WHAT IS THE RWU COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS CENTER?

The Roger Williams University (RWU) Community Partnerships Center (CPC) provides project-based assistance to nonprofit organizations and government agencies in communities in Rhode Island and Southeastern Massachusetts. Our mission is to undertake and complete projects that will benefit the local community while providing RWU students with experience in real-world projects that deepen their academic experiences.

CPC projects draw upon students and faculty from RWU programs in areas such as:

- Accounting
- Architecture
- Business
- Communication
- Community Development
- Construction Management
- Digital Media
- Education
- Engineering
- Environmental science and sustainability
- Finance
- Graphic Design
- History & American Studies
- Historic preservation
- Justice studies
- Law
- Management
- Marketing
- Political Science
- Psychology
- Public Administration
- Public Relations
- Urban Design
- Visual Arts
- Web Development
- Writing Studies

The Center has completed projects ranging from; market research and planning, historical research, mill redevelopment feasibility studies, urban policy analysis, design projects for affordable housing and education facilities, community business district revitalization, neighborhood revitalization plans, museum exhibit design, historic building rehabilitation studies, social services research, website and graphic design, environmental sustainability planning, and survey development.

CPC project services are performed by students in support of their educational experience. Applicants shall understand that any deliverables generated through an accepted project are intended to provide conceptual information only to assist in design and planning and as such are not intended, nor should they be used for, construction or other project implementation. Professional and/or other services may be needed to ultimately implement a sponsor’s desired goals.

HOW CAN YOUR ORGANIZATION PARTNER WITH THE RWU CPC?

As we prepare for upcoming semesters, we are seeking new projects that can benefit local communities while providing our student/faculty teams with opportunities to apply their learning, engage the community, and create final products that provide benefits to all.

We hope that your organization considers applying for project assistance with the RWU Community Partnerships Center this year. The next deadline for applications for projects is March 3, 2014.

In order to ensure ample time for faculty to develop curriculum to engage students in community projects, the CPC has moved to a year-long application period. Applications submitted for this deadline may be considered for either of the two upcoming academic semesters. The CPC will hold another call for projects in September of 2014, should your organization need more preparation time. In order to assist organizations as they prepare their applications, we are happy to answer specific questions by e-mail or by phone. We look forward to working with you in the future and encourage you to contact us should you have any questions, comments, or concerns.

CONTACT INFORMATION:
Stephany Hessler
Phone: (401) 254-5211
E-mail: shessler@rwu.edu

Arnold Robinson
Phone: (401) 254-3307
Email: arobinson@rwu.edu

RWU Community Partnerships Center
Roger Williams University, One Old Ferry Road, Bristol, RI 02809-2921 | Website: http://cpc.rwu.edu
CALL FOR PROJECTS
Spring 2015 & Fall 2015

Application for CPC Project Assistance

Instructions: We encourage non-profit organizations and municipal agencies to contact the CPC with ideas for projects that can benefit the community while providing meaningful service-learning for RWU students. Please fill out the Application for Project Assistance, answering all applicable questions and including all supporting documents.

In order for any project to be considered for assistance, completed applications must be submitted to CPC Project Coordinator, Stephany Hessler, by 5 pm on August 4, 2014. Applications may be submitted by:

Email: shessler@rwu.edu
Fax: (401) 254-3565
Mail: RWU Community Partnerships Center
Roger Williams University
One Old Ferry Road
Bristol, RI 02809-2921

Any questions regarding the application process can be directed to Stephany at (401) 254-5211.

