

Kim Hunt, MPP 2004

Helping Communities Find Their Voice

Kim Hunt, MPP'04, caught the community organizing bug early. A Kansas City native, she grew up during a major urban renewal project-construction of a highway system-that leveled many African American neighborhoods.

"I remember being very aware of the sense that these folks had no power," she explained. "They were being compensated in part for the market value of their property, but not at all for the loss of [their] community, which was huge."

Hunt decided to enroll in the Harris School to hone her skills and get more quantitative training. She already had 15 years of work experience, a master's degree in urban planning, and ran her own fundraising consulting firm for nonprofit organizations and small businesses. When she graduated, she wanted to combine her urban planning and public policy degrees to empower communities to make change, but found such opportunities few and far between.

So in 2005, Hunt co-founded O-H Community Partners (OHcp), a management consulting firm that advises nonprofits, government agencies, and corporations. Hunt serves as the managing partner/chief operating officer. Services range from strategic planning and program design to facilitating public-private partnerships to outreach and community relations-all in an effort to give underserved populations a voice.

"Often with government, there's not a strong sense as to who agencies should talk to in communities," she explained. "Because of the work we do with nonprofits and [Chicago neighborhoods], we have a lot of relationships at [that] level."

For example, OHcp has collaborated with the South Side organization Developing Communities Projects (DCP) over the last five years to advocate extending the Chicago Transit Authority's red line trains nearly eight miles further south. DCP's efforts have included educating the Roseland community about potential economic benefits to the neighborhood, working to increase attendance at public meetings, and forming an oversight committee with residents and local and political leaders. As a result, Roseland residents sat at the table with transportation decision makers, and the extension has been fast-tracked on the list of regional transportation projects.

"I've always thought about policy in terms of assisting people to gain access and power to tell their stories," said Hunt, reflecting on her career choice. "So consulting in under-resourced communities was a way for me to help all sides of the issue develop a common language ... and help people tell their stories to lead to the results they were looking for."

In another effort to help give communities a voice, Hunt recently took on a role as executive director of Affinity Community Services. Based in Hyde Park, Affinity is a community organizing and social justice organization that serves African-American lesbians and bisexual women and LGBTQ youth of color. Hunt's work there calls for interaction with policymakers and others whose work impacts the LGBTQ community.

With a full plate and new opportunities at her doorstep, Hunt reflected on what's most rewarding about her work. "When we've brought something new to a client, and they find a way to make it work for them and get outcomes they never image could happen."



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