings. One of its four-year development goals was to produce 75 to 100 housing units per year in OTR (3CDC 2005; May 2005; May 2006).

After decades of stagnancy, 3CDC succeeded in making visible changes in OTR. While 3CDC achieved success in securing funding and rehabilitating OTR buildings into attractive market-rate housing units and commercial properties, some view the organization’s presence in the neighborhood as a mixed blessing (Diskin and Dutton 2006). Proponents lauded 3CDC for its urban renewal effort, while critics, echoing concerns first heard in the 1970s, castigated the nonprofit for displacing residents from buildings that held low-income tenants (Dunlap, 2004; Livingston 2006; Zlatkin 2007; The Dean of Cincinnati 2006).
4.1.8: Conclusion

Neighborhood conditions in OTR were relatively stable until the turn of the twentieth century. The population in OTR began to decline in early-1900s and continued throughout the twentieth century as a result of the Great Depression and the advent of the interstate highway system that promoted access to the outer suburbs and other neighborhoods within Cincinnati. This population shift left the poor in OTR. Over time, the loss of wealth due to the out migration of more established wealthier families left primarily the poor in the neighborhood and causing a concentration of poverty. This eventually led to the gradual deterioration of OTR’s physical and social structure. Neighborhood groups and city plans competed with each other to change OTR based on different visions of what each considered best for the neighborhood. While the city initially sought to completely alter the physical design of the neighborhood, others sought to preserve the status quo with respect to OTR’s unique neighborhood identity. While each group struggled to determine the best course of action for the future of OTR, the neighborhood slipped into further despair.

Real change did not come to the community until Cincinnati gained national attention in 2001 from a three-day riot caused by the shooting death of an OTR resident by a Cincinnati police officer. The city took aggressive action through ordinances that forestalled development of low income housing in the neighborhood. The City believed the deterioration of the OTR was caused by the concentration of low income residents in this densely populated area. Most importantly, the City encouraged the development of 3CDC, a nonprofit organization that has successfully changed physical and social aspects of the neighborhood.

CHAPTER 5: OVER-THE-RHINE COMMUNITY HOUSING

5.1: Origins of Over-the-Rhine Community Housing

Formed in 2006, through a merger between two older affordable-housing groups,21 Over-the-Rhine Community Housing (OTRCH) is a CDC that provides low-to moderate-income households access to affordable housing in the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood. While volunteers

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21 Race Street Tenant Organization Co-operative (ReSTOC) and Over-the-Rhine Housing Network (OTRHN).
have played an important role in the development and organizational capacity of OTRCH, there is limited literature detailing the extent of their exact contributions. To provide context, this section describes the key events that led to the creation of OTRCH.

5.1.1: The People’s Movement

Among the political struggle to resolve the social and economic decline of OTR in the 1970s, a group calling itself The People’s Movement (TPM) formed on January 13, 1978 (Griggs 1999; Dutton 2008; Neumeier 1998). The group was led by Buddy Gray, a neighborhood activist, along with other like-minded residents and volunteers. As the leader of the movement, Buddy Gray started his crusade for the poor and homeless in the neighborhood in 1972 at the age of 21. He was considered combative and a troublemaking rebel rouser by some. Others, however, viewed him as a compassionate and vocal advocate for the downtrodden, and someone who worked to empower the residents of OTR (Griggs 1999; Dutton 2008).

TPM’s core mission was to improve the lot of the poor in OTR by advocating for neighborhood development and improved access to institutional support services. Three goals guided the activities of TPM:

1) to promote equitable and inclusive development in OTR by building a racially integrated and mixed-income neighborhood,
2) to help the poor develop their own voice as a political force,
3) to integrate the homeless and poverty stricken back into mainstream society by providing substance abuse treatment programs, access to affordable-housing, employment, and job-readiness training (Diskin and Dutton 2002; Dutton 2008; Heath 2004).

TPM advanced its core mission through the establishment of two nonprofit organizations: Race Street Tenant Organization Co-operative (ReSTOC) and Over-the-Rhine Housing Network (OTRHN) (Neumeier 1997). Both ReSTOC and OTRHN had similar missions: to rehab old, neglected structures left by absentee landlords so that housing for low-income people could be preserved and maintained.
ReSTOC, the first of the two nonprofits founded by TPM, was established in 1978 (Diskin and Dutton 2002; ReSTOC 1994). ReSTOC held properties primarily located in the Washington Park area (Over-the-Rhine Community Housing 2006). ReSTOC was viewed as more controversial and radical than OTRHN (Community Shares of Greater Cincinnati 2004; Neumeier 1997). This was, in part, because ReSTOC was considered to be a more direct extension of Buddy Gray and TPM’s view of development in OTR (Sturmon 1993).

OTRHN originally began as OTR, Inc. in 1981 as a coordinator of affordable-housing efforts that sought to unite a number of other individual housing development organizations in OTR. It was later reorganized and adapted as an independent 501(c)3 corporation in 1988 (Community Shares of Greater Cincinnati 2004). Properties held by OTRHN were located in the East Clifton area of OTR (Over-the-Rhine Community Housing 2006). Of the two organizations, OTRHN was considered less visible as it had a reputation for focusing on the basic mission of developing and managing affordable housing (Cramer and Zdenek 2006).

TPM distinguished between gentrification and development (Diskin and Dutton 2002). Gentrification was understood as a process of neighborhood transformation which attracted a wealthy professional class at the expense of the poor, i.e., as property values increased, poor homeowners and renters would be displaced due to their inability to afford higher rental costs or property taxes. In contrast, development was understood as building or restoration that ensured equal and inclusive access to affordable-housing for low-income households. Development was viewed more favorably as it would improve the overall environment while raising the living standards of OTR’s existing populace (Bird 2001; Diskin and Dutton 2002).

5.1.2: ReSTOC/OTRHN and the City

From the late 1970s through the mid-1990s, relations between ReSTOC and OTRHN and the city were strained at best. While ReSTOC and OTRHN were both successful in lobbying the city for funding to aid them in renovating their buildings, they were often criticized for warehousing buildings and failing to renovate them in a timely manner (Sturmon 1993).
From its inception, ReSTOC (and later on, OTRHN) purchased buildings marked for demolition by the city. This prevented the city, through private developers, from claiming properties and rebuilding them into upscale condominiums, bars and restaurants. As well as staunching gentrification, ReSTOC and OTRHN sought to save buildings to create affordable-housing for OTR’s poor (Griggs 1996; Henson 1996). Funding used to acquire buildings was procured through state and federal housing programs and private donations made to the nonprofits. ReSTOC and OTRHN also obtained buildings in OTR through donations from private property owners who wanted to unload distressed properties that they could not afford to fix (Diskin and Dutton 2002; Halpin 2000; Sturmon 1993). ReSTOC alone held about 72 properties along with a parking lot on Vine Street valued at $190,000. The parking lot was centrally located across from the only grocery store in the neighborhood (Gorman 1993; Sturmon 1993; City Council Delays a Vote on Housing Funding Proposal 1993). While some of the properties that they held were successfully rehabbed through utilization of volunteer labor, many of ReSTOC and OTRHN’s structures remained vacant and dilapidated. This was due to the fact that they, as nonprofit providers of low-income housing, lacked the wherewithal to fund and carry out the work and purchase necessary materials (Diskin and Dutton 2002; Sturmon 1993).

From 1985 to 1993, the city invested approximately $18 million in building-restoration projects in the OTR neighborhood. The City Council, business professionals, developers, and residents all wanted the area improved. They were especially interested in restoring buildings along Vine Street, the main thoroughfare connecting OTR to the downtown business district (Popyk 1993; Sturmon 1993).

Funding was allocated to various affordable-housing developers, including ReSTOC and OTRHN. In this period, ReSTOC received about $630,000 from the city to renovate its properties. From the city’s $18 million total investment, only 1,117 housing units of OTR’s housing stock were renovated. Of that 1,117 renovated housing units 106 were ReSTOC’s. The small number of housing units renovated in the neighborhood concerned city officials and became a public issue among residents (Popyk 1993; Salvato 1993; Sturmon 1993). They questioned whether the city received a good return on its investment in the neighborhood. Since the city required its funding recipients to produce neither renovation project plans outlining
deadlines, nor annual reports itemizing how funds were spent, there was no way to track the progress of each individual project investment. It was felt that there should have been more physical improvements for the $18 million invested over the eight year period. For instance, many of the buildings along Vine Street remained in disrepair (Popyk 1993; Sturmon 1993).

In 1993, city council threatened ReSTOC, OTRHN and other property owners in OTR with prosecution and fines for violating the city’s building code, and threatened to exercise its powers of eminent domain to take control and demolish failed structures held by the groups. The city enacted requirements on organizations and firms receiving city funding to provide project plans and annual reports. Meanwhile, demonstrations and other “antics” organized by TPM also failed to endear the groups to the city. Protests in front of City Hall and occupation of properties slated for demolition added additional costs to projects (Akron Beacon Journal 1993; Popyk 1993; Sturmon 1993; Van Sant 1994).

