Reflections: Weaving Threads to Strengthen the Fabric of Our Communities

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Reflections

Weaving Threads to Strengthen the Fabric of Our Communities

An Intentional Conversation About Community Engagement
Reflections

Weaving Threads to Strengthen the Fabric of Our Communities
An Intentional Conversation About Community Engagement

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INTRODUCTION

Sharon Press, editor

This publication is many years in the making. Most of the pieces were written by participants in the Dispute Resolution Institute’s (DRI) 2017 Symposium entitled: An Intentional Conversation About Community Engagement: Weaving Threads to Strengthen the Fabric of our Communities. The Symposium was the second one devoted to public engagement and followed the 2015 biennial symposium entitled An Intentional Conversation About Public Engagement and Decision Making: Moving from Dysfunction and Polarization to Dialogue and Understanding. Articles from the 2015 Symposium were published in the Mitchell Hamline Law Review.1

At the conclusion of the 2015 Symposium, DRI committed to continuing public engagement work and to continue the conversation during the 2017 Symposium. Between 2015 and 2017, DRI partnered with the Minnesota State Office of Collaboration and Dispute Resolution (OCDR) on two grants from the American Arbitration Association — International Center for Dispute Resolution Foundation (AAA-ICDR Foundation) to move the symposium conversations from talk into practice. The grant, entitled Talk with Purpose: Using Dispute Resolution to Engage Communities and Foster Relationships for Constructive Change, was premised on the belief that there was great need for public engagement and dialogue on issues related to economic and racial inequality. Specifically, there was a need not only for substantive solutions, but also for people to be heard and included in problem solving forums that would result in “real change.”

DRI/OCDR undertook two projects as part of this grant: 1) a project with the Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS) to assist with the community engagement process as part of the hiring of a new superintendent and to work with the School Board on its internal relationships; and 2) a project with the City of Falcon Heights to develop and run community conversations in the aftermath of the death of Philando Castile by a Saint Anthony Police Officer.

The 2017 Symposium, An Intentional Conversation About Community Engagement: Weaving Threads to Strengthen the Fabric of Our Communities, included three sessions.

The first session featured five theme leaders who were tasked with setting the stage for the conversation by discussing community engagement projects in which they had recently been involved. The session was framed as “Discussion of Local and National Projects: Lessons Learned” and included Toby Berkman, an Associate with Consensus Building Initiative (CBI), who dis-

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1 Sharon Press is a Professor of Law and the Director of the Dispute Resolution Institute at Mitchell Hamline School of Law.
cussed his work with CBI; Melanie Leahy, who had served as Co-Chair of the City of Falcon Heights Task Force on Inclusion and Policing; Kevin Lindsey, then Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Human Rights; Sharon Press, who co-led the DRI/OCDR Grant projects; and Andrew Thomas, the Community Relations and Neighborhood Engagement Director for the City of Sanford, Florida who assisted the city in the aftermath of the death of Trayvon Martin. Mariah Levison, Manger, OCDR served as moderator. The theme leaders were encouraged to share a lesson (or two) they learned from their projects before turning it over to small group discussions involving all the participants in the symposium. Leahy focused her comments on the importance of building relationships and the challenge of providing sufficient time in public engagement processes to do so; Berkman addressed the challenges of an institutional organization (like CBI) to scale so that the engagement is meaningful and engages a cross-section of the community; Thomas focused on the importance for communities to develop preparedness plans for “inevitable” crises rather than waiting for them to happen; Lindsey discussed the challenges of creating a state-wide plan for community engagement as the Commissioner of the Department of Human Rights; and I focused on my reflections of the AAA-ICDR Foundation grant work and the importance of strong leadership to open the path for community engagement and a network of committed volunteers willing to assist.

After the opening, participants gathered in small groups to surface additional lessons learned from community engagement projects — both successful and unsuccessful ones.

The second session, “How Do We Define and Demonstrate Success?” was moderated by Ken Fox, DRI Senior Fellow and included Chris Carlson, Chief Advisor to Policy Consensus Initiative (Divided Communities Steering Committee Member); Craig McEwen, Bowdoin College Professor Emeritus (Divided Communities Steering Committee Member) and Kathy Quick, Associate Professor, Humphrey School of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota (and Co-Facilitator of the Falcon Heights Task Force on Policing and Inclusion) as theme leaders. Fox asked each of the theme leaders to answer the following questions:

- Who is the audience for community engagement assessments?
- What are we trying to measure and why (what does success look like)?
- How do we measure it?

At the conclusion of the opening panel for session two, symposium participants identified issues related to evaluation and then once again met in small groups to deepen the discussion. The afternoon concluded with a “popcorn” style sharing of insights, aha moments and additional thoughts. No attempt was made to provide a synthesis of this discussion.

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6 See, Levinson, M., Bridging Divides: A View From the Minnesota State Office for Collaboration and Dispute Resolution, Reflections: Weaving threads to Strengthen the Fabric of Our Communities an Intentional Conversation about Community Engagement (2020).
Introduction

The third and final session took place on Saturday morning and was framed as “Where Do We Go From Here?” For this session, we began in small facilitated groups where participants were asked to discuss their ideas for carrying this work forward and to consider their personal commitments which they were invited to share at the conclusion of the symposium.

Joseph (“Josh”) Stulberg,7 Michael E. Moritz Chair in Alternative Dispute Resolution, Moritz College of Law, the Ohio State University moderated the discussion. The theme leaders for session three included: Terry Amsler, Deliberative Democracy Consortium Executive Committee Member; Suzanne Ghais,8 Principal, Ghais Mediation and Facilitation; and Grande Lum,9 then Director The Divided Communities Project10 at the Ohio State University Moritz College of Law.

There were numerous activities and projects that grew out of the two DRI Symposia — too many to recount here — so I will focus solely on this publication.

In addition to the theme leader contributions, two other participants and a board member from the Institute for the Study of Conflict Transformation11 also submitted articles which are included.

After this introduction, you will find three articles that reflect broadly on community engagement themes:

- Bridging Divides: A View from the Minnesota State Office for Collaboration and Dispute Resolution by Mariah Levison
- “Who are you and why do you get to run the meeting?” Reflections on Facilitator Identity and the Management of Complex Public Disputes by Toby Berkman and Danny Egol
- Minnesota Government Recognizes Meaningful Civic Engagement as Means to Create a More Inclusive Stronger Democracy by Kevin Lindsey

These are followed by three articles that grew out of the DRI/OCDR Community Conversations for Falcon Heights:

- Evaluation of the Falcon Heights Community Conversations Process, by Elizabeth Dressel
- An Interview with John Thompson: Community Activist and Community Conversation Participant, by Sharon Press
- Racially Diverse Community Conversations: Designing a Process that Includes All Voices, by Jill Slipper Scholtz

Finally, there are three pieces that consider public engagement in the context of different cultures.

- Intentional Conversations Across Cultures: Utilizing Tribal-State Relations Training to Strengthen the Governmental Services to Indian and Non-Indian Minnesotans, by Tadd Johnson, Rebecca St. George, and Joseph Bauerkemper

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9 Lum currently is the Provost of Menlo College
10 https://moritzlaw.osu.edu/dividedcommunityproject/
11 http://transformativemedication.org
- Recognizing and Supporting Natural Helpers of Welcome Dayton: A Non-Directive Approach by Tom Wahlrab
- Lessons from Peace Processes for US Community Engagement, by Suzanne Ghais

Special thanks to the American Arbitration Association/International Center for Dispute Resolution Foundation for the generous support DRI and OCDR received to develop and run the community engagement projects for the Saint Paul Public Schools and Falcon Heights, to host the 2017 Symposium, and to produce this publication. I also want to acknowledge the helpful editorial assistance I received from Joseph Sathe who worked with me while he was a student at Mitchell Hamline School of Law.

Finally, the Dispute Resolution Institute could not function without my partners in everything, namely Associate Director, Kitty Atkins and Debra Berghoff. In addition to serving as the Administrative Coordinator for DRI, Debra is the secret sauce behind DRI Press. Through her expertise, the final pieces are turned into a publication!

We hope you enjoy this publication and find it useful in your practice.
Bridging Divides: A View from the Minnesota State Office for Collaboration and Dispute Resolution

Mariah Levison

It was 9:30 p.m. and the pastor of the small church we were using for our community conservation was standing near the door. The church did not have any staff to close up. The pastor had to do it herself. I wanted her to be able to go home to her family, but John Thompson, Philando Castile’s close friend, and St. Anthony Police Chief Jon Mangseth were also standing near the doors, deeply engaged in conversation.

On July 6, 2016, Philando Castile was killed by a police officer during a traffic stop in Falcon Heights, Minnesota, a small city at the edge of the capital city Saint Paul. The next few Falcon Heights City Council meetings were attended by lots of concerned citizens — many of them angry. Among them was John Thompson who, along with others, passionately expressed frustration that their voices were not being heard. The Council abruptly ended the meeting. In response to the outpouring of concern and the City Council feeling ill-equipped to productively address the concerns, the City Council created the Task Force on Inclusion and Policing and a series of community conversations to create a forum for the City and Community to work together to improve policing and make the community more inclusive. The City asked the Minnesota State Office for Collaboration and Dispute Resolution (along with partners including the Center for Integrative Leadership at the University of Minnesota, the Dispute Resolution Institute at Mitchell Hamline School of Law, and Metropolitan State University), where I work, to design and facilitate the task force meetings and community conversations. It was at these community conversations that Mr. Thompson and Chief Mangseth got to know each other. Mr. Thompson said about the experience,

I never wanted to come to the Community Conversations. I thought the City was just checking a box. Mayor Lindstrom and (Task Force co-chair) Melanie Leahy kept calling me asking me to go. Finally, I said ok, ok and everything that I thought about it was totally different. I was seated at a table with (police) Chief Mangseth and I got to talk to him. Now I don’t agree with him on everything but I said let’s work on this thing. Am I mad? Yes I am mad, but I got to tell him. And I was seated at a table with Mayor Lindstrom. I

1 Mariah Levinson is Senior Program Manager at the Minnesota State Office for Collaboration and Dispute Resolution
had never talked to him before. I just yelled at him. Now I see he is crying and I realize that he is young and a new mayor and now I realize I have some things to figure out. I lost Philando and that was all I was thinking about. I didn't think about how Mayor Lindstrom was young and a new mayor. If I hadn't been at the Community Conversations, I would still have these feelings.

The media is filled with stories of how divided we are including police-community relations in Falcon Heights and around the country; demands for confederate era statutes to be removed and protests against removing them; NFL players engaging in a variety of symbolic gestures to demonstrate their concern about the treatment of black men in America and the booing of these gestures; liberal college students protesting conservative speakers and conservative students protesting their protests — the list goes on. While these events are difficult, I wonder if we aren't any more divided than we have ever been, but rather that we have gotten so much better at managing our differences that we are choosing to take on issues that we have long avoided. As the increased awareness of killing of unarmed black men by police and sexual harassment in the workplace illustrate, divisions have always existed. We just were not talking about them.

Talking about difficult public issues is positive because this is how we will make progress on these challenges. Unfortunately, the way we talk about them is not always so positive. As was the case in Falcon Heights initially, the discourse is often divisive. Our difficulties at having productive conversations about divisive issues creates a negative spiral in which we end up even further apart due to the way in which we talk about them.

When we struggle to understand each other, our rhetoric can become hurtful and harmful. We see too much of this today. In my job at the Minnesota State Office for Collaboration and Dispute Resolution, I bring together stakeholders who have reached an impasse over contentious public issues and help them build consensus. I have worked with not only the City of Falcon Heights and concerned citizens, but on many other contentious public issues including:

1) Former Minnesota Governor Mark Dayton's Capitol Preservation Commission Subcommittee on Art about what to do with controversial art featuring Native Americans at the state capitol;

2) A multi-year conflict involving the Minnesota Department of Human Services, the Governor's Office, labor unions, families of patients, mental health advocates and others about the care of the mentally ill and criminally dangerous at our state's security hospital;

3) A decade long legislative conflict as to how to amend child custody statutes that included accusations that the system is biased against fathers.

All of these issues were complex, long-standing, and deeply divisive. Yet, like John Thompson, participants in these processes came to understand each other better and were able to identify solutions that they all could support. Based on these experiences and others, I offer ten suggestions on how to have productive conversations on divisive public issues.
1. **Recognize and focus on shared values**
While individuals in public life hold different positions on controversial issues, regardless of their different backgrounds, political affiliation, hometown, etc., they are motivated by the same core set of values which often include such things as integrity, community, accountability, and compassion. In the midst of a difficult issue, remind yourself that the other side is not bereft of values, and in fact probably shares many of the same values as you.

2. **Talk about interests not positions**
The book *Getting to Yes*\(^2\) introduced the world to the concept of interest-based negotiation. In interest-based negotiations, negotiators strive to move from positions — what they say they must have — to interests — “the why” behind the what they want. For example, in the recent debates over historical monuments, the positions are usually tear it down versus leave it as is. When focusing on positions, only one side can win. The statue stays up or it comes down.

The interests on one side include dignity, justice, and harmony. The interests on the other side include a self-determination, preservation, and a desire to grapple with history. A solution that addresses these interests could be to leave a statue where it is but add more interpretive information that explains the complexity of the history that the statute represents or add many more statues depicting underrepresented groups and stories.

Here in Minnesota, the state Capitol recently was renovated. As a part of the process, the Governor formed the Capitol Preservation Subcommittee on Art to assist him in making difficult decisions about existing and new art in the Capitol. I had the honor of facilitating a process with the subcommittee and the greater public to develop recommendations on the art. Almost no art had been added to the Capitol since it was built in the 1800s. As one might imagine, there were very few depictions of women or people of color. Two paintings, located in prominent locations, were of special concern. They depicted Native Americans in ways that some found offensive or inaccurate. Some stakeholders’ position was that they should remain in the Capitol for historical reasons. The position of other stakeholders was that they should be moved. The subcommittee, with substantial feedback from the public, began by identifying their shared interests. The interests included that art in the Capitol should challenge the public to grapple with difficult and complex issues and should create an environment that is affirming and welcoming to all Minnesotans. Based on those shared interests, they recommended the paintings be moved to another location in the Capitol where they could be better contextualized. They also recommended adding new art which would tell the stories of more Minnesotans and reflect the increased diversity of the state. Both of these recommendations were accepted and implemented.

When you are engaged in a controversial public issue try to identify both your own interests and the interests of the other side. Ask yourself (and if possible “the other side”), “What’s behind the outcome you and the other side are demanding?” At the deepest level, interests often include the core human motivations of a sense of security, belonging to social groups, recognition, and efficacy.

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3. **Explore the other side’s perspective**

You may have seen an image that looks to some like an old lady and to others like a young woman. The lesson the image and others like it is that while we cannot always see it, what others see is valid. This does not mean that other people's point of view is scientifically provable, factually accurate, or that we agree with it, but it does mean that it is as real for them as our point of view is for us. The reality is that contentious issues are usually more complex than either person can see. We have a tendency to assume that we know everything we need to know and just need to convince the other side of our position. It is more likely that each of us is bringing different information and experience to the table.

This is important for a few reasons. First, if we dismiss the perspectives of others as wrong, crazy, or irrational, they will be unwilling to engage in resolving the issue at hand. Second, to resolve the issue you will need to identify a solution in which both sides get some of their most important interests addressed (see number two above). If individuals' interests are not included in the proposed solution, they will keep fighting the issue one way or another — at the legislature or courts or through public opinion. Trying to understand their point of view will enable you to identify their interests which must be included in the solution. Even in cases where an issue cannot be resolved in a mutually acceptable manner, taking each other's point of view increases mutual respect and fosters civil disagreement.

For example, in the debate over immigration, we can recognize that many individuals who support restrictive immigration policies think that immigrants are not respecting the law by coming illegally, are undermining wages by working for less than U.S. citizens, and creating a strain on public goods and services such as roads and schools. Individuals that support open immigration policies think that every individual, regardless of country of origin, deserves the relative safety and opportunity that the United States provides. We can not slip into thinking that the other side is just mean or irrational. While neither side is necessarily “right”, we need to first understand where they are coming from before we can start to develop solutions.

To apply this approach, challenge yourself to find out the other person’s or group’s perspective. No matter how difficult this process is for you, do not proceed to the next phases of problem solving until you can identify their perspective. You can do this by listening to them, asking open ended questions and challenging the assumptions you hold about them.

4. **Don’t compromise — integrate**

Despite the bad rap that “compromise” currently has, it can be wonderful. However, sometimes the values underlying public issues are so important that they cannot be compromised. And sometimes we default to a compromise solution when a more complex one is needed. Because interests, unlike positions, are not mutually exclusive, we can develop solutions that integrate (or address) the interests of both groups. Integrative solutions have the potential to be both more thoughtful and to satisfy more citizens (see number two above).
5. **Don’t fall prey to cognitive biases**

Heuristics are mental shortcuts that ease the cognitive load of making a decision in our complicated world. (For more on heuristics see Daniel Kahneman’s NYT bestselling book *Thinking Fast and Slow*). Like most shortcuts, they are generally helpful, but like shortcuts, they have a tendency to lead us astray. Conflict increases our cognitive load and makes us more prone to these shortcuts. Two heuristics or biases frequently occur in conflict.

**Attribution biases** are the errors people make when trying to evaluate or find reasons for their own and others’ behavior. When we make attributions about another person’s actions, we are likely to overemphasize the role of dispositional factors, while minimizing the influence of situational factors. This is called the Fundamental Attribution Error. For example, if I run a stop sign, I am likely to attribute my action to being really stressed and rushed due to pressures at work and home. If I see someone else run a stop sign, I am likely to attribute the action to being a reckless, selfish jerk — especially if it is someone I am already in conflict with!

**Confirmation Bias** is the tendency for people to unconsciously seek out information that confirms their beliefs and disregard information that challenges their beliefs.

As we get overloaded by conflict, we develop a story that the other side (who we use to get along with) is doing what they are doing not because of some situational limitation but because they are a terrible person. We then look for evidence to confirm this and we disregard any evidence that contradicts this story. This dynamic has occurred with every group I have worked with. For example, a part of what could be happening in the case of college students protesting conservative speakers on campuses is that due to the polarization between political parties, college students make dispositional attributions about the speaker (i.e. she is evil, he is hateful) rather than situational attributions such as she is hawkish because of all the danger she perceives in the world or he is anti-immigration because he sees a situation in which some people who used to make $30 an hour now cannot find jobs. Those students may then read liberal sources of news and information which reinforce those attributions and avoid conservative sources of news and information which would challenge those attributions.

When you find yourself in a difficult conversation, ask yourself, “why do I think he is saying this?” If the answer is a negative attribution about his character (he is a jerk, he is narrow minded, etc.), recognize that is unlikely to be the case and ask some questions to help you better understand his motivations. Then really listen and challenge yourself not to disregard things he says that counter your narrative about him. Then believe him. See # 9 Take People at Their Word..

6. **Find the good in everyone**

Very few people get up in the morning wondering, “How can I make the world a worse place today?” Most people, most of the time, do what they believe is best. Of course, people do things that are not kind, ethical, or productive. However, they generally do so not out of malfeasance, but out of a misguided attempt to solve a problem or because they are having a bad day (or decade) or because they are unaware of the negative consequences of their actions or for some

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other reason that is not that they are a terrible person with horrible motives. In order to solve a problem with someone, it is essential to find and connect with the goodness in them.

7. **Acknowledge historical injustices and do not call each other racist**

Social psychologists have volumes of research to demonstrate that humans have a tendency to form groups and favor the groups that they are a part of. Evolutionary psychologists theorize that human beings do so because membership in a group helps to ensure survival. So, the theory goes that we all have unconscious bias against people who are not members of our group.

Unconscious bias against people of color is particularly strong because it has been reinforced by history and culture. Well-intentioned white people (me included) rarely understand how profound these injustices are because we live in a segregated society and our schools failed to truly teach us about them. Since unconscious bias and current and historical injustices play a role in many divisive issues (think police-community relations and monuments), white people and members of other majority groups, must learn about and acknowledge the role that they play in the issue at hand and consider ways to right wrongs.

Unfortunately, acknowledging and exploring these topics is really hard. This is good and bad. It is good because part of the reason that it is hard is that it has become so unacceptable to be biased against another group that the mere implication that one is biased leads to defensiveness. It is bad because that defensiveness makes it hard for us to talk about and therefore hard to develop better understanding of each other and solutions to challenging public issues.

Calling people racists makes it extra hard to have these conversations and develop mutual understanding and mutually acceptable solutions. Ta-Nehisi Coates⁴, an eminent thinker on racism, writes about the narrowing of the term racist. He says, “the racist is not so much an actual person but a monster, an outcast thug who leads the lynch mob and keeps Mein Kampf in his back pocket.” The idea of a racist as an inhuman monster rather than a complex human being who does some good things and some bad things, harbors unconscious bias, and has failed to learn about systemic racism, etc. has the effect of stymieing needed, difficult conversations. Hard conversations are needed, contempt is not.

8. **Presume positive intent**

In conflict people become convinced that the other side has negative intentions. For example, advocates of universal health insurance coverage assume that people who do not want to expand Medicaid feel this way because they do not care about poor people versus because they believe that a larger deficit will cause greater harm than lack of health insurance. Or people who support unrestricted access to guns assume that people who want to enact strict background checks really want to take away all of their guns rather than that they want to keep guns out of the hands of people who cannot or will not use them responsibly. While we might not agree with someone else’s intention, it is rarely nefarious. Literally every single group that I have worked with has made negative assumptions about each other’s intent. They have to spend a

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⁴ [https://ta-nehiscoates.com](https://ta-nehiscoates.com)
lot of time in difficult conversation challenging these assumptions before they are able to start developing mutually beneficial solutions.

9. Take people at their word
Almost all mediators that I know have a policy of believing the parties at the table. Why? Because it works. Questioning whether the parties at the table are telling the truth leads to defensiveness and dead ends every time. Even if what they are saying is not 100% true, it is almost always true that on the whole they are good people who are struggling with a problem, that they do not really enjoy the state of conflict that they are living in, and that they would like to resolve the issue at hand. So rather than question their veracity, we mediators move forward in the problem-solving process of identifying interests and developing mutually beneficial solutions. The same strategy will work for you too.

10. Collaborate (putting it all together)
Competition works great in sports but not on contentious public issues. In today’s world of thinly distributed power, a defeated group or point of view will only remain vanquished for a short period of time before they start an influence campaign, get a friendly official elected, challenge a regulation in court, etc. When it comes to resolving contentious issues, sometimes the only real option is to collaborate. Competing is pursing one’s own interests. Accommodating is prioritizing the interests of others over your own interests. Compromising is meeting in the middle. Collaboration means pursuing both one’s own interests and the interests of others. It is identifying solutions that address the most important interests of everyone involved. How does one do such a thing? Start by really understanding your own interests and then listening to the other side’s perspective so that you can identify their interests. Finally, brainstorm options that address the interests of everyone involved.

An example of collaboration in action:
Public institutions across the country including schools, hospitals, and prisons are being charged with shifting from a punitive to a treatment based approach to addressing the behavior of violent individuals. The Minnesota Security Hospital (MSH) houses the mentally ill and criminally dangerous. The facility has a long history of conflict. In 2011, MSH was placed under a conditional license due to overuse of restraint and seclusion. However, the shift from a punitive to a treatment based approach was hindered by a lack of professional staff (psychiatrists, psychologists, etc.), an existing staff that lacked a human services background and had worked for many years in the security-focused environment that characterized the facility, and lack of successful training in “patient centered” approaches to addressing violent behavior. As a result the number of serious patient and staff injuries rose.

The Minnesota State Office for Collaboration and Dispute Resolution conducted a collaborative problem solving process with staff, management, patients, mental health advocates, union leaders and others. More than 100 individuals participated in collaborative problem solving groups to develop solutions to these issues. Participants worked together to understand each
other’s perspective, articulate their interests and develop solutions that addressed the interests of everyone involved.

The result was that participants developed an understanding that staff safety and quality patient care are inherently linked — when patients have high quality treatment, they are less likely to become violent and require restraint and isolation or harm other patients or staff. This shared understanding enabled unions and management to agree on the types of staffing increases needed and therefore make a joint case to the legislature. In 2017, the legislature appropriated $23 million to increase staffing at MSH by 146 employees. The increased treatment provided by these individuals led to a nearly 50% reduction in staff injuries. Furthermore, the process developed the trust and relationships needed to ensure quality patient care and staff safety at MSH.

Conclusion
Making progress on contentious public issues is messy. The outcome of a consensus building approach is seldom a clear-cut solution but rather the development of relationships, trust, and communication channels to enable progress. Building consensus takes time, hope, a deep commitment to a collaborative approach, and a leap of faith to trust each other. Nonetheless, these approaches reliably produce progress.
A white-haired, elderly woman approaches the microphone. “I’ve been going to this Church for fifty years,” she says, her voice ringing through the hall. “Who exactly are you and why do you get to run the meeting? Are you even Catholic?” A series of murmurs from around the room suggest the woman is not alone in her skepticism.

It is your very first time facilitating a large public meeting. The Catholic Archdiocese has just informed the crowd of parishioners that their church will soon be closing, and the mood is grim.

Flustered, you hesitate, then finally muster up the courage to respond. “No, as it turns out I’m not Catholic. I’m Jewish, but I don’t think that’s really the point. I’m not here to take sides. I’m just here to help manage this meeting and make sure everyone has a chance to contribute their perspective.”

This response seems to work well enough. The woman sits down, apparently satisfied. You exhale with relief and shift the conversation to the next item on the agenda. Still, you can’t help but feel a bit unsure of yourself. Was your response helpful? Was it avoidant? Was it even a true and accurate description of your role? You just don’t know.

In case it isn’t already clear, the “you” in this story is actually one the co-authors of this article — Toby Berkman — who now works as a professional facilitator at the Consensus Buildin

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1 Toby Berkman is a professional mediator and facilitator at the Consensus Building Institute, where he helps organizations and stakeholders collaborate around difficult public issues. As affiliated faculty at the Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School, Toby also teaches courses on collaborative problem solving and dispute resolution to law students, executives, and professionals from around the world. Danny Egol is a Co-Founder and Executive Director of Inclusion NextWork a community of emerging leaders and organizations committed to IDEAS: Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, Social Justice. Through Inclusion NextWork, Danny organizes in-person and virtual convenings, creates original content, and consults with organizations to build our collective capacity to drive IDEAS-based social change.
Institute (CBI). A decade later, the moment resonates with both authors as an opportunity to reflect on our approach as facilitators. The scenario raises several difficult questions related to facilitator identity in complex public disputes, including:

- What is an appropriate response when one's credibility as a facilitator is questioned based on a perceived facet of one's identity, like religion? Was it appropriate for Toby to suggest that his identity as a non-Catholic was not “really the point,” or did the role of his religion in this context deserve further exploration?
- What about other kinds of identities, like Toby’s status as a newcomer to the community? Was his participation as an outsider an appropriate target for stakeholder concern?
- What might have been done to avoid and/or manage this situation more effectively? What are some best practices for facilitators to navigate arenas where they may be perceived as outsiders based on elements of their identity, or for navigating questions of facilitator identity more generally?

Whatever the answers to these questions, we believe that a facilitator’s various identities — both as understood by practitioners themselves and as experienced by others — complicate perceptions of facilitator authority, credibility, efficacy and neutrality in interesting and non-obvious ways.

For our purposes here, identity refers to the social categories and attributes people use to answer the questions, “Who are you?” and “What does it mean to be who you are?”

Social identity has been explored by many different fields, including sociology, anthropology, psychology, amongst others. Published literature from these fields has powerful implications in the room for facilitators, for organizations and for the dispute resolution field in general. This literature, when combined with our professional experience and that of our colleagues offers at least three broad categories of lessons we believe to be particularly relevant for public dispute resolution practitioners and organizations:

1) the importance of understanding and navigating identity through an intersectional lens, and doing so with humility and integrity;
2) the importance of proactively and simultaneously tracking both internal and external perceptions of identity; and
3) the importance of acknowledging both lived and learned experiences as key components and perceptions of identity.

**Intersectionality and facilitation**

The cross-disciplinary body of work on intersectionality, when combined with our own experience, has valuable insights for facilitators of public disputes. According to Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw’s body of work, intersectionality “highlights the need to account for multiple grounds...”

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2 CBI is a nonprofit that helps groups collaborate and manage conflicts on tough social, environmental, and economic issues. Visit www.cbi.org for more information.

3 For simplicity, here and below we use the generic terms “facilitator” and “facilitation” to reflect the broad range of multi-stakeholder contexts in which our work takes place, which includes everything from multi-stakeholder dispute resolution to group problem-solving, mediation, dialogue work, and more. Irrespective of the terminology, our observations are intended to apply equally to these various contexts, including public dispute resolution and mediation.
of identity when considering how the social world is constructed." We are each individuals with unique perspectives and experiences. Yet, at the same time, each of us belongs to multiple people groups with shared characteristics. Some of these traits are chosen and others are innate, some of them visible, others not. Equally important is the need to approach these issues with humility: we cannot assume any one person’s individual experience based on perceptions of their group identities.

The power of Crenshaw’s framework lies in how intersectionality highlights that we are many things at once, even if particular facets of our identities become more salient in a given moment or context. According to Crenshaw, “identity politics takes place at the site where categories intersect.”5 Because we live in a society where certain social groups have been afforded privileges while others have been disadvantaged based on shared characteristics, intersectionality also brings to light the compounding effect these various advantages or disadvantages can have on people’s lives.6

For facilitators, it is important to be mindful of the potential for these advantages and disadvantages to influence our work directly, or to be present “in the room” as unspoken and often unacknowledged realities. In the Church example above, multiple privileged and/or outsider identity categories, as perceived by the stakeholders, may have been at play as Toby stood in front of the room of mostly blue-collar New Jersey Catholics. These include those called out by the woman at the microphone (non-Catholic, not from the community) and others left unspoken (e.g. a shared racial identity as white Americans for a majority of the parishioners, or unshared attributes such as “well off,” based on Toby’s suit, or “elite,” based on his affiliation with Harvard Law School).

Intersectionality underscores the importance of facilitators acknowledging and leveraging our own multiple identities with humility and integrity. Clearly, a number of Toby’s identities and life experiences separated him from the parishioners in New Jersey. He would have done well to note these layers of difference to himself beforehand, check his own internal biases, and try to enter the meeting with a curious mindset. However, other identities could have provided fodder for common ground. These areas of commonality included, for example, Toby’s own experience and dedication to a community of faith and the months he spent preparing for the meeting by having in-depth, one-on-one conversations with parishioners to learn about their concerns and goals for the church and for their community.

A more fruitful approach to the meeting might have involved Toby acknowledging elements of his outsider status from the start and making clear that he was not claiming to understand what it felt like to be a member of the parish community, while also emphasizing a more comprehensive picture of his background that connected him to the problem at hand. We are not suggesting here to make disingenuous or tenuous connections to win over stakeholder sup-

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5 *Id.*

6 For example, each year Equal Pay Day symbolizes how far into the year women must work to earn what men earned the previous year. However, the original conception of the day failed to acknowledge that there are compounded penalties in pay at the intersection of gender and race. While White women earn 77 cents for every dollar earned by White men, African American women only earn 61 cents to every dollar. (www.equalpaytoday.org/equalpaydays)
port, but rather to lead with integrity about who we are as facilitators, including our strengths and limitations, to build authentic trust and connection. By acknowledging his own multiple identities, Toby might also have opened a window of thinking for the participants about their own multiple and complex affiliations, possibly breaking down cleavages just below the surface in the room.

This kind of transparency may be in tension with the concept of a wholly “neutral,” detached facilitator, but we believe it is critical step for practitioners to build credibility and license to operate across difference.7

**Navigating internal vs. external perceptions of facilitator identity**

Another suggestion is to recognize that identity involves two sides of a coin: our own, internal perception of who we are, and how we are viewed externally by others. These perceptions may not always be aligned.

For example, Danny — this article’s other co-author — has maternal grandparents who are both Cuban; he has many aunts, uncles, and cousins still on the island whom he visits regularly. He speaks Spanish, cooks Cuban cuisine, and considers his Cuban roots an important part of who he is. However, this feature of Danny’s identity is often invisible to others as he looks (and also identifies) as white, given that his father’s family is Jewish. Though his Latinx identity resonates internally for Danny as a key part of his self-image, others may make assumptions about his experience and cultural background that overlook this part of his life based on his external physical features.

For individuals who belong to groups with less social capital8 and/or, like Danny, who belong to multiple groups, there can be a significant cost — via additional emotional and cognitive labor — in trying to manage the lack of alignment between internal and external understandings of identity. In referring to the experience of Black folks, W.E.B. Du Bois coined the term “double consciousness” to describe “this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others.”9 While everyone may respond differently to how they are viewed by others, the perceived or actual group affiliation(s) of some individuals, depending on race, class and countless other attributes, can overshadow how people receive them as individuals.

For facilitators, these observations suggest the importance of working to become more self-aware with respect to our own internal identities, how we are likely to be perceived by stakeholders, and how both of these factors relate to the interaction at hand.10 Facilitators should carefully

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7 While not the focus of this article, intersectionality also has clear implications for managing the identities of stakeholders. It suggests the importance of using facilitation techniques that create space for stakeholders to bring their full set of multiple identities into the room, and paying particular attention to groups/individuals who may face disadvantages or advantages across multiple identity categories based on embodied characteristics, institutional affiliation, professional experience, or personal perspective.

