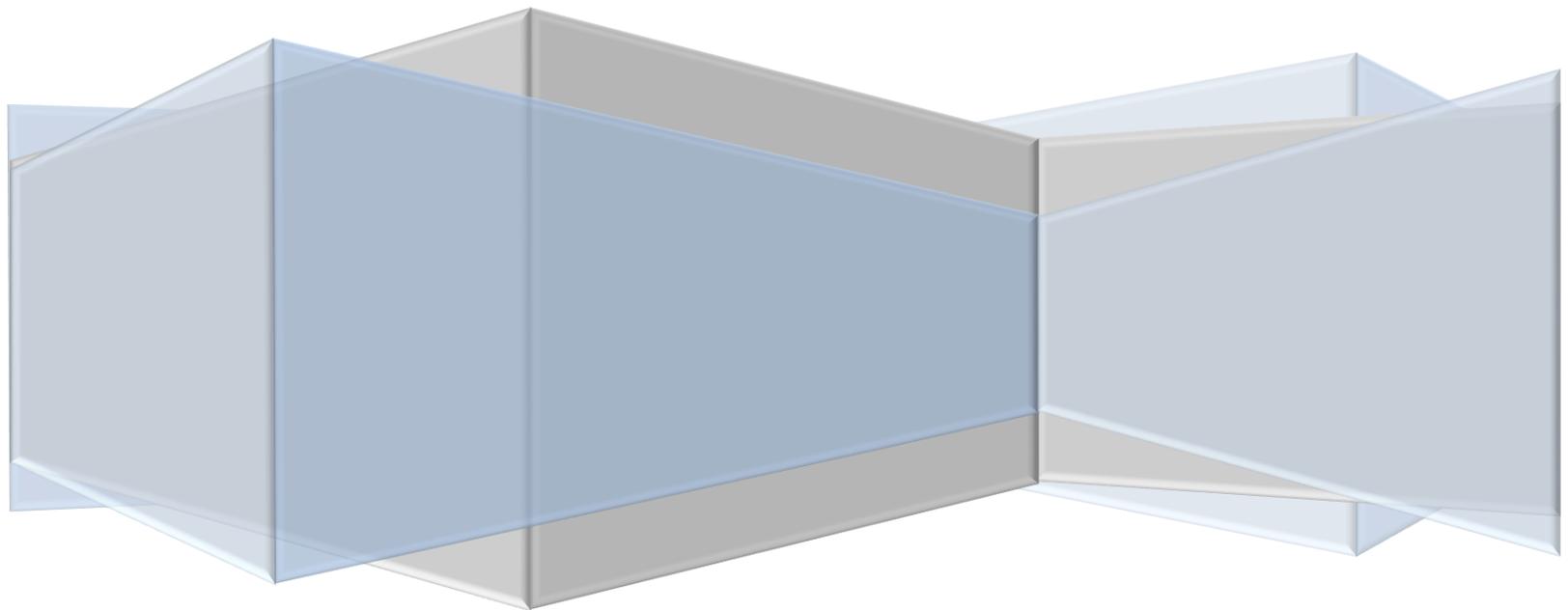


Strategic Welcoming Plan – Austin, MN

Building a More Welcoming Community

May 21, 2018



Strategic Welcoming Plan – Executive Summary

Purpose of This Plan

Create a clear roadmap for making Austin a truly Welcoming Community, including a consensus definition of what success looks like and actionable ideas that will create real and meaningful change over the next 5 years.

This builds upon prior work by the City Council (unanimously approving Austin joining the Welcome America network in July 2016) and the Human Rights Commission (releasing the Welcome Report in July 2017).

Process

This was a truly collaborative community effort:

- Strategic direction, focus, and initial ideas were generated by a core taskforce and advisory panel of 20 people from the City Council, City of Austin, Chamber of Commerce, Human Rights Commission, Riverland, and local schools, businesses, and non-profits
- 100+ community members participated in a Community Conversation in April to provide feedback and direction on which ideas should be made into final recommendations

Strategic Focus Areas

Austin will focus on making real progress over the next 5 years in 2 key focus areas:

1. **Empowering Multicultural Leadership:** lowering barriers to allow all residents to fully participate in the process of maximizing Austin’s potential
2. **Increasing Connections Between Communities:** breaking down silos to build common interests and relationships among Austin’s various micro-communities

