

CapitolRiver Council (CRC) Strategic Action Plan – Inclusion (December 2021 DRAFT)

Background -- Inclusion is Essential

CRC is one of 17 District Councils, which are 501(c)3 nonprofit organizations that administer community engagement activities through a contract with the City of Saint Paul (the Community Engagement Contract).

The primary focus of CRC's engagement work is to improve the livability of the Downtown neighborhood, and in the Capitol area (District 17). CRC facilitates participation in public decision-making through public meetings, and by engaging residents, business owners, building owners, and workers in discussions about local issues, and by soliciting feedback on development projects and City-led activities that affect District 17. CRC committees include Development Review (scope includes long-range planning), Skyway Governance Advisory, and Public Realm (scope includes public safety, parks, transportation, and related topics), all of which offer members of the community the opportunity to provide feedback and to ask questions about issues, and to set the agendas for future committee meetings. Committees then may develop recommendations to the CRC board or directly to local officials, for example, to recommend support for a development project or for a request to change the Skyway hours of operation. CRC has formed other committees and work groups to engage stakeholders in discussions about a particular project or topic. Inclusion is essential in all of those activities, so that people who have different interests and perspectives are able to fully participate, which will ideally lead to recommendations that are based on ideas and concerns of a broad range of people, including people with different lived experiences.

We encourage active participation by all members of our community by using various methods to invite people to attend our meetings, and/or to become board members. Different methods for engaging people in our work include our email newsletter, social media, and individual recruiting efforts (people inviting others to attend a meeting and/or to become a board member). Our Community Engagement Contract with the City requires CRC (and other district councils) to:

- Ensure that the City's planning and public policy decision-making processes include diverse voices and a local perspective.
- Adopt policies and practices that intentionally create space for residents who currently are under-represented.
- Pursue systemic work that reflects the needs and priorities of residents who have been historically under-represented (in government decision-making processes).
- Recruit board members and volunteers who reflect the diversity of the neighborhood (demographic data for District 17 is available on the Wilder Foundation website):
<https://www.mncompass.org/profiles/neighborhoods/minneapolis-saint-paul>
- Comply with City regulations related to Equal Opportunity in hiring / human resources policies, and in supporting women-owned and minority-owned businesses:
<https://www.stpaul.gov/departments/human-rights-equal-economic-opportunity/contract-compliance-business-development/vendor>

We acknowledge that it is possible to achieve diversity without inclusion. Sometimes people in a diverse group are treated with disrespect in various ways. Therefore, the purpose of this plan is to create processes and actions that are repeatable, and that can be continually improved to create a culture of respect and inclusion.

Recruiting / Engaging Volunteers Who Reflect the Diversity of District 17 – Past CRC Activities

Email has been the primary communication tool that CRC has used to promote opportunities to attend meetings and / or to provide feedback or ask questions about a topic or specific project. Therefore, a key focus

of recruiting has been to invite people to sign up to receive CRC emails. By attending neighborhood events, such as National Night Out events, CRC staff and volunteers have been able to engage in conversations with people who agreed to provide their email address for future follow-up. CRC also has used Facebook and Twitter to start conversations and / or to invite people to attend events.

All residents in District 17 live in high-rise buildings, either as renters or owners. Therefore, a continual goal is to develop and maintain a professional relationship with at least one resident in each building, and to maintain contact information for a staff person who serves as a point of contact (such as a property manager or condo association representative). In some buildings, this is a constant struggle for various reasons. Sometimes we have developed good relationships with people who move out of Downtown. Some buildings have frequent staff turnover, resulting in emails bouncing back, instead of being passed along to tenants. Some residents might feel intimidated by attending a public meeting, or they might assume that their ideas or concerns will be ignored by the group.

- Action step: In 2021, there are more than 80 residential buildings, and the Downtown population is expected to increase, either through new construction of high-rise buildings or through projects to convert other buildings to residential. CRC should formalize this goal to be in contact with every residential building through a combination of activities, which could include recruiting volunteers and / or to hire staff (which could include community organizers from adjacent district councils) to maintain these important relationships.