8 For a definition of social capital, please reference: https://www.socialcapitalresearch.com/literature/definition/


10 While this article focuses on how facilitators can effectively manage their own identities, culturally savvy facilitators should also consider how these same dynamics are at play with stakeholders, in particular those from marginalized groups who may be experiencing the additional labor of navigating spaces where they are underrepresented. These stakeholders may be particularly attuned to the lack of alignment between their internal and external understandings of identity based on experiences in other contexts and therefore bring this lens into the facilitation process.
plan when and how to bring elements of their “internal” identity into the open, communicating them to clients and stakeholders when disclosure helps to move the conversation forward or creates the opportunity for others to reciprocate openness. Our colleague, CBI Senior Mediator Michele Ferenz, has put it aptly. “At end of the day it’s about authenticity and not pretending to be something you’re not,” she says. “We need to be able to authentically and ethically convey how ‘my story is part of your story.’”

Sometimes, this kind of transparency can have surprising results. While there may be an assumption that stakeholders and clients value working with facilitators whose identities mirror their own in certain ways, this is not always the case. CBI’s experience suggests that, in some instances, stakeholders may even prefer a facilitator who is seen as an outsider and therefore more “neutral” or capable of offering benefits that insiders cannot by virtue of being too entrenched in the conflict. For a recent dialogue among Inuit representatives on a climate impact assessment, for example, the organizers approached CBI for advice, and we offered to refer them to a skilled facilitator with an indigenous identity. However, the organizers suggested that an indigenous facilitator would bring his or her own identity conflicts, and a white American from CBI would do just fine. Of course, facilitators should also be prepared to step away from particular engagements if it becomes clear that stakeholders value a particular kind of identity-based experience that the facilitator cannot provide.

Understanding the value of both lived and learned experiences
A third lesson involves understanding and valuing both lived and learned experience as elements of one’s identity. Lived experiences are those that can be attained only by living as a member of a particular identity category. Learned experiences are those that can be acquired through practice, opportunity and exposure.

We can offer at least two core mantras when it comes to navigating these dual elements of identity. First, both elements have value. Second, the two elements are not equivalent or interchangeable. For example, though both Toby and Danny have plenty of expertise drawn from different aspects of their own identities, the fact that we are both cisgender men means that we cannot be the authority on what it is like to be a woman, trans, or gender non-binary facilitator. We would be remiss to suggest that our reflections and advice on the topic of facilitator identity could fully take the nuances of these lived experiences into account.

Creating space for both lived and learned experience to surface in facilitation spaces can enable clients and stakeholders to bring their full selves to the engagement and unlock perspectives and solutions that may go otherwise unrecognized. Facilitators should consider when it is appropriate and ethical to draw on both elements of experience, both in the room and when considering which projects to take on.

When this work is done effectively, it can play out in surprising ways. For example, CBI Managing Director David Fairman recalls feeling concerned about his role in facilitating a dialogue in Nigeria around development strategies. What place did he have as a white American in helping to convene and facilitate this particular dialogue? Was his involvement, in fact, preventing a similarly skilled Nigerian from stepping into that space?
To his credit, David raised these concerns explicitly with the client and with stakeholders, who assured him that they valued both his expertise as a facilitator and his strong professional network. They wanted him to be involved. He ended up working in close partnership with a highly skilled Nigerian facilitator, ensuring that both lived and learned perspectives were represented in the work.

Lived experience is often explicitly or tacitly minimized (or discarded) in professional spaces, particularly for people belonging to marginalized or underrepresented groups, even when insights derived from that lived experience can enrich facilitated dialogues or processes. For example, Danny openly identifies as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community. As part of this marginalized group, Danny is often the only one from this community in the room (or may think he is because others who do identify as LGBTQIA+ feel uncomfortable or unsafe to disclose that part of themselves at work).¹¹

Danny’s experience as a minority based on his sexual orientation shapes how he participates in facilitated processes and may help orient him to which voices are underrepresented in a given context. At a recent stakeholder meeting on energy and safety, for example, Danny was the only person to voice the absence of any First Nations, Indigenous, or Tribal representatives, even though Danny was the most junior facilitator in the room.

To return to Toby’s church example, his learned experience as a professionally trained facilitator suggested he might bring some skill and resources to the table, but his lack of lived experience as a member of the community positioned him as an outsider. Before the meeting Toby would have done well to consider whether he could credibly lead the process in light of his lived experiences, and to have discussed this openly with the client. Was there someone closer to the problem at hand who could have engaged the community more effectively? Was his expertise as a process manager valuable enough in this context to justify his involvement? Could there have been some way of featuring his respect for lived experience by partnering or co-facilitating with someone on the ground so that both elements of identity were given equitable space?

At the outset of the meeting itself, Toby could have openly acknowledged both the benefits and limitations of his lived and learned experiences. An opening like the following might have been effective:

*I haven’t experienced first-hand what it means to be part of this community like all of you, and I haven’t been part of a church that’s closing down. I won’t pretend I fully understand what you’re going through. I’m also not Catholic, although I do have a lot of admiration for its teachings and come from a community of faith of my own. What I do bring is some experience working with communities that are facing difficult times, helping them think together about how to move forward, and an interest in listening and learning.*

¹¹ According to New York University Law School professor Kenji Yoshino, “covering” an aspect of one’s identity like this—in order to be safe, to fit in, or to be successful—requires active energy. See Yoshino, Kenji. *Covering: The Hidden Assault on Our Civil Rights*, 2007.
To be clear, we are not suggesting that lived experience is the only kind of valid experience for facilitators, or that we should always take clients’ or stakeholders’ preferences on these issues at face value. We believe in taking advantage of opportunities to demonstrate competence and good faith across difference. Some situations may call for simply persevering through a process, demonstrating one’s skill, credibility, and trustworthiness by working hard to incorporate diverse voices and acting with integrity. In some instances, it may even be appropriate to respectfully challenge a stakeholder’s or client’s preconceptions around the need for certain lived experiences. For example, when clients have expressed a preference for a male facilitator due to preconceptions about women’s leadership capacities, CBI has typically drawn a hard line and insisted that CBI’s practitioners of all gender expressions are eminently capable of managing complex dispute processes, even in cultural contexts that may be resistant to recognizing non-men in leadership roles.

Key lessons and take-aways

In summary, pre-dialogue, our key suggestions for practitioners include the following:

- Do your homework and think about your own identities, how they relate to the engagement at hand, and whether your engagement feels appropriate and credible. If you have any doubts, check in with the client and/or others in the community you will be serving. In some instances, it might be most appropriate to step aside or seek a co-facilitator who brings a different set of identities to the table.

- Keep in mind your multiple identities and those of your stakeholders and clients, and how they might intersect in ways that might make effective and authentic dialogue more challenging. Consider how your own background and experiences might bias you in one direction or another and seek to foster a curious mindset.

- Consider how you want to present yourself and how you disclose elements of your identity ethically and strategically. Consider both internal identities and how you are likely to be perceived externally, as well as the role of both lived and learned experiences.

- Though in an ideal world, you could head off any resistance before entering the room, consider running through some potential scenarios of what you would say if challenged on a particular topic or facet of identity during the facilitation process.

Once in the room, the following additional recommendations may be helpful:

- When you first introduce yourself, offer a transparent and authentic description of your relevant identities, how they may connect you to the problem at hand, and where your limits may lie.

- Be prepared to address pushback proactively and compassionately. Doing this work well requires resilience. If you are stepping into hard situations as a facilitator where you are different from the people with whom you are working, you have to be particularly attuned to the fact that you may receive pushback. Remain open to stakeholder preferences and do not make assumptions about them, even if they seem surprising or counterintuitive, yet understand where you draw the line (as in the example above
where clients’ gender preferences had no bearing on the facilitators’ ability to lead engagements).

- Consider that participant behaviors you experience as difficult or confusing could be connected to one or more identities that they cannot or do not want to share explicitly, but that nevertheless drive their views and opinions.
- Continually look for opportunities to demonstrate competence and good faith across difference.

Above all, we suggest facilitators remember that few of these recommendations are black and white — context is everything! Our work in the U.S. and internationally often takes place in contexts that are politically charged and nuanced. Effective facilitation must consider the larger cultural milieu and the particulars of both the situation and the people at hand. That said, we believe the facilitator’s identity is a factor in all processes whether or not it is expressly acknowledged. Effective facilitation thus requires raising our awareness around this reality, considering its impact, and addressing it with transparency, nuance, and integrity.
Minnesota Government Recognizes Meaningful Civic Engagement as Means to Create a More Inclusive Stronger Democracy

Kevin Lindsey

I. Introduction

The State of Minnesota has sought to be a leader on civil rights and providing equal opportunities for all. Minnesota was the first state within the United States to form a statewide agency to combat discrimination when it created the Minnesota Department of Human Rights (the Department) in 1967. While civil rights progress in Minnesota has not always been linear, Minnesota is generally regarded as a leader among states within the United States on civil rights issues. In 2012, the voters in Minnesota defeated constitutional amendments denying same-sex couples the right to marry and requiring photo identification to vote. In 2013, Minnesota joined a handful of jurisdictions prohibiting private employers from inquiring into the criminal history of job applicants prior to extending the job applicant an interview. In 2014, Minnesota


2 In 1967, Minnesota Governor Harold LeVander in his inauguration speech called upon Minnesotans to lead on civil rights and creating equal opportunities for all. Governor LeVander stated, “We need people who have an understanding and compassion for men. We need people who want to follow the commandment ‘Love one Another.’ Because our most critical problems are really people problems, we are going to have to try to understand people. How do we encourage society to accept the former convict? How do we motivate underprivileged children? How do we create true harmony among races? . . . I am asking Minnesota to take the opportunity to initiate and implement programs that will set the pace for meeting our present and future problems. In a word, I am asking Minnesota to lead. If we in Minnesota can’t create racial harmony, we should ask no state to do it.” Governor Harold LeVander, Inaugural Address to the 65th Session of the Minnesota Legislature, January 4, 1967.

3 Governor LeVander in his 1969 state of state speech to the Minnesota Legislature commended Minnesota for its work in establishing the Minnesota Department of Human Rights. Governor LeVander noted, “It is an issue which intimately affects every man and directly tests our principles. It is the question of human rights. Two years ago we recognized the vital importance of this concern and you created the nation’s first Department of Human Rights. You passed a fair housing law. The Department formed almost 50 local human rights councils and handled over 450 cases of discrimination.” Governor Harold LeVander, Inaugural Address to the 66th Session of the Minnesota Legislature, January 8, 1969.

4 At the 1948 Democratic convention, Minneapolis Mayor Hubert Humphrey, who would subsequently be elected to the United States Senate and attain the office of Vice-President of the United States, delivered a landmark address calling upon his political party “to get out of the shadow of states’ rights and walk forthrightly into the bright sunshine of human rights.” See, “Into the bright sunshine - Hubert Humphrey’s civil-rights agenda,” MinnPost, Iric Nathanson, May 23, 2011.

5 See, Minnesota voters beat same-sex marriage, photo ID measures, MPRnews, Patrick Condon, Associated Press, November 7, 2012 and Minnesota residents vote down photo ID requirement, Rochester Post Bulletin, November 7, 2012. Minnesota was the only state in the United States in 2012 to defeat a ballot initiative restricting enfranchisement rights. The Department of Human Rights conducted several town hall meetings throughout Minnesota discussing both constitutional amendments in the months leading up to the November vote.

passed the Women’s Economic Security Act (WESA) to become one of the first states in the nation to take action to ensure that its large business contracting partners provide equal pay to women and to require all employers in Minnesota to allow pregnant employees the ability to obtain lifting, sitting and bathroom accommodations without having to submit a note from their treating medical professional.

Another step taken by the State of Minnesota to lead on civil rights issues and ensure that all people are provided with equal opportunities was the creation of the Diversity and Inclusion Council. On January 20, 2015, Governor Mark Dayton signed Executive Order 15–02 (Executive Order) which formally established the creation of the Diversity and Inclusion Council. The Executive Order constituted a fundamental change for Minnesota Government in approaching and pursuing the creation of state government employment and business contracting opportunities with historically disenfranchised communities beyond regulatory compliance with Minn. Stat. 16A and 43A.

The most significant fundamental change for Minnesota Government within the Executive Order however was the establishment for the first time of a coordinated effort by state government to ensure that all Minnesotans could participate in the development of public policy through meaningful civic engagement with administrative agencies. The effort to create a statewide framework for authentic civic engagement was an ambitious effort by Minnesota officials as the academic literature on civic engagement suggest that such efforts had been exclusively confined to cities and counties.

The purpose of this paper is to provide information about the steps taken by the public, administrative agency officials, and the Department to make the vision of civic engagement among administrative agencies set forth within the Executive Order a reality. The author hopes that government officials will take the ideas and lessons learned through the effort undertaken in Minnesota to improve upon future civic engagement efforts within all levels of government and encourage other states to implement statewide civic engagement. This paper will discuss the formation of the civic engagement steering committee, the civic engagement work plan created by the steering committee, the governance structure created to implement and sustain civic engagement, and the efforts undertaken by the State of Minnesota to implement the civic engagement work plan. In an effort to provide context for how civic engagement came to be

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8 Minn. Stat. §181.9414.
9 Executive Order 15-02 provides, in part, that Minnesota should lead “in its commitment to equal employment opportunities, equal contracting opportunities and full participation in civic life for all Minnesotans.” The Executive Order was subsequently amended by Executive Order 16-01.
10 Id.
11 Id. Executive Order 15-02 provides, in part, that all in Minnesota should “have the opportunity to fully participate in the development of policy within our vibrant democracy.”
12 See, Christopher Hoene, Christopher Kingsley, and Matthew Leighninger, Bright Spots in Community Engagement, National League of Cities, April 2013.
13 The author wishes to acknowledge the contributions of the following individuals within the Minnesota Department of Human Rights for their work in moving civic engagement forward in Minnesota - Nick Kor, Civic Engagement Director; Mai Thor, Civic Engagement Coordinator; and Rowzat Shipchandler, Deputy Commissioner of Human Rights.
embedded within the Executive Order and the role of the Department in this effort it is helpful to begin with a discussion the current civic engagement and participation landscape and the events that led to the creation of the Diversity and Inclusion Council.

II. Public Engagement and Participation in Public Policy Landscape

Public engagement is a broad term that encompasses a wide variety of indirect and direct activities by which people’s concerns, needs, interests, and values are incorporated into decisions and actions on public matters and interests. Direct participation occurs when people are personally involved and actively engaged in providing input, making decisions, and solving problems whereas indirect participation occurs when people select someone to act on their behalf as an agent. Direct participation generally falls into one of three categories — conventional, thin, and thick.

Conventional participation is the form of participation which most people are familiar. In conventional participation, citizens are often asked to sit in a room and watch decision-makers sit behind a table and go through a pre-set agenda that defines the topics for discussions for the meeting. Once the agenda has been exhausted, there is typically a limited public comment period in which citizens have a few minutes at an open microphone to address the decision-makers.

Thin participation refers to a variety of fast, easy, and convenient approaches that allow individuals to receive information, submit ideas, indicate preferences, or provide feedback in a fast or convenient way. As thin participation usually has short time commitments that involve a discrete amount of information, it generally occurs by telephone, online or during an isolated face-to-face meeting.

Thick participation refers to processes in which large numbers of people work together in small groups to discuss, learn, decide and act together. Common elements of thick participation include proactive member recruitment, small-group facilitations, sequenced discussion, framing of issues and decision making of action planning. While thick participation often occurs when members meet face-to-face, a growing number of online platforms for thick participation have emerged such as Engagement HQ, MetroQuest and Zilino. Thick participation is

15 Id.
16 Id.
17 Id. at 1657.
18 Id.
19 Id.
20 Id.
21 Id. at 1658.
22 Id.
23 Id.
the most meaningful and powerful; unfortunately thick participation is also the least common as it is the most intensive and time consuming.\textsuperscript{24}

There is no definition of public participation at the federal level despite over two hundred mandates for public participation within the United States Code.\textsuperscript{25} All too often, public participation has been reduced at the federal level to limited written public comment during the rulemaking process or three minutes in front of a microphone at the end of a public meeting.\textsuperscript{26}

Minnesota statutes, similar to federal law, generally contain very little detail about public participation except with regard to notice and comment during the rulemaking process.\textsuperscript{27} Several administrative agencies are however specifically instructed under Minnesota law to “use technology where appropriate to increase agency productivity, improve customer service, increase public access to information about government, and increase public participation in the business of government.”\textsuperscript{28}

\textbf{III. Creation of Diversity and Inclusion Council Executive Order}

In April of 2011, Governor Dayton convened a meeting in North Minneapolis to hear about pressing issues within the African-American community.\textsuperscript{29} At the time of the meeting, the extent of disparities in the unemployment rate between African-Americans and Caucasians was among the starkest among metropolitan areas in the United States.\textsuperscript{30} In 2011, the unemployment rate for African-Americans in Minnesota was 23.5\%.\textsuperscript{31}

The community members asked Governor Dayton to address the unemployment disparities in the African-American community by creating more employment and business opportunities between the State of Minnesota and the African–American community.\textsuperscript{32} Community members also asked Governor Dayton for the opportunity to be in ongoing dialog with him and the members of his cabinet so that the African-American community could be involved in the development of policies created by administrative agencies that directly impacted their

\textsuperscript{24} Id.
\textsuperscript{25} Id. at 1636.
\textsuperscript{26} Id.
\textsuperscript{27} Id. at 1646.
\textsuperscript{28} See, Minn. Stat. §16A.055, Subd. 6 and §16B.04 (administration), §17.03 (agriculture), §45.02 (commerce), §241.01 (corrections), §116J.011 (economic development and planning), §120A.03 (education), §144.05 (health), §363A.06 (human rights), §245.03 (human services), §175.001 (labor and industry), §190.09 (military affairs), §84.027 (natural resources), §116.03 (pollution control), §299A.01 (public safety), §270C.03 (revenue), §174.02 (transportation), and §196.05 (veterans affairs).
\textsuperscript{29} April 8, 2011 Letter from Governor Mark Dayton to community leaders in response to the March 30, 2011, Twin Cities Economic Development Summit.
\textsuperscript{30} See, Dr. Algernon Austin, Uneven Pain - Unemployment by metropolitan area and race, ECONOMIC POLICY INSTITUTE, June 8, 2010.
\textsuperscript{31} See, Christopher Magan, Minnesota job gains lead to lowest unemployment rate for blacks on record, PIONEER PRESS, January 18, 2018.
\textsuperscript{32} Dayton Letter, supra note 29.
Academics would define the relationship sought by the African-American community as “collaborative governance.”

Subsequent to the meeting, Governor Dayton asked the Commissioner of the Department of Administration to examine the state’s contracting practices and to provide recommendations on how to increase opportunities with small disadvantaged businesses and for the Commissioner of Human Rights to examine and provide recommendations on the hiring and retention practices of the administrative agencies that comprised his cabinet.

In determining best practices among Minnesota employers in the area of hiring and retention, the Department met with several individuals leading diversity and inclusion efforts in the private, public, and non-profit sectors. Some of the consistent messages received from these leaders were: (1) the importance for senior leadership to demonstrate support for the diversity and inclusion effort; (2) the importance for the diversity and inclusion effort to be understood throughout the organization; (3) metrics of success be broadly and clearly communicated; and (4) individuals responsible for implementing the civic engagement effort felt supported by senior management.

Several diversity and inclusion leaders also felt it was critical to establish a customer centric culture within their organization. These inclusion leaders often expressed this effort as building “brand allegiance” with their customers consistent with their vision of diversity and inclusion. These diversity and inclusion leaders believed that a customer centric culture leads to their customers wanting to (1) work for them, (2) contract with them as a business vendor, or (3) help them grow their business as an advocate.

In reflecting upon all of the comments, we heard from diversity and inclusion leaders, we believed that a customer centric culture where we commit to “brand allegiance” seemed to be the most consistent approach for building a strong vibrant democratic government built upon authentic civic engagement. Government officials should work to ensure that all of its citizens have the opportunity to fully participate in the manner they wish to participate within the democracy. Governmental units that work toward building a more inclusive public policy process in which government employees actively collaborate with citizens are likely to reap the benefits of a diverse workforce, a diverse vendor base and stronger democracy.

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33 Id.
34 Amsler and Nabatchi, supra note 14 at 1631 (Identifying collaborative governance as “[a] governing arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative and that aims to make or implement public policy or manage public programs or assets.”)
35 Dayton Letter, supra note 29.
36 Id. at 13 (“Governor Dayton has asked the Commissioner of the Department of Human Rights Kevin Lindsey to conduct an evaluation of diversity across agencies and assess best practices in an effort to improve diversity.”) See generally, MDHR REPORT – BEST INCLUSIVE HIRING PRACTICES prepared by the Department finding employment practices within the state was analogous to civic engagement practices in that: (1) good work was occurring but not widely known; (2) efforts were under-resourced; and (3) better infrastructure and consistent training would improve outcomes.
37 See, Garcia, H., A New American’s Perspective: Improving Public Engagement by Rededicating Our Society to Democratic Ideals, 42 MITCHELL HAMLINE LAW REVIEW 1474 (2016)(Noting that a new form of public engagement with historically disenfranchised groups based upon democratic ideals is necessary to eradicate social and economic disparities and create a prosperous future for America).
Micah Hines, General Counsel for Governor Dayton, was charged with the responsibility of drafting the Executive Order reflective of the intent of the Governor.\textsuperscript{38} The Department shared its thoughts with the General Counsel. The new Executive Order, drafted by the General Counsel with the assistance of the Commissioner of Human Rights, was entitled Diversity and Inclusion.

The Executive Order provides that the Commissioner of Human Rights would chair the committee responsible for implementing civic engagement efforts.\textsuperscript{39} The formal charge given to the Department from the Diversity and Inclusion Council was to ensure that all Minnesotans have equitable opportunities to participate fully in the development of policy within our democracy.\textsuperscript{40} Consistent with the Executive Order framework, the Department began to work toward (1) understanding the extent of current civic engagement efforts within administrative agencies; (2) gathering information about best practices in civic engagement from the community, practitioners and academics; and (3) instilling a culture within all administrative agencies to commit to continually seeking to improve their community engagement efforts with all Minnesotans.\textsuperscript{41} The charge given to the Commissioner of Human Rights was consistent with the primary duties identified for the Commissioner under the Act and its legislative scheme.\textsuperscript{42}

In addition to intentionally directing civic engagement efforts, the Diversity and Inclusion Executive Order also dramatically differed from prior Executive Orders issued by Minnesota Governors in that: (1) all administrative agencies within the Governor’s cabinet were charged with the responsibility to fulfill the Executive Order;\textsuperscript{43} (2) the language went beyond merely ensuring that statutes were properly implemented but instead required the establishment of metrics and the development of a long range plan that set forth best practices;\textsuperscript{44} and (3) the Governor would chair the Diversity and Inclusion Council.\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{38} Governor Dayton initially signed Executive Order 11-08 in April of 2011. The Executive Order was entitled \textit{Affirmative Action} and was the continuation of an Executive Order 91-14 signed by Governor Arne Carlson. The sole purpose of Executive Order 11-08 was to establish a committee to ensure that the affirmative action rules set forth within Minnesota Chapter 43A related to the hiring practices of administrative agencies were faithfully implemented. The Lieutenant Governor chaired the committee and the following administrative agencies served as members of the committee: Administration, Department of Employer Relations, Department of Employment and Economic Development and Department of Human Rights.

\textsuperscript{39} Executive Order 15-02 supra note 9.

\textsuperscript{40} See, “Governor Dayton’s Diversity and Inclusion Council,” July 1, 2015 Report to Governor Dayton.

\textsuperscript{41} Id.

\textsuperscript{42} See, Minn. Stat. §363A.06, Subd. 7 which provides that the Department may “obtain upon request and utilize the services of all state governmental departments and agencies” and Minn. Stat. §363A.06, Subd. 10 which provides that the Department should use “education, conference, conciliation, and persuasion to eliminate unfair discriminatory practices.” The two provisions read together suggest that the Department should work to facilitate conversations between the public and administrative agencies to eradicate discriminatory practices. See also, supra 28.

\textsuperscript{43} Executive Order 15-02 provides in part, “The Council should involve all of the Commissioners that comprise the Governor’s Cabinet in their work, as their visible strong leadership is critical to improving diversity in recruiting, retaining, and promoting state employees, in state contracting, and civic engagement in the State of Minnesota.”

\textsuperscript{44} Id.

\textsuperscript{45} Id.
IV. Civic Engagement Foundation
The Department initially focused on four primary tasks in building the civic engagement foundation. The first task for the Department was to conduct more in–depth research on best practices within the area of civic engagement. The Governor was particularly interested in finding out if there were any other states that had launched similar statewide civic engagement initiatives.

The Department did not uncover any other states that had launched a similar statewide initiative on civic engagement. However, the Department did uncover that there were several civic engagement initiatives that had been launched or were being launched by cities to engage citizens in their public policy work.

A. Survey Research
A report that was reflective of the Department’s research into civic engagement was Bright Spots in Community Engagement, Case Studies of U.S. Communities Creating Greater Civic Engagement from the Bottom Up, which was authored by the National League of Cities and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. The Bright Spots report highlighted the civic engagement work of 14 cities in the United States.

The report noted that when civic engagement is done well, civic engagement has the ability to change policy and reconcile community divisions. The report further noted that there is a relationship between community engagement and vitality as “engagement generates opportunity by creating networks of individuals, organizations, and institutions committed to development and sustainability.”

The report noted that the definition of civic engagement was not uniform among the 14 cities. While not uniform, the report noted that the identified civic engagement initiatives within the 14 cities contained the following three common elements:

1) A significant number of people were given a chance to shape government priorities;
2) Government leaders sought to tap into the energy and creativity of citizens to spur economic development; and
3) Effort sought to improve access to government data with the ultimate goal of improving the quality of life for all in the community.

The Bright Spots report however noted that while cities were experiencing success, there were also several challenges in the area of civic engagement. The Bright Spots report noted three primary challenges for government:

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46 Id.
47 Bright Spots Report, supra note 12.
48 Id.
49 Id.
50 Id.
51 Id.
52 Id.
53 Id.
54 Id.
1) **How to achieve scale** – Most of the efforts undertaken within cities were confined within a few departments. Accordingly, how does government build upon and replicate their micro-level efforts to reshape all of their departments and systems?

2) **How to reconcile deep community divisions within “hard-to-reach” communities** – A perennial question asked within all of the efforts was how does government address issues surrounding race, ethnicity, and class to ensure real inclusion for all? “There appears to be a need for increased sophistication in understanding how . . . to broaden and deepen community engagement” among historically disenfranchised communities.

3) **How sustainability is achieved** – How do initiatives survive when changes in political leadership occur? How will initiatives be adopted and adapted so that learning and innovation can evolve over time?

### B. Community Stakeholder Meetings

The second task for the Department was to meet with community stakeholders from historically disenfranchised communities in order to build trust;\(^{55}\) to begin to identify current civic engagement efforts within communities; and to identify best practices for civic engagement challenges from the perspective of communities working with agencies in the formulation and development of policy.

All the community members the Department spoke with were enthusiastic about the State’s effort to focus on civic engagement. Many community members were also eager to share and provide insight on best practices as well as committing to partnering with the Department as the work of civic engagement proceeded.\(^{56}\)

A number of ideas were generated from the community stakeholder conversations. The themes recurring most often from the community stakeholder conversations were:\(^{57}\)

- Agencies should not be fearful of utilizing civic engagement to tackle complex issues, i.e. dealing with age demographic shifts. Complex issues can be a positive catalyst for promoting systemic change in approaching impending problems.
- Agencies should be focused on creating long-term institutional relationships as opposed to being seen by individuals and community organizations as only wanting to create a one-time transactional relationship. Real civic engagement is a cultural shift that will go beyond compliance with administrative rules. One community representative used the analogy of the medical care one receives from their regular treating physician to the medical care that they receive when they periodically visit an urgent care clinic every four to five years.
- Civic engagement thrives when it is clear through financial and human capital that the leadership within the agency is committed to supporting civic engagement. Community stakeholders encouraged an examination of how civic engagement is communicated

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55 The Department focused its initial conversations regarding restoring trust with leaders of community organizations to begin to frame the larger conversation with community. The expectation of the Department was that the initial conversations would serve to be the beginning of a subsequent larger dialog with the community.


57 *Id.*
within organizations, what resources are provided for civic engagement and how they seek to induce an internal mindset change regarding civic engagement.

- Agencies should ensure civic engagement occurs early enough in the process to be of value to stakeholders and should clearly define their role and purpose in the effort to ensure that stakeholders have ownership in the process. Too often civic engagement is seen by community stakeholders solely to “rubber stamp” a decision that has already been made.

- Agencies that facilitate well–run community meetings and are transparent in the publication of their data are perceived by the public as good civic engagement partners. Community stakeholders encouraged agencies to examine how much training is provided to agency staff on how to convene meetings and examine how accessible agency data is to the public.

- Agencies that have good civic engagement are able to distill information to a practical level for all of its audiences. Several community stakeholders commented that too much engagement occurs “at the 40,000–foot level” in which they felt ill–equipped to provide meaningful input. Additionally, several community members noted that too often they are unable to respond because the agency has not provided them with sufficient background information.

- Agencies should pay particular attention to what may be perceived as small technical details that have a big impact on turnout such as childcare, food, parking, and the location of the meeting. Agencies should work to lessen the financial burden and time constraints for disenfranchised communities to be engaged.

- Metrics that go beyond mere attendance in a meeting are important for agencies to understand, measure, and track on a consistent basis going forward. While no clear consensus emerged from the conversation as to the best model for metrics, community stakeholders believe solely relying on quantitative metrics is insufficient and that qualitative data about how participants felt about the process, their desire to participate again, the transparency of data, and the willingness to engage with people who have different points of view were also important.

C. Administrative Agency Survey

The third task undertaken by the Department was to conduct a survey of the existing civic engagement efforts of administrative agencies to develop a civic engagement baseline.58 The survey was comprised of nine questions and the expectation of the Department in creating the survey was that staff would follow up with the administrative agencies on specific issues raised within the survey responses.59 In an effort to obtain candid responses, the Department informed the administrative agencies that their information would be compiled and reported in an aggregate format.

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58 *Id.* at 53-55.
59 *Id.*
Below are the nine survey questions that were given to the administrative agencies and the aggregate responses that were drafted and submitted by the Department to Governor Dayton.\textsuperscript{60}

1. Does your agency engage in civic engagement efforts with the public during the development of agency policy?
All agencies are engaged in civic engagement efforts with the public during the development of agency policy. The majority of the agencies that responded to this question limited their response to civic engagement efforts that were part of a specific administrative rule making process or a formal multi-year planning process. The committee anticipated asking additional questions to determine the level and prevalence of other forms of civic engagement by administrative agencies.

2. Does your agency internally communicate the importance of civic engagement in the development of agency policy?
A little less than half of the agencies that responded to this question failed to identify how leadership communicated the importance of civic engagement in the development of agency policy. As to the agencies that responded that they did internally communicate the importance of civic engagement in the development of agency policy, all referenced that they felt civic engagement was an important value within their mission statement.

3. What type of training do you provide to staff concerning civic engagement?
The amount of training provided to staff concerning civic engagement varied widely among the administrative agencies. Some agencies provided no training to staff on civic engagement. Some agencies provided training to staff on civic engagement in the form of how to convene and conduct public meetings. A few agencies were providing staff with training on civic engagement beyond how to convene and conduct public meetings.

4. How does the agency facilitate public meetings to maximize civic engagement?
 Agencies identified a wide variety of means to facilitate and maximize civic engagement. Most agencies relied on receiving information from the public through agency sponsored events such as conferences, formal presentations, open houses, and formal agency comment requests for information. However, several agencies identified attending community events and having direct conversations with interested stakeholders. The World Cafe\textsuperscript{61} model was cited most often as a means to facilitate community conversations; however, several other meeting models were identified by agencies. Additionally,

\textsuperscript{60} Id.

\textsuperscript{61} World Café is a methodology for hosting large group dialogue. http://www.theworldcafe.com/key-concepts-resources/world-cafe-method/
several web–based platforms such as MetroQuest\(^{62}\) and CitiZing\(^{63}\) were identified by agencies as examples of facilitating public meetings in cyberspace.

5. How does your agency publish data to promote civic engagement?
The most common manner in which agencies publish their data to promote their civic engagement efforts was through the use of their website, monthly newsletters, news releases, and annual reports to the Legislature. Several of the larger agencies have developed targeted civic engagement strategies for key identified projects. A few agencies, mostly large agencies, publish civic engagement materials in multiple languages.

6. What metrics does your agency use to determine the success of your civic engagement efforts?
Most agencies responded to this question by referencing the number of people who attended meetings, the number of meetings subsequently attended by people who attended the first meeting, the number of hits to the agency website requesting information, and the number of people who requested project updates. A few agencies identified that they had retained outside consultants to evaluate their civic engagement efforts.

7. If you have councils, boards, or task forces that assist in the development of agency public policy, what steps does your agency undertake to ensure that your councils, boards, and task forces reflect the diversity of Minnesota?
Most agencies track the diversity of the councils, boards and task forces that assist in the development of agency public policy and most agencies wanted assistance from the committee to ensure they have diverse representation.

8. What type of training concerning civic engagement would your agency like to receive during the next biennium beginning July 1, 2015?
The most common form of training or guidance concerning civic engagement identified by administrative agencies concerned: (a) the development of civic engagement metrics, (b) how to convene meetings/communicate with diverse audiences, and (c) how to integrate employee training and development regarding cross-cultural communication and how to avoid unintended bias.

