

# INTRODUCTION

*Sharon Press, editor*<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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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<sup>2</sup> 42 Mitchell Hamline Law Review 5 (2016).

cussed his work with CBI;<sup>3</sup> Melanie Leahy, who had served as Co-Chair of the City of Falcon Heights Task Force on Inclusion and Policing;<sup>4</sup> Kevin Lindsey, then Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Human Rights;<sup>5</sup> 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,<sup>6</sup> 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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<sup>3</sup> See, Berkman, T. and Egol, D., *Who are You and Why Do You Get to Run this Meeting? Reflections on Facilitator Identity and the Management of Complex Public Disputes*, REFLECTIONS: WEAVING THREADS TO STRENGTHEN THE FABRIC OF OUR COMMUNITIES AN INTENTIONAL CONVERSATION ABOUT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT (2020).

<sup>4</sup> See, Dressel, E., *Evaluation of the Falcon Heights Community Conversations Process*, REFLECTIONS: WEAVING THREADS TO STRENGTHEN THE FABRIC OF OUR COMMUNITIES AN INTENTIONAL CONVERSATION ABOUT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT (2020).

<sup>5</sup> See, Lindsey, K., *Minnesota Government Recognizes Meaningful Civic Engagement as Means to Create a More Inclusive Stronger Democracy*, REFLECTIONS: WEAVING THREADS TO STRENGTHEN THE FABRIC OF OUR COMMUNITIES AN INTENTIONAL CONVERSATION ABOUT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT (2020).

<sup>6</sup> 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).

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,<sup>7</sup> 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,<sup>8</sup> Principal, Ghais Mediation and Facilitation; and Grande Lum,<sup>9</sup> then Director The Divided Communities Project<sup>10</sup> 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 Transformation<sup>11</sup> 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

<sup>7</sup> See, Stulberg, J., *Mediating Disputes that Divide Communities: What Constitutes “Success”?*, 41 MITCHELL HAMLIN L. J. OF PUB. POL’Y & PRAC. (SYMPOSIUM ISSUE) (2020).

<sup>8</sup> See, Ghais, S., *Lessons from Peace Processes for US Community Engagement*, REFLECTIONS: WEAVING THREADS TO STRENGTHEN THE FABRIC OF OUR COMMUNITIES AN INTENTIONAL CONVERSATION ABOUT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT (2020).

<sup>9</sup> Lum currently is the Provost of Menlo College

<sup>10</sup> <https://moritzlaw.osu.edu/dividedcommunityproject/>

<sup>11</sup> <http://transformativemediation.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

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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.