Recommendations

Implement over the next 12 months (By May 2019)

1. Create Honorary City Council program
2. Create a series of “Explore Your Community” events
3. Proactively recruit more diverse candidates for local boards & commissions

Implement over the next 1-5 years

1. Create a Multicultural Liaison position
2. Formalize a My City Academy program
3. Create a Multicultural Exchange program
4. Create a “Grow Your Own” program for hard to fill positions

Strategic Welcoming Plan – Final Report

Purpose of Strategic Welcoming Plan

Create a clear roadmap for making Austin into a truly Welcoming Community, including a consensus definition of what success looks like and actionable ideas that will create real and meaningful change.

Background

Our community has changed substantially over the past 30 years. The non-white population has increased from 2% in 1990 to 23% in 2015 (US Census Bureau, 2016). There are now 47+ different languages spoken at Austin Public Schools, and more than 50% of the Kindergarten class has been non-white for several years, suggesting that this change will continue (Austin Public Schools, 2017). This increased diversity has helped Austin be a shining growth star in Greater Minnesota, *increasing* our overall population by 8% between 2000-2016 (MN State Demographer, 2018). This is a welcome departure from what many sister cities are experiencing with declining populations and shrinking tax bases.

Austin joined the Welcome America network in July 2016. The City Council unanimously approved a resolution to join this national network of communities who are leading efforts to make their communities more vibrant places for all. This network provides ongoing resources along with networking opportunities that allow Austin access to best practices from across the country to maximize it's potential. At the time, Austin was one of the first two cities in Minnesota to join the network. This was a public declaration that Austin should be a city that is guided by principles of inclusion and is dedicated to creating a community that prospers because all residents feel welcome.

The Austin Human Rights Commission published a Welcoming Report in July 2017. This built upon the Council's actions by helping to identify the key steps that would be needed to turn the vision of being a Welcoming Community into reality. This 6-month effort interviewed a large contingent of residents from all parts of the community to determine what was working and what barriers existed to Austin being a truly Welcoming Community. (<http://www.ci.austin.mn.us/HRights/Welcome.pdf>) A key recommendation of this report was that Austin needed to create this Strategic Welcoming Plan to create consensus on the future direction and actions that the community would take to create a truly Welcoming Community.

Definition of a Welcoming Community

A Welcoming Community is “guided by the principles of inclusion and creating communities that prosper because everyone feels welcome”. (Welcome America, 2017) This means that a Welcoming Community

seeks to make everyone in the community feel welcome, whether they are a newcomer to Austin or have lived here their entire life.

Why a Welcoming Community?

Communities are stronger and more prosperous when *all* residents can contribute to their maximum potential. Newcomers drive population growth, generate taxes, support the local economy, provide a much-needed workforce, and start new businesses.

- **Drive Growth:** Our local population base would be declining without immigrants and refugees. Indeed, domestic migration has been negative in Minnesota for many years, meaning that international migration is critical to maintaining and increasing our population base (Minnesota State Demographer, 2017)
- **Generate Taxes:** Immigrants and refugees pay \$283 million in taxes annually in Southern Minnesota alone, and \$3.3 billion statewide (Partnership for New American Economy, 2014)
- **Support the Local Economy:** Immigrants and refugees spend \$771 million annually in Southern Minnesota alone, and \$8.9 billion statewide (Partnership for New American Economy, 2014)
- **Provide a Much-Needed Workforce:** Minnesota has more available jobs than workers to fill them, a gap this is projected to increase in future years (Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, 2015)
- **Start New Businesses:** Immigrants and refugees bring an entrepreneurial spirit, starting 16,000 new businesses that generate \$289 million in sales. 39% of the Fortune 500 companies in Minnesota were started by immigrants or their children, today providing 264,000 jobs and generating over \$100 billion in sales (Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, 2017). This includes Austin's own Hormel Foods, which was founded by the son of German immigrants.

Clearly, Austin's social and economic future will largely depend on being a Welcoming Community that can attract and retain a diverse and talented base of residents from all walks of life.

