



AMBASSADOR PILOT PROGRAM

The ambassador approach was key to the overall success of creating people-centered spaces at mobility hubs in Minneapolis. Ambassador teams, as champions for care and programming of mobility hubs, have a multiplier effect on the positive impact of these spaces in the community.

What is the Ambassador Pilot?

Goals of the Ambassador Pilot Program

1. Provide community-based approaches to safety through a regular on-site personnel presence;
2. Create a decentralized, community-grounded maintenance approach for the mobility hub features;
3. Provide a holistic model that connects maintenance, public safety, resource distribution, and enhanced public realm features by capitalizing on the synergies between these often siloed conversations.

Ambassador Role

The core duties for a Mobility Hub Ambassador were to activate and maintain the mobility hubs and make users at each hub feel more safe and welcome. The Ambassador's responsibilities included:

- » Performing light maintenance, such as litter pick up, tending plants, adjusting signs, snow removal, and artwork care at each mobility hub and monitor conditions as they walk between each site;
- » Alerting Mobility Hub project staff about larger maintenance issues (i.e. broken or missing items);
- » Interacting with people (while socially distanced due to COVID-19) at mobility hubs to establish positive relationships with frequent users and nearby businesses and residents;

- » Connecting mobility hub users with Metro Transit's Transit Assistance Program, Nice Ride for All, Bird Access and Lyft Community Pass;
- » Communicating safety issues occurring at the site to appropriate channels, intervene in minor unsafe activity (i.e. divert verbal street harassment, check in with individuals who are in distress);
- » Supporting engagement efforts.

Why the Ambassador Model?

Community engagement during the 2019 Mobility Hub pilot illuminated that feeling unsafe at transit and mobility locations was a common and significant barrier to using these facilities and services. What "safety" meant for people varied - for some it meant traffic safety from cars as a person walking or biking, while for others it had more to do with personal safety while being at the site.

In addition to safety, the ambassador approach also filled the following needs that would improve the experience at mobility hubs:

- » Establish a regular presence who can support positive activity and be a friendly face to frequent users
- » Provide frequent maintenance for enhanced features distributed throughout neighborhoods
- » Create a role that can advocate and raise on-site needs across the many jurisdictions and stakeholders with assets at mobility hubs spaces

How was the Ambassador Pilot Implemented?

An ambassador program, run in partnership with community organizations and small-scale entrepreneurs was developed to meet the needs identified. A model of having locally-hired ambassadors visibly and frequently caring for spaces in the public realm was chosen because it:

- » Leveraged existing community relationships and interests to unearth new opportunities for partnership and improvements;
- » Ambassadors could become familiar faces in these spaces, allowing them to build new relationships with users, making people feel both more comfortable and safe;
- » Promoted well maintained spaces, and having that maintenance be highly visible communicates safety and community ownership;
- » Supported community members to spend time on things that improve quality of life but are hard to efficiently deliver in a centralized maintenance system, such as snow removal and planting care.

The Ambassador partnerships were sought out through an open call supported by targeted outreach to BIPOC-led and community-based organizations where the project team had prior relationships. The City, through its project partner The Musicant Group, contracted with the West Bank Business Association to implement the Ambassador pilot for mobility hubs in West Bank/Cedar Riverside. To establish Ambassadors at mobility hubs in North Minneapolis, youth outreach entrepreneur Marc Woods was selected to lead a team. Funding was made available through the Energy Foundation via Bloomberg Philanthropies American Cities Climate Challenge.

Gratitude

The City of Minneapolis Public Works and the Musicant Group would like to thank Marc Woods and KJ Starr for their leadership in piloting the Ambassador Pilot Program with us.



Ambassador Pilot Partner Profile: West Bank/ Cedar Riverside

WEST BANK BUSINESS ASSOCIATION

Hiring local | Managed by the West Bank Business Association (WBBA), two neighborhood residents were hired to serve as ambassadors overseeing six mobility hubs in the neighborhood. Each worked 10 hours a week for 18 weeks. One of the two ambassadors spoke Somali, which opened the potential to connect with the significant East African community in Cedar Riverside.

Training | Provided by The Musicant Group around site care and WBBA around harm reduction and de-escalation.

