

**Minneapolis Ready and Resilient Evaluation Summary Report**  
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## **I. Summary of Process**

Between August 2016 and November 2017, the City of Minneapolis initiated a series of community meetings about climate change. Meetings were hosted in the Phillips neighborhood on November 5, 2016, the Longfellow/Seward neighborhood on November 15, 2016, and in Northeast Minneapolis on October 10, 2017. The overarching goal of these meetings was to collect community-identified priorities, solutions, and resource needs to be integrated into the Resilient Minneapolis initiative, the Green Zones initiative, and the Minneapolis Comprehensive Plan. In addition, this information will be shared with the City's Chief Resilience Officer, Community Planning and Economic Development staff, and additional department staff.

The project implemented a community deliberation model, developed by Macalester College and tested in Saint Paul, that engaged racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse citizens to consider how extreme weather will impact their lives. In these community meetings, participants were asked to identify their chief concerns and to generate actions that address the impacts of climate change. The local understanding of a neighborhood's specific resources and vulnerabilities is invaluable to successful extreme weather preparedness and planning, as residents best understand what is most important to their neighborhood and which actions are likely to become accepted.

Each meeting was facilitated and organized by a community partner (or two partners) selected by the project team. The meetings had a similar structure that included: Part 1: Introductions, Part 2: Stories and discussion, Part 3: Climate information, and Part 4: Vulnerability. Participants were provided gift cards for their time.

## **II. Evaluation Questions**

Our role in this project was to provide detail about the model we devised and implemented in Saint Paul. This included meeting with the project team during their workshop design phase and providing our recruitment strategies, facilitation advice and meeting documents.

We were also asked to evaluate the Minneapolis community workshops along the following dimensions. We report on these categories in particular.

**Participation:** Who was the city able to invite into these community discussions? Did they meet their goal of engaging with diverse communities (geographic, cultural, racial) on the issues of climate, extreme weather, and community resilience?

**Engagement:** How engaged were the participants? Were the presentations and activities appropriate and effective at maintaining participant interest?

**Success:** What worked well at these meetings?

**Challenges:** What could be improved?

**Suggestions:** What overarching suggestions can we offer for the City's further work?

### III. Observations

#### **Participation**

*1. Who was the city able to invite into these community discussions? Did they meet their goal of engaging with diverse communities (geographic, cultural, racial) on the issues of climate, extreme weather, and community resilience?*

Across the three meetings, it appears that attendees represented a mix of racial/cultural diversity and were also diverse in age. More women than men participated in the Phillips and Northeast meetings, while the Longfellow meeting had a balanced gender mix. We weren't provided the demographic criteria for each neighborhood, so it is difficult for us to comment on how closely the assembled group met diversity goals.

We recommended providing stipends or gift cards to increase diversity of participants by making the meetings accessible to people with financial constraints. This was implemented, however, it is always difficult to know to what extent this influenced who participated.

Translation was essential in all but the final meeting (Northeast). Having translators made it possible for non-English-speaking residents to take part in these discussions, and without translators, many important voices would not have been present. Unfortunately, having translators also created delays in the meetings themselves – each piece of information offered to the group had to be repeated in the translated language, including instructions from facilitators, presentations, and questions or comments from participants. When no translation was available, for example at the beginning of the Phillips meeting, a number of attendees were unable to participate in the activities and expressed frustration.

*2. How engaged were the participants? Were the presentations and activities appropriate and effective at maintaining participant interest?*

We noted several important variables that influenced attendee engagement in the meeting and in the individual activities: meeting location, configuration of the space, presence of translators, facilitation and communication factors, design of the presentations and activities, and overall organization of the event.

Location: The locations of the meetings seemed well-chosen. They were comfortable, welcoming, accessible, and meaningful community spots. Attendees appeared to feel at home in these spaces, and we noted generally positive response and appreciation with no complaints or criticisms. Meals were provided at each meeting; this facilitated participation and helped set a warm tone.

Configuration of the meeting space: Our notes indicate that the set-up of the meeting space was a potentially important and under-appreciated factor in attendees' ability to engage vs. disengage from the meeting activities. At the Phillips meeting, the space configuration tended to allow participants to more easily disengage from the activities. The meeting room was adjacent to a busy public space, and a few attendees seemed distracted by friends, acquaintances, and/or family members outside of the meeting room. Though the organizing team had tried to create a clear boundary between the meeting space and the outside public space, this wasn't fully achieved, and a number of people drifted in and out of the space during the meeting. Quite a few people left the room for five or more minutes – some no doubt to use the rest room, check on children in childcare, or get more food. Other attendees left during the meeting to use their phones. Of the attendees who left the room during meeting activities, most remained somewhat disengaged after returning.

In addition, several observers were present at the Phillips meeting, and they were seated in chairs set up around the perimeter of the meeting 'workspace' (several large tables with 10 or so chairs). Perhaps because people were already sitting outside of the table 'workspace', at least two attendees pulled their own chairs back from their tables, joined the observers in the perimeter of the room, and stopped participating directly in the table conversations.

In contrast, the space configuration at both the Longfellow and the Northeast meetings seemed to better support attendee presence and engagement.

Presence of translators: As already noted, translators were absolutely necessary to enable a subset of the attendees to participate in the activities. Even a few participants whose English ability seemed quite strong were more comfortable offering their ideas through a translator.

Facilitation and communication: Similar to room configuration, meeting facilitation had both positive and negative effects on attendees' engagement in meeting activities.

