

What's Working in NRI

An inexpensive competition with a big payoff

Idea: With very little money, Curb Appeal, a friendly competition that inspired residents to improve their front yards and house facades, transformed a Buffalo, N.Y., neighborhood in a matter of months.



Why we did it: Westminster Economic Development Initiative, a Buffalo-based nonprofit, decided to get creative after receiving a \$1,000 grant. The nonprofit partnered with a fledgling neighborhood block club to engage residents to reclaim a street challenged by crime, blight and indifferent landlords.

How we did it: We selected a two-block area of Arnold Street and pre-registered 12 contestants (only one entry per property) on a first-come, first-served basis. We photographed the front yards and facades of the contestants who could be renters or homeowners. Each contestant received a \$40 gift card

to a local garden cooperative. (The gift card expired the last day of the contest.) Contestants had three months to make improvements. A panel of volunteer judges — a local councilman, a city court judge, and the executive director of a local nonprofit — scored each property based solely on improvement, not on which looked the best. (The judging criteria are attached.) This framework encouraged everyone to participate regardless of their property's condition. At the awards ceremony, the winner received \$400 and a trophy, and the runner-up received \$100.

Partners: Residents, Arnold Street Block Club, Westminster Economic Development Initiative, NeighborWorks America (grantor); Urban Roots Community Garden Center; volunteer judges.

Successes: The cash prizes were an effective incentive to encourage residents to paint their houses, rebuild decaying flower boxes, mow lawns, pull weeds, collect trash and paint fire hydrants. Two contestants installed fountains. Some noncontestants pitched in to help residents who offered to share prize money and bragging rights. Half of the contestants were renters who became more involved in the block club. Residents spent more time together, laughing and talking, and working in their yards. Because of all of the activity, gang members moved from the street. The contest has now been repeated successfully in several other neighborhoods in the



area. Moreover, Curb Appeal has enduring benefits. It seems to play into factors neighbors use when making individual investment decisions: Should I move away? Should I put on a new roof? Should I mow my lawn today? Putting off mowing is easier when the yard next door is a disaster.

Challenges: Two of the 12 contestants did nothing. Surface-level improvements to facades can sometimes hide deep social and economic issues that remain unaddressed. Some houses have serious structural issues that a coat of paint or a spruced-up flower box can't take care of. Renters and new homeowners often fail to understand how to make lasting improvements that actually improve house values and quality of life on the street.

What we would do differently: The success of the competition caught us off guard. We would better document the event to leverage public relations, funding, and word of mouth.

Advice for other affiliates: Try it. There is little to lose and so much to gain.



For more information, contact Jeremy Clifton, designer and former manager of the Curb Appeal competition, at 716-510-8784, or email jer.clifton@gmail.com.

*Has an idea or practice worked for your NRI affiliate?
If so, please email NRIWhatsworking@habitat.org*

Front Yard and Front Facade
2010 Arnold Street Competition

Description Summary:

We will pre-register 12 contestants on Arnold Street (only one entry per property). If necessary, residents (homeowners and renters) have priority over non-resident property owners. Registration will be awarded on a first-come-first-serve basis. On April 22nd, 2010 (Earth Day), we will take various pictures of the final 12 contestants' front yard and front facades*. At that point, contestants will each receive a small allotment of starter funds in the form of a \$40 gift card to Urban Roots that will expire the last day of the contest, July 17th, 2010 (one week before Garden Walk), giving contestants almost three months to make improvements. On the 17th we will either take pictures again or the Judges may opt to peruse the properties themselves. Finally, these improvements will be judged by a panel of three outside judges based on the rubric below. Prizes will be awarded at the September Arnold St. Block Club meeting.

Budget:

Item	Cost
Grand Prize	\$400
Runner-Up	\$100
Starter funds	\$480 (\$40 per contestant)
Trophy	\$20
Total	\$1,000

Rubric for Judging:

Contestants will be judged solely on the basis of who has the *most improved* front yard and facade. Thus, everyone can be competitive, no matter the current state of their property. Judges will give between one and 10 points on the following categories. The property with the most combined points wins. Judges will not be from Arnold Street or WEDI. The Judges are County Legislator Maria Whyte, Grant-Ferry Association Executive Director Bob Franke, and Executive Director of Westside Ministries Cornelia Dohse-Peck. Cornelia is our head judge and she will make the competition decisions hence forth with the input of the other judges.

How much improved is the aesthetic appearance of the yard?

0 = There is no improvement.

10 = It is so improved I can hardly believe it is the same yard.

Consider all improvements, but especially flower beds, bushes, walkways, gardens, decorations, the quality and upkeep of the grass, overall cleanliness and good taste.

How permanent are the yard's improvements?

0 = No improvements will be noticeable in 2011.

10 = All changes will likely endure and some for decades.

Keep in mind perennials vs. annuals, the quality of the improvements, depth of mulch beds, etc.

How much improved is the aesthetic appearance of the front facade?

0 = There is no improvement.

10 = It is so improved I can hardly believe it is the same house.

Considerations should include (but are not limited to) paint jobs, the quality of workmanship, the condition and aesthetics of the front porch, decorations, creativity, permanency and whether the work is done in good taste.

*The facade is defined as the portion of the building which faces the street.

(initial here)

I agree to participate in the *2010 Arnold Street Competition*. _____

I grant the Arnold St. Block Club permission to take pictures of my front yard and facade on Thursday, April 22nd, 2010 and again on Saturday, July 17th, 2010. _____

I give permission that these pictures be used in printed promotional materials and on the internet. _____

I have received my \$40 gift card to Urban Roots and I am aware that it will expire on July 17th, 2010. _____

I promise to spend this money only on front yard and front facade improvements. Any additional expenditures will be my own responsibility. _____

Signature

Date

Witness

Date

Contact Information for Contestant:

Name -

Phone -

Email -

Address -