

Daren Ellerbee, the URA's communications and marketing specialist, conducted the interview with Karen Abrams.

DE. What was the central question the students had to investigate in this initial Urban Matters cohort?

KA. The students tackled the question of land banks asking, "How do land banks work?"

DE. How did the students go about answering this question?

KA. Students conducted primary research, which consisted of man-on-the-street interviews, as well as interviews with subject experts, including Ronell Guy, executive director of the Northside Coalition for Fair Housing, Kyra Straussman, director of real estate for the URA, and Jerome Jackson, executive director of Operation Better Block (OBB) and chair of Interim Land Bank Board. In addition, the students conducted secondary research using various online sources, policy papers, videos, and newspaper and magazine articles.

DE. What were their findings?

KA. The class findings will be presented at graduation, which will also include a screening of their documentary. Their graduation will be open to the public.

DE. Where does Urban Matters go from here?

KA. It is our hope to create a youth advisory group. Also many of the students have expressed interest in pursuing internships. Organizations such as the Heinz Endowments and CORO Pittsburgh have expressed interest in having Urban Matters participants enter their youth programs and internships. Urban Matters' staff will be working to place them accordingly.

DE. When will you start recruiting for the next cohort?

KA. We are still in the process of speaking with current funders as well as potential new funders. Hopefully we will begin planning the next round in January 2015 for the summer.

DE. Is there a way for parents, guardians or mentors to refer children into this program?

KA. Urban Matters staff is considering ways to get more youth involved. Right now, we rely on youth-based organizations to recruit young people to the program. It is our intention to reach out to the Pittsburgh Public Schools and other city high schools as a part of our recruitment strategy.