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To: Saint Paul City Council
From: District 1 Community Council

Re: Innovation Fund Allocation Process

Since the inception of the Innovation Fund, the district councils, in a collaborative effort and with input from various City departments, designed a process by which the fund would be promoted and allocated. Over the years during which the fund has existed, the process has been assessed annually and refined. These assessments and refinements have been presented to all the councils for input before modifications went into effect. Although there has not been universal agreement about the process, all councils have had the opportunity to participate in changes to it. Beyond such expected annual evolution of the process, the past year included departure of the District Council Coordinator who had facilitated the process, and the hiring of the Community Engagement Coordinator, with a resultant shortening of the application and decision-making process.

However, all councils were aware that the format would follow a similar process to last year, one that emphasizes both equity as the focus of community work and collaboration among a broad range of councils as the means, with subsequent impacts that would be felt city-wide.

The District 1 Community Council has been the lead organization on two Innovation grants over the past three years. The first involved cross-cultural and cross-generation dialogues among police and youth of color, parks and communities, and PED and district councils. All councils were invited to participate and a cross-city representation of the councils comprised the leadership group overseeing the work. The second, awarded for this year, involves the development of equity plans for six councils. This work will be facilitated by a consultant experienced in such planning efforts and designed to meet the varying needs of the participating councils. The participating councils are each at different points in organizational development around issues of equity. We hope that the resultant plans will provide a range of starting points for future councils' joining in this work. An additional expected outcome we hope to come of this project is a means by which all the councils can document the impacts of their work towards equity in their annual City contracts.

The councils involved in the current project are districts 1, 2, 3, 5, 8 and 13, in wards 1, 2, 4, 6 and 7. In addition, two other district councils have expressed interest in participating (from wards 2 and 4), even though there is not sufficient funding - our original request was dramatically reduced from 10 to 6 participating councils in order to include the project proposed by districts 4 and 7.

Although we appreciate that there are some district councils who believe that there is a single best way to involve the public in civic decision-making, or that there is a single best way to assure equitable engagement of traditionally underrepresented communities, our project is meant to assure that the diversity of our complex neighborhoods is given the opportunity to express itself while working towards the common goal of equity among us all.

Our mission is to create opportunities for the people who live and work in our neighborhoods to engage with each other and with our government officials in order to build a more vibrant and welcoming community.