9. Is there information about civic engagement which you have not provided but that you believe should be shared with the Governor?
A few agencies explicitly stated that they believe that this is important work and would like all Minnesotans to engage in our civic engagement opportunities. A few other agencies offered that they were willing to assist other agencies in sharing best practices in civic engagement.

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\(^{62}\) An online public engagement platform for urban and transportation planning. https://metroquest.com/

In following up with administrative agencies after the survey, the Department asked agency officials additional questions to obtain a better understanding of their requests for assistance from the civic engagement committee. The refined requests for assistance from the civic engagement committee were:

- Provide training on how to develop metrics to successfully measure civic engagement;
- Provide information on innovative and successful models for civic engagement;
- Provide information on best practices for conducting civic engagement; and
- Provide training on how to successfully run and conduct public meetings.

**D. Administrative Agency Work Group**

The final task for the Department was to meet with administrative agency officials to determine best practices within civic engagement that were occurring within administrative agencies. The Department met with several commissioners and individuals leading interagency task force efforts to ascertain best practices within state government, identify leading practitioners within state government, and identify existing resources within state government that could support the development of civic engagement best practices. The Department referred to this group as the Administrative Agency Work Group.

The Department reached out to the Commissioners of the Department of Education, Department of Health, the Department of Employment and Economic Development, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, the Department of Administration, and the Chair of the Metropolitan Council to participate as members of the Administrative Agency Work Group. The administrative agencies were selected because of their prior work in civic engagement or because of their interest in developing their organization's capacity in civic engagement.

The Department also reached out to the leaders of the following interagency task force efforts or sub-cabinet initiatives: Olmstead Implementation, Reducing Recidivism, Workforce Alignment, and Ending Homelessness to serve on the agency work group. The leaders of the interagency groups were asked to participate because the Department perceived conducting

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64 See, Governor Dayton’s Diversity and Inclusion Council, January 1, 2016 REPORT TO GOVERNOR DAYTON, page 32.
65 Id. Metrics, by a significant margin, was the issue most often cited by the administrative agencies for the civic engagement committee to provide assistance.
66 Id. at 31.
67 See, 2016 Diversity & Inclusion Report, supra note 60 at 30-32.
68 Id. at 30.
69 Id. at 30.
70 On January 28, 2013, Governor Mark Dayton issued Executive Order 13-01 which established an Olmstead Subcabinet to develop and implement a comprehensive Minnesota Olmstead Plan. On January 28, 2015, Governor Dayton issued Executive Order 15-03 which further defined the role and nature of the Olmstead Subcabinet.
71 The Minnesota Statewide Initiative to Reduce Recidivism (MNSIRR) is a collaborative initiative between state and county systems, community service providers, and other stakeholders to reduce the recidivism rate statewide which is led by the Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC).
72 Pursuant to an initiative of the National Governors Association Policy Academy, the Department of Employment and Economic Development sought to coordinate the efforts of state agencies to ensure that all Minnesotans — students and adult learners - are given the necessary skills to compete and succeed in the global economy.
73 The Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness is comprised of 11 State agencies, the Met Council and the Governor’s Office and is accountable for leading the State’s efforts to achieve Housing Stability for all Minnesotans.
successful civic engagement within interagency task forces to present different challenges given
the different skill sets, philosophy, and civic engagement goals of the agencies that comprise the
 task forces.\footnote{See, 2016 REPORT, supra note 64 at 30.}

The Department asked the Administrative Agency Work Group to share their insights on
best practices in civic engagement as well as identified challenges in implementing civic en-
gagement.\footnote{Id. at 30-31.} The Administrative Agency Work Group was also asked to share their thoughts and
ideas on how to successfully achieve the goals of the Executive Order.\footnote{Id. at 30-31.}

The biggest challenge identified among the administrative agency work group was ensuring
how leadership communicated its commitment to civic engagement.\footnote{Id. at 32-33.} The group identified ten
goals for leadership to consider in fostering a culture of civic engagement within an administra-
tive agency:\footnote{Id. at 32-33.}

1) Leadership should clearly express its support for civic engagement to play a role in the
development of agency policy;
2) Leadership should clearly define its expectations for civic engagement in the develop-
ment of policy within the agency;
3) Leadership should provide adequate resources for civic engagement in the development
of policy within the agency;
4) Leadership should provide staff with adequate training to successfully implement civic
engagement in the development of agency policy;
5) Leadership should determine its current civic engagement baseline in order to measure
future progress or determine lack of progress;
6) Leadership should measure and track success of civic engagement in the development
of policy within the agency;
7) Leadership should encourage staff to engage with diverse communities in non-agency
related activities;
8) Leadership should provide the public with clear expectations at the beginning of the
civic engagement process;
9) Leadership should ensure that civic engagement events comply with the law and are
welcoming to the public; and
10) Leadership should develop a formal communication strategy to inform the public as to
how its input was used by the agency.

The Administrative Agency Work Group believed that it was extremely beneficial to have a
clear statement as to why civic engagement is important to the administrative agency in order
to provide direction to all within the agency.\footnote{Id. at 31.} The two most common overarching principles
expressed by committee members for an administrative agency to successfully implementing

\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{See, 2016 REPORT, supra note 64 at 30.}
\item \footnote{Id. at 30-31.}
\item \footnote{Id. at 30-31.}
\item \footnote{Id. at 32-33.}
\item \footnote{Id. at 32-33.}
\item \footnote{Id. at 31.}
civic engagement were to: (1) build and sustain our democracy and (2) increase program efficacy.\(^{80}\)

Under the rubric of democracy building, government is built upon the premise that government exists to fulfill the public good for its citizens.\(^{81}\) In order to fulfill the public good, administrative agencies must be in active dialog with citizens to understand their needs and desires.\(^{82}\)

The legitimacy of our democratic institutions to lead the public derives from the belief that the public has had a fair and meaningful role in the decisions that government makes which impacts their lives.\(^{83}\) Administrative agencies can serve a valuable role in ensuring the vibrancy of our democracy by facilitating civic engagement with the public to ensure that all individuals have a fair and meaningful role in the decisions that government makes which impact their lives.\(^{84}\)

Individuals and their communities are also strengthened through the process of civic engagement. The capacity building potential of individuals and communities to reach their goals and realize their aspirations within our democracy are dramatically increased when administrative agencies are intentional in their civic engagement efforts.\(^{85}\)

Some agency leaders suggested that government has an affirmative obligation to engage in civic engagement with disenfranchised groups even if the obligation is not explicitly stated within statute.\(^{86}\) A nation risks the freedom of its citizens when it fails to adequately educate its citizens about their rights to petition government and inform them of the issues that impact their lives.\(^{87}\)

Several administrative agencies considered civic engagement important because civic engagement improved their program efficacy.\(^{88}\) The three most common rationales offered by administrative agencies that civic engagement improves program efficacy were:\(^{89}\)

- Increases the likelihood of the successful implementation of policy — assists agencies in building trust within communities so that resistance to change is minimized or eliminated such that policy initiatives can be more successfully implemented;
- Increases understanding of the complexity and depth of problems — associated with the delivery of program services; and

\(^{80}\)Id.  
\(^{81}\)Id. at 31-32.  
\(^{82}\)Id.  
\(^{83}\)Id.  
\(^{84}\)Id.  
\(^{85}\)Id.  
\(^{86}\)Id.  
\(^{87}\)Id. See also, Garcia, supra note 37 at 1487. (Citing several quotes of Thomas Jefferson such as “[i]f a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be,” for the proposition that Jefferson warned us that “democracy and freedom from abuse of power prevails only if citizens are educated on the issues that affect them”; and citing Franklin Roosevelt “Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice are prepared to choose wisely. The real safeguard of democracy, therefore, is education.”)  
\(^{88}\)See, 2016 Report, supra note 64 at 32.  
\(^{89}\)Id.
Identifies solutions to problems – solutions often exist within historically disenfranchised communities and among those impacted by the problem sought to be addressed by the agency.⁹⁰

The agency leaders acknowledged that as a practical matter some individuals within an administrative agency might question the position that active civic engagement participation improves program efficacy as it necessitates ascribing to a narrative that while the agency has expertise, the agency does not have all of the answers. Agency leaders noted that it was therefore very important to intentionally to combat the false narrative of the omnipotent administrative agency official. Several agency leaders discussed the value of leading by example in sharing instances in which their knowledge grew by actively listening to the public.

**E. Secretary of State Meeting**

The Department met with the Office of the Minnesota Secretary of State (SoS) in response to the desire of the public,⁹¹ advocacy organizations,⁹² and administrative agencies in an effort to diversify membership on state boards, state councils and state commissions (collectively “state boards”).

The SoS acts as a clearing house of information for the public regarding state boards, but SoS has no oversight over state boards and no role in appointing members on state boards. Some state boards have their members appointed by the Governor alone, some state boards have their membership appointed by the Governor and legislature, and others are appointed by executive branch agencies.

There is no uniformity among state boards. The number of people serving on state boards varies significantly from less than ten to more than 20 people. Some state boards require their members live within certain geographic areas in Minnesota, while other states have no geographic restriction. While many state boards provide a per diem for attending meetings, some offer no compensation. In a few instances, state boards provide a salary or stipend for individuals to serve.

In the conversation with the Secretary of State, several themes emerged concerning challenges associated with diversifying state boards. The first challenge identified was the difficulty of determining the current baseline of diversity on state boards.⁹³ No uniform process existed for collecting and publishing information on the existing diversity on state boards.⁹⁴ While many believed that there were significant disparities on state boards, the depth and extent of

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⁹⁰ Id. See also, Garcia, supra note 37 at 1500 (Noting the civic engagement paradigm shift of the World Bank that has occurred in which the World Bank now “emphasize(s) the philosophy of collaboration instead of patronizing charity”).

⁹¹ See, 2016 REPORT, supra note 64 at 32-33.

⁹² Advocacy organizations such as African-American Leadership Forum (AALF), Coalition of Asian American Leaders (CAAL) and LatinoLEAD, Nexus Community Partners, and Voices for Racial Justice had at various time reached out to members of the Dayton Administration to encourage efforts to diversify state boards.

⁹³ See, 2016 REPORT, supra note 64 at 32-33.

⁹⁴ Id.
disparities was unknown. Additionally, no process existed for collecting and publishing information on individuals who applied to state boards.\(^95\)

The second challenge was the lack of awareness among diverse applicants concerning the role and impact of state boards.\(^96\) The third challenge identified was the lack of awareness among diverse applicants of open positions and the process to apply to serve on state boards.\(^97\) As two of the challenges concerned education and awareness, the Department and the Secretary of State began brainstorming as to how best to improve the dissemination of information to diverse communities about the impact of state boards and how to apply to state boards.

V. Steering Committee to Create Work Plan

In the fall of 2015, the Department engaged in a deliberate outreach effort to create a diverse steering committee comprised of people that was reflective of the communities that have been historically disenfranchised.\(^98\) The Department, in formulating the steering committee, sought to include Native Americans, people who identify as belonging to various racial and ethnic communities, people who identify as from the LGBTQ community, and people who identify as individuals with disabilities.\(^99\) In selecting members to serve on the steering committee, the Department was mindful that individuals living outside of the metropolitan area sometimes felt excluded from the political process; the Department, therefore sought to ensure that there would be individuals from every region within Minnesota to ensure geographic diversity on the committee.\(^100\)

Deputy Commissioner Shipchandler led the Department’s steering committee grassroots recruitment effort. In seeking to ensure a diverse pool of candidates to choose from to serve on the steering committee, the Department reached out to each of the 11 federally recognized Tribal communities in Minnesota.\(^101\) The Department reached out to legacy organizations seeking to increase opportunities for racial and ethnic community groups such as the African–American Leadership Forum (AALF), the Coalition of Asian–American Leaders (CAAL), and LatinoLEAD.\(^102\) The Department also reached out to executive branch agencies that seek to facilitate ensuring economic, social, legal, and political equality for historically disenfranchised groups such as Council on Asian–Pacific Minnesotans,\(^103\) Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs,\(^104\) Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage,\(^105\) Minnesota Indian Affairs Council,\(^106\)

\(^{95}\) Id.
\(^{96}\) Id.
\(^{97}\) Id.
\(^{98}\) Id. at 28-29.
\(^{99}\) Id.
\(^{100}\) Id.
\(^{101}\) Id.
\(^{102}\) Id.
\(^{103}\) Minn. Stat. §15.0145, Subd. 6(a).
\(^{104}\) Id.
\(^{105}\) Id.
\(^{106}\) Minn. Stat. §3.922, Subd. 6.

The Department's recruitment effort yielded more than 60 candidates. The Department, consistent with its goals for a diverse steering committee to hear the voice of communities within Minnesota, selected 35 steering committee members. The Executive Directors of the Council on Asian–Pacific Minnesotans, Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs, Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage, Minnesota Indian Affairs Council, Minnesota State Council on Disability and the Office of the Economic Status of Women were placed on the steering committee as ex-officio members.

The Department convened the first steering committee meeting on December 8, 2015. The Department provided committee members with the results of the preliminary survey identifying the civic engagement efforts of administrative agencies that had been provided to the Governor.

The Department also brought to the initial meeting some preliminary ideas for the steering committee to consider in the development of the civic engagement work plan. The Department arranged the ideas into the following four categories: (1) increasing meaningful engagement from diverse communities in agency policy making, (2) developing civic engagement infrastructure within administrative agencies, (3) working toward ensuring interagency efforts reflect communities served, and (4) diversifying membership of boards and commissions that impact administrative agency policy decisions.

Some of the ideas presented to the steering committee for increasing meaningful engagement from diverse communities in agency policy making included the following suggestions:

- Provide listening sessions with the community to identify historical conditions that have created distrust and identify practical solutions for the healing and reconciliation needed to rebuild trust;
- Identify best practices for meetings that consider location and time of the event; provision of childcare, food and parking; clarity of the role of the public in the process; and timing of public communication with sufficient notice to the public;
- Build ongoing relationships with communities so that they are always part of the process in developing policy, including the possibility of co-creating policy;

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107 Minn. Stat. §256.482, Subd. 5.
108 Minn. Stat. §256C.28, Subd. 3a.
109 Minn. Stat. §3.303, Subd. 7. The Office of the Economic Status of Women was financially sunset by the Legislature in 2016.
110 See, 2016 Report, supra note 64 at 41.
111 Id.
112 Id.
113 Id. at 34.
114 Id.
115 Id. at 35.
116 Id.
117 Id.
118 Id.
Recommend practical and creative resources for administrative agencies to use to ensure meetings are held in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Minnesota Human Rights Act;\(^\text{119}\)

- Identify metrics that will be used to create a baseline of current practices and a plan for continuous improvement over time;\(^\text{120}\) and
- Ensure that communities have meaningful input into agency policy making and that all communities are viewed by administrative agencies as resources.\(^\text{121}\)

In framing the ideas for developing civic engagement infrastructure within administrative agencies, the steering committee was informed that communities want to be viewed as a source for ideas, transformation, and leadership.\(^\text{122}\) Administrative agencies must acknowledge that communities should have meaningful impact into agency policy making decisions.\(^\text{123}\) Finally, agencies must be committed to developing and creating the skills, resources, and internal agency culture necessary to engage with diverse cultural communities.\(^\text{124}\)

Some of the ideas presented to the steering committee for developing civic engagement infrastructure within administrative agencies included the following suggestions:

- Identify specific ways in which agencies can ensure communities have meaningful and purposeful impact into agency policymaking decisions;\(^\text{125}\)
- Provide recommendations on how to achieve cultural and behavioral shifts that agencies need to make to better engage communities;\(^\text{126}\)
- Make recommendations on how to build infrastructure within agencies such as:\(^\text{127}\)
  - Changing agency culture to promote civic engagement and promote culturally adaptable practices;
  - Communicate the importance of civic engagement throughout the administrative agency;
  - Providing training to agency staff;
  - Identifying external and internal resources to develop competency; and
  - Identify metrics that can be used to determine existing baseline of civic engagement efforts and improve existing civic engagement practices.

The Department also suggested to the steering committee that it examine the civic engagement practices of interagency efforts.\(^\text{128}\) The primary suggestion provided by the Department was to meet with representatives from the Olmstead Sub-Cabinet, the Reducing Recidivism group,
and the Ending Homelessness Initiative to evaluate the civic engagement strategies of each initiative and identify best practices.\textsuperscript{129}

The final suggestion provided by the Department for the steering committee was to identify strategies to diversify the membership of state boards and commissions that impact administrative policy decisions.\textsuperscript{130} The specific suggestions provided by the Department included:

\begin{itemize}
  \item Assist the Secretary of State’s office to implement better tracking of the composition and applicant pool of state boards;\textsuperscript{131}
  \item Establish metrics, baselines and goals for increasing diversity;\textsuperscript{132}
  \item Promote the importance of diverse state boards to the Governor’s office; and\textsuperscript{133}
  \item Educate and raise the diversity of boards and commissions within diverse communities\textsuperscript{134}
\end{itemize}

\section*{VI. Creation of Work Plan}

The steering committee subsequently created four subcommittees to develop the civic engagement work plan.\textsuperscript{135} In keeping with the principle of collaborative decision making between the public and administrative agencies, the steering committee had each subcommittee co-chaired by at least one member from the public and one administrative agency member.\textsuperscript{136}

\subsection*{A. Defining Meaningful Engagement}

The topic that generated the most discussion was the topic of how the public and government should define what constitutes meaningful engagement. The steering committee believed that it was critically important to stress that meaningful engagement means that relationships and conversations are reciprocal, authentic and happen with the intent of making an impact.\textsuperscript{137} Additionally, engagement should be educative for all involved and take into account that diversity, equity, and inclusion are positive values that strengthen our democratic society. The steering committee ultimately defined meaningful engagement “as the intentional effort of government to facilitate meaningful dialog with all members of the public in its work and in the development of policy.”\textsuperscript{138}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[129] Id.
\item[130] Id.
\item[131] Id.
\item[132] Id.
\item[133] Id.
\item[134] Id.
\item[135] Id. at 34.
\item[136] Id.
\item[137] See, Garcia, supra note 37 at 1478 (“There are several significant characteristics in the dysfunctional communication which became so entrenched in Minnesota. One of the most noteworthy is that government and others who are intent on helping minority communities do not listen to minority representatives as equals. I have heard minority and American Indian leaders often express frustration about being invited to participate in plans designed by the majority to bolster cultural awareness or inclusivity but are not invited to participate in the actual design of those plans.”)
\item[138] 2016 Report, supra note 64.
\end{footnotes}
The reasons articulated by the steering committee for pursuing civic engagement echoed prior community conversations and discussions with administrative agencies. The rationale for civic engagement set forth by the steering committee in the work plan provides as follows:

- Meaningful engagement strengthens our democracy as it reaffirms the consent of the governed. Meaningful engagement also increases the efficiency of government as the ideas of all innovative and creative people are considered and the level of trust in society increases in the identified solutions sought to be implemented by government; and
- Building a genuine relationship with communities is integral to implementing meaningful engagement. People are experts in knowing their long–term needs and how to maximize their interactions within the places they live, learn, and work. Collective problem solving takes advantages of the insights of everyone involved.

The final work plan that was developed by the steering committee is set forth below in its entirety.\textsuperscript{139}

\textbf{B. The Work Plan}

\textbf{1. Laying the Foundation for Meaningful Engagement}

\textbf{Background}

Communities of color, American Indian communities, LGBTQ communities and disability communities have previously been underrepresented in policy making. The failure to include these communities in the development of policy is detrimental to the long–term interests of the State of Minnesota. Effective meaningful engagement with all citizens in our state is essential to the functioning of Minnesota government. For engagement to happen, there has to be an intentional period of building trust with these communities. Trust must first be established with underrepresented communities before meaningful engagement can occur.

\textbf{Goals and Strategies}

Build trust through community engagement conversations:

- Hold a series of authentic community engagement conversations around the state that identify practical solutions for healing and community needs for reconciliation to build trust. The conversations should reflect the principles of meaningful engagement, be convened by trusted community organizations, be held in locations that facilitate power sharing and mutual understanding, have clear expectations and ground rules, and include clear statements on what and how information will be used.
- Measure the success of these conversations including whether people feel heard and the quality of the conversation.

\textsuperscript{139} Id.
Build trust through all interactions with community

- Embody the principles of meaningful engagement in all interactions.
- Agencies will be present and connected to communities to build long-term relationships by regularly participating in community conversations, events and activities even when there is no short-term or present benefit for the agency.

2. Build Infrastructure

Background
Agencies currently conduct meaningful engagement efforts, however there is room to deepen the engagement and further affect policy. Historical conditions have created distrust and because of that, some communities are wary of the actions and motives of government. Leadership commitment is key to effectively engaging and addressing the many policies that create unnecessary barriers.

There are many government policies, from data practices\textsuperscript{140} that may make the names of people who come to meetings public to restrictions [for] purchasing food, which make it difficult to do effective meaningful engagement. In addition, unquestioned agency practices may pose additional barriers. There are a variety of meaningful engagement methods and protocols used around the state, but many of them do not specifically consider communities that have been traditionally marginalized in the political process. Measurement is needed in order to create accountability for change and refine policy and practices.

Goals and Strategies
Communities should be viewed as a valuable source for ideas, transformation and leadership by administrative agencies

- Use information gleaned from ongoing relationships and consider purchasing the services of members of impacted communities as consultants.
- Agencies will analyze and document the impact of policy or services on priority communities and routinely ask if the policy is more effective for those impacted.

Agency leadership, culture, policy, and practice support meaningful engagement.

- Senior leaders will support meaningful engagement in a variety of ways, such as incorporating meaningful engagement into the agency mission, regularly communicating support of meaningful engagement, and providing adequate staff and financial resources to support meaningful engagement.
- Meaningful engagement is incorporated into inter and intra agency training, work plans and performance management.

\textsuperscript{140} "Data Practices" refers to Minnesota Government Data Practices, Minn. Stat. §13 which specifies how government data are collected, created, stored, used and released.
Assess and create plans to address formal and informal barriers to meaningful engagement such as data practices, purchasing food, lack of per diems and agency culture.

Create and strengthen networks of people who are doing meaningful engagement across state government to enhance mutual learning.

Agencies maintain dynamic lists of community organizations to be used to ensure that diverse perspectives are included in community engagement.

Agencies coordinate among and within agencies so that the state is not always approaching the same people for input.

Agencies should devote adequate resources to facilitate meaningful engagement with the community.

Agencies should expand their definition of cultural communities to include race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and disability status.

Ensure public meetings are inclusive by incorporating sufficient notice (ideally at least 14 days in advance), being held at times and locations that promote community participation and accessibility for people with disabilities, providing materials in different formats and consider needs such as childcare.

Agencies use culturally adaptable practices such as providing for language access, developing new channels to cultivate relationships, using facilitators from cultural communities, and using culturally tailored materials and methods. Agencies will also work to provide materials that use plain language.

Community organizations and individuals are compensated and/or reimbursed for their planning and implementing outreach efforts. Agencies provide, as feasible, per diem or mileage reimbursement, food at meetings and assess such policies that create barriers to meaningful engagement.

Agencies develop and use creative means of soliciting input from community members and go to them.

Agencies measure the effectiveness of meaningful engagement.

Agencies acknowledge that there are both quantitative and qualitative measures that should be analyzed. Along with monitoring who is at the meetings, agencies should assess whether or not people feel their time and opinions were valued and if those who are part of agency engagement efforts would participate in another agency engagement effort. Agencies should create an agency scorecard to assess meaningful engagement across the agency.

3. Diversify Boards and Commissions

Background
The State of Minnesota has more than 220 boards, agencies, councils and task forces (collectively Boards) whose members are appointed by the Governor, commissioners of executive branch administrative agencies and members of the Legislature. The Boards
have a variety of powers such as licensing and registering members of various professions, providing advice on public policy, and overseeing grant, loan, or compensation programs.

The majority of the above appointments are managed through an open appointments process that is coordinated by the Secretary of State’s (SoS) office. In the SoS office’s annual report on Board membership, the report indicates that nearly one third of Boards did not provide Board demographic data to the SoS office.

Applicants are currently required to provide their name, address and felony conviction information, data such as gender, national origin, race; whether they identify as a person with a disability is optional. Applicants are not asked to identify their sexual orientation. No demographic information is collected by the SoS office after someone is appointed.

In comparing the aggregate data from the SoS office Open Appointments Annual Compilation of Statistical Report of Multi–Member Agencies report with United States Census American Community Survey data for communities of color and individuals with disabilities in Minnesota, the Committee found that there were disparities for communities of color and individuals with disabilities. The Committee found that disparities for communities of color were particularly pronounced for individuals who identify as Hispanic or Latino or who identify as Asian or Pacific Islander.

**Goals and Strategies**

Boards should be reflective of the demographics of people of color, American Indian Communities, individuals with disabilities and individuals who identify as LGBTQ in the State of Minnesota.

- Encourage the adoption of goals that every Board is reflective of people of color, American Indian Communities, individuals with disabilities, and individuals who identify as LGBTQ in Minnesota; Boards that have more than 10 members should be encouraged to disaggregate their goals for people of color and American Indian Communities.
- Encourage Boards to develop and implement retention strategies such as: (1) creating a more inclusive onboarding process for members; (2) creating recognition strategies for Board members; and (3) identifying and removing barriers to Board meeting attendance.
- Eliminate statutory requirement for applicants to provide criminal history information except where absence of criminal conviction is a statutory requirement to participate on the Board.

Appointing Authorities and Boards should expand recruiting and outreach efforts to communities of color, American Indian Communities, individuals with disabilities and individuals who identify as LGBTQ in the State of Minnesota.

- Appointing Authorities and Boards should create a recruiting and outreach plan that is inclusive of communities of color, American Indian Communities, in-
individuals with disabilities and individuals who identify as LGBTQ by: (1) collaborating with state ethnic councils, the Olmstead Implementation Office and legacy community organizations, (2) distributing informational materials on opportunities to serve on Boards to targeted audiences, and (3) developing materials that celebrate recruiting successes achieved by Boards.

- Create venues in which staff and members of the Board can share best practices regarding recruiting and outreach.

Improve data collection efforts concerning Board applicants.

- Encourage Board applicants to provide more demographic information by: (1) asking for demographic information after appointment to the Board has been made, (2) adding a statement on the application explaining the importance of collecting demographic information to increase diverse board representation, and (3) adding additional categories for individuals to identify, for example, as multi-racial or as LGBTQ.

- Compile and publish applicant pool data to assess the diversity of the Board applicant pool.

4. Interagency Strategy

Background
The State of Minnesota is committed to addressing disparities in education, housing, employment, wealth creation, and criminal justice. Addressing disparities is often complex as it requires working across disciplines and jurisdictions as solutions to disparities are often multifaceted and require systemic institutional change. Working to address disparities within historically disenfranchised communities is challenging because the communities often have a deep lack of trust in government. Working with a variety of agencies and units of government is also challenging because of the differing approaches to meaningful engagement.

The State of Minnesota has created interagency taskforces with local units of government and the public to develop solutions to addressing society’s most pressing disparities. Because of the complexities of working with multiple stakeholders and the lack of trust that exists between historically disenfranchised communities and government, the committee has identified several goals and strategies to enhance meaningful engagement in addressing disparities.

Goals and Strategies
Interagency efforts should play an active role in leveling the playing field of information with disenfranchised communities about policy, systems and process.

- Efforts should consider creating informational documents for the public that explain the jurisdiction and scope of government stakeholders in the process.
Efforts should create a common glossary of terms to increase public awareness and understanding.

Efforts should inform the public as to what data exists and where there are gaps in data.

Efforts should provide staff resources for the public to be informed throughout the policy development process.

Interagency efforts should be intentional in building trust with community at all stages. Trust is built through clear and transparent communication.

Efforts should be clear with the public as to the scope and intended purpose of the initiative.

Efforts should contain explicit statements about: (1) how input will ultimately be incorporated in shaping policy, (2) how community can provide input into the process, and (3) when community can participate in the process.

The purpose of public testimony and how the interagency effort intends to use public testimony should be clear.

Efforts should be intentional in welcoming community members into policy discussions; for example, interagency efforts should consider hosting meetings within community organization meeting space.

Interagency efforts should be proactive, thoughtful, and strategic in determining the role of senior agency leadership in meaningful engagement efforts.

Prior to launching any interagency efforts, senior leadership of administrative agencies and local units of government should discuss challenges to successful engagement and reach consensus on how to maximize effective management.

Senior leadership should visibly demonstrate commitment to collaboration by participation in community listening sessions and outreach activities.

As involvement of front-line staff in the process of meaningful engagement may occasionally be misinterpreted as a lack of sincerity to engage with community, senior leadership may wish to consider: (1) setting up a process for subsequent contact with senior leadership, (2) clearly state the reporting responsibility to senior leadership at a meaningful engagement forum, and 3) explain how information at meaningful engagement forum will be used in the implementation of policy.

The Department bound the work plan and electronically published the civic engagement work plan on its website. The civic engagement work plan was discussed and formally presented to Governor Dayton at the August 2016 Diversity & Inclusion Council meeting.

While finalizing the civic engagement plan, the Department submitted several requests for program funding from Foundations. The Department was fortunate to obtain a funding grant from the Bush Foundation to assist the Department in hiring a Civic Engagement Director and to assist the Department in hosting events with the public to facilitate the civic engagement work plan. The Department is grateful for the support from the Bush Foundation.
begun to interview candidates for the newly created Civic Engagement Director position. The Department created the Civic Engagement Director position to help facilitate the implementation of the civic engagement work plan. Several committee members were involved in the hiring process, which included recruiting candidates and having members sit on the interview panel. The new Civic Engagement Director was hired by the Department in September of 2016.

C. Governance Structure

The steering committee had several discussions about the governance structure that could best assist administrative agencies in implementing the civic engagement work plan. The steering committee suggested that three committees be created to assist the Department in strategically implementing the civic engagement work plan. The three committees were: (1) steering, (2) implementation, and (3) practitioners.

The duties of the new steering committee would be to provide accountability to the public and strategic guidance to administrative agencies as they work toward implementing the civic engagement plan. The proposed composition of the steering committee would be community members and executive branch employees. Individuals who developed the work plan believed that the steering committee would be critical to building and sustaining trust with historically disenfranchised communities. Everyone who served on the committee that originally developed the work plan were encouraged to apply to serve on the steering committee.

The steering committee believed that it was important to create an implementation committee that could help drive culture change within their administrative agency as well as within the state-wide enterprise. The implementation committee would be comprised of administrative agency officials who had the positional authority to champion ideas, policies and protocols suggested and developed by the public, and support civic practitioners with resources within administrative agencies.

Finally, the steering committee believed that it was important to create a practitioners’ group that would be comprised of state civic engagement staff within each of the administrative agencies. At the time of the initiation of the civic engagement effort, no civic engagement practitioner group existed. The suggestion was to create a practitioners’ group and for the practitioners’ groups to evolve into a professional development network around civic engagement that would provide peer support and support the coordination of civic engagement efforts within the statewide enterprise.

VII. Implementation of Work Plan

In approaching the implementation of the work plan, the Department was mindful of the need to simultaneously juggle several tasks with internal and external stakeholders in order to sustain momentum of the civic engagement effort. The Department understood that it was important to:

- Continue building trust with disenfranchised communities;
- Coordinate training of civic engagement practitioners within administrative agencies;
- Develop tools for measuring short-term and long-term success of civic engagement efforts;
- Collaborate with the Governor’s office and advocacy groups and organizations to diversify state boards; and
- Educate the public, administrative agencies and Governor’s office on civic engagement effort accomplishments.

As a result, the Department initiated the following efforts.

A. Information Campaign

In an effort to introduce the new Civic Engagement Director and unveil the new civic engagement work plan, the Department launched an information campaign comprised of formal presentations to agency officials and informal presentations to advocacy organizations.

After the civic engagement plan was presented to the Governor at the August 2016 Diversity & Inclusion Council meeting the Governor requested the Commissioner of Human Rights present the civic engagement plan to all the administrative agencies at the following Cabinet meeting.

In addition to presenting at the Cabinet meeting, the Department also held a formal “kickoff” meeting for administrative agencies in the fall of 2016. While all administrative agency officials were welcome, the Department targeted its outreach efforts to the administrative agencies that had not formally participated in the work that lead to the development of the civic engagement work plan. This strategy was undertaken to broaden the baseline understanding of the civic engagement work plan. As the State of Minnesota is a large and diverse organization employing more than 50,000 employees, the Department understood that it was important to be intentional to share information about the civic engagement effort and not to assume that there was awareness of the work. The “kickoff” meeting was well attended and there was significant enthusiasm for the effort to work more collaboratively with the public.

Shortly after the kickoff meeting, the Department secured an invitation to speak at the monthly Deputy Commissioners meeting. The Deputy Commissioners are primarily responsible for the day-to-day operations of the agency and are critically important to the successful implementation of new policy or program initiatives. The Department presented the civic engagement work plan in the winter of 2016 at the Deputy Commissioners meeting to ensure senior leadership staff within all the administrative agencies were aware of the plan and how to contact Human Rights with questions or to request assistance going forward.