Process

- **Fall 2017:** Austin was awarded a nationally competitive "Gateways for Growth" award from Welcome America and New American Economy to assist with developing a Strategic Welcoming Plan.
- **Fall 2017:** Mayor Tom Stiehm appointed a 6-person core taskforce to lead the development of this Strategic Plan. This group was:
 - Janet Anderson, City Council At-Large
 - Craig Clark, City Administrator
 - Jason Baskin, Chair of Austin Human Rights Commission
 - Dr. Adenuga Atewologun, President of Riverland Community College
 - Sandy Forstner, Executive Director of Austin Area Chamber of Commerce

- Dan Mueller, Human Rights Commissioner and African Asian Refugee Services Agency
- **October – December 2017:** Core taskforce met to discuss project scope, best practices, and create an action plan. A key part of this action plan was the decision to create an Advisory Panel to assist in the development of this Strategic Plan to ensure that all key community stakeholders were fully involved in the process.
- **January – March 2018:** Advisory Panel met multiple times to:
 - *Determine what the focus areas should be.* A key decision was that Austin could best create real and meaningful change by focusing energy and resources on 2 key areas over the next 0-5 years.
 - *Define success for each focus area.* Group created a consensus definition of what success looks like to ensure that energy and resources are focused towards a specific end goal.
 - *Create list of ideas to achieve success.* Group conducted multiple ideation sessions to develop options for how to achieve those specific end goals.
 - Advisory Panel members:
 - Dani Heiney – Riverland Community College
 - Oballa – Human Rights Commission
 - Andre Goodlet – Hormel Foods & Human Rights Commission
 - Sara Karki – Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota & Human Rights Commission
 - Santino Deng – Austin Public Schools
 - Kristi Beckman – Austin Public Schools
 - Lisa Kocer – Mower County Health & Human Services
 - Jessica Swanson – Hormel Institute & Human Rights Commission
 - Miguel Garate – Riverland Community College & Human Rights Commission
 - Herve Idijidina – Welcome Center
 - George Bass – Riverland Community College
 - Rain Suereh – Welcome Center
 - Tori Miller – Crime Victims Resource Center
 - Many others were involved indirectly...
- **April 2018:** Community Conversation
 - More than 100+ people from across Austin gathered at the Hormel Historic Home on Tuesday, April 17
 - This session, which was attended by our national partners for Welcome America and New American Economy, had 2 major goals:
 - *Rank the ideas for achieving success.* All participants were asked to rank the list of potential ideas in each focus area. This provided a clear understanding of what ideas the community was most supportive of.
 - *Build on ideas to make them more successful.* Each table of 6-8 people was then asked to take their Top 2 ideas and figure out ways to make them better. This helped flesh out the top ideas and increase the likelihood of them succeeding.

- **May 2018:** Publish final Strategic Welcoming Plan. This plan is the culmination of the efforts of all parties, and reflects a consensus around the direction that Austin should take to create a truly Welcoming Community.

Focus Areas

The group consensus was that 2 focus areas were most critical to pursue over the next 5 years. This reflects an understanding that Austin, as a mid-sized community, has limited resources and therefore needs to focus those resources where they can make the biggest impact. While other aspects of building a Welcoming Community are important, making those areas a priority should be reserved for a later timeframe when there has been substantial progress made against the 2 priority focus areas.

Key Focus Area #1: Empowering Multicultural Leadership

Definition of Success: Leadership and workforce of city government, community organizations, and businesses reflects the population they serve

This focus area is about empowering communities to help themselves by developing a deep leadership bench and enabling them to fully participate in maximizing the potential of Austin. The Welcome Report had several findings around this focus area:

A small number of leaders are relied on for nearly everything within newcomer communities. There are many outstanding leaders in newcomer communities. The challenge is that these leaders tend to get stretched incredibly thin because they are one of a small number of people who can easily interact in both the traditional Austin community and their own community of newcomers. They end up tasked with an overwhelming burden of helping others while also trying to run their own individual lives, which can create the very natural consequence of burnout. Being able to develop a deeper bench of leaders within the newcomer communities would not only help ease the burden on these current leaders, but would also help increase and strengthen relationships with these communities.

A challenge to creating this deeper bench is that potential leaders often don't see anyone who looks like them in positions of community leadership. Role modeling can be a powerful force in helping someone visualize themselves in a position of power. There are, however, very few visible role models within the normal channels of community power that accurately reflect the true population of Austin. The Austin City Council, School Board, and Mower County Commissioners are all 100% white. The clear majority of City Commissions and Boards are white. Most city employees are white. Most teachers are white. This is the natural consequence of Austin being a mostly white community for most of our history and will likely evolve over future generations. However, a truly inclusive community is not content to simply use the advancement of time as an answer and needs to proactively work to make city institutions more reflective of the overall population.