Public opinion was mixed about the work done by the ReSTOC and OTRHN. Some city officials, market rate developers, and citizens felt that the groups’ warehoused buildings, thus impeding progress in OTR. Questions surfaced about ReSTOC’s and OTRHN’s use of public funding and their ability to restore the buildings they managed. Opponents of the organizations argued that the slow progress of ReSTOC and OTRHN to restore their properties worsened the condition of OTR. They felt that the buildings the organizations held were unsafe and promulgated criminal behavior, as many of the properties were not secured (Hazardous Buildings 1993; Griggs 1996; Sturmon 1993).

Supporters of ReSTOC and OTRHN, local businesses, religious groups, educational and social organizations, as well as the organizers of the two groups, felt the city was justified in demanding to know how the city’s funding was being utilized. However, they also believed that the city and developers were unduly critical because of a personal vendetta against Buddy Gray. Supporters believed Gray’s leadership of public rallies, protests, and sit-ins that prevented building demolition made him a hero because he prevented the poor from being marginalized in OTR (Sturmon 1993; Van Sant 1994). Supporters also argued that ReSTOC and OTRHN’s heavy reliance on volunteer renovators kept renovation costs low. The volunteers work
(dependant on recruitment from high schools, colleges, churches and other local community groups) was slower and piecemeal because volunteers did not work whole days or weeks (Mets 1993; Popyk 1993).

### 5.1.3: Changes in Over-the-Rhine

Despite their focus on low-income households the typically client made 38 percent of OTR’s median income, the activities of ReSTOC and OTRHN remained stable until the mid-1990s. The loss of TPM’s leader, Buddy Gray\(^{22}\), and a compromise between City Council and ReSTOC, compelled these groups to consider organizational change in the form of a merger (Alltucker 2000; Osborne 2000).

An unexpected shock to TPM came in November 1996 when Buddy Gray was murdered. His activism in OTR spanned the entire history of ReSTOC and OTRHN and during this 25 year period Gray formed many important personal relationships and friendships with low-income advocates and officials on the local, regional and national levels that benefited ReSTOC and OTRHN directly. With his passing, these relationships gradually waned. While many people were saddened by the loss of the vigilant advocate of the poor in OTR, some acknowledged that the city’s plans for the neighborhood would proceed more easily (Griggs 1996; Henson 1996).

The second turning point took place over a four-year period, starting in 1999, when ReSTOC, with some assistance from the Mayor’s office, was awarded a state grant to renovate eight of its buildings (Metz 2002). In June of 2000, ReSTOC sought $700,000 from the city’s earmarked federal housing block grant (CDBG) funds to match a state grant and private funds to renovate the eight buildings. The state grant was worth $4.3 million, and the total cost of the project was $5.2 million. The state funding would require ReSTOC to transform these buildings into 45 low-income housing units and to complete the project within one year. This made procuring the city’s matched funds critical. When the petition was brought before City Council it was rejected unanimously by council members because they wanted to curb the continuance of more low-income housing development in OTR. While public demonstrations were ineffective, months of

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\(^{22}\) Buddy Gray was murdered on November 15, 1996 by a deranged client of the Drop Inn Center, a homeless shelter that Gray also help create.
lobbying by ReSTOC finally got City Council to reconsider the matter (Alltucker 2000; Osborne 2000).

City Council members continued to vacillate between rejecting and approving ReSTOC’s petition (Alltucker 2000; Osborne 2000). Council members in favor of allocating funds to ReSTOC thought that there was a lack of low-income housing in Cincinnati. Their support was also based on the fact that the project was reliant on state and private funding and that ReSTOC would be held by the grant stipulation to a strict deadline of completion. Council members were also aware that if ReSTOC failed to procure the state grant funds to renovate the buildings it would take the group many years to acquire adequate financing (Housing ReSTOC Rejected 2000; Osborne 2000).

Opposing council members rejected the idea that more low-income housing was needed in OTR, or for that matter, in Cincinnati. Their rejection of ReSTOC’s petition was based on the idea that more market-rate development was needed in the neighborhood to revitalize the struggling area. These members cited the fact that 85 percent of OTR properties were already inhabited by low-income people and that various studies showed that an area with more than 30 percent low-income housing would decline socially and economically.23 Some of the opposing council members said that the nonprofit affordable housing developer had acquired 71 parcels in OTR, few of which were renovated or occupied. They felt that ReSTOC could raise the necessary funds to renovate their buildings without assistance from the city if they sold some of the vacant buildings that they already held (Osborne 2000; Saladian 2002; Thumbs Up--Council Stands 2000).

Because council members were split on the approval or rejection of ReSTOC’s petition, the Cincinnati Planning Commission called for a moratorium on low-income units in OTR until a clear course of action was determined (Thumbs Up--Council Stands 2000). In October 2000, after five months of debate, City Council members decided to approve the ReSTOC’s funding request as long as the group consented to the following five compromises. ReSTOC would have to:

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23 There were no specific citations of these studies mentioned in source material.
1) sell one of the eight buildings sited for renovation to the Cincinnati Development Fund, a private developer,
2) refrain from purchasing any more property in OTR until 2008 unless approved by City Council,
3) develop all of the properties within their holdings by 2008,
4) earmark 80 percent of the newly renovated properties for market rate housing, and
5) lease a parking lot that it held on Vine Street to retail businesses (City Council Delays a Vote on Housing Funding Proposal 2000; Osborne 2000; Osborne 2002).

Under this compromise proposal, ReSTOC was given six months to comply with the portion of the agreement that required it to sell a building as well as to begin renovations of the selected buildings (Osborne 2002).

Although ReSTOC was willing to compromise, it rejected the offer because some of the city’s stipulations went against the organization’s original mission. Specifically, the organization had vowed never to allow its properties to be used for anything other than low-income housing (Alltucker 2000; Anglen and Alltucker 2000; Thumbs Up--Council Stands 2000). ReSTOC counter proposed to rent 11 of the 45 renovated housing units at a market rate, and requested that the city increase its funding from $700,000 to $1.05 million. This counterproposal was based on the fact that, with a shift from below market rate to market rate, the group would lose some state tax credits for the project that were needed to offset its renovation costs. City Council refused the counterproposal (Osborne 2000).

In November 2000, ReSTOC officials realized that City Council would not reconsider their position on the original compromise proposal. The agency relented shortly after spending 10 percent of the project costs to retain the state grant (Anglen and Alltucker 2000). With the loss of one of the eight buildings, ReSTOC would now renovate 30 housing units instead of 45, and the state grant would drop to $3.5 million (Anglen and Alltucker 2000; Deal to Help Renew Cincinnati Neighborhood 2000; Osborne 2000). In good faith, city officials also granted ReSTOC an additional $70,000 to cover contingency fees in case unforeseen problems would arise with the renovation project. This additional grant brought the total award from the city of Cincinnati up to $770,000 (Deal to Help Renew Cincinnati Neighborhood 2000; Osborne 2000).
By this time, ReSTOC had already begun the renovation project in order to retain the state grant, thus fulfilling one of the timed stipulations under the compromise with the city. The other timed stipulation, to sell one of the eight buildings cited in ReSTOC’s renovation project plan, needed to be executed no later than April 1, 2001. In the event of the group’s inability to meet this timed obligation, ReSTOC could apply for an extension with the city’s neighborhood housing director. This request for an extension was required to be delivered in writing no later than April 1, 2001 (Korte 2002; Osborne 2002; Saladin 2002; ReSTOC--Bad Deal 2002). ReSTOC failed to sell one of the eight buildings or apply for an extension by April 1, 2001. Instead, they made their request for an extension making the request in October 2001.

The City Administrator’s office approved ReSTOC’s extension request. When City Council was informed of the Administrator’s extension to ReSTOC in early 2002, council members called for an immediate freeze on the CDBG fund’s distribution. Council members wanted the extension invalidated but had to wait for the City Attorney’s office to determine the legality of the contract. City Council members felt that because the City Administrator had acted without their approval, the extension given to ReSTOC should have no legal bearing (Korte 2002, and Osborne 2002). Some City Council members criticized ReSTOC, saying the group’s failure to meet the stipulations in the compromise was but one of numerous project deadline infractions, and that since the early 1980s, ReSTOC’s projects consistently failed in timeliness, productivity, and accountability (Korte 2002; ReSTOC a Lousy Record 2002; ReSTOC--Bad Deal 2002).

In defense of the missed April 2001 deadline, ReSTOC officials explained that they experienced delays that were beyond their control, such as changes in the state regulations for lead paint and asbestos abatement in older buildings. The city had also required a room-by-room inspection to insure the clearance of lead paint and asbestos. To meet this requirement, ReSTOC spent over $400,000 (The Trouble with ReSTOC 2002). They also explained that some of the problems hindering their progress were common to other developers (Korte 2002; Osborne 2002). ReSTOC officials countered speculation about the group’s lack of intention to sell one of their buildings in accordance with the compromise. Consequently, in January 2002, three months after the October 2001 extension, ReSTOC sold the building (Korte 2002).
City Council members were once again deadlocked about ReSTOC’s renovation project. This time, however, there were questions about the legality of the October 2001 extension granted by the City Administrator’s office. There was also the matter of the Housing Impact Ordinance, an ordinance enacted shortly after the three-day riots in April 2001 that sought to remedy the concentration of low-income persons in areas already saturated with low-income housing by withholding funding from affordable housing developers (Diskin and Dutton 2002; Korte 2002; ReSTOC--Bad Deal 2002). The impact to ReSTOC and OTRHN as well as other nonprofit affordable housing developers would have been immediate and profound as they were reliant on local housing financing to minimize housing production gaps in the inner city (Diskin and Dutton 2002).

