

Community Engagement Project Report
City of Minneapolis
Department of Communications

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Overview:

In response to Minneapolis City Council direction, the City Coordinator assigned responsibility for assessing and overseeing Community Engagement (CE) processes and activities within the City to the Communications Department. The Communications Director contracted with Dr. John Persico and Peg Peck-Chapman of *Quantum Change* to meet three goals of the Community Engagement Project. Those three goals are to: 1) assess Community Engagement efforts at present, 2) research and develop a Community Engagement Process Model, and 3) research and write a Community Engagement position description.

Purpose:

The purpose of Goal One was to survey numerous staff members and elected officials within the City of Minneapolis to find out what is being done now and to catalog Community Engagement processes and activities. The information is cataloged in the attached appendices. Information from the survey will be utilized to establish future benchmarks for the City and individual departments. Ultimately the benchmarks will assist departments in goal-setting, performance measures and improvement efforts for Community Engagement within departmental business plans.

Goal Two's purpose was to create a Community Engagement Process Model which was flexible enough for all departments to use in assessing and developing pending City-initiated decisions that will impact City services. The detailed results of this Process Model development can be found in the accompanying Guidebook.

Goal Three's aim was to create a position description for a Community Engagement Coordinator. The Community Engagement Coordinator will function as a consultant and coach for the departments in the area of CE. The coordinator will assist the departments in establishing standards, measures and improvement areas for CE within the departmental business plans. This position description for the Coordinator has been completed and forwarded to Human Resources to begin the classification process.

Methodology:

The following observations and recommendations are based on the conversations and discussions the consultants had with the following City departments: Assessor, City Attorney, Civil Rights, CPED, Finance, Fire, Health and Family, Human Resources, Police, Public Works and Regulatory Services. We interviewed 55 people in the eleven departments noted above.

Identifying Community Engagement:

During the assessment of current engagement activities, it became clear that there is confusion in departments about what qualifies as community engagement and what does not. In addition, the volume of activities claimed as community engagement was prohibitive for the purposes of an effective oversight function. The conclusion of the consultants and Communications staff was that there was a need to identify distinguishing characteristics to serve as basic criteria for what qualifies as community engagement in the context of the Communication's oversight role.

After an analysis of the data collected during the interviews, we concluded that the activities listed by departments naturally fall into two different categories: 1) engaging the community for the purpose of getting input/feedback regarding a city decision and 2) being involved in the community to deliver programs or services, volunteer or educate the public. While both may include a range of city responses, from simply providing information to face-to-face contact with community members, there is a key distinguishing feature of what (for the purposes of this report and the oversight function) we will call community engagement: **Community engagement always involves an impending city government decision.** Some examples from the activities identified by departments illustrate how this key distinguishing feature helps set engagement apart from involvement in the community.

In the course of our research, the Police Department cited the Police Activities League (PAL) as one of their community engagement efforts. While this is a positive outreach program with many benefits for the community, based on our criteria it is not community engagement. Instead, it is a service program (or involvement in the community). No decision is being made through PAL that will alter police services to the public. Similarly,

Regulatory Services cited thermometer give-a-ways at the Farmer's Market to test food temperature as an engagement activity. It is an effective public relations activity, and may in fact aid in the prevention of food-borne illness, but it is not community engagement. Again, the purpose of this particular interaction with the public is not to involve the public in a decision about services. It is instead, merely *providing* service.

Alternatively, Health and Family Services holds public meetings to receive input on what people think are important criteria for issuing grant money to the community. In this case, a decision is being made about the distribution of grant dollars and has the potential to have an impact on residents. When the Police Department plans to launch an initiative to address a crime problem, they often meet with members of communities of color. A decision is being made in this case, perhaps on specific crime-fighting tactics, or where to concentrate enforcement geographically. In most cases, the public does not make the final decision. However, they are engaged at an appropriate level, so that the Department can make an informed decision, and the community is informed that a decision is being made.

The scope of contact with the public in both involvement in the community and engagement includes a broad range of activities. In the case of involvement in the community, contact ranges from public education to an in-person service program (taking kids on a canoe trip through the Police Activities League). In the case of engagement, contact ranges from informing the community of a City decision that will be made, to meeting with the community to receive input that may inform the decision and at times collaboration with community members to make the decision.

To illustrate the distinction further, consider a hypothetical public health education program that a department wishes to change in order to target a different group of people. Prior to making that change, the department engages the community per the standards and protocols that are being established in the Communications Department as a means of influencing decisions about service delivery. In this case, the public health education itself is NOT engagement. However, going to the community to inform them about a change to the program, and to solicit ideas about how to change the program IS engagement.