Opportunities Supported | A campaign around promoting low-carbon transportation options among the Muslim community of Cedar Riverside.



“ This pilot would work very well with our organization’s long-term priorities [to help] our businesses transition from reliance on parking and vehicular traffic... It will be wonderful to have a friendly face to help direct and welcome people.”

- At the outset of pilot: KJ Starr, West Bank Business Association

Impact

- » 12 planters placed, maintained, and watered at mobility hubs
- » 300+ maintenance/outreach hours logged on site and in the community
- » 2 bright yellow vests with West Bank insignia that signal: “this is a person I can ask for help”
- » 2 bus shelters that had the lighting and heating replaced when an ambassador noted it was broken
- » Both ambassadors underwent de-escalation training during this project.

Funding | \$11,700 for two part time ambassadors and administrative time. This covered an 18-week pilot of Ambassador service.

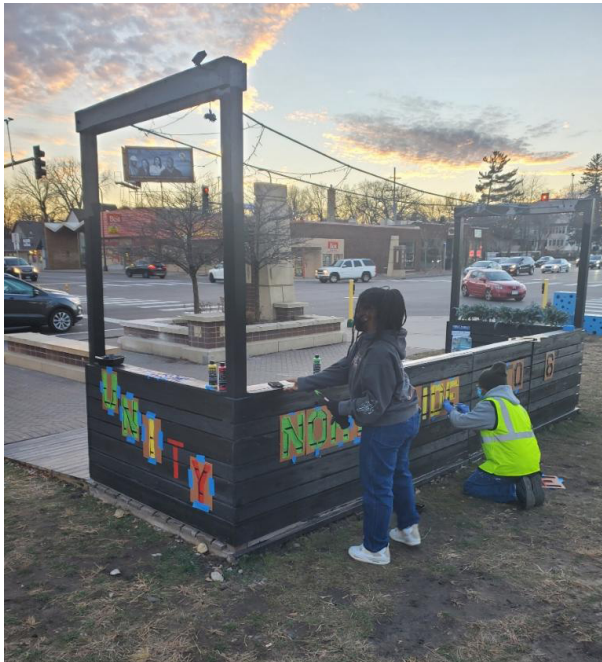
Ambassador Pilot Partner Profile: North Minneapolis

MARC WOODS + YOUTH SERVICE LEARNING

Hiring local | Marc Woods led the Northside Ambassador team, employing two youth workers and one adult to program and care for seven North Minneapolis mobility hub sites. Marc built on his past experience managing street outreach and youth mentorship programs with the Minneapolis Youth Congress and Youth Coordinating Board to build a business to consult on projects like this.

Training | Provided by The Musicant Group around site care. Additionally, team capacity grew around grant administration and event planning.

Opportunities Supported | New community artwork was installed on the parklet at the Penn and Lowry mobility hub, masks were distributed to community members, and volunteers provided care and maintenance services.



“The number one thing that has developed from this mobility project for me is a sense of community. As I have used my light to give to others, reciprocity has followed. The mobility spaces have changed the community by giving familiar faces, allowing others to see youth in a positive light. It has given an outlet to the elders who don’t have much hope to vent, and help, it has become a resource center with our [masks, water] giveaway. I’ve had so many people come to me asking for work ,it’s overwhelming. The people who have come literally take so much pride in their work that there’s very little for me to do outside of teach, and provide tangible ways to accomplish their desires. A highlight being the little boy with handmade business cards who asked to work.”

– Marc Woods, Ambassador Pilot Lead

Impact

- » 12 planters placed, maintained, and watered at mobility hubs
- » 260 hours logged on site and in the community
- » Youth given opportunities to develop solutions to problems in their own community
- » A coat drive
- » A Halloween Trick-or-Treat event
- » A community painting event
- » A dozen resource distribution pop-ups
- » National exposure in news article and webinar.

Funding | \$11,700 for two part time youth ambassadors, one maintenance-focused ambassador, and Woods’ administrative and mentorship time. The team also used their funding to do bi-weekly activations on site, from distributing masks and water, to painting the parklet on site.