In February 2002, the City Attorney determined the extension given by the City Administrator’s office to be binding and urged City Council to move forward in good faith with the compromise made with ReSTOC. Despite the legitimacy of the October 2001 extension, some members of City Council considered voting to withdraw from the contract with the group regardless of liability. Before a vote could be held on the matter, members of council decided to go back into negotiation with ReSTOC. Under the new agreement, the agency would comply with five stipulations. ReSTOC would now have to:

1) sell at least 10 buildings, using profits to fix up others,
2) commit not to buy any more buildings through 2010,
3) redirect its focus toward homeownership,
4) cooperate with the city in developing business activity on Vine Street, and
5) employ a professional property manager for the Vine Street project (Korte 2002; Osborne 2002).

Included in this new agreement was a penalty if ReSTOC failed to comply. If the group failed to meet these standards it would in essence void the contract, foregoing the $770,000 giving the city the option to purchase the buildings sited for renovation (ReSTOC Deal Unload Stockpile_
To gain access to the formerly promised city-administrated funds, ReSTOC acquiesced to the agreement (Diskin and Dutton 2002).

5.1.4: Merger between ReSTOC and Over-the-Rhine Housing Network

In 2004, ReSTOC and OTRHN began negotiating a merger in order to pool their administrative and organizational skills especially in pursuing the limited funding available (Cramer and Zdenek 2006; Community Development Corporations Association of Greater Cincinnati 2006). By joining forces, each contributed strengths the other lacked. ReSTOC had an extensive volunteer workforce with hundreds of participants. OTRHN had developed expertise in allocating private and public financing for developing properties (Cramer and Zdenek 2006; Osborne 2006). The merger process took two years requiring structural changes for what would become a new organization. The structural changes included, 1) broadening the organization’s mission to embrace development of a healthy neighborhood by creating opportunities for homeownership, 2) intensifying resident organizing through the creation of block clubs and residents’ associations, 3) using tax credit financing that would require the organization to adhere to rigorous compliance procedures and annual recertification by federal agencies, and 4) taking on a more entrepreneurial approach to development by shedding unproductive buildings that drained its cash flow, thereby allowing them to attract higher segment of low-income tenants and expand housing production (Cramer and Zdenek 2006; Osborne 2006). ReSTOC and OTRHN completed their merger in 2006, thus creating OTRCH (Over-the-Rhine Community Housing 2006). Its combined assets totaled 95 buildings with a net worth of $5.5 million (Osborne 2006).

5.1.5: Conclusion

OTRCH was borne out of competition for limited funds, a need to employ expertise and labor that each other lacked and a political environment that would not accept what was perceived as excuses for earlier failures. The two groups that merged to form it were initially created by TPM to secure and provide low-income housing for the poor in OTR in the late 1970s and early 1980s. They purchased property slated for demolition and staged rallies against proposals or plans that were seen as venues for gentrification. While ReSTOC and OTRHN’s methods supported their mission for a time, their activism against city plans hurt them when they
needed to lobby for city funding. City officials and private developers viewed ReSTOC and OTRHN as barriers to redevelopment efforts in OTR.

The dispute between the city and ReSTOC and OTRHN over what was best for OTR and its residents, continued for about twenty years. It was not until the mid-1990s, with Buddy Gray’s murder and subsequent difficulties in acquiring CDBG funds through City Council that led ReSTOC and OTRHN reconsidered their position as affordable housing providers. The merger of the two agencies required adapting to the changing political climate in the City and adopting structural changes in forming a new organization.

CHAPTER 6: PROGRAMS, PROJECTS AND VOLUNTEERS

6.1: Over-the-Rhine Community Housing

The overarching mission of OTRCH is to “build and sustain a diverse neighborhood that values and benefits low-income residents.” The organization pursues this mission through its housing redevelopment projects and its resident engagement, affordable housing, and advocacy outreach program (Over-the-Rhine Community Housing 2006). OTRCH’s mission and programming does not differ vastly from statements from ReSTOC and Over-the-Rhine Housing Network. By expanding the programming and taking a more holistic approach to development in the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood, the merger between ReSTOC and Over-the-Rhine Housing Network has resulted in a broader mission based on their collective strengths. With a staff size of 15 and a limited budget, it is nearly impossible for this nonprofit to operate without outside assistance. The organization relies heavily on volunteers to make up the difference (Over-the-Rhine Community Housing 2006).

6.1.1: Housing Projects and Programs

Like its predecessors, OTRCH currently owns and manages property in the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood. Since the 1960s, in its former state as ReSTOC and Over-the-Rhine Housing Network, OTRCH saved 45 historical buildings from demolition, fifteen of which were renovated with the assistance of volunteer labor (Over-the-Rhine Community Housing 2006).
Today, there are over 432 housing units online for occupancy (Over-the-Rhine Community Housing 2009).

OTRCH continues to make available new affordable housing units in OTR through collaborations with academic programs and other affordable housing providers. These providers include private architecture firms and private and public development organizations and companies. The following are three of the current housing projects that the group is undertaking:

*North Rhine I and II Redevelopment*
This redevelopment project seeks to provide 64 housing units serving residents with 35-50 percent of the area median income (AMI). In 2000, the neighborhood’s AMI was less than $5,000 (Over-the-Rhine Community Housing 2006; United States Census Bureau 2000).

*City Home*
OTRCH is partnering with Eber Development, Martha Dorf, and 3CDC in developing mixed income housing. The goal of this housing project is promote homeownership on and around Pleasant Street in OTR. Twenty four units will be available for purchase, 60 percent of which will be affordable and 40 percent will be market rate (Over-the-Rhine Community Housing 2006).

*Elm Street Elderly Housing*
OTRCH is making provisions for comfortable senior living in the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood with the renovation of one of its Elm Street buildings. When completed, this elderly housing project will have 14 units of affordable housing available for seniors. The building will be Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certified.24 This project will allow OTR and OTRCH’s senior citizen to “age in place” (Over-the-Rhine Community Housing 2008).

Besides its housing projects, ORTCH offers three programs that assist them in carrying out their mission: affordable and supportive housing, outreach to OTR residents, and low-income housing advocacy.

OTRCH’s housing program offers both affordable housing and supportive housing to OTR residents. The units that OTRCH manages are scattered throughout the neighborhood, but primarily concentrated on 12th, 13th, Elm, Peete, and Elm streets as well as East Clifton and

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24 LEED is a standard for environmentally sustainable construction.
McMicken avenues. Rents range from $125 to $600, depending on the unit size (e.g. efficiency, 1-bedroom, 2-bedroom, 3-bedroom, 4-bedroom) and utilities. A 2005 comparison of fair market rental unit costs between OTRCH and Cincinnati, OH-KY-IN Primary Metropolitan Statistical Area (PMSA) shows that OTRCH units in OTR are relatively affordable (see Table 4).^25

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Studio</th>
<th>1 bedroom</th>
<th>2 bedroom</th>
<th>3 bedroom</th>
<th>4 bedroom</th>
</tr>
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<td>$497</td>
<td>$652</td>
<td>$903</td>
<td>$938</td>
</tr>
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<td>$150-375</td>
<td>$175-450</td>
<td>$300-550</td>
<td>$350-600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OTRCH Avg. Rent</strong></td>
<td>$181</td>
<td>$263</td>
<td>$313</td>
<td>$425</td>
<td>$475</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Housing Urban and Development 2005; Boll 2009

The other component of OTRCH’s Housing Program is its supportive housing. Four buildings managed by OTRCH, Recovery Hotel, McMicken Transitional Housing (McMicken), the Jimmy Heath House (known also as Odeon Permanent Supportive Housing), and Buddy’s Place, are designated as recovery housing for neighborhood residents who are recovering from substance abuse and homelessness and transitioning back into society. Between these buildings there are 77 units available, which are subsidized through the Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority (CMHA). Tenants of these units must qualify. Tenants of Recovery Hotel and McMicken housing units are involved in on-site drug or alcohol abuse treatment programs offered by the Drop Inn Center, a homeless shelter in OTR.

Recovery Hotel and McMicken are considered transitional. After treatment residents may opt to find permanent housing through OTRCH or may receive permanent housing through Buddy’s Place or the Jimmy Heath House. The typical tenant of Buddy’s Place and the Jimmy Heath House is described as “single, homeless, and low-income.” Tenants of these housing units may

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^25 Primary metropolitan statistical area (PMSA) is an urbanized county or set of counties with strong social and economic ties to neighboring communities. Cincinnati’s PMSA consists of: Dearborn County, IN; Boone County, KY; Campbell County, KY; Kenton County, KY; Clermont County, OH; Hamilton County, OH; Warren County, OH.
or may not have transitioned from Recovery Hotel or McMicken and, unlike Recovery Hotel or McMicken, Buddy’s Place and the Jimmy Heath House do not provide an on-site substance abuse program.

The goal of OTRCH’s outreach program, the Resident Engagement program, is to encourage community participation. Residents are actively invited to participate on the organization’s Board of Directors, Block Clubs, and as volunteers. Tenants of St. Anthony Village are also encouraged to enroll in a Renter Equity Program.26 This program is a collaborative between OTRCH and the Cornerstone Corporation. The program also offers long term renters in OTRCH apartments the opportunity to build financial assets throughout the course of their residence.

