

The East St. Louis Action Research Project (ESLARP)

2006 Annual Report

ESLARP establishes and nurtures mutually enhancing partnerships between community-based organizations in distressed urban areas, and students, staff, and faculty at the University of Illinois and on other campuses. Through these innovative partnerships, ESLARP promotes the revitalization of distressed areas as well as advances the University's research, teaching, and service missions. Distressed urban areas continue to confront serious environmental, social, and economic challenges. Local government agencies in these areas are unable to deal with the particular challenges they face, and this task is increasingly being left to community-based organizations. As local residents, organization members often know how best to deal with these challenges but need technical and logistical assistance in planning and implementing their efforts. At the same time, students need richer learning opportunities than currently available to them. They must better understand the real-world relevance of the concepts and skills they are taught; they must gain a greater and deeper awareness of the diverse realities that people experience in the world.

ESLARP organizes technical and capacity-building assistance for community-based organizations by harnessing and leveraging the efforts of students, staff, and faculty. In the spirit of true partnership, community residents identify and prioritize tasks to be worked on, as well as the ends towards which campus efforts must be directed. Individuals from the campus learn from community residents, who have intimate and extensive knowledge of their community; in exchange for access to this knowledge, they work on projects that enhance and build community. ESLARP maintains and sustains this relationship regardless of the individuals, on campus and in the community, who might be involved at any given point.

After a decade of service as a liaison to the community and a “walk-in” site for ESLARP, the Neighborhood Technical Assistance Center closed its doors. Much of the work previously assigned to the NTAC staff has shifted to graduate assistants supported by the funds provided by the Provost’s office. The community liaison function has shifted to the Cooperative extension Office for the Fall 06 term with some funding support from ESLARP. The number of active projects has increased and communications between partners and campus have improved through this new approach.

ESLARP 2005-06 accomplishments:

- Support for neighborhood based organizations
 - Emerson Park Development Corporation (Neighborhood Plan, award submittals, youth prevention programs). Rush City (research and support for relocation negotiation of residents for industrial redevelopment). South End New Development Organization (organizational support, small grants). Precinct 12 (clean-up and youth programming). 41st street (Wetland Park Planning and design, grant writing).
- Support for individual non-profit groups
 - Opal’s House (Homeless women and children; construction and grant management), Eagles Nest (Homeless Veteran shelter; grants and construction), Village Theater (Community Theater and youth programming; set up of computer site, construction assistance), Catholic Urban Programs (pantry, resale

store etc.; assessment of buildings), East St. Louis Park District (design, clean-up/construction, grants)

- Over 300 hundred students from a dozen units from Fine & Applied Arts and across the University participated in ESLARP Volunteer Outreach weekends:
 - Example: Precinct 12 clean-up: In addition to the students this cleanup had broad participation from local stakeholders. Waste Management, donated seven 20-yard dumpsters and one 40-yard dumpster and helpful crew as well as plenty of free dumping. St. Clair County removed 500 tires from the precinct, donated dump trucks, and an end-loader with crew. The City of East St. Louis also donated dump trucks, an end-loader with crew and stored the surplus tires (over the 500 the County removed) in the City Garage until the following Monday. The East St. Louis Housing Authority loaned new equipment to the volunteers, including gloves, wheelbarrows, rakes, shovels and lots of garbage bags. The East St. Louis Park District donated their trash truck, two Johnnies-on-the-Spot, as well as crew with chainsaws to cut down dead trees. A private land owner also graciously donated a truck and trailer for moving tires to the City Garage, a riding lawn mower with his own crew as well as a Bobcat with a bucket for loading the dump trucks which he personally operated. Let's not forget the volunteers! One hundred and fifty-two tons of illegally dumped trash was removed from the precinct during this clean-up.
- Technology access: Community Technology Centers (CTC's), Teen Tech, River Web, use of virtual reality in education
 - ESLARP is providing public access to computers and internet through partnerships with churches and other non-profits in East St. Louis. Over the past 6 years 42 labs have been established with a total of 600 computers. 8 labs has been upgraded. App. 325 U of I students have participated. 40 local residents have been trained in a train-the-trainer program. We also provide training and opportunity for youth to learn about rebuilding and selling computers, so fare 33 local youth have participated. App. ½ mill \$ have been generated in grants for these programs over the past 6 years (Greater St. Louis Empowerment Zone, Ameritech etc.)
 - River web is a research project aiming at easy access to historical information.
 - Other technical assistance such as maps and census data is also available through the ESLARP Web Site.
- Comprehensive neighborhood planning for Emerson Park (1998, 2005), South End (2003), Lansdowne (2001), Alta Sita (1999).
 - Data books of current conditions,
 - Neighborhood goals and strategies for implementation.
 - Support of implementation
 - Awards submissions for documents
- Design projects/design-build
 - Projects at Opal's House, Eagles Nest ant the Shiloh Church in the South End Neighborhood

- Park development/family reunion tourism project
 - Created marketing and site design plan for reunion tourism & Grant writing.
- Predatory lending study
 - Including assessments of properties named in a predatory lending suit by the Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Center
- Service learning courses in: Urban and Regional Planning, Architecture, Landscape Architecture, Library and Information Science, Recreation, Sport and Tourism.
 - Each year both graduate and under graduate students are involved in a broad aspect of community development including direct service with tangible improvements in the community, action research and organizing efforts, real world work with clients, grant writing.
- RA-ships for up to 12 students each semester
 - An important role of the RA is to create a physical presence of the university in East St. Louis. Residents need easy access to campus resources and it is the RA's responsibility to create this connection. In addition to general technical assistance the RA supports organizational development and networking.
- Worked with Rockford College and Judson College in attempt to expand to other parts of the state. Networked with Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, Washington University, Lewis & Clark Community College and other local institutions.
- COPC conference presentations, journal articles
- The presentation we did in Springfield for extension...
- Tours for the Community Development Society's conference in St. Louis
 - Including tour of the city with stops at ESLARP's oldest partner Emerson Park Development Corporation and Eagles Nest
 - Village Theater Workshop; use of community technology center (CTC).

ESLARP future:

- Continue providing services similar to those listed above
- Foster leadership development and professionalism amongst our students
- Provide opportunities for engagement, civic responsibility/awareness and research opportunities for graduate and undergraduate students
- Build closer linkage with extension
- Prevention education. New partnership with Kinesiology and Community Health.
- Support the continuous development of leadership in East St. Louis by providing easy access to campus resources.
- Expand the Community Liaison concept to serve the community better
- Oral History project to document the stories of local activists and the history of the community.
- Expand to other departments on campus; involve new faculty and more students.
- ESLARP going global; Africa
- Publicizing accomplishments, sharing lessons learned
 - Redesigned web site, more publications and presentations, new Video