

The District Councils

A snapshot of Saint Paul's community engagement system

May 2017



Innovation Grant Phase One

Snapshot of current Saint Paul District Councils

- Capacity
- Scope of Work
- Achievements and Impact
- Challenges



Analysis of community engagement in 3 other cities

- Boston
- Seattle
- Portland
- Best practices (Ideas to steal)
- Lessons learned



Saint Paul District Councils

- 17 districts
- Independent 501.c.3 organizations
- Annual contracts for community engagement



Saint Paul District Councils: City is getting more than it pays for

- 3:1 return on investment
- 33 FTE staff
- 500+ volunteers



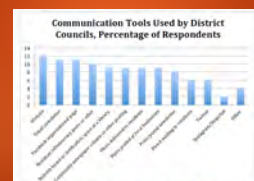
Saint Paul District Councils: What they do

Issue	Average Percentage of Organizational Resources
► Community Building	24.5%
► Land Use	14.4%
► Transportation	11.2%
► Youth and Family	9.7%
► Crime Prevention	8.5%
► Parks / Public Space / Placemaking	6.9%
► Natural Environment / Sustainability	6.8%
► Housing	6.7%
► Economic Development / Local Business	5.2%
► Other	6.0%

Saint Paul District Councils: Community Building

Top Activities	Percent of District Councils That Do This
► Publicize community-building events or activities	100%
► Sponsor an annual community-building event	92%
► Host a community meeting specifically to discuss community or livability topics	75%
► Sponsor a committee or working group specifically to address community building or livability	58%
► Provide support to individuals or organizations pursuing community building or livability issues	58%
► Convene a meeting with city officials to discuss an issue related to community building or livability	58%

Saint Paul District Councils: Community Building



Saint Paul District Councils: Community Building

"It's always about making the community a better place. If there wasn't an organization like the district council, the changes would still happen but people might know less about it, feel more blindsided, feel disenfranchised."

- District Council board member



Saint Paul District Councils: Community Building

"The City Council would be unable to process all the input the district councils receive. We're the steam valve for some issues. Neighbors learn that there are some issues that can be addressed at this level rather than at City Hall."

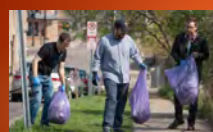
- District Council board member



Saint Paul District Councils: Environment and Sustainability

Top Activities	Percent of District Councils That Do This
► Distribute information about sustainability issues	92%
► Publicize environmental issues in the community	92%
► Provide in-kind support to another organization's environmental activities	58%
► Host a community meeting focused on natural environment or sustainability issues	58%
► Sponsor a committee or working group specifically to address natural environment or sustainability issues	58%
► Provide support to individuals or organizations pursuing natural environment or sustainability issues	58%
► Convene a meeting with city officials to discuss an issue related to natural environment or sustainability	58%

Saint Paul District Councils: Environment and Sustainability



Saint Paul District Councils: What the numbers don't tell you

- Policy
- Quality of life
- Equity
- Partnerships



Saint Paul District Councils Beyond the numbers: Policy



Saint Paul District Councils Beyond the numbers: Quality of life



Saint Paul District Councils Beyond the numbers: Equity



Saint Paul District Councils Beyond the numbers: Equity



Saint Paul District Councils Beyond the numbers: Equity

"We're trying to address the equity question head on, so the whole community can benefit from what goes on here.... Hopefully we'll get to the point where everyone feels they have a place and a stake in the neighborhood."

- District Council board member



Saint Paul District Councils Beyond the numbers: Partnerships



Saint Paul District Councils Beyond the numbers: Partnerships



Saint Paul District Councils: Challenges

- Financial sustainability
- Institutional memory
- Political divisiveness
- Councils' relationship with the city
- Councils' relationship with each other
- Equity



Community engagement in 3 other cities

- Boston
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Community engagement in 3 other cities: **Boston**

- No citywide system
- No financial support from city
- Volunteer-driven
- Exacerbates inequalities
- Neighborhood liaisons based in Mayor's office



Community engagement in 3 other cities: **Seattle**

- In flux
- Mayor cut all ties with district councils in 2016
- City experimenting with project-based engagement tactics



Community engagement in 3 other cities: **Portland**

- Robust and well-funded
- 7 District Coalitions
- City provides funding and staff support
- Supplements geographic system with culturally based outreach
- Civic leadership development



Community engagement: Ideas to steal

1. Abutters meeting
2. Coordinated issues database
3. Diversity and civic leadership training
4. Impact advisory group



Community engagement: Ideas to steal

5. Participatory budgeting
6. Public involvement principles
7. Public outreach and engagement liaisons
8. Small grants program



Lessons learned: Effective, equitable community engagement ...

1. Is well-resourced with consistently reliable funding.
2. Includes intentional cooperation and communication among neighborhood organizations and city departments.
3. Combines geographic engagement with culturally-based outreach that crosses geographic lines to reach traditionally under-represented populations.
4. Combines project-based engagement from city departments with grassroots, resident-based engagement supported by independent neighborhood organizations.

Lessons learned: Effective, equitable community engagement ...

5. Seeks partnerships among city staff, neighborhood organizations and institutions, residents and businesses, foundations, and others.
6. Supports long-term community building in neighborhoods, not simply reaction to one-time projects driven by city departments.



Lessons learned: Effective, equitable community engagement ...

7. Is deliberate, intentional, and visibly credible, not just a required box on a checklist.
8. Looks for opportunities to innovate.
9. Makes expectations and realities clear to all involved, early in the process.
10. Honors the commitment, expertise, and sincerity of resident volunteers.