Appreciating the level of historical distrust within communities, the Department also had similar meetings with community organizations and the state ethnic councils to provide them with an update on the hiring of the new Civic Engagement Director and civic engagement work plan. The meetings served as a reminder of the historical level of distrust of government. While reserving some level of skepticism, attendees at these community meetings were excited about the prospect of administrative agencies being intentional in expanding their outreach efforts to all communities.
B. Civic Engagement Training Series
The Civic Engagement Director and Civic Engagement Coordinator met with several civic engagement practitioners to develop the Civic Engagement Training Series. Most of the trainings were foundational to ensure that attendees understood the fundamentals of civic engagement, acquired basic civic engagement skills, and understood the principles and values of civic engagement as set forth in the civic engagement plan. The Civic Engagement Training Series was held in the spring of 2017 and 2018. Training topics included:

- Breaking Out of the Permission Zone
- Building Trust
- Conflict Resolution
- Core Skills in Community Engagement
- Designing Civic Engagement Events
- Evaluation in Community Engagement
- Facilitation Skills
- Foundations of Community Engagement for Practitioners
- Foundations of Community Engagement for Managers and Supervisors
- Foundations of Community Engagement for Agency Leaders
- Maintaining Buy-in and Accountability
- Self-Care for Engagement Practitioners
- Stakeholder Analysis
- Powerful Questions in Engagement
- World Café

More than 350 people participated in the training series to gain practical skills and knowledge to improve their civic engagement efforts in their own work and within their agency. Training evaluations showed that 85 percent of participants were satisfied with the training and 80 percent of participants reported having a deeper understanding of civic engagement because of the training they attended. The training series helped raise visibility of the Diversity and Inclusion Council’s Civic Engagement work, served as a model for administrative agencies to replicate when providing civic engagement training to their staff, and further contributed to creating a culture and an environment of constant learning and connection with the civic engagement initiative. The training series also provided more space for practitioners to continue to build relationships with their peers, find places for collaboration, and de-silo their work within their administrative agency.

C. Practitioners’ Group
The Practitioners’ Group has become the civic engagement network home for civic engagement practitioners within the state to develop leadership skills, find peer support, brainstorm new ideas to navigate challenges, and work together to address systemic barriers to authentic civic engagement. The Practitioners’ Group has been meeting monthly since its first convening by the Civic Engagement Director in January 2017.
Since its formation, the Practitioners’ Group has met to discuss a variety of topics such as:

- Foundations of Community Engagement
- Co-creation of best practices
- Diversity and Inclusion
- Food Policy
- Creating Accessible Documents
- Digital Engagement
- Civic Engagement Assessments
- Fostering Connections Between Government and Community
- Civic Engagement World Café
- Transition Plan and Leadership for Practitioners Group
- 2020 Minnesota Census
- Engagement Through an Equity Lens: Navigating intersectionality Within Marginalized Communities

In addition, the Practitioners’ Group formed two working groups to make recommendations regarding the state’s special expense policy (for food) and crafted a civic engagement best practices document as a resource guide for all civic engagement practitioners.

Appreciating the critical role civic engagement practitioners play in shaping the civic engagement culture of their administrative agency, the Practitioners’ Group is critically important to the long-term sustainability of meaningful civic engagement within Minnesota state government.

**D. Civic Engagement Newsletter**

The Civic Engagement Director and Civic Engagement Coordinator created the Civic Engagement Newsletter to periodically send out information to individuals interested in keeping current with the civic engagement efforts within the state. The newsletter highlights important civic engagement news such as upcoming events, job postings, and opportunities to network. The newsletter helps spread the message of the civic engagement effort across and outside of state government. The newsletter has been especially helpful for civic engagement practitioners within small administrative agencies to identify and leverage civic engagement resources. In less than two years, the quarterly newsletter had grown to nearly 2,000 subscribers.

**E. Civic Engagement Agency Assessment Tool**

In July 2017, Governor Dayton asked all cabinet level agencies to provide an update to his office on their respective Diversity & Inclusion efforts. In light of the Governor’s request, the Department developed a tool to assist administrative agencies in assessing their engagement efforts, identifying successes and challenges, and ensuring there is an understanding of what needs to be done to improve engagement within the agency. The Assessment Tool was created based upon goals from the Civic Engagement Plan and input from the Civic Engagement Implementation Committee.
The Assessment Tool was designed to help agencies think more strategically about their civic engagement efforts by providing ideas and strategies that agencies can take to systemically improve their civic engagement efforts as well as timeframes in which to accomplish their goals. The Assessment Tool sets forth three goals for administrative agencies to assess in evaluating their civic engagement efforts. Within each goal, there are identified objectives and recommended actions that can be undertaken by the administrative agency. The Assessment Tool also provides an opportunity for administrative agencies to identify what actions they intend to take, the targeted date for completion of the task, and the individual responsible for completing the task.

Agencies are also asked within the Assessment Tool to specify what specific action they undertook in completing the recommended action. Agencies are then asked to assess their efforts in accomplishing the following goals based on the scale 1-Excellent; 2-Adequate; 3-Inadequate; or NA, Not applicable:

1) Senior leadership is committed to a vibrant democracy by ensuring that all people living in Minnesota understand the work of the agency;
2) Senior leadership is committed to a vibrant democracy by ensuring that all people living in Minnesota have the opportunity to participate in the development of policy; and
3) The Agency is committed to continuous improvement by developing, measuring, and evaluating civic engagement metrics.

Under the first goal within the Assessment Tool, there are three objectives. The first objective is “senior leadership conveys importance of civic engagement to individuals within and external to the agency.” Under the first objective, the Assessment Tool identifies the following recommended actions:

- Incorporate civic engagement within mission, vision and value statement of the agency;
- Develop and implement a civic engagement framework document;
- Create a civic engagement advisory committee that includes members of the public;
- Make inclusion of people of color, American Indian communities, LGBTQ communities and people with disabilities a priority for all boards, commissions, and advisory committees; and
- Commissioner and senior leaders regularly provide a statement emphasizing the importance of civic engagement.

The second objective is for “managers and supervisors to value civic engagement for all people living in Minnesota.” Under the second objective, the Assessment Tool identifies the following recommended actions:

- Incorporate civic engagement within work plans and performance measures of employees;
- Ensure that civic engagement is reflected within position descriptions of employees;
- Ensure that civic engagement staff are supported and well resourced;
- Ensure that people in the agency complete agency-wide civic engagement training; and
- Recognize and reward the civic engagement efforts of people working the agency.
The third and final objective under the first goal provides that “information about the operations of the agency is communicated in a transparent manner to allow the public to understand the work of the agency.” Under this objective, the Assessment Tool provides the following recommendations:

- Commissioner and senior agency officials regularly meet with the public to discuss the work of the agency;
- Commissioner and senior agency officials regularly meet with communities of color, American Indian communities, LGBTQ communities and people with disabilities to build trust;
- Web page and online presence provides a clear and transparent explanation of the work of the agency; and
- Written materials published by the agency provide a clear and transparent explanation of the work of the agency.

The second goal of the Assessment Tool has two objectives. The first objective provides that, “public meetings and events are conducted in a manner that is inclusive for all to participate.” There are three recommended actions set forth in the Assessment Tool for the first objective:

- Agency has adopted a public meeting checklist that ensures participation for those individuals who are poor, who are individuals with a disability, communities of color, American Indian communities, and LGBTQ communities,
- Agency has developed metric tools to evaluate the active participation level of the public in its civic engagement initiative, and
- Agency allows members of the public to co-develop agendas and co-convene meetings and events.

The second objective provides that, “information about the operations for the agency is communicated in a transparent manner to allow the public to participate in the development process of public policy.” There are four recommended actions set forth in the Assessment Tool for the second objective:

- Public understands how their input to public policy process will be used by the agency;
- Public is given sufficient time to understand the information provided by the agency;
- Meetings are posted with sufficient time to allow the public to adequately participate in the public policy development process; and
- Agency provides adequate information to allow the public to ask questions.

The final goal within the Assessment Tool has one objective which provides that the “agency has developed internal processes to evaluate their civic engagement efforts.” The recommended actions for this objective within the Assessment Tool are:

- Agency measures and evaluates the inclusive nature of its public meetings;
- Agency measures and evaluates how well the public understands the work of the agency; and
- Agency measures and evaluates how well the public feels that it was involved in the development of public policy.
All of the administrative agencies utilized the Assessment Tool. As a result of the administrative agencies using the Assessment Tool, there is a better understanding of where the enterprise is as a whole with civic engagement. Key learnings from the collected results:

1) Many agencies are implementing efforts that are leading the way in civic engagement and more needs to be done to share that knowledge.

2) More needs to be done to institutionalize civic engagement practice throughout individual agencies.

3) Evaluating and measuring civic engagement continues to be an area of need.

**F. Metrics Evaluation Project**

As discussed above, more than 20 of the 24 cabinet agencies in the survey administered in 2015 asked for help with measuring their civic engagement work. In response to this need, the Department issued a Request for Proposals for the purpose of entering into a contract with a vendor that would assist the State in developing tools and best practices on how agencies can evaluate their civic engagement efforts. In January 2017, the Department entered into a contract with the Improve Group to lead the project. The duties of the Improve Group include:

- Research existing civic engagement evaluation measurements and metrics used by a sample of executive branch agencies, other government entities, nonprofits, and businesses, around the state, country or even internationally.
- Based on the research, develop a menu of evaluation measures and metrics that agencies can use to measure their civic engagement efforts. Create written materials for administrative agencies use.
- Pilot measures with three agencies: Environmental Quality Board (EQB), Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT), and the Olmstead Implementation Office (OIO).
- Develop case summaries of these efforts so that those inside and outside the State of Minnesota can learn about the initiative’s efforts.

The Improve Group convened an advisory committee to provide leadership and facilitate their work with administrative agencies. They conducted research on civic engagement evaluation tools and worked with the identified pilot projects to develop and test their evaluation framework. The administrative agency projects that were chosen to participate in the pilot are:

- **EQB Public Meetings and Strategic Planning Process**
  - This pilot will be useful for state boards and commissions, agencies that convene public meetings, and those who conduct environmental review proceedings.

- **MnDOT Rethinking I-94 Project**
  - This pilot will be useful for state agencies that are engaged with large public infrastructure projects which require coordination between technical experts, contractors, and engagement staff, as well as any other projects that directly impact physical locations where people congregate and live.
- OIO Community Engagement Workgroup
  - The pilot will be useful for state agencies that convene advisory groups, large interagency initiatives, and seek to evaluate service delivery programs.

The Improve Group working in collaboration with Department staff, pilot project staff, and the advisory committee, developed a working civic engagement framework. The Improve Group and the Department believe that the Evaluation Framework has the potential to be transformative in that the framework allows for the evaluation of civic engagement by administrative agencies in a cyclical and continuous lens that includes multiple types of evaluation. The working framework will be further refined through tests with the pilot projects.

The Improve Group concluded its work in December of 2018. The Department and the Improve Group shared the findings of their work at the December 2018 Human Rights Symposium.

**G. Diversifying Boards and Commissions**

In January of 2018, the Department partnered with the Governor’s Office, the OIO, and Nexus Community Partners to develop and host a training for creating welcoming board environments. The training was meant to provide current board members and their staff with tools to create more welcoming and hospitable environments for new board members in order to improve the retention of diverse state board members. This is as important, if not more important, than activities solely focused on recruiting diverse board members. Diverse state board members are often helpful in recruiting future diverse board members, as their networks are often more diverse than the existing applicant candidate pool utilized by the state board.

The training session appeared to tap into the needs of state board members in that it brought together over 70 people serving on state boards to talk about recruiting, retention, and creating

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142 Amsler and Nabatchi, supra note 14 at 1659 (Suggesting that governmental units maximize their civic engagement efforts when they are able to successfully combine the best features of their thin and thick participation efforts.)

143 Nexus Community Partners is a non-profit organization that seeks to “build more engaged and powerful communities of color by supporting community-building initiatives that expand community wealth and foster social and human capital.”
a welcoming environment. The response from board member attendees was incredibly enthusiastic and the Department worked with the Governor’s Office to convene a subsequent meeting and event for state boards.

**H. Civic Engagement Summit**
On June 6, 2018, the State of Minnesota held its first ever Civic Engagement Summit. The Summit brought together over 170 participants from community and all levels of government to further build relationships, develop civic engagement skills, and work together to form a more cohesive civic engagement network in Minnesota.

During the Morning Plenary titled, “Conversations with Minnesota’s Government Leaders,” government leaders including, Secretary of State Steve Simon, Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey, Saint Paul Mayor Melvin Carter, Governor Dayton’s Chief of Staff Joanna Dornfeld, and city officials from Rochester, Duluth and Worthington held small table conversations with Summit attendees in an effort to build trust, listen authentically, and continue to bridge the divide that exists between government and communities.

The Summit was the first event of its kind to bring together civic engagement practitioners from across the state and across sectors. Participants appreciated the speakers, the opportunity to develop relationships with new peers, to connect with their government leaders in ways they have never done before, and to build upon their civic engagement skills. The Summit also provided space to take government work out of silos and encourage collaboration to build a more connected civic engagement network across the state. Summit evaluations showed that 70 percent of attendees rated their overall experience as ‘very good’ or ‘excellent.’

**VIII. Conclusion**
Minnesota has taken several strides forward in strengthening its democracy and improving the efficacy of government through the actions it has undertaken under Diversity and Inclusion Executive Order 15-02. The work to realize the civic engagement vision of the Executive Order was accelerated by the intentional effort to build trust with the public in developing the civic engagement work plan. While portions of the civic engagement work plan remain to be fully implemented, much has been accomplished by the public members who serve on the civic engagement steering committee, administrative agency leaders and the numerous civic engagement practitioners within the state responsible for the daily implementation of civic engagement.

In looking to the future of civic engagement, the administrative agencies within Minnesota government are poised to continue to make progress in implementing civic engagement. The efforts of the civic engagement practitioners have already changed the state’s food policy consistent with the policy recommendation within the civic engagement plan. Many agencies have enhanced their civic engagement infrastructure and the report concerning metrics to be published by the Improve Group discussed above will lead to the further refinement of civic engagement best practices.
Minnesota’s civic engagement efforts within the Dayton Administration is the latest chapter in Minnesota’s history to lead on civil rights and provide equal opportunities for all.
Summary of Evaluation Findings
This report shares the results of an evaluation of the five community conversations that took place in Falcon Heights from February through June 2017. The evaluation was commissioned by the Minnesota Bureau of Mediation Services’ Office of Collaboration and Dispute Resolution, the Dispute Resolution Institute at Mitchell Hamline School of Law, and the Center for Integrative Leadership at the University of Minnesota with funding from the American Arbitration Association — International Centre for Dispute Resolution Foundation. Elizabeth Dressel, a master’s student at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs, led the evaluation with support from Kathryn S. Quick, PhD, Associate Professor, Humphrey School of Public Affairs and Co-Academic Director of the Center for Integrative Leadership, and Chen Zhang, PhD candidate, Humphrey School of Public Affairs.

Six main topics arose from the analysis of focus group transcripts and survey responses.
1) **Divergent and Changing Concerns**: Participants arrived and left with divergent concerns and many changed their priorities over the course of the process.
2) **Interface with City Council and Task Force**: Participants wanted more action, accountability, and interaction with these bodies.
3) **Impacts of a Resource-Constrained Process**: Participants observed and bemoaned that limited resources had negative impacts on communication, childcare, and food.
4) **Lack of Diversity**: Participants explored multiple concerns with turnout and diversity of perspectives.
5) **Circle Format and General Process**: Participants articulated feedback on the benefits and limitations of the circle format and its implementation in this setting.
6) **Facilitation Role**: Facilitators reflected on the distinctions between a circle process and other types of facilitation, and the ambiguity and tension they felt in this setting.

These topic areas are groups of frequently expressed ideas and comments. Within each were areas of convergence and divergence. The report details the findings for each in greater detail.

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Elizabeth Dressel, is an Implementation and Equity Specialist with the Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness. Dressel was a master of Urban and Regional Planning student at University of Minnesota, Humphrey School of Public Affairs when she prepared this evaluation for the Office of Collaboration and Dispute Resolution and the Dispute Resolution Institute at Mitchell Hamline School of Law.
Outcomes Highlights

One of the most interesting findings is a positive change in the emotional state of the participants. Participants felt more optimistic and trusting and less cynical, sad and angry after participating in the conversations. In addition, participants expressed feeling both more energized and more fatigued after the community conversations.

Another noteworthy finding is changes to what participants hoped to accomplish through the community conversations. Following the conversations, participants prioritized higher:

- understanding the role I play in injustices within my community; and
- making new connections with people in my community

These changes are reflective of the planning team's goals that the conversations provide the opportunity for impact at various levels including policy, community, inter-personal, and intra-personal.

The conversations did not make any difference in one prominent area of concern: both before and after, the number one priority was changing the way the city handles policing practices. Notably, however, framing that change in terms of St. Anthony Police Department (SAPD) became less important: fewer people prioritized ending the contract with SAPD after the conversations than before them.
**Process Highlights**

91% of survey respondents said that they strongly or slightly agreed that participating in the community conversations was a valuable way to spend their time. With a few key caveats, participants liked the circle method. However, there was a clear message that there was **too much material to cover at each conversation**. Both participants and facilitators often felt too rushed while trying to get through all of the questions in each conversation. This did not allow participants to fully share, and some mentioned they quickly passed or chose not to share so that others in the circle could have more time. It is recommended that future processes allow more time to cover the materials either extending the time period or reducing the agenda.

Another key finding is that, **participants would have liked to have had more time to directly discuss the draft recommendations and provide direct feedback to the Task Force and City Council members**. This lack of direct interaction left many participants feeling frustrated and uncertain about the next steps, and whether the recommendations and input will be implemented. Future processes should include more time on the development of recommendations and allow for more interaction between participants, Task Force, and City Council.

**Overview of the Task Force and Community Conversations**

The Falcon Heights Task Force on Inclusion and Policing was created by the City Council of Falcon Heights, Minnesota, following the killing of Philando Castile by a police officer in Falcon Heights. The Task Force was charged with articulating community values, identifying community needs, and recommending programming and policies that would make Falcon Heights a more inclusive and welcoming place for residents and guests.
The Task Force was comprised of 11 committed individuals with diverse experiences and perspectives. Beginning in December 2016, they met for 13 regular task force meetings. To develop a set of recommendations on policing and second set of recommendations on inclusion, the Task Force deliberated with the interested public through five Community Conversations (the focus of this report), and consulted with subject matter experts in four priority areas (policing, police-community relationships, citizen oversight boards, and joint powers authorities). The Task Force members also stayed connected with the broader community through individual dialogues with other residents and guests of Falcon Heights, by attending City Council meetings, and by being involved in other community events.

The policing recommendations lay out a set of goals for policy implementation and change relating to restoring mutual safety and trust for community members and police. The final version of the policing recommendations was adopted by the City Council on May 24, 2017, and may be found here: www.falconheights.org (Search for Policing and Inclusion Recommendations).

The inclusion recommendations include a Statement of Community Values, and a series of recommendations for building a more inclusive Falcon Heights. The foundation of all of the recommendations is that many people feel that they do not fully belong in the Falcon Heights community. The final version of the inclusion recommendations was adopted by the City Council on June 14, 2017, and may be found here: www.falconheights.org. At that time, the Council also unanimously agreed to seek grants and allocate funds in upcoming city budgets in order to be able to dedicate skilled staff attention to sustaining this work.

In conjunction with the Task Force meetings, more than 180 people participated in a series of Community Conversations. The dialogue and feedback was used to develop and shape the recommendations.

- Conversation 1 - February 16, 2017: Conversations focused on personal and community values. Conversation 2 - March 2, 2017: Participants helped develop options for how the City can live out the Community’s values in its activities, policies, and policing policies and practices.
- Conversation 3 - April 3, 2017: Participants reviewed and provided feedback on draft policing recommendations.
- Conversation 4 - May 1, 2017: Participants shared their thoughts on what is needed for transformational change to begin and each made a personal commitment.
- Conversation 5 - June 19, 2017: Commemoration of the work accomplished and development of next steps for the community.

Data and Methods
Evaluation data was gathered in two ways. First, the evaluation team emailed a survey to all participants who attended at least one of the community conversations and provided an email. In total, the survey was emailed to 158 participants for whom we had email contact information, of whom 57 completed and submitted survey responses. Removing the 13 emails that bounced back due to incorrect addresses, there was a 39 percent completion rate.
In addition to the survey, the evaluation team conducted four focus groups, two specifically for community conversation participants and two for conversation facilitators. One focus group of each type was held in June and a second pair was conducted in August. We intentionally invited individuals to the first set of focus groups in June to represent diversity in terms of the number of community conversations they attended/facilitated, where they were from, gender, and race or ethnicity. A second invitation was emailed to all participants or facilitators and they were asked to RSVP if they were interested in participating and providing feedback. Due to this methodology, the first participant focus group was quite a bit more diverse including both residents, non-residents, varied ethnic and racial background, and gender balance. Across all of the focus groups, 23 people attended — 13 community conversation participants and 10 conversation facilitators.

A complete list of the survey questions and results can be found in Appendix A, and a complete list of the focus group questions are located in Appendix B. I want to acknowledge and thank Kathryn S. Quick, PhD, Associate Professor at Humphrey School of Public Affairs and Co-Academic Director of the Center for Integrative Leadership, and Chen Zhang, PhD candidate, Humphrey School of Public Affairs, for their assistance in designing the approach to the survey and focus groups, for partnering with me to facilitate the focus groups, and for helping to analyze the data from both the survey and focus groups. I am also thankful for Giulietta Perrotta for transcribing all of the focus group recordings.

Key Findings

Six main topics arose from the analysis of focus group transcripts and survey responses.

Divergent and Changing Concerns:

1) Participants arrived and left with divergent concerns and many changed their priorities over the course of the process.
2) Interface with City Council and Task Force: Participants wanted more action, accountability, and interaction with these bodies.
3) Impacts of a Resource-Constrained Process: Participants observed and bemoaned that limited resources had negative impacts on communication, childcare, and food.
4) Lack of Diversity: Participants explored multiple concerns with turnout and diversity of perspectives.
5) Circle Format and General Process: Participants articulated feedback on the benefits and limitations of the circle format and its implementation in this setting.
6) Facilitation Role: Facilitators reflected on the distinctions between a circle process and other types of facilitation, and the ambiguity and tension they felt in this setting.

These topic areas are groups of frequently expressed ideas and comments. Within each were areas of convergence and divergence. Below, for each topic area, I provide a description and analysis of the variety of reasoning and comments that were shared within each group, broken out by survey results, as applicable, followed by findings from focus group comments. I conclude the report with a few short recommendations for carrying this work forward in other communities.
Divergent and Changing Concerns
Participants arrived and left with divergent concerns and many changed their priorities over the course of the process.

Survey Results
The priorities of participants before and after the community conversations are highlighted in Figure 1. The conversations did not make any difference in one prominent area of concern: both before and after, the number one priority was changing the way the city handles policing practices. Notably, however, framing that change in terms of St. Anthony Police Department (SAPD) became less important: fewer people prioritized ending the contract with SAPD after the conversations than before them. In contrast, there were a few areas that became a higher priority for the survey respondents after the conversations:

- understanding the role I play in injustices within my community; and
- making new connections with people in my community.

These changes are reflective of the design team's goals that the conversations provide the opportunity for impact at various levels including policy, community, inter-personal, and intra-personal.

Top Priorities To Accomplish

![Figure 1: Top priorities to accomplish](image)

Focus Group Comments
Many of the focus group participants shared their commitment and connection to Falcon Heights and dedication to working to create a more inclusive community. Facilitators expressed a desire to help and be involved in a topic they feel personally connected to even though they live outside of Falcon Heights. Many expressed that they hoped to use their professional skills
and passions to help the community. As the organizers and facilitators anticipated and recognized during the conversations, there was no single theme or concern that brought people to the table. We asked people in the focus group what had compelled them to participate in the conversations, and found no consistent patterns. We heard a variety of reasons for why people attended the community conversations and how they defined the issues at hand. There was divergence on what participants perceived as the problem and how to move forward. There were some who expressed that canceling the contract was the most important outcome and the need to solidify a new contract was important. Others felt that the city would have been better off continuing to work with SAPD. A number of ideas and differences arose over the need to gather funding and make changes to the budget. The second participant focus group discussed the reality of the upcoming election and whether new councilmembers would have power and control to change the budget priorities. The take-away for evaluating this community conversation and planning comparable kinds of processes in the future is that it's important for the design team to expect and anticipate that participants will present very diverse experiences, concerns, and priorities in the conversations.

**Interface with the City Council and Task Force**

*Participants wanted more action, accountability, and interaction with these bodies.*

**Survey Results**

The top priority that participants listed as wanting to accomplish before and after the community conversation was to change the way the city handles policing structures and practices. Forty-nine percent of participants listed this as one of their top three priorities before and after the conversations. This indicates a high level of commitment to action and change within the city. Additionally, more people expressed a priority to “make new connections with people in my community” and “become more active and involved”. This highlights that many participants are interested in taking action and making connections.

The comments in the open-ended response questions on whether this was a valuable use of their time and whether or not they changed their mind indicated some survey respondents’ disappointment with the actions of the city council. Some respondents stated they are unsure what the next steps are and feel discouraged by that. Others feel that the conversations were a way to start informing recommendations and feel that their voices were acknowledged and matter. In next steps, respondents stated commitments to staying involved, connected, and on top of the implementation of the recommendations. The desire for action and to see accountability from the city council and city officials was a strong theme.

**Focus Group Comments**

Action and accountability themes arose throughout the focus groups. Community conversation participants converged on the desire to take action personally, and the desire to see the city council take action on the recommendations. There was frustration and feelings of uncertainty about the next steps, and whether the recommendations and input will be implemented.
Participants felt disappointed by the lack of action and concrete next steps from the city council. Specifically, they mentioned the final community conversation as particularly frustrating. Participants felt that the conversation goals did not meet their personal goals of hearing the final recommendations, having time to discuss them, and then moving into personal next steps. The circle questions during the final conversation felt disjointed from the participants’ desire to focus on the final recommendations and get to action steps. The questions at that particular conversation were noted as not allowing them to connect to their actions. Additionally, they left without next steps and did not feel the follow-up communication from the small groups met their desire for actionable next steps. The design of the conversations did not align with the desire for action. The circle process constrained the ability to have cross dialogue and move quickly towards actions, which is discussed further in the Circle Format and General Process section of this report. Based on the comments from the participants, I would recommend more of an interface with the task force process and more structured ability to have dialogue with the Task Force, and react to both the draft recommendations and the final recommendations. In future processes that interface with a city council or task force, I recommend a design that includes direct feedback and interaction with the task force/city council.

**Impacts of a Resource-Constrained Process**

Participants observed and bemoaned that limited resources had negative impacts on communication, childcare, and food.

**Focus Group Comments**

There are constraints of an all-volunteer facilitation and recruitment team and the impacts of this were seen by participants and facilitators alike. Across the focus groups, participants and facilitators named a variety of visible resource constraints and the impacts these had.

- **Childcare:** The childcare was not well utilized because it was last minute and its availability was not well advertised.
- **Food:** There was a lack of food at the conversations. People suggested offering healthier and more robust dinner options. It was also noted to pay attention to culturally specific foods, such as not offering pork and the timing of food being offered during Ramadan.
- **Advertisement:** Feedback on the location of advertisement was shared. Many suggested that there could have been more outreach to local community leaders within the African American community and publication through social media.
- **Unclear Commitment from the City:** Participants shared that is was unclear what the city had committed to at the outset of the community conversations. There was not a clear timeline for when and or how the city council would take up the policy recommendations.
- **Plan for Action Oriented Follow-Up:** There were concerns about steps community members can take after the final community conversation. They wanted more information on follow-up within action groups. It would have been helpful to have commitment at
the outset from the city and others involved in the design process on a plan for communicating next steps and potential resources to support the work and places to hold meetings within City Hall.

- **Facilitator Roles**: Facilitators did not always feel clarity in their roles and where they could have flexibility in the questions or structure of the conversation. Facilitators were able to use the ambiguity to be creative and resourceful in a positive and productive way. At times when there were extra facilitators for the evening, they felt a bit underappreciated. While they understand the nature of a volunteer process, they encourage a different choice of wording when letting people know they are not needed. They felt that being told they “have their night free now” was dismissive of their commitment and preparation. They suggest language that thanks them for their commitment and acknowledges that they may be disappointed.

Putting in more resources — both financial and personnel — would provide a better experience on a number of the resource based constraints raised above. While there are a number of changes that could be made in future engagement processes by utilizing more resources, respondents expressed that this process was positive and worth their time.

**Lack of Diversity**

*Participants explored multiple concerns with turnout and diversity of perspectives.*

**Survey Results**

The survey respondents shared concern about turnout and the diversity of participants who attended. A third felt somewhat or very dissatisfied with the diversity of attendees. Nearly 60 percent felt somewhat or very satisfied with the participation. This is the section regarding the satisfaction with the process that had the highest level of dissatisfaction.

**Focus Group Comments**

Across all of the focus groups, people had mixed feelings about the turnout at the conversations. Diversity of participants was used to refer to a variety of types of diversity including: where people came from, Falcon Heights resident versus outside of Falcon Heights, ideological diversity, and racial diversity. The feelings ranged about whether there was enough participation and engagement from residents of Falcon Heights. Some felt there was a lot of engagement for a sustained period of time while others felt that there was not a high enough proportion of residents in attendance. We noticed convergence around feelings of a lack of ideological diversity in participants. They noted that many of those in the circle had similar thoughts and there could have been more people with divergent ideas in attendance. There was a convergence of opinions around a lack of racial diversity among participants and facilitators. They noticed that the majority of participants were white and that most circles had just one or two people of color. Some participants noted that they felt it was on them as person of color to explain to the white participants the experience of being a person of color and that felt burdensome. People expressed that they did not always feel heard or that their diverse perspective was listened to.
Additionally, there were discussions about police participation in the conversations. There was a divergence on whether police should have been included in the community conversations in a formal manner to provide a diversity of perspective or whether that would have caused some participants to feel unsafe, not attend, or not have the ability to share freely. Safety can mean different things to different people, but some participants expressed that police presence, whether in uniform or not in uniform could cause participants of color to feel unsafe; while others expressed the need to formally include police into the conversation and that it would be important for them to attend in uniform in official capacity. It was noted that to include police in a formal manner, a more professional level of facilitation would have been needed to ensure all felt safe. The take-away for planning future comparable kinds of processes is that extensive planning, outreach, reflection, and design is needed to ensure diverse participation and productive dialogue among diverse participants.

Circle Format and General Process
Participants articulated feedback on the benefits and limitations of the circle format and its implementation in this setting.

Survey Results
Figure 2. depicts the survey responses on satisfaction with the process (see appendix A for individual graphs of each question on process). It indicates a high level of satisfaction with the quality of dialogue, facilitators, and the circle process. Overwhelmingly, survey respondents felt satisfied with the circle format used in the conversations. Eighty-four percent of respondents were somewhat or very satisfied with the circle format. Eleven percent felt neutral and five percent felt somewhat dissatisfied. No one indicated being completely dissatisfied. The most dissatisfaction arose regarding the diversity of participants. The concerns with turnout are discussed above in the Lacking Diversity: Exploration into Multiple Concerns with Turnout and Diversity of Perspectives section of this report.
Focus Group Comments

Circle Format

The topic of the process and circle format came up in each focus group. There was a consistent theme that people liked the circle format. However, we saw divergence in the reasons for liking the circle format. Some of the differing reasons for connecting with the circle process were:

- Allows people to have a voice.
- Talking piece can empower people to share and allow time to speak.
- Appreciate that the talking piece allowed the speaker to talk without interruption and did not allow for cross talk.
- Each person has to look at one another.
- A circle with no barriers allows for vulnerability and for participants to become closer.
- Provides a safe space for people to share and be heard. Safety does not mean people may not feel shame or be uncomfortable in the process.
- It is a focused process where people have to be engaged and respectful.

While all focus groups in general appreciated many aspects of the circle format, there are two notable ways in which there was not full agreement on this:

- Some participants had strong negative reactions to some aspects of the circle format. In the first focus group of community conversation participants, many described the circle format as overly constraining, too polite, and a structure that did not allow people to really get to know one another, transform their own and each other’s thinking through genuine dialogue with one another. Participants did not feel that the structure allowed for getting to action. They would have liked to be allowed to have cross dialogue, to
question one other, and dig deeper. In fact, this focus group was challenging to keep on track in part because the participants were so activated to engage in cross-talk and dialogue, and seemed to be using the focus group format to express their resentment of what they experienced as an overly confining format in the community conversations. The convergent and divergent comments on the circle process should indicate future community dialogue process should allow time for cross dialogue and response and developing actions and next steps.

- Some of the facilitators found the circle worked poorly because there was not enough clarity about whether the role of the facilitators was to hold or host a circle and/or to take a more traditional facilitation role to guide dialogue. This is discussed in more depth below in the Facilitation vs. Circle Process: Implications for the Facilitator Role section.

**Space and Audibility**

Space and audibility issues were named as concern. Many participants and facilitators mentioned that it was hard to hear one another in the circle when they were sitting close to another group. The gym location for the first community conversation was noted as particularly loud.

**Flow of Time**

Regardless of feelings toward the circle format, participants raised concerns about the process feeling rushed and constrained. At times there were too many questions to move through. This did not allow participants to fully share, and some mentioned they quickly passed or chose not to share so that others in the circle could have more time. Both participants and facilitators shared that filling out the notecards prior to the report out often happened quickly and in a rushed fashion. Feedback was consistent regarding the desire for more time for each question. Alternatively, participants and facilitators suggested that fewer questions and tasks be included to allow more conversation to take place within the small groups. Not all focus groups brought up the topic of how the organizers launched each community conversation, but the second participant focus group felt strongly that too much time was taken in the beginning of each evening by people at the front of the room — be it the Task Force co-chairs, mayor, facilitation team, or hosts from the meeting site — giving a welcome, explaining the process, or making their own statements. They especially noted the fifth conversation as an example of too much time being taken at the beginning of the evening by the front of the room. They would have preferred to have more time in their circles to alleviate the rushed nature.