At the Phillips meeting, facilitation was divided among several people including several different City staff members and the Phillips community partners. These individuals had widely varying styles and ability to capture the room's attention. When a softer-spoken person took over facilitation, it was difficult to quiet the crowd and proceed with the agenda. This person's facilitation skills were fine, but it wasn't clear to attendees that someone new was taking the reins of the meeting, and so it took extra effort to direct participants to the new activity.

In contrast, the Northeast meeting had stronger and more consistent facilitation. Shanai, who has been professionally trained, was able to command attention and gently but firmly guide people through the various segments of the meeting.

We also noted that City staff were present and participated at tables at some of the meetings. It was unclear to us whether they were facilitating or note taking (or both). It is likely that their roles were also unclear to meeting participants.

Facilitation and communication are closely related variables. One of the qualities of a strong facilitator is good communication skills, and communication is also an influential factor on its own. We noted a few difficulties with communication at the Minneapolis meetings. First, across the three meetings we felt that the purpose of the meetings was not stated clearly enough, nor were participants given their responsibility, or ‘charge’, for the meetings. For example, at the Phillips meeting, the statement of purpose and ‘charge’ to participants was lost in the shuffle of a confusing meeting beginning and unclear facilitation responsibility. Second, directions for the different activities were not always communicated clearly. Part of this communication difficulty was due to inconsistent or confusing facilitation. Third, participants were confused by the packets of paper they were given at the beginning of the meetings. It was not clearly communicated to them what they should do with these packets, when they should fill them out, or how/if the packets would be used during or after the meetings.

Design of the presentations and activities: From what we witnessed, and based on notes taken at each meeting, the activities were appropriate and largely effective at encouraging discussion. Discussion was not always focused on climate change, extreme weather, or community resilience; however, in each meeting, the conversations eventually elicited relevant opinions and insights from community members.

### *3. What worked well at these meetings?*

In our comments above, we’ve noted a number of things that worked well at the Minneapolis meetings. In particular, we highlighted that:

- Meetings attracted a diverse group of participants.
- Community partners were trusted and appreciated.
- Translators were provided and this enabled non-English speakers a chance to participate.
- Selected locations appeared to be comfortable, welcoming, accessible, and meaningful community spots.
- Organizers and facilitators were flexible and respectful of attendees needs (e.g., checking on children in next room), as well as of cultural differences (e.g., punctuality).
- Attendees seemed grateful to participate.
- Presentations and activities were effective in getting people to think about and discuss extreme weather preparedness.
- Meeting evaluations indicate that attendees left with generally stronger knowledge about climate change and community resilience.
- Many participants indicated a desire to stay engaged with the topics discussed at the meetings.

#### *4. What could be improved?*

- The “charge” for participants was lost in the shuffle of the confusing meeting beginning. People were confused about the purpose of the meeting. (Two people expressed frustration about this.)
- At all three meetings, the packet of papers for each person appeared to cause some confusion. People didn’t seem to know what to do with it or how/when to fill it out.
- It might have been better to have had a main emcee for each meeting, who would hand off responsibility to co-facilitators for various sections and activities. As it was, it wasn’t always clear who was leading or facilitating the meeting. The different facilitators had very different styles and the tone of the meeting changed when they switched roles. People were unsure whose instructions they should follow.

#### *5. What overarching suggestions can we offer for the City’s further work?*

In this section, we offer our suggestions as well as several questions about the challenges of this work.

##### Suggestions:

- 1) Gatherings should begin with a clear message of the purpose, or ‘charge’, of the meeting along with participation expectations (e.g., respectful dialogue, be present at your table, avoid cell phone use except during breaks, etc.).
- 2) Strong, clear, and consistent facilitation is essential. While community partners can and should play a role in facilitating individual activities, a trained facilitator is needed for the important work of introducing the meeting and its different segments, keeping the agenda on track, making sure attendees are engaged and included, and facilitating full-room discussions.
- 3) The meetings are likely to have greater benefit, both for attendees as well as for the City, if organizers can gather a bit of participant data ahead of time. Who will attend? What demographics do they represent (and what demographic groups are missing)? What is their existing understanding of extreme weather or climate change? Why are they interested in participating in the meeting? This background information can help City staff customize their presentations and activities, or organize participants into small activity groups during the meeting according to their interests or questions.

##### Questions about the challenges of this work:

- 1) How do we gather information about participants and their base of knowledge without it feeling extractive or the city collecting “data about them”. This is something we’ve heard is a problem throughout the Cities.
- 2) How can these meetings be respectful of different cultural traditions, in particular differences in attention to punctuality, while still holding to a planned schedule? Can/should the norms and expectations of the meeting be communicated more clearly? Can the meeting be planned with enough flexibility to accommodate different arrival times and varying norms from different community groups?
- 3) How do we give participants room to speak and share their concerns while gently keeping things focused on weather, climate and health?
- 4) How can these meetings also serve as community building events? We speculate that room-wide introductions may be important for community-building, though we acknowledge that they require a great deal of precious time.
- 5) What will the city do with what they learn? We don’t think this was sufficiently shared with participants.
- 6) How can the city provide resources at the meeting to help people take action once they leave? What further opportunities exist for participants to stay engaged? The meetings we observed activated attendees, awakened concern, and gave them an opportunity to think about actions. What can the city do to make their continued involvement - and more importantly - action - possible?