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SECTION 1: Organization Information

Name of Organization: Olneyville Housing Corporation

Mailing Address: 66 Chaffee Street, Providence RI 02909

Name of Project Contact Person(s): Jennifer Hawkins, Associate Executive Director

Contact Information
Phone: 401-351-8719, x101
Fax: 401-351-0019
E-mail: Hawkins@Olneyville.org

Type of Organization
- Public (town, city, municipality, special district, government agency)
- X Private (citizen, non-profit)
- Other (please explain)

Description of Organization and Mission:
Olneyville Housing Corporation (OHC) was founded in 1988 to promote the comprehensive revitalization of the Olneyville neighborhood of Providence. Our mission is to work with residents to build a safe, healthy and stable community. We accomplish our mission through the creation and preservation of affordable housing, development of commercial real estate to spur economic development in the neighborhood, individual asset building, as well as community building and organizing.
On average, how many individuals does your organization serve per year?

OHC broadly serves Olneyville neighborhood with a population of 5,559 people living in 1,891 households (2010 Census). The organization directly serves approximately 500 residents living in its 118 rental units and 48 homeownership properties.

How did you hear about the CPC?

As a recipient of a Byrne Criminal Justice Innovations grant from the Department of Justice, OHC is currently collaborating with researchers at Roger William University’s Department of Justice Studies on crime prevention strategies for Olneyville, including addressing problem properties. This productive partnership further highlighted the importance of engaging academia in the design and implementation of our initiatives.

Additionally, Ms. Maia Farish of Roger Williams University (RWU) encouraged OHC to apply for project assistance, suggesting that CPC could offer valuable strategic support to strengthen our community programs.

SECTION 2: Project Description

Title of the Project:  “Preventing Problem Properties: Early-stage Interventions For Olneyville Homeowners”

Project Location (Address, City, State, and Zip): 66 Chaffee Street, Providence RI (Olneyville Neighborhood)

General Project Description (you may attach a longer narrative if necessary):

Olneyville Housing Corporation (OHC) seeks support from Roger Williams University (RWU) Community Partnerships Center (CPC) to broaden and strengthen its public safety initiatives, particularly those that target Olneyville’s vacant and abandoned properties. Last year the US Department of Justice named OHC as one of fourteen award recipients for its highly competitive Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation Program to pilot community-oriented methods of crime reduction in one of Providence’s most crime-ridden neighborhoods. The organization and its grant partners, including researchers from RWU’s School of Justice Studies, aim to improve area safety by using a three-pronged approach: increased enforcement, collective efficacy, and property abatement.

This third strategy, addressing nuisance properties, is especially well-suited for CPC project support given the multi-faceted nature of remediation initiatives. While OHC has historically focused on the area’s highest-risk properties, it plans to expand its efforts under the Byrne grant by piloting early-stage interventions to complement its full-scale redevelopment programs. OHC hopes to capitalize on RWU CPC’s interdisciplinary expertise to design interventions that creatively address problem properties at their earliest stages of decline. These might include notification letters to owners in violation of city code; OHC-administered grant and revolving loan programs for voluntary, small-scale repairs; improved property tracking systems to better monitor decline and advocate for municipal action; expanded foreclosure assistance including counseling and loan modifications; free legal counsel for property owners to assist with housing court, permit processes, and tenant disputes; and community outreach and education.
**Potential Scope of Work/Tasks for RWU CPC (you may attach a longer narrative if necessary):**

Envisioned project assistance includes:

- Researching evidence-based property abatement strategies and presenting tailored recommendations for OHC
- Developing systems to electronically report and track nuisance properties including status changes, program interventions, and related outcomes
- Designing early-stage interventions such as: grant and loan programs to support voluntary repairs; legal assistance clinics for at-risk homeowners; pro-bono construction/design counsel for small-scale renovations; and community education and outreach
- Collaborating with partners, particularly the city’s interdisciplinary Nuisance Taskforce, to streamline enforcement processes and support transfer and abatement actions
- Supporting program implementation by organizing and facilitating legal clinics, performing community outreach, and developing related materials

(see below for deliverables & expected timeline)

This proposed scope of work is ambitious, and OHC recognizes that not all implementation components may be fulfilled. However all project assistance, even if limited to the planning and designing stages, is very welcome and would offer valuable support to the organization’s efforts.