Finding ways to proactively build a deep and diverse bench of community leaders is critical to building an inclusive and successful community. The chances of success are higher when a community closely reflects the population it serves. Leadership diversity creates better understanding and ideas by harnessing multiple viewpoints to create solutions. There are many outstanding newcomers who are

hungry to play a positive role in helping Austin maximize its full potential. Proactively identifying and training these emerging leaders will not only build a more inclusive community, it will also improve the ultimate success of our community as a whole.

Key Focus Area #2: Increasing Interactions Between Communities

Definition of Success: The majority of residents feel like they are a meaningful part of the larger Austin community.

This focus area is about Austin transitioning from a community that *has* diversity in silos, to a truly diverse community working together. The Welcome Report had several findings about this focus area:

Austin is made up of several different communities that interact either not at all or on a mostly superficial level when they do. Long-time white residents exist within their own micro-communities, Anyuaks interact primarily with Anyuaks, Dinkas primarily with Dinkas, Hispanics primarily with Hispanics, and so on. This disconnect has more to do with unspoken expectations than it does with outright alienation. What we did find was a lack of opportunity to meaningfully interact *between* the different cultures as well as a knowledge gap about cultural differences.

Through conversations we found that many residents of Austin are willing to welcome newcomers, but have a “...come to me if you need something” mindset. There is an expectation that immigrants and refugees will bring needs and concerns to them. This is what they believe they would do if they immigrated to another country and therefore this is the reasonable expectation of newcomers to Austin.

This is not an unreasonable expectation, but it highlights a knowledge gap of the immigrant and refugee experience. An Immigrant is an individual who leaves one’s country to settle in another, whereas refugees are defined as persons, who move out of one’s country due to restriction or danger to their lives. An immigrant is someone from a foreign country who relocates to live in another country. Immigrants are usually driven by economic factors, or they want to be close to family. Immigrants can usually find a home in their new country.

Refugees move out of fear or necessity. For example, to flee persecution, or because their homes have been destroyed in a natural disaster. Refugees are forced to relocate for reasons such as fear of persecution due to war, religion or political opinion. Refugees come from refugee camps to a third country. They usually cannot return to their own country. **What is consistent in both groups is natural distrust of groups or individuals in power. This contributes to a reluctance to reach out for help.**

From the Austin community perspective, many longtime residents expressed a knowledge gap about immigrants and refugees. They don’t know why Austin is a destination or how to interact with them, and have minimal knowledge about the customs and cultures of newcomers. The difference between immigrant needs and refugee needs was also often misunderstood. Common questions we heard included “where are they from?”, “what draws them to Austin?”, “why do they do X”? Most of these questions reflected a genuine sincerity, with only minimal pockets of hostility. This knowledge gap,

however, makes it difficult to easily call up common interests that could provide fertile ground on which to build a relationship.

The Welcoming Report found that rather than being antagonistic toward newcomers, longtime Austin residents are more unsure of how to welcome these cultures that are so different into the greater Austin community while preserving what make Austin special to them. Many Austinites struggle with how to connect better to these newcomers or more importantly why connecting better is important. What is in it for them? Why is being a Welcoming Community in their best interest?

This lack of interaction between groups also exists within different groups of newcomers. There are many different pockets of newcomers, and most groups have little to no interaction with even each other. Anyuaks have minimal interaction with Hispanics, Karens have minimal interaction with Dinkas, and so on. The same challenge of a lack of shared common experiences and interests (combined with some historical political baggage) exists in these relationships, which makes it difficult for even communities facing similar challenges to work together. This is not a new challenge. For example, in the early United States it was unlikely to see Germans working with Irish, Swedes with Poles, etc.

Finding ways to create positive interactions and common experiences appears critical to solving this barrier. Experiences create beliefs, and beliefs drive actions and ultimately results. It is therefore necessary to create new experiences that are highly positive to start changing long-held beliefs for both longtime residents and newcomers. Doing so will help change the actions that each group takes, which will ultimately impact the key result of making Austin a more inclusive community.

