

Engaging Apartment Residents in Community Associations

A Study in Reston, VA

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CSSR is a member of the National Consortium of Social Science Research Centers and Institutes, the Association of Academic Survey Research Organizations, and the Virtual Worlds Consortium.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Community associations are private organizations that govern the use of land and the provision of certain services within a particular geographic area. They can span an entire town or operate in a single building, as in the case of a housing cooperative or condominium association. Community associations are becoming an increasingly prominent form of housing development. From 1980 to 2000, half of all new housing units constructed in the U.S. were part of a private community association.¹ In 2011, an estimated 62.3 million Americans lived in a household that was governed by a community association.²

Community associations can take on many of the roles of a local government and thus, can provide numerous opportunities for residents to engage in social, recreational, educational, and civic activities. However, community associations also face challenges in ensuring that residents are aware of these opportunities and are able to take advantage of them. One group that may be particularly vulnerable to low levels of participation is renters living in community associations. In some community associations, requirements that members own property may prevent renters from fully participating the community. In other associations, renters may not be aware that they are considered members and are able to vote in elections and run for the Board of Directors. In the spirit of encouraging the development of vibrant and inclusive communities, this report examines how to include a subset of renters (i.e. apartment residents) more fully in community association activities.

This report focuses on Reston Association, one of the largest community associations in the U.S. Reston Association considers renters full members of the association, encouraging them to participate in the association's advisory committees, social and recreational activities, and Board of Directors. Through interviews with Reston Association staff, interviews with apartment staff members, and a community survey of a random sample of apartment residents, this report explores the opportunities available to members, the extent to which apartment residents are involved in community activities, and what challenges these residents face to greater participation. The report finds that:

- There are numerous opportunities for apartment residents to participate in social, educational, recreational, and civic activities as part of their Reston Association membership as well as in most apartment complexes that participated in this study.
- Many apartment residents are involved in activities in their apartment complex (47.6%) and in the broader Reston community (75.7%). Fewer residents report participating in Reston Association civic activities. Only one person interviewed had attended a Reston Association advisory committee meeting, and two had attended a Reston Association Board of Directors meeting. About 12 percent of the apartment residents interviewed had voted in a Reston Association election or viewed a Reston Association Board of Directors meeting on television.
- Apartment residents often do not connect their participation in community activities to their membership in Reston Association. Most of the residents we interviewed (64%) were not aware

¹ Nelson, Robert H. "New Community Associations for Established Neighborhoods." *Review of Policy Research* 23(6):1128-1141.

² Community Association Institute. 2012. "Industry Data: National Statistics." <http://www.caionline.org/info/research/Pages/default.aspx>.

that they are members of Reston Association. When asked why they do not believe they are members, many residents said that they were not actively participating in Reston Association meetings or events, that they were unaware of the benefits of being an RA member, and that they assumed that they were not members because they had not personally paid a fee to join the association.

- While most participate in at least one community activity, apartment residents also face barriers to increased participation in Reston Association and other activities. Nearly half of residents reported that they are too busy to be involved in more activities. About a quarter of residents said that they are unaware of activities, and a similar proportion indicated that the timing of meetings and activities is a challenge. About one-fifth of the apartment residents we interviewed said that they were uncomfortable speaking English and that this presents a challenge to participation in meetings and activities.
- In order to be more involved in the community, apartment residents asked for greater and more frequent communication from Reston Association about available opportunities. Almost as many residents said that they needed more English as a Second Language (ESL) or translation services to be able to participate more fully in community activities. Most of these residents asked for more assistance with learning to read, write, and speak in English. Other suggestions included providing information in Spanish and providing translation services at meetings and events. A number of residents also cited transportation and the timing of activities as barriers to greater participation.

Given that communication appears to be important to helping apartment residents become more involved in their community association, this report also examines best practices for communicating with a diverse population of community association members. These best practices include:

- **Regular communication about events and activities in a consistent format.** Reston Association publishes a quarterly magazine, *Reston* magazine, which includes listings of events and volunteer opportunities. Nearly three quarters of apartment residents said that they learned about community activities from reading the magazine. Many of the apartments included in this study provide a regular newsletter or activity calendar for residents and often supplement these publications with paper flyers. Another apartment complex requires all residents provide an active email address and provides a bi-weekly email update of complex information and community activities.
- **Providing information in multiple languages.** In half of the apartment complexes where residents were interviewed, a significant proportion of the residents' primary language is not English. In some apartment complexes, there is a dominant language (e.g. Spanish), while in others, residents speak more than a dozen languages. In the case of a complex where most residents speak a single foreign language, translation becomes more feasible. Many of the apartment staff members who participated in this project discussed translating written materials, such as paper flyers and activity calendars, into languages other than English. One apartment complex also has a website that can be translated into other languages by selecting a button that corresponds to the language.

In communities where residents speak multiple languages, it may not be feasible due to cost or logistics to translate all written material into all languages or hire staff members who speak each

language. Instead, community associations may want to identify the top two or three languages spoken by residents and provide translation for written materials in those languages. One of the apartment complexes in our study recruits residents who are bilingual to serve as ambassadors to other residents who communicate in languages other than English. The ambassadors meet at least once a month with the community's social worker, who reviews the activity calendar for the month and shares any other relevant information. The ambassadors then schedule a meeting with residents who speak the same language (e.g. an ambassador who speaks English and Russian will meet with Russian residents) to provide information about important events and activities.

- **Knowing how members prefer to receive information.** It is important to select communication strategies that are accessible to residents. In order to understand what languages are spoken in a community or how people prefer to receive information, it may be necessary to collect information from residents before deciding how to proceed. One apartment complex pursued this strategy when staff members were deciding whether to transition more of their communications online. Since many of its residents have limited incomes, staff members were concerned that many residents might not have easy access to computers or to the Internet. After surveying residents, however, they found that the vast majority did have computer and Internet access. The complex then developed a website for residents that can be translated into four different foreign languages. For residents without Internet access, the complex provides several computers with Internet access in their activity room and also continues to post paper flyers about events in the leasing office. In our study, we found that while most households have access to a computer and the Internet, fewer residents reported receiving information about community activities through social media or email.
- **Using multiple communication strategies.** Reston Association and the apartment complexes that participated in this study use a variety of approaches to communicate with residents, with the understanding that one type of communication does not address everyone's needs. These approaches include word-of-mouth communication, paper or online flyers in multiple languages, and recruiting volunteers who can provide translation services. While time-consuming, word-of-mouth and in-person translation strategies appear particularly important for engaging residents who are unable to read print material in English or in their native language.

This report also offers specific recommendations for Reston Association to enhance its efforts to encourage more apartment residents to participate in Reston Association activities and elections. These recommendations include:

- **Dedicating a portion of a Reston Association staff member's time to communicating with apartment complex staff members and residents.** Reston Association already has a structure in place for communicating with clusters of homeowners. This model could be applied to communicating with apartment staff members and residents, and it could be piloted with the seven apartment complexes that participated in this study. The RA staff member could communicate with apartment staff members to find out when resident meetings are held and to provide information for inclusion in apartment emails, newsletters, and activity calendars. At the resident meetings, the RA staff member could provide information about the benefits of RA membership, share information about upcoming activities, and hear any resident concerns.

- **Collaborating with apartment staff to host activities.** Particularly in apartment complexes where transportation is a barrier, Reston Association could hold senior advisory committee meetings or other events at apartment complexes. Reston Association also could help to support innovative activities at apartment complexes, such as the multicultural monthly teas held for residents at Fellowship House Hunters Woods.
- **Beginning to explore ways to support and communicate with residents who are learning English or do not speak English as their primary language.** This could include an assessment of the main languages spoken by all Reston residents and the translation of a portion of *Reston* magazine into one or more of these languages. As the diversity of the Reston community continues to increase, RA could sponsor an advisory committee or a special committee of the Board of Directors to examine ways to communicate with and engage residents who do not speak or who are learning to speak English.

The sections that follow outline in more detail previous research related to community engagement, the methodology used for this study, and more detailed findings about levels of community engagement and barriers related to increased participation. We hope that this report will be the beginning of a conversation among Reston Association staff members, apartment staff members, and residents about the benefits and barriers to increased community engagement in the Reston community. We also hope that this report will contribute to a broader conversation among community association managers about successful ways to include renters more fully in community association activities.

1. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

This report examines the levels of community and civic engagement among apartment residents who live in community associations. Community engagement benefits both communities and individuals, particularly through the development of social capital. Social capital is defined as the benefits individuals and groups obtain from cooperating and working together. Civic participation, including participation in a community association, creates social capital that can, in turn, increase political engagement and improve democratic governance, serve as a bridge to employment, improve public safety, and enhance the health and quality of life of a community.³ Communities with high levels of social capital are considered better places to live.

Community associations serve an important role in the development of social capital. Community associations have been described as standing at the intersection of the state, the market, and civil society.⁴ Thus, members of community associations have numerous opportunities to develop social capital, including helping to foster community, participating in the governance of their community, and managing association funds in cooperation with other members of their community.

Studies on challenges to civic participation in the U.S. have identified several obstacles to increased participation, including a lack of resources such as child care or transportation, insufficient interest or motivation, and not being asked to participate.⁵ Language and cultural barriers are another set of obstacles. These challenges can vary across communities; thus, it is essential to understand the local conditions that hinder residents' participation.

The Community Association Institute (CAI) has begun to examine the challenges associated with renters' participation in community associations and to develop strategies to engage renters in community association meetings and activities. CAI's 1999 publication "Successful Leasing in a Community Association" provides an outline of best practices for communicating with renters, including forming a welcome committee, creating a community handbook, publishing newsletters, disseminating information through bulletin boards and flyers, and communicating through email. This report seeks to update this collection of best practices for communicating with renters, giving attention to the significant increase in online communication as well as to how information is accessed by linguistically diverse residents.

³ Putnam 2000. Tavits, Margaret. 2006. "Making Democracy Work More? Exploring the Linkage between Social Capital and Government Performance" *Political Research Quarterly* 59(2):211-225. Granovetter, Mark. 1973. "The Strength of Weak Ties." *American Journal of Sociology* 78(6):1360-1380. Granovetter, Mark. 1983. "The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited." *Sociological Theory* 1:201-233. Sampson, Robert J. and Jeffrey Morenoff. 2001. "Crime and Public Safety: Insights from Community-Level Perspectives on Social Capital," in *Social Capital and Poor Communities*, edited by Susan Saegert, J. Phillip Thompson, and Mark R. Warren, New York: Russell Sage Foundation, pp. 89-114. Ziersch, Anna M., Fran E. Baum, Colin MacDougall, and Christine Putland, "Neighborhood Life and Social Capital: the Implications for Health." *Social Science and Medicine* 60 (2005): 71-86.

⁴ McKenzie, Evan. 2003. "Common-Interest Housing in the Communities of Tomorrow." *Housing Policy Debate* 14(1&2): 203-234.

⁵ Social Capital Benchmark Survey. 2000. http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/data/datasets/social_capital_community_survey.html#. UETH46OJmSo

2. PROJECT OVERVIEW

Previous research has demonstrated the value of participation in community associations both to individual and community life. Community associations help residents develop skills in communication, meeting planning and facilitation, and decision-making.⁶ They also can foster a sense of trust and reciprocity among residents.⁷ However, the benefits of community associations can only be realized when residents are aware of these opportunities and benefits and see the value in participating. This project was designed to better understand the benefits and barriers to increased resident engagement in community associations, particularly among apartment residents, in the context of Reston, VA's community association.

Reston Association

Reston Association is one of the largest community associations in the U.S. with approximately 58,000 members. Reston was one of the first planned communities built after World War Two. Beginning in 1961, Robert Simon developed the Reston community on the basis of seven goals:⁸

- Providing resources – recreational and cultural facilities, an environment for privacy – that would allow residents to take full advantage of their leisure time.
- Constructing housing with diverse styles and prices that would allow residents to remain in the community through major life transitions.
- Focusing on the “importance and dignity of each individual” in all planning processes.
- Creating a community where people could live and work in the same place.
- Making commercial, cultural, and recreational facilities immediately available to residents.
- Fostering structural and natural beauty.
- Ensuring that the community would be a financial success.

From Reston's founding, the community's planners have been committed to including housing accessible to residents of all income levels and to engaging both apartment residents and homeowners in leadership and governance activities. Thus, in addition to townhouses and single family homes, Reston includes low- and moderate-income apartment complexes, some of which operate as publicly-subsidized housing. Apartment residents are permitted – and encouraged – to participate in Reston Association meetings, to run for seats on Reston Association's Board of Directors and to serve on Reston Association committees.

As a mixed-income community, Reston has experienced dramatic demographic changes over the past several decades, particularly in the proportion of renters and racial and ethnic minorities living in Reston. According to the 2010 Census, 11 percent of Reston residents identified as Asian, 10 percent

⁶ Fung, Archon. 2003. “Associations and Democracy: Between Theories, Hopes, and Realities.” *Annual Review of Sociology*, 29: 515–539. doi: 10.1146/annurev.soc.29.010202.100134.

⁷ Putnam, Robert. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

⁸ Netherson, Nan. 1989. *Reston: A New Town in the Old Dominion*. Norfolk, VA: Donning Co. pp.48-50.

identified as African American, and 13 percent identified as Latino or Hispanic.⁹ About a third of Reston housing units are renter-occupied.¹⁰ The Reston population is projected to double over the next few decades as three new Metrorail stations are built to serve the greater Reston community. This new development likely will further increase the number of apartment residents served by Reston Association.

Project Methodology

This project broadens a study conducted in Reston in 2009 to 2010, *Yes We Can! The Southgate Community Engagement and Leadership Project (2010)*, which examined community engagement and leadership in one community with a focus on apartment residents' perspectives.¹¹ This current project seeks to understand the issue of community engagement from a variety of perspectives. Thus, it includes several data collection components: interviews with Reston Association (RA) staff and board members, interviews with apartment staff members at the association's 18 apartment complexes, and a community survey of a sample of Reston residents living in these apartment complexes. (See Appendix for community survey questionnaire.) Each of these data collection phases is described in more detail below.

Interviews with Reston Association Staff

From September through December 2011, meetings were held with Reston Association staff members to discuss the research project and draft interview questionnaires. Based on staff members' feedback, the research materials were revised and submitted to the Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) at George Mason University. After receiving HSRB approval, five Reston Association staff members and one member of the RA Board of Directors were interviewed. The interviews were designed to collect information about how apartment residents are currently engaged in Reston Association, the barriers residents face to increased participation, and recommendations about ways to increase resident participation. During the interviews, staff members were also asked to provide feedback on the questionnaire for the apartment staff members. This phase of the project also included a review of print and online materials describing Reston Association's work and the activities RA sponsors as well as Community Association Institute (CAI) publications related to apartment resident engagement and community building.

Interviews with Apartment Staff Members

From February through May 2012, apartment staff members were contacted to hear their perspectives on community engagement. Initial contact was made with apartment owners and managers at a

⁹ U.S. Census Bureau. 2010. "State and County Quickfacts: Reston CDP, Virginia."

<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/51/5166672.html>.

¹⁰ U.S. Census Bureau. 2010. "Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics: 2010."

<http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>.

¹¹ *Yes We Can! The Southgate Community Engagement and Leadership Project (2010)* was funded by the Sociological Initiatives Foundation, The Center for Social Science Research at George Mason University, and Reston Interfaith. The project was supported by the Departments of Community and Recreation Services and Systems Management of Human Services, Fairfax County. For study findings and for more information about other community-based research projects, visit the Center for Social Science Research web site at <http://cssr.gmu.edu>.

luncheon sponsored by Reston Association. At the luncheon, information was presented about the overall project and apartment owners and managers were asked if they would be willing to participate in an interview and to allow our research team to interview their residents. Following the meeting, contact was made with the owners and managers who attended the meeting and eventually with all 18 apartment complexes to invite them to participate in an interview. Property managers were invited to participate in this project via email, phone call, and/or letter.

During this phase, eleven staff members were interviewed at seven apartment complexes. All of these interviews were completed in person. These staff members included property managers and executive directors, activity directors, community organizers, and social workers. Most of these staff members are employed by the companies or nonprofit organizations that manage or own the apartment complexes. However, several staff members are employed by a nonprofit organization that provides services on-site at several affordable housing complexes. For simplicity, this report uses the term “apartment staff member” to refer to all interviewees.