Lessons Learned

1. Co-Creation and Adaptability

Given the many demands on community groups during the first half of 2020, one goal of the partnering process was to minimize administrative burdens and ensure that there were mutual benefits for all involved. The resulting partnerships were established around shared goals - the community partners were able to pursue their goals through the opportunity of the mobility hub ambassador pilot program. The first several weeks of the relationship focused on creating the framework for the ambassador program in collaboration - drawing from both the project team's experience operating hubs in 2019 and partners' experience running other similar programming. From this foundation, there was enough trust to be able to navigate the new terrain of operating the ambassador program, amid dynamic challenges of 2020.

Lessons Learned | Future iterations of the ambassador program should build on the success of this approach - establishing partnerships with a foundation in aligned goals, co-creation of the program details, and flexibility.

2. Open Communication

Establishing shared expectations for the communication pathways is important. The approach this season established communication channels from the Ambassadors through the Lead in each neighborhood. The Lead from both neighborhoods would communicate with the project team, who could then activate any other maintenance resources, permissions or changes needed across other departments. This approach minimized the need for Ambassador partners to attend weekly project team meetings and reduced demands on their time. Good communication also depends on building strong relationships and responsiveness in a short chain of communication.

Other communication tools that were tested during the program were a form that Ambassadors used during their shift to document the work they did, additional maintenance items, photos and insights from conversations/observations during the shift. This opens up potential for an ongoing feedback loop and data gathering from the site to the project staff, reducing steps in the communication process. However, access to a Google Form while in the field caused trouble for some team members, and so communication then flowed only through the Lead in each neighborhood.

Lessons Learned | Future iterations of the Mobility Hub Ambassador program can use this insight to 1) develop the right input tools for simple data gathering/communication from the field and 2) consider hiring Ambassadors through the Local Lead but having them report directly to the Project team. This more direct communication chain would ensure insights from the site and in the neighborhood do not get delayed in the communication process.



3. Benefits of Localization

From the start of the ambassador pilot, the project team prioritized hiring people from the neighborhood to serve as ambassadors. A flexible model was established that could adapt in response to user feedback received and based on strengths of the partner running each team. West Bank Business Association and Marc Woods were the partner Leads on developing the ambassador approach. Since they came from different backgrounds, the model provided insights into how a business district-oriented approach and youth mentorship oriented approach contributes to the pilot objectives. The pilot was nimble enough to reflect the assets each partner brought to the approach and the context of their organization, while still being under the same umbrella of the Ambassador pilot goals and receiving support from the project team.

Both ambassador teams saw great benefit in an approach that was intentionally localized because it provided the opportunity to:

- » Hire neighborhood residents
- » Create authentic connections within the program to local culture and identity
- » Offer avenues for other benefits like service learning, mental health outlets and community growth through events

The aspects of the program that could be streamlined through centralized administration:

- » Communication of maintenance issues in need of further work, building stronger accountability into the system
- » Shared training experiences for consistent service quality across neighborhoods
- » Minimizing administrative burden at the local/grassroots level

Lessons Learned | As the ambassador approach evolves, the program can actualize benefits of both local participation and some enhanced centralized administration. A program structure could utilize a central Ambassador Pilot Lead (within the project team or through another partner with sufficient capacity), who is accountable for the outcomes across several Ambassador teams and who has direct communication with the Ambassadors on-site. Another local partnership could help direct potential Ambassador hires to the program, but wouldn't need to stay active in the day-to-day operation of the team.



“Rewarding others for doing positive things became a reality after a follow up conversation with Ella and Max. Oftentimes people think that they should be given an opportunity before they can make an impact. In my opinion it’s quite the opposite. I recruit those who are already doing the work. It becomes more natural and a bonus instead of a chore or punishment.”

- Marc Woods, Ambassador Lead



4. Building Youth Capacity

Both the Northside and West Bank Ambassador teams took the opportunity to fill at least one out of two of their ambassador roles with local youth. This created many benefits for both the youth and the project overall - generating earning opportunities, skill development, and infusing the program with their unique perspective on their neighborhood.

Lessons Learned | For the youth to be most successful, in the new role it was important for their managers to have a sense of the support they would need. As the program evolves, it could further support youth employment opportunities by allocating further resources toward staff capacity to support managing youth team members and investing in their growth and development.



