

**Grassroots Neighborhood Leaders in Vermont:
A Qualitative Analysis of the Rewards, Challenges, and Goals in Community Development**

Student Research Conference Abstract

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Grassroots neighborhood leaders are important in promoting community development. This research investigates what volunteer grassroots neighborhood leaders identify as the rewards and challenges of their volunteer work and how these are associated with their goals. This information is useful for understanding strategies for sustaining effective community leadership and development. This research builds on a study that qualitatively assessed how and why grassroots neighborhood leaders in the greater Burlington area became involved and sustained in their community leadership work. In-depth interviews (60-90 minutes long) had been conducted individually with 32 grassroots leaders (16 females, 16 males). Interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed inductively to identify key response themes and their frequencies, as well as associations between themes within and across leaders. Analyses revealed that among the most commonly reported rewards of neighborhood grassroots leadership were making a difference and self-satisfaction; the most common challenges included dealing with difficult people and time related demands; and major goals included specific projects in the community and continued involvement. As predicted individuals' perceived rewards and challenges also predicted their future goals (e.g., 62% of individuals that named "achievement of a specific project" as a reward, also named wanting to complete another project in the community as one of their goals). While the male and female data overlapped on many themes, there were notable differences (e.g., only males noted wanting a self-sustaining organization and only females noted the reward of feeling safe in the community). Analyses of these challenges, rewards, and future goals and the co-occurrence of these themes can inform communities regarding how to promote sustained community member involvement. The results of this research will be provided to the City's Center for Community and Neighborhoods so that grassroots neighborhood leaders can understand the patterns of relationships between rewards, challenges, and goals in their community work.