Staff members were interviewed at market-rate, affordable, and senior (both independent and assisted living) housing complexes. The interviews were designed to collect information about activities that are provided at apartment complexes, strategies apartment staff members use to communicate with residents, apartment staff members’ relationships with Reston Association, and challenges residents might face in increasing their participation in community activities.

Community Survey of Apartment Residents

From May to July 2012, a team of Reston residents and George Mason University students interviewed a random sample of 103 Reston residents at five apartment complexes. During the interviews, residents were asked about their participation in community and civic activities, how they receive information about these activities, and what challenges might prevent them from being more involved in their community. The interviewers also provided residents with information about Reston Association and other community activities as part of the interview.

Prior to engaging in the interviews, students and residents received training in research methods from CSSR staff members. Lilia Jimenez-Siuhengalu, a resident of Reston and a Community Organizer with Reston Interfaith, and Cleveland Williams, a Reston resident, assisted with the training.

The survey team interviewed residents at Crescent Apartments, Harbor Park, Fellowship House Hunters Woods, Island Walk, and Tall Oaks Assisted Living. All of Reston Association’s 18 member apartment complexes were invited to participate in the community survey. A subset of apartment complexes was selected for the community survey based on their interest in the project and our desire to hear from a broad cross-section of Reston residents of different ages, economic backgrounds, and household sizes.

The residents who we interviewed were selected randomly from a list of all the units in the apartment community.¹² We made attempts to interview residents who did not speak English as their first language and completed a dozen surveys in Spanish at two apartment complexes. In one of the

¹² One exception was the residents we interviewed at Tall Oaks Assisted Living. Due to privacy regulations, we were unable to select a random sample and to visit residents in their rooms. Instead, we visited the facility’s common areas and spoke with residents who were willing to be interviewed for the project.

complexes, apartment residents served as translators, helping us to reach residents who spoke at least six different languages.

Our interviewing strategies at the two senior complexes differed from the methods we employed at the non-senior apartment complexes. Due to privacy regulations at one complex, we were unable to visit residents in their rooms, so we scheduled a day to visit residents in the common areas and invited them to participate in the survey. At another complex, language barriers required us to plan in advance to secure translation assistance. At this complex, we randomly selected residents to interview and provided this list to a staff member who scheduled the interviews with the residents and paired us with other residents who provided translation services. We spent a day at this complex completing the interviews.

Table 2.1: Demographic Characteristics of Survey Participants

Race*	
White/Caucasian	45.6%
Asian	19.4%
Black/African American	15.5%
Other	6.0%
Don't Know	10.7%
Did Not Answer	2.9%
Ethnicity	
Latino/Hispanic	15.5%
Did Not Answer	2.9%
Gender	
Female	62.1%
Did Not Answer	2.9%
Age	
18-29 years	27.2%
30-39 years	13.6%
40-49 years	17.5%
50-59 years	10.7%
60 and over	28.2%
Did Not Answer	2.9%
Household Composition	
At least one child living in household	36.8%
At least one adult over age 64 living in household	27.2%

* Respondents were able to select multiple categories.

At the non-senior apartment complexes, we took a more traditional route of selecting a random sample of 50 residents to interview, posting or emailing flyers shortly before we began our interviews, and knocking on doors to invite members of the sample to participate in the survey. We varied our interviewing times at these complexes, knocking on doors during weekdays, evenings, and weekends, to

reach as many residents as possible. At the three non-senior complexes, we knocked on a total of 223 and completed 76 interviews for a response rate of 34 percent.

While there were a few residents we were not able to reach due to scheduling conflicts or language barriers, as Table 2.1 (previous page) demonstrates, we spoke to a diverse group of apartment residents in Reston. Nearly half of the residents we interviewed identified their race as White, 19.4 percent identified as Asian, and 15.5 percent identified as Black or African American. In terms of ethnicity, 15.5 percent of interviewees stated they were Latino or Hispanic. We interviewed slightly more women (62.1%) than men and spoke with residents of a variety of different ages. Slightly more than a quarter of our sample was aged 18-29 and another quarter was 60 years or older. The residents that we interviewed had lived in their current apartment complex for an average of about five years.

3. OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN RESTON

Reston Association and most apartment complexes that participated in this study provide numerous opportunities for residents to engage in a variety of activities. This section outlines the social, recreational, and civic opportunities that are available to residents in apartment complexes and the broader Reston community. This section also discusses the communication strategies employed by Reston Association and apartment staff members to make residents aware of these opportunities.

Opportunities for Involvement in Reston Association

The following activities are open to both homeowners and apartment residents as part of their membership in Reston Association.

- **Recreation Activities:** Reston Association owns and operates 15 community pools and numerous athletic facilities and fields. RA members must purchase a pool and tennis pass to gain access to these two amenities; fees are \$20 for adults and \$10 for children under 18. Reston Association hosts programs for kids and families at their community pools, including a “Dive In” movie series. Reston Youth Soccer, Reston Little League Baseball, and Reston Pro Ball (basketball) operate programs at Reston’s athletic fields and facilities. RA also maintains 55 miles of pathways throughout the community that are used by walkers, runners, and bicyclists. Each summer, RA hosts a series of summer camps focused on recreation, the environment, science, and the arts. Scholarships are available for some recreation programs and camps.
- **Walker Nature Education Center:** RA’s Nature Center includes two miles of trails, demonstration gardens, and picnic pavilions as well as a series of nature programs for all ages. Recent activities included star-gazing, bird walks, and a digital camera scavenger hunt. Fees are nominal (\$4-\$5) for programs.
- **Volunteer Opportunities:** Reston Association’s Community Outreach Specialist plans and coordinates volunteer activities for RA members, local businesses, and area teens. Many volunteers help to restore Reston’s natural areas as part of its Weed Warriors program, which meets the fourth Saturday of every month. Other volunteers read with children at Reston Interfaith’s Laurel Learning Center, while others provide programming for senior citizens at the senior center or the two Fellowship Houses, which are seniors-only residences. Volunteers also provide important services to the community association. For example, Reston Association’s quarterly magazine is produced largely through the work of volunteers, and over 100 volunteers helped to manage and operate the last Multicultural Festival. Volunteers also staff the front desks at the Reston Association office and the Nature Center.
- **Activities for Senior Citizens:** Reston Association sponsors special activities for its members who are 55 years and older, including a monthly “Meet Me at the Movies” outing. Recent events for seniors have included a 10-week class on writing memoirs and a workshop on container planting at the Nature Center. RA’s Senior Advisory Committee meets the second Tuesday of each

month to plan trips and activities. Recent trips have included visits to the Smithsonian Museum of American History, a National Symphony Orchestra Rehearsal, and the Western Maryland Scenic Railroad.

- **Festivals and Expos:** Reston Association co-sponsors several major events throughout the year, including its Spring Festival in April, the Reston Festival in the summer, and the Reston Multicultural Festival in the fall. Every two years, RA hosts an Expo focused on exterior building improvements where residents can meet with landscaping businesses, energy experts, and other vendors.
- **Reston Association Workshops:** RA holds eight to ten workshops per year focused on topics of interest to members. Previous workshops have focused on managing conflicts around parks, pets, and people and discussing legislative issues related to condos and single family homes. Workshop topics are selected from issues presented at Reston's "Open Mic" nights, recommendations listed on previous workshop evaluation forms, and suggestions from the Reston Neighborhood Advisory Committee, which helps to plan the workshops.
- **Reston Association Advisory Committees:** RA has seven advisory committees focused on the environment, parks and planning, pedestrians and bicycles, seniors, tennis, transportation, and communication. The eighth committee – the Reston Neighborhood Advisory Committee – is responsible for facilitating communication between the association and residential property owners about issues including property maintenance and management. Up to 15 members can volunteer on each committee; committee members also include one Board member and at least one staff member from RA. Committees usually meet once a month. There are also a number of ad hoc committees that have been established, such as the Arts Advisory Committee that works with Reston's art organizations to bring public art to the community.
- **Reston Association Board of Directors:** RA's Board of Directors consists of 10 members who set the policies and goals for the community association. There are four district representatives, four at-large representatives, an RA member representative, and an Apartment Owners' representative. Apartment residents and other renters are permitted to run for the Board of Directors, but there is not currently a seat reserved specifically for an apartment resident or renter representative. Board members serve three-year staggered terms. Each spring, three new Board members are elected.

