

**Northeastern IPM Center – IPM Partnership Grants – 2010 – Proposal
Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation (NMIC)
Project Description**

PD: Evan Hess

Project Title: Community Education for Integrated Pest Management in Upper Manhattan

Project Type: Minigrant

b. Project Summary – In upper Manhattan, the aging housing stock, characterized by extensive water infiltration, holes, cracks, and poor sanitation, results in an environment conducive to vermin. In response, NMIC proposes to increase awareness of IPM among residents, owners, building managers and superintendents as an effective method to eliminate rodent infestation in targeted areas, and diminish use of toxic pesticides. We will hold a total of 10 workshops on IPM over the course of one year. Five will be targeted to low-income cooperatives and tenant controlled rental buildings, all with rodent infestation problems, and two which have adjacent vacant lots, with the remaining five workshops targeting tenants associations, superintendents and building managers in privately owned buildings with rodent problems.

Our workshop curriculum will cover the basics of Integrated Pest Management. Our approach will be holistic – we will discuss the neighborhood conditions that foster vermin infestations, such as the prevalence of deteriorated buildings and vacant lots, and review the laws and mechanisms available to residents to change these conditions. We will promote the long term cost effectiveness of controlling infestations, saving on the cost of violations given by the NYC Department of Health, as well as repeated use of pesticides. Bilingual (English/Spanish) materials will be distributed at all workshops.

To evaluate our effectiveness, NMIC staff will survey infestation in targeted buildings before workshops, creating a baseline. We will document all attempts to exterminate vermin using IPM. At the conclusion of the trainings, we will again survey the extent of the infestation to assess success. The service model will be promoted for replication in other urban, immigrant communities in the northeast with aging housing stock.

c Background and Justification - Vermin infestations are highly prevalent in poor housing. In upper Manhattan, the aging housing stock, characterized by substandard conditions such as extensive water infiltration, holes, cracks, and poor sanitation, results in an environment highly conducive to rats, mice, and roaches. In an effort to address infestations, many families in our community use highly toxic pesticides, which are known hazards that reduce fetal growth, cause developmental delays, and have been associated with ADHD. As more and more people begin to understand the role that vermin such as rats, cockroaches, and mice play in asthma (a big problem in our targeted area), but then lack the knowledge on how to do this in an environmentally sound manner, use of dangerous pesticide sprays to control infestations will increase. And, as landlords attempt to deal with rising energy costs by replacing windows to reduce drafts and air from outside, the effects of these pesticides will become even more concentrated and harmful.

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is a safe, ecologically sustainable alternative to control pest infestations, avoid allergies related to asthma, and prevent future infestations in the least toxic manner available. With the harmful effects of spraying demonstrated and proven, the need for an alternative has lead many to turn to IPM, which has been shown to be effective in reducing pest populations without exposing residents to toxic pesticides. The growing body of evidence of recent successful IPM interventions helps provide a framework for expanding this method of pest control and justify halting the practice of indoor pesticide spraying and improving the health of residents.

Source: “*Integrated Pest Management in an Urban Community: A Successful Partnership for Prevention*” Environmental Health Perspectives Vol. 111, Number 13, October 2003 (www.ehponline.org/members/2003/6069/6069.html)

Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation, founded in 1979, is a community based non-profit organization serving the communities of Washington Heights and Inwood (WH/I) in upper Manhattan. Our mission is to serve as a catalyst for positive change in the lives of the people in our community on their paths to secure and prosperous futures. Our programs include tenant and community organizing, low-income housing development, weatherization of low-income buildings, free legal services, workforce development and adult education, and social services. Tenant organizing for building repairs was one of NMIC’s first activities. Tenants in WH/I live in some of the worst maintained housing in the city, and have more housing code violations than any other NYC neighborhood. These communities also contain one of NYC’s greatest concentrations of poor Spanish speaking immigrants, and are characterized by very little public housing. Only 2.5% live in public or subsidized housing, a remarkably low number for a low-income number community. Nearly 75% of neighborhood residents speak little or no English and 40% of adults over 25 lack a HS diploma or GED, with literacy levels typically at 8th grade or less. (US Census 2000).

NMIC’s Community Organizing Department educates tenant associations about their rights and helps them select appropriate strategies to obtain repairs, working with approximately 42 tenant associations at any given time. In order to provide residents with an opportunity to actively participate in the civic life of their community, NMIC supports and coordinates the Union Comunal de Washington Heights (Washington Heights Community Union), a community-led membership organization comprised of over 2300 households. The Community Union is made up of 28 active tenant associations, which comprise block associations that cover eight blocks. In their Annual Assembly this past May, attended by over 200 residents, members set an agenda for the coming year. Poor housing conditions, primary of which was rodent infestation, was named as a top priority. NMIC’s community-wide approach, through our organizing work with block associations and the Union Communal, is critical in properly addressing pests, since an infestation in a particular building cannot be resolved if the surrounding buildings continue to engage in practices that attract vermin.

For nearly a decade, NMIC has worked with community leaders, residents, and the City of New York on a campaign to eradicate rodents, with limited success. This is due to the inherent limitations of the tools we had available, letter writing to landlords and the NYC Department of Health, and calls to 311 (more recently). Usually these efforts result in increased trapping and baiting. While this approach provides short term relief, the underlying causes of the infestation,

such as holes, cracks, unsanitary trash collection areas and other common building spaces, are not addressed. Clearly, a more holistic approach is needed. Integrated pest management impacts an entire building, literally from the bottom up.

NMIC's Community Organizing Department also has a long track record as the primary resource in providing information, education, counseling, and advocacy on neighborhood conditions and healthy housing to tenants, including lead paint poisoning in our community. From 2002-2009 we ran an extensive community education campaign around the issue of lead paint poisoning, which was funded by the US Dept of Housing and Urban Development through a national intermediary, the Coalition for Healthy Homes. Surveying and assessing building conditions was a significant part of that project. Today, the area in which we conducted our lead paint project (W. 169th – W. 177th Sts) has the most active block associations in the community, and we have established relationships with hundreds of tenants as well as owners, managing agents, and superintendents, well positioning us to conduct an Integrated Pest Management Training program.

Approach and Procedures - Our workshops targeting tenants will use an adult education model known as "contextualized learning", that has been proven to be very effective, particularly for people with low literacy skills. All exercises and trainings will be framed within the context of residents' immediate experiences, and will be as concrete and hands-on as possible. Each workshop will be approximately 90 minutes, and will be bilingual in English and Spanish. Most of the training will take place in NMIC classroom space and community rooms; however, we will do some hands on work on-site at designated buildings.

Goal: Eliminate rodent infestation in targeted areas in Manhattan.

Objective: Increase usage of Integrated Pest Management Techniques as an effective and safe method to reach the stated goal.

Outcome: Increased awareness of IPM among residents, owners, managing agents, and superintendents.

Evaluation: NMIC staff will survey the extent of vermin infestation in target buildings before the workshops, establishing a baseline regarding building conditions. We will then document owners' attempts to exterminate vermin. Finally, at the conclusion of the program, we will again assess the extent of vermin infestation, to assess the efficacy of owners' attempts at extermination.

We will promote our service model for replication in other northeastern urban, immigrant communities with aging housing stock, by sharing our results at various fora and with other organizations such as the Community Environmental Health Resource Center in Washington DC, and the Bergen County Community Action Partnership, Inc. N.J., Bergen County's designated anti-poverty agency. The WH/I communities are linked physically and increasingly culturally by the George Washington Bridge to New Jersey, as low and moderate income residents have moved there in recent years searching for lower cost housing in response to displacement pressures.