Recommendations

The Strategic Welcoming Taskforce recommends that the following actions be implemented over the next 0-5 years, to build a truly Welcoming Community. These action steps:

- Were created by a diverse cross-section of the community over multiple sessions
- Generated strong interest from the wider Austin community
- Are based on best practices from across the country

Implement Over the Next 12 Months (by May 2019)

1. Create an Honorary City Council member program

- *Purpose: Build long-term bench of community leaders by increasing understanding of local government in action*
- Mayor appoints 1 person to serve a 3 month “term”
- Person is non-voting, and receives all public information given to City Council members and sits in on all public Council meetings and worksessions
- Participant gets time to meet individually with Mayor, City Council members, and leaders of City departments to better understand how city government works
- Similar program could also be implemented by the School Board and Mower County Commission

- *Responsible for implementation: Mayor's office*
2. **Create a series of "Explore Your Community" events**
 - *Purpose: Lower the natural human barrier to exploration of new places and increase interactions between communities*
 - Monthly or quarterly coordinated visit to a multicultural business, such as a grocery store or restaurant
 - Group would meet and greet the owners and be given a semi-formal overview of the business to make them more familiar with it
 - *Responsible for implementation: Human Rights Commission in conjunction with Chamber of Commerce*
 3. **Proactively recruit more diverse candidates for local boards & commissions**
 - *Purpose: Make local government more reflective of and increase connection to the population it serves*
 - Create easy to understand 1 page sheet and presentation on what local boards and commissions do, when they meet, and who the key contact is
 - i. Can include both government and non-profit groups
 - Assign group to present this information to where multicultural groups are already gathering (e.g. Sunday afternoon church events, willing employers, etc.)
 - Create master list of emerging leaders who would like to get involved based on these presentations
 - Targeted advertising of openings in multicultural communities
 - Personally invite candidates to serve
 - *Responsible for implementation: Mayor's office & Human Rights Commission*

Implement Over the Next 1-5 Years

1. **Create a Multicultural Liaison position**
 - *Purpose: Critical to successfully implementing other long-term recommendations by creating a central point of contact that owns the coordination of those efforts*
 - Based on similar position in local governments across the country
 - This would be a paid position on either a full or half-time basis
 - Office should be housed out of City Hall
 - Funding for this position will need to be determined
 - Mission is to design and implement plans to increase access to community services and coordinate efforts to increase connections between communities
 - *Responsible for implementation: City of Austin & Multiple Partners To Be Determined*
2. **My City Academy**
 - *Purpose: Build upon successful pilot to increase understanding of and access to local government*
 - Based on local Austin, MN pilot & similar program in Nashville, TN
 - Partnership between Community Learning Center & City of Austin
 - Over several weeks, Adult Education participants do sessions on how city government works, have guest speakers from city government, learn what local boards & commissions do, and take a tour of City Hall

- Proactively match up interested students with boards & commissions that will have openings
- *Responsible for implementation: Multicultural Liaison & Community Learning Center Adult Education Program*

3. Multicultural Exchange Program

- *Purpose: Increase connections between communities by building personal relationships*
- Pair community members in groups of 1-4 people with newcomers enrolled in Adult Learning classes
- Expectation is that they meet at least once per month for 6 months
- Volunteers recruited from existing partner networks
- *Responsible for implementation: Multicultural Liaison*

4. “Grow Your Own” program for hard to fill positions

- *Purpose: Increase the diversity of the qualified applicant pool to make local government, businesses, and service providers more reflective of the population it serves*
- Based on similar teacher program being done in partnership with Austin Public Schools, Riverland, and Winona State University
- Identify key local positions that require specific training and are challenging to get a diverse pool of qualified applicants (e.g. law enforcement)
- Partner with Riverland to create program to develop qualified candidates that doesn’t require students to leave Austin
- Offer scholarships in exchange for 4 years of local service after graduation (if successfully make it through the applicant pool)
- *Responsible for implementation: Multicultural Liaison & Other Partners To Be Determined*

Future Areas of Exploration

While the focus for the next 5 years is clearly on Empowering Multicultural Leadership and Increasing Connections Between Communities, there are 3 areas of additional focus that should be pursued in the 5+ year range to build a truly welcoming community. These are:

- Equitable access
- Education
- Economic development

The Human Rights Commission will be tasked with monitoring progress against this Strategic Plan and reporting annually on the status of these efforts.