Opportunities for Involvement in Apartment Complexes

All but one of the apartment complexes where interviews were conducted offer a variety of activities targeted to the needs and interests of their residents. These activities include social, recreational, and educational activities. Four of the seven apartment complexes provide holiday parties for their residents. Most of the apartment complexes that offer holiday parties tend to focus on secular holidays, such as Halloween, Memorial Day, Mothers Day, and Fathers Day, while another complex has focused on increasing connections between residents from different backgrounds through the celebration of a number of religious and secular holidays. This latter complex, an independent living residence for seniors, also hosted an International Festival that was attended by more than 200 of their residents. Residents provided the entertainment for the festival, which included performances by the

Korean Women's Choir, the Chinese Men's Choir, and a Peruvian dancer. This apartment complex also hosts monthly teas to promote interaction and understanding among residents of different ethnic groups. One staff member at the apartment complex described an outcome of the monthly teas: "I really was thrilled because I had three ladies that decided to go visit somebody in the hospital. One was from Peru; one was from China; and one was from Afghanistan. They formed a really good relationship. One said, 'Oh, I didn't like her at first. I didn't understand her...but she's such my good friend now.'"

Two affordable housing complexes host monthly social events for particular groups of residents, such as seniors, mothers, and teens. One complex offers monthly teen nights to allow teens to socialize and play games. This complex also organizes a baking class to allow adult residents to share their expertise and develop leadership skills. Another complex has a monthly program for mothers who are home in the daytime, usually involving arts and crafts. This complex also offers a "how-to" series with programs like writing memory books for seniors and tips on dressing-for-less for adult residents. The "how-to" series provides continuing education credits for residents who operate home-based daycare services. Several complexes also have movie days or nights for residents.

Three of the seven apartment complexes offer educational programs for their residents. Two affordable housing complexes provide after school programs. At one complex, the after school program serves students in first through twelfth grades and includes homework support, reading tutoring, a health and wellness program, and college preparation and career exploration programs. Two apartment complexes also sponsor English as a Second Language programs for their adult residents. One complex has computer classes, while another offers an early literacy class for adults. One of the senior complexes invites a guest speaker to come once a week to discuss current events with residents.

Several apartment complexes also offer health and wellness services. One of the senior apartment complexes sponsors exercise classes, while another has a morning walking group. A complex that serves many residents who are refugees offers counseling services to residents. This complex also provides a monthly brown bag and fresh food program in partnership with the Capital Area Food Bank and has developed partnerships with health care providers to offer some medical services on site.

Three of the seven complexes have resident councils or meetings to facilitate communication among apartment staff members and residents. These meetings are held on a monthly or quarterly basis. Overall, apartment complexes serving seniors or low-income families tend to offer more services and activities, including resident meetings, than do market-rate complexes serving younger, single residents.

Communicating Information about Activities

Both Reston Association and individual apartment complexes employ a variety of strategies to communicate information to residents about social, recreational, and civic activities. These strategies include print materials, online communications, and word-of-mouth. This section describes these strategies in more detail.

Despite the many ways in which Reston Association and apartment staff members reach out to residents, most of the staff members at RA and the apartment complexes that were interviewed believed that there was a lack of knowledge among apartment residents about their status as Reston Association members and about what opportunities are available to them. Communication challenges are discussed in more detail in the "Challenges to Community Involvement" section below.

Reston Association

Reston Association staff described a variety of ways they communicate information to RA members, including:

- **Newcomers Night:** Twice a year, Reston Association hosts a Newcomers Night for residents who have moved to Reston in the past six months. Representatives from RA discuss membership benefits and opportunities for residents to participate in their community. Postcards are sent to new residents, inviting them to attend, and announcements are published in RA's magazine and online newsletter.
- **Reston Magazine:** Reston Association produces a quarterly magazine filled with information about community events and other opportunities for involvement. The magazine is mailed directly to over 21,000 homes in Reston and is available at a number of distribution centers, including the Reston Community Center. Several staff members discussed difficulties with ensuring residents in the apartment complexes had access to the magazine. When magazines are delivered to management companies' offices they sometimes languish in the offices or are placed in stacks near residents' mailboxes, rather than distributed individually to residents.
- **The Advisor:** RA publishes a quarterly newsletter for its cluster, condos, and single family residents. Since apartment residents are not members of clusters, they likely would not receive this publication.
- **Branching Out:** The Walker Nature Center publishes a quarterly newsletter describing its programming, which also includes a calendar of events.
- **Reston Association's Website:** RA updates its website daily with community news and events. Website visitors also can sign up to receive RA News, a weekly email newsletter. The website is located at www.reston.org.
- **Emails:** Reston Association's volunteer and special events coordinators maintain email lists of participants from past activities and use these listservs to communicate with residents about future events.
- **Social Media and Video:** RA communicates with residents through Facebook postings and Twitter updates. Reston Association also produces a 5-minute video newscast once a month and topical videos that are featured on public access TV, the RA website, and RA's YouTube site.
- **Flyers, Brochures, and Postcards:** For special events, volunteer opportunities, and seniors' events, flyers often are posted in the lobby of RA and in local organizations such as libraries and community centers.
- **Other Media:** Volunteer activities and special events are publicized through other organizations' event calendars and through newspaper advertisements.

During the interviews, Reston Association staff and board members expressed a desire to know more about how apartment managers communicate with residents, including how they provide information

about Reston Association activities to their residents. The next section examines how information is communicated within apartment complexes.

Apartment Complexes

The seven apartment complexes that participated in the interviews communicate with their residents on a regular basis, and all combine multiple methods of communication. Five of the apartment complexes communicate information about activities via paper flyers. These flyers are posted on bulletin boards and/or delivered door-to-door. Four complexes provide a paper activity calendar for residents, and three publish newsletters. Several staff members also mentioned talking with residents in person or on the phone as a helpful communication strategy. Three apartment complexes communicate with their residents via email. One apartment complex also posts information on its Facebook site and Twitter feed, while another has recently developed a website to share information about apartment complex and community activities.

Several staff members expressed challenges associated with sharing information with residents who speak other languages. These challenges included the ability to translate written materials into multiple languages as well as the difficulty of reaching individuals who are unable to read information in English or their native language. Apartment staff members also described several strategies they have developed to address at least some aspects of these challenges. These strategies include:

- **Recruiting Bilingual “Ambassadors”:** An independent living community for senior citizens recruits residents who are bilingual to serve as ambassadors to other residents who communicate in languages other than English. The ambassadors meet at least once a month with the community’s social worker, who reviews the activity calendar for the month and shares any other relevant information. The ambassadors then schedule a meeting with residents who speak the same language (e.g. an ambassador who speaks English and Russian will meet with Russian residents) to provide information about important events and activities. When there is an emergency announcement that needs to be made, the ambassadors are asked to announce the information over the PA system in multiple languages.
- **Developing a Website with Information in Multiple Languages:** One apartment complex recently created a new website for residents that includes information in Arabic, Farsi, Urdu, Spanish, and English. The complex’s activity director translates the information using a combination of online translation services and proofreading help from residents. The apartment complex conducted a survey of residents’ Internet access before developing the website to ensure that the website would be accessible to residents. The complex also provides free computer and Internet access to residents in its community center.

Most of the staff members interviewed use a variety of approaches to communicate with residents, with the understanding that one type of communication does not address everyone’s needs. These approaches include word-of-mouth communication, paper or online flyers in multiple languages, and recruiting volunteers who can provide translation services. While time-consuming, word-of-mouth and in-person translation strategies appear particularly important for engaging residents who are unable to read print material in English or in their native language.

Communication among Apartment Staff and Reston Association

Apartment staff members' knowledge of and connection to Reston Association varied. Almost all apartment complexes communicate some information about Reston Association activities to their residents. Several apartment managers and community organizers described incorporating information from the Reston Association website or from *Reston* magazine in their emails, newsletters, or activity calendars. One apartment complex actively works to connect its youth residents with RA summer camp opportunities. One senior housing complex discussed their positive relationship with the Reston Association staff member responsible for senior programming and also explained that they had hosted Reston Association Senior Advisory Committee meetings at their complex.