**What will be the final product output for this project? (survey, website, design plans, drawings, etc.)**

- "Strategy Toolbox" report outlining recommended strategies for OHC to support local property owners
- Monthly clinics to provide legal counsel to at-risk homeowners regarding code violations, foreclosure proceedings, resale, and housing court actions as well as guidance to landlords on enforcing tenant leave obligations
- Pro bono individual design plans and/or construction/engineering advice to at-risk property owners for small-scale home improvements to meet code standards (as needed)
- Template legal documents including violation notification letters to property owners and contracts/application forms for possible OHC-run grant and/or revolving loan programs
- Standardized definition and rating scheme for nuisance properties that expressly outlines criteria and is endorsed by the city.
- Educational materials to promote resident awareness and action for nuisance abatement (e.g. how to report blight)

**Proposed Project Schedule (when the tasks/project needs to be completed):**

Proposed timeline below, however, schedule would be adaptable to project needs:

- Organization & neighborhood orientation; housing evaluation walk-through with Chris Ackley: September 2014
- Draft “toolbox” recommendations: November 2014
- Pilot first voluntary homeowner intervention “violation notification letters”: December 2014
  - Flowchart of action triggers/process
  - Creation of online tracking/reporting system
  - Development of related documents such as template letters
- Proposal for OHC-run grant and/or loan program outlining recommended program components, documentation, and required funds: December 2014
- First monthly legal clinic for property owners: January 2015
- Recruitment of volunteer designers/architects to provide small-scale renovation plans: Jan 2015
- Program evaluation & revised recommendations: March 2015
• Full program roll-out: April 2015
• Final report to City of Providence’s “Nuisance Taskforce” including outcomes and scalability for possible city-wide implementation: Summer 2015

Please provide the names and contact information for any staff members or volunteers who will be playing a primary role in the proposed CPC project.

Primary Contact: Jennifer Hawkins, Associate Executive Director (Hawkins@Olneyville.org)
Secondary Contact: Christopher Ackley, Stewardship Manager (Ackley@Olneyville.org)

What resources/previous work would the CPC be building upon that you already have completed?
(Please select all items that are applicable)

X Strategic Plan
X Additional organizational documents
X Preliminary photos of the site/project
X Maps
X Previous research
X Architectural or building plans

What active support would your organization be able to contribute should your project be selected?

X Funding
X Volunteers
X Staff time
X Consultants
X Other (please list)
  Office space for clinics, community meetings/teach-ins

SECTION 3: Project Outcomes

Please describe how this project might benefit the overall community, including specific groups that could benefit from this project (i.e. target populations, neighborhoods, specific town/city/region).

The possible benefits of CPC project support are far-reaching. If effective, early-stage interventions for problem properties will not only improve street aesthetics for direct neighbors, but will also strengthen the safety, reputation, and overall well-being of the larger neighborhood.

Olneyville snapshot
Located in the western part of Providence, Olneyville has a diverse population of approximately 5,500 residents; nearly half the population is foreign-born and 66% speak a language other than English at home. The neighborhood has a much younger population than the state as a whole, with 43% of the neighborhood residents aged 18 or younger compared to 28% statewide. Incomes are comparatively low: the median household income in Olneyville is $22,773, compared to a state median of $53,901. Twenty-three percent of are households earn less than $15,000 a year.

Distressed streets
Today, many parts of Olneyville are visibly distressed. The area’s history is closely tied with the textile industry, and the industry’s collapse in the mid-twentieth century continues to affect the neighborhood. The quality of the housing stock varies dramatically, from well and moderately maintained single family and multi-family structures to many distressed or deteriorating structures, with interior conditions or systems not in compliance with city codes. Fully half of the 2,327 housing units in Olneyville were built
before 1960, typically resulting in stock needing repair and rehabilitation. Given today’s low housing prices, the cost of needed improvements often exceeds the value added to the home, resulting in “appraisal gaps” that require flexible financing to fill.