OTRCH’s Advocacy and Education program seek to build relationships with outside agencies, institutions, and groups. It also serves to educate the public about the importance of preserving affordable housing in OTR. One of the direct forms of advocacy and education that the agency has is through its volunteer programs.

6.1.2: Volunteers

According OTRCH, the organization has approximately 1,450 new and return volunteers that participate in one or more of its volunteer programs.27 While most of the volunteers are high school or college students, the agency also obtains volunteers from church groups and the Drop Inn Center. Below is a list of some of OTRCH’s frequent volunteers groups (see Table 7).

26 OTRCH partners with Cornerstone Corporation, an organization that helps fund affordable housing programs and projects through low-interest loans, through a Rent Equity Program. This is a membership program that allows St. Anthony’s resident an opportunity to build financial assets while developing ownership skills. To partake in program, the resident must earn less than 60 percent of the area median income.

Each membership household earns credits monthly toward a future cash payment from the fund. Credit is earned by paying rent on time, fulfilling responsibilities for cleaning and upkeep of common areas and attending resident association meetings. Credit earned can be converted to cash payment of $4,137 after 5 years or $10,000 after 10 years. These funds can be used to purchase other assets such as a home, an education, a business, or an investment in a retirement fund.

27 Ibid
OTRCH has seven volunteer related programs: Adopt a Apartment Program, Saturday Crew, Saturday Crew Leaders, Skilled Volunteer (formerly “general”), and Miami University-Design Build/Center for Community Engagement. The other related volunteer programs are the intern program and AmeriCorps. Through these programs, volunteers perform administrative functions (e.g. researching and writing grants) and physical tasks (renovating housing units and buildings, cleaning lots, and executing maintenance).28

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28 OTRCH also provide volunteer experience by participating in the Urban Plunge, and Urban Residency Programs. These programs allow students the opportunity to temporary live in the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood while learning about homelessness, hunger, and affordable housing. The Urban Plunge is a weeklong experience for students from Maine to Alabama. Some of the most recent volunteers who participated in the Urban Plunge came from the University of Vermont and the University of Pennsylvania. Both Xavier University and Miami University have Residency Programs where students reside in the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood for a semester. Students of both the Urban Plunge and the Urban Residency Programs live in OTRCH’s volunteer/intern house during their stay in the neighborhood.

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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 5: OTRCH Volunteer Groups</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>High Schools</strong></td>
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<td>• Amelia H.S.</td>
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<td>• Anderson H.S.</td>
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<td>• Clark Montessori</td>
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<td>• Elder H.S.</td>
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<td>• Walnut Hills H.S.</td>
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<td><strong>University Groups</strong></td>
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<td>• Miami University</td>
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<td>• Peace or Hunger Conference (Wright State &amp; XU)</td>
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<td>• University of Cincinnati</td>
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<td>• University of Cincinnati Architecture Student Group</td>
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<td>• University of Cincinnati Greek (fraternity/sorority)</td>
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<td>• University of Cincinnati Public Law</td>
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<td>• Xavier University</td>
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<td><strong>Church Groups</strong></td>
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<td>• Immaculate Heart of Mary</td>
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<td>• Over-the-Rhine Marianists</td>
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<td>• St. Andrew</td>
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<td>• St. Gertrude</td>
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<td>• St. Ignatius</td>
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<td>• St. Mary's</td>
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<td>• St. Peter and Paul</td>
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<td><strong>Corporations</strong></td>
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<td>• Home Depot</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Other Organizations</strong></td>
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<td>• Homeless Coalition</td>
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<td>• Keep Cincinnati Beautiful</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Individuals</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Bob Knueven</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Howard Smay</td>
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Source: Over-the-Rhine Community Housing 2006
Volunteers benefit in a numbers of ways. First, they have an opportunity to learn about community issues (social inequality, poverty and neglect) that are common to urban neighborhoods. Second, volunteers from outside OTR are also given the opportunity to see positive aspects of the neighborhood that they may not be privy to otherwise (Over-the-Rhine Community Housing 2006). Third, some volunteers feel a sense of camaraderie from working alongside OTR’s residents and fellow volunteers, as they transform “old, forgotten, historic buildings into livable residences”. The work performed also makes them feel as though they are making a “real, tangible difference”. Other volunteers have the opportunity to see a different side of the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood. These volunteers realize that OTR is a tight-knit community and that the people who live and work in the neighborhood are committed to building a vital and sustainable community that provides safe housing for those in need (Boll 2009).

The benefit of volunteers to OTRCH is one of economy. Volunteers help the organization save money that it would otherwise have to allocate to pay staff persons. Therefore, volunteers positively impact OTRCH’s organizational capacity. Rather than profit-oriented, OTRCH is provision-oriented – OTRCH provides housing at below market rent to low-income households. The money that is saved works as a subsidy to affordable housing costs. In 2006, OTRCH’s income and expenses were $1,239,082 and $1,300,349, respectively. Figure 1 and 2 below shows a percentage breakdown of OTRCH’s 2006 income and expenses. Volunteer labor contributions are shown as part of “In-Kind Services” category and represents 5 percent of the group’s 2006 income.29

29 According to Hutzel, the 5 percent income contribution from volunteer labor remains stable from year to year.
6.1.3: Conclusion

OTRCH’s mission is broader and more comprehensive than the former ReSTOC or Over-the-Rhine Housing Network’s. Being a relatively small nonprofit, with only 15 full-time staff members, OTRCH is reliant on volunteers labor to fill the service gap. This allows them to save
money that would otherwise have to be allocated to hire additional staff. These savings act as a subsidy of sorts for more affordable housing development.

**CHAPTER 7: VOLUNTEERS SPEAK OUT**

7.1 Participant Interviews

The mission of OTRCH is to provide all-inclusive affordable housing to the residents of OTR. This study was designed to determine the impact that volunteer work has on the capacity of the OTRCH to carry out its mission, and was conducted in 2008 through interviews with ten current and former volunteers. For details on the methodology see Chapter 2, section 2.2. The identities of all participants are hidden.

The following survey questions were asked in the participant interview:

1. How did you come to volunteer with Over-the-Rhine Community Housing (e.g. organization’s mission, location, career path, assigned by third party, etc.)?
2. What are benefits and costs associated with volunteering?
3. What type of work were you assigned as a volunteer with OTRCH?
4. Were you afforded autonomy in work assignments? That is, could you accept or reject assigned projects at will?
5. Did you receive training for the work that you were assigned or did your experience match assignments given?
6. What kind of contributions do you believe that you, and other volunteers, made to help the organization meet its mission?
7. Did you experience a change in perception of the organization following your volunteer experience? That is, did you have the same view organization once following volunteer? If not, how did your view or perception of the organization change?
8. Did you or do you feel as though there was or is sufficient guidance provided by the organization’s personnel?
9. Do you believe that OTRCH is successful in meeting its mission? Why or why not?
10. Do you have any suggestions that may improve OTRCH’s volunteer programs?
7.2 Participant Profile

The majority of the participants are single, white males, who have obtained at least a high school education (see Figures 3, 4, and 5). The median age of all participants is 24; one male participant decline to provide his age. All of the volunteers are employed in a service-oriented profession (i.e. teacher, food server, neighborhood specialist, administrative assistant, etc.). Fifty percent of all participants are pursuing some type of higher education, either a bachelor’s degree or a master’s degree (see Figure 4).

Of the ten participants, half were current volunteers and half were former volunteers of OTRCH. Eighty percent of the nonprofit’s former volunteers indicated some plan to volunteer again with OTRCH. Participants volunteered from 2 months to eight years with the organization. On an average, volunteers spent about 33 months (or 2 years and 9 months) with the nonprofit. Those with over two years of volunteer time were associated with either ReSTOC or Over-the-Rhine Housing Network prior to their merger.

![Figure 3: Racial Breakdown of Participants](Source: Author 2009)

![Figure 4: Highest Grade Completed](Source: Author 2009)
7.3 Factors Driving Volunteerism

Question 1: *How did you come to volunteer with Over-the-Rhine Community Housing (e.g. organization’s mission, location, career path, assigned by third party, etc.)*?

Concerning the factors driving or attracting participants to volunteer with OTRCH, responses were grouped in the following categories: Academic Program, Internship, and OTRCH’s mission.
Forty percent of the participants of this survey became acquainted with OTRCH through an academic program.

“During the Fall 2007-08 semester I lived in Over-the-Rhine through a Miami [University] residency program and part of that was to do 24 hours a week … of community engagement.”

“[I] began through affiliation with extracurricular activities at Xavier University (Urban Plunge, service work, Shantytown); after graduation I took on an AmeriCorps VISTA position there because I was familiar with their work and enjoyed my interaction with them.”

Of these participants, three were enrolled in a residency program or involved in an extracurricular activity at Xavier or Miami University that required them to work and/or live in the Over-the-Rhine Neighborhood. The fourth participant indicated that while attending high school he was influenced to volunteer with OTRCH (then ReSTOC) by multiple factors, including an extracurricular volunteer program.