**Facilitation Role**

*Facilitators reflected on the distinctions between a circle process and other types of facilitation, and the ambiguity and tension they felt in this setting.*

**Survey Results**

The survey respondents felt very satisfied with the quality of the facilitation. Eighty-four percent of respondents felt somewhat or very satisfied with the quality of facilitation and 9 percent
felt somewhat or very dissatisfied. These responses can be seen above in Figure 2. The tensions that facilitators felt does not appear to have affected participants’ experiences.

**Focus Group Comments**
The facilitators named the tensions they felt between the roles they were asked to play as a circle keepers sharing a piece of their own stories versus a more traditional neutral facilitation role. They mentioned tensions they observed at the initial facilitator training about the role of a circle keeper vs. the more neutral facilitation role and felt this did not resolve into clear direction for the role they should play in the community conversations. Facilitators individually sorted out this dual role tension, and shared the variety of ways they dealt with it. A few facilitators were keenly aware of what they observed to be an overabundance of white female facilitators. They were thinking a lot about racial and gender aspects of their identity, as white, female facilitators, when facilitating conversations. Several mentioned their resentment, rolling forward into these community conversations from previous experiences, of people of color all too often being “facilitated” by white facilitators, which fed into their negative reactions against facilitators who took a more traditional, intervening stance rather than keeping circle during these conversations. Some explained that they fully embraced either end of the spectrum, from circle keeper to traditional facilitator, and shared a personal story during the circle, while others stated that they chose to pass the stone without sharing during the circle. Those who shared within the circle felt that it showed humility and vulnerability. Additionally, if facilitators felt that the conversation was moving away from the questions or personal sharing or that the lead facilitator was not keeping the circle, they could model an answer to a question and reorient the conversation. While there was this tension between roles, facilitators were able to make personal decisions to use the tools that the community conversation organizing team provided in the preparatory training session, held on February 7, 2017 at Mitchell Hamline School of Law, and the briefings that took place right before each the conversation. In future processes, clearer identification of roles could eliminate this tension and confusion. The facilitators felt that the format required them to do a lot at one time, which obliged them to switch modes from holding the circle to filling out cards and notetaking. At times there was a lot that needed to get done in the circle, and not always enough time to accomplish those goals. They had to rush through questions to give enough time to each of them and transition into completing the notecard activities. In the future, facilitators would like more time to complete the tasks or guidance on what could be cut or shifted.

**Other Observations**

**Attachment to Place**
In analyzing the focus group data, we noticed a strong attachment to place among residents of Falcon Heights. In identifying their purpose for attending community conversations, participants highlighted that they felt connected to the community and to being involved. There was a sense that the length of time living in the community was an important factor motivating participation. This theme is something I make note of to pay attention to in future community
based conversations. Community residents carry this sense of commitment to the place they live and express a high level of expectation and commitment from those organizing conversations.

Changes in Emotions
In analyzing the survey data, we noticed that participants’ emotions changed in noteworthy ways, when comparing how respondents felt before and after the community conversations. Generally, the shift was to the positive. The chart in Figure 3 outlines the percentage of participants who became more, less, or still felt particular emotions. Thirty-four percent of individuals became more optimistic while 21 percent became less cynical. Smaller percentage of participants became less optimistic or more cynical. Nineteen percent became more trusting and 17 percent were less distrusting. The graph lists the changes seen across all of the emotions measured. Feeling energized and fatigued were both named as more prominent feelings after the community conversations. Fewer people named feeling angry or sad afterwards. These results indicate the community conversations potentially had an impact on the prominent emotions of participants. These preliminary results indicate this process changed emotions in a positive way.

Figure 3: Most dominant emotions (aggregated for all survey respondents).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change</th>
<th>Optimistic</th>
<th>Cynical</th>
<th>Trusting</th>
<th>Distrusting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More dominant</td>
<td>34% (18)</td>
<td>8% (4)</td>
<td>19% (10)</td>
<td>8% (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less dominant</td>
<td>17% (9)</td>
<td>21% (11)</td>
<td>9% (5)</td>
<td>17% (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Still dominant</td>
<td>17% (9)</td>
<td>9% (5)</td>
<td>8% (4)</td>
<td>11% (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never dominant</td>
<td>32% (17)</td>
<td>62% (33)</td>
<td>64% (34)</td>
<td>64% (34)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More – Chose as dominant feeling after, but not before  
Less – Chose as dominant feeling before, but not after  
Still – Chose as dominant feeling both before and after  
Never Dominant – Never chose the feeling

**Recommendations**

**Recommendation — Process**
With a few key caveats, participants liked the circle method. People became tired with the repetition and wanted to move towards action and felt hindered in that goal. However, there was a clear message that there was **too much material to cover at each conversation**. Both participants and facilitators often felt too rushed while trying to get through all of the questions in each conversation. This did not allow participants to fully share, and some mentioned they quickly passed or chose not to share so that others in the circle could have more time. It is recommended that future processes allow more time to cover the materials either through extending the time period or reducing the agenda, and a design that includes a variety of circle format and cross dialogue.

Another key finding is that, **participants would have liked to have had more time to directly discuss the draft recommendations and provide direct feedback to the Task Force and City Council members**. This lack of direct interaction left many participants feeling frustrated and uncertain about the next steps, and whether the recommendations and input will be implemented. Future processes **should include more time on the development of recommendations and allow for more interaction** between participants, Task Force, and City Council members.

**Recommendation — Facilitator Preparation**
In future processes, **clarify the role you are asking the facilitators to play and work out any potential disagreement prior to training**. This will provide more clarity and less tension. In addition, providing guidance or suggestions for managing time and how to switch between a circle based conversation to more task oriented activities would be useful.

**Recommendation — General Resources**
Provide adequate resources for future processes to ensure well-advertised and sustained child care, substantial and culturally appropriate food, improved advertisement and outreach to ensure participation of racially and ideologically diverse participants, and more complete facilitator training and preparation.
## Appendix A. Full Survey Questions and Responses
(Total Survey Responses Received: 57)

**Question 1. Which session(s) did you participate in?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Session 1: February 16, 2017: Conversations focused on personal and community values.</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 2: March 2, 2017: Participants helped develop options for how the City can live out the Community's values in its activities, policies, and policing policies and practices.</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 3 April 3, 2017: Participants reviewed and provided feedback on draft policing recommendations.</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 4: May 1, 2017: Participants shared their thoughts on what is needed for transformational change to begin and each made a personal commitment.</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 5: June 19, 2017: Focused commemoration of the work accomplished and move towards next steps for the community.</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total Conversations Attended by Respondents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Conversations</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>39% (22)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>12% (7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>16% (9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>12% (7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All 5</td>
<td>21% (12)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Question 2: Before Participating in the Community Conversations what were the top three things you wanted to accomplish?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Desired Outcome</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change the way the city handles policing structure and practices.</td>
<td>50% (28)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educate myself and learn from others’ perspectives.</td>
<td>43% (24)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work on dismantling racism in my community.</td>
<td>38% (21)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have courageous conversations about inclusion and exclusion.</td>
<td>32% (18)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make Falcon Heights a more inclusive community.</td>
<td>25% (14)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share my experiences and perspective with others.</td>
<td>23% (13)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get the City Council to end the contract with St. Anthony Policy Department.</td>
<td>23% (13)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Become more active and involved.</td>
<td>16% (9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge myself to understand the role I play in injustice within my community.</td>
<td>14% (8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure my experiences and perspectives are represented.</td>
<td>13% (7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make new connections with people in my community.</td>
<td>5% (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question 3: Rate your feelings on the statements below:

- I believe this process had an impact on the community of Falcon Heights.

- I believe I changed other participants’ perspectives.
- I learned something new from participating.

**Question 4: Rate your level of satisfaction on the process and format of the Community Conversations:**

- Quality of the Dialogue
Evaluation of the Falcon Heights Community Conversation Process

- Circle Format

- Diversity of Participants
Question 5: Rate your feeling on the statement below:

- I feel that participating in the Community Conversation(s) was a valuable way to spend my time.

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>(36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly Agree</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>(15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly Disagree</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>(4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 6: Please share why this was or was not a valuable way to spend your time.

The five major types of explanations given by those who agree are:

- The conversations brought people together to share and heal.
- It was good to listen to others and hear perspectives that were different from my own. There was a sense that there was a diversity of opinions shared.
- It is important to show up and be engaged and the conversations were a way to do that.
- It was a good way to start to seek change and make connections within the community.
- The conversations were a way to start to inform the policing recommendations. This thread acknowledged that some are not sure their voices and opinions mattered to the elected officials.

Only five comments were made by those who felt it was not a valuable way to spend their time. Direct quotes are below:

- “Invited to attend the final event as a resource person the turnout ended up being so huge, and the groups so large, that no individual was able to meaningfully contribute to the conversation, let alone determine which resources they would need going forward.”
- “Attendance was low, needed to stop and evaluate how to get more diversity in age and race among attendees.”
“The city council has no interest in actually implementing any real reforms. Nothing happened because of the events.”

“Participants were more interested in talking about parties and inclusion activities rather than discussing the blatant racism of our police department which is obvious to anyone who notices that it is almost always people of color who are stopped.”

“I did not feel understood at all except by the facilitator.”

**Question 7: People often change their minds through community dialogues. For example, they gain new perspectives that lead them to change their understanding of a problem. They might learn about options they had not thought about. They might become more optimistic or more pessimistic about an issue. We are guessing you may have changed your mind in some way. Please tell us how.**

*Themes from those who shared how their mind changed:*

- Gained a new awareness of issues facing people of color including racism from white people and pervasive targeting by the police.
- Gained a new perspective and understanding of the difficulty of being a police officer and city councilmember.
- Felt more pessimistic and discouraged. Some of these feelings were directed at the police and/or expressed in terms of a lack of action by city councilmembers.
- Felt more connected to their neighbors and heartened by the participation of others in the community.
- See the possibility for change. (A few people mentioned this, and also that they are in strong support of the Task Force recommendations.)

**Question 8: What are your next steps?**

*Themes based on those who shared their next steps.*

Themes are similar to those that arose in community conversation #4: Transformational Change and Personal Commitments.

- Personal actions and continued conversations: People list that they plan to continue to have personal conversations and commit to specific actions.
- Ensure recommendations are implemented.
- Continue to make connections and stay involved.
- Educate themselves and to share the work the community is doing with others.
- Some respondents expressed that they are unsure about what their next steps will be and that they are disappointed and discouraged.
Question 9: Below, please select up to three of your dominant feelings before and after the Community Conversation(s).

Changes in dominant feelings (shifts within individual survey respondents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change</th>
<th>Optimistic</th>
<th>Cynical</th>
<th>Trusting</th>
<th>Distrusting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More dominant</td>
<td>34% (18)</td>
<td>8% (4)</td>
<td>19% (10)</td>
<td>8% (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less dominant</td>
<td>17% (9)</td>
<td>21% (11)</td>
<td>9% (5)</td>
<td>17% (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Still dominant</td>
<td>17% (9)</td>
<td>9% (5)</td>
<td>8% (4)</td>
<td>11% (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never dominant</td>
<td>32% (17)</td>
<td>62% (33)</td>
<td>64% (34)</td>
<td>64% (34)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More – Chose as dominant feeling after, but not before
Less – Chose as dominant feeling before, but not after
Still – Chose as dominant feeling both before and after
Never Dominant – never chose as dominant feeling
Question 10: Now, what are the top three things you want to accomplish.

| Change the way the city handles policing structure and practices. | 51% (28) |
| Educate myself and learn from others’ perspectives. | 40% (22) |
| Work on dismantling racism in my community. | 33% (18) |
| Make Falcon Heights a more inclusive community. | 31% (17) |
| Have courageous conversations about inclusion and exclusion. | 29% (16) |
| Challenge myself to understand the role I play in injustice within my community. | 25% (14) |
| Make new connections with people in my community. | 22% (12) |
| Become more active and involved. | 20% (11) |
| Share my experiences and perspectives with others. | 20% (11) |
| Get the City Council to end the contract with St. Anthony Police Department. | 18% (10) |
| Other | 11% (6) |
| Ensure my experiences and perspectives are represented. | 9% (5) |

Demographics

What is your gender?

| Male | 49% |
| Female | 51% |
| Other | 0% |

What is your ethnicity?

| White/Caucasian | 81% |
| Black or African American | 9% |
| Hispanic or Latino | 0% |
| Asian or Pacific Islander | 0% |
| American Indian or Alaskan Native | 2% |
| Other | 9% |

What is your age?

| Under 18 | 0% |
| 18-24 | 2% |
| 25-34 | 2% |
| 35-44 | 16% |
| 45-54 | 12% |
| 55-64 | 20% |
| Over 65 | 49% |
Appendix B. Focus Group Questions

Focus Groups comprised of Community Conversation Facilitators

1) Why did you participate in the community conversation(s)? What was the key interest or concern that initially brought you to participate?
2) Please share the moment during the community conversations that most impacted you. What happened, and how did it impact you?
3) When things were working really well, what was going on? What specifically was happening, what was positive about it, and do you have an explanation for what/how it was working?
4) Conversely, when things were not working well, what was happening?
5) Did you notice any variation in how accessible... or meaningful... or burdensome this process was to people?
6) What suggestions do you have about improving accessibility for everyone?
7) If you were to rethink this process, what is one suggestion you would make?
8) How can you imagine using a process like this in another setting? I’ll give you a few minutes to think, silently, about this, and then I’ll ask you to share. Please imagine a particular place or topic where you would like to try some part of this. What is the setting? What would you carry forward from this process? What would you change?
9) Did you have the support and preparation you needed? Are there any additional things you wished you would have had or known?
10) Please share your 1 or 2 key “take aways.”

Focus Groups comprised of Community Conversation Participants

1) Why did you participate in the community conversation(s)? What was the key interest or concern that initially brought you to participate?
2) Please share the moment during the community conversations that most impacted you. What happened, and how did it impact you?
3) Do you feel the community conversations were a valuable way to spend your time? Why or why not?
4) Did anything change for you, as you went through this process? What do you attribute that to?
5) Do you feel that the community conversations made a difference for the community as a whole? Why or why not? What kind of change did you observe? Or, if you did not see a change, what kind of change do you feel was missing?
6) Would you say that you started and ended with more (or less!) confidence or hope about your community? If we you were to participate in this again, what is 1) one thing that you would keep the same; and 2) one thing that you would do differently?
7) Please share your 1 or 2 key “take aways.”
SHARON: Thanks for letting me interview you. Let’s start with a little bit of background on John Thompson. Tell me about where you grew up.

JOHN: I grew up on the south side of Chicago in a predominantly black neighborhood. I attended Henry O Tanner Elementary School in Chicago. I know throughout my time in Chicago, I always wanted to be a basketball player, so it went from wanting to be Dr. J to Michael Jordan, from Michael Jordan to Dennis Rodman, and from Dennis Rodman to Charles Barkley. I actually thought that was the path I was gonna go, ’cause I started getting so tall so fast at a young age. But Chicago was pretty rough and the public-school system in Chicago was pretty rough, so I come here to Minnesota, it’s like a culture shock. Different things, just different, like I don’t think there was one white person in my school in Chicago.

SHARON: …and then you moved to Minnesota

JOHN: I moved to Duluth Minnesota. I have five other siblings — two sisters, three brothers and I’m the baby of the family. Just recently I took on a program called Safe, and it’s a mentorship program for children, and I was asked, “Why would you wanna be a mentor to some of these mentees?” I said, “Cause I was the little brother all the time.” So when I see some of the youth it was a no brainer, I’d be hypocritical not to help, ’cause that’s how I was raised… from the butcher on the corner or my next-door neighbor, “You want me to call your mother on you?” If we got out of school early, or we had an early release, my mom would always give us instructions “You go to the neighbor’s house”, which was Miss Hollandsworth, “You go to Miss Hollandsworth’s house, and you better not give her no problems. Whatever they eat for dinner, that’s what you are eating for dinner.” She’d spank us too, she spanked us and then call my mom. So that’s what I was telling this guy about at Safe, I said, “The whole neighborhood raised us.” So, I’d be hypocritical not to help raise some of these youth that he has in the Safe program.

1 Sharon Press is a Professor of Law and the Director of the Dispute Resolution Institute at Mitchell Hamline School of Law. She currently serves as Co-President, along with John Thompson, of Community Mediation Minnesota and was one of the organizers of the Falcon Heights Community Conversations in which Thompson participated.
SHARON: So, when you were in Duluth, did you still want to be a basketball player?

JOHN: Yes, I actually wanted to play basketball for UMD, I left all my study habits, I don't even know if I had any, but I left 'em and I brought all my party habits to Duluth, because it was easy to party. There are so many bars and so many parties in Superior, Wisconsin and Duluth, Minnesota, it's a college town. I forgot to study, I forgot to work hard, but I remembered to party. And so, my mom came and got me out of there, and she took me to Ohio. My mom's like, “You didn't get nobody pregnant here in Duluth?” And I went to Ohio and did just that, I had my first kid.

SHARON: And did you graduate?

JOHN: No. When I had my first kid, my mom was paying for a lot of stuff, and my mom was like, “You're not gonna leave this lady with a kid, so you're gonna have to get a job.” I actually wanted to be a psychiatrist, and that was gonna be my major, but I had to go to the home builder's institute, and I had to hurry up and take this trade. I wanted to do carpentry, electrical, plumbing — Building Apartment Maintenance, BAM, is what it's called, 'cause I needed to make money, 'cause I had a kid on the way, and my mom's like, “No, I'm not gonna raise your kid.” So, she kind of forced me to be a man early, and I always thank her for that, honestly, because I never had my dad. I knew my dad, but he wasn't present in my life. But my mom kept instilling that in me, and all of the boys, that these kids didn't ask to be here, so you're gonna raise 'em, and you're gonna have to sacrifice what you wanna do, in order to make their lives better, so I thank her to this day. I'm fighting for the trades right now, because the trades actually saved my life. Honestly, I would've probably been a deadbeat dad. I don't know, 'cause I was young, so I don't know.

SHARON: How old were you?

JOHN: My first kid was 22. So, I just wanted to make sure that I was the dad that my dad wasn't. I had my first son, he looks just like me, like I would stare at him like man, I created this, I created this kid right here.

SHARON: No denying it right?

JOHN: Wow. That amazed me. You know like when you look, you're holding your baby and you're looking at him like, man, he has my nose, I made this. When he started getting older, I'd buy a different pair of sneakers and a jogging suit, so I had to make sure I found the exact one that he had, so we matched. And everywhere I was at, you'd see me with this kid. I wanted everybody to know that I was happy to have a son.

SHARON: And what's he doing now?
JOHN: He's an accountant.

SHARON: Is he in the Twin Cities?

JOHN: Yeah, he's here in the Cities. Sad part is he went to school to be an accountant, and then people would let him do taxes at tax time, but none of these companies would hire him. I don't understand that. So he does taxes around tax time, and then when people need help with their taxes, but he's been out of school for three years now, he's yet to find a company that will bring him on, and say hey, you can work for this company. I told him that too, you go to Las Vegas, they're hiring accountants left and right for their casinos and all the money they have moving through Las Vegas. It should be the same way here, it's just that these companies are family owned, so they hire family, they train family.

SHARON: So, you went in to do the building and maintenance kind of stuff, and you continued doing that, because you work now as a machinist.

JOHN: That was a little different, because when I first got out of normal business, I moved back to Chicago, and I started to work for the Art Institute in Chicago. I started changing locks and doing building maintenance stuff, moving exhibits and painting, and things like that. I stopped working for the Art Institute, and then I started working for a Steel Foundry, 'cause it was a little bit more money and it was a union job. I think at this point my son is probably like seven. So, I'm working at a steel foundry, and now they're sending me to school, prepping me to be the machinist. At the end of the day, I'm going to school for hydraulics, pneumatics, welding and just sharpening my tools for the trade. I started getting it, and I always read a lot, like if I'm gonna do this, I'm gonna read up on what I'm doing. So, I just honed my craft. Then I decided I wanted to do plumbing. My friend owned the plumbing company, so he was paying me like $27 bucks an hour, plus training me, and I just told him, "I don't want you to waste your time or your money, I'm not gonna be passionate for this." But literally like two days later, I'm working for Saint Paul Public Schools. They hired me as an equipment repair tech to repair a lot of the nutrition service equipment throughout the district. That's how I met Philando [Castile]. I was repairing a lot of the nutrition service equipment throughout the district, milk coolers, ovens, microwaves, rooftop condenser units, and walk in freezers, whatever they have in the kitchens that make their nutritious service operation run.

I actually met Philando because one of his ovens was broken. The oven came from somewhere overseas; I remember the schematics being in German, I think. I'm pretty handy, I just don't read German. So, I called 'em back, "I need these schematics in English." I remember it took a long time to get the part, and then I had to figure out the schematics, and I'm calling to Germany, and I can remember the red tape that I'm going through to get this oven, and when I get there Philando has the meanest look on his face, like no matter how hard he tried to be mad, it was always like a silly smirk on his face so like you can't convince me you're mad. "Man, why's

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2 At the time of this interview John worked for the Saint Paul Public Schools as a Machinist.
it taking so long to get my oven done?”, and then he’s laughing, but I know he’s pissed ‘cause he only had one oven. I can’t even explain it. I would never take him seriously when he was angry, because of his glasses. I always thought he was a nerd. Man, you can’t convince me you’re mad at me, you’re gonna have to do a better job, even if you’re mad. But one of the first times that I met him was because it took a long time to get his oven, and we’re talking, and I can remember telling him, I can remember this conversation like yesterday, we were talking about how I represent the person who has taken so long to get your oven done, but that’s not my fault. I can remember telling him that when I show up people only see this blue uniform and the part I have in my hand, and “Damn it, why’s it take you so long,” not knowing what I had to go through to get this part. I had his oven running, it’s fired up and now he has two ovens. I did a good job of disarming, and making him laugh, and making him see that it’s not my fault, it’s not even the district’s fault, it’s these people.

Well it is the district’s fault, because they keep buying these foreign parts. But we just grew a bond from that, and every time I would get a work order to go to his school, I’m telling you, it was always like it would be a job probably take me 30 minutes, but I’ve been there for an hour and a half just talking and laughing, and we’d sometimes have some very deep conversations, like we talked about a lot of stuff. Now I can honestly say I can see him playing chess. I never played chess with Philando, but I could see him playing chess, ‘cause he was very articulate, he was a thinker, so he’d be sitting back thinking, and then he’d speak. I noticed this now after he’s passed, now I notice a lot of things about Philando that I didn’t, I didn’t even pay attention to it.

SHARON: Did the two of you spend any time outside of school district together?

JOHN: Mostly at the school. I have friends that I hung out with after work, and Philando had friends he hung out with after work. I probably saw him a couple of times outside the job. I don’t think Philando went out to bars much or hung out. I would see him sometimes, I’d be grabbing beer at the liquor store or something like that, I’d see him, but we never hung out. He would always say, “Man we gotta hang out.” But he was my friend from work, and I’d see him in the neighborhood a lot.

SHARON: So, take me back to the night when he was killed. When did you know?

JOHN: The night before Philando was killed I spoke to Philando about Alton Sterling [37-year-old Black American shot and killed by Baton Rouge Police Officers on July 5, 2016]. The day before Philando was murdered I can remember us talking briefly, and it was like normal conversation, because it had happened so many times, and we were like numb to it. Honestly, the outcome of what was gonna happen to the officers and things like that, we talked about that, ain’t nothing gonna happen to [the officer] ‘cause the law. We talked about it honestly, and then the very next day it happened to Philando. The ironic part is I saw it, like I’m scrolling through social media, and I saw it.
SHARON: You saw the video as it was happening?

JOHN: Yes, but I didn't know it was Philando, because it was Diamond Reynold's video. It was this posting that was going viral, so I just scrolled right past, ‘cause I didn't wanna see it. The next morning I wake up at five AM, so I could be at work at six AM, and I'd always turn on the news, and it says Philando Castile on the bottom, and then I see the sirens, and then his picture shows up, and I'm like, oh my God, that's Phil, whoa. And I woke everybody in the house up, I screamed to the top of my lungs, “They killed Phil.” And everybody's like, “Who's Phil?” And then I get a call from the director of nutrition services [Stacy Koppen], she said, “I heard about your friend, I know you guys were very close,” so she said, “We have crisis people. Come in if you need to talk to somebody.” I had never talked to Philando's mother, but I was trying to figure out a way to talk to her and let her know who I was. I can remember wanting to take off work, but I didn't take off work, because Philando was a part of our family, as far as Saint Paul Public Schools, in that I can remember knowing that our family's gonna need everybody. I can remember thinking that. And when I went to work it was just like I didn't even wanna be there. I didn't wanna talk. This is the day after everything. I didn't wanna talk. I can remember having the work order to fix something at Ramsey, and it was blocked off, everything was blocked off, and I didn't know what was going on at the mansion, but Ramsey Middle School was right up the street, so I get a message on my phone, and I look at the message, and it's Clarence Castile on my message at the mansion speaking.

I'm in my Saint Paul Public Schools work van, in my uniform, with my ID and things of that nature, and I can remember thinking I need to go up to the mansion. I went to the mansion, and I remember this, this is like the day after it happened, I met a lady named Monique Collier. Her nephew was murdered by Saint Paul Police. I can remember meeting her, she gave me the microphone to speak, and the only thing I could think to speak was what I had on my body. I had on my Saint Paul uniform which represented somebody that fixes ovens, somebody that works for a company. This uniform that I have on, I remember speaking that, “This uniform saves my life a lot.” I can remember speaking and breathing that into the microphone.

SHARON: The uniform, you were saying the uniform saves your life, because it gives you a certain credibility, or respectability with a cop?

JOHN: Mm hmm. I can remember saying that, Sharon, because I wanted people to know that when I take off this blue uniform, that I am just as dangerous to society as Philando was perceived to be every day, especially driving through Falcon Heights. Like driving through that stretch of Larpenteur, we get profiled even when they're not looking for somebody. We get profiled even when there wasn't a burglary or a robbery, we get profiled. So, we just knew not to drive down that stretch of Larpenteur, unless we were in our professional uniform.

That give us a “he knows who I am,” “he knows I'm not a thug.” I can remember talking about that over the microphone and saying that Philando wouldn't have got killed had he had on a nutrition service hairnet, and his coat and his glasses. But because he had on a baseball
hat and jeans, and the urban gear.... that's pretty much what got him killed. I remember that day just like yesterday, because when I got off work, I changed clothes on purpose, so that I can come back to the mansion, and then I spoke. And I wanted people to see the difference in the clothes that I wear every day. These clothes get me killed. This hood I have on gets me killed. Officers don't humanize our clothes, our hoodies, our jackets, our shoes, they profile us. And Philando's fate was, he was profiled because of his costume, because of his skin complexion, because of his nose, but had he had on just the badge that said I'm a Saint Paul Public School employee, he'd still be living. I wanted people to know that.

SHARON: It sounds like right from the start you found your voice to speak these truths. And had you done that before?

JOHN: No.

SHARON: Did you know you had it in you?

JOHN: No. I was mad. I was getting mad because people were bashing my friend, in the media they were talking about he smoked marijuana, he's endangering someone's life, the kids, and I'm thinking, I watched Philando navigate the special needs of the kids without looking at the papers because he memorized every one of these kids. He knew every last one of those kids that came through his line. And he hadn't been at that school for a long time. I don't know if you guys knew that. Philando hadn't been at JJ Hill that long but knew all those kids. So, we're not gonna turn the victim into anything other than what he is. He's the victim here. What he's done doesn't justify where he's at right now. So, you're not gonna bash my friend. Did you know Philando played chess? Did you know he likes to play video games? This is what I want you to know about my friend.

SHARON: … to humanize him.

JOHN: This is why I was angry and upset. So that's pretty much why I came outside, because there wasn't really nobody saying that. People were just mourning and angry, but all along allowing media to portray my friend, and at this point I had already had an earful from Philando's mother, so I really knew how he was raised.

SHARON: So how did that come to be? Because you didn't know her before.

JOHN: No, I didn't know her before. Actually, I left Mama Val a message, she's my mother now. That's my mother, yeah I love Mama. I found out that one of my cousins is related to Valerie Castile's family, and so that makes us kinda related. But I was reaching out to my cousin because I wanted to be one of the pallbearers. He's like, “Just call her,” and I called her, and she called me back. And at this point they'd already had the tuxedos and everything, and so I just said,
An Interview with John Thompson

“I’ll just be there as support.” But she would see me, and I kept going, even after the funeral, I kept going, and I kept going, and I kept going, because one thing she said to me right after he was buried was “Keep your foot on their neck, and apply pressure. That’s how we gonna change something.” So, I just kept going, and kept going, and kept going, and any time I would speak, I would always call her, “Okay, I’m getting ready to go here, is there anything you don’t want me to say? Because I don’t think I have a filter today.” Or I called her for advice like, “I don’t think I should say this. I wanna be able to also represent you.”

A couple weeks after Philando was murdered my mom got injured, and she had an infection in her leg, and the infection went through her body, and my mother died. And so, I didn't have a mother. And I can remember Philando’s mother telling me, “Yes you do, yes you do. You get out of that rut. Your mother wants you to keep going, and you do have a mother. You want me to make some dinner for you?” And I can remember her making baked chicken, macaroni and cheese, cornbread, and oh man, it was something, it was a huge dinner. She makes the best macaroni and cheese in this state. But I can remember her making me dinner, and just pretty much telling me that “I’m your mother.” And I’m definitely her son, and I’m just one of her sons. She has millions of sons now, but I’m definitely her son. And she supported me ever since my mom passed, she’s been in my corner.

SHARON: Well, it sounds like you supported each other.

JOHN: Mm hmm. She helps me more. I could call her at two o’clock in the morning, and she’ll pick up the phone. “What the heck do you want?” But she’ll pick up the phone and she’ll talk to me. Or I have a problem and I’d be angry as I don’t know what, and I’ll pick up the phone and she’ll say something like, “Okay, so now you’re done being angry?”

SHARON: I don’t know Mrs. Castile, but everything I have heard about her sounds like she’s a really remarkable person in terms of how she has dealt with all of this, and with a sort of a “groundedness,” and I don’t know whether together the two of you moved from the anger, or took that journey of being able to turn a corner and say, ‘yeah I’m angry, but I wanna do something.’

JOHN: She said to me one time, “You have two choices, you can be mad as hell, or you can stand up and fight.” You can’t be both, because you’re not a good fighter when you’re mad. It makes sense, you don’t make rational decisions when you’re mad. You don’t think when you’re mad. So, I have to lose anger, that season’s passed. Do I get angry? Yes, but I just have to be angry, I can’t start trying to think and be angry. I would think after anger. I hope that makes sense.

SHARON: Total sense. Is there a clear point where you made that switch, or has it been an evolution?
JOHN: There was a clear point when I made that switch. We tried to get the [new] training fund named after Philando Castile here at the [Minnesota Board of Peace Officer Standards and Training] POST. And I can remember a lot of retired sheriffs, a lot of retired police officers, a lot of police officers throughout this whole state wrote the POST board in opposition. Keep in mind that the governor allotted for this training. They would’ve never got that amount of money, had this event, this murder, not have happened at Falcon Heights. They would’ve never gotten that money. They got a nice training facility here in Saint Paul. [Uncle] Clarence Castile was on the POST board, and I can remember him being the only person that wasn’t in opposition of having the training fund named after Philando.

SHARON: The only one?

JOHN: The only one. The only one that said he wanted that building, the rest of the post board was no, no, no, no, no, no. We had heartfelt speakers there also, after I seen the cold heartedness on their faces, but then afterwards there’s a Minneapolis Police Federation, their go to guy is Bob Kroll, he stood in front of the cameras and he says, “John Thompson who’s been “in all the anti-police rallies, and speaks about anti-police everywhere he goes is a known convicted felon.” And me and Valerie Castile were sitting right here, and someone’s recording him saying this. He says, “And Valerie Castile has pretty much got on TV and called for execution of cops.” I was very upset, because I’ve never been convicted of a felony, I’ve never been charged with a felony. But then I thought, it’s a whole lot of cameras in his face, and I see what he’s doing.

SHARON: He’s baiting you.

JOHN: I don’t know if he understands that there are too many elders in my ear, like, “John there’s another way to skin a cat,” “John this,” and “John that.” So, what he was trying to do, I immediately saw that. Defamation of character. I’m not gonna fall for that one. I fell for that too many times, and people already perceive me to be this angry black man. Well I’m angry, I’m angry enough to fight and now I’m gonna prepare myself with the tools to fight with. So, I just start outwitting ‘em. They try to bait me still. I just don’t respond because my silence is more deadly.

SHARON: You have been so incredibly wise through all of this and it all comes from inside you, ’cause you didn’t study it, no one told you… other than your mom.

JOHN: That’s funny you say that, because I’m actually doing this class, this project management course I’m taking, it’s an online course. And I was nervous at first, because I’m thinking, project management, aw man, and as I’m getting further and further into these courses, I realized that I’ve already had these skills all my life. I’ve done project management. When I decided I’m gonna rip all my kitchen tile out, when I decided I’m gonna do a tub surround for someone,
I had to actually plan how much it costs, plan if something goes wrong, the what ifs, prepare for something to go wrong. I was always, in Chicago we lived by that motto, proper preparation prevents poor performance, the five Ps, proper preparation prevents poor performance.

SHARON: And who used to say that to you?