However, at the same time that apartment staff members described their connections to Reston Association, they also expressed confusion about details related to Reston Association membership. Most apartment staff members were uncertain about the benefits RA membership provided for their residents. There was a perception among some affordable housing complex staff members that Reston Association activities, particularly those that require activity fees, were not relevant or accessible to residents on a fixed income. These staff members also did not appear to be aware of RA scholarships that are available for recreational activities. Most staff members also indicated that they are not aware of ways to find out about Reston Association events, beyond reviewing the quarterly *Reston* magazine.

4. LEVELS OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

As part of the survey of apartment residents, we asked participants about their involvement in social and educational activities and resident meetings at their complex. We also asked residents about their participation in Reston community activities and meetings, with an emphasis on those sponsored by Reston Association. This section reviews overall findings about residents' community involvement and, in some cases, draws distinctions between levels of participation among seniors, households with children, and households without children.

Participation in Apartment Complex Activities

Nearly half (47.6%) of the residents we interviewed had participated in a social activity in their apartment complex, while fewer (27.2%) reported participating in an educational activity at the complex. Seniors were more likely to report participating in a social activity in the complex ($p \leq 0.001$) than non-seniors, while households with children were no more likely to take part in a social activity than households without children. The most popular activities mentioned were holiday parties, pool parties, and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. About half (52.4%) of residents had heard of resident meetings being held in their apartment complex, and close to a third (29.1%) had participated in one of these meetings.

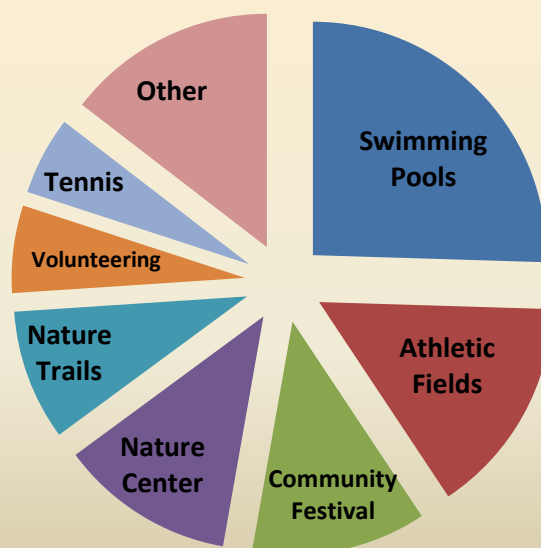
Most residents receive information about activities at their apartment complex through flyers or activity calendars delivered to their household (42.7%) or posted on bulletin boards (34.0%), emails from property management staff (28.2%), talking to property management staff (23.3%), talking to other residents in their building (19.4%), and reading apartment complex newsletters (15.5%).

Participation in the Broader Reston Community

Most of the residents we interviewed (75.7%) had participated in a social or recreational activity in Reston (Figure 2.1). Seniors were significantly less likely than non-seniors to take part in an activity outside their apartment complex ($p \leq 0.05$), while households with children were no more likely to take part in a Reston community activity than households without children.

The most popular activities mentioned were swimming in community pools

Figure 2.1: Participation in Reston Community Activities



(40.8%), using athletic facilities or fields (24.3%), attending a community festival (19.4%), and visiting the Walker Nature Education Center (19.4%). Households with children were significantly more likely than households without children to report visiting community pools ($p \leq 0.05$) and athletic fields ($p \leq 0.001$). Households without children were significantly more likely to have visited the Nature Center than households with children ($p \leq 0.05$).

Residents learned about Reston community activities from *Reston* magazine (72.8%), flyers or activity calendars delivered to their apartment (35.9%), and the Reston Association website (15.5%). Other sources of information included talking to other residents in their complex (9.7%) and talking to property management staff (8.7%). Seniors were significantly more likely than non-seniors to find out about upcoming activities by talking with other residents in their complex ($p \leq 0.05$) or talking to property management staff ($p \leq 0.05$).

Awareness of Reston Association Membership and Services

Despite participating in many social and recreational activities sponsored by Reston Association, most of the residents we interviewed (64%) were not aware that they are members of RA. There were no significant differences among subgroups in terms of who considered themselves to be members of RA. When asked why they do not consider themselves to be members of Reston Association, many residents said that they were not actively participating in Reston Association meetings or events, so they did not consider themselves to be members. Some residents said that they were unaware of the benefits of being an RA member, while others believed that they were not members because they had not personally paid a fee to join the association. Less than a third of residents (31.1%) also reported that they are aware of the difference between Reston Association and Reston Community Center.

Because swimming pools are a major way in which Reston Association is visible to many residents, we asked several questions about residents' ability and interest in accessing pool passes. Slightly more than a quarter of the residents that we interviewed (27.2%) reported having a pool pass and another quarter (26.2%) said that they were planning to get a pool pass this year. Households with children were significantly more likely to report that they knew how to obtain a pool pass than households without children ($p \leq 0.05$). Of those who had a pool pass, about half reported receiving their pool pass from their apartment complex and half said they had obtained it by visiting Reston Association. Of those who did not have a pool pass, slightly more than a third (36.9%) reported that they were not aware of how to obtain a pool pass. Other reasons for not obtaining a pool pass included having a pool at their apartment complex or nearby at a community center (23.2%), not being interested in swimming (12.5%), and having health issues or physical limitations (7.1%).

Not very many apartment residents we interviewed (7.8%) said they had attended a Reston Association workshop, program, or special event. Three interview participants had attended a yard sale, and two had attended a workshop. One resident had attended "field trip" excursions to New York and other destinations, and other resident had attended a parade. One person we interviewed had attended a Reston Association advisory committee meeting, and two had attended a Reston Association Board of Directors meeting. More interview participants reported voting in a Reston Association election (11.7%) and watching a Reston Association Board of Directors meeting on television (11.7%).

5. CHALLENGES TO PARTICIPATION

As part of the interviews, residents were provided with a list of potential barriers to participation in apartment complex and broader community activities and were asked to indicate which challenges, if any, applied to them. These challenges included not knowing about meetings or activities, being too busy to attend, lacking child care or transportation, and not feeling comfortable speaking English. (For the full list of barriers provided to residents, see Appendix B.)

Residents indicated that similar challenges prevent their greater involvement in apartment complex and broader Reston activities (Table 5.1). Nearly half of residents reported that they are too busy to be involved in more activities. About a quarter of residents said that they are unaware of activities, and a similar proportion indicated that the timing of meetings and activities is a challenge. About one-fifth of the residents we interviewed said that they were uncomfortable speaking English and that this presents a challenge to participation in meetings and activities. Other challenges mentioned by residents include health issues or physical limitations and a lack of interest in being more involved.

Table 5.1: Challenges to Participation in Apartment Complex and Broader Community Activities

Challenges	Apartment Activities (n = 103)	Reston Activities (n = 103)
Too Busy	45.6%	46.6%
Meeting Time	28.2%	24.3%
Unaware of Activities	23.3%	30.1%
Language	23.3%	21.6%
Lack of Child Care	13.6%	15.5%
Inadequate Transportation	9.7%	12.6%
Feeling Unwelcome	8.7%	6.8%
Safety Concerns	7.8%	6.8%
Other	8.0%	13.5%

Residents who indicated that they faced more than one challenge to participating more in community activities also were asked to select their greatest barrier to participation. For apartment complex activities, most residents who selected more than one challenge said that being too busy (29.1%) was their greatest problem, followed by not feeling comfortable speaking English (9.7%), meeting times (7.8%), and not knowing about the meetings (7.8%). For activities in the Reston community, many residents said that being too busy (26.2%) was their greatest problem, followed by not knowing about the meetings (12.6%), and not feeling comfortable speaking English (12.6%). Seniors were significantly more likely to report challenges related to transportation ($p \leq 0.001$) and language barriers ($p \leq 0.05$). Non-seniors were significantly more likely to report that being too busy kept them from participating more in community activities ($p \leq 0.001$). There were no significant differences in barriers to participation among households with and without children, with the exception of access to child care.