“I went to a high school, Finneytown High School, in [suburban] Cincinnati, Ohio that had a faculty… Steven Elliot, who had pretty much created from scratch one of the most respected, socially responsible, extracurricular volunteer program in a high school … he was a history teacher and my sister was one of his students. She was drawn to him and his volunteer mindedness and social consciousness, and became very involved in volunteer work in Over-the-Rhine at… ReSTOC. She was very influential. So pretty much my sister, the atmosphere at my school, the friends that I had were as involved as I was and just as interested.”
Another 40 percent of the surveyed participants came to volunteer at OTRCH as an internship requirement. At the time these questions were administered, all participants in this category were actively pursuing or had just completed a graduate degree in Social Work or Community Planning at the University of Cincinnati. This is what the Social Work graduate student had to say about her selection of OTRCH as a site to volunteer,

“Through the social work program you need to do an internship or field work as they call it. I had interviewed with three different agencies. One was at the mayor’s office. One was the Drop Inn Center, and then Over-the-Rhine Community Housing. So, through social work, I selected Over-the-Rhine Community Housing.”

Two participants that volunteered as interns had this to say about their volunteership,

“We got an email through the Planning Listserv about where internships…I was looking for an internship that I could do…part of the time while I worked so that I could make some money.”

“...I was looking for an internship and I wasn’t sure of if I was going to get a paid internship or not and I talked to a friend of mine who is the President of Ohio CDC. She referred me to Over the Rhine.”

For twenty percent of the surveyed participants, OTRCH’s mission was the main reason for volunteering. This is what they had to say,

“I started getting attracted to the mission… one weekend went to two weekends to three weekends then every weekend. And, little by little we started adopting buildings, and then we formed a student advocacy group here at Moeller to establish M.A.C.H. 1 (Moeller Advocate for Community Housing).”

“I heard about the organization while…an undergrad student. After learning about its mission, I wanted to see and serve the agency myself.”

7.4 Benefits and Costs Associated with Volunteering at OTRCH

The second question deals with two separate elements of volunteering: the benefits of volunteering and the costs of volunteering.
7.4.1 Benefits of Volunteering

Question 2: What are benefits and costs associated with volunteering?

Concerning the benefits of volunteers, participants’ answers were broadly grouped into the following categories: education, altruism, work flexibility, living in the OTR neighborhood, and increased awareness (see Figure 9).

![Figure 7: Benefits of Volunteering](source: Author 2009)

Of the 10 participants, six stated “education” as the most significant benefit of their volunteering experience at OTRCH. The reason for their response varied. One participant, a graduate architectural student, had an opportunity to “integrate architecture with social justice and explore it as an optional architectural tool.” Another participant felt the experience widened her perspective and provided “skills in new venues” (e.g. business management, organizational skills, etc.). Others, however, believed the experience was educational because they:

“…[learned] how to work with people” as well as “the ins and outs of nonprofit organizations and the politics and dynamics of the city that you might not have gotten if you were just studying it or just working away from an organization like that.”
Three of the 10 surveyed participants saw that their volunteering was an act of selflessness (altruism). The benefit of feeling good about sharing their skills and knowledge was factored into their association with OTRCH. One participant had this to say about the feelings that she derived from her volunteership with the nonprofit,

“Volunteering is also beneficial for the opportunity it offers to give something of yourself to another, to act in a less selfish manner than sometimes your everyday routine requires.”

Another participant, a social work student, stated flexibility, as a benefit for volunteering. This is what she had to say:

“…we have an organization, without the pressures of having a deadline, everyone is pretty lenient on you as a volunteer.”

Three of the surveyed participants saw the opportunity to live in OTR as a benefit in itself. One participant, a non-native of Cincinnati who moved to the city to attend college, found living in the neighborhood as a way of connecting with the community.

“I am not originally from Cincinnati…it was hard for me to get connected to [the] community when I came to Cincinnati and that was one way that I could be brought in. I also met people [volunteers] from different schools that I would have never had the opportunity to meet if I did not volunteer.”

Participants also benefited by gaining “increased awareness” while volunteering with OTRCH. The reasons for this varied. One participant felt that volunteering with OTRCH pushed her to “think more deeply about the roots of poverty, how [she] contributes to the city’s or the nation’s or the world’s relative wealth and poverty ratios, what sorts of action alleviates or worsens the effects of poverty.” As a result this participant is striving for a deeper understanding of the world in which she lives. Other participants felt that social awareness and professional awareness was gained through volunteering in OTRCH’s volunteer program.

Two of those interviewed believed that increased social awareness was a benefit of volunteering. These participants believed that most of their fellow volunteers were white, middle class, high school students that lived in suburban Cincinnati. They also believed that these students did not have any concept of the world beyond their “secure and safe” existence. By working in OTR these volunteer students were given an opportunity to learn more about the people residing in
OTR and to better understand the world outside their suburbs. Participants noted this was instrumental in dealing with false perceptions promulgated by media coverage or by the opinions of their parents. One participant had this to say about the benefits of social awareness for OTRCH’s volunteers:

“Your parents tell you to ‘Stay away from Over-the-Rhine’ because it is a dangerous, drug infested, crime ridden, gang laden kind of place. And, when you actually go down there and spend time and you have an opened mind about it you really find that, that is really not true. It has its problems, all neighborhoods do. Even more importantly you get a sense of the reasons for the problems and a lot of time people try to deal with the symptoms instead of the root causes, which is never going to solve anything.”

The final benefit cited was increased professional awareness. One of the participants felt that it is important to know how nonprofits work, especially for those who expect to work in a nonprofit. This is what she had to say:

“[T]he more you work with organizations…you realize how much disorder there is in nonprofits. [I]f you are going to work for a nonprofit you should know how they work and a lot of times they aren’t very organized or they don’t have a lot of money.”

7.4.2 Costs of Volunteering

While most of participants believed the benefits far exceeded the costs, there were still costs associated with volunteering at OTRCH. Accordingly, these costs were grouped into the following categories: psychological impact, lack of monetary reward, security concerns, loss of weekend time for sleep and recreation, loss of time for alternative opportunities, and transportation cost.
One participant, an AmeriCorps volunteer, felt particularly psychologically affected by the work. This participant took the work that she performed for the organization seriously in that she wanted to positively impact OTRCH. She would “stay up late at night thinking” about what she had experienced and what more she could do. She also pondered the real effects that her work had on the overall scheme of OTRCH to provide inclusive affordable housing to its residents.

Compensation was listed as a cost of volunteering. Some participants saw the lack of a monetary reward as a cost of volunteering with the organization. These participants volunteered through OTRCH’s internship program.

Another participant, who lived in the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood while volunteering with the organization, felt a loss of security. This participant made the following observation,

“Volunteer organizations are often in very bad neighborhoods. They [the neighborhoods] have lots of problems, and they are not always the healthiest place to be working, volunteering or, in my case, living… Some people have the constitution to be able to deal with things day in and day out. Others do not. I am one of them. I need more to be fulfilled and motivated and inspired than some other people that work there [OTR and OTRCH]. They more easily can see the good in all of this. They can more easily see the beauty in this reality. For me it was just hard because I saw
the bad more regularly sometimes than the good. It is not easy work and it can cost you some peace and some emotional stability.”

Other participants cited the loss of weekend sleep, especially on Saturdays, as a cost of volunteering. Most of the surveyed participants were enrolled in some type of academic program during their volunteership with OTRCH. To this group it was difficult balancing their academic workload with volunteering especially when they were involved in the Saturday Crew volunteer program. This particular volunteer program started at 9AM.

The loss of time was a cost to volunteering for some participants. Volunteers’ lose time when contributing their services for a cause. One participant assessed the loss of time in economic terms, “There is the opportunity cost. I could be using my time and energy elsewhere”.

For one participant, transportation cost was cited. This participant used to reside in Over-the-Rhine, but evidently moved out of the neighborhood. Although he continued to volunteer, his access to the organization was different. Thus, transportation became a cost during his volunteership.

### 7.5 Type of Work Assigned

**Question 5:** What type of work were you assigned as a volunteer with OTRCH?

Responses of the surveyed participants were grouped into the following categories indicating work type assigned: Administrative, Maintenance, and Both (see Figure 11).
Six out of ten of the surveyed participants performed both administrative and maintenance tasks. While the administrative work assigned varied, the maintenance work was a general part of OTRCH’s Saturday Crew volunteer program. According to these participants, their volunteer work assigned is described as follows:

“I did a lot of computer work. I was working on Adobe Illustrator. I also worked with an architect that they hired. I worked on a sketch up with them to create some mockups [sic] for one of their housings.”

“I worked in fund development.”

“I wrote a part of a marketing plan for OTRCH and we worked on opening a coffee shop that is over by OTRCH.”

Two of the participants worked solely in an administrative role. One participant, a social work intern, performed “resident work,” primarily with the Recovery Hotel and Buddy’s Place. As a resident worker she assisted existing tenants experiencing some type of economic hardship that hindered their ability to pay rent. A part of the resident worker’s main objective was connecting these tenants with local agencies and programs that could possibly alleviate financial strains. Another participant compiled data from a building assessment that featured different building
characteristics within OTRCH’s holdings, and marketed vacant apartments by distributing flyers to businesses and groups in OTR.

Two participants worked solely in a maintenance role. While it is not clear whether these participants’ work was part of the Saturday Crew or regular volunteer’s maintenance activities, the response of one participant sums up the assigned workload:

“[There were] a myriad of activities. Initially, we started by picking up trash, and going around and cleaning up the lots, from putting on a fresh coat of paint to… taking buildings and turning them around. Doing anything… all the plumbing, electrical, and drywall.”