JOHN: All my friends, every last one of my friends and my parents. A lot of people in Chicago know about the five Ps, proper preparation prevents poor performance. They probably won’t admit it, but they know about it. This is something that was taught to you, if you’re from Chicago. I had project management skills, I just didn’t have a certificate. But it’s very easy for me, the things that you guys see me do now, I’ve always had that, I just didn’t have a certificate. I’ve always had that, I just didn’t have the platform. Now that I’ve been doing, it’s been what, like three years now almost? This is what God put me on this Earth to do. That’s my calling. I have never been more passionate about anything in my life ever. Besides machinist work, I’ve never been more passionate about anything in my life. I can remember talking to our current mayor [Melvin Carter III], and I said to him, “Man, you speak very well.” He said to me, “Well you speak very well too.” I said, “What’s the secret?” He said, “You know what? A wise man once told me, man, when you get in front of that microphone, just speak.”

SHARON: You ever have notes with you?

JOHN: No.

SHARON: Do you plan out what you’re gonna’ say?

JOHN: Oh yeah. I think it through. I may write a few things down, but I won’t show you, because I’ve already read it, and I know where I’m going. I have the bullet points right here, cause I’ve already read it all. I’ve become very good at that. I’ve always been that way. I could look down, I could write down an entire speech, and I’ll set it down on the podium, and I’ll start out and then a certain feeling will come out, this whole speech. So, I think that I’ve always had that in me, I just never had to use it. Now there’s nowhere I go where I don’t have to use it.

SHARON: When did you create Fight for Justice LLC?

JOHN: I did that right after I was starting to do a lot more community outreach. I started going to different places and speaking to youth, and I can remember going to Stadium View, which is a juvenile detention center in Minneapolis. They’re in jail. And I can remember speaking, and I stayed there for almost four hours. I can remember one kid, his story was heartbreaking. He molested his sister, but when I was talking to him, telling him, “this condition that you’re in right now is not your life.” He was six feet tall. I can remember telling him positive things, because he’s the toughest guy in the prison, and I can remember telling him that. I can remem-
ber telling the correctional officer that also, “he’s supposed to be tough, he’s in jail.” “Well, I see him crying all the time.” “He’s supposed to cry, he’s in jail. He’s 16.” I can remember saying that to him. And the kid was like, “nobody here has ever been as authentic. We hear these speeches about how you can motivate your life and it just sounds like wah, wah, wah.” The director said, “John, you know there’s a guy came here, he spent like 30 minutes, and they cut him a check for $2500 bucks.” She said, “you need to get your EIN number. You need to be licensed by the state to do this.” And I started noticing, a lot of times I was being pulled in different directions, and people weren’t even making me a sandwich. I would travel to Virginia, Minnesota, on my gas and I’m giving presentations, and I’m facilitating, and I’m speaking, and I’m doing this because this is what I feel God wants me to do, but God don’t want me to be a fool either. So, I listened to Brenda. Brenda Johnson’s running for the commissioner’s seat in Minneapolis. I can remember her giving me that advice. Saint Anthony Villagers for Community Action are serious about changing the paradigm and seeing that played out. So, I can remember them helping me start my LLC.

SHARON: So that was within the first year?

JOHN: Within the first year. That was the reason why I started the LLC, because when people start surrounding you, and telling you that “you’re inspirational,” and “I really love what you’re doing,” people started to see what I didn’t see, ‘cause I still have a hard time seeing that now. I just wanna be me, but people say that, John, you are huge. And they were saying that back then. I see it now, I do see it now, because I have to be very cognizant of what I say, and have to be very, very careful now, because I have a lot of people watching me. So that’s the part I don’t like.

SHARON: What kind of people are watching you?

JOHN: The people that I need to sit down at the table with, and to help change the conditions in our community are watching. And I think I’ve done a good job now of letting them see that I’m not this angry black man, that I am actually somebody who wants change, and I’m actually somebody who will sit down and reason. Somebody who will sit down and that will stay down until we come to a conclusion. Before, people weren’t so receptive. ‘He’s a protestor.’ ‘He’s an angry black man.’ ‘He’s mad because his friend was murdered.’ They didn’t have any idea that I’m articulate when I speak, that I’m very concerned, not only about police and police brutality, not only about what happened with my friend. I don’t want that to happen to my nine-year-old son, and I don’t want that to happen to nobody else’s son, and in order to change these conditions, we gotta change the conditions they live in. So those are the players who are at that table, who can change the conditions that we live in. They’re watching me also, and I don’t wanna give them a perception of this is just a loudmouth who we can’t work with. I could be a loudmouth, but for the right reason.

SHARON: What are you most proud of in this work?
JOHN: Being able to change people's mind and knowing that I'm doing that. Being able to change people's perception of African American men and knowing that I'm doing it. I've witnessed that. You ever see these church shows, where the pastor will touch somebody on the head and they'll just fall out? I've been in church, and I've seen someone catch the Holy Ghost right next to me several times, and we were just standing next to each other singing. What happened there? I never thought that that was real, never. And then [after I spoke one time] this lady grabbed me, and she said, “John, you have changed the way I think,” and she starts crying. If that's what the Holy Ghost feel like, I'm shaking, and my body's tingling, because this a white woman and she grabs me, and I'm thinking that I did something wrong to her. She's crying. I'm just John Thompson to me. I've never in my life had someone tell me that I've changed their life. Then I see elected officials and politicians, and different congressmen, and people running for governor, and I'm in all these spaces that I've never been before in my life. And they're telling me the same thing, “John, honestly, I'm gonna work with you, and I'm gonna help you.” Before, nobody wanted to help me. Everybody was just like, oh my God, he's just an angry black yeller. I thank Melanie Leahy for that. Mel said to me, “In order to play the game, you need to learn how to play the game. You can't just pull the Monopoly board out and figure out how to play. You gotta read the directions, and I'm gonna show you how to play the game.” She said, “Baby you can catch a whole lot more bees with honey.” I can remember that too. That's why Mel's my good friend, that's my mother too.

SHARON: And how did you meet her?

JOHN: Oh, wow Sharon, I met Melanie Leahy at the city council meeting in Falcon Heights. I was yelling at Peter Lindstrom, the mayor, the city manager, the councilmen, I'm yelling at them because I wanna know what is it that you're gonna do? We were at every city council meeting. At this particular meeting there was no public input, there was no public speaking. They [the Council] were only speaking, and they had to speak out loud for the recording. I didn't know that; I could care less. I know two weeks ago my friend was murdered here. And everybody with me, and it was probably about 350 people with me. Everybody with me, we don't care, we don't care about your budget. We were very upset, 'cause we wanted to know, let's get to this topic right here. It's still business as usual, it's still business that has to go on. As I look at it now, there's still business that had to go on with that city, regardless to what happened to Philando. And that's exactly what was taking place in this particular meeting. So, I understand what Melanie was saying, when she said, “You don't even know how to play the game.” When she was talking to me, a lot of the people I was with were pulling me away from Melanie. Like, she's one of them, they hired her to silence the crowd. And she grabs me again, and this time she grabs both of my hands, because I've spoken, and I've spoken to Peter Lindstrom, and I'm telling him that I'm here, even though my mother is on her death bed, I'm here. And I started crying, because I'm sad. And she grabbed me, and at this point it's no more about Falcon Heights, it's no more about Philando, it's no more about any of these people here. She grabbed my hands and she squeezed 'em in a way that my mother squeezed my hands. And
she says something to me that my grandmother said. My Great Grandma Ella Mae Banks said, “When there’s chaos, just pray.” Melanie said, “Baby, come here, let me pray with you.” So now everybody that’s talking to me, I hear a lot of what’s in the background, but I hear this in slow motion, let’s pray. And so we went to the front, and she grabbed my hands, and she prayed for me, and she prayed with me for about a good 20 minutes, and then she gave me her phone number, and she let me go back in there, and she didn’t pressure me, she didn’t say, don’t go in there and talk. She gave me her number, and she said, “I’m gonna keep praying for you.” I gave her my number, and since then, she’s taken me out to lunch one time, me and my wife, she’d taken us out to lunch, and she said, “I’m gonna be your spiritual mother.” And at this point I’m yelling at –

SHARON: Peter [Lindstrom]?

JOHN: Not Peter, I’m yelling at people like Tony Cornish,\(^4\) and I’m yelling at these guys. And she said, “I see you, but you gotta remember the honey in the jar?” I didn’t know what happened with Tony Cornish was gonna happen. I didn’t know that. But I can remember telling him that next year you will not have this seat. I can also remember Melanie telling me, “Didn’t I tell you?” She was like a coach though, you know how you always have the tools, but you just don’t quite know how to use ‘em? So, Melanie’s like “this is a phillips screwdriver here, and the only screws you can turn with that have a cross here, and this is a flathead, and this is an allen wrench.” Melanie is that person who showed me how to use the tools that I already had. She didn’t have to give me tools, she said, “You already have the tools. Choose the right one. John, your voice is like the tools you use in your trade. Sometimes you walk in a room, and you gotta use a jackhammer, and sometimes you just use sandpaper, smooth it out. Sometimes you gotta use the jackhammer and then use the sandpaper, but you’ve got the tools.”

Well, I guess that’s how I got here, it’s because I started using the tools that I already had and didn’t even know I had in my tool belt.

SHARON: At that time, from the Falcon Heights City Council’s perspective, there were a lot of tough meetings so [Mayor] Peter [Lindstrom] reached out to [Professor] Kathy Quick, and said, “I need help.”

JOHN: I love Kathy too.

SHARON: Peter and Kathy knew each other previously, and at that point they were putting together the task force, and Melanie [Leahy] was a co-chair along with Randy [Gustafson]. And Kathy brought in Mariah [Levison from the Office of Collaboration and Dispute Resolution], me, and [Professor] Raj [Sethuraju] to help with the community conversations. Can you talk

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\(^4\) State Representative from Southern Minnesota who posted on his facebook page a picture in support of Officer Yanez. [https://minnesota.cbslocal.com/2016/07/28/tony-cornish-philando-castile-officer-shirt/]
about them, did you wanna go to those community conversations? What did you think about them?

JOHN: No, actually I didn’t wanna go because first of all, I figured they would only pick people who weren’t affected by the tragedy. They would only pick people who were residents of Falcon Heights, and it was just gonna be like every other meeting that I went to. I’d been to several meetings that nothing ever came out of it, but this city has an opportunity to do something different.

I honestly thought that they could flip the switch and get rid of Saint Anthony Police, and that’d be the end of it. I was dumb to the process, is what I’ll say. So, I’m not gonna come to any of these meetings, because it’s a waste of my time and everybody that’s with me, they’re not coming either. All the people who stood in solidarity with me, we weren’t coming to a doggone task force meeting, because this is just to quiet the crowd. And I didn’t attend, and Melanie kept calling, “Baby just come to this one.” “I’m not coming.” “All right.” Then she’d call again, “Come to this one.” Peter Lindstrom called and invited me. Valerie Castile called me, and it was the last one. Melanie had called me at least six or seven times, trying to get me to come, and she’s persistent, but she wasn’t forcing me. She’s like, “All right, baby.” And she’d call at the next meeting, “You know we’re having another one, you wanna come?” Valerie Castile called me, and she says, “Melanie has been talking to me, and she says she’s asked you to come.” She said, “I went to one of ‘em. You should go.” And Philando actually talked to me that day. The day I went, Philando was like, “Man, just go and see. Go, if you gotta get loud, get loud.” I was going to actually get loud, and when I walked in, Peter Lindstrom was in there, and we were in group discussions, but he’s saying stuff like, “I’m just a new mayor.” He’s saying stuff like, “I became the mayor because I wanted to make a difference, and this shit just fell in my lap.” He’s saying that. He can’t say that from behind a bench at the city council. I see a human being now, and he had tears in his eyes. I was just on his front lawn, like “you have my friend’s blood on your hands.” I had no idea; I didn’t think what if somebody did that to me, and I didn’t know what to do? That’d be very intimidating. I didn’t think about how hurt my kids would be if I was the mayor of the city, and people were calling me. I didn’t think about that. I didn’t think that until I saw Peter Lindstrom at the [community conversation]. He’s like, “what is it that the community wants?”

Peter Lindstrom was talking in a way that I’ve never seen a mayor talk before, because they have to be a certain way. I had only seen mayors on TV, I’ve only seen ‘em behind the bench, I’ve never seen ‘em in a community setting, where they’re speaking and could care less how politically correct. At this particular time, he wasn’t politically correct Peter Lindstrom, he was very vulnerable.

SHARON: and authentic?

JOHN: He was authentic. I could feel for a man who has tears in his eyes. “This just fell in my lap. I’m trying to fix it. I have no idea how to fix it.” At this point it’s like a little light, then I’m telling ‘em, “if you guys worked together, there’d be a [positive] spotlight on Falcon Heights, and other states will come here, and they’ll ask how you did it.” I’m telling these guys this, but I’m
not practicing what I preach. I didn't know that in order to change you have to be part of the process, I just want you to change. Had I not come to the [community conversation], I’d have missed out on a great opportunity. A lot of this stuff that you see me doing now is because I attended and I know the process.

There are some bad elected officials, so I can't say I will never yell at elected officials again, there's just some that just need to be yelled at, but I would never treat another human being, the way I treated Peter Lindstrom. I can call him right now, and he's fine. Let's go to dinner. I thought that he knew. I should've sat down and had a conversation with him before, but I was so angry, because there was nothing but meetings after meetings, after meetings, after meetings.

Everything that he said he wanted to do from the time it happened, he did. Everything he said, even when we were giving him hell, he did. He told us we're gonna form a task force. “We don't care about your task force. We don't need this.” We were shooting down every idea. Everything that he said he was gonna do for that city, he's done. And he actually said, “What do you want?” and the city said, this is what we want.

I can honestly tell you, I can drive down Larpenteur Avenue now, until I get to Saint Anthony, then I get nervous. But I can drive down Larpenteur Avenue, and I see Ramsey County sheriffs, and they wave. I can go to the Philando Memorial right there, and they'll pull over and engage. They're human. They actually say, my name is officer A, B, C, honestly because of what the community said they want in their police officers. So, if someone was to ask me, how does it work? I have a blueprint, I've watched it. I actually have a blueprint, I watched it work. And for people who are fighting and resisting, I was there, so I actually know, you have to be a part of the process, or you are just complaining.

There may be times when you have to be the loudest mouth in the room, so that they know you're serious. But then there's also a time when they know you're serious, or you're gonna have to sit down and show you're serious. I don't know how else to put it, but the city of Falcon Heights, they have beautiful flowers coming out of the concrete now.

Melanie [Leahy]'s the new city councilwoman, and Randy [Gustafson], and Sack [Thongvanh]'s the city manager. Sack has always been even keeled, laid back, he never showed anger, he had a poker face all the time. But then just talking to Sack, he knew the process would work. I guess he just had to get people to buy-in. I'm glad that they didn't buckle. I'm glad that they called you guys.

The reason I came back [to the community conversation] was 'cause I saw brother Raj [Sethuraju], like, okay Peter Lindstrom has Raj here? Raj is one of us. That's my brother too. Raj is here, wait a minute, there has to be something, 'cause Raj is not gonna buy into no crap. So there has to be something here. I'm more interested in seeing if Raj could help change these people's mind, and I could help him in any kind of way. I'm more interested in helping him because now I have an ally right here. They did a very good job changing the way that people view Falcon Heights, changing the way that people view the city, the council, and the mayor. There are still a few people who think that it can be something different done, but as far as Falcon
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Heights, they don't even know, there's so many cities gonna come and ask them how, why. So many places.

SHARON: Unfortunately, this is not going be the last city that will have to deal with this.

JOHN: But [now] they have a blueprint. You're absolutely right. I always say that too. It's like these snuff movies that we watch, and there's another one coming soon to a television set near you. There is. We just had one in LA with the last name Clark [Stephon Clark]. We just had that, and he was at his grandma's house.

SHARON: In the back yard.

JOHN: It always amuses me why people seem to think that anger's not an emotion that you should have. Like what other emotion should you have when you see stuff like that? Anger's an emotion that's gonna be the initial emotion. People have to process this, and we shouldn't have to digest this at all. But we have to know, it's a part of reality.

SHARON: Do you think that there needs to be an incident that makes people come together to talk and to change? Did Philando have to be killed in order to do that? Falcon Heights is just one community. There are how many other communities around us? Could/should all of those communities be doing what Falcon Heights did and have these kinds of conversations?

JOHN: You know what? Yes, they should, because there is a reason why it's happening. There are several reasons why it's happening. If we can change those, then we won't see it anymore, but until we're able to all come together and share those stories, it won't change. I'm a firm believer in in order to change the conditions in our community, we have to change the conditions in our community. So, if you don't wanna see another young African American man get killed at the hands of the police, you have to change the conditions they live in. If you don't wanna see another African American male get profiled by the police, you have to change the conditions they live in. What makes an African American young male think it's cool to have his pants sagging all the way down? I'd profile your butt if I was a cop, honestly, but now I'm starting to see, a lot of times we don't do a good job for ourselves. And I'm starting to see very prestigious, very educated black men wearing their pants like that, not knowing that you will get profiled. I don't care how you wear your clothes. If that's the style, that's the style.

SHARON: People should be able to wear whatever they want, even if it's not what I would wear. It certainly is not a reason to be killed. Are you hopeful that things are changing?

JOHN: I'm gonna make sure things change, I'm gonna be the change that I'm looking for, it'll start with me, and it'll work on everybody else. So yes, I am hopeful, I don't have time for doubt. I am actually a change agent. I like to consider myself a professional black man. I've seen things

change in just one city within what, a year and a half time period? Philando Castile was responsible for a lot of elected officials that we have now in office deciding to run for office. Philando Castile is a conversation still worth having in a lot of different circles, and they’re still having it. They may not just say Philando Castile, but Philando has opened the eyes, a lot of eyes, and he’s talking right now, he’s actually talking in this room with you right now. He’s talking at Minnesota Art Institute, he’s talking when he, Philando just paid [\$45,000] odd dollars over to [Saint Paul District], I don’t know if you knew that.

SHARON: Yes, I did.

JOHN: Philando’s talking very loud right now and people are listening. But it doesn’t have to have his name on it, but when you asked earlier, did Philando have to die, I believe yes, I believe my friend was a martyr.

SHARON: It changed the trajectory of a lot of lives.

JOHN: Philando Castile is one of the reasons Colin Kaepernick\textsuperscript{7} doesn’t have a job right now. I do have hope.

SHARON: I wanna ask you one other thing about allies. What role do allies play, and what can allies do to support?

JOHN: There was a murder in north east Minneapolis of Justine Damond\textsuperscript{8} by a Minneapolis cop. A lot of my allies are white, and I always said to them, that sometimes you get into rooms I can’t get in. Sometimes your finances are larger than mine will ever be. So those are two areas that’ll help support a movement, because we need you. We need those white voices, we need the finances, and sometimes they have to open the door, and then say, this is my friend, ‘cause odds has it if I knock on the door, they’ll be like, no you can’t come in. But if I come in with a friend, and I’m just putting it that way to make people understand where I’m coming from.

Let’s go with grant writing. How many African American men know how to write grants? But I have allies who know how to write grants, who can get me in a position. I have different allies, and I wouldn’t be able to do any of this stuff, had I not had allies. Also remember this, black and white as far as race, is crazy. I’ve never seen a person this color [pointing to a white piece of paper], and I think I would remember it. We’re all human, and we’re all allies in this. We’re all what we call a community, from the Justine Damond and justice for occupation for Philando to these different people who have formed this community since these tragedies have

\textsuperscript{6} https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/school-lunch-debt-philando-castile/
happened in our community, allies included, we need your unity. We need your unity, and you can't spell community without?

SHARON: Unity.

JOHN: There you go. So those are the ways that allies can help. Speak, be unapologetic when you speak in these rooms, honestly let ‘em know exactly what's wrong. Call it out, call it out, because it's on system managers. Call it out in the areas where I’m not able to call it out. A lot of times I’ll call it out, and people will say, he's intimidating. I have two gears, there's first and second. I try to stay in first gear a lot, because second gear can be pretty intimidating. I'm not trying to intimidate you, I'm trying to open your eyes, and I may have to be a little bit louder. But there are people who have become allies of mine who know now, because they've taken the time to get to know me, that he's not intimidating. Now what do they call me? A Care Bear. He's a soft Care Bear.

I don't like that term though. But you have to convince the people who are still in their bubble, to let me in their bubble. Then when I get in their bubble, and they see that he's just a “Care Bear,” then I can start to change how you view people who look just like me. 'Cause I can come in here with my hat cocked, pants sagging, and be very articulate, but you wouldn't give me that chance based on what I have on. What about what's inside this shirt? I got a heart that beats. I have mother that really loved me. I had a friend who was really special, not only to me, but to the community, taken away from us. I don't have time to be angry at you no more, I don't have time to yell at you no more, I don't have time to be intimidating to you. I’m gonna show you how to love everybody. That's where I'm at with it.

I’m gonna back away, but first, I am gonna plant in your garden, and I’m gonna come back and pour some water on it. And I’ll leave you alone, come back and pour a little bit more water on it, I’ll leave you alone, and I’ll come back, and before you know it, you’re like, John, you just planted some beautiful flowers in front of me. “Hey, remember I told you. You just saw seeds and dirt, and every time you turned your back, I poured a little more water on it.” That's my blueprint now.

This journey that I've had has taught me more than any school I’ve ever been to, it’s taught me more than any life experience I've ever been through. This journey right here. I never thought I can cry in front of people, always man up. It’s okay to be emotional, it’s okay to be angry, it’s okay to be sad, it's okay to be talked about. People talk about me, that's okay. “Well they talk about Jesus Christ, John. Who are you? I can remember Melanie telling me that. Melanie said “John, who are you? They talk about Jesus, are you somebody special? You’re nobody, you’re just John. Come on now.” I would call her with some nonsense like that, so you can see why I say Mel's my mother.

SHARON: But give yourself some credit, you know who to reach out to, and when you need to talk.
JOHN: Sharon, you know what? Honestly, I’ve always surrounded myself by positive people, always, and I’ll tell you why, because as a kid my mom used to pick my friends. Even though I wanted to hang out with a knucklehead, she’d be like, “I’m telling you now, he ain’t gonna be nothing,” or “I’m telling you now, he’s gonna be standing in front of the liquor store begging for change, I’m telling you.” She would actually tell me what my so called friends would be doing, and I’m not even kidding you, every last one of ’em are doing exactly what my mother said they would be doing, every last one of my friends. I told my son exactly the same thing my mother said to me about every last one of his friends, and every last one of his friends are doing exactly what I told him. ‘Cause I watched, but you hope to break [the cycle]. I’m gonna change our conditions, there’s gonna be a paradigm shift. There ain’t gonna be too many more police shootings here, not just here in Minnesota, but throughout the United States. That’s my target, locally is fine, but if I could reach people outside of Minnesota, that’s my target, because there’s a way to change that, but you have to actually get people to buy in. You gotta get people to see that it worked for me. People see me, and they’ve seen what I’ve done, and how I’ve evolved from who I was and who I am right now. I don’t do this for recognition, I don’t get paid, it’s definitely not a paycheck. I do it because I’m serious. I do it because I’ve had conversations with God. I do it because I’ve had conversations with Philando, and with my mother, with Philando’s mother. This is why I do this, because this is my calling, this is what God put me on this Earth to do. It’s so easy for me to do stuff for free, it’s easy for me to do it, because God said go do that. God said to me, you’ve got a job, you’ve got to volunteer. Okay, okay, I’m very obedient. When I stop being obedient, I always bump my head and I wind up with a big old knot and need ice, and I’m calling Mel crying. So, I’m an obedient man, and I know that it’s gonna pay off. I know that at some point, I’m not gonna be able to do machinist work anymore, because they’ve already told me. Actually, the chief engagement officer [at Saint Paul Public Schools] told me at work, “You’ve outgrown this position.” So, I am worried about how I’m gonna support my family doing this, but I know this is gonna be what I do for the rest of my life. I’m a professional speaker.

SHARON: You are.

JOHN: And I dream about this, I don’t know if I shared this with you, but I dream about this a lot, I think I’ve had the dream probably a few days ago. It’s always a dream and I’m being called out from behind the curtain, and I walk out, and there’s a podium right there, and I look out, and there’s thousands of people, and I’m getting ready to faint, this is the dream, I’m getting ready to faint, and I look over the crowd, so I don’t see anybody and I don’t pay attention, and I just talk from my heart.

I have this screen behind me, and I’m just clicking, and I’m talking, and I’m clicking, and I’m walking, and I’m clicking, and I’m engaging the crowd, and I’m clicking, and then when I’m done, everybody’s standing up clapping. And then people are waiting to meet me, and they’re like, “John, thank you, that was very inspirational, and inspiring.” I’ve had this dream maybe 30, 40 times. So, if it keeps being a dream of mine, I know that this is my calling. And I do it now.
I just was at the brand-new comedy theater. I don’t think we had a seat in the house, but they have a monthly series called Assata Speaks.  Nekima Levy-Pounds owns Black Pearl and she does this monthly series, it’s like TED Talks. But, I just put on a power point presentation called “Beyond the Angry Black Man,” and Andre Koen, who is a friend of mine, is like, “John, don’t care how many times you do it, just keep doing it. Keep doing it until you get tired of it, and then when you get tired of it, do it some more, because it’s very powerful, keep doing that powerful.” I told him, I’ve done it a hundred times and he said, “Well, do it a hundred more times.” I said, “But, Andre I have two more power points.” “No, do the angry black man.”

I have put on this presentation, to me it feels like over 200 times. I’ve presented this at the Department of Human Rights symposium last year, I’m working on something else now, I wanna present that. And he’s like, “No John.”

The reason why I brought up Assata Speaks is because I’m in a crowd, I walk out, and there’s a screen with the Fight For Justice logo, and I had the clicker.

SHARON: So, it felt like the dream?

JOHN: Wow, I know what to say, but it changes. I still have the same images, but what I say changes depending on the feeling I get from the crowd. I’ve actually mastered an art that many don’t have, and I didn’t know that until one of the professional speakers came to me, like, “Have you ever done this before?” “Yeah, I’ve done it before, but not for this many people.” “Man, you have something that people go years without having that.”

I just want the truth to come out on that screen, and I think God has a mission for me, is what I tell this guy. So, it’s coming, I know it’s coming. And that’s my dream, that’s pretty much how I’m gonna feed my family, that’s how I’m going to provide for my family. I love being a machinist, I used to be passionate about being a machinist. I’ve never been more serious about nothing in my life.

SHARON: Well, now we just have to figure out how to make that dream real, live it.

JOHN: Hey, do you know about Toastmasters?

SHARON: Yes.

JOHN: I go to Toastmasters because they’re gonna train you on how to be [effective as a speaker] and I get there, and the guy who’s running the program says to me, “You’re John Thompson. You’re wasting your time here.” He’s like, “People here watch you.”

SHARON: Yeah, they’ve got nothing to teach you.

JOHN: That’s exactly what he said. He says, “You could stay if you wanna talk,” but he’s like, “Man, you got it, I don’t even know why they would send you here, you’ve got it. These people

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9 https://www.blackpearlmn.com/assata-Sharoneaks
here don’t have it and I’m telling you, we watch you. I can remember one of the other guys playing you on Facebook.” So, I’m thinking, okay, I just probably wanted that Toastmasters…

SHARON: certificate?

JOHN: You’re right. I’m trying to build this resume to guide me in the right direction. But if I got it, how do I use it? I don’t know how to figure that out. I’ve talked to several people who have done it, several people who I know, who are currently doing it. They’re like, “Oh John, we’ll put you in.” So far, it’s only you guys [DRI] and the Kettering [Foundation].

SHARON: Yeah, so I’m still hopeful that we’re going to able to help you reach an audience that would pay you. I know, you have to get to that next level where people are paying you to speak.

JOHN: I’m very patient. Patient is part of being obedient, and I’m following what Mel tells me to do to the tee. So, patience is one of the things that she definitely instilled in me. “John, you gotta be patient.” Without Mel, without Kathy Quick, without Peter Lindstrom, Sack, oh man, Randy Gustufson10. Randy is my twin brother now, I don’t know if you could tell the resemblance, but without those guys, I’d be probably still sad. I’d probably still be crying and having to go see a behavioral help specialist. I honestly, I don’t go see a behavioral help specialist too much, because I go into these rooms, and there’s an audience, and the audience is my behavioral help specialist.

SHARON: And you have to know that you’ve changed others, too. I remember the first conversation I had with the City of Falcon Heights. It was the first time I met Melanie too, and I can’t even remember what was said, but it was something so insensitive, so wrong, and there was a pause, and then Melanie just came in and said the most wonderfully understandable and corrective thing. And I thought, she’s brilliant. Not everyone started with an understanding of other’s experiences. But, through the work of the Task Force, with Melanie, with you, and with the Community Conversations, people learned.

JOHN: There was a moment at the Kettering Foundation where we had homework. You had to engage with somebody who you haven’t engaged with. I engaged with this cop. He’s crying, “I don’t want my son to be a cop,” and he’s telling me he lost a son. And he’s like, “How do I tell people and get people to feel how I feel?” I told him, “Do the same thing I’m doing. Honestly, I think that me and you should tell this story all over the United States, because people don’t know that there are police officers that don’t want their kids to be cops. People don’t know that you even cry, people don’t even know that you shop at Cub Foods. People don’t know if you barbecue… invite friends over? … do anything, or be anything other than a police officer?” And

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10 Randy Gustufson was the Co-Chair, along with Melanie Leahy, of the Falcon Heights Task Force on Inclusion and Policing and is currently the Mayor of Falcon Heights.
I'm talking to this guy, and he's like, “You know what, yeah, I've never seen a cop cry. I've never seen a cop say, ‘I'm tired of people judging us like this.’ I've never seen that.”

Where is he? Put him on TV, or put him in front of an audience, put him in front of people and make this cop the cop that makes people see the real person inside, ‘cause there's a person inside of his shirt that has a heartbeat. The guy was crying, “my son just called, he graduated from the academy, he's about to be a cop, and I don't want my son to be a cop ‘cause I just lost a son last year and I'm the damn police chief in this small town, so I'll be his boss.” He’s saying that to me and he starts crying, and it’s like I'm off guard with it.

I’m ready to go into all about how we need to have African American cops, and he took over the conversation, and then he said, “How do I get people to see what I see?” That's the same thing Peter Lindstrom did to me sir, I’ll have you know. Now, I don't see “officer so and so,” I see, his name is Paul, so I see Paul. I see Paul as somebody’s dad. I see Paul as somebody that wants to get off work and crack a beer and turn on his gas grill and put on a steak. We have no idea if cops ever take off, we think you're cops 24 hours. We never see you, and when we do see you guys in Walmart, you’re walking like you still got your gun holster on, and you’re ready to be a cop. You're like Robo Cop, when it's okay to just loosen up, to say, “I'm off work.”

Because of the exchange that I had with this guy, now, when I’m in stores and see police officers, I actually go and engage and say to them, especially African American cops, “thank you for being in our neighborhood.” ‘Cause people always tend to say, we need an African American cop in the neighborhood. Well, we got ‘em now, now let’s support ‘em. I get, “Aw John you’re for the police ‘cause you working with the police.” No, we now have what we asked for here.

The same thing just happened in Minneapolis. We have a new Police Chief Arradondo in Minneapolis. We asked for someone that looks just like us to represent us. He has his hand out. I don't know if people know that he has his hand out. So, when he asked me, “John, how come I can’t get community?” I have to answer when I don’t wanna answer. I say to him, I always have these weird analogies, and I said to Chief Arradondo, I said, “It's kinda like you’re in a long term relationship, and you cheat on your girlfriend, and then she takes you back. And then you cheat on her again, then she takes you back, and then you cheat on her again, and she takes you back. Eventually this woman’s gonna say, ‘This is a cheating ass man, and I don’t want nothing to do with him.’ So, when you ask how do we fix this… how do we build a bridge? Well, we keep trusting you, and you keep cheating on us.” I’m hoping that [Arradondo] is not the boyfriend that cheats on us, honestly. And then I see in the paper where he's like, “I’m not arresting people for low level marijuana offenses no more. We don’t have room.” I see him doing it, because a lot of the people that are being arrested are African American men. I just saw that last week in the paper. He's showing it.

SHARON: Trust is an interesting concept, because it’s hard to build, really easy to break, and then it takes time to rebuild. Trust doesn't happen overnight.

JOHN: You’re right. I know I wouldn’t wanna trust someone who kept cheating on me. I don’t care how much I love you, I’m always gonna sleep with one eye open. But I wanna trust. This thing with the police, I know at some point we will need them, but we don’t wanna to because we think they are going to cheat again.

SHARON: Right, small steps.

JOHN: I would like for every interaction to be a good outcome. They asked me about Ramsey County, what’s happening different now that make people more receptive to having Ramsey County Sheriffs in Falcon Heights? I observed one of the traffic stops of an African American male. Actually, I do that a lot. If I see a cop pulling over, I will pull over too and start recording. So, I saw a traffic stop and I didn’t know the cop, but he was a white cop. He got out of the car, and he said, “My name is ____.” He’s a Ramsey County Sheriff, so he’s like, “Yeah, that’s what we do.”

So, he got out of the car, and he says, “My name is Officer XYZ, do you know why I pulled you over? Okay, the reason why I pulled you over is because you’re going a little bit over the speed limit. Are you in a hurry today?” “Yeah, I’m in a hurry, I’m trying to get to ________.“ And, the guy didn’t even get a ticket. I was recording this, and then I turned it off. I don’t even have to record it. He’s actually dealing with a human being. So, this kid’s not scared, he’s not.

SHARON: Deescalated the situation.