Creating a Culture of Respect and Inclusion – Past CRC Activities

In 2018-2019, CRC staff prepared a brief survey on a half sheet of paper that solicited feedback from people who attended CRC meetings and events. The questions were:

- How would you rate the quality of the meeting location / venue?
- Were all attendees encouraged to participate in the discussion?
- Was the discussion civil and respectful?
- Did you learn anything from the discussion or gain insight into different people's perspectives?
- Did the group vote on any recommendations or action items?
- If so, do you understand the next steps (where the recommendation will go and how we can influence change)?
- How would you rate your overall experience?

The majority of feedback that was received was positive. However, some negative feedback, such as comments about people who dominated the conversation, or who would interrupt other people who were talking. That feedback led to CRC staff and board members reviewing and updating the rules of procedure, and spending time discussing the importance of treating people with respect. CRC staff has spent time with people who facilitate meetings (board and committee chairs) and discussed how they can reinforce the rules by pointing out when people are speaking out of turn or when they need to allow someone else a chance to speak.

The surveys were filled out on paper, which made it relatively easy to distribute and collect. The results were then typed, which was somewhat time-consuming, but it did yield good information that led to specific changes. We still receive some negative feedback about CRC meetings, but many people who have been involved in our work for many years have said they have noticed an improvement.

- Action step: The paper survey served its purpose and doesn't need to be repeated. However, CRC board members, committee members and staff should develop other methods for periodically seeking feedback from people about their experiences in CRC meetings and events. For example, when people are introducing themselves at the beginning of a meeting, the facilitator and / or staff may periodically state some of these questions, and let people know how they can provide that feedback during or after the meeting.

Inclusion With Intention – Recommendations by Lissa Jones-Lofgren

Recommended Strategic Vision Statement: Inclusion is achieved when someone with any kind of identity feels welcome, safe, and able to access the process of decision-making in our work.

- Action step: Incorporate this as a key message when recruiting board members and volunteers.

Recommended Framework for Maintaining an Inclusive Culture: IDEA

Inclusion is the intentional creation of spaces and services with diversity in mind, to enable all individuals to succeed and thrive.

Diversity is the differences inherent in individuals. This includes, but is not limited to, ability (cognitive and physical), age, cultural background and values, ethnicity, gender, language, nation of origin, race, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and the intersections therein.

Equity is social justice, and the fair treatment of individuals, based on their individual and diverse needs, viewed through the lens of historical power structures and social norms.

Accessibility is building equitable access to our resources, services, and spaces for all customers and accommodations where accessibility isn't possible.

Diversity, Equity and Accessibility are **strategies we use to achieve Inclusion.**

Diversity – how do we make sure that we are maintaining good relationships with the full range of potential stakeholders (different age ranges, different racial / ethnic backgrounds, different physical abilities and / or challenges, different levels of income, etc.)?

Equity – how do we treat people justly and fairly, so that everyone has access to power and is involved in setting social norms?

Accessibility – it's not just about providing physical access to buildings. It's about access to everything that we do, and where there are barriers to access, accommodations will be made.

Conclusion / Next Steps: CRC board members and staff should look at everything we do (committee meetings, social media strategy, email newsletters ...) with the strategic vision in mind. Does everyone feel welcome and safe in our work? ("Safe" doesn't strictly mean safe from acts of violence. If someone is treated as if they are not old enough, not young enough, not wealthy enough, not smart enough, or anything along those lines, in order to be taken seriously, they might not feel safe to participate in the discussion. If someone doesn't feel safe, they might not ask a question or make a comment due to a fear that they will be treated with disrespect.)

When topics are being discussed, especially about decisions that are being considered by the City Council and / or Mayor's office, the following types of questions should be asked as a way to assess whether CRC has effectively created a diverse, inclusive, and respectful environment that is conducive to learning and / or toward the goal of developing a specific recommendation.

- Who will be impacted by our decisions?
- Who is here and who is missing?
- What am I doing to demonstrate that other people are welcome and safe to fully participate in our work?

Board members, committee members and staff should be continually asking the above questions related to Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility as a part of our organizational culture to work toward becoming more inclusive.