7.6 Autonomy of Volunteers

Question 4: Were you afforded autonomy in work assignments? That is, could you accept or reject assigned projects at will?

Relating to volunteer autonomy, participant responses were collected into three categories: Yes, No, and Not Applicable (see Figure 12).
Most of the surveyed participants in this study felt they had a significant degree of autonomy in the work assigned by OTRCH. This group indicated that they were presented with a list of project options by the Director of Operations and allowed to select available projects that they were interested in working on during their time with the organization. This is what three participants had to say in response to this question:

“I am there for them, so whatever they needed me to do.”

“He left room for me to be creative. I did not reject assignments.”

“...if I felt uncomfortable doing anything we could have said “no, I don’t want to do that”. But I never felt like anything that I was assigned was like ridiculously unfair. I did whatever they wanted [me] to.”

Three of the 10 participants felt that worker autonomy was not relevant to their assigned tasks.

“[I] never really was posed with that scenario. Kind of always said yes to whatever was assigned. I never ran into that situation.”

Only one of the 10 participants responded negatively to this question. When reviewing this participant’s response more closely the author of this study believes that the participant possibly misunderstood autonomy as meaning authority. This is what this to say in his response:

“No, I don’t think that I was given that authority. Maybe I could have. There were times when we had a limited amount of people and more than enough things to do, and sometimes it was my call to decide what to do.”

### 7.7 Training for Volunteers

**Question 5:** Did you receive training for the work that you were assigned or did your experience match assignments given?

Responses to this survey question indicated three levels of volunteer training: low, medium, and high (see Figure 13). Responses indicating that no training was received were grouped as low. Responses where training was considered informal or hands-on were grouped as medium. Likewise, responses where the surveyed participants indicated receipt of formal training were grouped as high.
Four of the surveyed participants felt they received some type of training. According to the responses, training received was either informal, project based, or hands-on. There was also a general consensus that their skills and experiences, for the most part, matched assignments given. This is what three of those participants had to say:

“[I] received a little on the job training when we were working with construction in one of the units. But the computer work, those were skills that I brought with me.”

“I think that my experience just sort of matched. I mean there wasn’t really that much training required for the things that I was doing. Other than…some of the rehabbing of houses…”

 “[A]t first I started out with very simple tasks, just picking up stuff. Then from talking with people that were there they helped me along by knowledge of how to do things. It was like my volunteering at the first part was my training…”

One participant’s provides some insight as to why there was a lack of formal training:

“People came and went and you know, no matter how hard we tried we never got it down to a system that functioned the same way every time. There were always things that were unexpected. There were always hang-ups and people not showing up or whatever, so, it was kind of learning on the fly.”
Three of the surveyed participants indicated that they received the necessary training for their assigned work. Two of them said,

“[I] received the type of training needed, but the jobs did not require that much training…”

Three out of 10 participants indicated they received no training from OTRCH for the work assigned. Rather than receiving training via OTRCH, these participants indicated they received some form of guidance or training prior to their volunteership, or else connected with outside professional sources shortly after taking on projects. One of the participants, who marketed rentals, had this to say about training received:

“Well, I didn’t receive any training per se, but marketing was based on what I knew before.”

One of the participants approached the non-training aspect as a personal challenge. This is evident by his response,

“I am extremely unskilled in all these areas. But, I guess the one thing that my parents instilled in me is an ability to try new things, and to dive in head first into uncomfortable situations. So basically it has been a learning experience. We have been assisted by some very good and knowledgeable people downtown. It has been learning by trial, by experience.”

7.8 Contributions Made to OTRCH

Question 6: What kind of contributions do you believe that you, and other volunteers, made to help the organization meet its mission?

Responses to this question were grouped in the following categories: Significant, Insignificant, and Unsure (see Figure 14)

30 This participant works primarily in the Saturday Crew and Adopt-a-Building volunteer programs at OTRCH.
Five of the 10 respondents believed their contributions were significant to the organization. Some of these were AmeriCorps volunteers, while others came to OTRCH through an academic program at a university or through a high school extracurricular program. For these volunteers the work performed had value as it saved the organization money and time. The response from the former AmeriCorps volunteer best summarizes the comments of this group:

“The diverse population that regularly volunteers adds to the inclusive atmosphere of the neighborhood. By keeping costs down, volunteers are an important factor in providing housing at affordable rates and keeping OTRCH in functional operation. Volunteers, by their transitive nature, also breathe new life into the organization and keep the flow of ideas and creativity active and constant.”

Three out of ten of the participants indicated that their contribution lacked significance. The reasons for their feelings varied. Two of the participants were graduate students who besides their volunteer work held part-time employment that allowed them to pay their living expenses. These participants felt as though they were not contributing as much as they could base on the amount of time they volunteered to OTRCH. The inconsistency of project work was also problematic for some. This is what one of the participants had to say about her volunteer experience:

“They said that they were going to have me work on the comprehensive plan or something regarding that but then they never did. During my office hours, I really didn’t feel like I was
doing that much stuff. I felt like since I was not there every day, I kind of didn’t have as many projects as some of the other volunteers, which sort of made me feel a little less needed.”

“When I had projects it was awesome; however, when I didn’t I could also see them struggling to give me something to do. I guess it was a little hard for them to actually give me a project but I kind of felt like I wish there was a little more for me to do.”

Concerning the contribution of other volunteers, some participants noted that other volunteers who held more consistent schedules, such as the AmeriCorps volunteers, had opportunities to be involved in the daily operations of the organization. They believed that these volunteers contributed greatly to OTRCH through the work that they performed.

Other participants were unsure of the impact of the work they performed for OTRCH. One of the participants created an interactive Illustrator map of Over-the-Rhine that marked properties owned by the Model Homes, 3CDC and OTRCH. Another participant worked on marketing rental properties, and a capital needs assessment project. When answering this question both participants clearly indicated that the lack of feedback from the organization on the usefulness of their finished products made them uncertain whether their work held any value.

“I am reserving judgment on how helpful it [the interactive map] was because I haven’t seen how it was used. Hopefully it was helpful.”

“I am not sure because I never received feedback on what I did. I spent two month over there, whether I was helpful to the organization I am not sure.”

Participants also had this to say about the contribution of other volunteers:

“I know that some of the teachers from Elder and Moeller. They were outstanding. They showed up every Saturday, they showed up at meetings. They seemed to be very organized as far as recruiting volunteers from their schools. They always had a pretty good work crew to work with them on Saturdays. It was sort of a much better showing from some of the Elder and Moeller volunteers than the general public. They came out in force.”

“I am not sure if I can evaluate other volunteer work because I didn’t really get to work on a team.”
7.9 Perception of OTRCH Before and After Volunteering

Question 7: Did you experience a change in perception of the organization following your volunteer experience? That is, did you have the same view organization once following volunteer? If not, how did your view or perception of the organization change?

This question deals with the volunteer’s perception of OTRCH before and after their exposure to the organization. The first part of this section’s analysis concerns the participant’s opinion of the organization prior to their volunteering with OTRCH. The second section concerns their opinion after working with OTRCH.

7.9.1 Perception of OTRCH Prior to Volunteering

Participant opinions of OTRCH prior to volunteering were grouped in the following categories: Positive, Negative, and Not Applicable (see Figure 15).

![Figure 13: Volunteers’ Perception before Volunteering](Source: Author 2009)

Two of the 10 participants had a positive perception of the organization prior to volunteering. Both participants were familiar with the work and accomplishments of OTRCH (formerly ReSTOC and Over-the-Rhine Housing Network) through academic programs in which they were involved. This is what they had to say about the organization:
“I had a lot of respect and admiration for this agency that I had heard accomplished so much. Then upon meeting them and seeing their work I was pleasantly surprised to see how down to earth and family like they were.”

“I think that they are a better run nonprofit than most of them are. They have been around for a very long time. They have an objective and a mission. Some of the other nonprofits that I work for did not. They are doing advocacy for residents in Over-the-Rhine and believe in what they do.”

Prior to volunteering with OTRCH, two of the participants had negative views of the organization. The reasons for their negative views differed. One of the participants is a native of Cincinnati, who resides in one of the wealthier suburbs of the city. This participant indicated that he was like most people who live in the city [and suburbs] in that he had no ties to OTR. His negative perceptions of the neighborhood and the people of the neighborhood were greatly linked to local news media coverage. He believes that the portrayal of OTR by the media “permeate the general consciousness about the neighborhood.” As a result his parents warned him away from OTR saying it was “a dangerous, drug infested, crime ridden, gang laden kind of place”.

The other participant’s negative perception of OTRCH resulted from his past experiences with nonprofits. This is what he had to say prior to working with OTRCH:

“Going into an organization is ‘iffy’. You don’t think that they are run very smoothly because you see a lot of flaws in them but after volunteering and realizing how difficult it is to organize all the volunteers and get everyone working together.”