JOHN: He dictated how that traffic stop was gonna go. I guess this officer said, “I don’t have time for the BS today, listen, my name’s officer so and so, I pulled you over because of this.” He didn’t even say, “Do you have any idea how fast you were going?” That’s one of those things, ‘cause when an officer asks me, “John, do you know how fast you were going?” “Yeah, I was doing the speed limit,” ‘cause I don’t want a ticket. But, then the officer’s like, “Oh now you’re being smart.” Honestly this officer, he dictated how this traffic stop was gonna go from start to finish. I honestly knew from what he was saying to the kid that he wasn’t getting a ticket, he wasn’t getting his car towed. He didn’t even ask for his driver’s license, he didn’t even ask for his license. He said, “Were you in a hurry?” “Yeah, I’m in a hurry, I work right up the street here at Pizza Hut, right there on the corner of Larpenteur, and I just don’t wanna be late.” The cop said, “Well you gotta slow down, because one accident and you’re late anyway.” And then he says, “I’m not gonna write you a ticket, I’m gonna cut you a break, ‘cause you’re just going right here.” He let him go. Honestly that has never ever, as long as I’ve been in the state of Minnesota, that has never happened at Falcon Heights, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever. I’ve always seen the tow truck coming, I’ve always seen another cop pull up behind him. There was just one Sheriff, not two Roseville cops coming in from Saint Anthony surrounding this car. It was just one Sheriff, normally when they see me, what are you doing here? He didn’t mind that I was
standing there, and I would turn my phone off, 'cause I was close enough to hear his conversation. I haven't shared that with many people, because I don't want them to get big headed, I want them to keep doing that. That's what works.

SHARON: That is a great end, to come full circle.

JOHN: Yeah, keep doing that.
Racially Diverse Community Conversations: Designing a Process That Includes All Voices

Jill Slipper Scholtz

I have had the privilege of attending several thousand hours of workshops and presentations on racial awareness, cultural competence, and racial equity in education. Hearing from national experts on racial equity and listening to people of color share their personal experiences have given me a deeper understanding of my own racial identity as a white woman and how interactions are shaped by race. These experiences have also helped me understand how many elements and challenges must be considered in order to plan community conversations that effectively value racially diverse voices. In this article, I reflect on patterns of interaction between white people and people of color that I have observed in more than a decade of facilitating and participating in community conversations.

Becoming aware of and identifying some of the patterns that contribute to marginalizing the voices of people of color can help organizers and planners of community conversations design a more racially inclusive space for dialogue. Further, becoming more aware of our own social location within any group can help us identify inaccurate assumptions that inhibit the development of racially inclusive communities.

While multiple patterns of behavior and interaction contribute to marginalization and inequity, I will focus on three: inaccurate assumptions, expecting assimilation, and the ignorance of privilege. Understanding (and hence being able to foresee) these barriers will help everyone involved in community conversations address and change practices that perpetuate racial discrimination in government and local community decision-making.

During my years of working in the public arena, I have noticed the continued marginalization of the voices and ideas of people of color in government and community decision-making. Communities, including those in Minnesota, have historically lacked representative diversity in leadership and decision-making positions. Promoting racial equity and inclusion requires white individuals in government and other public institutions to be culturally competent and racially aware in order to gain meaningful participation from the entire community.

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1 Jill is a licensed attorney and a mediator with over 15 years of experience with racial equity work. Her training includes conflict resolution, cultural competence, the art of mindful inquiry, restorative justice, adaptive leadership, Courageous Conversations about race™ and collaborative problem solving. She holds a certificate in Conflict Resolution from the Dispute Resolution Institute at Mitchell Hamline School of Law and she is a qualified neutral in the state of Minnesota. Jill has presented nationally on policy leadership for educational equity.

“How can we help you?”
During the winter of 2016-17, the Dispute Resolution Institute at Mitchell Hamline School of Law, the Office of Collaboration and Dispute Resolution, and the Center for Integrative Leadership at the University of Minnesota helped organize a multi-session, community conversation in the city of Falcon Heights, Minnesota. This was the location of the shooting of Philando Castile, a black man who was killed by a police officer who pulled him over on a neighborhood road for what was considered a routine traffic stop. The small suburb of St. Paul was distraught over the event, and community conversations were initiated by the City Council to work in concert with the Council’s Taskforce on Inclusion and Policing. My experiences facilitating in Falcon Heights proved to be an excellent example of a well-designed community conversation. However, even using the most well-designed process, it is important for facilitators to be continually aware of barriers to participation in order to ensure that the process remains open.

The circle dialogue format in Falcon Heights was informed by restorative justice circles, a method of restorative practice with roots in Native American cultures. It was modified for these sessions to account for time and other limitations. Participants were randomly grouped into circles of about 10; each circle was led by two facilitators/circle keepers. Members of the circle were asked to respond to a series of questions, one at a time, using a talking piece that was passed from one person to the next around the circle. When they held the talking piece, participants could reflect on the question or they could pass. Participants were encouraged to speak their truth using “I” statements and to listen to each participant’s comments without judgement or immediate comment.

At one of the sessions I helped facilitate, two of the 10 circle members were people of color. As the talking piece was passed around the circle, each participant spoke to the question of what s/he valued about the community. One individual, a white woman I will call “M,” spoke at length during her turn and offered lots of comments about her positive experiences with the city and government. Once everyone had a turn, M asked to speak again. I gave her the talking piece out of order and she proceeded to direct a question to the only black woman (“S”) in the circle. “How can we help you?” she asked. I paused the circle to remind the participants of the format for circle dialogue. Rather than single out an individual and put them on the spot, I suggested that M state her question as a “wondering” and anyone in the circle who wished to respond could do so when the talking piece was passed around again. This was to maintain full participation of the circle as a community and to ensure a safe space for everyone to speak their truth. M responded, “Well, now I don’t feel safe.”

This interaction played over in my mind as I drove home that night. And I have continued to reflect on, and discuss with others, the many layers of racial marginalization that are contained this interaction. I’ll use this experience to examine three common patterns of interaction in cross-racial community conversations.

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3 Members of the design team for this project included Mariah Levison, Ken Morris, Sharon Press, Raj Sethuraju, Kathy Quick, and Elizabeth Dressel.

1. Inaccurate Assumptions
When we interact with others, making assumptions about them seems to be our default mode. In his book *The Nature of Prejudice*, Gordon Allport explained that it is human nature to think in terms of categories. Additionally, Dr. David Premack developed “The Theory of Mind” to explain how our brains are designed to guess at and draw conclusions about what others are thinking, assumptions that subsequently guide our actions. But how we categorize and act on information is subject to the limitations of our awareness. One example of this limitation is called implicit bias.

Implicit bias comes from a collection of associations that are held deep in our unconsciousness. As Mahzarin Banaji and Anthony Greenwald explain in *Blindspot: The Hidden Biases of Good People,* we all carry implicit biases that may not be consistent with reality, or even with our conscious belief system. Thus, we are often “blind” to the associations that guide our words and actions. There exists a wealth of research on how our brains make judgements and sort information based on prejudice, stereotyping, implicit bias, assimilation/contrast, and in-group favoritism. Our judgement is limited and not always inclusive of other perspectives; particularly those of cultures or races that we have little experience with. The result is that inaccurate conclusions may be drawn without evidence and are frequently hidden from our consciousness. Since implicit bias and cultural influences operate unconsciously, good intentions are not enough to create the conditions necessary for effective dialogue. In order for diverse communities to gain participation and function more equitably, we must make a conscious effort to seek accurate information through intergroup contact.

In general, I have noticed that when a predominantly white group of individuals designs a community input session, organizers often make assumptions about what will affect the participation of minority or non-white populations. For example, during my years in school board service, a common excuse that I often heard from white people to describe non-attendance from parents of color at teacher conferences, is that “those parents don’t care.” Upon reflection, I have never actually met a parent who did not care about his/her child’s education. Even this brief examination of an assumption reveals the absurdity in concluding that people would care about their children differently based on the melanin in their skin. Data does not support the conclusion that not attending conferences proves a lack of concern; there could be many other reasons for non-attendance. Checking all assumptions with data is an effective way to eliminate the barrier of inaccurate assumptions.

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5 Allport, G. 1954 *The Nature of Prejudice*. Addison-Wesley.
7 Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, The Ohio State University [http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/research/understanding-implicit-bias/](http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/research/understanding-implicit-bias/)
Another barrier rooted in inaccurate assumptions is the concept of “illusory truth.” For example, when a statement has been repeated many times in predominantly white spaces, it can take on the appearance of truth even when there is no evidence that supports the statement and the assumptions behind it. Even with knowledge to the contrary, illusory truth can dominate one’s beliefs. Making such assumptions often perpetuates negative stereotypes. Sometimes, a simple logic check or further reflection can reveal a negative stereotype. Identifying assumptions and checking them with reflection or actual data is necessary to avoid the barrier of illusory truth.

Another common assumption is that (all) people of color experience poverty and need organizers to provide meals, transportation, and daycare in order to attend a community event. These may be the needs of some families regardless of race, and providing access is important; however, targeting services based on race or ethnicity will often backfire. Community members of color can certainly identify actions, even those meant to be helpful, that are based on a negative stereotype. Organizers and planners must take the necessary steps to know their communities.

Returning to the Falcon Heights example, the design team included multiple perspectives and checked themselves for inaccurate assumptions. It was also important that as a facilitator I continued to scan for inaccurate assumptions in the circle process. When M singled out S, the only black woman in the circle, to answer the question “How can we help you?” I needed to pause the conversation immediately. The question triggered my awareness of the pressure commonly put on people of color in predominantly white spaces to speak for their entire race. There are a number of assumptions in this question:

1) that S can speak for all black people;  
2) that M is asking for all white people;  
3) that S needs or wants help; and  
4) that M is in a position to help.

These assumptions are likely products of the brain’s categorization system and implicit bias. While M’s question may have had its source in good intentions, the unconscious interference of implicit bias makes intent irrelevant. The effect of M’s question, and the assumptions therein, must be stopped and examined to avoid supporting an illusory truth and the negative stereotypes that result in marginalization of black voices in Falcon Heights.

Using social science research and technical conclusions based on data is one way to eliminate bias. However, in my experience, the best way to determine how to provide a welcoming environment for all voices is to seek intergroup contact through relationships between an institution and diverse populations. The contact needs to be proactive, authentic, equal, widely representative, and based on common humanity. Including a person of color on a committee and expecting them to answer for all people of their race will not meet this need. It is also

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11 Id.
12 Plous, supra note 9 at 15.
helpful if the individuals designing community conversations are trained to recognize implicit bias. There are tools available that can increase our understanding of implicit bias and how it affects our judgement. Paying attention to verbal cues, using logic and data to follow through on assumptions, using tools to become aware of one’s own implicit bias tendencies, and seeking intergroup contact are all ways to mitigate the barrier of inaccurate assumptions when predominantly white groups design racial and culturally diverse community input sessions.

2. Expecting Cultural Assimilation
Culture is a term that is widely used, yet its meaning remains vague. For this article, I define culture as a multi-dimensional framework that shapes our identity and how we interact. In addition, I describe the common experience of people who identify as white in the United States as a culture of experiences and expectations. Drawing on the expertise of social psychologist Geert Hofstede, culture is often unconscious, and we do not always know when we are affected by it. This is especially true for a dominant cultural group. My own culture becomes much more noticeable when I step outside of my predominantly white environment. Therefore, it becomes vitally important for leaders who design community dialogue to not only be aware of other cultures, but to know and recognize their own culture.

There are layers of norms and expectations that dictate the “how” and “why” of the democratic process in the United States. A white family moving into a predominantly white community will have a sense of ownership over decisions that are made at the local level. To be heard by local decision makers, and to have a say in how tax dollars are being spent is not experienced equally by all racial populations. The cultural expectation to have a voice in decisions is uniquely “white.” An individual from a non-white racial group is often expected to assimilate to the dominant culture; that is, the culture that influences systems and institutions. This assumes that the way things are done is already the best way for everyone.

Dominant cultures often portray an inflexible control and paternalism that stifles creativity, progress, and authentic inclusion for the greater community. Expecting assimilation is a

For example, verbal cues can alert one to situations were implicit bias may be engaged. The descriptive phrase “those people” when used by whites about people of color separates people of color into a general “other” category with assumed common generalizations that are perceived to be different than those of people who are white. The use of “we” when spoken by a white person can also implicitly mean only white people, especially when the statement contains an assertion with which people of color cannot identify.

Bringing unconscious bias into consciousness can begin by having individuals take the Implicit Association Test (IAT). https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html. Project Implicit is a non-profit organization that collects data via the internet on hidden biases with the goal to educate the public about social cognition. The organization also has helpful tools to assist individuals in understanding their own implicit bias. https://www.projectimplicit.net/index.html

It is important to note that while race informs culture, race and culture are not the same. For example, two individuals who have similar social experiences based on the tone of their skin can be culturally very different based on their lived experience with language, religion, and ethnicity. Therefore, describing white as a culturally similar experience does not ignore the other cultural differences that shape a person’s identity.


Lee, J. Culture and its Importance in Mediation, 16 PEPPERDINE DISPUTE RESOLUTION JOURNAL 317 (2016).

Paternalism is the root of much of the dominant culture related to inclusion in this country. Originating from the Latin word pater, meaning father, paternalism assumes a male figurehead displays an assumed responsibility for the welfare of subordinates by exerting control and authority. https://www.britannica.com/topic/paternalism In 1971, Professor Gerald Dworkin illustrated the concept of paternalism in the law, and attempted to describe the circumstances where it was ap-
cultural expression of paternalism. Even if input is welcomed, a paternalistic entity may reinterpre
terpret the input to make it fit the cultural norms of the dominant culture. This is another way the barrier of expecting cultural assimilation preserved the status quo of inequity, even when it appeared that input was welcomed and given.

When paternalism becomes deeply ingrained in our country’s lawmaking, and the lawmakers lack racial and cultural diversity, assumptions based on implicit bias and homogenous white experiences become part of the laws of our nation. The assumption that “we” (as white people) know what is best, or that people of color need our help, continues to exist as a strong cultural influence, informing structures and systems that perpetuate racial inequity.

Organizers of racially diverse community input sessions need to be keenly aware of the effects of cultural influence and develop a process that effectively receives input from people of color. When M asked “How can we help you?” her question was loaded with paternalistic perspective. “We” assumes that there is some group that is in charge of helping. When the statement is made by a white community member, and the “you” refers to a person of color, the “we” is seen as referring to white people. By asking how to help, M reflects the cultural influence of paternalism that whites are in a position to help, and that S is subordinate. This is why I stopped the discussion when this question was asked during the Falcon Heights community conversation. I tried to take the focus off of the single person of color and placed the responsibility of answering the question on the entire group, allowing all group members an equal opportunity to respond to the question when they had the talking piece. This is consistent with restorative justice circle process in keeping a balanced community during discussion. The circle process is a great tool to “redress the abuse of power and the resulting imbalance” as long as the circle facilitator has “a critical consciousness about her own social location.”

Assimilation is a strong cultural expectation that is rooted in our country’s paternalistic history and legal system. Including other cultures and perspectives into the design process is an effective way to resist paternalism. If the diversity of the greater community is given power and control over designing a process for community conversation, the likelihood of it being inclusive increases dramatically. As the Falcon Heights conversations illustrate, circle process is a helpful tool for leveling the playing field for participants and for avoiding the assimilation barrier.
3. The Ignorance of Privilege

Awareness of explicit and implicit bias, as well as one’s own culture, are important skills for community leaders, especially for white leaders in diverse communities. But perhaps the most humbling and challenging awareness for a white person in this country is that of one’s own privilege. Peggy McIntosh introduced the phrase “white privilege” to describe the invisible unearned benefits that society confers upon white people as an institutional phenomenon.23 She lists those benefits metaphorically; it is as if white people have an invisible knapsack of unearned privilege.24 “Power from unearned privilege can look like strength when it is, in fact, permission to escape or dominate.”25 The power that comes from privilege is the power to be comfortable. The comfort comes from living in a society that is set up for your success.

White people in the United States live in an environment that is set up for their success based on cultural assumptions.26 People of color do not share that same privilege. Inaccurate and negative assumptions about people of color and the culture of paternalism create and perpetuate systems of inequality. As a white person, awareness of privilege, along with awareness of one’s own race and culture, is a necessary skill for influencing actions to equalize the power base of communities. In order to combat racial inequality, it becomes necessary to actively work against the systems that privilege whites.

When Beverly Daniel Tatum coined the phrase “the moving walkway of racism,”27 she was describing the effect of systems of oppression for people of color and the power that comes from a history of repeated norms that perpetuate that oppression because they become entrenched in society. So even if a white person’s behavior is not racist or prejudicial, she contributes to preserving systemic racism by just living her daily white existence (on the moving walkway of racism).

The foundation upon which I base much of my understanding of the world and the values that I hold changed as I began to learn about the experiences of people of color. Twenty years ago, I was not aware of my unconscious bias, the biases embedded in the culture that I lived in, or how I supported racial inequity. Cruising along the moving walkway of racism, it was easy for me to be blind to policies and practices that oppressed people of color. As a person with privilege living in a predominantly white environment, I did not see the effects of racism. If I witnessed racial inequity, it was easy for me to explain it as an isolated occurrence, and not part of a system. By not objecting to things I noticed, my silence endorsed racial inequity. My ignorance of privilege helped preserve the status quo of social racial hierarchy.

Only through many years of interactions and relationships with people of color have I come to better appreciate my own privilege and, alternatively, what it means to live without those

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24 Id. at 3-5.
25 Id. at 7.
26 Id.
same benefits. I now understand that regardless of my intent, the effect of my actions can either be consistent with the walkway, or in resistance to it. This has changed my perspective, behavior, and worldview. I am more aware of power dynamics within society and how they play out. Witnessing racism and then being able to deconstruct my perspective with a racially conscious person of color was critical to my learning. I have become more culturally cognizant and better understand my own racial identity. And I still make mistakes and seek multiple perspectives so I can continue to learn.

White privilege showed up in Falcon Heights, when M said she did not feel safe. M presented as a very knowledgeable, confident white woman. Her participation content, length of speaking, and perspective sounded like she was a leader in the community and a caring person. My own experiences as part of white culture made it easy for me to relate to her. Whether or not it was conscious, M understood that certain achievements and titles gave her the authority to speak without being challenged in many environments.

However, the circle process levels the playing field for all who are participating. It does not matter what racial, professional, or societal role you hold, everyone is equal. There is no place for privilege or the expectations that come with it. M did not actually have the privilege of stepping outside the circle format. As a facilitator, I should have not given her the talking piece out of order. Doing so allowed her to exert a social position that circle practice does not recognize, and I should have sent the talking piece around the circle again with a specific prompt. To correct the imbalance, I brought the question to the group as a whole. I believe this alerted M to her privilege and made her uncomfortable. When she stated, “Now I don’t feel safe,” she equated not being comfortable with not being safe.

Shortly after this circle exchange, I became aware of the work of Robyn DeAngelo and the term “white fragility.” Dr. DeAngelo explains that one of the ways white fragility presents itself is when white people equate discomfort with a lack of safety. Talking about race can be uncomfortable for anyone. The fear of being called racist is often cited as a reason white people avoid the topic of race. It is especially difficult for white people to get to a place where their reaction to being called a racist is one of curiosity about what they may have to learn about themselves or others. In fact, it is a common avoidance technique for white people to claim that the mere word “race” stifles conversation. However, it is the reaction to the word that stifles conversation, and that reaction is caused by white fragility. I’ve found that when I react to an assertion of racism with open curiosity and actually listen, the conversation is quite enlightening. Being cognizant of dynamics related to white privilege is crucial to providing a place where people of color can show up, speak their truth, be believed, heard, and honored. “[F]eeling safe” as a person of color in a predominantly white environment has a different meaning than when used to describe a white person’s experience in that same environment. It is important to understand these dif-

28 DiAngelo, R. 2018 WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE WHITE? DEVELOPING WHITE RACIAL LITERACY - REVISED. Counterpoint Books. See also, DiAngelo, R. 2018 WHITE FRAGILITY: WHY IT’S SO HARD FOR WHITE PEOPLE TO TALK ABOUT RACISM. Beacon Press.
30 Id.
different perspectives. A person's life experience with feeling safe is often different based on skin tone and the culture of the environment they live in.

Being aware of one's privilege and being able to maintain an open curiosity about race can lessen the effects of white privilege. This awareness, along with an understanding of implicit bias and ways that a dominant culture can perpetuate structural inequities are skills that will improve access to community decisions for people of color.

More importantly, building and maintaining authentic relationships with people of color reduces barriers to creating the understanding necessary for racial equity. Deep and intentional listening is a skill that helps build relationships and opens up new perspectives. The more we open space for other possibilities and points of view and listen to what is said, the better our communities will be. The circle process used in the Falcon Heights community conversations was an excellent tool to promote equality in participation. When assumptions, assimilation and privilege crept into the discussion, circle practice allowed me as the facilitator the ability to quickly correct the imbalance and bring the discussion back to the community conversation.

A Note About Perfection
The desire to design a perfect process can itself be a barrier to effectiveness. Similarly, fear of doing or saying something wrong in a relationship can paralyze us. Humility and curiosity are helpful when designing processes to counteract systems that have repeatedly marginalized or silenced the voices of people of color. When seeking multiple perspectives, it is helpful to suspend judgement about what is right or wrong and allow space and time for different perspectives to surface and be heard. Mistakes can bring critical new understanding. When we speak out, we may make a positive difference or learn ways to do better.

Conclusion
Understanding how specific patterns of interaction can marginalize the voices of people of color is helpful in creating a safe space for authentic dialogue. What is perhaps more helpful is increasing our awareness of implicit bias, white privilege, and cultural influences through self-reflection. My relationships with people of color are the source of most of my awareness of my own white privilege. I reflect more deeply on my beliefs when they are challenged by experience. It is critical to make a conscious effort to seek accurate information through intergroup contact in diverse communities. When personal relationships are authentic, meaningful, and honest, they help remove barriers across race and culture. In Falcon Heights, when M asked S, the only person of color in the circle, “How can we help you?” S responded, “Get to know me.”
Intentional Conversations Across Cultures: Utilizing Tribal-State Relations Training to Strengthen the Governmental Services to Indian and Non-Indian Minnesotans

Tadd Johnson, Rebecca St. George, and Joseph Bauerkemper

There are eleven tribal sovereign governments in Minnesota. They have the right to govern themselves, to govern their lands, their boundaries, businesses and taxes, so they have all the rights and responsibilities of any government. I worked with one district engineer who said, ‘We didn’t understand how to work with tribes – so we just didn’t.’ Linda Aitken, Minnesota Department of Transportation (MNDOT) Tribal Liaison and Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Band member.

The Training

An old saying in Indian country was: “You can tell where the reservation begins, because that’s where the paved road ends.” In 2013, Linda Aitken, Minnesota Department of Transportation (MNDOT) Tribal Liaison and Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Band member, decided to do something about the disconnect between the Indian tribes of Minnesota and the agencies of the State of Minnesota. Aitken organized other Tribal-State Liaisons, mainly Indian people who worked for the State, along with academics, state employees and tribal leaders and made recommendations to the Governor on a new Executive Order on Tribal-State Relations. Simultaneously, Aitken worked with the Department of American Indian Studies at the University of Minnesota Duluth (UMD) to develop a pilot course in Tribal-State Relations. The pilot course, which took place in June 2013, included forty-six state employees. The faculty and the training specialists from the State took note of the participant comments and by the fall the course was changed significantly.

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Some of the valuable lessons included:

- While it was important for state employees to hear the history of the policies between federal, state, and tribal governments, it was just as important that they hear the personal stories from Indian people as to how the policies impacted them directly.
- Rather than holding the course at a University campus, all future courses should be held on Indian reservations — in order for state employees to experience the sights and sounds of reservations — and encounter Indian people directly.
- State employees needed to be exposed to the Dakota and Ojibwe languages.
- The tribes should be allowed to provide their perspectives on state, federal, and tribal policies.
- The “Why Treaties Matter” exhibit should be on display at each training. The exhibit is a collaboration between the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council, the Minnesota Humanities Center, and the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian, and it includes treaties, contexts, and comments from all eleven Minnesota tribes.
- Each session should begin and end in accordance with the host tribe’s protocol for beginning and ending their own meetings — with an invocation, a flag ceremony, a drum group, and a travel song at the closing.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MNDOT) provides extensive staffing subsidy for the training because of its belief in the value of the training and desire to see the implementation of the training. The implementation team includes the training staff of MNDOT; Tribal-State Liaisons from several state agencies; the University of Minnesota Duluth American Indian Studies Department; the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council; and all eleven tribes of Minnesota.

The certificates awarded at the close of the two-day training come from the University of Minnesota Duluth’s Tribal Sovereignty Institute (which is housed within the Department of American Indian Studies) and the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council. To date more than 3,500 people have earned the certificate.

Consistent with lessons learned from the pilot trainings and through ongoing consultation and collaboration with tribes, the current training agenda opens with a ceremony including the presentation of the colors, flag and honors songs, an invocation by a spiritual leader selected by the host tribes, and words of welcome from an elected official from the host tribe. More recent training sessions also include either an in-person greeting or a video message from Governor Tim Walz and Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan.

Dr. Joseph Bauerkemper from the UMD Department of American Indian Studies serves as facilitator of the training and follows the opening ceremony and welcome with an overview of what is ahead. He explains, among other matters, tribal locations, population statistics, data showing that Minnesota tribes are among the twenty largest employers in the State, and that tribal jurisdiction impacts thousands of acres of land both within and beyond reservation boundaries. Bauerkemper goes on to explain the core of Governor Walz’s Executive Order 19-24 on tribal consultation, which serves as the primary mandate for the training. Bauerkemper

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1 https://www.leg.state.mn.us/archive/execorders/19-24.pdf
then delineates the primary program objectives: enhanced understanding of American Indian tribal sovereignty, increased awareness of tribal, state, and federal intergovernmental relations, familiarity with the ongoing impacts of historical policy, expanded understanding of American Indian history and cultures, applicable insight into collaborating and building partnerships with tribes, and improved effectiveness and efficiencies in state government.

In order to address common anxieties about word choices and so that participants can develop a shared vocabulary, Bauerkemper covers key terminology for the training including governance-oriented definitions of “Indigenous,” “Native American,” “Indian tribe,” “Indian country,” and who is considered an Indian. He emphasizes that being Indian is not a racial classification, but rather a political classification under federal law. These remarks are followed by a language lesson in either Dakota or Ojibwe language, depending on the host tribe. A language instructor or elder designated by the host community discusses the importance of Native languages and teaches participants how to greet one another, how to say the name of the tribal homelands where we have gathered, and how to articulate gratitude. Participants in more recent sessions have also been provided with notecards sharing either Dakota language or Ojibwe language affirmations and values. These include, among several others, Gidapiitenimin ("I value you" in Ojibwe) and Ohóda pi/po (“Be respectful” in Dakota).

At this point Tadd Johnson presents a deep dive into “Federal Indian Policy and the Legal Background Between the Tribes and the State.” Using a “River of Time” as a visual organizing metaphor, the presentation moves through the major periods of federal Indian policy: International Relations (1770-1830), Removal (1800-1870), Reservation (1850-1890), Allotment and Attempted Assimilation (1870-1930) Reorganization (1930-1950), Termination (1940-1970), and Self-Determination (1970-present). The explanation of these eras includes policy details and impacts on tribes. It takes four to five hours during the afternoon of Day One. It is interspersed with relevant activities and focused sub-presentations. For example, during consideration of the Reservation Era, Bauerkemper facilitates a discussion activity focused on the previously mentioned “Why Treaties Matter” exhibit. Participants have an opportunity to engage with the exhibit and then talk with one another at their tables about particularly striking takeaways and specific connections they can make between exhibit information and their work within their respective state agencies. During consideration of the Allotment and Attempted Assimilation Era, a guest speaker provides insight into experiences and impacts associated with Indian boarding schools. This has included a moving first-hand account from Grace Smith, a tribal elder and boarding school survivor from Alaska. She explains in heartbreaking detail how she was taken from her family, beaten several times, and how she lost her tribal roots. Listeners often shed tears during and after her poignant presentation. More recent training sessions have featured a presentation from Mary Otto, tribal liaison for the Minnesota Department of Commerce. Otto shares family stories and photographs that connect various members of the training planning team to boarding schools, and she also illuminates the broader community impacts that boarding schools continue to have on Indian people and nations.

Day Two of the training begins with a breakfast Question and Answer period guided by questions submitted by participants and continues with three rotating breakout sessions fo-
Community Engagement: 2017 Symposium

The plenary session in the late morning features “A Closer Look at Tribal Lands” presented by Levi Brown, Minnesota Department of Transportation Tribal Affairs Director, in collaboration with land program experts from the host tribe. The afternoon of Day Two includes a Tribal Leadership Panel during which top-level elected tribal leaders engage in direct conversation with participants, answering audience questions and emphasizing the “dos and don’ts” of approaching tribal leaders and building partnerships with Indian people.

Each training session concludes with a debrief and dialogue activity in which agency-based participant groups discuss consultation and building partnerships. These conversations seek to identify common ground with tribal governments and build traction toward constructive steps each respective agency could take to improve tribal-state relations. Finally, the session closes with the retiring of colors, a departing invocation, and a traveling song from the drum group.

Why Consultation is Important

In the summer of 2012, Duluth, Minnesota, suffered severe storms and flooding. As a result, a bridge that crosses Mission Creek on Highway 23 in the Fond du Lac neighborhood of Duluth, was severely damaged and the city was devastated.

It took four years of planning and coordinating before federal and state agencies began work to fix the bridge. The planning and coordinating by the United States Army Corps of Engineers (ACE) included a historical analysis of the history of the bridge itself, and nothing else.

As part of the bridge repair, MNDOT needed to dig up part of Highway 23 and move it. Normally, when MNDOT does road work they are at least partly funded with money from the U.S. Department of Transportation, and thus must comply with federal requirements for such things as a cultural survey/analysis of the area to be impacted by the construction. In this case, the work was funded only using money from the State, so there were no federal requirements. Governor Dayton’s Executive Order 13-10\(^4\) required tribal consultation, but that order had no teeth and was regularly ignored — as it was in this case.

Had either the Corps or MNDOT done even a cursory survey of the area surrounding the bridge, they would have found rich data about a cemetery that dates back hundreds of years. They would have learned that the cemetery was disturbed when the railroad came through in the 1800s, and that when Highway 23 was built in the 1930s, several graves were moved to other areas, while many, many more were left in place. They would have found historical photographs of spirit houses in the exact spot where their road work was to take place. They might even have learned about living Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa elders who remember traveling to that area as children with the sole purpose of leaving tobacco for their relatives who were buried there.

But neither the Corps or MNDOT did any research or survey. They simply dug in and started moving tons of earth.

During the first week of June 2017, some Band members walked by the construction site and asked some of the road crew working there if they were aware of the presence of the historical

\(^4\) Supra note 2
cemetery. They were not. Wayne Dupuis, Environmental Program Manager for the Band, was contacted. Dupuis called the Minnesota State Archaeologist, Amanda Gronhovd, who came to the site. Within minutes of walking over the disturbed ground she saw fragments of human bone. The road work was immediately halted.

**MNDOT Response**
Duane Hill, MNDOT’s District Engineer for the region, was in Washington, DC, when the desecration was discovered. He spent the following days emailing various MNDOT staff to do as much damage control as he could. Upon reviewing those emails later on, Mr. Hill noted that he could tell, with complete clarity, which staff had attended the Tribal State Relations Training, and which had not. Staff who had attended the training responded to the crisis with a high level of sensitivity as to why, in the tribal community, this was a crisis, and why MNDOT’s response to the tribe needed to handled respectfully and delicately. Those who had not attended the training were much more likely to respond with frustration and a desire to gloss over the problems and get on with the job of fixing the bridge and building the road.

On June 14, 2017, MNDOT’s Commissioner, Charlie Zelle, traveled to the Fond du Lac Reservation where he met with tribal leadership. At that meeting, Commissioner Zelle accepted full responsibility for what had happened, and expressed deep and meaningful remorse for the damage caused to the Band and its members. The Commissioner took time to visit the desecrated cemetery along with tribal leadership, and he held a meeting for the community in the Fond du Lac neighborhood. At that meeting, Commissioner Zelle continued to accept responsibility for what had happened, refusing to get defensive or to downplay the suffering caused by the desecration. When community members spoke angrily about what had happened, Commissioner Zelle, along with District Engineer Duane Hill, Project Manager Roberta Hill, and Tribal Liaison Ed Fairbanks all validated that anger and agreed that it was up to MNDOT to try to fix what had happened. All of the MNDOT staff in attendance had previously attended the Tribal-State Relations Training.

When MNDOT personnel responded to the tribal community with compassion and understanding, it was clear that they had a foundational understanding of exactly why the community was upset. They clearly understood that the historic trauma that the cemetery desecration had unearthed was real and personal, and they appeared to understand why. The Commissioner said that attending the Tribal-State Relations Training provided him with some background and understanding of historical trauma and the profound pain that MNDOT’s actions had caused the community. Zelle attended several of the Tribal-State Relations courses and it appears that he internalized the course messages. As a result, while many community members came to the meeting ready to fight for accountability, they found that they had no need to fight: they were heard, and MNDOT was ready to take meaningful action to try to right the wrong that they had committed. Kevin Dupuis, Chairman of the Fond du Lac Band of Superior Chippewa, was so impressed with the impact of the Tribal-State Relations Training that, at one point, he suggested that any companies (such as pipeline companies or power companies) doing work on the reservation or in the ceded territories should be required to attend that training.
On June 22, 2017, a working group organized by the Band and the State met for the first of many meetings to navigate the pending work at the cemetery. The working group included representatives from the Band, MNDOT, the Army Corps of Engineers, Minnesota Office of the State Archaeologist, Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office, and the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council. Later meetings included representatives from the City of Duluth. MNDOT made it clear from the beginning that decisions about how to handle materials at the site of the cemetery would need the approval of Band leadership. They further agreed to hire and train as many Band members as they could for various tasks, and ultimately contracted with the Band for much of the work that needed to be completed, including providing 24-hour security at the site and serving as cultural resource technicians. Because the harm had been perpetrated by MNDOT, they agreed that any involvement, at any level, of Band staff or resources would be compensated by MNDOT, and MNDOT backed their promises up with three major contracts with the Band.

