

Neighbourhood Houses in Metro Vancouver www.nhvproject.ca

Civic and Community Engagement through Neighbourhood House Involvement By Sean R. Lauer

Funded by SSHRC (Grant No: 435-2012-1276), the NHIMV project explores the contributions of neighbourhood houses to local communities. Neighbourhood houses have a long history of operation in Vancouver, dating back to 1938. They began as part of the Settlement House Movement made famous in North America by Jane Addams and her work at Hull House. While time and distance have created differences to that early model, the houses remain neighbourhood-based, locally governed, multi-service, community development oriented organizations. Visit www.nhvproject.ca for more information.

This research brief asks if neighbourhood houses contribute to civic and community engagement among individuals who use their facilities and participate in their programs and activities. By civic and community engagement, we are referring to people's participation in local events, and organizations and political engagement. As part of the NHIMV project, we conducted survey-based research in February and March of 2014 at 15 neighbourhood houses located in Metro Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Respondents were recruited through requests made on the premises of the neighbourhood houses on randomly selected days. Our target population includes users of all neighbourhood houses in the Metro Vancouver area. In total, we collected questionnaires from 687 users.

Neighbourhood Houses & Community Engagement

Neighbourhood houses bring local residents together in a shared local space, where they can develop an awareness of the importance of participating in both the community and wider society. Neighbourhood houses offer a wide variety of programming and events. These include important services, such as child care and English as a second language courses, and expressive activities, such as holiday festivals and community dinners. These activities provide opportunities for participants to develop a broader awareness of their responsibility to engage with the community.

In addition to this, neighbourhood houses actively work on community development and civic engagement. Programs such as dialogue circles, citizenship development, and all candidates meetings, during which residents hear from and interact with local politicians, all encourage members to be active and involved members of their communities.

Neighbourhood house involvement encourages users to value civic and community engagement, and directs the ways in which users can engage.

Key Findings

Our respondents are especially engaged in community activities such as ethnic events and neighbourhood meetings and projects.

The longer a respondent is involved with the neighbourhood house, the more the extent of their civic and community engagement increases.

Users' Civic & Community Engagement

We asked respondents to consider eight different types of civic and community engagement, and asked if they had participated in any of these activities in the past 12 months. The findings are presented in Table 1. Some of these patterns of engagement follow what we

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already know about Vancouver residents. Neighbourhood house users differ from regular residents, in that they are noticeably more involved in their local communities. A large number have attended ethnic and cultural events, and neighbourhood or community meetings, and have participated in neighbourhood and community projects.

Table 1. Civic and Community Engagement

<i>In the past 12 months, have you ...</i>	<i>Yes</i>
Visited your local library or community centre?	83
Attended an ethnic or cultural event?	50
Voted in the provincial election?	49
Attended a religious service?	36
Attended a neighbourhood or community meeting?	36
Participated in a neighbourhood or community project?	36
Attended a city council or school board meeting?	14
Attended a political meeting or rally?	11

Figures shown are percentages.

Engagement and Involvement

Using these eight types of activities, we looked at the total amount of engagement with which

a user participated. Figure 1 shows that a number of users fall into the lower range of two or fewer activities. A number of users participated in over four activities and some in all eight activities. We looked at the ways in which this engagement varied with the participant's length of involvement in the neighbourhood house. See Figure 2. As tenure increases, so does the extent of engagement. Neighbourhood houses appear to nurture civic and community engagement over time.