Most of the participants answering this question did not have an opinion about the organization prior to volunteering with OTRCH. From the survey responses, the primary reason for this was that the participant became involved through a high school program and had not formed an opinion about the organization, or because the participant was a non-native of the city. The latter had heard about OTR and OTRCH, but did not completely understand why some viewed the neighborhood and organization negatively. This is what two participants had to say:

“I didn’t know too much about them to begin with. All I knew that they used to be ReSTOC and obviously Buddy Gray was a big part of that. I also knew that a lot of city council people were angry at ReSTOC. A lot of people were angry at ReSTOC for buying houses and not really doing anything with them.”
“Not being from Cincinnati and not really knowing anything about Buddy Gray and the issues of Over-the-Rhine.”

7.9.2 Perception of OTRCH after Volunteering

Concerning opinions of OTRCH after volunteering, participant responses were grouped in the following categories: Positive, Negative, and Not Applicable (see Figure 16).

Eight of the 10 participants had a positive perception of the agency after their volunteer experience. Once they became personally acquainted with OTRCH, its staff, and the neighborhood, all of the participants that harbored negative perceptions (and some of the participants that had no opinion of OTRCH) changed their mind. According to participants, this change in perception was due to the strong commitment shown by OTRCH’s directors and staff to its mission: providing affordable housing to residents of OTR. These participants were further encouraged by the welcoming atmosphere as well as the efforts of OTRCH to address the social problems that exist in OTR through its residential programming (e.g. advocacy, block clubs, etc). This is what two of the participants had say about OTRCH after volunteering with them:

“I used to volunteer at ReSTOC a lot. And, then after that it became OTRCH. A lot of things are kept up better. The office has more flow of people coming in and out. The people that work there do a lot more different things in the community. They do a lot more outreach in the community, not just for housing but for many issues that I do not believe that they could do with just
ReSTOC… I have a lot more respect. The organization is doing great things. The people that work at the organization they really care about their jobs. They care about what they are doing. Seeing that helps the volunteers to get into the mindset to care about the organization.”

“Volunteering with OTRCH, and just being involved with them and Over-the-Rhine, in general, has changed who I am as a person. It has changed how I perceive the world. How I perceive poverty and addiction and all the social ills. I think that it has changes what I will do with my future. Not necessary that I don’t have a direction of where I am going, but before the experience it would have been possible that somehow I would have gotten offered some corporate job that I really would not want. But that won’t happen. I think that I have developed as a person.”

One of the participants, who had no opinion prior to volunteering, felt negatively about the organization after his volunteer experience. A part of this participant’s dissatisfaction with his volunteer experience was due to the fact that he was not sure what impact volunteers had on the social problems afflicting the neighborhood. He saw the organization as dealing more with physical improvements and lacking in responsiveness to the core problem of poverty:

“I became disenchanted with the volunteer program. What was really important in my perception was building relationships between the volunteers and the community members. But there is no interaction, if it was it was in passing. Some groups took it upon themselves to involve themselves in the community and that was great, but largely they were focused on the physical space and not on people. So, I guess I became a little disillusioned with the volunteer program.”

Another participant, a former intern who initially had no opinion prior to volunteering, felt that his time with the organization was so short that he did not have an opportunity to learn about the culture of OTRCH. Thus, he indicated that his neutral opinion had not changed after his brief experience.

7.10 Direction Provided by OTRCH Personnel for Volunteers

Question 8: Did you or do you feel as though there was or is sufficient guidance provided by the organization’s personnel?

Depending on their yes/no response, participants were grouped into categories indicating whether they received or did not receive adequate supervision while volunteering with OTRCH (see Figure 17).
Of the 10 participants in this study, six responded positively when asked if they thought there was sufficient guidance provided by OTRCH’s personnel. While answering positively, the reasoning for doing so differed between participants. Some participants responded positively to this question because they truly felt enriched by the experience. One such participant had this to say about OTRCH’s personnel:

“OTRCH’s personnel is more than personable! [sic] OTRCH has so many stories, and a lot of wonderful storytellers. I felt welcomed as part of a family. I always felt valued, appreciated, and taken care of.”

Others, however, responded positively because they believed guidance was available if they had sought it out. This is what two of the participants had to say:

“There would have been had I ever really sought it, but it was kind of hands off. They are very supportive people who would have given me guidance had I gone looking for it. I think I kind of took what I had available to me and kind of formed it into something and just went with it.”

“I feel like the organization’s personnel do give you enough guidance and if they do not give enough guidance they are very easy to answer your questions. Usually, I felt like when I have volunteered there was usually like one –maybe not personnel as in employee--but a long term volunteer that knows what to do. Or, like a person that is retired from the organization that helps out on Saturdays. And, yeah, they have plenty of guidance.”
Three of the 10 participants of this study felt that they did not receive sufficient guidance while volunteering with OTRCH. One participant, a graduate student, believed that he did not receive proper guidance but also explained that his own performance was lacking because of the demands of his academic schedule.

“I felt like I didn’t have proper guidance. Then, I also felt like I wasn’t giving my own 100 percent while I was there. I was busy at the time.”

Another participant wished for a little more guidance in the form of a “guidance plan”:

“It is hard because I understand if you have an intern and you basically have four people managing all of these interns and volunteers. It got to be tough. You as in intern going into an organization and they say read this, this, and this about an organization, that way you will know about our organization. And, do this, this, and this as your assignments. I always felt like I was bothering people because everyone was so busy, and because I didn’t have necessarily a straight forward path.”

7.11 Does OTRCH Meet Its Mission?

Question 9: Do you believe that OTRCH is successful in meeting its mission? Why or why not?

OTRCH’s mission statement reads: OTRCH is a nonprofit organization that works to build and sustain a diverse neighborhood that values and benefits low-income residents. Participant responses to this question were grouped in the following categories: Yes, No, and Both (see Figure 18).
Nine out of 10 of the participants believed that OTRCH met its mission. Generally, this group connects the organization’s success with its capability in providing affordable housing, providing beneficial relationships with its residents, and providing programs that meet the needs of the community. Here are three participants comments made about OTRCH’s efforts to meet its stated mission:

“OTRCH continually establishes new programs, developments relationships, and procedures in order to grow and change with the community, to better meet the needs of the community. By appealing to and providing housing for a wide variety of residents through their affordable rents, they continually contribute to the diversity of the neighborhood. The commitment to quality and respect keeps residents satisfied. Their reputation in the neighborhood is always one that advocates and supports the low-income individuals and families that they serve.”

“I think that their heart is in the right place on a lot of things. Like I do think that they try to do good things and provide housing for a lot of people that wouldn’t be able to afford it before.”

“Just by being there and seeing the number of people are marginalized in that community; the number of people that come to Over-the-Rhine that benefit from their services. I would say they do a good job of providing low-income affordable housing to people.”

There was one participant who felt that organization only met its mission in part. This participant believed that satisfaction level of the residents with their units is proof that the organization meets its mission:
“I met some people that seem to be really happy with the units that were provided by OTRCH. In that way they seem successful.”

The lack of financial means to complete projects is the reason that this participant did not see the organization as completely meeting its mission:

“I guess certain project that they wanted to do that kind of didn’t seem like they were going to happen … just according to what I observed there. Like for instance, we hired out that architect that I worked with and it didn’t seem like a successful partnership, and that they weren’t really going to be able to afford to do anything that he was coming up with. Money seemed like a very big issue.”

None of the participants believed OTRCH had failed to meet its stated mission.

7.12 Suggested Changes to Volunteer Programs

All of the participants of this study had one or more suggestions that they thought would improve aspects of OTRCH’s volunteer program. Some of the suggestions are general, while others are specific. Suggestions provided by participants include improvements in volunteer recruitment and retention, improvements to the Saturday Crew program, the creation of a Volunteer Guestbook, the use of “before and after pictures” to educate the public, and upgrades to the Volunteer/Intern House.

Volunteer Recruitment and Retention

Several participants made suggestions concerning the general recruitment and retention of OTRCH’s volunteers. These suggestions are based on observations made or issues that arose during their time with the organization. Two areas suggested for improvement are increasing the number of volunteers from within OTR, and volunteer education and training.

Recruitment

One of the suggestions made by a few of the long term volunteers who had worked with ReSTOC is that OTRCH should increase its efforts to attract more neighborhood-based volunteers. This group feels that the organization places too great an emphasis on recruiting outside the neighborhood rather than from within the neighborhood. They view the relationship between transient volunteers and the neighborhood as somewhat dysfunctional, as they do not see neighborhood residents maintaining their environment, and instead rely on unpaid labor in
the form of outside volunteers. They do not see how the volunteers are addressing the poverty issue though physical improvements, especially when some of their work is repetitious. For instance, during the spring, summer and the early-fall, a part of the Saturday Crew activities include picking up and disposing debris on and around OTRCH’s rental properties. Each weekend they may clean the same property that they clean the week before. While this is a part of the external maintenance of the property, some volunteers wonder how it encourages self-sufficiency among the residents. Presumably, they should be improving their own living conditions.

These veteran volunteers understand that some OTR residents have problems, economical, social or chemical, that prevent them from volunteering with the organization. However, they would like to see the organization increase its efforts to engage neighborhood members in the upkeep of Over-the-Rhine. Part of this suggestion stems from how Buddy Gray ran the ReSTOC program. Gray required Drop Inn Center residents as well as ReSTOC residents to invest their time in rebuilding and remodeling efforts to provide affordable housing.