Key Findings:

- Most departments reported doing more with less. Despite budget cuts; they felt they were doing more Community Engagement (CE) than in prior years.
- Interviewees were almost unanimous in feeling that CE is a good strategy for achieving better quality decision-making and results between departments and stakeholders.
- The quality of results in terms of CE has been highly dependent on achieving the proper balance between stakeholder expectations regarding the decision making process and the amount of authority that could be delegated.
- A general consensus was that all departments needed and wanted to utilize CE even more than was being done at the present time.
- In respect to doing more CE, it was felt that budget cuts could continue to restrict the amount of activity and collaboration that could be done effectively.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

1. The City of Minneapolis needs to continue to develop and improve metrics that can be used to measure community satisfaction with CE activities. This means that each department needs to establish CE goals, with specific performance measures and document improvement efforts within their business plans.
2. The development of measures and evaluation tools for CE activities in conjunction with business process measures needs to be addressed within each department. Each department should work with the CE Coordinator on this part of their business planning processes.
3. A dedicated budget for CE activities needs to be established for the City which would reflect the needs of various departments and the emphasis that the Council wants to place on CE.
4. A need to eliminate internal bottlenecks that restrict CE activities among departments was also identified. In talking to staff, it seems there might be ways to more efficiently work with neighborhood advisory groups and boards by the coordination of ongoing departmental efforts in this area. Many City staff members talked about the value of attending these meetings but the lack of time to do so. Perhaps more coordination between departments on engagement activities would provide a more efficient utilization

of staff at such meetings. Increased sharing of information and resources between departments could result in better allocation of staff time.

5. Find ways to foster more interdepartmental cooperation and communication in respect to CE activities. Two ideas mentioned below that could promote more cooperation include an annual CE Workshop and a CE website. In addition, the CE Process Model drives departments to seek out these efficiencies.
6. Develop an internal cross-functional team or task force to enhance CE activities and cooperation. This is an additional way to foster interdepartmental cooperation and communication around CE.
7. There is a need to develop facilitator training for staff and managers who participate in CE activities. This would be one of the primary responsibilities for the new CE Coordinator position.
8. There is a need to build training materials and tools to support CE activities. This also would be a responsibility for the CE Coordinator.
9. Public exposure of CE activities currently ongoing in the City could be helpful to spread the word in respect to some of the good work that is being done by departments. This might be accomplished through media, i.e. press releases or government access TV.
10. There should be a dedicated CE website as part of the overall City website that would be used for information by all departments concerning their CE activities and could also allow for commentary and questions by the community and citizens. This website could assist the departments with developing collaborative efforts.
11. It would be helpful to have an annual Community Engagement Educational Workshop. The first one could be a major kick-off to the City's increased emphasis on CE. This workshop would address the distinction between Community Engagement and community education. The CE Process Model and Guidebook could be presented and associated with training and information as deemed useful.

Policy Questions:

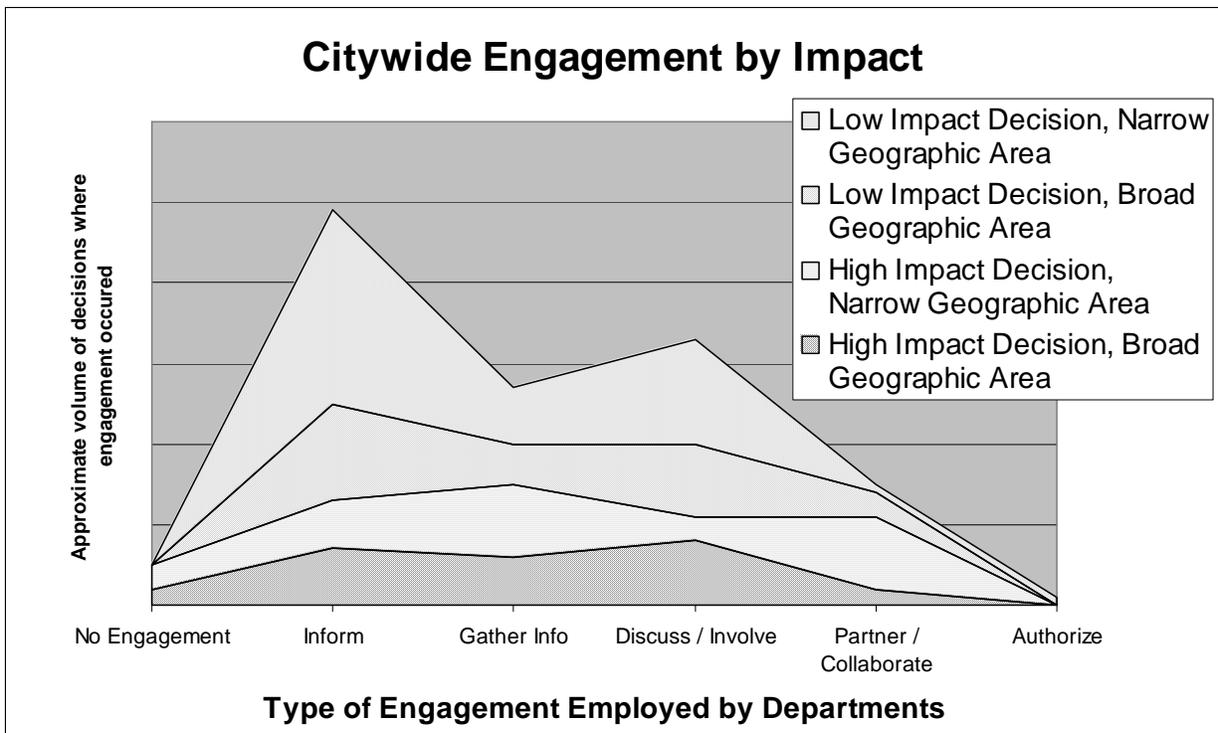
The new Community Engagement Process Model (which is outlined in detail in the accompanying CE Guidebook) was developed to provide a mechanism for effective and efficient community engagement policy development. There are two key ways this solid but flexible process model will support policymakers and newly established policy:

