

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

WASHINGTON, D.C.

BRINGING HOMES UP TO DATE
THROUGH COMMUNITY HOME IMPROVEMENT CAMPAIGNS
IN RURAL DISTRICTS AND SMALLER TOWNS

Prepared by the Committee on
Reconditioning, Remodeling, and Modernizing

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BRINGING HOMES UP TO DATE THROUGH COMMUNITY HOME IMPROVEMENT CAMPAIGNS IN RURAL DISTRICTS AND SMALLER TOWNS

Carefully organized educational campaigns designed to emphasize to local property owners the value of making needed home improvements and repairs perform the double function of encouraging community betterment in general and of materially aiding local employment and business.

The stimulation of employment, particularly in the building field, through an aggregate of small home repair and improvement jobs, which individually may only amount to a few dollars, is a substantial element, since on the average it is generally assumed that at least 50 per cent of expenditures for this work are paid directly in wages. An educational program of this nature has a particularly worthy objective in the encouragement of thrift through sound investment in carefully planned home improvements as well as the social value of emphasizing comfort and attractiveness in the home.

It is generally possible to create a community improvement spirit among home owners which will result in a substantial number going ahead with needed repairs and remodeling work. Many home owners have postponed making necessary repairs and improvements, which they are financially able to make, because of a feeling that expenditures for such work might not be in accord with the current tendency to reduce expenses. Such a feeling among home owners may result in greater depreciation to many properties than would otherwise be incurred, and these owners can be properly and effectively influenced concerning the advantages of an up-to-date home through the efforts of a well-organized educational publicity campaign.

Women's clubs as well as other civic organizations have often unusual facilities for initiating community betterment campaigns. Certain members may have special qualifications for assisting in the work of carrying such local efforts through to a successful completion. A brief study of what has been done in other places through community activities, many of which are being sponsored by organizations such as Better Homes in America, should be sufficient encouragement to crystalize the desire in the local organization to develop a similar activity. The movement may be started by outlining a tentative plan for enlisting the aid of local public officials and influential citizens, as well as other civic and business groups, in developing a local home improvement campaign.

As a concrete example of how a town of approximately 1,500 people carried on a campaign resulting in expenditures for labor and materials of approximately \$35,000, the following outline is cited:

Several members of a local civic organization in this town became interested in the possibilities of a local home modernizing campaign and,

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after interesting a number of the other members, decided to call a general meeting. They invited representatives of local business organizations, including building material dealers and contractors, as well as responsible representatives of the local lending institutions, and members of active clubs, churches, and fraternal groups, to attend. The chairman of this informal meeting was instrumental in having a committee chosen, which included representatives of the various organizations, and in having required staff work and incidental expense taken over largely by the building interests. The small representative committee, after serious consideration, prepared a simple plan, which divided the town into five districts, and appointed a leader to act as a captain of each district. It was each captain's job to choose as many members as were needed to make a systematic house-to-house survey, from whatever groups he felt desirable, which in this particular case was chiefly from the interested women's clubs. The house canvassers were carefully instructed at a general meeting on how to approach home owners with a message designed to stimulate them to make needed repairs or alterations to their properties. Pledge sheets were given to the home owners by the canvassers to be signed and returned to the local home improvement committee headquarters. The following copy of such a pledge is generally typical of those stressing the employment appeal:

(Sample of Pledge)

TO HOME OWNERS

Date.....

The local newspapers are cooperating with the Home Improvements Committee of the Campaign to Create Needful Employment. Mrs.----- and Mrs.----- are heading this committee and are exceedingly anxious to create as much work as possible now so that employment may be given to men and women who are at present without means of support. You can help to bring joy to the families of unemployed by filling in this questionnaire and mailing or bringing it to the Committee.

Check List

It is my intention to devote.....Dollars (\$.....) to home improvements and I will have this work done on the following items within the next three months (or before.....1933)

- | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Bathroom fixtures..... | Painting..... |
| Carpentry, cabinets..... | Papering, decorating..... |
| Electrical work..... | Plastering..... |
| Hardware..... | Plumbing..... |
| Hardwood floors..... | Roofing, sheet metal..... |
| Heating..... | Tile work..... |
| Landscaping..... | |
| Masonry, cement..... | |

I can give ----- men or ----- women one or more hours work on odd jobs each week. Please state how many.

Pledge obtained by:

..... Name.....

..... Address.....

..... Telephone No.....

1. The first part of the report discusses the
background and objectives of the study.
2. The second part describes the methodology
used in the research, including the
sample size and data collection methods.
3. The third part presents the results of the
study, showing the distribution of
responses and the statistical analysis.
4. The fourth part discusses the implications
of the findings and provides recommendations
for further research.

5. The fifth part concludes the report
and summarizes the main findings.
6. The sixth part provides a list of
references used in the study.
7. The seventh part includes an appendix
with additional data and figures.
8. The eighth part contains the
acknowledgments and the author's
contact information.

