

# **Minneapolis Community Engagement Processes**

## **PRINCIPLES AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

October 2005

**Presented to:**     **The Minneapolis Mayor and City Council Members, and the  
Minneapolis Communications Director**

**Endorsed by:**     **New American Collaborative Member Organizations:**

- Confederation of Somali Communities of Minnesota
- Minnesota African Women's Association
- American Refugee Community For the Horn of Africa
- Somali Benadiri Community of Minnesota
- Hope International
- Minnesota State Colleges and Universities
- Pillsbury United Communities
- Women's Initiative for Self Empowerment
- Leadership Empowerment and Development Group MN
- Oromo Community of Minnesota
- International Self Reliance Agency for Women
- Somali Community of Minnesota

**RE:**                 **Draft Minneapolis Community Engagement  
Process-Model Guidebook**

### **Problem Statement:**

Immigrant and refugee communities are contributing members of the city, and want to participate in shaping city goals and directions. However, the current Minneapolis community engagement system is often inaccessible to us (i.e. Minneapolis Neighborhood Revitalization Program, CCP/SAFE, City appointed commissions, public hearings, etc.). As non-geographic community organizations, we are not provided the same opportunities as geographic community organizations (neighborhoods) to:

- Advise the City on policies,
- Allocate city resources for community priorities (e.g. NRP), and
- Receive city resources to strengthen our organizational capacities to foster civic involvement (e.g. citizen participation funding from CDBG).

Without these opportunities, immigrant and refugee community organizations are not given the same opportunities as neighborhood organizations to build relationships with City elected officials, so that our assets and challenges can be better understood, and to demonstrate our investment in making Minneapolis our home.

### ***A strong community engagement system must:***

- Be inclusive of all types of communities and accessible to all residents in Minneapolis.
- Provide an exchange of information on a regular basis rather than episodic.
- Build the capacity of the community to interact with the City.
- Recognize the importance of two-way communication.
- Understand how community organizations work and find ways to partner with them.
- Interact with communities in ways that are respectful of their cultures.

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### Purpose:

These recommendations are presented to the Minneapolis Mayor and City Council to incorporate into the Minneapolis Community Engagement Process-Model Guidebook for city departments, and in consideration of the city's overall goals and activities in regard to community engagement.

### **Principles and *Recommendations*:**

**Principle:** Importance of equal access -- city departments must provide equal access to information and participation. Some communities of color are represented by city advisory committees (Native American, Latino, SE Asian and Pan Pacific Islanders), and others are not (African communities).

- ◆ **Recommendation:** Cultural communities that do not have a city advisory committee should have the opportunity to do so, providing equal access. Or a multi-cultural advisory committee should be created with representatives from all cultural communities to advise the city on issues.
- ◆ **Recommendation:** Non-geographic community organizations should be notified about city community engagement processes as well as geographic community groups (neighborhoods).

**Principle:** Special considerations must be made to engage immigrant communities. Barriers to participation, such as language, childcare, transportation, and evening work schedules must be addressed. Immigrants and refugees are often unfamiliar with American governmental processes, or are distrustful of government in general.

- ◆ **Recommendation:** The city should provide information on how to participate in city processes to the broader public.
- ◆ **Recommendation:** Alternative options to provide input must be provided (i.e. scheduled meetings for different times of the day, web based or written comments, etc.)

**Principle:** Maintain contact information on community organizations for notification and outreach. Don't rely on existing relationships with groups that have historically been engaged with city departments.

- ◆ **Recommendation:** The city (perhaps through the Community Engagement Coordinator) should maintain an inclusive database of community organizations and contacts, which should be updated regularly.

**Principle:** Community input is broader than one perspective. A major deterrent for many underrepresented groups is the assumption that their voices are outnumbered, and therefore irrelevant. If there were a way to give them voice, there may be a greater willingness to participate.

- ◆ **Recommendation:** Find ways for minority opinions to be recorded in the community engagement processes as well as majority opinions.

**Principle:** Need to address the lack of cultural competence of the city staff.

- ◆ **Recommendation:** Provide cultural orientation training for city staff.
- ◆ **Recommendation:** Cultural diversity needs to be reflected among city staff to strengthen awareness and understanding of cultural differences.

**Principle:** Community engagement is a two-way relationship.

- ◆ **Recommendation:** Following a community engagement process, the city should report back to the community participants about the final decision.
- ◆ **Recommendation:** Greater levels of participation can be achieved when the city is able to coordinate with community events (i.e. gather input at community festivals, events, regular meetings, etc.).