- First, by moving the City toward a standard approach for engagement, and improving measuring and reporting of engagement results, policy makers will be better informed as to which policies may be best for the City.
- Second, the process model will serve as an implementation tool for most new policies set by Council. Currently, there is no clear mechanism for the implementation of community engagement policies. With the new CE Process Model, Council will have a place to turn to carry out most new policies citywide.

Specific areas for policy consideration by Council have already surfaced through the research and development of this new Community Engagement Process Model. Input received from elected officials helped to guide the development of the Process Model, and also served as a platform for devising questions for policy consideration. Below are four questions that Council may wish to take up at the policy level.

Policy Question 1: Establishing specific outcomes of engagement

Analysis of the inventory of engagement efforts compiled from departments gives a sense of how the City engages, depending on the likely impact of a pending City decision. (Results are presented in the chart below. See CE Guidebook for a complete explanation of impact levels.)



Council may wish to prescribe specific outcomes or goals for departments to achieve based on the categories outlined above. For example, the draft process model requires departments to measure how well an engagement activity reaches traditionally underrepresented groups. Council may wish to establish a policy on reaching underrepresented groups when a department engages on a pending decision determined to be Impact Level 2. Council could direct that a certain percentage of underrepresented groups be at the table when a department engages at the “partner and collaborate” level. Or, Council may wish to set standard number of public meetings to occur before a decision at Impact Level 1 can be made. Council could establish general or specific policies and the CE Process Model will accommodate it.

Policy Question 2: Creating policies to support achievement of engagement goals

If Council sets a goal as described in Policy Question 1, Council may need to devise policy that supports this directive. An increase in the percentage of underrepresented groups in department engagement activities may require creative public policies. For example, funding for transportation to meeting sites, funding for day care, or a mandated range of meeting times may be required to achieve desired level of attendance at public meetings. Since community engagement is not a budget line item for departments, but rather

incorporated on a project by project basis, policies like these could be considered by Council.

Policy Question 3: Creating new mechanisms for resident ideas to be considered

A policy question for Council to consider is how to create new mechanisms for residents to bring issues and concerns directly to the City that are not part of a City-initiated decision making process. Beyond the structural systems currently in place to bring potential decisions to Council, are there ways we can encourage (and facilitate) the community to implement its own ideas? The new CE Process Model seeks to ensure that residents are appropriately engaged around City-initiated decisions. However, Council may wish to establish mechanisms for community ideas to be considered and potentially implemented. One example is the highly-touted matching grant program through the Department of Neighborhoods in Seattle, Washington.

Policy Question 4: Determining Council oversight of Community Engagement

The new CE Process Model rests accountability for engagement efforts in the reporting of department business plans to Council. The CE Guidebook also requires that the role of elected officials is considered in every engagement plan. However, Council may wish for additional, timelier reporting from departments and the CE coordinator, particularly on major decisions of broad-based impact. In the language of the CE Process Model, we call these major decisions Level 1 Impact decisions (See CE Guidebook for more detail.) Council may wish engagement plans for Level 1 Impact decisions to be submitted for review or approval. At this point it is unclear how helpful or burdensome reporting and review of Level 1 to Council would be. It is difficult to predict how many Impact Level 1 decisions we will have prior to implementation of the process. Nonetheless, the issue of oversight is worthy of Council consideration.

Next Steps:

- 1) Engage stakeholders formally and informally. Validate CE model through a focus group process. The consultants will conduct a minimum of ten focus groups. Gail Plewacki and Jamie Lantinen will be speaking to City staff and interested parties informally regarding the CE Process Model and Guidebook. The consultants, Dr. John Persico and Peg Peck-Chapman will be facilitating the focus groups.
- 2) Hire a Community Engagement Coordinator to support community engagement activities as requested by departments. This position description for the Coordinator has been completed and forwarded to Human Resources to begin the classification process.
- 3) Staff members within the City departments will be given training sessions on how to utilize the CE Process Model and Guidebook.

Appendix: Engagement Activities Inventory