For about one-fifth of the households in our sample, not speaking English is a significant barrier to increased participation. Table 5.2 outlines the languages spoken by households that we interviewed for the community survey. A majority of households (74.8%) have at least one member who speaks English,

Table 5.2: Languages Spoken by Households Interviewed for the Community Survey

Languages	Percent (n = 103)
English	74.8%
Spanish	22.3%
Farsi	8.7%
Russian	7.8%
Arabic	6.8%
Chinese	3.9%
French	2.9%
Korean	2.9%
Somali	2.9%
Amharic	1.9%
Urdu	1.9%
Vietnamese	1.9%
Other*	7.8%

*Includes Armenian, Hindi, German, Italian, Igbo, and Pashto

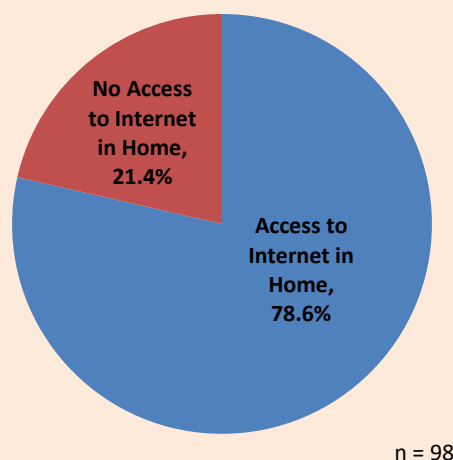
and about one fifth of households have at least one member who speaks Spanish. The households that we surveyed speak more than a dozen additional languages, including Arabic, Farsi, Russian, Chinese, and Korean.

One-third of our respondents said that their primary language was not English. Most residents felt that they could speak (78.6%) and read (75.7%) their primary language well. Fewer residents reported that they could speak (58.2%) and read (60.2%) English well.

As information about activities and meetings is increasingly communicated via websites and social media, it is important to know whether residents have access to the Internet. We asked the households we surveyed whether they have access to the Internet in their homes and whether they have somewhere they go outside of their homes to access the Internet. One-fifth of the households we surveyed reported that they do not have access to the Internet either in their home or at a site outside of their home. Most of the respondents who lacked Internet access were aged 60 or older; about 90 percent of respondents aged less than 60 years reported having Internet access in their homes.

In spite of this access, however, few residents reported receiving information about community activities via Facebook, Twitter, and the Reston Association website. More residents reported receiving information via email, but this was largely driven by a single apartment complex that requires residents to provide an email address for updates from apartment management staff.

Figure 5.3: Apartment Residents' Access to the Internet



6. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM RESIDENTS

At the end of our survey, we asked residents what activities they would like to see in their community and what would help them to be more involved in the Reston community. Many residents called for additional social, recreational, and educational activities and more opportunities for children.

- **Social activities:** Residents would like to see more opportunities like barbeques or parties for neighbors to get to know each other as well as opportunities to socialize outside their apartment complex like trips and tours in Reston and beyond.
- **Recreational activities:** Residents recommended that Reston Association provide more recreation opportunities for adults, more sports facilities and parks, and organize community trail walks or hiking trips.
- **Educational activities:** In terms of educational activities, the most popular request was for more accessible English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. Several residents have transportation challenges that make it difficult for them to take advantage of existing ESL classes. Other recommendations for educational activities included computer classes, a career center, or skills-related workshops with child care provided.
- **Activities for children:** A number of households would like to see more activities for children, such as after school educational activities and more access to summer camps.
- **Arts activities:** Residents also called for more arts activities, including painting classes, crafts, and outdoor musical performances.
- **Celebration of cultural diversity:** Residents also would like to see more communication among diverse groups of Reston residents. Suggestions included ethnic festivals, more multicultural events, an interfaith program, and meetings to address cultural diversity.
- **Other recommendations:** Several residents also shared other recommendations of what activities they would like to see in their community. These included more activities that are accessible to low-income individuals, more activities held in apartment complexes, more outdoor activities, and posting videos of Reston Association Board Meetings online so people can connect with those who are running for elections.

In terms of what would help residents to be more involved in their community, the most common response was greater communication about Reston Association and the opportunities it provides. Residents asked for more information and for information to be provided more frequently. Residents' responses varied in terms of how they would prefer to receive this information. Suggestions included face-to-face interaction, emails, and newsletters. One resident also suggested that agendas for meetings be provided in advance so that people know how they can participate.

Almost as many residents said that they needed more ESL or translation services to be able to participate more fully in community activities. Most of these residents asked for more assistance with

learning to read, write, and speak in English. Other suggestions included providing information in Spanish and providing translation services at meetings and events.

A number of residents also cited transportation and the timing of activities as barriers to greater participation. Some residents who do not have access to a car have difficulty participating in community activities. Other residents recommended holding more activities on weekends or at the apartment complexes. Additional barriers to participation mentioned by residents included being too busy with work, having a limited income and having health problems or physical limitations.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on interviews with Reston Association staff members, apartment managers, and apartment residents, this study has demonstrated that there are numerous opportunities for apartment residents to participate in Reston Association and other community activities and that many residents are taking advantage of these opportunities. Communications from Reston Association and apartment complexes, particularly in the form of *Reston* magazine and paper flyers and activity calendars, are reaching apartment residents.

One challenge facing Reston Association is the fact that many residents do not connect the activities they participate in or read about to their membership in RA. Some residents believe they must be actively participating in particular activities to be considered members of the association, while others shared the misperception that they had not paid a membership fee. (Apartment residents' assessments are paid through the apartment complex as part of their monthly rental payments.) Both apartment residents and apartment staff members shared some uncertainty about what benefits and amenities residents were able to access as a result of their RA membership. Additionally, fewer apartment residents are involved in civic opportunities available to them as Reston Association members, such as participating in advisory committees or Board of Directors elections and meetings. Some residents also face barriers to participation including meeting times, transportation issues, and not feeling comfortable speaking English.

This information was collected in order to help Reston Association, apartment complex staff members, and residents develop strategies to engage more residents in community activities. One place to start in addressing some of the challenges to engagement is in enhancing the communication between Reston Association and apartment complexes and between RA and apartment residents. During the survey, many residents asked for more communication about the opportunities available through Reston Association. It is hoped that this report will contribute to a continuing conversation among Reston Association staff, apartment staff members, and Reston apartment residents about what communications and other strategies would help residents to address some of the challenges they face to increased participation. To that end, this report includes a few recommendations about initial steps that could be taken to increase apartment residents' awareness of their RA membership and decrease barriers to greater participation:

Increasing Communication between RA and Apartment Staff Members

- **Dedicate a portion of a Reston Association staff member's time to communicating with apartment complex staff members and residents.** Reston Association already has a structure in place for communicating with clusters of homeowners. This model could be applied to communicating with apartment staff members and residents, and it could be piloted with the seven apartment complexes that participated in this study. The RA staff member could communicate with apartment staff members to find out when resident meetings are held and to provide information for inclusion in apartment emails, newsletters, and activity calendars. At the resident meetings, the RA staff member could provide information about the benefits of RA membership, share information about upcoming activities, and hear any resident concerns.

Enhancing Communication among RA and Apartment Resident Members

- **Collaborate with apartment staff to host activities.** Particularly in apartment complexes where transportation is a barrier, Reston Association could hold senior advisory committee meetings or other events at apartment complexes. Reston Association also could help to support innovative activities at apartment complexes, such as the multicultural monthly teas held for residents at Fellowship House Hunters Woods.
- **Begin to explore ways to support and communicate with residents who are learning English or do not speak English as their primary language.** This could include an assessment of the main languages spoken by all Reston residents and the translation of a portion of *Reston* magazine into one or more of these languages. As the diversity of the Reston community continues to increase, RA could sponsor an advisory committee or a special committee of the Board of Directors to examine ways to communicate with and engage residents who do not speak or who are learning to speak English.

Increasing Renters' Engagement in Community Associations

In addition to providing specific recommendations to Reston Association, this report also sought to update best practices for communicating with renters living in community associations. While this research focused on apartment residents, the following recommendations could also be applied to community associations that are interested in engaging renters outside of apartment complexes. These recommendations include:

- **Regular communication about events and activities in a consistent format.** Reston Association publishes a quarterly magazine, *Reston* magazine, which includes listings of events and volunteer opportunities. Nearly three quarters of apartment residents said that they learned about community activities from reading the magazine. Many of the apartments included in this study provide a regular newsletter or activity calendar for residents and often supplement these publications with paper flyers. Another apartment complex requires all residents provide an active email address and provides a bi-weekly email update of complex information and community activities.
- **Providing information in multiple languages.** In half of the apartment complexes where residents were interviewed, a significant proportion of the residents' primary language is not English. In some apartment complexes, there is a dominant language (e.g. Spanish), while in others, residents speak more than a dozen languages. In the case of a complex where most residents speak a single foreign language, translation becomes more feasible. Many of the apartment staff members who participated in this project discussed translating written materials, such as paper flyers and activity calendars, into languages other than English. One apartment complex also has a website that can be translated into other languages by selecting a button that corresponds to the language.