Olneyville was among the hardest hit zip codes nationally for its concentration of foreclosures. In 2012, 58% of properties for sale were in the foreclosure process. Full neighborhood blocks were marked by houses with boarded windows, exterior deterioration, and vandalism typical of foreclosed and abandoned homes. The sub-prime lending scandal targeted the low-income, immigrant population that overwhelmingly resides in Olneyville. While the foreclosure crisis has stabilized, the effect of the “boom and bust” cycle is still visibly apparent. Less visible, but equally detrimental, is the more recent impact of irresponsible investors returning to the neighborhood and out-bidding developers seeking to redevelop and maintain properties as affordable assets for low-income families.

The Connection Between Blight & Crime
It is well documented that abandoned and blighted properties attract criminal behavior, and neighborhoods with a high concentration of abandoned and blighted properties experience heightened crime. This has certainly been the case in Olneyville. Analysis of 2009 law enforcement data provided by the PPD indicates that Olneyville has a high violent crime rate of 104 per 1,000 in 2009, second only to Lower South Providence (131 per 1,000). Within-neighborhood variation in crime levels reveals several particularly discernible hotspots for violent crime. The neighborhood’s major thoroughfare, the Manton corridor, has disproportionately high rates of crime: in 2011, 25% of the 101 forcible sex offenses, robberies and aggravated assaults that occurred in the neighborhood occurred along this section of Manton Avenue.

Benefits of Property Abatement
Property abatement strategies can be powerful tools for improving neighborhood conditions and preventing crime. OHC has developed 45 for-sale homes and 118 affordable rental apartments, in addition to 40 apartments in redevelopment. OHC secured Neighborhood Stabilization Program funds and other public financing sources to acquire and redevelop 33 foreclosed or abandoned properties and numerous blighted lots into 56 high quality affordable housing units between 2008 and 2012.

In every instance, OHC real estate activities have resulted in the transformation of blighted, crime-ridden properties into safe, attractive community assets. As a consequence, violent and non-violent crime in the vicinity of the new housing developments has plummeted. Comprehensive strategies to ensure that properties remain safe and maintained—including structurally sound, properly secured, occupied, free of garbage, and free of overgrowth—benefit the area in numerous ways. Property values rise, prostitution and drug sales decline without spaces to operate, related crimes—both violent and quality-of-life—decrease, and neighborhood pride and engagement grow.

Please describe how this project will benefit your organization and the advancement of your mission:

OHC’s Redevelopment Success
Olneyville Housing Corporation is committed to promoting the comprehensive revitalization of the Olneyville neighborhood, and its keystone strategy is the redevelopment of problem properties into affordable housing and community assets. OHC selects properties to renovate that are gateway sites—places where renovation will have a positive domino effect on a block or street. This intentionality has proven effective: crime rates along Riverside Park in Olneyville plummeted after OHC’s development of 61 homes along the park. The organization expects to see similar impact in the area around D’Abate Elementary School as its redevelopment efforts continue.

Challenges Remain—The Need for CPC Support
Yet even with these successes, Olneyville remains among the most economically distressed neighborhoods in the city, and nuisance properties continue to plague its streets. The area still claims a disproportionate share of chronically vacant (more than three months) residences compared to other
similarly situated neighborhoods, while rates of vacant land, residential parcels in one-plus year tax
delinquency, and property foreclosures remain equally high. Elevated crime rates also persist,
particularly in key “hot spots” marked by blight. In 2011, Olneyville had 473 burglaries, motor vehicle theft,
larceny, larceny from a motor vehicle, and receiving stolen property crimes, with 86 (18%) of these crimes
occurring in the “Manton Corridor” (Manton Avenue from Hyat Street to its terminus at Atwells Avenue)—
a 25% increase over 2010 crime data.

While OHC offers some early-stage housing interventions such as foreclosure prevention services and
homebuyer education classes, its limited staff capacity prevents the organization from fully pursuing the
range of strategies available to curb problem properties. CPC project support offers OHC the chance to
expand its “toolbox” and proactively respond to early-stage code violations and damage before properties
become inhabitable and magnet sites for crime. Access to expertise in areas such as law, design,
information technology, and public policy would help OHC develop programs that more comprehensively
address nuisance properties with an emphasis on prevention.