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When the pledge was returned to the committee a service star was sent to the home owner with the request that he display it in a window to signify his cooperation in the campaign. A notation of the amount pledged and a return card, to be filled in and mailed when the work was completed, were inclosed with the service star.

The drive was finished in about eight weeks. Each week the pledges were totaled and a report was sent to the local newspaper. When the three months time allotted to the pledges was nearly up, the return cards were checked, and a follow-up was sent to each person who had sent in a pledge but had not reported the work as completed. It was assumed that the cards might have been mislaid. A second follow-up was sent a few weeks later, and a final totaling of the cards was made for a general report to the local newspaper and for further reference.

An organized campaign in a mid-western city of about 10,000 people included such work as painting, paper hanging, re-roofing, plastering, tiling, plumbing, flooring, masonry, replacing window glass, repairing stone work, walks, roadways, fences, and the planting of new shrubs and trees. More than \$100,000 was spent in three months, even though some of the larger projects were not completed.

It is found that much work can be secured in connection with the improvement of gardens and grounds as well as the house itself. Nurserymen, seedmen, and florists generally have reduced their prices, and specialized skilled labor is readily secured. It is surprising how a few well-planted shrubs can transform a dreary, bleak-appearing house into an interesting, attractive dwelling place. A winding road leading up to the entrance, hedged, or fenced with stones and vines, or a straight approach, bordered with trees, creates new interest in the old homestead. A stepping stone walk that leads through the yard between colorful beds of flowers to the garage may be both useful and decorative.

Some of the home and garden clubs may be eager to cooperate in a modernizing campaign, initiated by the women's clubs, or by any other interested group.

So many kinds of modernizing may be planned within the home that it is difficult to enumerate them. The basement may be transformed from a forlorn storeroom into a popular recreation hall. The attic may be converted from waste space into a cheerful playroom. The sunroom, the bathroom, and the kitchen, may be redecorated so attractively with modern wall finishes and made so convenient as well as beautiful with modern equipment that it seems most advantageous to modernize them while prices are at their present level,

Many people are adding vast dividends to their satisfaction in living by merely transforming the somewhat neglected structures in which they live into more comfortable, interesting homes.

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Any effective campaign for creating additional home improvement and repair work should recognize the importance of having desirable financial arrangements available to local property owners. Perhaps the necessary step required to secure such financing would be to have representatives of the various financial agencies in the community participate in the campaign. In many communities much assistance in developing loans for home improvements might be secured through advice from the regional and national directors of the Federal Home Loan Bank System, which has pointed out that applications for loans to cover home property improvements are worthy of primary consideration.

One of the local committees which secured good results from campaign activities summarized its work by stating that a strong appeal should be made to the local citizens through various publicity mediums, including talks to audiences at public, fraternal, church, and business gatherings, as well as through window displays, newspaper stories, and poster advertising. The idea should be stressed that the time is opportune to take advantage of prevailing conditions in improving and modernizing homes, thus not only adding to the property value as well as comforts and pleasures of the family, but also contributing a very material share in furnishing employment to capable workers.

Community improvement campaigns of this nature are in no wise merely an experiment. Some 80 cities throughout the country reported to the Commerce Committee that a total of approximately \$65,800,000 was pledged or spent by property owners for improvements and repairs to homes and other structures during 1932. More detailed information regarding methods used in various cities, as well as information of special interest to home owners, may be secured by a request sent to the Committee.

The Home Modernizing Committee of the Department of Commerce carries on educational work pertaining particularly to residential improvements, and therefore most of its data is on home modernization, though many local campaigns have included substantial expenditures for modernizing commercial properties. This Committee is composed of the following 17 voluntary members who are experts in the housing field, and acts as an advisory group of the Division of Building and Housing of the Bureau of Standards:

- George L. Bliss, Federal Home Loan Bank of Newark, Newark, N.J.
- H. H. Bede, Nat'l. Real Estate Journal, 139 N. Clark St., Chicago, Ill.
- L. J. Briggs, Acting Director, Bureau of Standards, Washington, D.C.
- Joseph E. Chandler, Architect, 18 Arlington St., Boston, Mass.
- Miss Emily W. Dinwiddie, Director Children's Bureau, Dept. of Public Welfare, Richmond, Va.
- F. Stuart Fitzpatrick, Mgr., Civic Development Dept. of U. S. Chamber of Commerce, Washington, D.C.
- J. Harold Hawkins, Associate Editor, Ladies Home Journal, Curtis Publishing Co., Philadelphia, Penna.
- B. L. Johnson, Editor, American Builder and Building Age, 105 W. Adams St., Chicago, Ill.
- Mrs. W.F. Lake, Pres., Federated Women's Clubs of Arkansas, Hot Springs, Ark.

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Chairman: Frederick M. Feiker, Director, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic
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