In communities where residents speak multiple languages, it may not be feasible due to cost or logistics to translate all written material into all languages or hire staff members who speak each language. Instead, community associations may want to identify the top two or three languages

spoken by residents and provide translation for written materials in those languages. One of the apartment complexes in our study recruits residents who are bilingual to serve as ambassadors to other residents who communicate in languages other than English. The ambassadors meet at least once a month with the community's social worker, who reviews the activity calendar for the month and shares any other relevant information. The ambassadors then schedule a meeting with residents who speak the same language (e.g. an ambassador who speaks English and Russian will meet with Russian residents) to provide information about important events and activities.

- **Knowing how members prefer to receive information.** It is important to select communication strategies that are accessible to residents. In order to understand what languages are spoken in a community or how people prefer to receive information, it may be necessary to collect information from residents before deciding how to proceed. One apartment complex pursued this strategy when staff members were deciding whether to transition more of their communications online. Since many of its residents have limited incomes, staff members were concerned that many residents might not have easy access to computers or to the Internet. After surveying residents, however, they found that the vast majority did have computer and Internet access. The complex then developed a website for residents that can be translated into four different foreign languages. For residents without Internet access, the complex provides several computers with Internet access in their activity room and also continues to post paper flyers about events in the leasing office. In our study, we found that while most households have access to a computer and the Internet, fewer residents reported receiving information about community activities through social media or email.
- **Using multiple communication strategies.** Reston Association and the apartment complexes that participated in this study use a variety of approaches to communicate with residents, with the understanding that one type of communication does not address everyone's needs. These approaches include word-of-mouth communication, paper or online flyers in multiple languages, and recruiting volunteers who can provide translation services. While time-consuming, word-of-mouth and in-person translation strategies appear particularly important for engaging residents who are unable to read print material in English or in their native language.

8. APPENDIX A

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE¹³

A. INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT AND INTERVIEW (See Consent Form)

Complex: _____ Survey Number: _____
Date: _____ No. of household members responding: _____
Interviewers: _____ Time Start: _____ Time End: _____

B. INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS

B.1 How long you have you lived in this apartment complex? **(Write response)**

Years _____ Months _____ ☐ Don't Know ☐ Refuse to Answer

B.2 What do you like about living here in Reston? **(Write response; probe “anything else?”)**

☐ Don't Know
☐ Refuse to Answer

B.3 Overall, how would you rate Reston as a place to live: excellent, good, fair, or poor? **(Check one)**

☐ Excellent ☐ Don't Know
☐ Good ☐ Refuse to Answer
☐ Fair
☐ Poor

Read aloud: *In this next section we are going to ask some questions about the social and educational activities that take place in your complex.*

C. ENGAGEMENT IN SOCIAL, EDUCATIONAL, AND RESIDENT MEETINGS

C.1 Has anyone in your household participated in a social activity in this complex such as a holiday event or social gathering? **(Check one)**

☐ Yes ☐ Don't Know
☐ No ☐ Refuse to Answer

¹³ This questionnaire was adapted from a prior study conducted in Reston, *Yes We Can! The Southgate Community Engagement and Leadership Project (2010)*. The study was initially funded by the Sociological Initiatives Foundation, The Center for Social Science Research at George Mason University, and Reston Interfaith. The project was supported by the Departments of Community and Recreation Services and Systems Management of Human Services, Fairfax County. For more information about this and other community-based research projects, visit the Center for Social Science Research web site at <http://cssr.gmu.edu>.

C.2 Has anyone in your household participated in an educational activity in this complex such as attending a lecture from a guest speaker or an English as a Second Language class? **(Check one)**

☐ Yes

☐ Don't Know

☐ No

☐ Refuse to Answer

C.3 (If responded YES to C1 or C2, ask:) Since last summer, what social or educational activities in this complex have members of your household participated in? How often? **(Write response in chart)**

C.2.a Activity	C.2.b Participant (ex. respondent, spouse, child, senior etc.)	C.2.c Frequency of Participation (ex. once a week, twice a month, once a year, etc.)

Read aloud: *Some apartment complexes have resident meetings. Their goals are to communicate information about events and to listen to residents' concerns.*

C.4 Before now, has anyone in your household heard of resident meetings being held in this complex? **(Check one)**

☐ Yes

☐ Don't Know

☐ No **(Skip to C.7)**

☐ Refuse to Answer

C.5 Has anyone in your household ever attended a resident meeting in this complex? **(Check one)**

☐ Yes

☐ Don't Know

☐ No **(Skip to C.7)**

☐ Refuse to Answer

C.6 How many times in the last year has someone in your household attended a resident meeting in this complex? **(Check one)**

☐ Once

☐ Don't Know

☐ 2 to 5

☐ Refuse to Answer

☐ 6 to 10

☐ More than 10

C.7 Do you receive information about social or educational activities or resident meetings in your complex? **(Check one)**

☐ Yes

☐ Don't Know

☐ No **(Skip to C.9)**

☐ Refuse to Answer

C.8 **(Give respondent the laminated list; indicate Figure 1 on the laminated sheet)** How do you receive information about activities and meetings in your complex? **(Check all that apply)**

☐ Flyers or activity calendars delivered to me

☐ Don't Know

☐ Flyers or activity calendars posted on bulletin boards

☐ Refuse to Answer

☐ Apartment complex newsletter

☐ Apartment complex website

☐ Emails from property management staff

☐ Emails from activity directors or community organizers

☐ Talking to property management staff

☐ Talking to activity directors or community organizers

☐ Talking to other residents in my building

☐ Facebook

☐ Twitter

☐ Other: _____

C.9 **(Give respondent the laminated list; indicate Figure 2 on the laminated sheet)** If you wanted to become more involved in activities and meetings at your apartment complex, which of these problems might keep you from doing so? **(Place checkmarks in the appropriate column)** Of these, which is the biggest problem? **(Check one)**

☐ Not aware of any activities or meetings

☐ Don't Know

☐ Refuse to Answer

	No Problem	Problem	Biggest Problem (Check one)
C.9.a Meeting time			
C. 9.b Lack of child care			
C. 9.c Inadequate transportation			
C. 9.d Too busy			
C. 9.e Not knowing about the meetings			
C. 9.f Feeling unwelcome			
C. 9.g Not feeling comfortable speaking English			
C. 9.h Concerns for your safety			
C. 9.i Other (Fill in) _____			

C.9.1 Other Comments: **(Write response)**

Read aloud: *In this next section we are going to ask similar questions about the larger Reston community and Reston Association.*

D. RESTON ASSOCIATION

D.1 Has anyone in your household participated in an activity in Reston such as the use of swimming pools, tennis courts, nature walking trails, or summer camps? **(Check one)**

☐ Yes

☐ Don't Know

☐ No **(Skip to D.3)**

☐ Refuse to Answer

D.2 Since last summer, what Reston activities have members of your household participated in? How often? **(Write response in chart)** Ask: Anything else? **(Write response next to "Other.")**

D.2.a Activity	D.2.b Participant (ex. respondent, spouse, child, senior etc.)	D.2.c Frequency of Participation (ex. once a week, twice a month, once a year, etc.)
Swimming pools		
Tennis		
Athletic fields (soccer, basketball, baseball)		
Summer camps		
Nature center		
Volunteering (community clean-up, senior center)		
Community festival		
Other: _____		
Other: _____		

D.2.1 Other Comments: **(Write response)**

D.3 Do you receive information about Reston activities? **(Check one)**

☐ Yes

☐ Don't Know

☐ No **(Skip to next Read Aloud)**

☐ Refuse to Answer

D.4 **(Give respondent the laminated list; indicate Figure 3 on the laminated sheet)** How do you receive information about Reston activities? **(Check all that apply)**