JOY: A LIP SYNC BREAK



“When you invest in others they are more likely to support you in return.”

- Marc Woods, Ambassador Lead



PARKLET PAINTING



**COMPLETED PARKLET
AT PENN + LOWRY**

5. Community Ownership

Success in the ambassador program came through the strongest when the partner organization, in several cases led by a youth member of the team, was given the opportunity to express their identity and vision through the mobility hub program.

One youth Ambassador led an event that demonstrated their ability to bring energy to the mobility hub spaces and make the space their own by painting the parklet at Penn and Lowry. The youth on the Northside Ambassador team organized this event, recruiting other youth from the Black Student Union in Minneapolis high schools to participate in painting the parklet black. The students then came up with ideas to further enhance the space, adding words like “Unity,” “Equity” and “Community” in colorful letters.

In her own words, this is an excerpt of an event summary written by Landrei Areial, who led the Paint the Parklet event:



Landrei Areial

“When the time came for us to paint our bench at the pilot on Lowry & Penn, multiple members of the community asked to join us and help paint. We quickly handed them paintbrushes and little bowls filled with black paint. As we painted the bench together we heard many stories, some which included the loss of loved ones, others which included a mini-series of those “back in the day” stories. I personally believe that specific project was probably one of the most meaningful as well as insightful moments out the pilot as a whole.

Our moments, presence and activities were therapeutic to the community. Giving others the ability to speak and be open with us about their personal hardships and obstacles that they have faced and are facing to this day, and being able to mutually relate to some stories and topics was all therapeutic.

Being able to come together for something positive yet so simple as painting, as a collective, which is something you don’t see too often, I think not only gave some community members a glimpse of hope but also a positive staple in the community that many will now see whether their driving, biking, or walking by, it’s a representation of community collectiveness which I believe is a huge factor in moving towards our next step as a people.”

In the West Bank Ambassador team, one youth team member developed a communication campaign around the concept within the Islamic concept of “Sunnah,” encouraging neighbors to participate in activities that emulate the Prophet Mohammed and benefit the community, like picking up litter or riding a bike. They designed posters around several messages and worked to distribute them around the community, including a shoutout in a local radio program.



Further Lessons Learned from Northside Ambassador Pilot

The following is an excerpt from the summary written by Marc Woods, lead of the Northside Ambassadors.

Marc Woods

"If I had to have steps to lead someone in this process again, I would list the steps in this order

- » Meet people where they're at
- » Make goals and agendas as transparent as possible
- » Put others in a place where they can thrive (set them up for success not failure)
- » Reflect daily and often for clarity
- » When working with youth invest in them over the work, the work will be taken care of when staff/people are valued
- » Be stern but redirect conflict by asking for possible solutions
- » Trust the process
- » Listen to what others say and facilitate instead of control.

Goals accomplished:

- » Practice philanthropy
- » Mentor youth and employ them
- » Create safe spaces
- » Provide resources to the community
- » Create equity
- » Model positive initiative
- » Build community culture
- » Give hope
- » Allow outlets for mental health
- » Represent community in a positive light no matter what it looked like"

Further Lessons Learned from West Bank Business Association Ambassador Pilot

The following is an excerpt from the summary written by KJ Starr, lead of the West Bank Ambassadors.

KJ Starr

"Having bikes and scooters in the neighborhood this year definitely increased ridership among our residents. I hope we will have them again next year and they will help tie together our transit with our bike friendly population that works, lives and plays on the West Bank.

Having ambassadors help with trash in the neighborhood was definitely beneficial. We will continue to work on both having systems in place so that our main commercial corridor is maintained and garbage cans are available and work on cultural messaging to care about our neighborhood.

We look forward to developing the safety work of the ambassadors this next year. The safety work will benefit from not being tied so much to the mobility hub locations.

As a short term, part time project, it was also always likely to be a challenge to hire individuals who were very committed to doing the work. In contrast to professional ambassadors downtown, I was unable to commit to more than providing a few months work to people."



Minneapolis

Public Works

This pilot was implemented by City of Minneapolis Public Works with the support of The Musicant Group.



2020