



Frogtown Neighborhood Association (District 7)

501 North Dale · Saint Paul, MN · 55103
651-239-8699 · www.frogtownmn.org

January 30, 2017

Dear City Council Members,

We, the Board of the Frogtown Neighborhood Association, respectfully request the Council take an active role in assessing The Innovation Fund; both the process used to make funding decision and the criteria used in that process. We urge the Council to apply an equity lens for that assessment. Following the Innovation Fund precepts laid out in the Innovation Fund Invitation for Proposals would be an important beginning: “Examples of capacity building include increasing collaboration with other organizations, achieving an increase in productivity through economies of scale **and implementing methods of community engagement that address inclusive involvement and racial equity.**”

We write to you today as neighbors, as fellow Saint Paulites, voices and interests not frequently brought to you so directly. We are leaders of our respective “district councils,” leaders in our communities and we are deeply concerned with the process that was implemented to make the Innovation Fund decisions. According to a committee member present at the initial review, one of the proposals contained no mention of equity. That proposal was given funding nonetheless.

Our city, like the rest of America, is moving towards deep racial and cultural diversity. It is time to intentionally support emerging leaders of color in our neighborhoods. Does the Innovation Fund, as presently allocated, resource support for new and emerging leadership or does it follow the same sad and destructive pattern of supporting white led and white controlled interests? That really is the bottom line. There can be no more excuses about how hard it is to “diversify.” There have been decades of funding white-led attempts to diversify their organizations. White organizations can no longer afford to pretend that they have the answers to our issues of collective injustices; the stakes are too high.

A city that claims to be equity directed must be intentional in its allocation of resources by supporting organizations led by people of color; whose Boards have significant number of people of color and staff of color.

This year’s Innovation Fund allocation does not follow an equity driven strategy. Rather a massive (relatively speaking) portion of its funds are directed at majority white-led organizations to define how district councils should increase leadership of color or outreach to increase participation of people of color. That is not an equity led strategy.

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An equity-led strategy would look to and resource existing and emerging neighborhood leaders of color to increase their already deep and experientially developed ideas to enliven their communities and develop community-based strategies for inclusion. That is our strong recommendation.

FNA's Board is led by people of color and its staff are a majority people of color; we know "equity," we live "disparities." We are building deep relationships across racial, cultural, age, gender differences in our neighborhoods. We are more likely to have answers or be in a position to devise answers to our most urgent community issues.

FNA and Dayton's Bluff Community Council are hopeful that next year's process will follow equity values and strategies that ensure Innovation Fund resources will support organizations already racially/culturally diversified

With Common Hopes for Saint Paul,

Corina Serrano, FNA Board Chair