**Retention**

The Over-the-Rhine neighborhood and Over-the-Rhine Community Housing both have a rich history that volunteers could benefit from learning about. Some volunteers, especially onetime volunteers, do not have the opportunity to understand the role or the purpose of the organization in the neighborhood, nor the relationship that the organization has with volunteers. It is believed that volunteers, especially high school students, need to know that they are giving their time for a worthwhile cause. When volunteers fail to understand how their time and energy impacts a cause, they are less likely to want to continue volunteering. Some participants believe that one of the ways that OTRCH can overcome this information gap is to offer regular or periodical orientations. One participant, with prior nonprofit experience, indicated that Habitat for Humanity offers an intense weeklong training for its volunteers so that they understand their purpose and role within the organization. In her experience, this training was very effective in keeping her focused on Habitat for Humanity’s mission.
Saturday Crew

Most of the surveyed participants that volunteered in the Saturday Crew enjoyed their experience, and indicated plans to continue involvement with the organization in the future through this program. Based on their experience, this group provided two suggestions to improve the Saturday Crew volunteer experience.

The first suggestion involves the recruitment method of Saturday Crew members. This volunteer program lacks a sense of diversity and attendance. Some of the surveyed participants note that the majority of the Saturday Crew members are associated with Elder High School or Moeller High School. While the presence of these volunteers provides stability to the volunteer program, some believe that OTRCH should reach out to other schools, groups and organizations. Additional outreach efforts may help diversify the Saturday Crew group, enriching the experience. For high school recruitment, college prep courses, that prepare high school seniors to enter and succeed in college, seemed to be the most ideal place to attract potential volunteers. Additional outreach efforts may also help reduce the attendance gaps that exist when individuals or groups fail to show on Saturday mornings.

The second suggestion concerns consistent leadership for the Saturday morning volunteer program. Some of the surveyed participants found the lack of consistent oversight problematic. This was especially evident when individuals and groups failed to show up. Lack of oversight placed a strain on volunteers because no one knew the organization’s priority concerning current projects. Groups that were supposed to work together also had to be split up, so that as much work as possible could be accomplished. Reorganizing the groups to accommodate the volunteer shortage and determining which projects should receive attention caused a lag in the start time for work to commence. While consistent leadership cannot control who shows up, it could reduce the stress on volunteers from having to decide the priorities of the organization. Surveyed participants suggest that OTRCH assign one of their full time maintenance personnel to oversee the Saturday Crew program. Under more consistent leadership they believe that this program may offer volunteers a more satisfactory experience, potentially encouraging a one time volunteer to become a repeat volunteer.
Guestbook

One participant suggested that a guestbook for volunteers and visitors be available for signing at the reception. The guestbook would require volunteers and visitors to place their name and affiliated organization, e.g. high school, university, church group, agency. This suggestion is made to combat the perception that OTRCH’s volunteers are only associated through a few high schools or universities. The guestbook would serve as evidence that OTRCH’s volunteers are diverse, coming from a variety of organizations and places as a group or individually.

Display Before & After Pictures

While OTRCH takes before and after pictures of buildings throughout construction and redevelopment phases, some participants suggested that these photographs be displayed prominently. This would allow visitors, volunteers and donors to see how much progress, through physical improvements, the organization has achieved through the use of limited staff and volunteer labor.

Volunteer/Intern House

The volunteer/intern house is another aspect of OTRCH’s volunteer program that some participants believed in need of improvement. Participants who lived temporarily in the volunteer/intern house felt that the quality of the house did not compare to living in on-campus dorms. Two problems cited with the volunteer/intern house were the presence of excessive furniture and lack of a volunteer residency move in/move out schedule.

Excessive furniture cluttered and made the volunteer/intern feel unwelcome. As a means to improve the living condition the dwelling, some participants suggested that excessive furniture be stored when not in use or thrown away. This would free up space that the furnishings take up and make the volunteer/intern housing more comfortable.

The absence of a residency schedule for the volunteer/intern house creates confusion and chaos when volunteers groups move on and off the premises. To address this issue, participants suggested posting a residency roster in the entry way or in another open area of the volunteer/intern house showing the date, time, and name of the group scheduled to occupy or vacate the premises. This could serve as an effective way of communicating the change in
tenancy to groups presently on the premises. It gives exiting groups sufficient notice so that rooms used can be cleaned and cleared out so that entering groups can take over the vacated space. The residency roster should also be provided to the incoming groups so they know their expected arrival time.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

Up to now, the CDC industry and academic literature has not addressed the influence that volunteer labor has on the capacity of CDCs similar to OTRCH. To address this gap, I interviewed current and former volunteers of OTRCH concerning their contributions to this nonprofit organization. This study shows that some of the challenges faced by OTRCH in the past, as well as some of its future challenges, are not unique but extend through the CDC industry as a whole. While most of the findings from the interviews portray OTRCH in a positive light, there are aspects of the nonprofit’s volunteer programs that need tweaking over and beyond the five main suggested improvements that participants made.

Overall, volunteer labor in CDCs like OTRCH impacts their organizational capacity. As a CDC with only 15 staff members and a comprehensive mission statement, OTRCH uses volunteers to fill administrative roles (e.g. researching and writing grants) and to perform physical tasks (renovating housing units and buildings, cleaning lots, and executing maintenance). This saves the nonprofit both time and money. According to OTRCH, volunteer labor contributes to about 5 percent of their annual income. Since most of OTRCH’s volunteers are associated through academic programs and outside partnerships, some of these volunteers start off with skills and abilities that can be readily utilized by the nonprofit with little to no training. The presence of volunteers also allows OTRCH to advocate while educating.

Three prominent challenges of the CDC industry affect individual CDCs like OTRCH: mission creep, pressure by outside funders to professionalize, and the difficulty of measuring organizational success. CDCs in the past have experienced two mission creeps (the tendency for organizations to stray from their origin mission); both have been brought about by capital needs. The initial mission creep occurred in the 1970s when public and private funding became
available. These funding sources required CDCs to focus on community development and housing production. The second mission creep transpired when federal subsidy programs were cut in the 1980s by the Reagan Administration and then in the early-1990s by the Bush Administration. To fill funding gaps, CDCs formed partnerships with local intermediaries like LISC but these partnerships required programming changes for these nonprofits to receive financial support.

Furthermore, CDCs have been pressured by some funders to become more professionalized. These funders recognize the need for CDCs to become more self-sustaining and financially stable to prevent drastic impacts on CDCs’ operating budgets when temporary funding sources dry up. Therefore, funders push CDCs to increase fees and revenues. While this benefit CDCs by allowing them to function more efficiently and enabling them to better meet performance needs, it drives a wedge between the CDC industry and their mission to advocate on behalf of target communities. These financial challenges bring into question CDCs’ ability to continue to resist pressure from outside funders to become sole stewards of affordable housing stock rather than to remain advocates for the surrounding poor communities.

The final challenge faced by the CDC industry relates to performance outcomes. As indicated in this study, measuring the performance of CDCs success is made complex by both organizational and contextual variables. While most studies of CDCs’ performance seem to concentrate on operating budgets and size, housing production, and programming activities, these results are incomplete; the research generally fails to take into consideration all factors that affect these nonprofits’ ability to meet their mission.

Participants in this study suggested five changes that they felt OTRCH should make to enrich volunteers’ experience: 1) improvements in volunteer recruitment and retention, 2) improvements to the Saturday Crew program, 3) the creation of a Volunteer Guestbook, 4) the use of “before and after pictures” to educate the public, and 5) upgrades to the Volunteer/Intern House. In addition, respondents indicated the need for greater diversity (income, age, race, and culture) among volunteers and the implementation of orientation/exit interviews.
OTRCH could encourage participation of more diverse groups in several ways. To attract different age groups, the nonprofit should consider soliciting retirees. This could be achieved by simply contacting retirement communities in Cincinnati and by leaving pamphlets and/or flyers, newsletters to generate interest, or by sending a representative to speak at one of their social programs.

Since most of OTRCH’s existing volunteers come from academic institutions, OTRCH staff should extend their recruitment efforts to minority and cultural-based sororities and associations. The lack of representation of minority and cultural groups may be because members of these groups are not aware that OTRCH exists, much less know about its purpose. To garner participation from different socioeconomic groups, consideration should be given to agencies and organizations that cater to youths of economically impacted households, such as Cincinnati Job Corps. This approach would create advocacy and educational possibilities.

Volunteers need to be properly introduced to the organization. This is especially true concerning OTRCH’s quality volunteers, who are expected to spend a significant amount of time with the organization. On average, quality volunteers remain with OTRCH for 2 years and 9 months. Since OTRCH relies on the work performed by these volunteers, especially AmeriCorps Visa volunteers; these volunteers should know OTRCH’s history, its purpose and their responsibilities to the organization.

There is also a need for exit interviews. Quality volunteers should be given interviews. An exit process will provide a self-assessment tool for the nonprofit’s volunteer programs and may influence a onetime volunteer to become a return volunteer. Through this process, OTRCH may also be better able to gauge volunteers’ satisfaction. (Some of the participants did not feel as though the work they performed held value.) An exit interview would have given these volunteers an opportunity to voice some of their concerns. Further, a final meeting would provide the director and staff the chance to personally thank volunteers for giving their time and talent. This could go a long way toward making the volunteers feel a sense of goodwill toward OTRCH.
Hopefully this project will stimulate more research with larger samples, and with a variety of CDCs in different cities on the unique role of volunteers in the CDC industry.
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