☐ Flyers or activity calendars delivered to my apartment

☐ Don't Know

☐ Flyers or activity calendars posted on bulletin boards

☐ Refuse to Answer

☐ Apartment complex newsletter

☐ Apartment complex website

☐ Emails from property management staff

☐ Emails from activity directors or community organizers

☐ Talking to property management staff

☐ Talking to activity directors or community organizers

☐ Talking to other residents in my building

☐ *Reston* magazine

☐ RA News e-newsletter

☐ Reston Association website

☐ Email from Reston Association staff member

☐ Facebook; specify which Facebook site: _____

☐ Twitter; specify whose Twitter account: _____

☐ Other: _____

Read aloud: *Reston Association is a major service provider in the Reston community, with a focus on providing recreational programs and other services, preserving the natural environment, and enhancing property values and the surrounding community.*

D.4 Before now, has anyone in your household heard of the Reston Association? **(Check one)**

☐ Yes

☐ Don't Know

☐ No

☐ Refuse to Answer

D.5 Do you consider yourself to be a member of Reston Association? **(Check one)**

☐ Yes

☐ Don't Know **(Skip to D.7)**

☐ No

☐ Refuse to Answer

D.6 Why or why not? **(Write response)**

☐ Don't Know

☐ Refuse to Answer

D.7 Are you aware of the difference between Reston Association and the Reston Community Center? **(Check one)**

☐ Yes

☐ Don't Know

☐ No

☐ Refuse to Answer

Description: Reston Association is a community association providing civic and community services for members – including renters – within its boundaries, while Reston Community Center is a Fairfax County organization that provides recreational and community activities to those who live and work in Reston.

D.8 Do you have a Reston Association pool pass?

☐ Yes **(Skip to D.12)**

☐ No

☐ Don't Know

☐ Refuse to Answer

D.9 Do you know how to get a Reston Association pool pass?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Don't Know

☐ Refuse to Answer

D.10 Are you planning to get a pool pass this year?

☐ Yes **(Skip to next Read Aloud)**

☐ No

☐ Don't Know

☐ Refuse to Answer

D.11 And why is that? (Write response)

☐ Don't Know

☐ Refuse to Answer

D.12 IF ANSWERED "YES" TO D.8: How did you get your pool pass this year?

☐ From my apartment complex

☐ From the Reston Association office

☐ On the Reston Association website

☐ Other: _____

☐ Don't Know

☐ Refuse to Answer

Read aloud: *Reston Association holds eight to ten workshops per year focused on topics of interest to members and also hosts a number of special programs and events, such as a community yard sale and Reston Presents, a bimonthly lecture and presentation series .*

D.13 Have you or anyone in your household ever attended a Reston Association workshop, program, or special event? **(Check one)**

☐ Yes

☐ No **(Skip to next Read Aloud)**

☐ Don't Know

☐ Refuse to Answer

D.14 What kind of workshop or event did you attend? **(Write response)**

☐ Don't Know

☐ Refuse to Answer

D.15 How many times since June 1st of the last year have you or someone in your household attended a Reston Association workshop or event? **(Check one)**

☐ 1 to 4

☐ 5 to 10

☐ More than 10

☐ Don't Know

☐ Refuse to Answer

Read aloud: *Reston Association has eight advisory committees, focused on the environment, parks and planning, pedestrians and bicycles, seniors, tennis, transportation, communication, and neighborhoods.*

D.16 Have you or anyone in your household ever attended a Reston Association advisory committee meeting? **(Check one)**

☐ Yes

☐ Don't Know

☐ No **(Skip to next Read Aloud)**

☐ Refuse to Answer

D.17 What kind of advisory committee meeting(s) did you attend? **(Write response)**

☐ Don't Know

☐ Refuse to Answer

D.18 How many times in the last year have you or someone in your household attended an advisory committee meeting? **(Check one)**

☐ 1 to 4

☐ Don't Know

☐ 5 to 10

☐ Refuse to Answer

☐ More than 10

Read aloud: *Reston Association holds elections each year for its Board of Directors. Residents of apartment complexes are encouraged to vote in elections and run for seats on the Board of Directors.*

D.19 Have you or anyone in your household ever voted in a Reston Association election? **(Check one)**

☐ Yes

☐ Don't Know

☐ No

☐ Refuse to Answer

D.20 Have you or anyone in your household ever attended a Reston Association board meeting? **(Check one)**

☐ Yes

☐ Don't Know

☐ No

☐ Refuse to Answer

D.21 Have you or anyone in your household ever watched a Reston Association board meeting on TV? **(Check one)**

☐ Yes

☐ Don't Know

☐ No

☐ Refuse to Answer

Description of Reston Association Board: Just so you know, in Reston, all residents - homeowners and renters alike- can vote in a Reston Association elections. Reston Association board meetings are held monthly [3rd Thursday, 7pm] and are opened to all residents. Any resident can have 3 minutes at any board meeting to express an issue.

D.22 **(Indicate Figure 2 on the laminated sheet)** If you wanted to become more active in Reston Association programs, committees, or elections which of these problems might keep you from doing so? **(Place checkmarks in the appropriate column)** Of these, which is the biggest problem? **(Check one)**

☐ Not aware of any activities or meetings

☐ Don't Know

☐ Refuse to Answer

	No Problem	Problem	Biggest Problem (Check one)
D.22.a Meeting time			
D. 22.b Lack of child care			
D. 22.c Inadequate transportation			
D. 22d Too busy			
D. 22.e Not knowing about the meetings			
D. 22.f Feeling unwelcome			
D. 22.g Not feeling comfortable speaking English			
D. 22.h Concerns for your safety			
D. 22.i Other (Fill in) _____			

D. 22.1 Other Comments: **(Write response)**

D.23 Reston Association oversees administrative issues in Reston and sponsors programs in the community. What social, recreational, or other activities would you like to see Reston Association sponsor in your community? **(Write response)**

☐ Don't Know

☐ Refuse to Answer

D.24 What would help you to be more involved in your community? **(Write response)**

☐ Don't Know

☐ Refuse to Answer

Read aloud: Thank you for your patience. This is the end of our neighborhood questions. Could you please fill out a few short questions about yourself and your household? **HAND NEXT PAGE TO RESPONDENT TO FILL OUT.**

E. DEMOGRAPHIC AND HOUSEHOLD QUESTIONS

E.1.a What are the languages spoken by any member of your household? **Check all that apply.**

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> English | <input type="checkbox"/> Farsi | <input type="checkbox"/> Spanish |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Arabic | <input type="checkbox"/> Korean | <input type="checkbox"/> Urdu |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Amharic | <input type="checkbox"/> Russian | <input type="checkbox"/> Vietnamese |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | | |

E.1.b. What do you consider your primary language? **Write response.** _____

E.2. On a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 being not very well and 7 being extremely well, how well do you feel you **(Circle one)**:

Speak your primary language	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Not very well					Extremely well	
Read your primary language	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Not very well					Extremely well	
Speak English	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Not very well					Extremely well	
Read English	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Not very well					Extremely well	

E.3 Do you consider yourself to be Latino/Hispanic? **Check one.** ☐ Yes ☐ No

E.4 What racial group(s) do you consider yourself to be a part of? **Check all that apply.**

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black/African American | <input type="checkbox"/> Asian | <input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander |
| <input type="checkbox"/> White | <input type="checkbox"/> American Indian/Alaska Native | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

E.5 What is your age? **Check one.**

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 18-29 | <input type="checkbox"/> 50-59 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 30-39 | <input type="checkbox"/> 60 and over |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 40-49 | |

E.6 What is your sex? **Check one.** ☐ Male ☐ Female

E.7 How many children under 12 live in your household? **Write response.** _____

E.8 How many children ages 12-17 live in your household? **Write response.** _____

E.9 How many adults over 64 live in your household? **Write response.** _____

E.10 At home, do you or anyone in your household use a computer? **Check one.** ☐ Yes ☐ No

E.11 At home, do you or anyone in your household have access to the Internet? **Check one.** ☐ Yes ☐ No

E.12 Do you or anyone in your household have access to the Internet outside your home? ☐ Yes ☐ No

E.13 Do you receive the *Reston* magazine? ☐ Yes ☐ No

At very end: Are there any other thoughts, questions, suggestions, or concerns you would like to share with us?

Interviewer notes:

9. APPENDIX B

FIGURE 2: List of Challenges

	No Problem	Problem
Meeting time		
Lack of child care		
Inadequate transportation		
Too busy		
Not knowing about the meetings		
Feeling unwelcome		
Not feeling comfortable speaking English		
Concerns for your safety		
Other		