From June of 2017 until the fall of 2019, there were weekly, or biweekly meetings of that same group. Those meetings started again in the winter of 2020. The group has worked collaboratively to determine how to delineate the cemetery borders, where other cultural resources exist nearby, how to handle the remains of the ancestors and other grave goods found, and how to maintain a sense of safety and security at the site. The leadership at MNDOT has met over a dozen times with the Band’s Reservation Business Committee both to keep tribal leadership updated on the project and to get direction as the project progresses.

The meetings and the communications have not always been smooth, and not everyone has always been happy with the results. However, even when conditions cause frustration from all parties, MNDOT has maintained clarity that the needs and the wishes of the Band are paramount. They defer to the Band and to Band leadership, and have made clear that they continue to understand the importance of working with the Band and respecting the Band’s leadership. None of that would likely be true without the Tribal-State Relations Training.

Conclusion

The complexity is you have to have the state and the tribe…working together to protect the health and welfare of all Minnesota. Without that you’re going to continue to have controversy and conflict which is going to cost everybody money, resources, and unfortunately – lives. Ed Fairbanks, Tribal Liaison, MNDOT and Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Member.

Governor Dayton’s term ended in January of 2019 and his successor Governor Tim Walz has renewed and strengthened tribal-state relations through Executive Order 19-24. (See Appendix) While this is indeed very good news both for tribes and the state, there is no guarantee that future governors will continue to mandate and support the Tribal-State Relations Training program. The best solution would be to institutionalize the training by making it a permanent part
of the Minnesota Statutes, rather than an Executive Order which exists at the whim of subsequent Governors. The only solution to future misunderstandings and avoiding future conflicts is a better understanding of tribal governance, jurisdiction, and American Indian culture.

The true winners in educating other government entities on the status of Indian tribes are the citizens of Minnesota and the members of Indian tribes. Indian tribes bring federal and tribal resources to the bargaining table. In the past, waste-water treatment facilities, roadways, and law enforcement services have been the result of tribal-state cooperation. A future wherein tribes, states, and counties cooperate on public safety, public health, and infrastructure projects can only be achieved with training which involves the education of employees at all levels of government — state, county, and municipal. Since the ultimate goal of government is the best possible provision of services to all citizens, the education of all governments on all possible partnerships can benefit Indian and non-Indian citizens alike.
Recognizing and Supporting Natural Helpers of Welcome Dayton: A Non-Directive Approach

Tom Wahlrab

Welcome Dayton, an immigrant-welcoming initiative, offers recognition to anyone who welcomes and supports newly arrived non-native born community members. The Natural Helpers initiative is an intentional and systemic recognition of the members of ethnic communities who act as cultural brokers, have networks within the community, and are able to provide direct assistance to individuals.

It’s a Saturday morning in late Spring, and the vast parking lot is empty. I enter the pre-designated door — there are several entry ways into this building — and I walk into a large, deserted open area. In front of one of several doors leading to hallways, offices, and non-descript rooms is a tri-pod with a sign that says, “Welcome Natural Helpers.”

This building’s regular open hours do not include Saturdays. This one-stop Jobs and Family Services Center has made an exception for our first Natural Helper training session. Previous polling of our first Natural Helper cohort revealed that this was the day and time that was available to them to participate in this and all subsequent sessions.

The story of Welcome Dayton is written elsewhere, but I want to note that as a principal organizer of this initiative, our process was based on a belief that a focus on conversation would serve to: offer recognition to individuals and how they relate to one another; uncover and reveal human riches that betray attempts to evaluate; perpetuate people-to-people relations that are never ending; and, eventually, change the ecology of the community. We held four conversations, which resulted in citizen volunteers writing the Welcome Dayton Plan that elected officials were asked to endorse and to support.

The work of welcoming in the U.S. is revealed in every immigrant’s story. Emily, born in Dayton, Ohio, in 1946 to immigrants from Eastern Europe, reports that her parents arrived with nothing and knowing no one. A church group welcomed them, and it was these people who helped her parents thrive in their new home. Emily, a first-generation immigrant, is a

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1 Tom Wahlrab is the former Executive Director of the City of Dayton (Ohio, USA) Human Relations Council and the Dayton Mediation Center. He is one of the principal facilitators of the community conversation that resulted in the Welcome Dayton Plan. http://www.welcomedayton.org/about/implementation-plan/ He is currently a Fellow and Board member of the Institute for the Study of Conflict Transformation (ISCT). He is married with three children, lives in Dayton, Ohio and with his wife, stewards a piece of land in Highland County, Ohio.
prominent local attorney. Whether it takes one, two, or three generations to support integration (if not assimilation), depends on how open and effective we are to “welcoming” newcomers.

**A Process of Engagement**

Within the evolving Welcome Dayton Plan was a task to develop a “welcome center” for immigrants.

Welcome centers are becoming more and more common as a result of a nearly unprecedented increase in immigrants over the past 25 years. They are designed to be informal meeting places and to provide access to information as well as community and governmentally sponsored services. For immigrants who are not recognized as refugees or are otherwise “undocumented” residents, governmentally sponsored fiscal and social benefits are often non-existent, but most community-based welcoming efforts are available to any and all newcomers.

The development of the Welcome Center was tasked to a small group of people drawn from the Welcome Dayton committee, local agencies, and interested individuals. We soon abandoned the idea of a welcome center, however, because it was cost-prohibitive. We also realized that we were all oriented towards more non-directive and person-centered processes. Even as we realized this about ourselves, we had continued to pursue a directive approach by accepting the “welcome center” concept without checking in with the people it was to serve.

As a mediator with a long history of using the Transformative approach, I still find it easy to slip into a problem-solving approach. As a group, however, we caught ourselves and intentionally recalibrated how we were relating to each other and how we proceeded to consider supporting and welcoming Dayton’s immigrants. We wrote a guiding principle: *Whatever vision or action we put forth needs to be congruent with our understanding of the expressed needs of our local ethnic groups.* Not having realized this principle, our pursuit of a welcome center was our first example of a “border,” or a dividing line in how we were learning to relate to each other.

Borders are commonly understood as edges that mark a separation or a difference. Understanding borders relationally, or as those interactions that change understanding or produce a (mis)understanding between people, helped us notice when we needed to slow our interactions and mostly listen better to each other. We came to see these borders, or moments of awareness about how we were interacting, as fortuitous. The very act of noticing, reflecting, and deciding how and what we needed to change contributed to a more successful Natural Helper initiative.

These borders became the exact places we wanted and needed to explore. They surfaced when we noticed experiences of “otherness,” i.e. when our interactions were not pleasant, produced misunderstandings, or made someone shut down or express themselves in a distressful emotional manner. Noticing these confusing or emotional interactions became a practice and we began to help each other change how we spoke and listened to each other.

The result was that we changed how and what we were doing either in that moment or in the way we managed or facilitated an aspect of the Natural Helper initiative.
The task of developing a welcome center was replaced with a process to seek out and listen to the people who were already doing what we were setting out to accomplish. We eventually named our initiative the Natural Helper program: A program that sought to formally train a cohort of established immigrants who were already helping these newcomers.

The number of people in our community who would be seen as “natural helpers” is unknown. When asked, though, they responded and revealed what would help them do what they do better. Within our organizational working documents, we defined natural helpers as “members of ethnic communities who are able to act as cultural and linguistic brokers, have networks within the community, and are able to provide direct assistance to individuals.” Our time with them revealed the spontaneous assistance they offered, and that such assistance is so much a part of everyday life, that its value was often not noticed nor given recognition.

While developing and implementing the first Natural Helper cohort, we committed to being sensitive to noticing when a person’s agency or voice was being replaced by or denied by us or others during our interactions. We brought a micro-focus to our interactions by noticing when our interactions, at these borders, produced scripted “counter effects” of dismissal, exclusion, or misunderstanding. We grew to understand the initiative to be more than an exchange of content, but also an opportunity to disrupt this script. Intervening at these borders disrupted their disempowering effect, orienting the participants to conversation as well as orienting them to making their own decisions about how they wanted to act or “be” in that moment.

Our conversations and our committee work included a robust reflective practice, e.g. How are we doing? Are we listening well? How do we know we are listening? What is the effect of what we are doing? Are our interventions fostering continuing conversations that appear to bring clarity where once questions and/or confusion reigned? We wanted to focus on the ways we acknowledged, recognized, and understood each other as we engaged with each other. As a result, we noticed three potential areas that were ripe for misunderstandings or were creating difficult interactions. These were:

1) Engagement between us and the Natural Helper cohort members;
2) Engagement between the Natural Helpers and agency experts; and
3) Engagement among the Natural Helpers themselves.

Engagement Between Us and the Natural Helper Cohort Members

The decision to build the one-stop welcome center was based on an assumption of what newly arrived immigrants wanted and needed, as well as research about how other communities had responded to the needs of immigrants. We were thwarted when we determined its cost, but that was a fortunate obstacle. We set aside our assumptions and instead offered four community conversations in four different locations to ask what the Natural Helpers, who were already doing the work with immigrants, might want in order to make what they do more effective.

The invitations were sent to individuals and organizations, and they included a request to forward it on to others in their communities. An African coalition set aside a regularly scheduled meeting to have this conversation. A Hispanic outreach worker organized and facilitated...
one of the conversations. A group of Muslim religious leaders offered an open invitation to a
cornerstone. A fourth group, of Middle Eastern women, established their own time and place
to have a conversation.

These conversations provided us with information on what Natural Helpers were currently
doing and what they believed they needed in order to be more effective. This information be-
came the basis for the workshops that were provided to the Natural Helpers and resulted in four
5-hour sessions covering the following topics:

§ Ethics; Navigating the Job Center;
§ Education; Immigration and Justice Systems;
§ Healthcare; and
§ Advocacy.

The first cohort, developed through an application process, requested ongoing education work-
shops on topics of their choice in the subsequent year.

**Engagement Between the Natural Helpers and Agency Experts**

While the subject matter of the workshops was based on the expressed needs of the Natural
Helpers, the way we designed the workshops favored the experts we brought in to do the train-
ing. It was only after seeing the effect of this that we listened again to the trainees and began to
actively facilitate the sessions to support the voices of the Natural Helpers in the sessions so that
they would be heard by the trainers.

We eventually understood that the trainings needed to be discussion-based and use case-
studies to highlight specific circumstances and questions. Handouts from presenters were en-
couraged, while PowerPoint slides and formal presentations were limited.

Additional lessons we learned included the following:

§ The trainings were offered in English. While interpreters were not needed, breaks were
   built into each session for Natural Helpers to process the material in their home lan-
guages amongst themselves.

§ The trainings were offered at the locations related to the topic. The cohort members
   were thereby given direct contact to some of the actual people who could help them
   when necessary. Case studies were developed with the agency offering the workshop in
   order to give the cohort members an opportunity to process the most important com-
   ponents through a simulated experience.

§ We actively noticed when the presenters used language that needed interpretation. We
   tried to be aware of jargon or the use of acronyms. Whether the presenter was finished
   or not, we tried to notice when there was a misunderstanding or confusion with any
   of the cohort members and intervened when someone needed to make a comment or
   ask a question. We got better and better at facilitating actual interactions between the
   presenters and the attendees and amongst the attendees themselves.
Engagement Among the Natural Helpers Themselves

When we designed the workshops, I do not believe we understood the need to attend to relational issues between the cohort members. We came to see that how the Natural Helpers interacted in the workshop sessions affected all of the members. These border areas, when clarified or given attention to, produced greater understanding between the members and helped us hear how the members wanted workshop design changes to be made.

Our interventions were focused on: supporting everyone without silencing or thwarting anyone’s voice; intervening when attending to one person’s concerns seemed to concern the group; and designing multiple ways of interacting in order to accommodate different learning styles and to help people connect with each other.

One of the cohort members had little difficulty asserting herself during a lecture or presentation to ask questions. At times, she could also dominate a conversation, leaving the less assertive members to be merely listeners.

While the workshop was designed in part to have a subject matter expert presenting, we actively inserted ourselves into the interaction by reflecting, summarizing, or checking in when one of the cohort members continually brought the conversation to bear on his/her own concerns and questions.

For example, Roxanne was assertive and had a strong command of the English language. She also had a way of steering a conversation by making a point with a story — stories that in content had purpose, but whose length dominated time.

Again, supporting the interaction by checking in with Roxanne and the presenter, we provided the opportunity for both her and the presenter to decide to continue or to broaden the focus to the whole group.

Kai was a quiet person and usually deferred to others in a conversation. Her English was not as proficient as most of the others. She never spoke in the big group. Her teenage daughter always accompanied her to the sessions. Her daughter also did not speak out.

Once or twice during a session we asked the members to take a turn to make a comment or ask a question. Each person could do so or pass. Kai and her daughter did pass at times but also, at times, spoke out. Their contributions were reinforced by the ensuing conversations amongst everyone after they had spoken.

A workshop design-change was to help the presenters develop case studies about their subject matter. The cohort members would break into small groups to discuss the case studies amongst themselves and then bring their understanding, comments, and questions back to the large group. In this way, because of the small group, everyone had an opportunity to speak.

Another design change that came from listening to the cohort members was to provide time at the beginning of each session for everyone to reflect on how the last session was helpful, what worked or did not work for them, and what needed to change in order for the sessions to be effective.
Conclusion: Engaged Listening and a Supportive Response

Intentionally offering recognition for their work led the Natural Helper initiative in an unexpected direction. While the Natural Helpers work within their own constructed social networks, the more they met for the workshops, the more they articulated to each other common themes related to needs, issues, and roadblocks. This understanding resulted in a request for training in how to be more effective advocates for individuals and for community-wide issues. They also asked for formal letters of introduction to many of the agencies they interacted with for their community members. Along with the letters, they asked for name tags that identified them as Natural Helpers — both material and symbolic elements of recognition.

At a recent holiday gathering, Sarah, a Natural Helper cohort member, was telling a story about a family she was assisting. While Sarah was talking, Diane, who was not a cohort member, revealed quietly that she had helped Sarah when she first came to the U.S. While Diane was now raising her family of three children, her husband had stepped up to become a member of the first Natural Helper cohort with an official nametag.

The Natural Helper program evolved from a pre-conceived concept, the welcome center, because we got out of the driver’s seat and instead listened to the people we sought to serve. We learned to notice the “heat” that rose when misunderstanding occurred, when a voice was silenced or dismissed, and to step in gently and tentatively. We learned to notice when these interactions impeded communication or quieted voices. The result was a continuous space for intercultural collaboration and an intentionally sensitive way of interacting for developing meaningful relationships.

Supporting the Natural Helpers has had an empowering effect on them. They are “helpers,” yes, but they are also change agents in their own lives and in the lives of other immigrants in Dayton.

Addendum

Since this essay was written, events have transpired that I would like to mention. The definition of a Natural Helper has been changed from requiring membership in an ethnic group to anyone who is acting significantly as a “helper” of, or cultural broker for, immigrants. A change in staff personnel resulted in a break in developing new yearly cohorts. Currently, a position description has been drafted and recruitment of an intern is taking place to provide a continuation of the program.

Also, in the time period from Memorial Day to nearly Labor Day 2019, several events have literally torn apart families and houses in the Dayton area. Our community experienced 14 tornadoes that devastated hundreds of homes; a mass shooter killed nine people (one of the victims was a refugee\(^2\)), a person under the influence of drugs wrecked his car causing the death of two six-year old children; and a person, “in the defense of his castle,” shot and killed two youths who were using his garage to hang out in.

How do any of these events relate to the Natural Helper program? Since 2011, Welcome Dayton\(^3\) has branded Dayton as a welcoming community. Dayton Strong (borrowing from others here) has recently been a stance that is expected to gird us to maintain mental and physical health. Natural Helpers have always been with us. Welcome Dayton, as well as the Natural Helper program, offered acknowledgement to those newcomers and to those people who were helping them in their new homes, respectively. Some of those newcomers experienced violence in their previous homes and have survived. Their experience and the violent experiences of the last few months in Dayton are all a part of the ecology of our time and place.

### Notes

The “We” in this article started as a committee of about 10 people drawn from the Welcome Dayton committee, local agencies, and interested individuals. As we recalibrated from developing a welcome center to supporting Natural Helpers through engaging the community and developing and conducting the workshops, the committee assigned the work to a smaller group of people. Of this smaller committee, three of us, Sally Lamping (Wright State University and Charles Sturt University), Melissa Bertolo (formerly Welcome Dayton and currently Welcoming America) and I, subsequently documented what happened and wrote an article published by the *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, “Activist Citizens in an Immigrant-Friendly City: The Natural Helpers Program.”

While I take full responsibility for this article, I also acknowledge my good friends. They are true colleagues and fellow practitioners and without them this essay would not have been possible.

I want to acknowledge Michel Agier (*Epistemological Decentring: At the Root of a Contemporary and Situational Anthropology*, 2016) as it is his theory on the concept of interrogating the border that I explore in this article.

Finally, I want to acknowledge Baruch Bush for editing suggestions and both Baruch Bush and Joseph Folger for their articulation of the Transformative Framework. Their work led the field to reconsiderations of directive approaches to mediation practices as well as the development of a distinctly unique practice of mediation and other conflict intervention processes. I continue to be inspired by this framework and especially as it affects my civic involvements in the community.

\(^3\) [http://www.welcomedayton.org/](http://www.welcomedayton.org/)
LESSONS FROM PEACE PROCESSES FOR US COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Suzanne Ghais, Ph.D.

During the years I was most active in public policy consensus building and dispute resolution — 1996 to 2010 — community engagement was an important part of my work. Examples included policy deliberations on how to reduce ozone air pollution; inter-governmental cooperation on cleaning up closing military bases; and public consultation on whether, where, and how to build a major new roadway. With a government agency typically the convening authority, my main role was usually to facilitate or mediate a sustained dialogue and negotiation among “stakeholders” — that is, organized interest groups such as environmental organizations and industry associations as well as related government entities (often at multiple levels — local, state, and federal). In most of these cases, my colleagues and I made additional efforts to get input from the general public, so that those who were not necessarily part of these organized stakeholder groups could also make their voices heard. Techniques here included public meetings, newsletters and news releases, information booths at public events and in high-traffic areas, and means such as hotlines and websites through which members of the public could comment. These activities — both the sustained processes with organized stakeholder groups and the broader outreach to the general public — are part of the field of practice variously known as public participation, community engagement, and similar terms. I practiced these solely in the United States.

In 2010, I began doctoral studies in order to advance my long-term career goal of working internationally in peace processes. In picking my dissertation topic, I was interested to explore some aspect of the peace negotiation process rather than content. The topic that offered me the richest literature to build on was that of inclusivity. There are many aspects of inclusivity, of which I chose two prongs: inclusion of armed groups and inclusion of civil society in peace talks. After a while I realized that civil society means more or less the same thing as stakeholders and possibly the public or community. Moreover, “including” such groups in peace processes does not necessarily mean having them directly at the negotiating table. Instead it can mean engaging them in a variety of ways (Paffenholz 2014) — many of which are the same techniques my colleagues and I had used in domestic public engagement. I find it frustrating that these two lines of practice and thought — community engagement on the one hand and civil society inclu-

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2 The terms public, community, and civic are used more or less interchangeably, as are the terms participation, involvement and engagement. See Goerke ND. Globally, use of the term community engagement is increasing while the term public involvement is decreasing. See BangTheTable.com 2014.
sion in peace processes on the other — have been so isolated from one another. At the same time, I am intrigued by the potential for mutual learning and enrichment that can come from comparing the two. My aim in this article is to begin to do that. In what follows, I will expose the reader to examples of civil society inclusion in peace processes and suggest some lessons from these cases that might be applied to community engagement in the US. While there are several lessons, my most emphatic argument is that community engagement practitioners in the US should think bigger: that community engagement has untapped potential to aid in solving major policy problems of our time.

**Civil Society in Peace Processes**

A large body of research suggests that peace processes that include civil society in a significant way are more likely to result in full and enduring peace (e.g., Wanis-St. John and Kew 2008, Nilsson 2012, Paffenholz 2015). Several reasons for this are theorized, among them that civil society’s involvement leads to greater legitimacy and public ownership of the peace and that civil society groups help bring greater transparency and accountability during the implementation stage. My own research (Ghais 2016) suggests that civil society actors help ensure that the peace process addresses underlying sources of conflict and help limit the private gains to armed leaders (such as amnesty or high-level government posts), resulting in greater public support for the peace.

Many peace processes are substantially supported by foreign governments, international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), regional organizations (such as the African Union or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations), and the United Nations (UN). In these circles, the need to “include civil society” has been promoted for many years. Several organizations — such as the Inclusive Peace and Transition Initiative, Conciliation Resources, and Inclusive Security — make civil society inclusion in peace processes a major goal of their work. The UN’s guidance for mediators (UN Peacemaker 2012, 11–13) has inclusivity as one of the eight “fundamentals” of peace mediation.

Despite the well-supported arguments and advocacy for involving civil society in peace processes, it is not always done, much less done well. Nevertheless, there are several examples of robust civil society engagement in peace processes. Unsurprisingly, these are among the comparatively more successful peace processes, although the risks of relapse into civil war remain to varying degrees. Practitioners of community engagement will likely recognize some of the mechanisms for participation in these examples, as well as noticing some (such as ceasefire monitoring) that are specific to peace processes.

**Case Study #1: Liberia’s Comprehensive Peace Agreement, 2003**

The first case is the negotiations that took place among the government of Liberia and the two major rebel groups that had engaged in Liberia’s second brutal civil war. The negotiations led to the “Comprehensive Peace Agreement” (CPA) signed in August 2003 in Accra, Ghana. Several civil society organizations participated as official delegates (Nilsson 2009; NDI 2004, 7; Hayner 2007, 12) and signed the CPA as “witnesses.” The signing organizations included the Inter-Religious Council for Liberia, the Mano River Women Peace Network, the Liberian National Bar Association, Liberians in Diaspora, the Liberia Leadership Forum, and the Civil Society Movement for Liberia. These representatives engaged in the plenary sessions and spoke to the warring parties directly (Nilsson 2009, 41). Numerous other civil society activists were permitted to attend informally as observers (Hayner 2007, 12). While the three
armed parties were the “central actors at the talks” and were the only parties to the ceasefire agreement signed June the same year, “[f]or the remainder of the negotiations towards the CPA, …national civil society actors also played an important role in the plenary sessions, giving input and pressing points” (Hayner 2007, 11).

It should be noted that activist groups were also outside the room during the peace talks applying pressure for the delegates to reach agreement. When the negotiations in Accra commenced, seven women from the various groups within the Women in Peacebuilding Network went to Ghana and mobilized Liberian refugee women there to protest with them outside the conference room. As a result, more than 200 women demonstrated, at one point staging a sit-in and locking arms to forbid delegates from exiting (even to use the bathrooms). Their demand was simply that the negotiators reach an agreement. A stand-off lasted at least two hours before the women agreed to release their human chain on several conditions, including that a peace accord be signed within two weeks. The agreement was in fact signed two weeks later (Gbowee 2009, 51; Hayner 2007, 13).

Several observers (e.g., Nilsson 2009; Harris 2006, 393–394) credit civil society participation with helping bring about a durable end to the fighting in Liberia, although a robust UN peace mission also facilitated this. Liberia has had many problems — including corruption, poverty, and the now-resolved Ebola epidemic — but a return to war has not been among them. In 2017, with president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf stepping down due to term limits, Liberians voted for a new president, leading to the country’s first peaceful transfer of power between two democratically elected presidents since 1944. It was also Liberia’s first election run without help from the UN.

**Case Study #2: The Philippines’ Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro, 2014**

After armed conflict dating back to 1969, the government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the largest separatist group representing the Muslim population of the southern Philippines, signed the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro in 2014. Both the government and the MILF included civil society representatives on their negotiating teams (Herbolzheimer 2015, 5). The government negotiating team was led by a female professor and also included a Muslim women’s rights leader (Busran-Lao 2014, 28). Members of civil society have also observed the negotiations. Additionally, several implementation mechanisms, most notably the Third-Party Monitoring Team, includes civil society representatives (Herbolzheimer 2015, 5). Both the MILF and government leaders held numerous community consultations (South 2017, NP; Busran-Lao 2014, 29).

As was the case in Liberia, civil society groups also carried out their own activism related to but separate from the peace negotiations. These included “the creation of peace zones, inter-religious dialogues, capacity-building in the theory and practice of conflict resolution, the consolidation of citizen agendas, lobbying the armed actors, and the creation of ceasefire monitoring mechanisms” (Herbolzheimer 2015, 5). Academics, religious groups, local NGOs, and indigenous people’s organizations engaged in peace-building activities (Busran-Lao 2014, 29).

After some delay, the Bangsamoro Organic Law—the legislation that implements the peace agreement, the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro—was signed in July 2018. It was overwhelmingly ratified to create the Bansamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. Although ongoing
terrorist activity by groups outside the peace process has dampened hopes for peace, the comprehensive accord is being implemented.

**Case Study #3: Colombia/Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia (FARC), 2016**

The armed conflict between the government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) is often referred to as the longest running war in the Western hemisphere. A peace agreement to end it came into force December 1, 2016 after four years of negotiation. An earlier version of the agreement had been rejected by the voters of Colombia in a referendum, but rather than returning to war, the parties returned to the negotiating table, working out an amended version that was signed November 24, 2016. The peace negotiations, held in Havana, Cuba, provided for public forums and roundtable dialogues to be held throughout Colombia. Additionally, the negotiating teams invited written proposals via the Internet or mail, and they invited select civil society representatives to meet with them in Havana. Both negotiating teams “have regularly engaged with key social, political, economic and institutional stakeholders throughout the peace talks,” and civil society has been involved in ceasefire monitoring (Herbolzheimer 2016, 8; see also Sánchez-Garzoli 2016, NP). The parties also arranged to receive input through mayors’ and governors’ offices; national officials attended meetings of the National Federation of Municipalities to receive their proposals (Bouvier 2013, NP). Additionally, the UN Development Program in partnership with a university program conducted in-depth consultations with academics, civic groups, think tanks, and more on such critical matters as rural development (Bouvier 2013, NP).

This peace process has introduced several innovations. One is eliciting the voices of conflict victims: five groups of 12 victims each, carefully chosen for diversity by the UN, met with the negotiating delegations (Herbolzheimer 2016, 4). Another, following “significant pressure from women’s organizations,” was the creation of a Gender Subcommission “tasked with reviewing all documents issued as part of the peace process and ensuring that they contained gender-sensitive language and provisions.” The commission invited delegations from civil society groups working on gender issues (Herbolzheimer 2016, 6).

Similar to both Liberia and the Philippines, Colombia has “a thriving civil society that has impressive levels of experience in monitoring human rights violations and promoting peace at multiple levels” (Herbolzheimer 2016, 8). Outside the official peace process, there was “an upsurge of additional civil society initiatives that also seek to influence the peace process” which itself was a response “to ‘the clamor of the population for peace,’ notes the preamble to the agreement” (Bouvier 2013, NP). “Social movements (notably of peasants and indigenous communities) have continually asserted their own agenda; universities have joined efforts in a National Network for Peace; religious leaders are promoting dialogue and reconciliation at multiple levels; and the private sector has promoted innovative processes of individual and collective commitment to peace” (Herbolzheimer 2016, 8). Implementation of the peace agreement is underway.
Lessons for Domestic Community Engagement

Strong Engagement Comes from Strong Civil Society?

One feature common to all three peace processes profiled above was a strong domestic civil society — specifically a strong peace movement — in each country involved. This is certainly not the case in all civil wars or all peace processes. For instance, in Chad’s peace negotiations with a rebel group in 2002 (Ghais 2016), there was not a strong civil society in Chad at the time, and there was no civil society involvement in that peace process. In the three countries featured here, civil society gained entry to the peace processes by demanding it over time through activism and advocacy. Is there a parallel in the domestic sphere in the US? Our country has an incredibly rich civil society, with an association or advocacy group for seemingly every possible interest or subgroup. Is this why the US has been a major contributor to the growth of the field of community engagement? (The International Association for Public Participation, for example, was founded in the US.) In other words, while government agencies at various levels make efforts to engage the public, is this perhaps because there were active interest groups and publics pressing for such opportunities in the first place?

It is difficult to answer these questions, but the potential implications are intriguing. Public engagement practitioners sometimes struggle with how to engage marginalized groups such as the illiterate, immigrants, and non-native speakers of English (see, for example, PBS&J 2006). I have, for instance, heard frustrations from community engagement colleagues who dutifully get all their materials printed in Spanish, provide translators, and reach out to Latino communities, but no Spanish speakers show up at events. If a robust civil society is the stimulus for richer community engagement efforts, this shifts the question in an interesting way. Instead of a government decision maker asking, “How can I elicit and utilize the public’s input” in order to enhance legitimacy for a decision or action, the more relevant question is perhaps, “How can I stimulate the growth of civil society in representing marginalized interests?”

Of course, the answer to this is no easier. For example, if governments provide grants to civic groups, such groups may spring up in an artificial way to bid for those grants (something that happened, for instance, in the former Yugoslav republics after the Bosnian war). By its nature, civil society depends on the free will and initiative of individuals to organize around their common concerns. Still, can governments perhaps facilitate this without creating “artificial” organizations? Perhaps by creating inviting public spaces? By putting up websites to enable citizens’ exchange of information? By providing free meeting locations? Are governments somehow getting in the way, such as by scaring immigrants about deportation (thus making them wary of interacting with local officials)? And if so, can governments somehow get out of the way, without leaving our laws unenforced?

Think Big

Community engagement is used in many forms of administrative decision making in the US, from passing new regulations, to siting new facilities, building roads and transit, solving environmental problems, and many more. Still, these efforts seem highly limited and/or localized compared to a peace process wherein a whole country riven by civil war seeks both to bring peace among armed groups and to address the political, economic, and social problems that generated conflict in the first place. The agenda for the Colombian negotiations, for example, addressed agrarian reform, political participation, illegal
drugs, conflict victims and transitional justice, and reintegration of fighters. A public engagement effort to, say, end homelessness in one American city, though certainly complex and challenging, seems small-scale in comparison.

Our country is facing a host of serious, divisive problems: to name a few, the growing disparity of wealth, high rates of gun violence (particularly mass shootings), a broken health care system, an opioid epidemic, tense race relations, and a broken immigration system. These issues get debated freely and abundantly in the news media, on social media platforms, and in people’s homes, but consensus fails to emerge. Our democratic process would normally have Congress address such issues, but Congress has become dysfunctional, too often unable to bridge partisan differences. One predictor of armed conflict is the belief among citizens that their political and legal institutions are unable to address their grievances. The existence of right-wing armed militias and occasional left-wing violent demonstrators suggests that a few Americans are already feeling that way, if perhaps around the fringes. We urgently need new ways to bring citizens together to find consensus on our big, complex problems. Would it be difficult? Of course. How much more difficult, though, than for a country like Liberia or the Philippines or Colombia to settle a civil war? I am anxious to get in front of these problems before political violence in our own country increases.

There are some groups undertaking such work on America’s big, divisive issues, among them the Millennial Action Project of Search for Common Ground and the Keystone Center. Still, I have yet to see, for instance, a nationwide public engagement process on health care reform (at least not since then-First Lady Hillary Clinton’s efforts in the 1990s), or one on immigration. I have seen many local dialogue and consensus building efforts, but I fear our field is prone to assuming that resources are scarce and our work is “alternative” rather than mainstream. Maybe we need to get a lot more ambitious and insert ourselves into the mainstream.

Get International Help
The most effective peace processes have benefited from tremendous amounts of outside assistance. In most peace processes, representatives of foreign countries, international NGOs, regional organizations, and the UN are swarming the relevant capitals or meeting locales, seeking the gratification and/or the glory of helping to make peace. Several countries and foundations disburse funds to promote peace. Anyone in the conflict resolution field knows that sometimes relatively detached, outside interveners can bring a helpful, fresh perspective and can synergistically partner with local insiders. Why not invite a few foreign experts from the Organization of American States (OAS), the UN, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), or the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) to help us with our seemingly hopeless internal divisions? In our globalized world, one country's internal problems create spillover effects for other countries, such as migration, terrorism, and disease. Other countries therefore see some interest in devoting resources to help troubled societies. This is not to suggest the US is in as bad a condition as, say, Syria, but rather that our divisions may be serious enough that some outside perspectives may help.
Conclusion

My first goal in this paper was to begin the process of sharing between the two distinct sub-fields of community engagement and inclusive peace processes. I have only begun. I also emphasize that the lessons can be applied in the other direction — that is, peacemakers can learn from the methods and examples of community engagement — and I plan to help in that arena too. I have described how a vibrant civil society is a key way to bring forth the voices of the marginalized, how we need some large-scale peacemaking here in our own country, and how we might benefit from outside help. Others may draw different conclusions, and I welcome the discussion.

References