Please explain why you have chosen to seek assistance from the RWU CPC with your project request,
instead of undertaking the project using fee-for-services from a paid professional:

As a 501(c)3 organization, Olneyville Housing Corporation depends in large part on grants and donations.
To make best use of its limited funds, OHC consistently seeks creative means to implement programs
including in-kind assistance from community partners. Equally important, the organization is founded on
the notion of community-partnership, believing that impactful, sustainable change stems from
collaboration—both with local residents as well as local businesses and institutions. Roger Williams
University’s Community Partnership Center offers its project recipients the unique opportunity to access
the strengths of academics and practitioners in a range of fields from architecture to law and public
administration. Instead of pursuing narrow interventions, OHC hopes to capitalize on the integrative
power of CPC’s work to develop strategies that are comprehensive and ultimately far more effective. We
are confident that the benefits of such a partnership will extend not only to the residents of Olneyville, but
also to the CPC members who generously offer their time and services.

Please describe how this project will benefit RWU students.

We anticipate that the proposed project will offer RWU students exposure to inter-disciplinary problem solving that
engages diverse stakeholders, builds on documented evidence, and provides tangible results. Specific benefits
include:

• Interaction with cross-sector stakeholders including city and state government, businesses,
  nonprofits, and local residents

• Experience translating research and raw data into actionable, practical programming

• Production of high-level deliverables for career portfolio (research, consulting, program design &
  implementation, legal materials, reports/memos)

• Exposure to key issues relevant to many disciplines such as community development, affordable
  housing, property redevelopment, municipal governance, crime prevention practices

• Opportunity to use learned skills to make positive, measurable impact for a RI neighborhood
  where housing redevelopment is critical to its revitalization
SECTION 4: Financial Information

What is your organization’s annual operating budget? Please include a copy of your most recent budget with the application.

$1,286,471  (See attached for FY14 operating budget)

What are your major sources of funding?

Major Sources of Funding:
- Developers Fees (36.7%)
- Corporate/Foundation Support (21.7%)
- Rental Income (18.3%)
- Government Grants/Contracts (17.6%)

How much funding from your annual operating budget is set aside for this project (if any)?

Funding is not available for CPC assistance at this time, but OHC will endeavor to secure funds from charitable foundations.

SECTION 5: Private Sector Involvement

Have you or your organization discussed the project with practicing professionals (e.g. architect, engineer, planner, consultants, etc.)?  (please circle one):  Yes

- Providence City Solicitor’s Office
- Providence Police Department
- Providence Department of Inspections and Standards
- RWU School of Justice Studies

SECTION 6: Supporting Documents

Please include the following items when submitting your application:

- Budget for the current fiscal year
  (see attached)

- List of current Board members

  Kate Trimble, President  Acting Director/Swearer Center for Public Service, Brown University
  Sean Creegan, Vice President  Deputy City Solicitor
  Elmer Stanley, Secretary  Neighborhood Resident
  Stephanie Ogidan Preston, Treasurer  Neighborhood Resident/Citizens Bank
  Omar Bah  Neighborhood Resident/Refugee & Community Advocate
  Kas R. DeCarvalho  Attorney
  Julia Gold  Climate Change Program Manager, R.I. Department of Health
  Lt. Dean Isabella  Providence Police Lieutenant
  Maryclare Knight  Neighborhood Resident/President Knight Consulting LLC
  Xander Marro  Neighborhood Resident/Olneyville Arts Collaborative
  Virginia Morgan  Neighborhood Resident/President, D’Abate Elementary School PTO
  Clay Rockefeller  Neighborhood resident/artist/developer
  Michelle Wilcox  Chief Operating Officer, Crossroads RI

- Copies of supporting resources identified in section 2 as needed to support your application
  (see attached)